

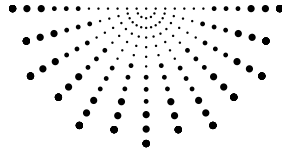
REPRESENTING THE
ALIEN BRIDE

Lottery

MARGO BOND COLLINS

REPRESENTING THE ALIEN BRIDE LOTTERY

A KHANAVAI WARRIOR BRIDE GAMES NOVELLA



MARGO BOND COLLINS

Representing the Alien Bride Lottery

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INTRODUCTION

Hello! Thank you so much for picking up one of my books. I really hope you love it!

I would hate to part ways once you finish this book, however—so let's keep in touch! I have a great bunch of people in my Readers' Group that you absolutely shouldn't miss out on.

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ABOUT REPRESENTING THE ALIEN
BRIDE LOTTERY

When the annual holiday ball at the Khanavai Embassy on Earth goes horribly awry, Khanavai warrior and cultural attache Aarek Difaelis joins with human attorney Vivian Alexander to try to save the night—and maybe even find love in the process.

CHAPTER ONE



AAREK DIFAELIS

I slid past the groups of people—both Khanavai and human—standing in groups in the Earth Embassy ballroom and chatting with one another.

It was a good start to the annual Holiday Ball, I thought.

I recognized several of the couples from previous vids of the Khanavai Bride Games.

I had spent one military rotation as an envoy to the Games, but quickly requested a transfer when I realized how difficult it was to work with Vos Klavoii, the director of the Bride Games.

I hadn't expected to be transferred to the brand-new Khanavai Embassy on Earth, but I was glad to be here.

Even if it meant being surrounded by human women I would never have the chance to get to know any better than as colleagues.

At least I had put what I had been learning about humans to good use. I glanced around at the ballroom. I designed the entire decoration scheme, and the humans in the room were clearly delighted by it, even if my Khanavai planet mates were less charmed.

A feminine squeal from a group of people to my left underscored the humans' pleasure. I drifted closer, finally recognizing them as Bride Game contestants from a few Earth-years ago.

"It's like a winter wonderland," a woman sighed, clapping her hands together.

Natalie, I remembered. And her mate, Cav Adredoni.

The ballroom walls had been draped in white satin, with silver spikes hanging everywhere, emblematic of winter on Earth.

"Why do they have weapons decorating everything?" Cav asked Natalie.

She frowned and blinked, and then snickered. “Those are meant to be icicles, not weapons.”

“Oh. Well, they still look like weapons to me.”

“Mia!” Natalie called out to another bride from the same games who was accompanied by her own mate, Commander Gendovi.

The two women embraced, and Gendovi and Cav gave each other the traditional Khanavai salute, thumping their chests three times.

I wandered closer to eavesdrop.

The commander slid up beside Cav and murmured, “This room is enough to make you want to claw your own eyes out, is it not?”

Cav pulled a face and nodded. “What is with all the white? And the metallic colors? They do not do anything to liven it up.”

Gendovi glanced up toward the ceiling. “Do not forget the dark blue above our heads. Supposedly it is meant to remind us of Earth’s night sky.”

I glanced upward. I did have to admit that the tiny twinkling lights—indeed meant to represent stars—were pretty enough. But it was a stark color scheme in Khanavai terms.

“It is certainly not what I would have done,” another male voice said from behind them in Khanavai. “But our mates seem to love it.”

“Zont,” Cav said cheerfully, turning and saluting the former spymaster turned vice-Ambassador. “Please tell me you are not in charge of this monstrosity.”

Well, vulk. Zont was my immediate supervisor. If he did not like the decorations, I would hear about it from him soon enough.

On second thought, I did not care. I actually rather preferred the human color schemes. The silvers and blues were soothing.

Really, though, only the ambassador's opinion mattered. The annual holiday ball was his brainchild, and I was determined to ensure that this year's festivities went off without a hitch.

I glanced around the ballroom which was filling up with humans and Khanavai alike.

All around me, humans and Khanavai exchanged hugs. Some human women with mates were even hugging other Khanavai—a social nicety we Khanavai males had had to grow accustomed to.

On Khanav Prime, no male would ever touch another Khanavai warrior's mate—not under any circumstances. On Earth, however, such greetings were commonplace.

“Not expecting anything as exciting as the last party, are we?” I heard Cav ask Zont as I slipped away. “No one slipping in to steal files or taking an unauthorized trip up to Station 21?”

The past few events had been interesting, to say the least. I was glad I hadn't been in charge of those galas.

But this time, I assured myself, there would be no uninvited party crashers, no one sneaking up to the transporter room to make their way onto Station 21, and no one getting into the ambassador's office.

This time, everything was going to run perfectly smoothly.

“You have done a wonderful job, Representative Aarek,” Ambassador Strozsih said from behind me, using my official title.

“Thank you, sir. Your mate helped with the decorations. I appreciated her input.”

He glanced at his wife, who was making her way through the ballroom greeting guests. In typical Khanavai fashion, he was still madly in love with her even after all the years they had been together.

A flash of envy shot through me, and I tamped it down.

There were plenty of human women on Earth, but fewer of them wanted to be mated to a Khanavai male than perhaps either of our governments would have preferred.

And I was a lowly ambassador's aide, a mere representative, unlikely to ever be chosen for the Bride Games.

Ambassador Strozsih caught sight of someone he knew, and I watched as he shifted into his politician mode.

That was why I would never be more than an ambassador's aide. I didn't have whatever it was that allowed Ambassador Strozsih to shift into that mode so quickly.

Shaking my head, I continued working my way through the party.

I made a pass by the refreshments table, checking to make sure the caterers had carefully integrated both Khanavai and Earth delicacies.

Personally, I could not imagine why humans liked caviar. But they did, despite the fact that it was overly salty and smelled terrible. I had tried to compensate for the disgusting scent by having traditional Earth holiday smells pumped into the room. Cinnamon, vanilla, cloves, nutmeg—the kinds of smells both humans and Khanavai enjoyed.

I inhaled deeply.

Excellent. The holiday spice scents were overpowering the disgusting food smells.

But there was something else in the air.

A scent I did not recognize.

It was even better than the spicy smell of human holidays.

What is that?

Whatever the scent was, we needed more of it. It was sweeter than cinnamon, more enticing than any smell I had ever encountered.

I was certain it was not in the essential oils mix I had approved for the party.

I would remember it.

Sniffing the air, I began tracking the scent to its source.

I made my way through the ballroom, weaving in and out of groups of people talking.

I needed to find the source of the smell before the ambassador opened the dancing. I didn't want to lose the trace.

I made my way to the center of the room, where the smell was strongest.

There. It was somewhere *right there*—coming from a group of human women.

I circled them, trying to remain unobtrusive.

It was coming from one particular woman.

She was taller than the average human, with lush curves and curly blonde hair.

She wore a silvery lavender dress in a metallic shade, one that could have been chosen specifically to match my skin tones.

Was the woman wearing some kind of exotic perfume? If so, I had to get the name of it.

I sidled in closer wanting more than anything to bury my nose in the woman's neck, inhale her amazing scent.

I could stay there forever.

That's when it hit me—like a bolt of Vadlosian lightning coming up from the ground.

Where the nose goes, the cock will follow.

It was an ancient Khanavai saying, one that I had found ridiculous.

Until now.

All my life, I had heard about the Khanavai mating instinct that allowed us to know our fated mate by their scent.

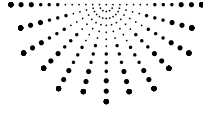
This woman was not wearing some exotic perfume.

And no other Khanavai was likely to react to her scent the way I did.

No. I had just recognized my mate by her smell.

And now I was going to have to decide what to do about it.

CHAPTER TWO



VIVIAN ALEXANDER

“**T**here he is again,” my friend Sandy hissed. “That purple Khanavai dude keeps circling us.”

I glanced at the Khanavai male she indicated. He wore the traditional kilt-like Khanavai uniform, the *chavan*, but instead of military rank, his *vandeno*i strap had the ambassadorial insignia on it.

More significantly, he was drop-dead gorgeous—then again, so were most of the Khanavai males. They were tall and muscular—even taller than I was. And given the fact that I stood at almost six feet in flats, I had gotten used to standing taller than most of the men in my life.

Not that my height bothered me. Not anymore. I’d hit my last growth spurt my sophomore year in high school, and although it had been difficult then—turning me into a gangly, uncoordinated mess—I’d gotten used to it, and was just as likely now to use my height to intimidate men as I was to be concerned about their fragile egos.

Still, it was interesting to imagine what it would be like to be with a Khanavai male. I wasn’t used to feeling small or delicate under any circumstances.

The purple guy circled us again, his expression serious as if he were concentrating on something important.

Then he stopped, standing perfectly still, a thunderstruck expression on his face. I glanced up at him just in time to make eye contact.

He blinked several times and turned and hurried away. If he’d been human, I would’ve said he was embarrassed to be caught staring.

But the Khanavai weren’t human, and it would be a mistake to attribute human emotions and reactions to them.

That’s what my father always said, anyway.

And he was the one who had all the Khanavai experience. Dad was in charge of negotiating a contract to manufacture some of the components the Khanavai needed to create their spaceships.

He said there was a rumor going around that suggested humans and Khanavai were in the process of setting up a joint deep-space exploration project.

I didn't know if I believed that, but the contract my father was arranging looked to be incredibly lucrative. And that's why he had insisted I join tonight's party. He wanted me to flirt with some of the more prominent Khanavai.

Honestly, I was better at writing contracts than I was at flirting, and I didn't much like the idea, but Dad's money had sent me to college and to law school, so I figured it was the least I could do.

Instead, though, I found myself watching the purple guy as he made his way across the ballroom, that same serious expression on his face.

Is he a prominent Khanavai? I thought. I wouldn't mind flirting with him.

Luckily, I had met and made friends with several other women around my age in the course of working on Dad's contract, so I had people to talk to at this party.

Not that I wasn't okay at making small talk. I just preferred to have a wingman—or in this case, several wingwomen—by my side when working a room.

Miki, a dark-haired Japanese delegate to the Khanavai Embassy, leaned in and whispered, "I think he is absolutely beautiful. You should talk to him."

I laughed, but it came out sounding more nervous than I intended. "After I make the rounds," I said.

"Saving the best for last or putting off the inevitable?" Laura, Texan wife of the British diplomat asked with a grin.

"A little bit of both, I suspect," I said.

The other women laughed, and when I glanced across the room, the purple Khanavai man was watching us.

“I’d better go check in with my father,” I said. “I’ll catch up with you ladies later.”

As I made my way across the ballroom, the alien’s gaze tracked me.

My friends were right. Eventually, I would have to speak to him.

I was too intrigued not to.

I HAD JUST JOINED A GROUP OF MEN DADDY WAS TALKING TO—Khanavai and human both—when there was a disturbance at the other end of the ballroom.

The double doors that had been opened wide to welcome guests slammed shut. I heard gasps and murmurs running throughout the room, and then the sound of gunfire.

One of the giant crystal icicles hanging from the ceiling broke off and crashed to the floor, sending shards of glass scattering throughout the room. Screams erupted throughout the ballroom, and people surged away from the doors. Dad reached out and took my arm, pulling me behind him as if to shield me with his own body.

I peeked around his shoulder in time to see a human man in a tuxedo—the same kind worn by the waitstaff—with a ski mask pulled down to hide his face and an old-fashioned AK-47 in his hands.

He climbed onto one of the refreshment tables, kicking serving platters of food out of his way. I glanced around the room. Several other members of the waitstaff had pulled ski masks down over their faces too and were herding guests into the center of the room.

“We are here on the behalf of the Make Earth Human Again cooperative,” the leader on the food table announced. “You are

all our prisoners and will be remaining here until our demands are met.

One of the Khanavai males, one with pink skin, assigned to security drew a blaster, but before he could get a shot off, the MEHA leader fired on him.

The pink Khanavai went down, and some of the women in the ballroom began sobbing.

Fucking terrorists. Of course they had targeted the Embassy ball.

“All your communication devices have been disabled,” the MEHA leader said. “My colleagues will be moving through the room to gather any weapons you may be carrying, as well as any valuables. Be prepared to hand them over or face consequences—like your dead comrade there.” He nodded toward the alien lying motionless on the ballroom floor.

I didn’t have any weapons, and the only valuables in my possession were a pair of diamond earrings my father had given me when I graduated from law school. I didn’t want to give them up, but my life was more important than a few baubles.

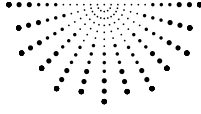
There has to be a way out of here.

And if anyone would know what it was, it was probably the staff members.

Including the purple guy who had been circling me earlier.

Slowly, I began sidling through the crowd away from my father and toward the purple Khanavai male.

CHAPTER THREE



AAREK

I froze when the armed humans burst into the ballroom.

Were they truly stupid enough to try to take over a room full of Khanavai warriors?

Oh. That was exactly what they were doing. They were precisely that stupid. The idiots.

When the leader leaped onto the refreshments table, I clenched my teeth.

We had worked hard to make this event memorable.

These were not the kinds of memories we had been aiming for.

I glanced over at the woman—my mate, though I did not even know her name—and realized she had started slowly moving through the crowd toward me.

We made eye contact, and she raised her eyebrows, apparently asking a question.

I hoped it was a request for me to meet her. In any case, I needed to get her to stop doing whatever it was that she had in mind—her expression was determined, and I was certain that determination would lead to trouble. So, I began moving toward her.

It took several minutes for us to meet in one corner of the ballroom, as far away from the MEHA bandits as we could get without them noticing us. Luckily for us, throughout the room, people were shifting, Khanavai warriors drifting to the outer edges of the crowd, quietly urging humans to move to the center of the room.

The humans did not seem to notice what was happening. They were too busy circulating through the crowd, holding open fabric bags for people to drop valuables into.

Almost no one had weapons. As a security measure, we had been scanning everyone at the entrance—which meant these MEHA humans had not been able to sneak their weapons in

through the front entrance. I doubted that we had been scanning for old-fashioned projectile weapons—they were outdated.

But still effective.

Vulk. We were going to have to increase our security again.

“What’s the easiest way out of the ballroom without those guys seeing us?” my mate asked. “I want to see if we can call for help,” she whispered.

I scanned the room. “The catering entrance,” I told her. “It is behind that panel. If we can get close to it, I think we can slip through when no one is watching.”

“Will you go with me?”

It was all I could do to keep from replying, *I will go anywhere with you.* But I had been given to understand that humans needed a little more time to accept their mates. They had entire rituals surrounding it, something called *dating*. So instead, I simply said “Yes.” Then I paused for a micromoment. “You move first,” I told her. “I will follow.”

She began slipping around the edges of the crowd.

She was good at this. I wondered if she had any training as a spy.

The thought made my stomach clench. Surely my mate would not spy against us.

I shook off the thought.

Better to think of my mate as smart and resourceful.

Anyway, the details did not matter—we could deal with any problems later.

The entrance to the kitchen had been hidden behind a panel that from a distance blended in with the rest of the ballroom decorations.

My mate paused not far from that entrance, her gaze flickering across the room as she made note of all the MEHA humans’ positions.

Part of me wanted to stay behind and help my fellow Khanavai warriors. They were getting into formation to protect the human guests. I was glad to see that the ambassador stood with his wife in the very center of the protected guests.

I suspected we would all be better served if I assisted my mate as she contacted authorities for help. In the meantime, I raised my wristcom, and tapped in my code to lock down the building.

It did not work. Apparently, the MEHA humans had managed to disable it. I needed to get to the ambassador's office—from there, I could override the entire system.

Then my mate slipped behind the panel and into the short hallway that led to the kitchens, and I realized I had no choice but to follow.

Micromoments later, I joined her, having first ascertained I was not being watched.

We both paused, listening for anything that might suggest we had been noticed.

"I believe we are safe," I finally said. "I do not think anyone saw us."

My mate nodded. Then she stuck out her hand to shake, human style. "Vivian Alexander," she said. "John Alexander's daughter—he manufactures widgets for spaceships. We've been working on contracts with the Khanavai. I'm an attorney for my father's business."

I breathed a silent sigh of relief. She was not a spy.

"Aarek Difaelis. I am an ambassadorial aide," I said, shaking her hand. Her skin was soft and smooth and sent a shiver down my spine.

She grinned. "I'd say nice to meet you, but circumstances dictate otherwise."

"Mm. Yes. We should move," I said. "The sooner we get away from the ballroom, the better."

"Agreed." She turned and began tiptoeing down the hallway. "I'm guessing the MEHA humans did something to detain the

caterers, as well,” she said. “Is there any way out of this hallway except to the kitchens?”

I nodded. “It splits into two hallways—one for catering, the other for the ambassador’s private use. We should take the ambassador’s hallway. When we get to the ambassador’s office,” I added, “I can put the entire building on lockdown.”

“Then you should lead the way.” She stepped back and motioned me to move in front of her.

At the end of the hallway was a locked door.

I raised my wrist, using my wristcom to badge us into the lift the door concealed.

The MEHA humans must not have a complete floor plan of the Embassy, or they would have guarded this space.

We stepped inside, and I closed and locked the door behind us.

Inside the lift, Vivian’s scent enveloped me, and my cock hardened, despite my realization that this was neither the time nor the place.

I scanned my wristcom, but the lift did not move. Flipping open the panel on the wall, I tapped in my override code, and we headed up to the ambassador’s office.

All the way up, I inhaled her scent.

CHAPTER FOUR



VIVIAN

Although I'd met several Khanavai men—males, I reminded myself, because that was their preferred terminology—I'd never stood quite so close to one before.

He was huge. I barely reached his chest.

Something about being this close to him was intoxicating, and I had to fight the urge to reach out and touch his bare chest, covered only by the leather strap running crossways over it.

Stop it, Viv, I scolded myself. This is an emergency.

I knew I should be anxious, probably even scared. But being in the elevator with this Khanavai, this alien warrior, somehow made me feel safe and secure in a way I hadn't experienced since I was a child.

We reached the ambassadorial offices level, and Aarek leaned out of the elevator putting his arm out to keep me from following him. He glanced in both directions then waved his hand and motioned me out next to him.

The hallway was deserted. We made our way to the ambassador's office quickly, and Aarek tapped a code into his wristcom to badge us into the office.

I was a little surprised that there weren't any MEHA guerillas up here.

"I guess they couldn't figure out how to get into the offices," I murmured aloud.

Aarek ushered me into the office suite and shut the door behind us. "They don't seem terribly organized, though I'm concerned that they were able to make their way in at all," he said, responding to my thoughts as if they were his own.

"I'm concerned about the whole thing," I said.

He murmured in agreement.

“You see if you can call out on the primary system,” Aarek said. “I will lock down the building in the meantime. We can give entrance codes to anyone coming in from the outside to help us.”

I nodded, moving to the phone system on the ambassador’s desk while Aarek pulled up the computer screen. The hologram image of it floated in the air in front of him and he began tapping in Khanavai codes.

The phone system was more advanced than any I had seen before—a mix of human and Khanavai technology designed to be able to allow the ambassador to communicate with anyone on Earth, Station 21, or Khanav Prime.

It was similar enough to the ones I had used before that I was able to figure out how to dial out.

At least, I should have been able to make an outgoing call.

“Um. Aarek? The com system isn’t working.”

He glanced at me with a frown. “I am almost done here.” He tapped in a few more codes, and the lights in the office flickered off and then back on.

“Was that you?” I asked, gesturing toward the lights.

He nodded. “That will let the ambassadorial staff know that the building is in lockdown, but I disabled all the alarms.”

Then he turned to the phone system and took the handheld receiver from me. He held it to his ear and frowned again.

He moved back to the computer, and tapped a few more codes into the interface, then moved to his wristcom and did the same thing over again.

“It is not responding to any of my codes. Apparently, the MEHA humans were able to disable the com system, at least the human tech portion of it.”

“So we’re not going to be able to call out for help?”

“I do not think so, no. The system is too integrated to use just the Khanavai elements.” Irritation threaded through his voice.

“So...we’re locked in the building with a bunch of terrorists?”

He nodded slowly, a human gesture I had seen more and more Khanavai adopting as our societies became more intertwined.

“So what are we going to do?”

He gave me a considering glance. “I suppose we are going to have to take out the terrorists ourselves.”

TEN MINUTES LATER, WE STOOD INSIDE A FULLY STOCKED armory. We had taken the ambassador’s private elevator down to a basement level and still had not encountered anyone else.

“Shouldn’t there be guards down here?” I asked.

“There absolutely should be,” Aarek replied. “I am worried that none of them are at their posts.”

“So this was perhaps better planned than you thought?”

“The MEHA humans seem to have access to some critical information—but not all of it. This armory isn’t on the most recent embassy blueprints. Otherwise, I suspect the terrorists would have raided it already.”

“So how could they have gotten some of the information but not all of it?”

He made a gesture with his hand that somehow conveyed both frustration and uncertainty. “We must have a leak somewhere. It has to be coming from someone with medium-level security. None of the elements of our security that require the top levels of clearance have been breached.” His expression turned hard. “Somehow, I will track down that leak and plug it.”

His gaze flickered toward me, and both his expression and his tone softened a bit. “But that cannot happen until we extricate all the hostages.”

He began arming himself with a variety of blasters.

He handed one to me, and I stared at it blankly.

“Do you know how to use one of these?” he asked.

I shook my head. Guns made me nervous, though I didn't say as much to him.

He took it from me, tapped in a code, and handed it back to me. "Wrap your hand around the grip," he instructed me. "Good. Now lightly press the indentation to the right of the trigger. Hold your finger there."

An odd tingling sensation ran from my fingertip down to the center of my palm and the gun beeped.

Aarek nodded. "Now it is registered to you. No one will be able to take it away and use it against you. The worst that can happen is you lose your weapon."

He took a holster belt off one of the shelves and reached around me to wrap it around my waist. The heat of his fingers burned through my ball gown, and I shivered involuntarily.

Aarek mistook it for fear. "You will do well," he said. "Stay behind me and try not to shoot one of the guests."

I glanced up from where I'd been watching him holster my blaster and discovered he was smiling at me.

Oh. That had been a joke. I chuckled nervously.

He reached out and took my face in his hands, staring intently into my eyes. "I will not let you be hurt," he said, the words sounding like a vow.

Unconsciously, I licked my lips, and his gaze flitted to my mouth.

He inhaled as if he were about to say something, but then he clenched his jaw and dropped his hands from me.

My face tingled where he had touched me.

"We should each carry as many weapons as we can manage," he said, his tone turning businesslike.

We went through the pairing routine with several more blasters and even a bigger weapon that Aarek called a long-range blaster. "I feel like I'm in an action movie," I said nervously.

"You mean one of the human entertainment vids where two heroes have to rescue a large group of people being held

hostage?”

“Yeah, one of those.”

Aarek waved off the suggestion. “I do not see the parallels.”

This time I laughed for real, and he gave me a wink—another gesture he must’ve picked up since he’d been on Earth.

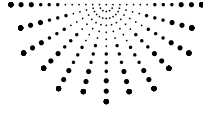
Once we were armed to the teeth—and slightly beyond—Aarek finally stepped back and examined me. “Is your clothing going to hinder your ability to move?”

I glanced down at my floor-length ball gown. “I don’t think so.” I hiked the skirt partway up on one side and tied it in a knot to keep it from tripping me. “There. That should help. “

Aarek gave an approving nod. “Very well, then. Shall we rescue our people?”

“Absolutely. Let’s go.”

CHAPTER FIVE



AAREK

“We need a plan of action,” I said, checking the last of my blasters and securing it in the holster attached to the black mesh belt I wore.

Vivian was examining her shoes. They were utterly impractical, if attractive, with tall, thin, spindly heels that must be difficult to walk on and pointed toes that had to be squeezing her feet into unnatural shapes. I frowned at them. “And I think the first thing to do is get rid of those.”

She snorted in laughter. “You know what? You are absolutely right.”

She stepped out of the torturous-looking footwear and kicked the shoes to the side. Her bare feet were tiny and delicate, the toenails tipped in a shade that was remarkably similar to my skin tone.

She saw me looking and grinned. “Purple’s my favorite color.”

“That is a good sign,” I murmured.

She raised her eyebrows, but I did not clarify.

I was glad that I was not prone to blushing. Not that any Khanavai blushed the same way humans did. Their faces turned an amusing shade of red showing the blood that ran through their bodies.

“Do you think we should find something else for you to wear?”

“Unless you have Khanavai children running around the embassy, I don’t think any of your boots will fit me. As long as I don’t walk on broken glass, I’ll be fine.”

I hoped her words did not prove prophetic.

But that icicle decoration had shattered all over the ballroom floor.

“We will see what we can do,” I promised her.

“So what kind of plan did you have in mind?” she asked.

I liked the way she got down to business—she had to be anxious, but nothing about her words or actions showed it.

It was all I could do to keep from taking her in my arms that very moment.

But we had a crisis to manage.

After we save everyone, I promised myself. Then I will make her mine.

CHAPTER SIX



VIVIAN

“What kind of plan of action?” I asked again.

Aarek glanced around. “I have not seen a single guard since we left the ballroom. The MEHA humans must have done something with them. I think we should try to find the guards first.” He paused, his expression a mask of concern. “I hope those *clivakas* have not killed them.”

The translator embedded in my head told me the word was something like *bastards*—but with an uglier connotation.

I had to agree. If the MEHA humans had killed the Khanavai guards, they deserved to die too.

“Where might they have stashed the guards?” I asked.

Aarek’s expression turned thoughtful.

“They must have come in through the first floor. It seems that they would have stashed the guards either in a central area or in a similar area on each floor. Hmm...” He headed out of the armory and toward a closed door. He held his hand up to the palm scanner, but the door didn’t open.

A few seconds’ worth of tapping on his wristcom, however, and the door slid open.

Three guards lay in a crumpled heap, and I gasped, covering my mouth with my hand. “Are they...?”

If not for the fact that they had different brightly colored skin tones, I wouldn’t have been able to tell how many of them there were. They were just a tangle of limbs piled atop one another.

Aarek bent down to examine them. When he straightened, he looked relieved. “They are all breathing.”

He moved back to the armory and grabbed a small padded bag about the size of a computer case. He began filling it with vials from one of the shelves in the back. Then he grabbed an

autoinjector and took it over to the unconscious Khanavai in the closet.

At my inquiring glance, he said, “Stimulant. Too strong for humans, but it will work on any Khanavai.” With that, he bent over and quickly gave each of the guards a shot.

Within seconds, the guards were sitting up and shaking their heads, the confusion quickly clearing from their faces.

“What happened?” a bright blue guard asked.

“You were attacked by an anti-Khanavai human guerrilla group,” Aarek told him. “They are holding the Holiday Festival guests hostage in the ballroom.”

“Those *clivakas*,” a green Khanavai growled.

“Yes,” Aarek said. “We are going to free them.”

Part of me thought that with the Khanavai guards, Aarek would no longer need my help. But I wasn’t willing to let him go into danger without me.

I knew that was insane—nonetheless, I was determined to do everything I could to protect him.

The three revived Khanavai guards gave me curious glances but did not ask any questions. When they exited the armory moments later, they had even more weapons than Aarek and I did.

“In case we need to hand weapons over to more incapacitated guards,” the green one said, gesturing at the bag he carried, also full of weapons.

“Just do not allow the MEHA humans to take any,” Aarek said.

The four Khanavai males huddled together, making a plan.

Then they set their wristcoms to a specific channel, and Aarek did some Khanavai technological magic to make sure they could remain in communication.

“You stay with me,” Aarek ordered tersely with a glance in my direction.

I nodded my agreement, and we all headed out.

Aarek and I went with the green guy, traveling to other floors in search of more guards.

On every floor, we found them locked away in closets and rooms.

Not all of them had been as lucky as the three guarding the armory. Some of them were dead. When we discovered that, Aarek's jaw clenched.

He spoke into his wristcom. "Be sure to keep all your weapons on the stun setting. Unless these clivakas will not go down. Then you may kill them."

By the time we finished searching the building, we had seventeen revived Khanavai guards, all of whom had been dispatched to various positions near the ballroom.

Eight Khanavai guards had died in the initial attack.

My stomach hurt at the thought of their friends and families finding out humans had done this to them.

The MEHA humans are definitely clivakas.

Now my jaw clenched, too, and I was ready to do whatever it took to bring them down.

Aarek and I headed back down on the ambassador's private elevator. "Are you ready for this?" he asked me.

"Almost," I said. "There's just one more thing I need to do first."

"What is that?"

I grabbed his *vandenoi* strap and pulled him closer to me. "This," I whispered. "For luck." I stood on my tiptoes and pressed my lips against his.

He froze for the barest instant, then wrapped his arms around my waist, crushed me against him, and took over.

I let myself get lost in the kiss, his tongue sweeping across mine, sending chills racing up and down my body. "I have

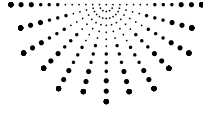
wanted to do that since I first saw you,” Aarek whispered against my lips when he finally pulled away.

I grinned. “Hold that thought,” I said. “I think that’s something we should continue once these *clivakas* are dealt with and all the guests have been freed.”

Aarek flashed a wicked grin. “That is definitely motivation to survive.”

Then we stepped out of the elevator and moved down the hallway that led back to the ballroom.

CHAPTER SEVEN



AAREK

The memory of Vivian's kiss played across my mouth like ghostly fingers. My lips still tingled where we had touched.

I had to force myself not to think about it too much—every time the memory crossed my mind, my cock twitched. I wanted more than anything to bury myself in her, make her mine.

Technically, Khanavai males stationed on Earth were not supposed to actively search for mates among human women. All pairings were supposed to go through Station 21 and the Bride Lottery.

But I assumed that was simply a formality—Central Command wanted human-Khanavai pairings, and as long as we registered our commitment to one another with the proper authorities, both on Earth and on Khanavai Prime, no one would stop us from being together.

But for now, I had to content myself with the knowledge that she was as interested in me as I was in her.

We had work to do first.

I had sent the Khanavai guardsman to various strategic points in the building. Clearly, the MEHA humans did not have a complete blueprint of the Embassy, which led me to believe they had somehow gotten their hands on one of the original blueprints. As the Embassy was being built, those were modified for security purposes. And specific elements, like the ambassador's private lift, had been added but not advertised.

In the hallway outside the ballroom, the two guards I had sent to the catering area joined us.

“Everything secure?” I asked.

The senior guardsman of the two gave a curt nod. “They had two humans guarding the catering staff. They have been stunned and secured.”

Good. I did not want to kill any more of them than absolutely necessary. That would be too easy for them.

I wanted these monsters to suffer at the hands of the Khanavai judicial system.

We were not as soft as human judges.

Besides, if we used our stun settings, it wouldn't matter if some guests were caught in Khanavai friendly fire. They might be displeased, but they would be alive. Our only real concern was keeping them from being shot by the terrorists.

I checked on the other guards, using the com system that I had set to a secure channel. The MEHA humans might have the system locked down in terms of outgoing calls, but they did not have the technological knowledge to keep us from communicating with one another on a strictly Khanavai channel.

“Everyone in place?” I murmured into my wristcom.

A number of affirmative responses came back, along with some other text responses from the guards who were concerned that they might be overheard if they spoke.

Most of those guards were currently situated in the maintenance areas of the embassy—including several in the ceiling above the ballroom itself. The maintenance spaces had been enlarged from the original blueprint to be made big enough for Khanavai males to use them.

I gave the predetermined command to set our plan in motion. “On the count of three, everyone. One, two, three. Go, go, go!”

I took up the rear of the line of Khanavai guardsman, pulling Vivian in close to me. As we burst out of the panel concealing the hallway, I stepped in front of Vivian.

From the ceiling, Khanavai guardsmen rappelled down, aiming their blasters at the obvious MEHA humans.

All around the room, terrorists dropped.

From their positions outside the circle of guests clumped together in the center of the room, several Khanavai warriors

sprang into action.

I recognized some of them from previous Bride Games—including Cav Adredoni and my direct supervisor, Zont Lanov. To my surprise, they took down some of the humans who were technically guests.

I was right. It had been an inside job.

Then Zont turned and attacked another ambassadorial aid.

I froze for a micromoment, horrified to realize that one of my colleagues had been involved in this attack on the embassy.

All around us, humans screamed, and the remaining MEHA terrorists began firing their projectile weapons at the Khanavai guardsmen I had sent in.

I caught a glimpse of one of the MEHA humans standing not far from us. He had grabbed a human female, an older woman with graying hair, and was using her as a shield.

One of my guardsmen fired at him and hit her instead. As she crumpled to the ground, I took a shot and tagged the human who had been holding her.

He fell on top of her, and Vivian dashed over to push him away, kneeling next to the unconscious female.

She glanced up at me. “She’s okay,” I saw her say, though I couldn’t hear her over the sound of blaster fire, gunfire, and screaming in the room.

All told, the entire retaking of the ballroom required less than five Earth minutes to complete.

As soon as there were no more projectile weapons firing, I began moving through the room, checking on the guests.

One man had taken a bullet in the shoulder. I called Vivian over. “This man has been shot. I need you to help stop the bleeding.”

She didn’t respond, and I glanced at her to find that her face had gone completely white. “Are you all right?” I asked.

My words seemed to jar her out of her shock. “Daddy,” she said, dropping to her knees beside the older male. “Are you

okay?”

This was her father? I hoped he did not hold his injury against the Khanavai.

He sat on the ballroom floor, one hand pressed to his shoulder. “I’m fine, sweetheart. I think the bullet went all the way through.”

She stripped his jacket off, then his shirt.

She was gentle, but by the time she finished, he was even paler than he had been before.

“Aarek,” Vivian said, her voice turning commanding. “I’ll need clean water and fabric—towels or bandages if you have them.”

“We need towels and bandages for injured guests,” I said into my wristcom. “Towels are available in the kitchen. I need all the bandages from any med packs.”

I moved to the refreshments table where several bottles of water had been kicked to the floor and picked one up.

When I got back to Vivian, she was easing her father back onto the ballroom floor using his folded jacket as a pillow. “Here’s the water,” I said, just as one of the guardsmen arrived with a pack of bandages and several small towels.

Vivian’s father looked up at me. “When this is over, I expect you to encourage your boss to accept my contract proposal.”

I blinked, and he gave a weak smile.

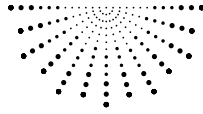
Clearly, Vivian had inherited her strength of spirit from this man.

“Daddy, this is Aarek. He’s the reason we were able to take the ballroom back from the terrorists.”

Her father held up one thumb in a sign that I had learned was one of approbation. “Good job, son,” he said.

Then he closed his eyes as Vivian pressed a towel against his wound, a grimace of pain crossing his face.

CHAPTER EIGHT



VIVIAN

Within five minutes from the time we'd rushed into the ballroom, all the MEHA terrorists had been captured, bound, and under guard. Between the Khanavai warriors who were already in the ballroom and had apparently been undermining the human's orders from the very beginning and the Khanavai guardsmen under Aarek's command, none of the attackers escaped.

Three of the terrorists who had tried it had gotten as far as the Embassy entrance—but Aarek had locked down the building, and they couldn't figure out how to get themselves out.

It took longer to get a message out to both the human and the Khanavai authorities—as Aarek said, the systems had been thoroughly fucked.

Unlike the Khanavai guards, none of the human guests or employees in the building had been killed. Several had been injured, however, so the paramedics who showed up ten minutes after our distress call went out were busy getting everyone stabilized and loaded up to take back to the hospital.

My father was one of the first to go.

"I'll be right behind you," I told him. "I'll meet you at the hospital. I just need to talk to a couple people first."

He waved me off. "I'll be fine. You don't need to come to the hospital."

I rolled my eyes. "Don't be ridiculous. I'll be there."

"It'll take them a while to get him sewn up," the paramedic told me. "We will let them know to contact you in the emergency room waiting room."

"Thanks," I said. I watched as they wheeled Dad away to be loaded into an ambulance.

Then I made my way over to Aarek who was talking to three other Khanavai males—one who was turquoise, one red, and one hot pink.

All of them were vaguely familiar, too, but I didn't waste a lot of energy trying to figure out who they were.

"Hey, Aarek," I said, dropping my hand onto his forearm when there was a break in the conversation.

Instantly, he focused all his attention on me. "Yes?"

I started to tell him where I was headed, but his gaze dropped to my feet. "You're bleeding," he exclaimed.

I glanced down at the floor where a trail of blood led across the room. I hadn't even felt it. I picked up my foot and looked at the bottom. "Damn. I guess I stepped on some of the glass on the floor."

"We need to get you to the hospital," he said.

I laughed. "It's just a few glass shards. I'm fine."

He frowned and turned to look at the three other Khanavai males. They smirked at him and all nodded. I had no idea what that was about, but instantly, Aarek swept me up into his arms. "I allowed you to be hurt," he said. "Now you must allow me to ensure that you are healed."

I laughed, but I had to admit I didn't mind being carried across the room.

"This human woman is injured," Aarek announced as he approached another pair of emergency medical personnel. "She must be healed immediately."

"I have some glass in my foot. It's not bad," I explained.

"Sit down here, and I'll take a look at it," one of the EMTs said—an attractive human man with dark hair and eyes.

Aarek stared at the man for a moment then sat down in the oversized folding chair and settled me in his lap.

This time, I laughed aloud. "I can sit on a chair by myself."

A low growl rumbled in Aarek's chest. He glowered at the EMT, who blanched. "No problem—I can check your foot out just like you are."

As the technician held my foot up and began plucking tiny pieces of glass out of it, I whispered to Aarek, “It’s rude to terrify the people who are trying to help us.”

“I am allowing him to touch your foot because he is a medical professional. But I will not leave you with him.”

Well, then. So be it. I snuggled against his chest and waited for the paramedic to finish what he was doing.

When he was done removing the glass, he sterilized the wounds and bandaged my feet.

I was going to have to find some shoes to wear in the hospital. I wouldn’t be able to shove my bandaged feet back into my high heels—which I had left in the armory, anyway.

“What were you coming to tell me?” Aarek asked, clearly attempting to distract me from any pain I might feel.

“I was coming to say goodbye. I’m about to head to the hospital where they’ve taken my father.”

“I shall accompany you,” he announced.

“That’s not necessary,” I assured him.

“I want to go with you,” he said, his voice dropping down into a lower register.

A slow smile spread across my face. “Well, then. That’s entirely different.”

“And while we are on our way to your father’s sickbed,” Aarek continued, “there are some things I would like to discuss with you.”

CHAPTER NINE



AAREK

I arranged to take one of the Embassy vehicles to the hospital.

Vivian insisted on stopping by her apartment to change into more suitable clothing.

Unlike Khanavai, humans required different wardrobes for different activities.

Our *chavans* were perfectly acceptable in every situation.

But I had to admit, the form-fitting clothing she wore when she rejoined me in the Embassy car was almost as attractive as the dress she had worn to the party.

“There,” she said. “That’s better. Anyway, I think jeans and a sweater are more appropriate hospital-wear.”

We sat in silence for a few moments after I plugged in our destination and the car began driving itself. Few people on Earth used autopilot for their vehicles as it had been deemed too unsafe for general use—but the Khanavai Embassy had a waiver to do so.

“So,” she said. “You had something you wanted to discuss with me?”

I wasn’t entirely certain how to begin. Cav Adredoni and his friends had given me several suggestions, all based on their experiences with their human mates, but I wasn’t certain any of them would work.

However, Cav had told me to, “Work your way up to it,” because humans tended to be resistant to the idea of the mate scent.

“I presume you have watched the Bride Games before?” I finally asked.

“Of course. Pretty much every human girl has.”

“What do you know about the means by which Khanavai males find their mates?”

She frowned. “I assume they choose the women who seem like they’re the best match? Though there’s also something about the Khanavai males knowing immediately when they meet their mates.”

“That’s true,” I conceded. “But it’s not the entirety of the bond.”

“How does that work?”

“We first know our mates by smell. From the moment we catch that scent, the mate binding process begins. The mate bond is completed when the male and female copulate.”

A slow grin spread across her face. “So in order to be bound to a human, you have to have sex with her?”

“Exactly,” I said, relieved that she understood.

“And you’re telling me this why?”

I frowned, but she was smiling, so I had to wonder if she was, as humans said, *teasing* me.

“Because from the moment I caught your scent from across the room, I knew that you were my mate. We are destined to be together.”

“You think we’re mates?”

“I do. And I would very much like to complete the mating process with you.”

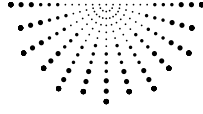
Her mouth fell open, and she stared at me blankly for a long moment. “But we just met.”

“It doesn’t matter.” I shrugged as I had seen humans do. Her shoulders had been turned toward me so she could face me in the back seat of the ambassadorial vehicle. Now, she spun around and leaned back against the headrest. “This was so not in my plans,” she murmured.

“It was not in my plans, either, but there are loopholes for ambassadorial staff who run into their faded mates.”

“Of course there are,” she muttered.

CHAPTER TEN



VIVIAN

We left my father's hospital room several hours later. They were keeping him overnight for observation just to make sure he was okay, but the doctor didn't foresee any problems.

We got back into the embassy car with its little flags flying at the corners.

"Have you been considering what I told you earlier?" Aarek asked. I could tell asking the question made him nervous.

"About you thinking we're some kind of soulmates?"

He tilted his head, considering the term. "Soul mate. I like that. On Khanav Prime, we simply call it mate."

I grinned at him. "Well, on Earth, we usually have slightly longer courting periods."

"Do you not have stories of human couples who met and bonded immediately?"

I lifted one shoulder in a shrug. "Sure. We also have stories of those people ending up divorced."

Aarek shook his head. "Among Khanavai, divorce does not exist. We are never wrong about our mates."

"And you're absolutely sure of this—that you and I are meant to be together?"

"Without a doubt."

"And no Khanavai male has ever been wrong about his human mate? If that's the case, then why are there Khanavai males who choose human women in the Bride Games and don't end up with them?"

This time, Aarek was the one who shrugged. "There are elements of the Bride Games that are... synthesized. Sometimes a male will think he has scented his bride, only to discover that she is not. That is because the brides' scents are fabricated and sent out to potential grooms. In other cases,

there have been grooms so desperate for a mate that they have convinced themselves they can be happy with a woman who is not fated for them.”

“So how do you know that’s not what’s happening with you?”

He snorted. “Nothing I scented on you is synthesized—beyond the perfume you’re wearing, of course, but I can separate that smell out from your personal scent.”

Okay. Under any other circumstances, I would find that comment a little creepy. But right now, coming from Aarek, I actually thought it was kind of sexy.

What the hell was wrong with me?

“And as for mistaking my mate out of desperation—I had no interest in finding a bride.” His eyes flashed. “Until I met you, that is.”

Okay. This whole conversation was sexy. There was something riveting about being pursued so single-mindedly—and not in a disturbing stalker way, but because he was so certain we belonged together.

And because it’s Aarek.

I stared at him for a long moment. He reached out and ran one fingertip down my cheek. The touch sent desire shooting through me.

“Is there any way to test your theory?”

His lips curved up in a slow, sensuous smile. “There is one way, yes.”

“And that would be...?”

“Intercourse.”

I threw my head back and laughed aloud. “Really? You’re telling me that you can figure out whether or not we’re meant to be together forever by having sex with me? That has to be the most original pickup line I have ever heard.”

“And yet it is true. Have you heard rumors of the Khanavai mating cock?”

I blinked. “It’s true? You really have two penises?”

“So I’ve been told. The mating cock does not appear until and unless a Khanavai male is with his true mate.”

“You’re saying that if we have sex and you grow a second penis, it means we’re meant to be together forever?” It was all I could do to keep from snickering as I spoke.

“More or less.”

This whole conversation was insane.

But speaking of crazy—I was insanely curious, too.

I stared at him for a long moment then said, “Would you like to try it?”

His voice turned low and throaty. “More than I could ever tell you.”

I glanced around the darkened parking garage. “This doesn’t seem like the most private place.”

Aarek flashed a wicked smile and tapped a few buttons on his wristcom. “There. No one can see into the vehicle now.”

“Really? Well, then. I think we should take a tour of the city—at least until we’re finished.”

“I am in perfect agreement.”

With a few commands, Aarek programmed the vehicle to drive around the streets of Manhattan indefinitely.

I TURNED TO FACE AAREK IN THE BACK OF THE EMBASSY limousine, and he unbuckled my seatbelt, then dragged my body up against his, wrapped his arms around me, and claimed my mouth with a kiss.

Within a few seconds, an alarm went off inside the car telling us that all passengers must remain belted into their seats at all times.

With a muttered Khanavai curse, Aarek flipped open a panel in the back seat and did some magic with his wristcom until the alarm shut off.

Aarek unbuckled his seatbelt, as well, and waited for a moment to see if the warning would start up again. When it didn't, he nodded in satisfaction.

“That’s better,” I said with a smile barely biting back a snicker.

Aarek murmured his agreement, then picked up where we had been interrupted.

His tongue played in my mouth, sending shivers rolling through my body. My nipples hardened under my sweater as Aarek’s hands slid up under it and pushed aside the cups of my bra.

He circled his thumb lightly around my nipple, and they grew even harder, coming to taut peaks as I leaned back, thrusting my breasts toward him and letting out a sigh of pleasure. A few moments later, he dragged his face away from me and stared into my eyes. His own eyes were heavy-lidded, his pupils dilated with passion.

Wanting to get on with it, I tugged the sweater up over my head and unhooked my bra, letting the straps slide down my arm. It joined the sweater in the pile of clothing on the floorboard.

Aarek let out a little groan of appreciation and bent his head down to flick his tongue across first one nipple, then the other.

Now I was the one moaning with pleasure.

Heat pooled in my core as his hands ran down the sides of my waist and over my hips.

I could see the growing bulge of his cock under his chavan and reached down to slip my own hands up his thighs and under the kilt-like skirt of his uniform.

Like the rumors about Scotsmen, apparently the Khanavai didn't wear underclothing under their uniforms—at least not this Khanavai.

I cupped his balls in one hand and slid the other up his hardened length, and he leaned back against the headrest with a moan. “God, you feel amazing,” he murmured.

“So do you,” I replied. And huge, too. I was a little concerned about finding a way for our... um... parts to fit together. But there were plenty of apparently satisfied human women married to Khanavai men, so I assumed it was possible.

After only a few moments of stroking him, I was surprised when he pushed me away. “Is something wrong?” I asked.

“Not at all. Lie back on the seat,” he instructed me.

I bent my knees and wiggled around until I was stretched out on the car seat with my head toward the other door.

Aarek took a moment to study the button on my jeans, then figured it out and swiftly unfastened it. The zipper took even less time, and within moments, he was tugging my pants down my hips as I pushed myself up and wiggled to get out of them.

He dropped them on the growing pile of clothing on the floor and stared down at my lacy purple panties. “Pretty,” he said, running his finger along the waistband. I shivered at his light touch, and he grinned wickedly. Then he hooked his finger into the elastic. I prepared to wiggle out of those as well, but instead, he gave him a swift tug, and the elastic broke.

I gasped. “Those are my favorite pair,” I said, my tone full of faux outrage.

“I will get you more. If you decide you really have to wear such things.”

Now that I lay bare before him, I shivered a little in a mix of excitement and fear.

Not that I thought he would hurt me. But if he was right, what we were about to do would bind us together in some weird, Khanavai biological rite of passage.

With both hands, Aarek lifted my legs and draped them over his shoulders as he bent down.

His lips butterflyed across my abdomen, then moved lower, his fingers dancing across my clit then spreading me open to allow his mouth and tongue better access.

I gasped at the first touch of his tongue against my clit, my back arching up off the luxurious leather seat. I reached down and threaded my hands through his thick, dark hair, gasping and moaning as his tongue danced in circles and light flickers across me. Within seconds, I was writhing beneath him, begging him not to stop. He slid his hands around under my ass and lifted me closer to him. "You taste amazing," he murmured, his breath fluttering against me.

Then he sucked my clit into his mouth, holding it there as his tongue flicked across it again and again.

I raised my hips higher, and he crushed me against his face.

My orgasm built, pulsing inside me as I moved in time to Aarek's tongue until I was arching against him.

The heat swirling in my core spilled over, crashing through me as I shattered, screaming his name.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



AAREK

Vivian collapsed back onto the vehicle seat. Luckily, they were designed with Khanavai passengers in mind, so there had been plenty of room for the two of us.

After a moment, she opened her eyes. They slowly focused, and she stared at me with a satisfied smile on her face.

She glanced out the window as the vehicle came to a momentary stop. “Where are we?”

I shook my head. “I have no idea. Nor do I care.”

“Mmm. You know what? Neither do I.” Her chest was flushed red with the aftereffects of her pleasure, and I realized I could stay like this forever basking in the afterglow of her satisfaction.

But Vivian was not going to settle for that.

After a micromoment, she pushed herself up to sitting. “That was amazing,” she told me. “And now it’s your turn.”

My human mate did not bother to undress me. Instead, she simply pushed my chavan out of the way and bent over my cock, sliding her tiny hand up and down it. When she stretched her mouth open wide to capture the head, I pressed back against the car seat determined not to try to force her to take more into her tiny mouth than she was capable of.

To my surprise, she continued downward, until she had almost half of me in her mouth.

Human females were indeed stretchy and accommodating. I had heard the rumor, but never fully believed it.

As she moved back up, she flicked the underside of my cock with her tongue, and I moaned.

A few more passes like that, and I was certain I was going to explode in her mouth.

I did not know what that would do to the mating cock, so I pulled her up, my hands resting gently on her shoulders.

“Was that not okay?” she asked, her eyes wide and worried. “I don’t know what Khanavai males like.”

“It was amazing,” I told her, my voice tight with desire. “But I cannot last much longer.”

A wicked gleam flickered through her eyes. “No? Well, in that case...” She wiggled around some more and swung one leg over me until she was straddling my hips.

My cock pressed against her slick heat, and she wrapped her arms around my neck as she carefully maneuvered to take me inside her, enveloping me in her warm heat.

I held perfectly still through sheer force of will, allowing her to take my length into her tight pussy. She pushed downward then paused, allowing herself to grow used to my size. She let out a tiny whimper, but I was certain it was not one of pain, because she immediately lowered herself a little more.

When I was fully sheathed inside her, we stayed like that for a few micromoments, gazing into each other’s eyes. Then, without breaking eye contact, she began moving up and down, her inner walls squeezing around me, rubbing against all my most sensitive areas.

My balls grew heavy as pleasure gathered deep inside them.

I moaned again, and she increased the pace, tightening herself around me even more.

My thumb found the tiny nub that had sent her into orgasm before, rubbing it in time to her movements.

Within moments, she clenched around me and buried her face in my neck, screaming as she came.

She shuddered around me, pussy walls fluttering, and I pumped into her hard—once, twice, and then pulled her down tight against me as I exploded into her, the stars flashing behind my eyes more beautiful than anything I had ever seen in space.

WHEN WE HAD BOTH CAUGHT OUR BREATH, VIVIAN ASKED, “Was that it? Are we mated now?”

I shook my head. “Not yet.”

But I could feel my primary cock sliding down to reveal my mating cock—fully engorged and extraordinarily sensitive—as it slid out to take the primary cock’s place.

Apparently, Vivian felt it too. Her eyes grew wide, and she blinked rapidly. “Oh my God. Is that...?”

“It is,” I managed to rasp out.

Once again, Vivian began moving, riding up and down my mating cock.

It was an exquisite torture—the newly awakened mating cock hypersensitive to every touch leading me to a pleasure so intense it was almost pain. I could not speak, only feel, and every part of me knew that this was right. This was how it should be.

This human female was my mate. Now and forever.

And she reacted, too, the hormonal element of our binding sending ripples of joy through her as well. She moved faster and harder, and I met her stroke for stroke, slamming upward, our bodies slamming together.

This time, she did not need the help of my thumb on her clit. Instead, as she reached her peak, and I felt her start to tighten around me again, my mating cock pushed inside her, rubbing against her most sensitive inner spot until she gave a wordless cry, and I followed her over the edge, exploding into her in an orgasm like nothing I had ever felt before.

VIVIAN REMAINED ATOP ME FOR AS LONG AS SHE COULD, AS UNWILLING AS I WAS TO BREAK THE CONNECTION BETWEEN US.

Eventually, though, I softened, and she slid off of me to sit sideways in the seat next to me. Both her legs draped over my

lap and the rest of her body snuggled in as close to me as she could get, her head resting on my chest.

“What now?” she asked.

I shrugged. “Now you are my mate.”

“And you’re mine?”

“If you wish. I am more bound to you than you are to me. So it is ultimately your decision.”

“But what happens if I decide I don’t want that?” She glanced up at me. “I know it’s a hell of a time to be asking. But I am an attorney... I mean, I should’ve checked the fine print before I signed on to this, but I was a little caught up in the moment.” Her smile took away some of the fear her question generated.

“It is your decision,” I repeated. My heart sank at the thought that she might decide to leave me.

She caught the expression and responded to it rather than my words. “I am all in on trying this. I’m absolutely willing to see how it goes. I just need to know the details.”

I wrapped my arm around her and pulled her in even closer. “I promise I will make it worth your while. I will love and protect you with everything I have.” *And I will do everything I can to make you so happy that you never want to leave,* I added silently.

“That sounds nice.” A sly expression flashed across her face. “Would it be inappropriate for you to help me with my father’s contract with the Khanavai?”

I threw my head back and laughed. “I will talk to the ambassador. He likes working with people who have some connection to the Khanavai. I will help you as much as is appropriate.”

She nodded, content with my answer. “Then let’s get back to the Embassy. I think we should register our connection as soon as possible, Khanavai representative Aarek Difaelis.”

“I agree. Unless, of course, you are up for one more time?”

She glanced down at my cock, already hardening again, and her eyes grew wide. “Oh, yes. Absolutely.”

And suddenly, I was delighted to be representing my people to at least one human on Earth. Perhaps Vivian and I could work together to change the way human females and Khanavai males found one another.

Yes, I thought as she pressed her lips against mine. With any luck, this will be the start of an entirely new generation of Khanavai-human relations.

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USA Today, *Wall Street Journal*, and *New York Times* bestselling author Margo Bond Collins is a former college English professor who, tired of explaining the difference between “hanged” and “hung,” turned to writing romance novels instead. (Sometimes her heroines kill monsters too.)

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