



The Zoo

Eve Vaughn

Changeling Press

Children of the Dust: The Zoo

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Children of the Dust: The Zoo

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The Cyrellians appear friendly, offering hope to a battered and devastated Earth. But three women soon make startling discoveries that could very well change the fate of their home world yet again.

With the help of Cyrellian technology, Bella may soon hear for the first time. When she goes to their lab for tests, she finds herself sold off -- as a pet in an alien zoo! Although she's expected to mate with a "creature" of her kind, she can't fight her attraction to Dar, the zookeeper assigned to oversee her training.

Dar has a knack for dealing with the most unruly of the zoo's pets. Still, he's surprised at how like his people these new breeders are. Disturbingly he finds himself falling for the Earth being, even though he knows it's wrong to mate with the pets. But when Bella tells him of the Cyrellians' underhanded tactics, he risks his life on a daring escape. Will they find their way back to Earth in time to warn others of the Cyrellians' devious plans?

Prologue

Anarchy reigned supreme.

Those old enough to remember cursed the day when the world leaders decided nuclear weapons would solve their disputes. It did, but not in the way they'd expected.

In the years since nuclear holocaust wiped out three-fourths of Earth's population, animals included, no order had been restored. Clean water and food had become a form of currency. Nowhere was it safe to be out once the sun set -- people were likely to be killed for anything of value they might carry. Orphaned children ran through the deserted streets naked, dirty, and unsupervised. Women and men alike sold their bodies on street corners for a simple bite to eat.

Many who didn't die immediately eventually succumbed to radiation exposure. Still more chose death as an escape from the mess Earth had become. Bodies lay decaying on the ground, the meat picked from their bones by some hungry creature -- or person. There were those who craved some kind of structure, but were too afraid to voice their opinions, scared they'd be attacked by those who thrived on the chaos. And so nothing changed. There was no government, no law, no peace -- no hope.

The survivors dubbed themselves the Children of the Dust, as that was all that was left of the planet.

Then one day, help came in the form of alien space ships. Strange luminescent beings with misshapen heads, large dark eyes, and long spindly fingers descended on Earth. The aliens' arrival struck fear in the hearts of the people. It made no sense that they'd come to conquer a nearly barren planet.

While the skeptics kept their distance from the new arrivals, a few brave souls attempted communication. The Cyrellians as they were called soon proved to be

friendly. Not only were they instrumental in restoring Earth to its former glory, but they introduced the people to technologies beyond their wildest imaginings.

Within ten years of their arrival, the Earth was once again prosperous. Humanity flourished under the guidance of the Cyrellians. Things could only get better, or so they believed.

Discord was soon created by a small factor of malcontents who didn't trust their alien benefactors. But eventually, this small group of rebels disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again.

Chapter One

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Bella could tell from the thoughtful look on Holly's face that she'd try to talk her out of the decision she'd already made, but it would do her friend no good. There was no changing her mind.

She stood, abruptly walking the length of the room, and halted in front of the window to stare outside. Hovercrafts flew across the sky leaving little white clouds in their wake. Bella looked down below her to see people interacting with each other, laughing, chatting, and greeting one another. The city was full of activity.

And she heard none of it, not so much as a bird chirping or the sound of an engine. She lived in complete silence, and had since the age of nine, shortly after her parents were killed by a careless motorist. She'd come down with a cold that had soon developed into a nasty viral infection that destroyed her hearing. It was ironic that she'd lost the one sense she'd depended on the most. Bella had been a proficient violinist by the age of five. A child prodigy was what they'd called her. But what was the point in continuing when she didn't know if she was playing the right note, or whether her instrument was in tune?

Her violin still rested in her closet, a reminder of when she was whole. It mocked her each time she laid eyes upon it. With the help of a school for the blind and deaf, she persevered, learning to live independently. She now held a job as a teacher at the same school, owned her own condo, and lived relatively well by most standards, but she longed for more.

Bella wanted to hear again. Perhaps things would have been easier if she'd been born this way, but she could still remember the sweet sound of music. Her mother had

played the piano, and her father the flute. When they'd played together as a family, those were her favorite memories.

She still missed them every day, wondering if they'd be proud of the woman she'd become.

A hand descended on her shoulder, forcing her to turn around. Bella focused on Holly's lips to make out what was being said. "Look, Bella, I know this operation means a lot to you, but I would hate for you to be disappointed. This surgery is still in the experimental stages. Not only is it possible you won't get your hearing back, but you could die. Remember when the eye implants were developed for the blind? Quite a few patients didn't make it before they finally perfected the procedure."

Bella held up her hand, stopping Holly before she could say any more. "I know you mean well, but I won't change my mind. Don't you think I've weighed the pros and cons already? I know that by participating in this experimental surgery I'm putting my life at risk, but it's a chance I have to take."

Holly flipped a strand of long auburn hair over her shoulder with a sigh of obvious frustration. Bella was familiar with that gesture. "I don't believe you've thought this through properly. I'm sure if Sydney were here, she'd say the same thing."

"I've already talked it over with her and she's supporting me in my decision, just as I would expect a friend to do." Bella was finding it difficult to keep her anger under wraps. What the hell was Holly's problem? Lately she'd become Miss Doom and Gloom, but never would Bella have believed her friend wouldn't stand behind her.

"Just because I'm concerned doesn't mean I'm any less of a friend than Sydney. You know I'm here for you, but I don't want to lose you to something that's not guaranteed. Besides, you lead a perfectly normal life."

"If you believe that then you're more out of touch than I thought. Do you think being this way is a trip to the moon? Yes, I've learned to cope with my disability, but I'll never forget what it's like to hear the sound of laughter or music playing. Knowing there's something that could possibly fix my hearing loss has given me hope when I thought there was none. Would you take that away from me when I desperately need to

believe in something? If you're truly my friend, you'd at least try to understand where I'm coming from."

Holly recoiled, eyes widened as if she'd been slapped. "I am your friend. How could you imply I'm not?"

"Because you wouldn't try to talk me out of it if you were. You know how much this means to me. I've thought long and hard about it and I can't go on living like this when I know this can be fixed."

"Possibly fixed. But that's just it, you don't know for sure. Could you stop for a minute and listen to yourself?" The minute the words left Holly's mouth, she flushed apparently realizing the *faux pas* she'd made.

Bella knew her friend had meant no harm in her comment, but she wasn't in the mood to shrug it off. Narrowing her eyes, she glared at Holly. "It's hard for me to listen when I don't hear anything. This subject is no longer up for discussion and I'd like for you to leave."

The suspicious sheen of tears entered Holly's brown eyes. "I didn't mean it. I swear I didn't."

"I know, but now I'd like to be alone."

Holly reached out as if to hug her, but Bella took a step back, avoiding the gesture with a shake of her head. "Just go, please."

"Bella --"

She turned her back to Holly. She wasn't interested any longer in the way this conversation was going. Wrapping her arms around her body, she walked to the corner and leaned her head against the window, willing herself not to cry. She didn't turn around again until she saw Holly leave through the reflection of the window.

Swiftly, she wiped away an angry tear. Sydney had talked her into telling Holly about her decision because it was the right thing to do. Bella had been reluctant because lately Holly had begun to make strange statements about what the Cyrellians were doing to the planet. From what Bella could see, the Cyrellians had done nothing but good for Earth and its people. The only thing they asked for in return was the chance to

study the inhabitants of this world. When all was said and done it seemed like a fair enough bargain.

Actually it seemed more one-sided in the Earthlings' favor considering all the technology and innovations in medicine they'd brought with them. Few could remember a world without the Cyrellians and most of them didn't want to. Now that they'd found a way to restore hearing loss by rebuilding the inner bones and an electronic implant, Bella could only count her lucky stars.

She was well aware of the possible risks of the procedure, but the idea of being able to hear again made those possibilities inconsequential.

With a sigh, Bella walked over to her couch and flopped onto it. "Television," she commanded, bringing the set from the ceiling to her line of vision. "Channel Three News." The TV came on as did the subtitles for the pre-set closed caption feature programmed into it.

Trying to keep up with the flashing words, she finally gave up when a dull throb began at the base of her skull, threatening to turn into a full blown headache. She didn't feel like reading the news anyway. At times like this, it would have been nice to lie back, close her eyes, and listen to the sound of the anchorman's report as he relayed the happenings of the world.

Tears stung the back of her eyes. She'd give anything to hear the sound of... anything. No one could know the ordeal she faced daily. When she'd received that brochure in the mail about the miracle operation, Bella had believed it was an answer to her prayers. Sure it was experimental, but she didn't care. If there was the slightest of chances that her hearing would be restored, she'd take it. Damn the consequences.

If she could hear, maybe she wouldn't get those pitying looks any longer or deal with men who felt they could treat her any way they wanted because she should be grateful to have them. Some would say she was lucky to be alive, but what kind of life did she really have?

“Television off,” she ordered and lay back on the couch, closing her eyes. A smile tugged at the corners of her lips. Tomorrow she would go down to the BioMedic Labs and take the test to see if she was a candidate. She couldn’t wait!

* * *

Bella couldn’t say she enjoyed all the poking and prodding the Cyrellian doctors were subjecting her to. She wished she could make out what they were whispering to each other. Because the Cyrellians didn’t have lips, just a small slit to put food in and get words out, she couldn’t always tell what was being said. Not that it really mattered; she only spoke Spengnese, the official language of Earth. Right about now she wished she’d opted to learn more dialects when at school.

Strangely though, Cyrellian was not a language offered to children in school. No one really questioned it, especially as it was they who had taught the people of Earth the language they now used. But they maintained their own language amongst themselves. Bella could only guess at what they may have been talking about.

She frowned when one of the doctors stared at her with dispassionate large black eyes. They seemed to bore right into her soul. She couldn’t quite hold off the shiver that raced up her spine. Why did she get the uncomfortable feeling something wasn’t quite right? Could it be possible Holly had been right to be concerned with this procedure?

No. It couldn’t be.

She *would* hear again.

It was simply the nerves talking. “What’s going on?”“ She looked at the doctors who were still studying her as if she were an amoeba on a Petri dish.

The one who’d introduced himself as Dr. Hyoisl sighed. “Relax, Ms. Scott, we must first make sure you’re in good health before we can go any further.”

“But we’ve already been here for over an hour and all you’ve done is take my blood, and temperature. You’ve barely looked at my ears which is why I’m here in the first place. Surely if I weren’t a candidate, you would have told me by now.”

The two aliens exchanged looks and spoke in what Bella assumed was Cyrellian, as she couldn't make out even one word they were saying. Again that uneasy feeling returned and this time she couldn't shake it.

Bella moistened suddenly dry lips and stood up. "Look, let me know now if I'm wasting my time, so we can either get on with it or I can go."

Dr. Tyron patted her hand in what must have been his attempt at a comforting gesture, his thin mouth tilted in what looked like a smile. "We apologize for keeping you so long. You are indeed a candidate for this procedure, but first we must perform one last test to make certain."

She didn't think she could handle any more, but she figured the end justified the means. "What does this test entail?"

Without answering, Dr. Hyoisl produced a large menacing needle.

Bella gulped nervously. "What... what kind of test requires you sticking me with that thing?"

"We need to see how your body responds to this drug," Dr. Tyron explained.

She didn't like the looks of that thing or the determined look in Dr. Hyoisl's eyes. Taking a step back, she shook her head. "Uh, I don't think -- hey! What the hell are you doing?"

Dr. Tyron grabbed her arm while Dr. Hyoisl jabbed her with the sharp point and injected the contents of the needle into her.

Bella knew in that instant she'd made a mistake in coming here. For whatever reason they'd advertised, it wasn't for the purpose of conducting a surgery. She had to get out of here and fast. Thinking quickly, she slammed her elbow into Dr. Tyron's midsection, breaking free. She rushed to the door, but found it locked.

What in the world was happening and why did she suddenly feel so drowsy? It had to be that drug they'd administered. If she couldn't get out the traditional way, she'd have to try the window.

Bella grabbed a chair and tossed it toward the framed glass. The chair bounced back.

Plastic.

Damn. Now what? With each passing second, she grew more lethargic, swaying on her feet to remain standing. "What have you done to me?" she demanded.

Bella didn't have to hear herself to know her words were slurred. Unable to remain steady, she shook her head to rid herself of this sleepy feeling. Glancing at one of the doctors, if that was in fact what they were, she caught the gleam of triumph in his eyes.

This had all been a set up and she couldn't for the life of her figure out why. Bella's last coherent thought before she lost consciousness was that she wished she'd listened to Holly.

Chapter Two

"A new animal has arrived today, a *Human* -- a female this time. It's our hope here at the Interstellar Zoo of Flamryl that she'll mate with the male we already have in captivity. We've named her Shara," declared Zavian, the head zookeeper.

Dar squirmed in his seat, feeling slightly uneasy. In all his years tending to exotic creatures from other planets and galaxies, no species made him more uncomfortable than the *Humans*. For one, they were too much like his own race for his peace of mind. Then there was the way the male moved and gestured, almost as if he could have been one of his own species.

The male they called Quark had fashioned some leaves and dried straw into a crude loin cloth to cover his cock and balls. It made Dar think that not only did this being understand the concept of nudity, but was sentient as well. If that was the case, they had no business keeping him at the zoo.

Quark walked on two legs like the Flamrylians. He'd attempted communication. Granted they didn't understand what the creature was saying most of the time, but occasionally Dar could distinctively hear Quark use a few Flamrylian words. The human male was slender in build, and had basically the same equipment except the smaller sub-cock the males of Dar's race possessed for the purpose of stimulating the female anally as well as vaginally.

Another difference between them, the unsightly amount of body hair Quark had, where Dar's people only grew hair on their heads. The most noticeable difference however, was the skin hue. Flamrylians were golden with multi-colored markings on their bodies and faces, denoting their stations. Quark was pale, and pinkish in color. But still there were far more similarities than there were differences.

From what Dar knew of these creatures, they hailed from a planet called Earth where the Cyrellians ruled in a galaxy he wasn't too familiar with. From what the Cyrellian dealers had told them, these *Humans* were savage creatures, but trainable. But could their word be trusted? After all, they were notorious planet destroyers, banned from inhabiting any worlds in the Tron Three Galaxy for trying to overthrow the Intergalactic Federation Council. They had resurfaced a few years ago, selling animals they'd captured. Only the more unscrupulous bought from them, and unfortunately for Dar, the head zookeeper at his place of employment was the most crooked of them here.

"Dar, are you listening to me?" Zavian roared, a look of annoyance crossing his already stern face.

Dar snapped out of his silent musings, embarrassed at being caught so lost in his thoughts. "Uh, yes or course I heard you." He hoped it didn't sound as much like a lie to Zavian as it did to his own ears. "You mentioned a new female *Human*. It's your wish to have her mated with Quark."

Zavian's yellow eyes squinted, scrutinizing him, but Dar refused to squirm.

Gadzoets, he hated this smarmy son of a *caxiun*. Every worker at the zoo knew Zavian had had only been appointed head zookeeper because his brother was head councilman of the Parks and Beautification Committee. Like anyone unqualified for the job they had, he used his position to bully the employees directly under him.

Dar was the only one whom Zavian didn't cross because one, he too had political connections, and two, he wasn't afraid to tell the *ewala's* ass exactly what he thought of him. Dar supposed it was typical bully behavior, all talk and no action.

Whenever he saw Zavian attempt to run roughshod over the defenseless, Dar stepped in. Certainly there was no love lost between the men, but it suited him fine. His main concern was the animals. Since Zavian had taken over, he'd pushed to bring more unusual creatures to their zoo to increase the amount of visitors.

It was a strategy that had paid off, to the detriment of the animals. Though the zoo was making more money, the head zookeeper had cut the budget on natural habitats and treats he'd deemed unnecessary for the beasts.

Dar suspected Zavian was embezzling the surplus funds, but he couldn't prove it.

"Well," Zavian finally said in a huff, obviously not happy about losing an opportunity to humiliate Dar. "I'm putting her in your charge for now unless otherwise instructed, and you're to see that the two procreate. The *Human* exhibit has drawn a lot of attention, and has quickly become the most popular attraction, which translates to money. A baby between Quark and Shara would generate more."

Dar realized it would be a waste of breath expressing his concerns to one so tunnel-visioned, but at least he could document what he'd done so far for the benefit of the Parks and Beautification Committee who came annually to inspect the place. Nepotism may have put Zavian in the position, but it wouldn't keep him there if Dar had anything to do with it. "I wanted to talk to you about Quark."

Zavian sighed before a frown turned his lips down into an ugly scowl. "You're not going on again about Quark having a mind of his own. I don't care to have this conversation again. He's a lower life form -- a beast. They have no emotions, feelings or souls. Why you care so much about these animals is beyond me."

Dar glared, wanting to pound his fist into the corpulent man's face. "It's *beyond me* --" he pointed at his chest, "why you're head zookeeper when you clearly have such disdain for these lesser beings as you call them."

"I suggest you watch your tone with me, Dar. I'm in charge of this place, not you. I'm aware this is the position you coveted, but I'm here to stay and I demand respect."

Placing his palms on the large metal desk separating them, Dar leaned forward until he was inches away from Zavian's face. "You haven't done a thing to deserve respect and you're not getting any from me."

"I will put this incident in your file. Any more demerits and yo-you'll be f-fired," Zavian stammered.

Dar threw his head back and laughed. "And then it would be more apparent how incompetent you really are." He stood up then, tired of being in this man's presence.

“Sit down!” Zavian pounded his fist on the hard steel surface, creating a reverberating thud. “I’m not finished with you yet.”

“But I’m through with you. I’ll see to the new arrival. I won’t ask if there’s anything else you’d like to discuss because I’m not interested.” Turning on his heel, he walked out of the office, ignoring Zavian’s calls.

“You won’t be so defiant for long! I’ll personally see you put in your place.”

Dar didn’t stop until he reached the door of the infirmary where the new additions were brought and examined thoroughly before they were integrated with the other animals.

His blood was still near to boiling, like it was whenever he met with Zavian. The concern he’d never gotten to express about Quark before he’d been cut off was that, lately the *Human* seemed interested in cultivating some type of intimacy with him. Whenever Dar had gotten close enough to the human, it almost seemed as if Quark was flirting with him, but that couldn’t be. Could it?

If he didn’t know better, Dar would think the being was homosexual. Quark, though obviously male, was effeminate in so many of his mannerisms that it made Dar wonder. If the *Human* was gay, he certainly wouldn’t be interested in mating with Shara, his soon-to-be cage mate. That was the problem with bringing the new animals in; not a lot was known about them. Dar would make it a priority to study them more closely for the next few months, learning their habits, and rituals.

The thick steel door leading to the infirmary muffled the piercing shrill of the behavior neutralizer, a device used to control the animals with sound. Quickly he popped in his earplugs and raced toward the commotion.

He wasn’t sure what he’d find, but it certainly wasn’t the chaos unfolding before him. Standing on the examination table surrounded by the three other zookeepers, all holding neutralizers, was the female *Human*. She held what looked like a makeshift blade made out of a broken bottle.

Her screams were being drowned out by the noise makers, but she wasn’t covering her ears in pain, nor was she backing down. Why weren’t the devices working

on her? Even though the plugs he'd inserted were designed to drown out even the highest decibels of sound, he could still hear the faint buzzes. What in the name of Glarm was going on?

Normally Dar was fast on his feet, but this time they wouldn't move even if he wanted them to.

The female was magnificent.

Dark brown hair framed a delicately shaped face that fell like a silken cape around her shoulders. Were it not for her coloring and the markings Flamrylian woman possessed, she could easily pass for one. As it stood, her body was absolute perfection from the high pert breasts capped with deep red nipples to the tiny waist that flared out to womanly hips. A triangular patch of hair rested between her thighs that he'd never seen on any Flamrylian female, but it wasn't unappealing. It actually made him want to find out the secrets it hid beneath.

Dar's cocks stirred uncomfortably inside his pants. Thoughts he knew he shouldn't be entertaining ran through his mind. Only when he looked into her blazing green eyes did he come to his senses.

They were filled with fear.

She wasn't acting out, but frightened. "Turn off the neutralizers," he yelled as loud as he could, and when they didn't, he realized his error. They were all obviously wearing earplugs as well.

He strode over to the closest one and snatched the device out of nerveless fingers and switched it to off. Dar repeated the motion with the other two and then gestured for them to remove the sound mufflers from their ears.

"Why did you do that? We need to get her to desist this unacceptable behavior. She wouldn't cooperate with the examination," Yeahen explained.

"Obviously these things aren't working," Dar drawled.

The other two looked hesitant.

The female, however, went on the attack. She sprang at him with the jagged glass. Dar moved out of her way, barely missing the slicing arc she made with her

weapon. That would have produced a nasty cut. When she tried it again, he was ready for her. He caught her wrist in one hand and removed the glass from her and then tossed it out of her reach.

Dar was much taller and outweighed her significantly, but she put up a fight that made it nearly impossible for him to hold on to her.

Shara attempted to scratch his face, but when that didn't work, she pounded on his chest. He caught her flailing arm and gave her a strong shake. This didn't stop her. It seemed nothing would.

Leaning forward, she bit him.

Hard.

"Argh," he yelled his pain. The little she-beast's teeth had sunk through the cloth of his shirt and into his skin.

Yanking a clump of her hair, he was able to rip her head away from him, but not without causing injury to himself. Dar then grabbed Shara by the armpits and tossed her over his shoulder.

She cried out and pummeled tiny fists into his back.

His fellow zookeepers watched in fascination, not moving a finger to assist him, probably because they didn't know what to do. Dar couldn't blame them with the way this one carried on. Dar brought the flat of his palm onto her upturned bottom, not meaning to cause Shara pain, but to send a warning that he'd not put up with much more of her rebellion.

Though her struggles lessened, she still put up a fight, trying to wiggle from his hold. This time when he slapped her ass, Dar put more force behind it. He was in control and he wanted her to know it. Maybe what he was really trying to do was to control the racing hormones within him. The heat of her body so close to his was doing things to his body he hadn't experienced in a long time. He had to exorcise these inappropriate thoughts from his mind.

Shara cried out, but stilled.

Yeahen clapped his hands together. "You've done it! Finally you've conquered this wild animal. We've tried to restrain her for nearly an hour, but it only takes a few minutes for you to do what the three of us couldn't accomplish," he said, his voice full of admiration.

Dar frowned, not wanting the praise. He did what he had to do. "What did you do to her to make her act this way? In my recollection Quark has never given us this kind of trouble so it can't be something this species is prone to."

Ritza, one of the newer zookeepers, spoke. "She was sedated when she was brought to us. I was only giving her an examination. Yeahen was here to supervise since this was my first time. In the middle of the process, she woke up. That's when she threw this awesome tantrum, and grabbed the bottle of antibiotic from my hand and busted it against the wall. She brandished the jagged piece of glass at us, and even cut my hand." She held it up as evidence.

Dar winced when he saw the deep gash. "And then what?" he asked tightly. "What is Iosis doing here?" Personally Dar couldn't stand the man. He was Zavian's personal spy, and probably twice as corrupt. Whenever Dar saw him he wanted to ring Iosis's skinny little neck.

Though he had no proof, Dar suspected Iosis was abusing the animals. On a few occasions there had been marks on the animals' skins. Once Dar witnessed the other man caressing one of the Mulka' Beasts in a disturbing manner. Iosis had given him a weak explanation regarding what he was doing, but the incident remained in the back of Dar's mind.

Iosis flushed. "I heard the struggle and I came to assist. It's a good thing you came," he bit out finally, even though the brief look of pure hatred he shot Dar made a lie of his words. "That female is a menace."

"When they're frightened maybe. She was obviously terrified, as are many animals are when they're brought into a strange new environment," Dar countered.

"What... what do you plan to do with her? You can't put her in the holding unit with Quark. She'd probably dismember him," Iosis protested.

Dar's lips tightened. As much as he hated to agree with him, Iosis was right. Shara would have to be isolated until they knew for sure there'd be no more such incidents.

With a sigh, he nodded. "You three clean up, and I'll take her to one of the isolation cells." Without waiting for anyone else to speak, Dar strode out of the infirmary with the limp female over his shoulder. His strides faltered when he heard the sounds of weak sniffles.

No. Surely he was imagining this. Was she actually crying?

He quickened his steps, not stopping until he reached the isolation unit. Placing his palm on the DNA identifier, he waited the few seconds it took to verify his clearance before the door opened.

Dar carried her to a cell at the end of the unit. He had to punch in a security code on the panel in order for the laser shield to disappear temporarily.

Her body trembled against his as the sniffles grew louder. He could tell she was fighting back the sobs, but losing the battle. As he carried her to the far corner and placed Shara down on the pile of straw, his heart went out to her. She curled up in a ball, her eyes teary and bewildered. Full, pink lips quivered as if she would burst into full-fledged tears at any moment.

Incapable of feelings, emotions and pain? Seeing her like this, he knew that wasn't true. Was it possible these *Humans* weren't lower beasts at all, but another intelligent life form? How could something so Flamrylian-like not be sentient?

And what of his reaction to her? With so many life forms on other planets, it wasn't against the law to intermarry other sentient beings, but by his people's standards, she was an animal -- a bottom feeder. What he'd felt during that brief moment in the infirmary would generate disgust within his people. He'd have to force this irrational feeling away, and treat her as he would any of the other creatures in his care.

Still, when a single tear slipped from her eye, Dar couldn't help but be moved. Unsure if she'd attack him, he risked kneeling next to her and touching her cheek.

Shara flinched, and then turned her head away. Dar pulled his hand from her as if he'd been burned. Shara's skin was so soft, much softer than any other female he'd touched before.

What was the matter with him? This wasn't right. Still, he couldn't walk away just yet. "I mean you no harm." He knew she wouldn't understand a word he'd said, but somehow he felt the words were needed. "I won't hurt you," he repeated.

She lay there unresponsive, staring at his mouth as if she were trying to decipher what he was saying. Were it not for the flash of confusion crossing her face, he'd think she actually understood him, but why was she focusing so intently on his lips?

Then suddenly it came to him.

No wonder Shara hadn't been affected by the behavior neutralizer; she couldn't hear. Technology for several types of hearing loss had long since been developed on Flamryl. Was the place she hailed from so primitive that they had no such enhancements?

Then he remembered, she wasn't a spectator at the zoo, but the attraction. This operation wouldn't be done on an animal. If Zavian found out Shara was deaf he'd deem her defective and send her off to the "farm" where animals were sent for slaughter.

Dar shouldn't have cared, but he did. He'd have to find a way to communicate with her, at least make her understand this was now her home and she'd have to conform to the rules or else it could mean trouble for her.

He stood to his full height and paced the short length of the room. When he began working at the zoo several years ago as a fresh-faced lad, Dar had developed an affinity for the creatures he tended to. But never had he felt such a deep connection for one of them in so short a time, and not in this way.

Why?

Chapter Three

Bella didn't know how long she'd been in this godforsaken place, naked and cold. Was it minutes, hours, or days? She'd lost track of time after the slender gold man with the black eyes used some kind of stun gun on her. It had stung like a son of a bitch, rendering her immobile for a long time, giving her the shakes when she'd finally come out of her paralysis.

Why would they hold her like this? What had she done to warrant such treatment, stripped and not giving the common dignities any person had a right to? She was losing hope of escape. This place seemed to have more security than any place she'd ever seen. She felt like crying, screaming and raging, but what good would that do?

The strange aliens all treated her like some bug under a microscope. She'd tried to read their lips but it was unlike any words she'd ever seen. Bella didn't know why she was being held or what she'd done, but there was one thing she was certain of -- the Cyrellians were behind this. But who were those golden people, and who was *he*?

She'd only seen him a few times, and each time he'd entered her prison, he'd attempted to communicate with her. The last couple instances, he'd even looked like he tried to sign. But that would mean he realized her disability. She should hate him for what he'd done, tossing her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and then spanking her in front of those jerks who were probing her like some experiment.

Bella, however, found herself looking forward to his visits, well not eagerly, but at least he was better than the others. The fat one threw a dish full of blue paste at her, looking as if he wanted to be miles away. The minute he placed the slop down, he hightailed it out of her cell, as if being chased. She figured he was scared of her. The blue stuff turned out to be food, and it was disgusting, not fit for a pig.

Then there was the female, tall and slender with long red hair and strange tattoos on the side of her face. She wasn't so bad, but she was so impersonal it made Bella feel lower than low.

And lastly there was the smaller thin one, bald with squinty brown eyes. He wore a perpetual sneer on his face. He'd been the one who tasered her, seeming to take a gleeful pleasure in torturing her. He poked her with a stick and when he kicked her, she fought back. Like the first time Bella had seen him, he'd pulled out some long metallic, tubular object connected to his belt and pointed it in her direction. She couldn't figure out why he kept holding it her way, but something seemed to displease him because he'd frowned.

He'd hit the thing as if it were broken. That's when Bella determined it had something to do with sound. He quickly punched in the buttons and ran out the door. The lasers reappeared before she could escape. The next time he'd appeared he tried to grab her and she'd bit him. From the way his lips moved she knew he'd let out a scream, then anger flashed in his eyes, before he'd produced a small rectangular box and pushed it against her chest sending convulsions of shock through her entire body.

It was only when *he* showed up that Bella got excited. He was tall with long black hair that fell to the middle of his back. The uniform he wore didn't disguise his broad muscular frame. His features were lean and rugged and those eyes: a deep blue and so... dreamy.

Despite his coloring and the dark tattoo on the side of his face, he was easily one of the most handsome men she'd ever seen. Of course she hadn't appreciated his manhandling her in the beginning, but he'd shown gentleness toward her the others hadn't. Not only that, but each time he drew near, her body would tingle, and her pussy would clench.

It had been a long time since she'd taken a lover. There was no way she could be attracted to one of her captors. It was simply one of those things. Besides, maybe if she figured out a way to make him understand, she could guess what was going on and why she was being held against her will.

Bella crossed her arms across her chest still not used to the nudity they'd subjected her to. If there was nothing else she wanted, it was some clothes, and maybe something decent to eat. Out of desperation, she'd even tried the crap they called food. Why wouldn't they allow her clothing when they were all dressed?

She was never more aware of her nakedness than when tall, gold, and hunky walked into the cell. When would he return though? Bella happened to glance toward the glowing laser bars just in time to see them disappear. The thin one entered holding a bowl of that disgusting paste and a taser in the other hand.

Her heart fell. She hoped he wasn't planning on doing anything with it. Bella scooted into the corner, covering her body as best as she could. If she remained still and didn't try anything, maybe he wouldn't bother her. Something was different about him.

There was a knowing smirk on his face as he approached her. He let the dish fall at her feet and she huddled as far into the corner as she could go. Skinny, as she'd dubbed him, came closer. What was he doing? She didn't like that look in his eyes. He reached out and patted her hair.

Bella jerked her head away not wanting his touch. Skinny grabbed her hair and pulled her closer, and to her horror he grasped her breast giving it a hard squeeze. An evil grin spread his lips.

She would be completely clueless to not figure out what he wanted from her. Curling her hand into a fist, she slammed it into his face. The man grabbed his nose, giving her enough time to scramble away. The laser bars were gone if only she could make it out. Bella had just made it to the door when Skinny grabbed her ankle making her fall flat on her face.

She couldn't let him win, that wasn't an option. He dragged her further into the room and flipped her over. She kicked him in the midsection, but not before he pressed the taser into her leg.

The voltage must not have been as high as the last time, because it only sent a mild shock into her, not enough for immobilization or for her to give up. She screamed

and then dealt him another kick, this time in the groin. Skinny let go of her ankle and Bella wasted no time. She dashed out the door, not looking back.

Tears streamed down her face. She raced the length of the corridor, reaching a large metal door. Grabbing for the handle, she gave it a desperate yank. Bella had to get out of here before Skinny caught up to her. She kept pulling even though she realized the futility of her actions.

Glancing over her shoulder she saw Skinny approaching fast. She pounded on the door, knowing it would do no good, but frustration wouldn't allow her to stop.

Divine intervention stepped in when the door opened, and standing in front of her was *him*. Without another thought, she flung herself into his arms, and clung to him, refusing to let go. Unable to hold them back any longer, she burst into tears.

Dar had come as soon as he heard the distress signal that automatically went off when someone tried to get out of the security door without using the DNA tracker. Seeing it had come from the isolation chamber, he instinctively thought of Shara. He hadn't expected to come upon her in hysterics. Dar held her closer, slipping his arm beneath her legs and lifting her into his arms.

Her shoulders shuddered with her sobs. Shara was obviously distressed and it made him wonder what had set her off this time.

Out of vengeance, Zavian had him running errands normally relegated to one of the newer zookeepers, which meant his co-workers were put in charge of Shara temporarily.

The few days he'd gone to her, Dar felt she was beginning to trust him. Now she was a hysteric mess and it angered him. Iosis approached looking fluster and... guilty? Why?

"What happened?" Dar demanded.

"She's unruly. I simply put her food in front of her and she attacked me. I'm going to recommend to Zavian that she be sent to the farm. I wouldn't put her in with

Quark. She just might dismember him. Shara could probably take on a *heka* beast and win." Iosis's words were rushed and uneasy.

Dar narrowed his eyes. "Are you sure that's all?"

Iosis gasped, and then incredulity crossed his face. "Isn't my word good enough for you? She's an unstable creature. You've already seen it firsthand. She's been in isolation for over a week, and at the rate she's going she'll never leave. The behavior neutralizer doesn't work on her. I personally think she's stupid."

Dar would have wrung his scrawny little neck, but Share's distress could no longer be ignored. "Then it's a good thing for you I'm the one who'll be dealing with her from now on. I have sole responsibility for her."

Zavian thought he was punishing Dar by putting him in charge of her, but it's exactly what he wanted.

Iosis frowned. "Why did he choose you? I could have handled her."

Dar lifted a brow. "And you were doing such a great job just now," he said, doing nothing to hide the sarcasm from his voice.

Iosis stammered, "A-and I suppose you could do a better job?"

"A *wilka* beast could do a better job." The smaller man's nostrils flared before he stormed off, the door slamming behind him with a loud thud.

Dar carried Shara back to her cell and immediately the foul smell hit him. The pen hadn't been cleaned for days. What were the others thinking to leave the place in this condition? They didn't treat the other animals this way, and Shara certainly didn't deserve this. He made a mental note to have this particular cell cleaned from top to bottom, but in the meantime, he'd put her some place else.

He took her to the next stall, punched the code on the panel and took her inside. When he would have placed her down on the hay, she refused to let him go and made whimpering sounds. Gently he disentangled himself from her tight grip. It flattered him that at least she trusted him enough to know he wouldn't hurt her as he was sure Iosis had tried to do.

Something told him she wasn't one to attack without reason. Dar wished he knew what was going on. Why was Iosis so eager to watch her even though it was clear Shara didn't like him?

The musty scent she currently emitted told him not only did the others not clean her stall, they hadn't given her the benefit of a wash down. He moved to the control panel and turned on the shower that came down into the center of the room. The side of the wall opened up revealing trays of soaps the zookeepers used on the animals, but Dar knew Shara could wash herself.

Once that was prepared for her, he knelt down beside her again and pointed to the shower. He knew she would probably want her privacy so he left the cell, not bothering to turn the lasers back on. He would be standing outside the door so she wouldn't get far if she tried to escape.

Dar waited outside out the cell for several minutes, giving her the time she needed to wash, if she was utilizing it at all. He peeked inside to check up on her and saw her sitting beneath the water, her knees pulled tightly against her chest while she rocked herself. Shara appeared to be in an almost catatonic state. Because the water splashed over her face, he couldn't tell whether she was crying or not.

One thing he did know, he had to go to her. He wished Iosis was here so he could pummel the *jacknaks*. Dar hit the buttons turning off the water and turned on the hot air blower. She was dry within minutes. Then he went to her and lifted her into his arms.

She sagged weakly against his chest, her cheeks wet with fresh tears. Dar took her back to the corner and sat down with Shara in his lap before rocking her back and forth until her cries became short sniffs. He stroked her hair, whispering words to soothe. Even though she couldn't hear, it just felt right.

He cupped her chin, lifting her head to meet his gaze. Shara trembled in his arms, a look of uncertainty entering her eyes. Pointing to himself he said his name. "Dar." He'd determined from the way she stared at his lips earlier that it was how she would figure out what people were saying. He hoped she'd understand he was trying

to tell her his name. After repeating the gesture a few more times, he gave up in the face of her wide-eyed wonder.

Frustration beat within his chest. Dar had been so sure she was intelligent. Then to his surprise, Shara opened her mouth. "Daahrr." She pronounced his name slowly. It sounded guttural and husky, imperfect, yet he'd never heard a more beautiful sound.

A smile tugged the corners of his lips. He nodded vigorously. Then she pointed to herself. "Bella." Her name was Bella. He like it much better than the one Zavian had assigned to her. It was more musical somehow.

"Belhella?" he repeated as best as he could

She took his hand and placed two of his fingers over her lips. "Bella," she repeated.

Dar was sorry when she removed his fingers from her soft lips. He wondered how they'd feel underneath his own. "Bella," he whispered.

She gave him a smile, transforming her face. Bella was already pretty, but her smile made her gorgeous. She wiggled on his lap, probably to get comfortable, but it awakened his cocks with a vengeance.

This was absolute madness. He had no right feeling this way.

Bella must have felt his erection because she stiffened.

Dar groaned, wishing he was anywhere but here. Her large green eyes widened, and a soft gasp left her lips. Just one taste and he could stop these carnal thoughts. Unable to suppress the driving need within, he captured those very same lips he'd spent the past several days fantasizing about.

In that moment, she wasn't an animal in the zoo and he her keeper, but she a woman and he a man. Her mouth trembled beneath his. At first the kiss was one of gentle exploration, but his need grew. Dar wanted more, so much more.

Grasping the sides of her face, he pressed his tongue against the seam of her lips.

Bella relaxed within his hold and sighed into his mouth, granting him access to her sweet depths. She tasted sweet, tangy, and absolutely delicious. Bursts of incendiary

heat shot through his body. Dar thought he'd die of pleasure when her tongue pressed forward to meet his in acceptance.

She wanted this too.

Pushed back were the thoughts of how wrong this was. Bella placed her hands on his shoulders, pressing her pebbled nipples into his chest. His cocks strained to break free from the restraint of his pants -- begging for it.

He could smell the faint scent of her arousal and knew she'd be slick and ready for him. Dar dropped one hand on the tight patch of curls nestled so lovingly between her silken thighs.

As though sensing his silent command, she parted her legs, welcoming his intimate touch. Dar slid a finger along the length of her damp slit, testing how wet she actually was. Bella was literally dripping with cream. Sliding his middle finger into her cunt, he was satisfied to get a throaty groan from her.

She threw her head back, exposing the graceful line of her white neck to his hungry gaze. He planted kisses along the column of her throat as he finger-fucked her.

Bella wiggled and writhed in his lap, obviously enjoying this as much as he was. He never wanted this moment to end -- Bella in his arms, him tasting and touching her.

Only when the panic alarm went off did he come to his senses. Reluctantly, he pulled his finger out of her gushing pussy and gently moved Bella to the floor. He quickly got to his feet.

She shot him a bewildered look, her cheeks turning bright red. He couldn't meet her gaze. Turning his back to her, Dar retreated from the room and quickly punched in the code.

Self-disgust filled him. Though he had no doubt she was an intelligent, sentient species, she was still in captivity and he was in a position of authority over her. He couldn't let this happen again. As he raced toward the distress call, Dar couldn't help bringing his still dew-soaked fingers beneath his nostrils, remembering what could have been, but wasn't meant to be.

Chapter Four

Holly paced the living room of Sydney's high rise condominium, her panic increasing with each step. Two weeks and not a single word. She hadn't seen Bella in fourteen days. Three hundred thirty-six hours. Twenty thousand, one hundred and sixty minutes! She was going crazy with worry.

After the first couple of days, Holly figured Bella needed some time to cool off before calling, but after several unreturned phone calls, her concern grew, especially since Sydney hadn't heard from her either. Now another week had passed with no word and no one had heard from her.

The school Bella taught at had told her that she'd requested some leave, but they'd been very vague about the whole thing. Holly then decided to pay a visit to the clinic Bella was supposed to have her appointment at. They said they hadn't seen her, had no record of her even setting up a consultation with them at all.

Something strange was going on, and she had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach that her friend was in some kind of trouble. Holly didn't trust those Cyrellian doctors as far as she could throw them. They were definitely hiding something. Where there was smoke there was fire, and the damn building was about to burn down.

"Girl, if you walk across my carpet anymore, you're going to wear a trail in it," Sydney drawled.

Holly stopped, turning around to meet her friend's bored gaze. "How can you just sit there so calmly when we haven't seen or heard from Bella in days? What if she's hurt out there somewhere? What if the Cyrellians did something horrible to her? This experiment they wanted to try on her sounded too good to be true. And another thing, I did some research and found nothing on this procedure. Why would they single Bella out?"

"Maybe because they thought she would make a good candidate for the surgery?"

"Or maybe to do something far more sinister."

Sydney lifted one perfectly arched dark brow. "You've already mentioned what the school said that she put in a request for some time off. Has it occurred to you she's on vacation? She's an adult, and doesn't have to report her every move to us."

"I realize that, but it isn't like her to disappear without a word. Furthermore, I ran into another one of her co-workers who wasn't aware she was taking any leave. Now who am I supposed to believe? Why am I getting conflicting stories?"

Sydney shrugged. "I haven't a clue. Maybe that person isn't on a need to know basis about Bella's comings and goings. She loves that job. Why would she abandon it? I'm sure she'll be back soon."

"Her co-worker told me they've lost several students in the past few weeks. They simply dropped out. Explain that."

"I'm sure there's some logical explanation."

"Only the deaf students? Something screwy is going on."

"In your mind." Sydney huffed her exasperation. "Why not stop worrying? It won't do you any good one way or the other. I'm sure Bella is fine and we'll hear from her shortly."

Holly stomped her foot in frustration, wishing she could get it through her friend's thick skull that something was terribly wrong. "How can you be so callous? Our friend is missing and all you can say is everything will be okay?"

"It's better than making myself sick with worry. Bella has gone off before without notifying us. Why is this time any different? Look, Bella is a big girl, who's quite capable of taking care of herself. I wonder if you'd be so concerned if I took off somewhere for a little bit without calling."

"Of course I would. Why would you even imply that I wouldn't?"

"Because I'm not deaf. You treat Bella differently, always trying to protect her when she's doesn't want you to."

"I do not! I... I just don't want to see her get hurt."

"Sometimes we have to fall to get back up. You can't always be there for her," Sydney said gently.

"That's what friends do; we look out for each other. Not everyone has their head stuck in the sand like you do. And furthermore, you're probably not interested because this subject doesn't revolve around you." The second the words were out, Holly regretted them. Arguing wouldn't bring Bella back any sooner, and that attack wasn't called for.

Sydney uncurled her long legs from the sofa she'd been reclining on and stood up, her dark face remaining impassive. She strode over to the balcony window and stared outside. Though she didn't say a word, Sydney's hurt was evident in her rigid stance and stony expression.

Holly knew she'd gone too far. Her anger and concern for Bella had gotten in the way of her judgment. Maybe a little of what she'd said had sprang from jealousy. Sydney was used to being the center of attention, but not by design.

She was a rare exotic beauty -- stunning. Men fell at Sydney's feet when she walked down the street. With rich coffee-colored skin, which was a startling contrast to her tilted light brown eyes, she possessed features many women would kill for and others spent money to attain.

She wore her hair cut closely to her scalp in tiny natural curls that emphasized the highness of her cheekbones, and regality of her oval-shaped face. She was tall and slender with curves in all the right places, the exact opposite of Holly's short dumpy body.

Whenever Holly stood next to Sydney, they looked like the number ten. She supposed she couldn't blame Sydney if all the attention did go to her head but it didn't. Taking the attention all in stride, sometimes it seemed like the way men treated her annoyed rather than flattered her.

"I'm sorry, Syd. It's just... I... well, my temper... actually, there's no excuse for what I just said. It was totally unnecessary."

The other woman shot her a faint smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "You said how you felt at the time. I can't fault you for that. We all say things we don't mean in the heat of the moment."

"But I shouldn't have said it regardless. It was a bitchy thing to say."

"Forget about it. Look, if we're both being honest here, I'm starting to get a little worried too, but I also know from experience Bella doesn't like it when she's hovered over. I know you have a mothering instinct, but you have to let her fend for herself sometimes. I wasn't exactly thrilled at the prospect of this operation she wanted either, but she was so happy when she told me about it. I didn't have the heart to crush her hopes."

This was news to Holly. "You never mentioned it before. You should have voiced your concerns. It wouldn't have hurt to tell her what was on your mind."

Sydney turned around to meet her gaze. "Here we go again! Would you stop for a moment and listen to yourself? This is something she wanted badly. How can you tell someone not to try for their dream when it means so much to them?"

"But what if --"

"What? If they can't perform the operation? From what you just told me, the clinic has no record of her visit. She probably changed her mind, and you got your wish after all."

"That's if the Cyrellians can be trusted."

"Please, let's not get into any more of your weird conspiracy theories. Maybe she was so rattled after you tried to talk her out of it that she didn't go. And this is exactly why she wasn't going to tell you about the procedure in the first place."

Holly gasped. "Why not?"

"Because she knew you'd try to talk her out of it -- which it seems you did."

"So why did she change her mind and tell me?"

Sydney didn't say, but her silence spoke volumes.

"You convinced her to tell me?"

“Well, it would have been awkward keeping this a secret from you. We both know how mistrustful you are of the Cyrellians, even though they’ve made this society livable again. A hundred years ago Earth was a wasteland. They’ve restored it to something great. Why do you think so badly of them? What happened, because at one time you sang their praises?”

“When something seems too good to be true, it usually is. Why hasn’t anyone noticed there are no elderly people?”

Sydney snorted in derision. “Of course there are. There’s a nice couple who live down the hall from me, both in their seventies.”

Holly folded her arms across her chest. “Only a couple? I’ve noticed none in the past few months. When was the last time you saw your neighbors?”

Sydney furrowed her brows together as though deep in thought. “I’m pretty sure I saw them a few days ago. They were talking about going on a trip to see their grandchildren, so there. I guess that shoots your theories to dust. What do you think the Cyrellians are doing to the older people, sending them to be euthanized when they reach a certain age?” Sydney laughed.

“This isn’t funny. I’m serious.”

“And so am I. I think you probably need a vacation.”

“I have more proof.” Holly refused to be talked down on this subject.

“And what is it?”

“The news,” she declared full of conviction.

Sydney stretched, clearly bored. “What about it?”

“Haven’t you noticed there’s a lot of Cyrellian propaganda lately? There used to be a public access program that addressed concerns about what was happening to our society, but it’s no longer on the air.”

“Probably because no one was watching. Anyway, does all this really matter? You sound like one of those crazy rebels, hell bent on fighting the system. You know what they said in the old days don’t you? If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Holly wanted to strangle her. That was the problem with everyone. They were far too complacent with the way things were to open their eyes and see the truth. "Maybe those rebels aren't so crazy at all."

Sydney threw her arms up in the air, as though she'd given up. "Who are you and what did you do to my sane friend Holly?"

"I wish you wouldn't make light of my concerns."

"I'm not. I don't know how we've gone off on this tangent in the first place. We were talking about Bella, remember?"

Holly groaned, so caught up in her passionate beliefs about Cyrellian rule she'd momentarily forgot Bella. "You're right, but I don't have a good feeling about things. Something is wrong. I can't put my finger on it, but please trust me on this."

Sydney gave her a long hard look before relenting with a sigh. "Do you truly believe in your heart that something is the matter?"

"Yes!"

"Okay. You win. I guess it wouldn't hurt if we checked her condo. I have a spare set of keys. The truth is, I planned on going there tomorrow to check on things."

"Then what are we standing around waiting for? Let's go."

"And then when we see that she's okay, will you let this anti-Cyrellian crusade you're on go? You can be banished from the city if the wrong person hears you spouting that rhetoric."

"Why? I'm only speaking my mind. There was a time when free speech was allowed."

"We do have a free speech, with restrictions maybe, but the rules are for our own protection."

"I can't believe you buy that bullshit. As outspoken as you normally are, why do you support a system that denies us the right to say what we want, when we want to? These new laws they've enacted lately make no sense, and you weren't too happy about some of them either, unless something has changed between then and now."

Sydney lifted her chin defiantly. "I've landed a job with Cryo Cor."

"You what!" Holly squawked with disbelief. "You know how I feel about that place. There's something unnatural about their products."

"I think you've said enough. Are we going to Bella's condo or what? Standing here and arguing isn't going to help her."

Holly was furious. How could Sydney go behind her back and apply to Cryo Cor knowing how she felt about that particular company? "I haven't said half of what's on my mind. Why did you do this? Something isn't right about that place and before you say I'm talking about crazy conspiracy theories again, I felt this way about them before I began to question Cyrellian rule. It has a bad vibe about it and, furthermore, why are their labels written only in Cyrellian, a language they never taught us."

Sydney's nostrils flared. "You accused me of being self-centered earlier, but the only person I see with that particular trait is you. I don't know what happened a few months ago to cause you to act like this, especially after the Cyrellians have done so much and continue to do more for this planet. They may not have created a perfect society, but it's damn near close to it. And as I've already said, I'm finished talking about this with you. A word of friendly advice though, you had better be careful because people will start talking and think you're unbalanced."

"Do you?"

Sydney didn't answer but she didn't need to, and that hurt far more than any words could.

"I see," Holly said quietly. "I appreciate your support, friend --"

"And I'd appreciate yours, but I guess that's not going to happen," Sydney shot back.

Holly sighed. "Haven't I supported you in all of your ventures?"

"Then what makes this so different?"

"You know," Holly muttered stubbornly.

"I don't."

“Then I guess we’ll have to agree to disagree.” Holly raked her fingers through her hair. “Maybe I am crazy, but I hope you’re right about Bella being okay because God help us all if you’re not.”

Chapter Five

Bella had never been more confused about anything in her life. What was going on? And why was Dar now treating her like she had some kind of communicable disease? For the past several days, he seemed distant and standoffish toward her, not even making eye contact. That was what hurt the most, especially after what occurred between them.

Before that instant, she'd fallen into the abyss of depression allowing it to nearly crush her spirit. Isolation and loneliness did that to a person and her treatment at the hands of her other captors certainly didn't help. She'd thought Dar was different, that they'd made a connection, but now he was acting as if nothing had happened. Is this how he was with other women?

Envy ripped through her body, stirring within her heart. This line of thinking was irrational, but she'd come to think he actually cared for her. When Dar did come to see her, she tried to communicate with him, wanting to learn words in his native language and that way figure out what was going on.

Instead of so much as a glance from his direction, he'd come in, place some food in front of her, and leave. Sometimes he'd stay for longer spurts to clean her cell or to turn the water on for her to bathe, but he made no attempt to talk to her.

Bella was cut deep. It was hard not to break down into tears. How could he kiss her, touch her, excite her and then virtually ignore her? It was by far the worst thing that had happened to her since she came to this place.

She shivered with lust as she remembered his fingers sliding in and out of her pussy, making her so wet she couldn't stay still. In her shamelessness, she wanted more. Under the circumstances, it made no sense that she should want him as badly as she did.

But still the instant attraction could not be denied. She didn't know what game he was playing or if he got off on fiddling with people's emotions, but she couldn't stop thinking about him.

When she closed her eyes to sleep, he was her last thought and when she'd wake, he was there in her mind. No one had ever elicited such passion from her -- such need. If only he'd reach out to her once so she'd know for sure it hadn't all been a cruel dream, then she could at least justify these warring emotions within her.

Bella should hate him, after all, he was one of her captors, keeping her here against her will, but there was something different about him. If only she could figure out a way to get through to him, maybe he'd help her escape this place.

She'd already figured she was no longer on Earth. The air was easier to breathe, and the atmosphere didn't feel the same, her body felt heavier as if the gravitational pull was stronger. She wondered if her friends realized she was missing yet.

Sydney respected her boundaries most of the time and Bella appreciated that, so would her friend notice that she was missing? Hopefully a red flag would be raised after all this time. She knew for sure Holly would probably be throwing a fit. At times, Holly acted as though Bella wasn't capable of handling things on her own, and it was mainly due to Bella's disability although Holly would die before she'd admit it. Still, right about now anything would be a welcome change to what she'd been going through.

There had been times when Bella had butted heads with Holly over how overprotective she was, but at this moment she would give anything to be fussed over by her friend, who she knew meant well. She wished their last words exchanged hadn't been an argument. Bella had been so gung ho over the prospect of hearing again that she hadn't properly researched this experimental procedure.

Now that she'd had nothing but time to think over the course of events that had led up to her capture, she realized why Holly had been so adamant about her stance. Why was she solicited for this thing and no one else she knew had heard about it? She worked at a school for the deaf for goodness sake. It was almost as if she'd been singled

out for something shady, but why would they set up such an elaborate ruse in the guise of helping her hear?

Holly had warned her, but Bella had been so focused on getting what she wanted she wouldn't listen to reason. Now it made her wonder what exactly the Cyrellians were up to. What else were those bastards hiding? Saviors her ass. Undercover dictators more like it. They weren't saving the Earth; they were exploiting it for their own purposes.

If she could only get back home and warn everyone else. But would it do any good? She was sure they'd try to stop her. They might say she was crazy, but Bella was used to people treating her differently. Maybe if she could join up with the rebels once she got back to Earth, she could share her story and they'd believe her.

Unable to remain immobile, she walked around her cell. If she could she would have escaped, but those laser bars gave off a powerful shock when they were touched. She'd already tested them with the tip of her finger. It hurt far worse than when she'd been tasered. If she tried to run through them, it would most likely kill her.

She paced back and forth; any exercise would do at this point. Bella never thought she'd become accustomed to her own nudity, barely giving it a thought, not even flinching when someone came by.

Bella became aware she was no longer alone when a firm hand fell on her shoulder.

After jumping in surprise, she stilled. Bella didn't have to look behind her to know who stood there. She couldn't forget his masculine scent or the way his touch made her feel. A shiver of remembrance raced up her spine. Slowly, Bella turned around, not knowing whether to smile in greeting or hit him for being so cold to her lately. Instead of doing either, she schooled her features to remain impassive, not giving anything away.

Why did he have to look at her that way with those intense blue eyes? His nearness was causing havoc to her equilibrium and she lowered her head.

He grasped her chin, tilting her head upward and forcing her to look at him. "Bella," his mouth shaped her name.

"Dar," she said in return for lack of anything better to say. Yes, he'd ignored her the last several times he'd visited, but her relief to have him acknowledge her again outweighed any other feelings she had.

He pushed a long length of cloth in her arms and began to speak.

What was this? The cell they'd put her in was temperature controlled so no blankets were needed. Why did he feel it necessary to give this to her now? Bella shook her head in bewilderment not understanding what this was for.

Dar paused for a moment before he began making gestures. Taking the cloth from her hands, he wrapped it around her shoulders. The material was large enough to engulf her entire body, falling the length of her frame.

She'd been without clothing for so long now, Bella wasn't sure she missed them, but she appreciated his gift. She smiled her thanks, placing a hand on his taut, ripped chest. Temptation was too strong for her not to continue this exploration, allowing her hand to drift along one thick arm, corded with muscle. He was solid without an ounce of fat anywhere on his body.

God, he was hot.

Dar backed away with a frown. She took a step closer. There was no way she would let him ignore her any longer. "Help me," she whispered, taking the chance that he might understand her even though it was a long shot.

He didn't.

She took his hand. "Help me." He pulled away yet again, making Bella wonder if he'd start ignoring her again. That isn't what she wanted.

Suddenly, he captured her wrist and yanked her close. At first, she thought he would embrace her, or at least she hoped he would embrace her, and perhaps bring his demanding lips down on hers as he had before. She'd welcome that pleasure. However, Dar did something she hadn't thought would ever happen. He led her out of the cell.

Freedom!

Bella's elation was short lived because after a few short paces he stopped them in front of another cage. Inside was a blue furry creature about the size of a wolf, but it had no legs, and slithered on its belly like a snake. She'd never seen anything like it. The thing sneered at her with sharp menacing teeth, and Bella could only guess that the thing was snarling. It looked as though it was posed to strike.

She clutched Dar's arm, despite the laser bars separating them from the creature. That thing, whatever it was, gave her the serious creeps. Dar placed a hand on Bella's shoulder and moved her along to the next cell. This time, there stood a large bird-like creature with green feathers and strange black markings all over its body. The thing was resting when they approached but must have heard their footsteps because it lifted its red crowned head.

The animal had a sad look in its beady black eyes, making Bella's heart go out to it. The poor thing. Bella almost made the mistake of reaching her fingers through the bars, but the bird creature stood up unexpectedly and raced toward the bars, halted by their sting.

Her eyes widened in horror as it writhed on the ground in obvious pain. What kind of place was this? Dar continued the mini-tour, showing her what was in each little prison. All the little jails contained animals of the likes she'd never seen. One had orange fur and three horns. Then there was what looked like a two-headed monkey.

She shrugged holding her palms up in frustration. Dar then took her to the big metal door. Finally she'd get outside.

He placed his hand against some kind of scanning device which she assumed controlled the door. Dar guided her into the dark night air. It was almost a shock being outdoors after all this time, but once the idea had sunk in she wanted to kiss this man for letting her out. She didn't know how much longer she would have lasted in that tiny cell, with hardly any room to move.

But Dar wasn't finished showing her around.

Bella didn't understand what she was seeing at first until she recognized more animals in cages, and high fences. These spaces were as small as hers had been, some of

these confinement areas being several square feet. And within each of them contained a more exotic creature than the one before.

If she had any doubts before, there were none now. This was definitely a zoo. But again she wondered why the hell she was here.

Bella received the answer to her question when Dar nudged her toward another gated area. Peering through the bars, she noted a prone figure lying on a pile of blankets, its back turned to her.

The steady rise and fall of his shoulders told her the creature was sleeping. It wasn't an animal though. It was a man! Holy mother of God, it was a man in a cage in a zoo!

If that human male was an attraction then she... to them, she was an animal.

Dar was a zookeeper and Bella was truly screwed.

Chapter Six

From the shock in her lovely green eyes, to the way her lips trembled, Dar knew the exact second when comprehension dawned on Bella. If he weren't mistaken she looked as if she was going into shock. It broke his heart to see her this way and it made him wonder how he'd feel if their positions were reversed.

He'd stayed away from her the past few days for this very same reason -- because he didn't want to care about her thoughts or feelings. Unable to meet her startlingly beautiful gaze, he looked away. Because if he did look directly at Bella, Dar knew he wouldn't be able to stop himself from his carnal images of taking her into his arms and ravaging her.

Night after night he'd wake up in a cold sweat, wanting her, struggling with the feelings she'd awakened within him, making him express emotions he'd felt for no other woman. Focusing his attention toward other women didn't help, nor did the cold showers. And all stroking his cocks did was offer temporary relief from something that could only be assuaged by burying himself deeply into Bella's tight sheath and ass. No, his lust for her only came back tenfold to what he'd experienced before, so much so that he'd given up trying to ease the ache.

If the other zookeepers were to find out what had happened between him and Bella, he'd lose his position for sure. Not only that, but possibly face prison time for committing acts of the unnatural. But that was only on the basis that Bella was a dumb animal, not an intelligent being as he'd discovered her to be.

In the meantime, while he faced the dilemma of what he would do with her, Dar had stayed away from Bella, trying to resolve the issues whirling around his mind.

Zavian, however, had other plans. The head zookeeper had grown impatient with the acclimating of his new acquisition with the other *Human*. He wanted Bella to

be introduced to Quark and placed in her new home immediately. There was only one thing left for Dar to do, and that was to prove once and for all that Bella was in fact sentient. He'd have to teach her their language, so she'd be able to let everyone know her plight.

The fact that she'd been able to effectively communicate her name to him in spite of her disability should be enough, but knowing how thick-headed Zavian would be on the issue, Dar had to go a step further. In order to enact his plan, he wanted to see how she interacted with Quark.

He had to help her. There was no way around it. What kind of man would he be to keep her imprisoned, knowing it was morally wrong? Seeing her reach an understanding about the kind of place this was sealed it for him.

Bella's eyes shimmered with the suspicious sheen of tears.

Dar cupped the side of her face, circling the soft flesh of her cheek with his thumb. "Bella, it's all right. I'll figure something out."

Pulling away from him, she moved her hands frantically, fashioning them into crude signs, while she spoke a language he didn't understand. It struck him as odd that her people didn't speak the universal language. Though each planet had its own native tongue, Enwish was spoken by everyone. Wouldn't the Cyrellians have taught them that... or perhaps not. Maybe they hadn't on purpose.

Dar grasped her shoulders and yanked her back to him, but Bella obviously wasn't in the mood to be comforted. She pushed at his chest, placing some distance between them. "No! No! No!" she said over and over again.

That word he did understand. Quark said it often enough when he was displeased about something. The sound of her voice must have roused the sleeping male, because he turned around and opened his eyes, blinking and then rubbing them.

Slowly, Quark rose to his feet and walked closer to the bars.

Bella's eyes widened as he drew near. Quark looked at her and then at Dar, before returning his attention to Bella.

Dar stood back and watched as the male began speaking. To his fascination, Bella answered back, and a conversation ensued. For the first time since Dar had seen her, Bella was animated, excited and almost happy. He knew she counted on lip-reading to understand others' words, but the way she stared so intently at Quark's lips sent a wave of resentment and jealousy through Dar's chest. Yes, it was irrational, but he couldn't help it. Over the past few days, he'd begun to think of her as his.

Could it be that she preferred a man of her own race? Was there a connection between those two? And furthermore, what were they saying to each other? Quark was actually smiling, his dark eyes sparkling, an expression Dar hadn't witnessed from him before.

After several more minutes of being ignored by the two of them, he grasped Bella's elbow and dragged her away from the stunned-faced Quark. Though she resisted at first by digging her heels in, he shot her a look making it clear he'd tolerate no rebellion. Propelled by his need to be alone with her, Dar ushered her past the cage, not even stopping when they went by the isolation chambers where she'd been held.

Dar didn't stop until they reached the bungalow where the zookeepers on night duty stayed. He stabbed the security code into the console with quick strokes of his finger. When the door slid open, he nudged Bella inside with haste, not taking the chance that she'd try to escape him.

Bella made no attempt to move, staring at him with those luminescent eyes of hers, clutching the blanket to her small frame. Did she think he'd rip it away from her, and ravage that lovely body? The thought wasn't far from his mind, but now wasn't the time to give in to his carnal urges.

Unable to help himself, Dar reached out and tucked a stray strand of her dark brown hair behind her ear. Bella backed away from him, her expression suddenly mistrustful, and once again muttered something in that incomprehensible language.

Inspiration suddenly hit him as he thought of the lecto pad he often used to mark down his observations of the animals. "Wait here." He steadied her when she looked as though she'd move.

Retrieving what he needed, Dar returned and beckoned her into the living quarters. When Bella remained immobile, he strode toward her and gently took her hand, briefly reveling in how right it felt to hold it before he led her to the lounge. "Please sit."

He took a seat and stood up again in demonstration. "Sit," he repeated and did the motion over again, while saying the word.

Slowly, she reached out and placed her fingers over his lips.

Dar instinctively knew what she wanted. "Sit."

Several moments passed as she attempted to roll what he'd said off her tongue, until finally she croaked, "Sit."

He grinned, nodding vigorously, elation filling him that she was able to learn this so quickly. Granted it was a simple thing, but it opened the door to more possibilities and gave him hope that he'd be able to accomplish his goal. "Yes," he murmured, grasping her fingers once more and holding them to his mouth.

"Y-y-yes."

Dar smiled, wishing he could take her into his arms, but knew it was much too soon for any signs of affection on his end. He had to make sure he had her complete trust.

Bella on the other hand wasn't prepared to end their learning session. She now dragged him through the bungalow, pointing at different objects, and in turn he taught her how to say them. Some were more difficult for her to grasp, but Bella didn't move on to the next item until she perfected each word.

A couple hours passed before Dar realized what time it was and finally called a halt to their game. "No more, Bella. Sit."

She shook her head trying to take him to yet another object, but Dar remained firm.

"No." He moved to the lounge and plopped down. While it was gratifying that he'd found a way for her to learn his native tongue, he needed to know more about her. Picking up the lecto pad, he began to draw a picture, a crude rendering, but it would

have to do for now. He added other images on the pad, telling her his story, his love for animals, his background, and how he'd become a zookeeper. Dar hoped she would get what he was trying to convey.

While he drew, curiosity brought her to him. Bella joined him on the lounge and watched what he was doing intently until he finished. Dar handed her the pad.

Her delicately arched brows knitted together at first in consternation, until she brought her gaze to meet his and then darted back to the lecto pad. Finally she seemed to understand.

Discretely, he handed her the pen and showed her how to erase what he'd done to create her own picture. "Now you." Dar pointed at it.

With little hesitation on her part, Bella's hand practically flew across the lecto pad. Bella was a fine artist, far superior to him. As her story unfolded before his eyes, Dar's heart broke for her a little at a time. It spoke of her loneliness and isolation from the others of her kind although there were two other females she drew favorably, one short and plump, the other tall, dark and slender.

They must be friends of hers. Bella held up the pad and made sure he knew what he was looking at before she erased the drawing and began a new one. The next picture she created was what looked like a planet.

"Is that your home?" he asked before catching himself. He pointed to her and then at the world she drew, and then gestured around him. After making a few more indications that this was where he lived and then pointed back to the lecto pad.

"Yes." She smiled before turning her attention back to her task. His heart tweaked within his chest. She was so beautiful. It took every ounce of willpower he possessed to remain focused on what she was doing.

When Dar turned his attention back to her drawing, he saw a clear picture of a Cyrellian, looming menacingly on the world she'd drawn. It occurred to him that they were doing to Bella's world what they'd done to so many other planets, the reason they'd been banished from living in this galaxy in the first place. They were leeches,

offering their own brand of “help” to desolate planets until there was nothing left of the current place they inhabited.

The fact they were selling off humans to other planets told him it wouldn't be long before they destroyed all that was around them. It might not be today, tomorrow or the next, but it was coming. Somehow, he had to make Bella understand the danger the rest of her people were currently facing under Cyrellian rule.

Dar twitched, unable to keep still as he waited impatiently for her to finish drawing. Her detailed renderings left no doubt in his mind what she was trying to tell him. When she was through, he took the lecto pad from her hand and nodded to show he understood her.

Erasing the items she'd created, he then conveyed his own thoughts -- a warning of what was awaiting the fate of Earth if something wasn't done about the Cyrellians and soon. The inhabitants on that planet were in grave danger because if their patterns as world destroying predators held true, there wouldn't be anything to salvage soon. Perhaps they'd blow the planet up altogether. It wouldn't be the first time they'd done it.

When Dar raised his head to look in her face, his heart went out to her upon seeing the expression of utter desolation. Tears glistened within the depth of her beautiful eyes and more than anything he wanted to make things better for her, assure her everything would be all right, but there was only one way he knew how.

With a groan, Dar tossed the lecto pad aside and then cupped her face in between his palms, massaging the soft skin of her cheeks with his thumbs. “Everything will work out, Bella. I know you probably don't understand me right now, but there's no shame in crying. I'm here for you.”

The flood gates seemed to open then as a sob escaped from her mouth, and her shoulders shook. It was obvious she was trying not to break down completely, but he wanted her to know he didn't mind.

Pulling her closer, he wrapped his arms around her and rocked her body back and forth. That's when her body began to shudder violently and her cries grew louder

and more primal as though her heart were breaking. His broke for her. He wished there was something he could do about her planet, but what? If he were to attempt to signal the Earthlings, who was to say the Cyrellians wouldn't intercept his message? It was probably too late for Bella's people, and Dar had a feeling she knew it as well.

If there was more he could do then he would, but for now, he'd offer her the comfort she needed. He stroked her hair and he swayed back and forth. Soon her cries subsided to mere sniffles and she raised her head to stare into his eyes.

There was an imploring quality about her gaze as if she were begging for more. Pink, welcoming lips parted with a soft sigh, daring him to taste them.

There was nothing he wanted more, but should he?

What decided it for him was when her tongue darted out to slide along the rim of her bottom lip. How could he resist that?

With a sigh of resignation, Dar lowered his head to hers, brushing his lips against her, gently at first, reveling in her warmth. He tasted the saltiness of her tears on her mouth.

At first, Bella remained still beneath his tentative joining of mouths, but then she puckered, returning his kiss in earnest. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she moved into his lap, not breaking contact with their lips. The press of her body against his sent shock waves of delight up the center of his spine.

The blanket she had wrapped tightly around her petite frame earlier had fallen ever so slightly, revealing creamy white shoulders, so delicately formed, so perfect.

Dar had to touch her -- needed to.

Finally releasing her face, Dar slid his hand along the smooth expanse of her back, tracing the curve of her spine with his fingers. He loved the way her skin felt beneath his fingertips, like soft feathers.

Bella shivered, wiggling on his lap, inciting his arousal to unimaginable heights. She squirmed as though she couldn't get enough of his caresses and she stroked the back of his head.

Dar pushed his tongue past her lips, craving more of her taste, so tangy, sweet, and intoxicating. He could live another hundred years and never find anything quite like it. His balls tightened and his cocks grew impossibly hard, to near pain, straining to break free from the restraint of his pants. He had to press his thighs together to temper the building ache threatening to explode within him.

Bella threaded her fingers through his hair, holding his head closer, and slipping her tongue forward to meet his, circling, twining and dancing with his. Her passion nearly overwhelmed him, inflamed him, and drove him to the edge of sanity.

He wanted her now as he had no other woman.

Tearing his mouth away from hers, he stood up with her in his arms before striding to the back room and depositing her on the bed. By now her blanket had slid completely off, leaving her naked to his gaze.

He couldn't turn away from the perfection of her well-proportioned body. Dar stood over her, drinking in her beauty, immortalizing this moment in his head.

Bella licked her lips in what appeared to be a nervous gesture and she crossed her arms over the gentle swells of her breasts.

Reaching out, Dar pulled her arms away. "Don't. You need never hide your beautiful body from me."

She nodded as though understanding him. His eyes never leaving hers, he took off his top and watched as blatant desire flared within the depths of her eyes. It pleased him that she found him attractive.

Dar then unzipped his boots, kicked them off and removed his pants. His cocks sprang forward, ready to enter her damp holes. He stroked his shaft with one hand, and grazed his fingertips along his sub-cock, which was already dripping with lubricant.

Bella's mouth opened and eyes widened as she marveled at his body, filling him with masculine pride. She moved to her knees and ran her fingers along the center of his chest, making Dar shake with desire.

The feel of her hands on his body sent rip-roaring waves of passion through his entire core. His first instinct was to toss her on the bed and bury himself within her hard and fast, but he wanted her to get acquainted with his form.

When Bella wrapped her fingers around his cock, Dar clenched his fists at his sides as a groan escaped his throat. With her other hand, she grazed his sub-cock as though fascinated.

Judging from the male *Human's* body, Bella had probably never seen genitals like his, but thankfully they didn't seem to bother her. Not that it mattered because he knew when he'd taken her in his arms he'd have her.

And she wanted him too.

Already he could smell the musky-feminine odor of her fragrant pussy titillating his nostrils and inflaming his passion for her.

Bella lowered herself before him until her mouth was level with his cocks. Breath catching in his throat, Dar stiffened in tense anticipation at the mere thought of her pleasuring him with those soft lips of hers. She raised her head to meet his eyes as though seeking his approval for what she was about to do.

He nodded in consent, not trusting himself to speak. The moment her tongue slid along his cock, Dar realized he was much too horny to hold much longer.

Placing his hands on either side of her head, he guided her as she slid her mouth over his shaft, taking him inch by torturous inch into her mouth. He pushed his hips forward, going deeper into the moist cavern, careful not to thrust too hard for fear of choking her.

Bella's lips tightened around him, sliding along his cock tentatively at first, but then she increased the pace. Her hands cupped his balls, molding and shaping them in her palms, sending a burst of flame through his central nervous system. Her thumbs grazed along the length of his sub-cock making it twitch.

Dar couldn't remember a time when he'd been so turned on. There hadn't been many women in his life before Bella because he preferred making a connection with and caring for a woman before making love to her. None of them had ever made him feel

quite like this. He'd never felt so connected to another individual, where his body, mind, and heart had been engaged.

His heart?

Could he truly feel something for this beautiful woman other than desire and deep concern? Dar didn't have long to dwell on those thoughts because his body tightened and he knew he would come.

When he attempted to pull away, Bella grasped his hips, clamping her lips around him tighter than ever as if she wanted him to come in her mouth. In one last attempt to pull away, he grabbed a handful of her hair, forcing her to meet his gaze, but she refused to release his cock, sucking it with a fierceness that Dar didn't have the strength to fight.

He cried out as a bolt of lightning shot through him. His body shook uncontrollably as he came in her mouth. His sub-cock dripped with excess secretions and Bella slurped his offering as though she couldn't get enough. She ran her tongue over him and only when *she* was finished did Bella pull away, a shy smile curving her pink lips.

With a fierce growl, Dar pushed her onto the bed. He'd reached his climax, but he was still rock hard and his need raged on.

The only way this ache would be assuaged was by fucking her.

Chapter Seven

Bella told herself she had to be crazy. She'd never been so bold with any man, let alone one with two dicks! But something drove her on, perhaps the need to make a connection, to feel something other than the pain, desolation, and depression she'd spiraled into here.

Having her suspicions confirmed about the Cyrellians' nefarious plans for Earth didn't help matters either. She feared for her friends and the thought of never seeing Holly and Sydney again scared the hell out of her.

Now more than ever she needed to experience pleasure and happiness with this man. Exploring and sampling Dar's golden body just seemed right, not to mention it turned her on as she'd never been before. Besides, sucking his cock filled Bella with a sense of empowerment. It had been *her* choice to perform the act.

For the first time in weeks, she was doing something she wanted to do, not what she'd been forced to do and it was with Dar.

He covered her body with his, placing fervent kisses along her jaw line and all over her face before capturing her bottom lip between his teeth, tugging and nibbling, inciting her desire for him.

She grasped clumps of his silky black locks, holding his head. Bella wanted to have his lips crushing hers, no more of this teasing.

As if sensing her need, Dar released her bottom lip and pressed his mouth to hers. Then he thrust his tongue past her lips, exploring and dominating her, taking Bella on a ride of erotic insanity.

Arching her back, she pressed her pebbled nipples against his broad chest, reveling in the sensation of this intimacy with him. More than anything she wanted to be one with him. Bella returned his kiss with a ferocious passion of her own.

Soon, however, the kisses weren't enough for her and apparently not for Dar either. He lifted his head, his blue gaze blazing with naked desire and possessiveness that made her shiver.

He began to run his tongue along her neck, the roughness and texture of it sending torrid waves of pulsing heat through her body. Dar moved lower, making a trail of wetness on her hot skin. His warm breath against her already painfully tight nipples did things to her equilibrium she didn't think possible.

Writhing beneath him, she couldn't keep still. Bella could feel the pounding of his heart when she splayed her fingers against his muscular chest. She loved the way he felt beneath her fingertips.

Dar cupped her breasts before lowering his head and taking one throbbing nubbin between his lips. Sucking with gentle tugs at first, he took his time, but then seeming to lose all semblance of control he increased the pressure.

She moaned and sighed under his forceful ministrations. He went wild, releasing her nipple only to lick and lave her areola and the entire circumference of her breast, almost as if he were trying to devour her a little at a time.

All Bella could think was how wondrous this was. If she were to die in this moment, she'd be happy. She lifted her hips, grinding against his pelvis eager to join with him, but Dar ignored her silent request, releasing one breast and then moving to the next one.

He was going to torture her until she couldn't take it anymore. Already her pussy gushed with cream, wanting his cock inside of it. Dar seemed to be in no hurry as he tasted and played with her ultra-sensitized breasts, but she refused to be put off any longer.

Digging her fingers into his hair again, Bella tugged hard. Only then did he lift his head, confusion in those cobalt eyes.

His lips formed words, but she couldn't make out what he was saying in her passion-induced haze. She placed her hand between their bodies, lowering it until she touched his dicks.

Dar trembled before a smile of comprehension crossed his face. Then a mischievous gleam entered his dark blue gaze. He shook his head and grasped her hand, pushing it away. Dar then slid further down her body and pried her legs apart. He pressed a long deep kiss against her slick labial folds.

“Dar!” she cried out, craving more.

He parted her pussy lips and kissed her again, brushing his lips against her clit, sending stark raw need through her.

Bella was delirious with arousal when he latched on to her throbbing button, sucking and milking it between his lips. When he pushed two fingers into her channel, she nearly fainted from pleasure overload. He fucked her with his fingers with quick hard strokes, pushing her closer to orgasm.

Just when she thought she was near the edge, threatening to fall over into a pool of bliss, Dar pulled out, leaving her bereft and desperately wanting more. He didn't leave her to wonder for very long what he was up to next because those same fingers that had been inside her pussy were now slipping between her crack and rubbing her anus. Bella was too far gone to care, much too lost in the moment.

Dar pushed those wet digits past her anal ring, stretching her as though preparing her for his cock. Being anally stimulated wasn't something new to her, but it had never felt quite this exquisite.

Dar slid his fingers inside her ass, opening her up, while he continued to suck her clit. This time when she was about to reach her peak, he didn't pull away. Instead, he kept his head planted firmly between her thighs, and fingers pumping in and out of her bottom.

Bella gushed as she shook and squirmed beneath him, unable to keep still. She screamed her climax. “Dar! Dar! Dar! Yes! That's it!” She was so overwhelmed with emotion she didn't know whether to laugh or cry with the elation sweeping through her. Bella didn't know how much longer he stayed between her thighs, but when he finally lifted his head, there was a smug, self-satisfied smirk on his face.

He knew exactly what she'd just experienced and the pleasure he'd given her. Dar moved his body in alignment with hers and placed light kisses on her mouth. Her lips tightened with the taste of herself still clinging to his lips. When he pushed her legs further apart and positioned himself between her thighs, Bella nearly wept with relief.

This was what she'd been waiting for. She wasn't sure how he'd work this with two dicks, but she didn't wonder for long when he positioned the large one against her pussy, and the smaller, thinner one against her anus.

Double penetration.

This was a new experience for her, but Bella couldn't think of anyone she would rather have it with than Dar.

With one powerful thrust of his hips, she found herself invaded vaginally and anally. She gasped in surprise despite the fact she'd known it was coming. She didn't realize it would feel quite like this. The sensation of being deliciously filled was like nothing else.

Bella pulled him to her, holding his solid frame against her, not wanting him to move. She simply wanted to stay like this for a bit, getting accustomed to his invasion, being in the moment.

He lay against her, his heart beating in sync with hers. The burning ache would not allow either of them to remain still for very long, however. Soon, Bella wiggled her lower body, signaling him to move.

Dar's body glided against her, his dicks sliding out to the tips then thrusting back into her forcefully.

Wrapping her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck, she lifted her pelvis to meet his cocks. Digging her fingers into his skin, she held on tight. More than anything, Bella wanted to be Dar's woman forever.

She gazed into his handsome golden face, and noted his closed eyes and gritted teeth. Dar was holding back and that was the last thing she wanted. Bella needed him to lose control. Taking matters into his own hands, she slammed her hips into his, which drove him deeper into her tight sheaths.

His eyes popped open, and jaw dropped. his pleasure evident. For good measure, she lifted her lower body again, grinding into him until something within Dar seemed to snap.

He began to hammer into her like a madman, taking her to the line between pleasure and pain. And she loved it, didn't want this to end, in fact. With each pulse and movement in their mutual pleasure taking, she felt closer to him. Every single one of her senses was enflamed by his ministrations. Her vision was delighted by his gorgeous sculpted features, his flavor still clung to her taste buds, the slightly musky masculine scent of him stimulated her olfactory nerves and the feel of his sweat-slicked body moving against hers sent her mind reeling.

In this joining, Bella could almost imagine his sighs and groans of pleasure. If only -- no. She wouldn't dwell on what she didn't have, but what she did. And right now, in Dar's arms, she'd never been more grateful to be alive in her life.

This felt so right. Her soul was complete. The intensity of her orgasm was so strong, she had to cling desperately to consciousness. A scream tore from her throat. "Dar!" The violent shudders raking through her body didn't cease for several minutes, all while she clawed and pulled at him, not able to get close enough.

Dar threw his head back, opening his mouth wide and letting out what she assumed was a yell of his own. Two powerful streams of his ejaculate shot deep into her holes. Bella clenched her muscles around his cocks, milking him for every single drop of his come.

His mouth melded to hers in a hungry kiss of need and yearning. The tears that had threatened to spill earlier flowed down her cheeks at the beauty of their coming together.

When Dar finally lifted his head, concern marred his face. Gently he wiped the tears from her face, his lips shaping words she couldn't quite make out. She didn't want him to think there was anything wrong when there wasn't.

Bella smiled. "I'm happy," she whispered.

He tilted his head to the side as though trying to figure out what she was saying. Bella knew there was only one way to show him how she felt without words. Taking his hand, she placed it over the frantic pulsing of her heart and gazed into his mesmerizing cobalt eyes. She hoped the expression on her face showed him exactly how she felt about him.

Dar stared at her searchingly, his gaze roaming her face, and the corners of his sensual lips tilted and the corners of his eyes crinkled, conveying his own happiness. He stroked her face in a loving gesture and planted light kisses across the bridge of her nose, and along her cheeks.

Bella snuggled into him with a sense of contentment sweeping over her. She relaxed in his gentle hold. Her last thought as she drifted off to sleep was that she loved this man.

Dar remained awake long after Bella had fallen into slumber. He slid out of bed and tossed on his clothes, careful not to wake her. After what they'd just shared he knew in his mind without a shadow of a doubt there was no way he could keep her at the zoo. He'd have to break her out of here.

Bella was intelligent, but it would take months before she was fluent enough in his native tongue to effectively communicate with anyone other than him. In that time Zavian would try everything in his power to see her and the male *Human* mated. He couldn't allow that to happen. She belonged to him, and the thought of someone else holding, touching, and fucking her sent a spasm of jealousy through his core he'd never experienced before.

Besides that, how long would it be before one of the other zookeepers noticed that Bella was deaf and report it to Zavian? It would surely mean the end of her. He couldn't risk losing her.

But where would they go? There had to be some place he could take her where they could be together without the scrutiny of outsiders looking at them as if their love was some kind of perversion.

Love?

Certainly what had happened between them transcended mere fucking, but love? He delved deeper on this subject for nearly an hour and realized how much she filled his thoughts and how he couldn't wait to see her each day. How his heart flipped within his chest when she granted him one of her special smiles, and how he couldn't think of spending life without her. If that wasn't love, Dar didn't know what was.

He loved her spirit and courage in the face of her circumstances. Finally, Dar had found the woman he wished to spend the remainder of his life with, someone to grow old with, bear his children if it were possible for them to procreate together. Even if they couldn't, she was all that mattered to him.

The major problem in taking her off Flamyrl was not only would he be viewed as a pervert and thief to boot, but he'd be a fugitive, unable to return lest he be imprisoned for an unspecified amount of time.

He stole a glance toward the bed where Bella slept peacefully. The slow rise and fall of her chest told him she wouldn't be waking anytime soon.

For her, he would do it. She was worth all he'd have to give up, but there was only one place he could take her. Tabehr, just on the outskirts of the galaxy. It was a neutral planet which meant once he and Bella arrived seeking sanctuary for whatever reason, they would be under Tabehr protection. He'd have to leave all he knew behind, saying goodbye to his friends, family and his career.

His parents traveled quite a bit in their old age, so he would probably see them eventually, and as for his siblings, they had lives and families of their own. He'd find a way to communicate with them when things were settled. He'd miss his job because at times he cared for the animals more than he did his fellow beings.

In order to implement his plan, he'd need to pool his funds, gather supplies, and come up with a way to sneak Bella out of the zoo without being detected. This would change his life forever, but, with Bella by his side, they could make it work.

His plan would take some time to get together, a few weeks at the most, but if all went well, they'd soon both be safely on Tabehr. Before he left, however, he would

settle the score with Zavian. His conscience wouldn't allow him to leave things as they were, with the uncertain future of the animals and his fellow zookeepers. It was the least he could do.

He'd been keeping a log of Zavian's activities and only needed to get it into the right hands.

Who would have thought one tiny *Human* female would turn his world around? A smile touched his lips as he slid back into bed, pulling her warm body against his. He inhaled deeply, taking in her feminine scent. The air was permeated with their sex and his cocks grew hard once again. As much as Dar wanted to wake her and bury himself deep within her tight holes once again, he knew she needed the rest. Having studied her sleep patterns during her captivity, he knew she hadn't received the rest she truly needed. Besides, he'd be on night duty for a while and they'd have more chances to make love.

He dropped a kiss on her skin where her neck and shoulder connected. He vowed he'd always keep her safe, no matter what, even if it meant laying his own life on the line.

Chapter Eight

Holly refused to be thwarted this time. She wanted answers and wouldn't leave this godforsaken clinic until she had them. There was no way she could sit back and pretend her friend wasn't missing and this conspiracy seemed to be getting bigger the more she learned.

Besides, the realization that anyone over a certain age residing in her city was missing, Holly also noticed everyone was healthy. Riding the train home one day, she felt a bit of a headache coming on. She often got migraines in times of stress and there was nothing more worrisome than wondering what had happened to your best friend. She'd been holding her head in her hands when the passenger sitting next to her suggested she go to the wellness center to be checked out because of the amazing cures the Cyrellians were developing for something so simple as head pains.

This was the first time Holly had heard anything like it, and it got her to thinking. It had been quite a long time since she'd witnessed anyone so much as coughing. At her job, no one ever called out sick and everyone seemed to be in the best of health. The odds of that being possible seemed slim. If her suspicions had been aroused before, there were definitely sirens going off in her head now.

What's more, why was she the only one asking questions? Could it be that something happened to those who dared to investigate what was going on? Discreetly she began making inquiries about this so called wellness center and soon found it to be the same place Bella was to have had her operation. This was no mere coincidence. Something was definitely going on.

If they wouldn't see her when she wanted to find out what was happening then she'd have to come up with a reason for being there, which brought her here to the waiting room of the clinic, waiting for someone to call her in to see the doctor. Holly

had lied about having strange symptoms in order for them to schedule an immediate appointment.

Sydney would probably think she was nuts for coming here. She fidgeted nervously in her seat, unable to keep still. What would she find out, if anything? Would they try something on her?

But the fact remained, Bella had now been missing for over a month. Not even Sydney could deny that something wasn't on the up and up, though she was still cautious in admitting the Cyrellians had anything to do with the disappearance. Holly wanted to shake that woman and make her see sense.

As she waited, Holly got the distinct impression she was being watched. Her already paranoid senses were on high alert, but she steeled herself to remain calm. She didn't see any cameras lurking in the nooks or crannies of the room, but that didn't mean there weren't any.

She couldn't shake that feeling of being watched. There were only a couple other people in the room. Then she spotted *him*. Staring at her with an intense dark brown gaze was a man who looked like he could have belonged to a biker gang. With a shaggy mane of dark blond curls, the lower half of his face covered in stubble and thick arms corded with sinewy muscles, something within her responded to his blatant masculinity.

Why was he looking at her as if he wanted something from her, like her body? He was probably just trying to get a rise out of her to see if she'd fall for the bait and then do something cruel.

Screw him.

Holly picked up a magazine and glanced at the pages, not really seeing them at all, only to have a snicker greet her ears. She glanced his way to see the rude jerk was still staring at her.

She shot a glare in his direction before trying to refocus on her magazine. All Holly saw was a big blur in front of her, but he didn't have to know that. She wished he'd look at something else, but it seemed as though she wouldn't get what she wanted

today because the next thing she knew, he was beside her, sliding his lean frame into the chair next to her.

He had an earthy smell about him as if he spent a lot of time outdoors. It wasn't unpleasant, but she crinkled her nose in distaste all the same to let him know his company wasn't desired. Besides, Holly wasn't exactly sure why she was so aware of the laugh lines at the corners of his eyes, or the fullness of his lips.

It had been her intention to ignore him, but when he continued to stare at her, she finally snapped, turning her anger and prior frustration his way. "Do you mind?"

He raised a brown brow as though surprised at the vehemence in her voice, but other than that he didn't give much of a reaction. "Actually, I was wondering if you could teach me that neat trick of yours." The deep, dulcet tone of his voice left her momentarily speechless.

When Holly finally found her voice, her words came out a bit sharper than she'd intended. "What the hell are you talking about?"

He pointed to her magazine. "Reading upside down."

Heat rose in her face and she was sure her face was now darn near the color of her hair. She immediately righted the position of the periodical. "I wouldn't have had it upside down if you weren't staring at me. Hasn't anyone taught you better than that?"

"Can't say they have. Would you like the job?" His grin widened revealing large white teeth. One of his front ones slightly overlapped the other but it was charming, giving him more character.

Had the room grown warm or was it her? Not comfortable with the way things were going, Holly went on the attack, not knowing how else to deal with the devilishly attractive man. After all, he could only be teasing the chubby chick for his own sick amusement. "No, I'm not interested, not that you could afford to pay me anyway. I don't go for the dirty vagrant type." The moment those words left her lips, she was appalled by what she'd said. It wasn't in her to be so cruel, but there was just something about this man that made her feel... she couldn't put her finger on it, nor did she want to examine it.

The easy smile he'd given her fell, and his brown eyes narrowed. "A snotty one aren't you, Red?"

She hated when people called her that. It was one step above carrot top, but not much higher on the chain of name calling. Instinct told her to apologize, but he'd already gotten under her skin more than she cared to admit. She'd have to brazen it out. "Only to those people whose company I didn't ask for. Now if you don't mind moving, I'd really appreciate it. And by the way, it's called soap, use it," she hissed turning away from him.

Holly stood up and would have stalked to the other side of the room, when he grabbed her wrists. "Let go of --"

His eyes narrowed as his hold tightened when she tried to free herself from his vise grip. "Word of warning, sweetheart, something big is about to happen here, and I'd advise you to get out of here while you can."

She ran her tongue over her suddenly dry lips noticing how his dark gaze latched on to that particular movement. She couldn't ignore the electricity flowing between them, but his words had taken her aback. "What are you talking about?"

"Just heed my words. Get out now. I'd say you have about five minutes to get at least fifty feet from the building."

Her eyes widened. The implication of what he'd just told her wasn't lost on Holly. "You're going to blow --"

With one swift movement, he stood up and covered her mouth, not allowing her to speak. "Shut up, and come with me now if you don't want to be confetti." Not waiting for her answer, he pulled her along with him.

Holly was too stunned to fight or struggle. What the hell was going on? What mess had she just landed herself into? This was getting weirder by the minute.

Once they were outside of the building, Holly came to her senses. She had to go back and get the answers she sought. How else would she find out what had happened to Bella?

She gave him a hard shove, knocking him off balance, hoping he'd let her go, but instead when he fell, he took her down with him, and she landed on the hard wall of his chest with an *oomph*.

Holly tried to get up, but he held her. "Let me go or I'll scream," she yelled. "I have to get back in there."

"Not on your life, Red," he whispered.

"Why the hell not?" Her temper was threatening to blow out of proportion with this arrogant jerk.

Not seconds after she'd asked him a loud explosion blasted behind her. Holly swiveled her head around enough to see what had happened. The building she'd been sitting in only minutes before had just been blown to smithereens.

Her jaw dropped. Words formed in the back of her throat, but none came out. She turned her gaze back to the mystery man still holding her against him.

"That's why," he answered.

* * *

"You had better be careful, Bella. The one called Zavian has been showing a marked interest in our exhibit lately. He walks by when he doesn't think anyone is paying attention, and he watches, as if trying to find some kind of clue. He's up to something I think," David warned, running his hands through his fair hair. "God, what I wouldn't give for a long hot soak in a real tub. Who would have thought I'd end up in a damned zoo of all places?"

Bella knew exactly how he felt. She was in the same predicament, but not for long. Dar assured her she would be free of this place soon. After that night, she was placed in the regular exhibit cage with Quark, who she'd soon learned was really named David. He had been wary of her in the beginning. The first day he stayed away as if trying to gauge how she'd react around him. He probably wondered at the tenderness Dar showed her. It didn't take much longer for him to relax around her and he soon opened up, telling her his story.

It turned out that David had ended up in this place for asking too many questions. He'd been working at his job in a middle management position at a repair center when he began to wonder about new regulations his employers had decided to enact, one of those being placing bugs in the homes of the clients they visited. His bosses had told him it was for quality control to ensure the customers were satisfied, but it had made no sense to him.

When his suspicions became known to the powers that be because one day he was called to the Human Resources department. One minute he was lucid, and the next thing he knew he'd woken up naked with three gold men examining him like he was a bug on a Petri dish.

They'd both come to the conclusion that the Cyrellians weren't the unselfish benefactors they wanted the people of Earth to believe. Coupled with the information Dar had told her, they realized something needed to be done. On one of the nights Dar had taken her out of the cage and into the private zookeeper hut, he told her of his plan to break her out.

She'd waited weeks and she knew tonight would be the night she'd be set free, but she had made Dar promise they'd take David with them. There was no way she could leave him behind in this place, to suffer the humiliation of being ogled by a bunch of Flymrlians.

The most embarrassing part about being a living display was when the visitors threw food into the cage, expecting her and David to perform tricks. And then there were those who yelled rude things. For once Bella was thankful she was deaf. David however wasn't spared. She could tell when something particularly nasty was said by the expression on his face.

She knew the head zookeeper expected her and David to have sex, perhaps to make babies they could keep in captivity. If their situation wasn't so dire, Bella would laugh at the entire ordeal. David was openly gay and made no apology for it. "I know who I am, and am quite happy with it."

Their obvious disinterest in each other didn't seem to stop the head zookeeper from coming into the cage occasionally and pushing them together as though something would magically happen between them. She wanted to scream at him that it didn't work that way, and would have if she'd had a better grasp of their language. What Dar had taught her wasn't enough for her to hold a complete conversation yet.

Still, it would all come to an end tonight. Dar usually started work just when the sun was beginning to set. "Does it really matter what Zavian does? We're getting out of here tonight," she replied turning away from David. Nothing could bring her down today.

A hand fell on her shoulder. David turned her around to face him, an earnest expression on his face. "Bella, I know you're excited, and I truly think you believe Dar, but how do you know he's not just toying with you? After all, they view us as animals. Maybe he's into kinky sex. Who's to say he's not getting it on with the other animals?"

Bella's stomach turned at the thought. Her fingers itched to smack David across the face for even making such a sick suggestion, but reason took over. He'd suggested it not out of malice but out of concern. "Dar and I are in love. I know he'll come for us tonight. He's let me know his plans and we're going to some planet called -- Ta-Tabehr, yes that's it."

He shrugged. "Even if he does free us, what then? We can't hide out there forever, knowing what the Cyrellians are up to. I still have family on Earth. If we do get to Tabehr, I'll have to find a way to make it back home because there's no way I'll allow them to destroy Earth if there's something I can do to stop it."

Bella had thought the same thing. It was something she'd brought up with Dar in conversation. He seemed to understand what she'd been trying to tell him, but did he actually empathize? Would he find a way to get them back on Earth? David was right. Her conscience wouldn't let her live happily ever after when all she knew would soon be gone. Not seeing Holly or Sydney again cut deep. They were like her sisters.

She finally nodded. "You're right. We have to do something about it. When we're off this damned planet we'll come up with a way to get back to Earth, although I'm sure the Cyrellians would be monitoring all incoming ships."

David rubbed his fingers under his chin, in deep thought. "Hmm, not necessarily."

She raised a brow. "What do you mean? Of course they would. It would show up on their radar, wouldn't it?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe they would be able to detect a craft if it were near one of the major cities, but what if it was on the outskirts, where the renegades lived?"

Bella frowned. "They've introduced so much technology to our people, why wouldn't they have a satellite strong enough to detect a ship entering their atmosphere at any distance?"

"I thought the same thing myself, but what makes you think the outlanders wouldn't have developed something to block those signals? There has to be some way they're staying alive and since they've been banished from society they would have had to find a way to survive and develop technology of their own."

"Yes, but would it be as sophisticated as the Cyrellians?"

"Why wouldn't it be? The renegades aren't a bunch of ignorant savages who know nothing about what's going on. I think it's just the opposite actually. Perhaps they know too much."

Bella narrowed her eyes. "How do you know so much?"

"Why do you think I'm here, Bella? I not only asked questions, but well... I was talking to one of them."

"How? They're not allowed in the cities. The police squadrons have seen to that."

"One of the leaders found a way into the city, and last I heard, they were planning something big, a takeover."

"But --" Her words were cut off when David stiffened. Something caught his eyes, and he didn't look happy about it.

The sun was setting and most of the visitors would have left by now. She didn't know why, but a sense of impending doom crept through her body. Slowly she turned to see someone opening their cage.

It was the short stubby man who David called Zavian, the one Dar had identified as the head zookeeper, and in his hand was the taser weapon that had been used on her before. Something wasn't right.

Where was Dar?

Chapter Nine

Dar tried to break from the tight grip he was in, but his captors held on to him. “You *raztah!* You’re not going to get away with this,” he yelled at Zavian who wore a smug expression on his face.

All had been going according to plan. His ship was waiting to take him, Bella, and David to Tabehr, and he had ready funds, but the minute he’d stepped foot on the zoo’s property, Iosis had rushed to him saying Zavian wanted to see him about something.

Dar should have known right then and there something was the matter. After all, Zavian was usually gone long before the night shift started. He should have followed his instincts and stayed his course of setting the captives free, but he’d no sooner thought it when he realized that if he didn’t see what the head zookeeper wanted, they would probably send someone after him, making his plans for escape near impossible.

He should have known, he silently scolded himself, because the minute he stepped into the office, there were two large security guards waiting for him. They grabbed him, one of them had even slammed his fist into Dar’s midsection.

Zavian had lapped it up, enjoying it when both guards then threw Dar to the ground and kicked and beat him. He attempted to fight back, and even got in a few punches of his own, but he couldn’t take on the two of them.

Beaten, but not broken, they then lifted him up, one of them grabbing his hair and holding his head to meet Zavian’s icy stare.

The tubby man laughed with obvious glee. “Did you think I wouldn’t find out what’s going on between you and the *Human?* Your sick perversions? What do you think will happen when people find out what you’ve been up to, Dar? Consorting with the animals. You’ll be the most hated man on the planet. People’s stomachs will turn

when they learn of what you did." Zavian picked up a remote control and tapped one of the buttons, and a screen came down from the ceiling.

Zavian pressed another button, and the screen turned on. The image was of him and Bella in bed, she was on top of him, his cocks buried deep in her pussy and ass. There had been cameras planted in the bedroom!

"There's no point in denying it, Dar. As you can see, I have enough proof to have you locked away for a very long time. Not only that, but I will finally have my revenge. I want you to know, this is personal."

"I have nothing to be ashamed of. Bella is not an animal. She's just as intelligent as you and I, probably more so than you hope to be," Dar spat.

"She certainly knows how to fuck if nothing else. If I were so inclined to take part of your sick fantasies, she might be worth a time in bed."

This time, no force would be able to hold him back before he wrapped his hands around the man's throat. He tore out of the grips of the security guards, his anger guiding him. Rushing forward he grabbed Zavian and started to shake him.

"Unhand me if you know what's good for you or your... playmate."

Dar fell back, and again was recaptured by the guards. "What have you done to Bella?"

Zavian smoothed his clothes back into place with a laugh before hitting the intercom button on his desk. "Yeahen, bring the creature in."

Dar's heart dropped. "You had better not have harmed her. She's innocent. If you must punish anyone, punish me!" he yelled in desperation.

When Yeahen ushered Bella in, she looked frightened but basically unharmed. "Dar," she cried out.

"It's all right, Bella," he assured her even though he wasn't sure if that was true or not.

Zavian chuckled seeming amused at the display. "How sweet, man and his pet. I should be touched by your display. You see, I'm not such a bad guy, Dar, I'm even letting you see your lover before we have you sent away."

"You had better not harm her, or I swear to you, I'll find a way to make you pay!"

"Tough words... for a pervert." Zavian laughed grabbing Bella by the hair and holding her in front of him. "You have no right to make demands. If anything, you should be asking me what you can do to save your little pet."

Dar gasped in disbelief. He should have known Zavian was up to something. "What do you want from me?"

"I need you to turn over those files you've collected on me." He paused to take in Dar's stunned reaction. "Oh, you didn't think I knew what you were up to? You see, I would rather that file not get out. If you don't want this creature to come to harm, I suggest you tell me where to find it. Oh, I'll still have you thrown into jail, but at least you can be assured this little thing will be safe from harm, and who knows, by the time you get out maybe she and Quark will have some babies of their own and she will have forgotten all about you."

Dar saw red, wanting to rip Zavian limb from limb, but the man did have the upper hand. There was nothing he could do about it. He'd have to turn the file over. After all, if doing so would ensure Bella's safety then it was something he'd have to do. He, of course, didn't trust the head zookeeper to keep his word, but what choice did he have? Though the situation looked dire, Dar couldn't give in to the desolation spiraling within him.

He'd stay strong for Bella.

"I never thought I'd witness your downfall, but I'm glad to see it. You think you're so much better than the rest of us, but your sick perversions got the better of you," Iosis taunted.

"Who's the sick one? You're the one who tried to rape her," Dar shot back, fully aware of what the other man had tried to do.

"Liar!" Yeahen yelled.

“Enough!” Zavian barked before turning to Dar. “You will tell me where you’ve put those files.” He twisted Bella’s arm behind her back and she cried out in obvious pain.

Dar dropped his head in defeat, but something caught his eye. Hanging at Iosis’s waist was a behavior neutralizer. He knew once he set it off, the sound would be so piercing it would immobilize everyone in the room, leaving them paralyzed... except for Bella. If he could find a way to turn the device on maybe Bella would realize what was going on and get them out of this mess.

Formulating his plan, Dar nodded in Zavian’s direction. “I will take you to them, but tell your men to let me go. I can walk there on my own volition. It’s not like I’ll be able to get very far once you release that cartridge of Bella and me. I’ll be a fugitive.”

Zavian shrugged. “This is true, but why should I give in to your request when I have the upper hand?”

“Because there’s a key in my boot I need to get out that opens the box where I have your files. If you would only let me get it out, I’ll hand it over.”

Zavian paused to consider this and finally nodded. “If you try anything, the consequences will be dire.”

Dar nodded realizing he only had one chance to pull this off. Thankfully Iosis was close enough to reach. Dar silently prayed it would work. He bent over, pretended to lose his balance and fell forward, yanking the behavior neutralizer from Iosis’ waist. With a flick of his thumb, he clicked the device on. The shrill sound seemed as if it were scrambling his brains, he couldn’t move. The pain in his head was too great for him to do anything other than wait to see what would happen next.

Bella watched in stunned amazement at what had just happened. At first Dar looked as if he were going to fall, and then he grabbed that cylindrical stick she recognized from her first day here. It must have been the sound device because now each one of the men in the room was grasping their ears in obvious pain, Dar included. He’d done this so she could take action. Bella looked around the room in desperation

trying to find some heavy object, and happened upon a large metal ball that looked like some kind of fancy paperweight. Grabbing the thing, she moved to the short stubby man first, and with all her might brought it down on his head.

He keeled over into an unconscious heap. At first she thought she'd killed him, but the slow rise and fall of his chest told her otherwise.

Then she slammed the ball onto the head of the tall skinny one, the man who'd assaulted her. This time she did it with more force, not caring if she killed him or not. Then she immobilized the next two men.

She wasn't sure how the stick thing worked, but didn't want to risk turning it off. They had to get out of here. She grabbed Dar's hand, and dragged him toward the door although he didn't seem as if he'd budge. It was only when she tugged him out the door and was several yards away from the building that he began to gain full mobility.

He placed his hands over his head as though shaking the effects of what happened away. It was obvious to her he was still in some pain, but it didn't seem to stop him. Dar pulled her along until they made it to the cage holding David.

Her cellmate came to the bars. "Bella! I thought I'd never see you again!" he exclaimed. He seemed so relieved to see her, and she was just as happy to see him.

When Zavian had come for her, she'd been so frightened, instinctively knowing somehow they'd found out Dar's plans for them. The evil little man had kept her in a cold dark room. The worst part was not knowing what was to become of Dar because she knew something was going to happen to him.

How long that stick thingy would keep going, she had no idea, but Bella figured they had to act quickly before it wore off.

"We're going to get out of here. I think Dar has everything ready," she said to David.

"What happened to you?" David asked.

"I'll explain once we get out of here," she said, looking over her shoulder to see if anyone was following them. She wouldn't feel safe until they were off this planet.

Dar punched in a security code at the side of the cage making the door open. He gestured for David to step out. Dar didn't have to motion twice.

Bella looked to her lover for direction. Before she could say another word, he tugged her into his arms and gave her a swift hard hug, and then kissed her on the top of the head. She knew if the circumstances were different, there would be more time to display his affection for her, but time was of the essence.

"Come," Dar's lips formed.

Bella was quite pleased with herself for picking up so much of their language. It seemed that David knew quite a bit of it himself and often translated things for her.

Taking her hand in his, Dar led Bella through the maze-like zoo, past the cages, with David following them closely behind.

When the two men halted, she wondered what was wrong. "What's happening?" she asked aloud.

"They've sounded the alarms."

Dar literally swept Bella off her feet and took off running as if she weighed no more than a sack of feathers. He didn't stop until they reached a small space craft.

Frantically he pressed buttons on the panel until a large door opened and then took her on board. The ship was small, but it was comfortable enough for the three of them to travel. Dar placed her in a seat and fastened her in.

Finally they would be off this planet, and good riddance.

Chapter Ten

Bella didn't think they'd make it to Tabehr. They'd experienced quite a bit of turbulence on their way there, not to mention the scare of taking off as shots had hit their tiny craft. Dar explained to her that when a behavior neutralizer was in activation for more than a few minutes, someone would come to assist. Whoever had aided Zavian was probably far away enough to pop in their ear plugs, enabling them to turn off the device when they reached him.

She must not have hit everyone in that room as hard as she thought she had. It didn't matter now. They were safely on neutral territory. The embassy representatives had given her and Dar a room to stay in for the night and the following morning they could sort out their paperwork.

David was given his own room and said he'd meet up with them in the morning. The only thing that would complete her happiness was if she could see her friends again. She knew if there was some way they could get back home and warn the people what the Cyrellians were up to, there would be a long battle ahead of them.

Freshly showered, Bella stood in front of the window, staring at a full red moon, wrapped in one of the silk-like robes their hosts had provided for her. She was so used to going without clothing, she almost felt overdressed.

She sighed when she thought about home. Soon, she'd find her way back to Earth, but she wouldn't be alone.

Bella could feel Dar's warmth as he walked behind her, molding his taut frame against her body. He nuzzled her neck and gave her a kiss on her jaw line. Turning her around to face him, he smiled, and then uttered the words, "I love you."

That she did understand.

If someone would have told her getting her hearing restored would no longer be a priority to her months ago, she would have laughed. Would she like it back? Yes, but if she never did get it again, that would be okay too. She had learned in the past several weeks that life was far too precious to dwell on the things you couldn't change, and maybe this was one of those things.

Anyway, she'd found something far more precious.

Love.

With Dar by her side, she knew anything was possible. She loved this man all the more for what he'd done, sacrificing all he knew and loved to set her free, and to be with her. If she tried, Bella didn't think she could ever love another man more. Sure, he had gold skin, markings on the side of his face, and two dicks, but she must have looked pretty funny to him when he first saw her.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and gave him a long, lingering kiss, smiling in his face. "I love you too, Dar."

His smile said it all and she couldn't be happier.

Dar bent over and lifted her into his big, strong arms and then carried her over to the bed. He laid her down in the center with a gentleness that brought tears to her eyes. Slowly he shrugged out of his robe, revealing his tight body. The statue of David had nothing on this guy.

He was the very meaning of the word perfection and he belonged to her alone. Dar looked at her with such a loving look in his eyes; she couldn't hold back the shiver. Her heart was so full of love for him, she couldn't contain herself.

Bella held her arms out for him, beckoning him to join her. Without hesitation, he joined her on the bed, and slid on top of her, nudging her thighs apart with his knee.

He pressed fevered kisses against her neck, sending her senses reeling. Though she couldn't make out what he was saying, the vibration of his muttered words against her skin was stimulating.

Never had her body, mind, and heart been so in tune with another being. She loved this man from the very depths of her soul. Bella loved the feel of his rippling muscles beneath her fingertips and she ran her hands along his back.

He lifted his head to stare into her face, the look of naked, unashamed hunger glistening in the depths of his intense blue eyes. She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue anticipating his lips on hers.

With a sigh, Dar lowered his head and claimed her mouth in a kiss that took her breath away.

Her tongue thrust forward to meet his, twirling and dancing in a passionate dance of lust and love. The masculine, unique taste of him titillated her taste buds, heightening the sensations coursing through her body. Her pussy and ass throbbed with the need to be deliciously filled with his cocks. She lifted her hips to receive him, but Dar seemed to have other plans.

He broke off the kiss before making a wet trail with his tongue from the juncture where her neck met her shoulder to one puckered nipple. His warm breath against the taut peak had Bella writhing beneath him. She couldn't keep still to save her life. This was torture pure and simple, and what was worse, she had a feeling Dar knew it.

Dar circled the eager tip lovingly with his tongue.

Bella buried her hands in his thick mane of dark hair as she held his head against her breast, reveling in the feel of his questing mouth against her flesh.

His teeth nipped the tightened buds, sending electric currents along her nerve endings. Dar lifted his head to give her other breast the same attention, sucking, licking and laving it. His hands roamed the contours of her body, leaving no parts untouched.

By the time Dar positioned his face between her thighs, Bella was dripping with cream, so ready to be invaded by his tongue and fingers. He raised his head just enough to meet her eyes. A lopsided grin curved his sensual lips as if he was telling her this was only the beginning.

A quiver raced through her body, making her shake. "I want you, Dar," she groaned, never more turned on in her life.

Again he gave her that wicked smile of his, filling her heart with longing and love.

Dar kissed the insides of her thighs with butterfly caresses before he gently parted her labia and slipped two fingers into her moist pussy.

Bella lifted her hips against the delectable invasion, groaning as he finger-fucked her. He worked her body into a frenzy until Bella didn't think she could take any more. She screamed when he captured her clit between his lips, sucking on it like a starving man. She mashed her pussy against his face, demanded all he had to give.

Dar worked her with his fingers and mouth until she exploded, her body shuddering out of control. Slowly removing his fingers, he lapped at her juices with broad deliberate strokes of his tongue.

It was wonderful, but she needed more.

His cocks.

Finally, Dar moved to his knees and grasped his members. His chest heaved, as if he couldn't wait to get inside of her, before positioning them against her channel and anus. Then he thrust forward.

Bella sighed with carnal gratification. This was what she needed to replace the unpleasantness of trying to escape his home planet, and the fear she'd experienced at the thought of something happening to him.

None of that mattered now. They were together, and nothing felt more right.

Dar rocked his hips against her, pushing his cocks deeper into her, filling her with a burning heat. Bella's fingers slid along his spine, loving the way his skin felt beneath her fingertips. The alluring scent of their sex filled the air, and a scorching trail of passion burned along her nerve endings.

As he moved inside of her, he placed feather-light kisses along her neck and face, stroking her head, and making her feel loved. The tenderness of the moment was enough to make her cry.

With each stroke of his cocks, she got closer to heaven. Bella held him tight to her, never wanting this magical feeling to end. Her love for him only heightened the pleasure rippling through her core.

She pushed her pelvis forward, meeting him thrust for thrust giving him as good as she got until an explosion of fireworks burst within her, sending her to a raging orgasm.

Dar held her tight as she shuddered, and not long after he shot his seed deep within her. He still continued to move in and out of her for several minutes before going still.

Bella grabbed the sides of his face, and kissed him on the lips. She loved this man with all her heart, and knew she was well and truly captured, and as long as that prison was his arms, it wasn't such a bad thing.

Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn has enjoyed creating characters and making up stories from an early age. As a child she was always getting into mischief, so when she lost her television privileges (which was often), writing was her outlet. Her stories have gotten quite a bit spicier since then! Eve likes to read, bake, make crafts, travel, and spend time with her family. She lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband and pet turtle. She loves to hear from her fans, so feel free to contact her at EveVaughn10@aol.com, join her yahoo group at www.evevaughnsbooks-subscribe@yahogroups.com and visit her website at <http://www.evevaughn.com/>.