

Forbidden
Marteeka Karland

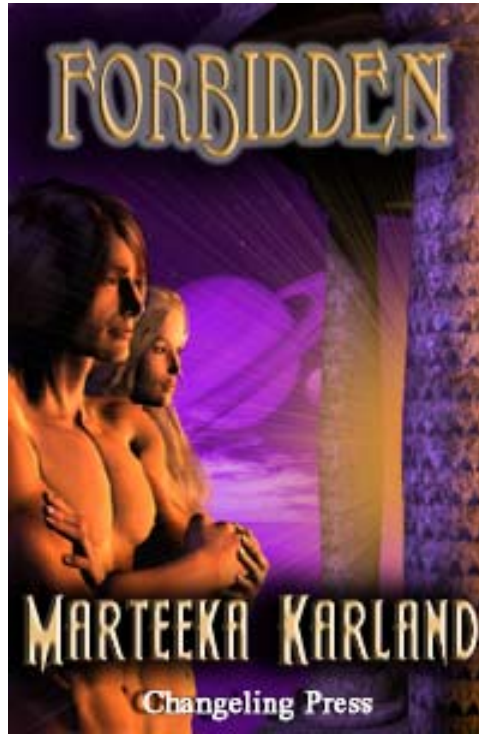
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Chapter One

Holding the blood-soaked body of her baby, Anna screamed. Her living room was now a bloodbath. Her husband's body had already been disintegrated, but the bastards who had so viciously murdered both males had yet to do the same with the body of her son. But they were now advancing on her. They'd get rid of the little boy without wasting any effort.

They were the Gothe'maran. Other worlders with the features of humans but a vicious killing streak no dictator on Earth, past or present, could ever hope to match.

Part of her mind was conscious of the three men deciding her fate. They would find out that she was incapable of having more children, that they couldn't use her as breeding stock, and they would kill her. Perhaps that would be for the best. She didn't think she could stomach being part of the deplorable process that would bring such monsters into the universe -- her mind and body couldn't survive being brutally raped day after day until she became pregnant only to have the baby taken as soon as it was born.

She'd never even had time to draw her weapon, and her first instinct had been to help the two most important people in her life, not to kill their attackers. Now her main focus was her infant son. Perhaps she should have felt more for her husband, and she was sure she would later, but now she was lost in a mother's grief.

Then, just beyond the three hulking monsters, in her front yard, another man approached through the haze of the smoke-filled air. He wore the uniform of the Gothe'maran, and she thought he was even taller than the giant soldiers before her, but his features, save the midnight hair escaping his helmet, were obscured in the distance. Her gaze froze on his approaching form.

He stopped.

She stared.

Silently, she pleaded for his aid.

The first warrior reached her and yanked her to her feet by her hair, breaking her rapt gaze. Suddenly everything in her screamed at her to fight. Where before there had been a willingness, if not an eagerness, to just get it over with, to surrender to their sadistic handling until she finally succumbed to the arms of death, now she was taken over by an all encompassing need to fight. If she was meant to die, she'd take a few of the bastards with her.

Her gentleness in laying down the tiny body belied her true feelings. Anna didn't just feel the need to defend herself, she wanted to kill. She wanted to do to these bastards what they had done to her family. Never thinking herself capable of killing, no matter how essential, she now drew her weapon and fired into the belly of the assailant holding her up on tiptoe by her hair. Blood splattered from his back, bathing his companions in the black, almost gelatinous substance. She quickly turned to the next-closest attacker and tried to fire, only to find her gun wouldn't discharge a second time. The Gothies had now drawn weapons, and she knew she only had seconds to live.

Glancing behind the warriors, she saw the newcomer within arm's length of them. Without a word, he reached around one man's neck and gave a sharp twist. The *crack* of snapping vertebrae seemed deafening, and the last Gothie turned to face the newcomer.

"General?"

The look of surprise and indecision on the monstrous face of her attacker was unexpected. The Gothe'maran were infamous not only for their brutality, but for their extreme control over their emotions during battle. Nothing caused a Gothie to show weakness.

Before the last soldier could decide whether or not to shoot his comrade, a smoldering hole appeared in the exact center of his chest. He gave a howl of rage that turned to extreme agony. The hole grew wider and acrid smoke rose from the wound as it crept toward his throat and lower abdomen. Ash fell from his body as it was

consumed by the strange weapon. The stench of burning flesh was almost overwhelming.

The man who had just saved her life stood looking at her with harsh, black eyes. As usual for one of his race, those black eyes gave away nothing of what he was feeling.

Had he not been what he was she might have found him handsome in a darkly masculine way. His face held harsh angles from his straight nose to his chiseled cheekbones and almost square chin. A pale scar ran vertically from just above his left eye, slightly off center down the length of his face. But instead of detracting from his handsomeness, it only enhanced his special brand of dangerous, manly beauty.

He took a step toward her, reaching out with one hand. She retreated two steps, raising her presumably useless gun with unsteady hands. She knew she needed to pull the trigger, knowing that doing so -- if the damned thing fired -- could mean the difference between life and a miserable death. But that same instinct to fire on her would-be killer insisted she not shoot the man before her.

She felt drawn to him. Something inside her wanted to reach out to this man. The man whose people had just slaughtered tens of thousands of her own in a single afternoon, including the two most precious in the world to her. Self-loathing permeated her mind. And shame.

She gripped the gun more firmly and tried to take aim at him, only to warn him off. This man was important to her. She needed him. He needed her. She knew he needed her as surely as she knew she needed to breathe. Confused, she looked away, and her gaze fell to the body of her son. *Alex. Oh, my precious Alex!*

Grief overtook her once again, and she staggered to his tiny, lifeless body. As she took him in her arms and cried into his little neck, she felt a stillness come over her. Her crying slowed somewhat. This was a terrible tragedy, something that never should have happened and there would be hell to pay for it, but she would survive. She would survive because the man before her would have it no other way. She couldn't help her husband or her son now, but she could help him.

She looked back at him in astonishment. Those feelings were his, not hers. What

the hell was going on?

He took a tentative step toward her again just as the medallion on his collar beeped. He pressed it to his throat as he spoke in his own language.

The conversation lasted less than a minute. When he finished he looked at her once more. "I'll find you again," he said slowly, his harsh accent very thick. Then he was gone. But so was the body of her son. Taken right from her arms.

"No," Anna whispered. Then in a gut-wrenching wail, "NO!" She fell to her knees and wept bitterly until she embraced an exhausted sleep.

Sleep was no comfort though. Her dreams were filled with her husband and baby's screams. Several times she woke from her resting place on the floor where her family had perished. Several times she cried herself back to sleep, unable to move from the only place she could feel close to them. She didn't even have bodies to bury. No way to find closure.

It was only later, when she had managed to move deeper into relatively safe UWA territory, she learned the man who had saved her life was the general in command of the forces trying to conquer what was left of the United States of America and the United World Army. He was General Kahn Mak'un. Also known as Kahn the Merciless.

* * *

Anna gasped as her body became a heated, sensitized version of itself. She could feel his hands moving over her flesh in the most tender of caresses. As he feathered light touches over her breasts and followed them with a wet lick, she arched into him, offering him whatever he wanted to take. She felt her nipples tighten, harden with the exquisite torture, and she barely held in the whimper that threatened to escape. She didn't want the pleasure to end. Maybe this time would be different.

He trailed his lips down her body, his hands never forsaking her breasts, until he found the little indentation of her navel. There he laved that sensitive spot before starting his downward descent. Her hands speared through his mass of dark hair, trying to hold to the illusion.

Just before he would have delved into the nest of curls at the apex of her thighs, he

stopped and looked at her over her outstretched body. "You are mine, as I am yours. Never think I'll allow you to be lost in this madness my people have started on your world. When I find you I will give you pleasure of the flesh, but I'll also give back to you some of what you've lost."

He buried his face in her cunt then, finding her clit with the uncanny accuracy she always expected of him. The cry she tried so valiantly to suppress emerged and Anna screamed her pleasure...

And woke herself from yet another dream that left her heavy with an unfulfilled, aching desire that no amount of masturbation could ever possibly ease. She knew. She had tried many times over the last several months.

Every night was the same since she first saw Kahn the Merciless. He came to her in dreams and left her more aroused and sexually frustrated than she thought she could bear. In a way, she felt guilty that she should welcome Kahn in her dreams even though it had been almost a year since she'd lost her family in the Pilot incident. In her heart though, she knew she had to move on. She still grieved, but she had to dwell in the land of the living.

Was she insane to want to give her body to the man who was most likely responsible for everything that had happened on Earth? Was she finally losing her mind? Maybe. All she knew for sure was that she had to find him. Only then would she find the relief she so desperately needed and the answers he so cryptically hinted at.

* * *

Anna's dreams intensified each month. Every night, Kahn the Merciless took her to new heights of ecstasy only to leave her hanging there, unfulfilled.

It had been two years since her family was murdered. Two years Anna had spent preparing herself to find the nemesis of her dreams and find answers for all that had happened on Earth. Answers for what had happened to her. She had searched every form of media she'd had access to for anything about Kahn the Merciless. The funny thing was, there were no pictures of him prior to the Pilot incident. After that, he appeared several times but he was never photographed with a weapon in hand. Apparently he did his killing through his army.

As she entered the recruiting office of the Somerset, Kentucky, branch of the United World Army, Anna prepared for the questions to come. Questions there was no way she could answer truthfully.

The sergeant, Mahoney by the nameplate in front of him, was a very large African American. He sat behind a desk that looked too small for him but was probably average in size. He wore camouflage fatigues with the sleeves rolled up to expose burly forearms covered with a myriad of scars and tattoos. His shaven head, also sporting scars, gleamed in the harsh fluorescent lighting of the underground recruiting office. A tattoo of some odd Celtic looking design covered the majority of his head. Anna wasn't sure exactly how tall the man was, but she was sure he topped her own five feet six by several inches. And she didn't think she had ever seen a more intimidating human.

"I want to enlist," Anna said.

"And you are?" he asked, barely looking up from the stack of folders before him.

"Anna Garrett. I'm a registered nurse and I'd like to do all I can as close to the Front as possible."

She knew that would get his attention. The life expectancy of soldiers fighting on the front lines was less than two tours of duty. That of Mobile Army Surgical Hospital unit personnel wasn't much better.

As she expected, the sergeant's head snapped up and his dark-eyed glare pierced her. It was a few moments before he actually spoke.

"You're aware the Gothe'maran do not distinguish between medical and combat personnel?"

"Of course," she said.

"Then why?"

"I believe I can do the most good there. It is where the most people are needed."

The response was, of course, total bullshit, and the sergeant would have to be moronic not to know that, but it was the expected answer to that question. There were only two reasons anyone would ask to be assigned to the Front. One was condoned, the other was not.

He regarded her a moment. "I'll have to pull up your civilian file. The UWA needs people at the Front too badly for me to dismiss anyone willing to go, but we will not help someone commit suicide."

"I understand. Would you like me to save you the trouble and tell you my experiences with the Gothe'maran?"

Again, she saw the surprise at her straightforwardness and had to smile inwardly. Humans were nothing if not predictable. It was a wonder they had managed to last this long in the war. All good humor faded with that thought.

Sergeant Mahoney sat back in his chair and regarded her thoughtfully. "Where are you from?"

"It's called Pueblo, Kentucky, but you will know it as the Pilot."

At the mention of the Pilot, the obviously battle-hardened man blanched. "Dear God! And you expect me to believe you aren't suicidal?"

"Sergeant, I want to kill as many Gothies as I can. Now, as a surgical nurse, I probably won't have the opportunity to actually kill any at all, but maybe I can patch together a few of our men and women who can."

"Well," he said, his focus once again on the files and papers scattered on his desk, "if there are no other more recent incidents, you've cleared the waiting period by exactly one day, but I suspect you did that on purpose." He referred to the mandatory two-year enlistment waiting period set up by the UWA just after the Pilot incident. Too many men and women had thrown their lives away needlessly after that massacre, and Earth didn't have the people to spare.

"I watched them butcher my husband and my son, Sergeant. The only reason I'm still here is because I can still have children." A lie, but then again so was the rest of her story. "I should have been on a transport back to their home world, but I managed to get away after I killed a couple of them." God help her if anyone found out differently.

Mahoney sighed. "You realize that just being a nurse isn't going to cut it at the Front. There is other training you'll need before we can send you in."

"What other training, Sergeant?"

“For one thing, the doctors and nurses at the M.A.S.H. units there do more than surgeries. They actually have to go into the field and get the wounded more than half the time, so you’re going to need some training in emergency evacuation and medical intervention. That can take at least six months to complete at best.”

“Would it help speed things up if I told you I am a nationally registered emergency medical technician paramedic as well as a nurse?” she asked with a smirk. She knew very well it would make a difference. She had been planning this since the day her family died... and *he* left. “I’m perfectly qualified in the areas you just mentioned.”

“I see,” Mahoney said. He paused to stare at her as if sizing her up. “Well,” he finally continued, “I’ll run this by the regional commanding officer and see if we can get you out there in a couple of days.” He stood and offered her his hand. “I’ll be in touch, Ms. Garrett.”

When she would have pulled her hand from his, his grip tightened. “I want you to really think about what you’re doing, Anna. That place is as close to hell as anyone can ever see. Some of the weapons they use are designed to make the torment last as long as possible. They make what they used at the Pilot look like squirt guns.”

Anna smiled. “Thank you, Sergeant. I’m making this request with my eyes wide open. I know what I’m getting myself into.” That statement was only partially true.

She knew about the Front, but she didn’t know about Kahn the Merciless, and he was the reason she was going there in the first place. She knew that, if she could survive, she would eventually find the man because his forces would push back the battle lines and the chances of her getting captured were great. She was taking a huge gamble that he’d see her before she was killed, but it was one she had to take. She had dreamt of the man every night since he had saved her and two things were very clear to her -- he needed her more than ever, and if the dreams didn’t stop soon, she’d probably die from unfulfilled lust.

* * *

A week later, she sat on a bus filled with determined, if frightened, men and

women headed to a little place near what used to be Lexington, Kentucky -- the state's own little piece of hell nicknamed the Front. She was going there intending to be taken as a prisoner of war by a race of people that didn't take prisoners. She was walking into the lion's den and, God help her, she had never been more excited in her life.

Chapter Two

"I don't care if you have his leg," Anna snapped to the enlisted nurse. "The Gothies will be here long before we could possibly get it packed for transport." They made their way through the M.A.S.H. unit, preparing for the latest attack. Anna had been in Lexington three months, and was now the most senior medical staff member.

She felt for the young soldier, she really did, but they didn't have time for niceties. "Give him a choice, Lieutenant. He can either stay here and hope the Gothe'maran will be so kind as to reattach his leg before they kill him, or he can be moved out with everyone else and lose it. And I don't plan to leave anyone behind."

Other than herself, of course. She'd make sure she was captured and damn the consequences. But she got the feeling that *he* knew what she had planned and would be waiting for her.

Suddenly, there was a flash near Anna's surgical suite. A deafening silence followed it, as if all sound had been simply sucked into a vacuum. The air around her seemed thick and unbreathable. Dizziness swamped her and she fell to her knees with a jarring thud. Her hands instinctively flew out to grasp whatever was in reach to steady herself. As the room spun around her, she looked up... and her eyes locked with those of Kahn Mak'un.

He stood in the doorway of the tent, his soldiers fanning out to check the other collapsed bodies round the room. She thought that odd because the Gothies usually just killed everyone they came across. He moved toward her. Her last thought before the blackness claimed her was *He's found me at last*.

* * *

What had happened to the humans was tragic. And those deplorable acts had been done in his name. Kahn could see the fear on the faces of those people of Earth he

met as he walked through the tiny camp. They knew who he was and thought they knew what he stood for. He had never been a part of the zealous faction of his government that had invaded Earth, and he certainly never condoned the slaughter of these people, of *any* people. All of this had been done behind the King's back. All in the name of "saving the race."

His people were warriors. Unfortunately, in their blood frenzy, most of those who had come to Earth in the beginning had forgotten that honor had to be met in battle. No matter what a superior officer ordered. There was no honor in killing women and children. The madmen that had started this had brought tens of thousands of his homeland's warriors, and Kahn doubted that there was a single one left who had not forsaken his honor for the kill.

Now, he had to clean up the mess. And that was proving as difficult as he expected. These people had lived in terror for almost three years. His job now was to round up every last warrior and get the hell off this planet. Some of them had heeded the return call, but more than half of them had not. They had chosen to continue their "search" for Earth women to bear children who could be raised to fight in the stead of homeland warriors. Gothe'mar then could fight wars without risking the lives of their people, thus expanding their empire. The notion was not honorable. It was disturbing that so many warriors had gone along with it.

In truth, Kahn suspected most of them simply enjoyed the violence. Such was the nature of his people. It was why they were taught to control their baser instincts from the time they were able to learn higher skills, even before they were of schooling age. Extreme emotion had no place in Gothe'maran society.

Now, it was taking all his control to keep from savagely killing every rebel warrior he came across. They had shamed him. They had shamed his people. And they would pay for every drop of blood they had shed.

Especially that of his woman's family.

True, he would not have been able to claim her had her husband been alive, but he would gladly have let her go if it would have meant she would not have been

tormented by the loss. He doubted he would ever forget her cries of anguish as she knelt over her baby. Still, now he felt only overwhelming joy. His soul had found its mate. This time he would not let her go.

He stood there watching her as she was overcome by the *tol'sun* -- the silent light. Her hair and skin were as pale as the rays of sunshine on this light-filled world. Slight of form, she still had lush curves that he could discern through her clothes. He itched to remove the offending garments to see the body of his mate.

She found him just as she gave in to the vertigo caused by the passive weapon. As he watched her slump to the ground and felt her acceptance of him, he thought that maybe, just maybe, he could claim her without causing her more grief. Because he knew there was no way he could let her go now that he had found her again. She was his, and honor, as well as his every instinct, demanded he claim and protect his mate at all costs.

"Round up the warriors for transport. Give medical assistance to the humans," Kahn said to his second, Kiril.

"Commander," came Kiril's low, rumbling voice. "Shall I have the ship prepare for your woman?"

As always, Kiril knew where Kahn's primary focus was. "Yes. I will take her aboard before the effects of the *tol'sun* wear off. She needs to adjust to her new life as quickly as possible."

"And if there is too much damage to be undone?"

Kahn thought a moment before he spoke. What he was about to tell Kiril would shake the foundation of the Gothe'maran. "I don't think that will be a problem, my friend." He looked Kiril in the eyes. "She can hear my thoughts when my emotions are high, as I can hear hers. Not to mention our mutual need of each other. It is almost unbearable for both of us."

Kiril's normally impassive features registered surprise for an instant before he snorted. "Unlikely, Commander. Telepathic abilities exist only in true mates and then only after they have been bound for many years. You jest with me."

Kahn's gaze didn't waver. "I never jest, Kiril. This you know."

Kiril's face paled. "Great Mother," he whispered. "You have been mates in past lives, then. Many lives if you connected with her so fast. And with someone not of our race? It is forbidden."

"Not of our race? I wonder." The implications hung heavily. Gothe'maran warriors may have slaughtered tens of thousands of their own people.

"You suspect these people of Earth are related to us?"

Kahn sighed. "Preliminary testing from scans and the microscopic tissue sample of the baby suggest the humans may be more closely related than previously thought. We will know more when we have her permission to take a blood sample."

Kiril grunted. "Is the child still in stasis?"

"Yes. His injuries were fully healed, but medical command thought it wisest to have his mother near when they brought him out of stasis."

"Another difficulty in getting your woman to adjust. She will not be pleased her son was not returned to her."

"She doesn't know he's still alive."

Kiril actually laughed -- something Kahn had never seen. He hadn't even known Kiril was capable of laughter. "Good luck, my friend. If she is a Gothe'maran by nature, her anger at being kept from her child will be unparalleled. I'm glad I'm not the one to have to tell her."

Kahn shared his second's amusement. He was actually more fearful that, once she became comfortable with their mind sharing, she would manage to glean the information directly from his brain than he was of telling her himself. He would have to keep her occupied with other things until he could broach the subject. Kahn smiled a bit before sobering. "There is much still to be done here, Kiril. Many warriors are still killing, and it's up to us to stop them."

"What would you have me do, General?"

"No mercy, Kiril. No mercy."

"As you command."

* * *

Anna awoke still a bit lightheaded. She also found she was quite comfortable for the first time in several months and did not want to spoil the pleasant feeling by opening her eyes and finding it all a dream. So she lay there dozing for a time not caring what had happened, not wanting to think beyond the wonderful feeling of a soft bed beneath her and warm covers over her.

“Are you aware you snore when you sleep, *tarae*?”

Anna jackknifed to a sitting position, the covers falling to her waist. Kahn the Merciless sat beside the huge bed she was in... *smiling*. In her search for this man, she had seen hundreds of photographs of him, and none of them could have prepared her for the devastation of his smile. All those angles, all the fierceness in his eyes, simply melted away. Even the scar seemed to diminish. He looked at her with a gentleness, a tenderness that took her breath away. She was speechless.

He was dressed in dark gray. His leather-like pants hugged muscular thighs and his shirt and vest were open, revealing a tanned expanse of very powerfully built torso. His hair hung in waves to his shoulders, giving him a wild look that sent a liquid gush of heat through her body. She was drawn to this man. Everything in her screamed for him.

“What? Nothing to say? From the woman who would give herself willingly to a people she knows to be deadly simply to find me? I expected a tirade of some sort at the very least.”

Teasing. He was *teasing* her! When the chuckle emerged from deep within his chest it was all she could take. Her hand shot out, grabbed the nearest pillow and hurled it at him. It hit him square in the face.

She gasped. Had she really just hit Kahn the Merciless in the face with a pillow? Of all the hare-brained, idiotic things to do! She flung herself across the expanse of the bed and made a mad dash for the door, only to be snagged in mid flight by a steely arm around her middle. The laughter at her ear was the last thing she expected.

“You’re probably the only person on several worlds who would dare throw anything at me, *tarae*. You should know you have nothing to fear from me. Can you not

feel it?"

The only things she felt were his breath feathering her cheek and the clenching in her belly. She almost melted on the spot. But she realized she *could* sense what he felt. His amusement -- and his lust for her.

She looked back at him. He had all her answers. Would he give them to her?

Gently, he took her shoulders and turned her to face him. "In time, *tarae*, I'll tell you everything."

"How...?"

"Later. I need you. Now."

It was only then that Anna realized she didn't have on a stitch of clothing. Not that she cared. She could actually feel his intense need for her. Amazing! But she wasn't sure what part of those feelings were hers and what was simply her experiencing his feelings through their strange bond. She only knew she needed him more than she had ever needed anything in her life. It was unsettling to say the least.

Anna knew what she was feeling was unnatural. This instant attraction was too much, too fast to be completely her own. When she considered her obsession with him, she knew there was something more going on than she was able to understand. But there was simply no way she could fight it. She needed his body and needed to give him hers. And this attraction, this desire, was getting stronger by the second until they threatened to spontaneously combust with the heat of their mutual lust.

With a fierceness she hadn't known she possessed, Anna flung her arms around his neck and plastered her mouth against his. Her tongue thrust between the seam of his lips, plundering, ravishing, using her kiss as the outlet for the pent-up lust she had not been able to express for the last two years, three months and fifteen days.

Anna ate at his mouth, licking and biting, the aggressor. A first for her. Somehow, she managed to rid him of his shirt and vest and began working on the fastening of his pants. She felt the lust in him. He was as wild as she, but holding himself back for her benefit. The effort he exerted was tremendous, and she felt him tremble with it both inside and out.

Once she managed to unfasten his pants, her hand found him, hot and oh, so hard. She probably would have been impressed with his length and girth had she been able to form a coherent thought, but her only consideration at that moment was getting him inside her. As soon as possible. Now.

She gave him a mighty shove, and he stumbled back onto the bed. With him on his back, his legs hanging off the edge, she advanced on him. She caught first his surprise, then the passion growing impossibly more intense. She was going up in flames and taking him with her.

Kahn pushed himself onto the bed a bit more, and she followed him, climbing up his body to rest her sex against his. Anna felt his cock pulse and twitch, burying itself between the moist folds of her pussy to rub against her throbbing clit. She heard the animalistic growl and thought it was Kahn at first, only to realize it actually came from her own throat. One part of her was shocked into total oblivion while the instinctual part was actually in heat. She couldn't control this side of herself.

Don't try, love. Not now. Not this time, Kahn's voice spoke in her head.

It was too much. Anna impaled herself on the cock of Kahn the Merciless.

She screamed.

* * *

Kahn was lost. He had never experienced anything like this. Anna buried her face in his neck and bit hard, forcing a startled grunt from him even as she eased the sting with a wet lick. She rode him with an abandon that bordered on insanity. He was in her mind. He knew what she was feeling -- he felt it himself -- but his Anna was not used to such powerful emotions. It was up to him to be her anchor. She needed fulfillment and it was up to him to guide her.

She rode him faster and harder, her grunts and squeals of pleasure testing his resolve as his hands caressed her body. He knew she needed release above all else. Only the satiation of her body would bring back her sanity. His thumb found their joined bodies and circled her clit. Her body immediately started to convulse around him as her first climax hit her. She grabbed hold of his thighs, throwing her head back and

shrieking her pleasure.

Still she rode him. The friction was almost unbearable, and Kahn knew his tightly held control was about to snap. Her hips gave a little twist as she sank down on his cock, and it was all he could take. He grabbed her hips so tightly he likely bruised her, rising to meet each of her thrusts with a savage one of his own.

He gave a mighty plunge when he felt her muscles start to spasm once more. His hips ground into hers, seeking to get as deep as possible before he emptied himself into her. On a roar, his climax hit him. His eyes clenched shut, his muscles bunching as he bucked underneath her, driving himself ever harder until the last drop he had to give spilled into her tight, grasping cunt.

She collapsed on top of him, her breathing as ragged as his own. His arms slid easily around her and gently stroked her back. He was about to roll them to their sides and cover their spent bodies when he heard the *hiss* of the electronic door opening.

Mikkiril De'Kar stood just inside Kahn's bed chamber. He was not as tall as Kahn and his musculature wasn't as impressive, but it didn't make him seem any less menacing. He was leader of the rogue warriors and also Kahn's father's youngest brother.

"Disgusting!" he spat in English. "She is human! Our people will never tolerate you succeeding your father while you bed the human whore."

Kahn had no doubt his uncle used the local Earth language hoping Anna understood his words. The lieutenant accompanying him stared straight ahead. Kahn immediately flipped Anna onto her back, kissing her briefly to muffle her small squeak of shock.

"Rest, *tarae*. I must deal with this. I will return as swiftly as I can." Anna's cheeks were crimson and he could feel the shame radiating from her in waves. He smiled once more at her, hoping to reassure her as he stood to greet the intruders. Grabbing a robe, he ushered the men outside his bed chamber.

"I assume you have a good reason for disturbing me by bringing this *bakkara* to my quarters?" Kahn's voice was quiet, deadly.

“Mikkiril is condemned, General. Coming here was his last request.” The lieutenant did not apologize, though Kahn could see the apprehension in his eyes.

“Why did you not think to warn me?” Kahn barked more harshly than he’d ever spoken to a junior officer. Volume wasn’t needed when menace worked better, but anger had overridden his usually steely control.

The lieutenant did not hesitate. “His request was an unannounced audience with you, General.”

Kahn crossed his arms over his chest, looking down at his uncle, head held high. “You have it. Speak.”

Mikkiril sneered. “I only wanted to confirm my suspicions that you bedded a human, and I have a witness.” He gestured to the now startled lieutenant. “You will release me or I will see to it you will never be king.”

“My fate and that of the mate chosen for me by the Universe is no concern of yours. We will accept whatever is to come.” Kahn couldn’t believe his uncle actually thought he would escape death. True, Mikkiril hadn’t been judged by the king as of yet, but there was little doubt the man was guilty of genocide and attempted slavery. Just looking at Earth was all the proof anyone needed. The only reason he was even given this much of a reprieve was because he was the king’s half brother.

“Ah, but did you know she cannot have another child?” The smirk on Mikkiril’s face indicated he thought Kahn unaware of that fact. “I should think that will affect your... affection... for her. Think about what you are doing, Kahn. You cannot rise to power with a barren wife. You’d be spitting in the face of a thousand years of tradition.” Mikkiril turned to the lieutenant. “Take me back to my cell. I’m finished here.”

Mikkiril. Always the royal bastard. Literally. Gothe’maran society held dear the idea of family. Men and women mated for life, but their ultimate goal was to only mate with the one the Universe had created only for them. Their soul’s mate. Mikkiril’s father had dishonored his wife by taking a mistress and fathering another child. The people had demanded he relinquish the throne. As a result, Kahn’s father had assumed the

throne while still in his boyhood years. A boy leading the mighty Gothe'maran was not readily embraced. Fortunately, Kerrek had not only gained the respect and trust of his people, he had made the Gothe'maran thrive. By taking a human mate, Kahn risked having his people question him as their rightful king when the time came to take his father's place, but he was confident that could be worked out.

But right now, none of that mattered. Mikkril had not only dishonored himself, but his entire family. He would pay with his life at the hands of the king. The only thing that mattered to Kahn was the woman on the other side of that door who was currently coming to terms with their torrid lovemaking.

* * *

After Kahn left, Anna lay quietly, gathering her emotions. She had never experienced anything quite like the sex they had shared. Okay, so "sex" was a fairly bland term to describe what they had done. Fuck like rabbits? Now there was a term! She was stunned by her own behavior, and by the feelings running around in her head. Unable to contain her nervous energy, she jumped up from the bed and paced restlessly.

When they'd had sex, she could feel what Kahn had felt, from the overpowering lust to how silky her skin felt to him when she'd glided over his body. But once the experience was over, she could no longer feel those emotions. It was as though he had simply turned himself off. Now, she only felt an occasional flicker of something. Annoyance, anger, pity. Then it was gone like it never happened. What the hell was happening to her?

It wasn't long before Kahn quietly opened the door and slipped in once again. As he entered, his gaze snared hers and he began to disrobe. Anna had thought him handsome before, but now that she had time to appreciate all of him, her breath caught in her throat, her chest constricted and her body went up in flames... again.

He looked like a bronzed god. He towered over her own sturdy frame by almost a foot, and was very heavily muscled. Vein-roped arms as thick as her thighs, a chiseled torso so steely only the skin made it soft to touch and molded, thick, defined legs all

bespoke the power this man wielded.

Perusing Kahn's legs had probably been a bad idea because her gaze was inevitably drawn to the male flesh now hardening between them. If his body was a work of art, his cock was the Rembrandt. She knew he was large -- she felt the evidence in the tenderness between her own legs -- but she hadn't realized how perfectly made his sex really was. She could distinguish each vein running the length of it, and the large, mushroom-shaped head darkened from red to a deep purple with his desire. Like everything else, his cock was in proportion with his body, which made him long and mouth-wateringly thick.

For his part, Kahn was definitely not immune to his mate's inspection. Just watching her lovely azure eyes run over his body got him hard. She had wrapped herself in the sheet, but he remembered her form perfectly. She was slight by the standards of his people. He was surprised he hadn't broken her with their wild mating earlier. Slender arms and legs joined a body boasting generous breasts and hips. Her work at the Front had reshaped her body and he found this one just as appealing as the fuller version of two years earlier. The mass of flaxen curls covering her head and sex was his undoing. His people were dark, bronzed. Anna was like the precious pearls of her world -- creamy white from head to toe.

Lust surged through him, answering both her feelings and his own.

"Anna." His voice was husky to his own ears. "I have need of you again but there are things we must discuss." She blinked and he registered her surprise that he knew her name. "It should not surprise you. You know my name. I seem to remember you calling out to me several times a few minutes ago." He smirked and irritation radiated from Anna.

"That's a bit different, *Kahn the Merciless*," she mocked. "Everyone on Earth knows who you are."

There was a silence between them as Kahn tried to figure out how to tell her about her son.

The moment he let that thought slip, he knew it had been a mistake.

She froze. "What about my son?"

Kahn gave her a wry smile. "You're becoming more comfortable with the mind merge. That's good, but I must confess, your timing could be better."

She cautiously stepped toward him. "What about my son," she repeated. It was a demand, not a question.

Kahn told her without preamble, "He lives."

His sense of Anna's emotions went suddenly blank. In the next second, she drove the heel of her hand upwards into his chin, snapping his head back and making him stagger backwards. "Bastard!" She clawed his face, slapped him, punched him, kicked him with all her strength. "What have you done to him? If you've harmed him, I'll kill you myself!" Her anguished screams tormented his heart.

Kahn let her beat on him a while before enfolding her securely in his arms. Great sobs racked her body as she cried brokenly. He knew she was not even aware that she clung to him instead of seeking his death. "Please don't hurt my son. I'll do anything you ask. Anything." This last was a ragged plea. Her heart was breaking all over again and Kahn suffered with her.

"*Tarae*, never, never would I harm you or anyone you love. For any reason. Least of all a child." He gently urged her to look at him, tilting her chin upwards and framing her face gently in his large, battle hardened hands. "I know you've believed all these years my people were bloodthirsty monsters, but we are not. When our emotions are out of control, our passions rule our minds but that is precisely why our race seeks emotional control above all else. I know you can feel it in me, when you feel my emotions pull away from you. The only thing we place above control is the protection of our family. For that, we would do whatever necessary." Kahn gently guided her to the bed, as he straightened the sheet covering her, and they both sat down. "Even such honorable things as that can be twisted, and that is what happened with your planet."

"Where is my son?" Her question was put to him in a whisper, her tortured eyes brimming with tears.

"You remember the day we met?" When she nodded, he continued. "My second,

Kiril, scanned the dead. Just as a man's heart can stop and his lungs quit working and there still be a chance he can be saved, so it was with your son."

"Impossible! He was literally torn apart. I remember there being so much blood..." Her voice trailed off as she slipped backwards into the memory.

"It is very possible, Anna. On Earth a hundred years ago, a man with no heartbeat was dead. There was no bringing him back. For us, it's not so much a matter of heart and blood activity as brain activity."

"So? Without oxygen, the brain dies. Without blood, there is no oxygen. You get the point? Once the brain starts dying, it's only seconds before the damage is irreversible. Alex had been dead too long."

"For your people, yes. Not for mine."

"I don't understand."

"We can repair cells in the central nervous system up to a point. Your son was placed in stasis to prevent further decay of his cells, and the damage to his body was repaired. All the damage. It is as though he were never injured."

Kahn watched Anna's eyes grow bigger with each word. "Impossible," she breathed again. "What you're suggesting is totally impossible."

"We've been perfecting the technique for a thousand years. I assure you, it is very possible."

"Have you seen him?"

"Only in his stasis chamber. Once we get to Gothe'mar, and you are present, medical command will bring him out of stasis and you will have your son back."

"But, if he's okay, why keep him in stasis?"

"It will be less traumatic for Alex. Sometimes there is a brief pain when the cells of the body are, for lack of a better term, jump-started. He will want his mother."

Anna smiled. Then she burst into tears once again. "Oh, Kahn. I can't believe I could be getting my son back! Even if I don't, just getting to see him again will bring me peace." She sniffed, wiped her nose, then pinned him with blazing blue eyes. "If you're lying to me, Kahn, I'll kill you."

Kahn did his best to block his amusement. She was truly Gothe'maran in nature. Holding her gently, he kissed the top of her head. "All will be well, *tae*. Trust me."

She looked up at him, her gaze calculating. "I will. For now."

Chapter Three

Still wrapped in the bed sheet, Anna walked around the stark room where she and Kahn had been staying since he had taken her from Earth. The only furniture seemed to be the large bed and a small table with one chair. There were two doors, one of which was open, the room beyond it dark. The color scheme was a colorful gray, dark gray and more gray. Even the bedclothes were gray. There appeared to be bare steel for floor, walls and ceiling with only a thin rug for carpeting. The only sound was a quiet but ever-present roar.

“How long before we get to my son?”

“The *Kol'cha*, my flagship, is the fastest ever built. We should arrive at Gothe'mar in about ten hours.”

“Once we get there, when will I get my son back?”

Kahn smiled gently at her. “We will go straight to Medical Command. It will take several hours for them to complete the restabilization process, but we will be there for all of it if you wish.”

“I wish. Definitely.”

Trust him. Those words were so easy to say, yet so hard to do. What could she do? Never in her wildest dreams did she ever imagine she'd get her son back. Now the only way that was going to happen was if this man decided to take her to him.

She continued to quietly pace the room. Finally deciding she needed a bath, she turned to Kahn. “I need to clean up. Is there a shower I can use?”

Kahn looked at her for a long moment, as though sizing her up. “There is a bath. Let me show you.”

He led her to the open door, and the lights came on when she stepped over the threshold. There was no toilet, but a huge, oval shaped pool surrounded by exotic, very

colorful plants -- the only color in the whole place.

"Thank you," she said, and turned her back on him, expecting him to leave. She wasn't surprised, though, when she felt his large hand on her bare shoulder.

"Anna," he whispered, hoarsely. She knew he was hurting. He tried to hide it with smiles and kindnesses but she knew he desperately wanted her to trust him. To love him. Part of her did. But another part of her knew that he could have found her at any time and brought her son to her.

Shrugging him off, she climbed into the water, and slid beneath until only her head remained above it. He turned to leave, and she had intended to let him go, but the thought of being alone was unbearable.

"Wait."

He half turned to her, his expressionless face grating on her nerves. Why couldn't the man just fucking say what was on his mind!

"Because it's not in my nature. But I will try to be more open with you."

She forced a breath of air out her lungs in frustration. "Then why don't you just tell me what you want from me? I can't feel you, and I can't read your expression... you're going to have to give me a little help here."

He took a step toward her. Okay, so it was more like he was stalking her than simply moving in her direction, but she tried to ignore that.

"I want you, *tarae*. I want your body and your mind. Your soul already belongs to me, but I want you to acknowledge it freely."

Maybe too much wasn't good either. "Kahn, I don't even know if I *like* you or not. I'm certainly not in love with you. I know that's what you're getting at. I can feel it now."

"But you want me. I feel that in you."

Much as she wanted to deny it, she couldn't. She couldn't be around him without wanting to feel his body against hers again. As his hungry gaze raked her naked form beneath the water, a fresh rush of heat exploded through her body. She didn't need to be able to hear his thoughts to know what was on his mind.

She was supposed to be mad at him, but she was finding it difficult to concentrate when he stalked her in all his naked glory, his cock jutting out proudly from the dark curls between his legs.

"I need you. I've never needed a woman more."

Anna desperately wanted nothing more than to welcome him into her arms, her body, but she couldn't. Not now. Not until she knew for sure he was the man she hoped he was.

"Kahn, you've got to give me some space. I can't do this until I know for sure I can live with the consequences."

He paused as he slid into the water behind her. "All right, *tarae*. We'll take it slow." He kneaded her shoulders, lessening the tension she hadn't realized was there. She sighed at the exquisite pleasure.

"Tell me something. What does that name mean you keep calling me?"

"Well." Kahn took a deep breath. "*Tarae* are domesticated pets, but still one of the most vicious creatures on Gothe'mar." Kahn moved closer, his breath tickling the back of her neck. "But the thing about *tarae* is, they breed so fast, if they didn't have a natural enemy they would probably take over the planet."

"Uh huh." Anna got a funny feeling in the pit of her stomach. "The point?"

"The predator that hunts the *tarae* is a very large, winged creature like a falcon or hawk on Earth but much, much bigger. He must hunt, and *eat*, many *tarae* a day if he is to survive."

"Uh huh." She was repeating herself, but when his mouth slid over her neck, when she could feel his immense need of her, her vocabulary dried up and her IQ dropped fifty points. "Does this bird have a name?" she asked, looking back at him.

His grin became positively wicked. "They are called a *kahn*."

Heat suffused her body at the implication. He would have her. It was inevitable, and she knew it with every fiber of her being. Her only dilemma was trust. She couldn't take the chance now. If he was right and she was about to have her son back, she couldn't be with a man she didn't trust.

But her body had other plans. He resumed his gentle massage and his hands on her bare shoulders and back sent tingling shivers straight to her pussy. She groaned and leaned into him. His lips were back at her neck and jaw as he kissed a path from ear to collarbone. If he didn't stop, she'd throw herself at him again. She had to stop this somehow before she did something she'd regret.

Pushing away from him, she slid beneath the water's surface. Eyes closed, face upturned, she came out of the water, smoothing her hair back from her head. She turned away from him, moving to the other side of the small pool before turning around. When she did, she couldn't miss the ravenous look in his eyes.

They sat there in the water staring at each other a long moment before Kahn finally broke the silence. "You make going slowly difficult."

His sultry voice made her wish things were different. She wanted simply to go to him, fuck him senseless, until neither of them could move. Her breasts felt heavy and full. She knew without looking that her nipples were hard. All she had to do was brush her fingers against them, squeeze them, and she'd be so hot for him, she might be able to forget why she shouldn't fuck him.

"Touch yourself, *tarae*," Kahn whispered. "If you won't let me give you pleasure, please yourself. Let me watch."

Anna was helpless to do anything but what he asked. She desperately needed release. Her own need was bad enough, but she could feel what he wanted from her as well, and it was driving her mad with unfulfilled desire. It was like her dreams all over again.

Her hands found her breasts and she massaged the full globes. Filling her hands, she pushed her breasts together and licked each tip impulsively. She shuddered at the sensation her own tongue created. Taking one peak into her mouth, she sucked and nipped gently, sending a flood of warmth straight to her cunt.

She didn't know if the moan was hers or Kahn's, but the sound was definitely encouraging. Sliding one hand to her pussy, she ran a finger along her folds until she found the small opening and dipped the finger inside. Savoring the sensations, she then

found and circled her clit several times until her hips rocked in time with the movement of her fingers.

Making eye contact with Kahn was not the smartest thing she'd ever done, but once she did, she couldn't look away. Nor could she simply sit there with him so close and not want him to touch her. She needed to come and she didn't think she'd be satisfied with anything less than his cock pounding deep inside her.

He rose and moved toward her slowly. When he reached her, his hand shot out to her hair and he pulled her head back roughly so that she looked up at him. The fear that coursed through her at his forceful gesture, and the evidence of his straining control blazing in his eyes, made her even more aroused.

Not bothering to ask permission, he grabbed her by the waist and lifted her to sit on the edge, spreading her legs and diving between them with his face. Anna thought she'd die, the waves of pleasure were so intense. Her clit burned where his tongue touched it, and her breasts tingled with each touch of her fingers and mouth. Kahn's heady growls were a powerful aphrodisiac and she almost came.

Almost.

Before she could stop it, a vision of her son's bloodied body filled her mind and all thoughts of sexual release vanished, leaving her empty and a little ashamed.

Raising his head, Kahn sighed. He kissed her belly and hugged her middle a moment while he got his breathing under control again. He had pushed her too hard. Once again, he'd let her down. When would he ever stop making mistakes with the only woman in the entire universe that mattered to him?

"I'm sorry," he said, muffled by her abdomen. "Forgive me."

Anna clutched his head to her middle. He could feel her shame, but also her need for him to anchor her in such a difficult time for her. She was trying to put aside her own wishes for the welfare of her son and for that he thought he might die from loving her. Anna was everything a Gothe'maran man could want in a wife.

Desperately needing to get her talking to him, to help her be comfortable with him again, he turned to the subject most on her mind.

“Tell me about your life on Earth, *tarae*.”

“You never ask the easy questions, do you?” Anna took a deep breath. “I’d never given the future much thought beyond looking for you. I wasn’t even sure I *would* find you.”

Kahn smiled. “I know, sweet. But *now*. What do you want from the future?”

Anna thought a moment. “I’m really not sure. Beyond getting my son back and him being whole and healthy, I don’t know what more I could ask of the future.” She thought for a moment. “I suppose I never really cared what happened to me before you found me at the Front. My thought was to get to you by any means necessary, but I never truly expected to ever see Kahn the Merciless a second time. I think I just wanted the nightmare my life had become to be over. Either you’d find me and explain the madness happening on Earth or the Gothe’maran would kill me. Either way, that phase of my life would be over.”

“And what of your life before?”

Anna swallowed. “I loved my husband deeply.” Her voice was husky, rough. “My little boy? It goes without saying that I loved him more than my own life. I would have given my own to save his, but they came out of nowhere. I didn’t have time to act, to prevent anything. When it was over, what could I have done that would have made any difference? Your scientists may be able to bring Alexander back to life, but I knew ours couldn’t. I worked in the medical field ten years before the Pilot incident. I knew nothing would save either Alex or Mark.”

Anna retreated, gliding to the opposite edge of the bath without turning to face him. “My life was happy, Kahn. Every married couple has problems and we were no exception, but I would have gladly spent the rest of my life with him, raising our son.” Kahn felt the emotion compress her chest. She hurt talking about this.

The gentle lapping of the water was loud in the ensuing silence as he moved to gently touch her shoulder. “If I gave you the opportunity, would you give your account of what happened at the Pilot?”

Anna wiped tears from her cheeks with the heels of her hands and sniffed.

“Why? What good could possibly come of it?”

He hesitated, unsure how to phrase his next statement. “When we get to Gothe’mar, there will be a trial going on. The man responsible for leading the rebel warriors to Earth is being tried for what your people would call crimes against humanity. There are statements that he alone was responsible for recruiting the warriors he unleashed on your planet, and that he gave them explicit instructions to wipe out every living thing on your planet save fertile females, but there have been no witnesses from Earth to describe firsthand what actually happened from Earth’s perspective.” Kahn gently turned her to face him, his eyes locked to hers, waiting for a reaction. “Mikkriil says Earth was in the middle of a civil war when they got there. They were only trying to end the killing.”

Anna gasped. “But you *saw* them kill my family!”

“No, Anna. I saw them vaporize your husband’s body and come after you. I didn’t see them actually kill anyone. After that incident, the only killing I saw was my warriors killing Mikkriil’s.”

Rage almost consumed her. She wanted to lash out, to hit something. To kill something... someone. Kahn couldn’t blame her. “So you’re telling me there is a possibility your people will be convinced we did this to ourselves? We killed each other on such a massive scale? What about the death camps? How will he explain them?”

“Your history is replete with similar incidents, as is our own. As is just about every race in the universe. It’s not uncommon. You can prove that’s not what happened.”

“What about Alex’s injuries? He was hit with a Gothe’maran weapon. Won’t that make a difference?”

“Certainly. Medical Command will testify to such, but they need your account to back them up and fill in the rest of the story.” He lowered himself into the water so that he was face to face with her, looking at her from eye level instead of towering over her. “Can you do this?”

The determination to avenge her son and husband in the only way given to her

was very strong. She would get her point across to the king. She would make him see Mikkril for what he really was. A murderer.

"I'll do whatever you need me to, Kahn."

He enfolded her in his strong embrace then. Nuzzling her hair with his chin, kissing her temple. Simply holding her. And she let him. He drew some comfort in that. "I'm sorry, *tarae*. All this has been more difficult on you than it had to be and I am the cause. I should have told you about Alex from the start."

"I guess I'm as much to blame as you are. I'm the one who practically attacked you when I first woke up." She smiled, a little, sad smile. "Just let me work it out. I will, in time."

"I know you will. Unfortunately, there is something else."

"There's more?" Her disbelief and dismay were clear.

"Yes. And I honestly don't know how to explain the rest to you. It will be difficult for you when we reach Gothe'mar, and there will be little I can do to help until the trial is over."

"What do you mean, 'difficult'?" Her wariness sharpened her features, and she looked at him through narrowed eyes.

Before he could answer, the intercom chimed softly.

Kahn swore under his breath. "Speak," he barked.

"General, Military Command requests you speak with them immediately." The voice was clipped, but neutral. He tried to bury his apprehension, but wasn't sure how well he succeeded. *Here it comes.*

"Alex?" she whispered. Kahn shushed her with a quick touch of his finger to her lips and a kiss to her forehead.

"Inform them I will contact them at once. Establish the link to my office in ten minutes. Kahn out."

He focused on her once more. "No. If something were wrong with Alex, Medical Command would be the one to contact me." He paused, warring with his sense of duty and his sense of responsibility to her. He could see by the look on her face that she

knew something wasn't right.

"Kahn?" She searched his eyes, his face, his mind.

"You said you trusted me for now. Can you trust me a little farther?"

"What's that got to do with this? What's happening?" she asked without answering his question. She wasn't going to deal well with this. Not that he blamed her.

"I don't have time to explain now and I may not see you again until we dock." His grip on her shoulders tightened. "Whatever happens, believe in me. I promise, I'll take care of you and Alex. Whatever the cost."

"You're scaring me, Kahn." Her face had gone pale and he could feel the adrenaline rush through her body as if she were preparing for battle.

"Don't be scared, *tarae*. I'll take care of everything. You just have to trust me."

Anna replied softly, "That's a lot to ask."

Kahn sighed as he got out of the bath and dressed. It wasn't much, but at least she hadn't completely rejected him. Before he left her, he looked at her one last time. "I love you, *tarae*. If you never believe anything else I tell you, believe that. Cling to that no matter what happens."

Kissing her lightly on the mouth, he left.

* * *

Kahn's presence hadn't actually been required for the curt statement from Military Command that he cease all contact with Anna. His father could simply have issued the order and been done with it. As head of Military Command, Kahn knew Kerrek had a job to do. As his father, Kerrek knew that if he extracted a promise from his son face to face, Kahn would not break that promise. Not that Kahn had been given a chance to explain the situation. The order was given, Kahn had acknowledged the order, and the "conversation" had been terminated.

Damn them all!

He could only guess what Mikkril had said to shift the blame from himself. Well, Kahn supposed he'd find out soon enough.

They were docking on the main spaceport orbiting Gothe'mar. They were here

and Anna still didn't know the prejudices that awaited her when she actually met Mikkril. If his people felt the same as Mikkril, if they were not willing to accept an off-worlder mate to their future king, Kahn wasn't sure what he'd do. As current ruler, Kerrek could smooth things over a bit if he chose to, but would he? Kahn could only guess what was in his father's mind.

Still, Kahn had promised to take Anna to Alex first thing, and that was what he intended to do. He just hoped he didn't have to disobey too many commands to get it done. Duty had never seemed so heavy. And it struck him that nothing had ever been more important to him than his duty to his planet and his people.

Until now.

* * *

When the two warriors came to escort her to the planet's surface, Anna was a little disappointed. She had expected Kahn would be there to take her to her son. Instead, the two silent giants flanking her took her to a small spacecraft that was to carry them to the surface of Gothe'mar. No matter how many times she tried to get the sentinels to tell her where Kahn was, she got no answer. In fact neither of them spoke to her, or even looked at her, except to give her orders.

Time seemed to crawl as the three of them sat in silence during the two-hour trip to the surface. Why they had to take a spacecraft at all was a mystery to Anna. She remembered vividly having her son vanish from her arms, and watching Kahn disappear. It seemed like a wasted effort, but she'd endure it. In silence. She'd be damned if she'd complain even once.

When she finally exited the tiny craft, she was met by Kahn and three other imposing looking men. The relieved smile she flashed him faded as she caught the look in Kahn's eyes. Merciless didn't even begin to describe it. She could feel the desperate hope within him that she'd trust him, but beyond that nothing else. And his features certainly gave away nothing.

"Medical Command has recommended you be present when they awaken your son," one of them said. Funny, he looked remarkably like Kahn. His expression gave

away nothing, but something in his voice disturbed her. He sounded almost... disgusted. Like he was looking at a particularly revolting insect. "I am Kerrek. You will come with us."

Anna gave Kahn a brief, questioning look before nodding her agreement. She didn't think she could have spoken if she wanted to, she was so nervous. She was going to get her son back!

The foursome led her down a series of crowded hallways, each becoming less and less congested. When they reached a hall leading to a large, gray door, Anna found her entourage was alone. No one spoke until they finally stopped before the entrance and Kerrek turned to her.

"You will do as instructed by the doctor without question," he said.

"Of course. Thank you for letting me be with my son for this."

The man just looked at her. When he spoke, disdain and contempt oozed from every word. "You are here because Medical believes it will be less stressful for the boy. Your feelings in this matter are of no concern to me or anyone else. If it were not for Medical's strong insistence you be present, you wouldn't be."

Anna was stunned. Something was very wrong. She looked to Kahn, but he was not facing her, nor was anyone else. He desperately wanted her trust, though. She could feel the need beating at her stronger than any of his emotions ever had before. The necessity for trust was so powerful, it created a stabbing pain in her temple and she almost fell to her knees.

Somehow, she managed to walk steadily through the door when it *whooshed* open. In the center of the room was an incubator-like contraption. Knowing in her heart that machine was where her son lay, she headed for it, unbidden. A vise-like grip on her shoulder stopped her, causing her to wince. One of her escorts effectively, and painfully, halted her approach. He never once looked at her.

A very tall, very slender man was working at the various terminals surrounding the place where her son rested. He looked up as soon as the doors closed again.

"Is this the mother?"

"It is," Kerrek acknowledged.

"She has no weapons of any kind?"

"None. My son brought her here and has assured me she carries no weapon. She can do no harm you will not be able to prevent."

Anna's head whipped around to the man she now realized was Kahn's father. Did this man think she would harm the people who had saved her son's life? "I would never try to hurt anyone who has tried to help Alex."

"Silence!" he roared at her, his face a mask of unbelievable anger. "To even presume you would be capable of doing harm to someone in Medical Command is ludicrous. We are concerned that you would undo all the good this man has done for the baby."

"What?" Anna whispered. She simply couldn't believe what he was implying.

"It may be acceptable to terminate your own children on Earth, but on Gothe'mar, you would forfeit your own life for even attempting it. We protect our children." The superior, condescending look combined with the rage flashing in the man's eyes was completely wasted on Anna.

She was lost in her own rage.

Before she could even form the thought, she backhanded him with all her strength using her closed fist. Everyone in the room moved to subdue her. One of the big men hit her full in the stomach, then her side as she bent double. Still another slapped her hard enough to split her lip. But even though the force of the blows made her want to vomit, they could not stop the fight in her, or stem her words. "How *dare* you! Your people slaughtered my people by the millions, including my husband and my child!" She struggled against the impossibly tight male hands holding her back from further attacking Kahn's father. "I don't know who you are or what your function is on this Godforsaken planet, but if you want to blame someone for killing that baby over there, look in the mirror. You! Your people! Your warriors!" Anna continued to lash out at her captors, even Kahn when she recognized his presence to her left. She kicked and scratched, even bit when she could. "Alex was killed by a Gothie weapon!" Her voice

dripped disdain. "Even if I was able to take the damn thing from one of your warriors, how could I possibly know how to use it?"

Kahn's father looked to the doctor who was shielding the incubator with his own body. The doctor nodded. "The child was killed by a standard issue destabilizer. I do not know if Earth possesses anything similar but in order to fire one of ours, she would have to have been fitted with a controller chip specific to the weapon in question. I found no such chip in the data files when she was scanned upon boarding General Kahn's ship. She would not have been able to fire any weapon of our world without it, and would not have been able to remove it without leaving trace particles."

"Do they have anything similar, Kahn?"

"They do not, Father." Kahn's voice was soft.

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely. Besides, when I got to this woman and the boy, she had not even drawn her weapon and there were no Gothe'maran weapons near her." Kahn's voice was carefully controlled. Even through her anger and grief, she sensed his wariness, his unwillingness to give away too much. God! She hated not knowing what was going on! And at this moment, she hated Kahn most of all.

"Did you see a warrior kill her husband or her son?" Kahn's father looked openly inquisitive. It was obvious this information was new to him. Information he wasn't sure he liked but, since it came from his son, he had no choice but to believe.

"No, but I did witness a warrior disintegrate the body of her husband. That warrior's attitude was not... reverent. At the time, I assumed from what I *did* witness that the three warriors present had something to do with the death of the man and the child."

"Interesting." An emotionless mask was once again in place. Anna decided she hated Kerrek almost as much as the men who had killed her husband. Kahn had come to her aid, but she wasn't sure she'd ever be able to forgive him for not actively helping her when she had been hit or, most especially, when she had been accused of murdering her own son. She was sure Kahn had known his father believed she'd killed

Alex before they ever reached Gothe'mar. Now that she was beginning to come down from the adrenaline rush, her face burned with pain and her stomach felt like something inside of her had torn. Breathing hurt and she was losing the ability to even stand up on her own. She would have slumped to the floor if not for Kahn keeping her upright.

The doctor came to her side, running a small scanner around her body. "She is bleeding internally from a ruptured spleen and a punctured lung. And a head injury. I must repair her first, then I will bring the child out of stasis." His examination stopped suddenly. He looked at her, surprise evident. "You cannot have children."

"No," she gasped. "Having Alex... almost... killed me." Breathing *really* hurt. "My husband... d-didn't..." Another gasping breath. "... want to p-put... me through that... again." Kahn and the doctor were now helping her into a machine that looked vaguely like a tanning bed. "Had a... tubal... ligation." God, she *hurt!* Why was *any* of this important?

"Relax, madam," the doctor said. "This will take a few minutes. You'll not feel any pain, only a warmth. It should be relaxing once the process gets underway."

Anna closed her eyes and simply gave herself into their hands. She hurt too badly to fight them anyway. If they honestly believed she had killed her own son, she was up shit creek without a paddle. For the second time in her life, she succumbed to the black blissfulness of unconsciousness.

Chapter Four

"Father." Turning away from his woman -- *his* woman -- in the healing tube was the hardest thing Kahn had ever done. "I know Mikkril is your brother, but I do not believe he is telling the truth about what happened on Earth." He had to be careful here. Kerrek loved Mikkril as if they were full-blooded brothers instead of half brothers. Kerrek would acknowledge Mikkril's deception if it could be proven, but he would not accept half-baked theories and assumptions. "Look at all the evidence and listen to what this Earth woman has to say. It can only serve to give you more information. You can decide later how much weight to give her statement."

"Listen to her?" Kerrek sounded incredulous. "After she assaulted me?" He paused, looking suddenly weary. "I fear I already know the truth of it." He looked at Kahn fully. "You think she is telling the truth?"

"I do," Kahn said without hesitation.

Kerrek spoke to the doctor, "Can you repair her internal damage?"

"Yes, sir. I can even repair the damage to her reproductive system if you wish it."

Kerrek gave Kahn a sidelong glance and spoke softly, knowingly. "Do you wish it, my son?"

Kahn actually blushed, horrified. *He knows!* "I -- Father --"

"Do it," Kerrek said, grinning at Kahn. "This woman is your future queen and she will need to have more babies."

Now, *this* was unexpected. "Wait," Kahn said, raising a hand in the doctor's direction. Turning to his father he said, "You have no problem with a union?" How could he not have known his father would have seen things this way?

Kerrek shrugged. "The Universe directs us in ways no one can predict. Given the fact that so many of our warriors were eager to sacrifice an entire world to 'preserve our

people,' perhaps it is time Gothe'mar learn that all life is precious. Not just the lives of our own people. If this woman has captured your heart, who am I to forbid a union?"

"My relationship with her is... complicated," Kahn said somewhat uncomfortably. There was no way Kerrek was going to believe any of this.

His father only smiled. "I can imagine. Mine with your mother was, also." The king chuckled as if remembering. Then his merriment faded and his eyes misted over.

"You miss her a great deal." Kahn's voice was soft, quiet with respect.

"She was my soul's mate. I will find her in the Chamber of Souls when my spirit departs this body." He smiled. "But, yes. I miss her a great deal." Kerrek paused and looked at Kahn. The force of that stare was enough to make even Kahn the Merciless squirm. "Kahn," Kerrek said, carefully, "is this Earth woman your soul's mate?"

Kahn's mouth went dry. "Yes," he managed. How would his father react?

Kerrek merely smiled. "So your time has come. It's not something I expected -- no one has ever found a soul's mate outside the Gothe'maran people. This will be the bridge they need to accept Anna as their queen. It is the very heart of our beliefs."

He clapped Kahn on the shoulder. "I will leave you now. Don't leave her side. If this situation had happened between your mother and I, she would have skinned me alive when she got out of that healing tube. I'm sorry I treated her so harshly, Kahn. You should have said something." He paused. "That's something else you're going to pay for." Still chuckling, his father turned away to consult the doctor and dismiss the guards who had accompanied them.

Anna's anger at Kahn had been bitter. He knew she had trusted him to protect her and he had failed. Had he better prepared her for what was going to happen when she reached Gothe'mar, told her she was being accused of her son's attempted murder, she might have been better equipped to deal with everything. As it was, he had led her into a situation that could very well have gotten her killed. Instead, he had bedded her. Eagerly. He chose to try to get her to accept him, to trust him, instead of telling her the king of Gothe'mar suspected she had murdered her own son. Anna trust him? Probably not in this lifetime.

That had cost her, too. One simply did not assault the king. She was lucky she had survived. She wouldn't have if Kahn hadn't stayed the guards when he did. Not that she would see it that way. Not that she should. His father's last words haunted him. He had denied her in front of his king and his people, not to mention his father, something she would never forgive. Not that she should.

Right now, Kahn could only wait. He had to be the first person she saw when she came out of that tube. He had to gauge her feelings through the link so he would know what he needed to do to regain her trust.

"Sir." The doctor was speaking to him now. "Shall I proceed? I need to see to her injuries."

Kahn hesitated only a moment. "Yes. Proceed, but do not repair her reproductive organs. It must be her choice." He started to turn away, but faced the doctor again. "Can you identify the problem she had with her pregnancy that caused it to be difficult?"

"Yes, sir. It is easily correctable. A minor problem with the shape of her uterus. Fixing that should solve any problems for birth in the future."

"Then hold your findings and keep them ready. If she decides she wants this, we'll do it later."

"As you wish, sir." The doctor turned back to Anna's healing tube. "This will take a while, sir. Go rest. I'll call when she's close to regaining consciousness."

Waiting had never been harder.

* * *

When Anna opened her eyes, Kahn's face was the first thing she saw. At first she smiled. It must have all been a very unpleasant dream.

Then the tall, thin doctor came into view. "How do you feel, madam?"

Not a dream after all. Well, shit.

She sat up, swinging her legs over the side and remaining that way for a moment before answering. "Fine. Will I still be able to see my son?" Her voice was bitter and she forced herself not to look at Kahn. If she did that, he'd see her hurt. If he didn't already

feel it. She'd give almost anything to be able to block her feelings from him at that moment.

"Of course. All is ready. We are simply waiting for you," the doctor said, not unkindly. "Please follow me and do not touch your son until I tell you. This process is delicate and can not be disturbed or he could be in danger."

Anna followed him without a word, still not looking at Kahn. Let him stew. If he even cared. She couldn't feel him and didn't want to try.

Looking into the encasement, she got her first look at her son. The tiny boy was resting comfortably on his back, one hand tangled in the tuft of dark hair on his head. It was like he was sleeping in his crib. He looked so peaceful.

Grief over losing him, joy at finding him again, all the emotions were so overwhelming, she staggered and would have fallen into the contraption had it not been for Kahn's steadying hands. She immediately shrugged away from him and focused her undivided attention on what was happening to her son.

When the doctor flipped a few switches and pushed a few buttons, the incubator started to hum with life. Soft lights surrounding the baby on the inside began to glow softly.

"Beginning cellular restabilization. This will hurt him for a couple of seconds, but will pass and the process will be completed. Do not touch him or the healing tube until I tell you it is safe." The doctor waited for her to acknowledge his words before he turned away again and flipped another switch.

As she watched, Alex sucked in a breath and then screamed so that Anna's first instinct was to snatch him up, but Kahn held her back, whispering, "Wait, *tarae*. Only a second or two more."

Anna looked to the doctor, beginning to feel frantic. Tears slid down her face unchecked. She could not bear another second of this. Her son needed her... again. And unlike the last time, she would be there for him.

"Please! He needs me," she sobbed.

"You may go to him now, madam. Cellular restabilization completed, patient's

vital signs normal. Congratulations, madam.”

Anna didn't wait to hear the doctor's last statement. She rushed to Alex the moment he'd let her and was now cradling her son against her chest, comforting him and crying with him.

After a few minutes, Alex's cries stopped and he looked at his mother. "Hello, booger." That name had always made him giggle. This time was no exception. The child giggled through the tears and started cooing and gurgling as any five-month-old should do.

"I need a bottle for him and some baby food." She looked to the doctor for help, but Kahn had a bottle already in hand.

"Give him this and I'll see what we have on Gothe'mar that is similar to what you would give him on Earth."

She took the bottle without acknowledgement and began feeding her son. She only hoped they would let her finish this one thing before they took him away from her. There was no doubt in her mind that they would take him. Worse, she knew there was nothing she could do. Fighting would only cause her more injury and distress her son. Frustrated, lost in despair, she knew she was beaten.

"He needs a diaper and clothes. And he is used to sleeping with his Buggly Bear." She started to cry again despite her resolve not to. "Some... someone will have to... rock him to sleep because... I-I've never put him to bed by himself," she said between snuffles. "And he n-needs... a n-nightlight." She was rambling and she knew it, but couldn't seem to stop herself. Giving him up this time would kill her. Without Kahn to sustain her, she knew she would grieve herself to death.

Then she felt strong, warm arms surround both herself and Alex. Even as angry as she was at Kahn, she couldn't stop herself from turning to him for help.

"I can't let them take him away from me, Kahn," she sobbed. "Please help me. I'll do anything, anything! Just please don't take him from me." She was crying uncontrollably now, to which Alex pulled back and looked at her, then at Kahn, then back at her and started giggling.

Normally, that would have been enough to stem the flow of tears, but it only made Anna cry all the harder and hug her squirming son closer. She knew that the next moment could possibly be her last with him and she wasn't letting go for anything.

"*Tarae*, relax. No one is going to take Alex from you." Kahn released her and led her to the door. "Come. Let's get Alex to our room. He needs rest."

Not trusting the reprieve, Anna clung to Alex. The relief was almost as overwhelming as the earlier grief, but she held on to her control. She wasn't sure why things seemed to have changed, but she wasn't questioning her good luck. Lord knows she deserved a little for a change. Kahn guided her to a suite and into the bedroom where a gigantic, very comfortable looking bed awaited her. There was an assortment of infant clothing and supplies in one corner, and Kahn brought her a fresh diaper and a sleeper.

"Here. Dress him for bed. He will need sleep."

He was right. Alex was rubbing his eyes even as he tried valiantly to avoid that awful creature called sleep. Anna changed and dressed him. Crawling into the big bed with him, she sang softly as she rocked gently back and forth, Alex wrapped snugly in her arms. It wasn't long before he dozzled off, looking as peaceful as an angel.

"We need to talk, *tarae*." Kahn's voice was husky with emotion she couldn't feel. But when she turned to him, the feelings suddenly swamped her. *Sorrow. Overwhelming sorrow.*

Her grip tightened on Alex and the child whimpered but continued to sleep.

"Please, let's talk, then you can rest with him. You both need sleep, but we need to clear the air so we both know exactly where we stand." The Kahn standing beside the bed pleading with her was not a Kahn she had ever met before or even suspected might exist. He looked like a lost little boy. Vulnerable. *This is because of me.*

She let his feelings flow over her and deciphered them as best she could. His sorrow stemmed from the possibility that she would not be able to forgive him. He believed there might be no hope for him. And he just might be right.

"Will my decision have any bearing on whether or not I get to keep my son?"

Kahn's startled expression told her all she needed to know about that. He had no intention of trying to use Alex to keep her in his life. Hearing him say it, however, was a step in the right direction for him. "Of course not! Alex belongs with you. No one will deny that anymore."

"Then, if it's all the same to you, I'd rather spend this time with Alex. I don't much feel like talking to you right now, Kahn. I'm really not sure I ever will again."

She turned her back on him, cuddling herself against the body of her son, and tried to ignore his devastation. It wasn't easy. He didn't say a word. He respected her wishes, but the depth of his despair almost caused her to change her mind.

No. He had to truly understand how much he'd hurt her, betrayed her. He was apparently so ashamed of her that he had let her be beaten, and almost let her lose her son because he wouldn't defend her. Because he seemed to be afraid of letting his people know he was involved with her.

Which brought up another question: just how involved did he see them? He'd said he loved her, but were their definitions of love the same? She tried to tell herself that she owed it to him to give him the benefit of the doubt. After all, he had given her Alex back and that was worth more than she could ever possibly repay, but she just couldn't bring herself to forgive and forget that easily.

She'd sleep on it. If she still hated him in the morning, she'd ask him to take her home. If not, she'd talk to him. It seemed the only reasonable thing to do at this point. He'd just have to understand.

* * *

Kahn was smiling, his hand outstretched while he held Alex with his other arm. Anna tried to take his hand, but found the gap just too big to bridge. But he had Alex. She had to try. She could almost grasp Kahn's hand...

Alex laughed. The sound was haunting somehow instead of joyous. Kahn looked at the little boy and grinned a "proud poppa" grin, then turned his gaze back to her. He was no longer smiling. Instead, there were tears in his eyes and his hand slowly dropped to his side. He seemed to be falling away from her.

But he wasn't. She was falling away from him.

She tried to find a hold, but all she found was air. She was reaching into nothingness and the two people she loved most were slowly but surely falling away from her. She screamed...

And sat up in bed, drenched in sweat and gasping for breath.

One quick look to her right assured her Alex was still sleeping.

She needed to splash a little water on her face and get a drink. Anna carefully and quietly gathered all the pillows she could find on the bed and arranged them around Alex. Sliding out of the bed, she made her way to the dimly lit bathroom.

As she pressed the button that would give her cool water, she looked in the mirror over the sink to confirm her suspicion. She looked as bad as she felt. She ached in her chest and upper abdomen and even though there were no marks, her face felt like it should have been black and blue. Her eyes had dark shadows underneath them and her skin was damp. Her lips were so pale, they almost disappeared into her face.

Dropping her head and bracing herself on the countertop with her hands, she bit back a sob. She'd been hard on Kahn. Damn hard. True, she had reason to be, but his misery wasn't wasted on her. She knew he was only trying to do the right thing for himself and his people. Knowing he was so off balance, she was miserable because she wasn't big enough to put aside her anger and try to see things from his point of view. She just couldn't understand why he hadn't told his father about her. Why had he treated her as if he didn't know her? Like they didn't have intimate knowledge of each other.

She began to cry. Losing Kahn was going to be harder than she thought given the short time they had known each other. Then again, she had wanted him on some primitive, emotional level since the first time she saw him. She could forgive him for anything except not wanting her. He might want her in private, but if he could not acknowledge their relationship in public, before his people or even his family, she could not be with him. She would not be his mistress. She had more self-respect than that.

Lost in self-pity, she turned around when she heard water sloshing gently behind her just as Kahn raised his big body out of the bath.

"Anna." His voice was husky, rough. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked almost as bad as she did. But he was still beautiful to her. So beautiful it hurt.

Water clung in a mesmerizing array of droplets to the fine hair on his chest and arms. The dim light accented the hollows and sinew making him look more powerful and sexier than ever before. Instantly, her pussy began to weep with wanting him. But it was the ache in his voice that drew her undivided attention.

She looked at him. Really looked at him. The sorrow in his face mirrored her own, and a little sob escaped before she could stop it. She almost ran into his arms. Almost. Pride held her legs rooted in place and stubbornness raised her chin.

"*Tarae*. Please. I was looking out for both of us." His face was shadowed and it was hard to read the emotions there, but what was inside was another story. "I was trying to be a leader instead of a mate." He rubbed his eyes wearily with a hand. "My family has held the throne of Gothe'mar for over a thousand years because the people believe my family held their best interests at heart. I feared they would not accept a queen not of Gothe'mar on the throne."

"I don't understand." Her eyes narrowed.

"My father is king of all Gothe'mar. My family has reigned for longer than any ruling family in recorded history. It is my duty to lead and look after our people, to put their lives above my own. I have been burdened with this since I was first old enough to understand what it all meant. I have always been taught that my people's needs come before my own." He moved a little closer to the pool's edge, closer to Anna. "As my father has recently pointed out, in thinking of my duty to my people, I neglected the most important duty of all -- that to you. Our relationship is not about me solely. Without you, there would be nothing. I would be nothing." She could feel him will her to look at him, and she couldn't help but meet his gaze. "I should have treated you with more respect."

"Yes. You should have." Anna wanted him with all her being. She wanted to reach for him, to move into his arms and feel his body around her. She could feel part of her soul being torn apart knowing that she could never be what this man needed. Her

heart was breaking.

Kahn moved toward her a little more, his arm reaching out to her before he dropped it. "My father approves of our union. He seemed a bit amused by the situation I've managed to create for myself where you're concerned. He will help me figure out how to see you accepted by our people."

"Kahn," Anna stated warily, not sure how to express herself without further hurting him. "I can't be anyone other than who I am. If you think your people can't accept me as I am, then I'm sorry. I won't live a lie even to please you."

"I would never ask that of you."

"What were you thinking when you treated me like you did? You were obviously concerned about it then. Why should I believe things have changed now?" Anna was trying very hard to express her anger, her hurt, reasonably. All she really wanted to do was rush into his embrace and fuck him until neither of them could move. Either that or slap his handsome face.

"It was a mistake. A huge mistake. One I'll regret for the rest of my life. I asked for your trust, then showed how little I deserved it."

This side of Kahn was so unexpected. This was a man who commanded armies, who was to be king of his world. He inspired fear and dread in the hearts of all who saw him. Yet he was willing to show Anna just how vulnerable he really was when it came to her. She was torn. If she walked away from him now, he probably wouldn't drop his pride a second time. On the other hand, if she gave in now, he'd know he just had to act contrite and she'd forgive him anything.

In the end, she searched her own heart. She couldn't make herself believe that Kahn was anything other than an honorable man. He had been unsure of how to handle things, probably for the first time in his life. Second-guessing himself had proven to be a mistake and he was admitting it. How bad could he really be?

Before she could change her mind, Anna pulled her sleep shirt over her head and slid her panties off her hips, stepping out of them as she walked to the tub. "We'll sort things out." She slipped into the water and into Kahn's embrace, feeling the squeezing

sensation around her heart ease a little. When he would have claimed her mouth, her hand came up against his lips to stop him. "This is to get the physical relief we both need and can't fight, Kahn. Things are far from settled between us. Do you understand?"

"Yes, *tarae*. But it is a beginning." He smiled at her, a tender smile full of love and relief and hope.

He did kiss her then. Slowly, languorously, savoring the very essence of her. Anna knew he needed her as much as she needed him and it was a heady sensation. She thought she would climax from his kiss. His feelings were hers and she knew how much he appreciated the dance her tongue was doing with his.

It was impossible to tell which feelings were her own, but she didn't care. The only things in the world that mattered to her were this man in her arms, and the baby sleeping on the impossibly large bed in the next room.

"We have to be quiet, Kahn. I don't want to wake Alex," she breathed. How she managed to form that thought was beyond her. She could hardly think of anything other than the talented mouth currently moving over her own.

He chuckled and it warmed Anna's heart to know she had driven the desolation from him by just accepting him once more. "I don't think I'm the one you need to silence, *tarae*. I seem to remember you making quite a bit of noise the last time."

"Did I? I thought it was you bellowing when you filled my cunt with your cream." She knew what the crudeness of her words did to him. She could feel the lust rise within him, within herself.

"Perhaps we should try it again." His voice was a growl. "See who screams as she gets pounded with my cock."

That did it. Anna knew she needed him inside her, riding her, taking her body any way he saw fit. The recent emotional upheaval needed release, and the man she loved was going to provide it in spades.

He fastened his mouth on her neck as he palmed her ass and lifted her until she instinctively wrapped her legs around him. She rubbed her cunt against his heavy

erection and felt his muscles tense as he suckled her neck. As he lifted her just a little higher, probed her slick opening with the head of his cock, she found his mouth with hers.

Instead of the quick entrance she expected, Kahn slipped just inside, halting her movements with his strong grip on her buttocks. He moved his kisses to her breasts and sucked one ripe nipple into his mouth. Letting the water support her as much as possible, Anna let her head fall back and tried to wiggle him inside her just a little more.

Kahn began to increase the pressure of his mouth on her nipple. Still he wouldn't let her ride him as she wanted to. He held her against his body so that she was unable to get more of him inside her no matter what she tried. Her breast ached and throbbed where his mouth was attached, making her pussy spasm around his cock. Her juices mingled with the water lapping around them. Her clit pulsed in time with her heart, and she could feel her impending orgasm just out of reach.

"Please, Kahn. I need you inside me," she pleaded. "Give me more of you. All of you."

Kahn growled as he thrust just a little more inside her. The emotions swirling inside him were chaotic. She felt his need to be a gentle lover this time warring with his need to claim her as his, to dominate his mate into accepting him. He didn't just need her body, but her. All of her. Everything that was her.

"What do you want?" It was more demand than question. "What will it take to get you to come?"

"You," she gasped. "Your cock. Ramming into me. I need your cock, Kahn." She could only whimper now. She was coming apart inside. Still he didn't move more than a fraction of the pace she needed. The teasing only served to drive Anna higher and higher without ever reaching the pinnacle.

"Look at me, Anna," Kahn said, halting all movement now.

She didn't want to meet his gaze. Though she knew he needed her, wanted her, she also knew there was a reason he thought his people wouldn't accept her. She knew she shouldn't want him, knew his people probably wanted him to marry someone

befitting their future king -- one of them. But she couldn't get enough of this man. God help her, she loved him with all that she was.

"Anna." His voice was gentle yet gruff with emotion and lust. When she finally did look at him it was through a haze of shame and desire mingled with love and so many emotions she couldn't name them all. His piercing eyes bored into her soul and he paused a moment before he spoke.

"You do not fully understand the bond between us, *tarae*. It cannot be denied by you because you think I believe you unsuitable for me, and I cannot deny it simply because my people might not want their future king mated to an off-worlder. I swear to you by everything that I am, I am your mate and Alex's surrogate father first. I'll be a king second. I'll do my duty to my people, but my family will always come first from this moment forward."

"And if your people don't accept me? If you have to choose between your people and me and Alex?" Anna had never been so unsure of herself in her life.

"Then we will leave. We will build a life together with love, and Alex will know that we love him and each other."

Anna didn't know what to do. She knew in her heart that Kahn was telling her the truth as he saw it. So she simply clung to that and hoped it would be enough.

"Make love to me, Kahn," she whispered.

And he did.

The slow, even thrust of his hips began again. The slick, gliding sensation of their bodies melding beneath the water was heady indeed. It didn't take long before Anna was as frenzied as she had been earlier, and she wrapped her legs around him fully, locking her ankles at the small of his back.

She ground her pussy onto his cock as she twisted her hips, threw her head back and cried out. Kahn's grip on her ass tightened and his nostrils flared with his effort to hold himself back. He released one cheek of her buttocks to run a finger down the seam and gently delve into her back entrance. When he pushed past the tiny ring of muscle, Anna held back the scream only by biting his shoulder. The sensation was almost

overwhelming in its pleasure. When he added the second, then the third finger, she had had all she could take.

“Oh my God. Kahn!” She exploded onto his cock, his fingers up her ass. Never had she felt so full. His grunts came with every stroke as he fucked her with a fever she’d never known existed, the corded muscles, tendons and veins of his face, neck and arms straining his skin. Just as her own climax was ebbing, he gave one mighty thrust and her name on his lips made a guttural, primitive sound in his own passion.

They clung to each other, the water rocking their bodies gently as if to soothe and relax them. Kahn spoke first.

“You are my life, my sweet Anna. Give me your trust and I promise I will not disappoint you again. Give me your heart and I’ll treasure it always.”

Anna stiffened. “You’ve got to give me time, Kahn. I promise to try to trust you, but it’s not just me now. I can’t afford to stumble into another situation like before. Do you understand?”

“You wouldn’t be a good mother if you didn’t take that into consideration. Of course I’ll give you time.” He kissed her forehead. “You will be asked to testify at the trial tomorrow. Will you at least trust me to see you safely there? It wouldn’t surprise me if Mikkril tried to hurt you before you can speak out against him. His life is on the line, after all.”

Anna looked at him, startled. “I never thought of that. Alex will be the most vulnerable. Since I’m obviously no match for a Gothe’maran warrior.” She thought for a minute. “I’m not thrilled about this. We have a long way to go, Kahn, and since I don’t have much of a choice, I know we’ll be safer with you than anyone else.” When he looked a bit crestfallen, she sighed. “I’m sorry if I sound harsh, but taking chances with my son’s life is not the way I’d choose to test how much I can trust you. From my viewpoint, I simply have no alternative. I may have issues with you, but you’re the only Gothe’maran I believe actually cares if we get there alive or not.”

Anna searched deep down for a gut feeling to tell her what she should do. “I think I do trust you. Even though things got a little out of hand when you brought me

to Alex, I know you didn't expect me to pick a fight." Needing to lighten the mood a little, she said, "I caught you off guard when I slugged your father, didn't I?"

Kahn groaned. "Don't remind me. You would have been killed if I hadn't intervened. I don't think anyone in our whole history has ever hit the king before."

"King. God, Kahn. I can't believe your father is the king of Gothe'mar! That you're next in line to be king. This whole situation is ludicrous." She would have laughed if she hadn't already started to become aroused again. His cock was still inside her, causing the most delicious sensations to thrill her cunt once more.

He chuckled. "Being heir to the throne has its advantages."

"Oh yeah?" Anna wiggled her hips to draw his attention to their joined bodies. "Like what?"

"If I were anyone other than the king's firstborn son, I would be on duty, not in this bath making love to my woman."

"Hm. And if you were king?"

He flashed her that wicked grin. "My woman would be making love to me instead."

Anna laughed, feeling lighthearted for the first time in a long while. "I guess it really is good to be the king."

Chapter Five

No matter what Kahn said, Anna wouldn't leave Alex with someone while she sat before the tribunal. Both he and his father had offered assurances that the boy would be safe and that she would most definitely get him back immediately afterward but she wouldn't budge. Kahn supposed he couldn't blame her. She had said it would take time to trust him again. Trusting him with her son's life was most definitely last on her list and that was as it should be.

Fortunately, the child was asleep when the time came for his mother to face the man she would speak out against, and Anna carefully made her way to the witness box. She shifted Alex so that he lay on her shoulder, and the child grunted at the movement but remained contentedly asleep.

"We understand that on Earth there are hearings such as this and that the witness against the accused swears to tell the truth before the court. Is this accurate and something you recognize as binding to you?" The king presided over all tribunals and he was the one to whom it fell to determine the accuracy of each witness's testimony. One thing he had always told Kahn was to find out what held the word of each species that entered the witness box and make them swear to it.

"Yes, sir."

"Then, by your rules of court, do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

Anna blinked. Kahn could see the surprise on her face at hearing the familiar words. Then she smiled. "I do. Of course."

When asked to relay her experiences during the war, Anna painted a gruesome picture. She described the tortures her people endured individually, and what she had seen at the death camps abandoned near the Front. She gave an account of the

equipment found at one of these camps, and there was no way it could have been anything other than Gothe'maran in nature.

Mikkiril looked at her impassively as she relayed her account. Try as he might, Kahn could not read the man's intent in his expression. He could have been merely a spectator for all the emotion he gave away.

Kahn noticed her embrace tighten on Alex as she told how he and her husband had been slain. There were tears in her eyes and on her cheeks, but her voice was steady and sure. She never took her eye off Mikkiril.

When the representative of Gothe'mar was finished questioning her, Mikkiril's representative stepped forward. Kahn held his breath. This would not be pleasant. He just hoped Anna could control that temper of hers. He smiled. Then again...

* * *

Anna didn't know how in the world Alex had managed to sleep through the proceedings so far. Thank God he had though because she absolutely refused to let anyone else have him. Even for a second. She was so nervous, she just knew she'd wake him with her trembling.

Courage, tarae. I'm with you. Anna warmed at the encouragement from her lover. *Lover!* Man, she was in way over her head. His eyes were focused on her and she took courage from his words and his intimidating physical presence.

Gothe'maran courts were held in what looked like a very large cathedral. The "judge," in this case the king, sat behind a very large desk to the left, and the accused sat in the middle of the stage. Each witness stood in a box facing both king and the accused. The "lawyers" moved around the space in between but were very careful not to obscure the view of the accused. From what Anna gathered, it was the right of the accused to not only face his accusers but to make them face him as well.

Now, it was Mikkiril's representative's turn to question Anna. She had a feeling this wasn't going to be pleasant.

"Ms. Garrett, you say your world was not in a civil war. Is that correct?"

"Yes, it is." Apparently, Mikkiril was sticking to the story that he had been trying

to save Earth from itself.

“Then can you explain the events just prior to the arrival of the Gothe’maran warriors?”

Anna frowned. “I’m not sure what you’re referring to.”

The representative was a very tall man, almost as tall as Kahn, and he had obviously practiced using his height to intimidate. Anna was sure as hell intimidated.

He looked down his nose at her. “Do you expect the king to believe you can remember to the last detail the battle you just described but you cannot remember the effects of a nuclear blast on your own homeland?” He sneered.

A light dawned and Anna sat up a bit straighter. “I always assumed the Gothe’maran had set off that explosion. I think everyone on Earth did, too.”

For the first time since the trial had begun, he faltered. Unfortunately, he picked up smoothly, “Would it surprise you to know that bomb was set by a faction within your own country?”

Without hesitation, Anna shook her head and said, “No. It has happened before. Groups of radicals, or even one individual acting alone but in the name of a group, have performed such acts of terror before. It doesn’t constitute a civil war.”

“Yet your country was at war.”

“But not with ourselves.”

“No!” He pointed at Anna to emphasize his statement. “With a country vastly inferior in technology to your own. A war they had no hope of winning.”

Anna remained as calm as she could. “On paper, maybe. But if you’ll look into Earth history a bit, you’ll find that the group of countries in the region you’re referring to has a long, bloody history of war, dating back thousands of years. You’ll also find that such people usually find a way to beat technology and ‘civilization.’ They were doing plenty of damage, just in bits and pieces. They knew the one thing America would never stand for was her soldiers coming home in body bags. The factions who were left to do the fighting after the governments fell took out one soldier at a time. It adds up after a while.”

"But Earth is still fighting amongst itself. Do you deny that?"

Anna was getting confused. She reached for Kahn with her mind hoping he could feel her confusion and help her out. She couldn't reach him this time. *Damn.*

"I suppose you could say that, yes."

"You see, Your Highness! She admits it!" Mikkril's representative was triumphant. "If it had not been for the Gothe'maran forces taking control of Earth, they would have annihilated each other."

The smile Mikkril gave her was pure evil. He obviously thought he had won a victory. And from the way the king was nodding his head, he just might be right.

"Your Highness." Anna looked to Kerrek. "I'm confused."

Mikkril's counsel barked a laugh. "You're human. It does not surprise me."

Kerrek speared him with a look. "Darkin, you will keep quiet when I am addressed or I will have you removed. Further, you will not insult any witness in this tribunal for any reason. Such shows disrespect by you and the one you represent." Kerrek's voice was quiet but even more menacing than Kahn's could be. "I will take any such action in the future as a personal insult."

The tribunal went dead quiet. Anna wasn't sure of the significance, but Mikkril paled and so did his representative. After one last menacing glare at Darkin, Kerrek returned his attention to Anna. "You wish to pose a question, Ms. Garrett?"

Anna looked warily at Mikkril before answering. "Yes, sir. Are our definitions of civil war the same?"

The king's eyebrows rose a fraction. "I'm not sure I see where you're going, Ms. Garrett. A civil war would be when a planet or empire is divided and separate sects fight amongst themselves for control of the government or to form a government of their own."

"But you see this as being separate sects within the same government?"

"Of course. What's your point?" The king looked annoyed, and in a race that gave away very little through facial expressions, that meant he was most likely *very* annoyed.

“Well, sir, Earth isn’t ruled by *one* government. Each country has its own form of government and there are literally hundreds of countries in the separate continents.”

The whole room came alive with murmurs. Anna looked behind her to find Kahn, wanting his reassurance. As she did so, she heard excited whispers being exchanged, and Kahn didn’t look happy at all. Unfortunately, when she turned back around she could see that Mikkril looked very pleased indeed.

“Silence!” The king roared. “I’ll have order in this tribunal or I will excuse everyone in the viewing gallery.”

“Your Highness.” Mikkril’s delegate again. “I ask you to dismiss the charges. It was obvious that Mikkril De’Kar understandably misunderstood the goings on of Earth. He was only trying to protect Earth from itself.”

“Absolutely not. There is still the matter of the genocide he ordered.”

“A misunderstanding as well, my king. He was not committing genocide but trying to get the populace under control when they refused to stop the bloodshed.”

“That’s a bit of an overkill, don’t you think?” Anna said dryly.

“Ms. Garrett, I’ll give you the same warning about speaking when I’m spoken to. I am in control of this tribunal.” Kerrek’s emotions were really showing now, and he looked livid. Which likely meant he was ready to commit murder. “I’ve had about enough of your double talk, Darkin. It is clear to me that Mikkril is responsible for the bloodshed on Earth.”

“But, Your Highness! He was only trying to save lives. Theirs as well as those of the Gothe’maran people. His methods might have been a bit harsh, but they were working. Earth ceased fighting itself. Given time, he would have added Earth to the Gothe’maran empire, thereby adding females to breed fighters. Our warriors would not have to battle to expand the empire and the Gothe’maran people would be the envy of the entire universe!”

“To my knowledge, this empire has never encountered a planet as divided as Earth.” Kerrek’s tone said he had heard enough. Anna held her breath. This was it. “And yes, I can see how one might mistake Earth’s squabbles as a sign of government

upheaval, but the killing of women and children has never and will never, *ever* be condoned. For any reason. General Kahn spoke here about how he liberated a so-called 'death camp.' His report was chilling even for a race that has thrived on war and bloodshed in the past." He now looked at Mikkril, his eyes chillingly angry. "Mikkril, if there is ever a need for war, Gothe'mar will defend itself with its own warriors, without breeding a race of slaves for that purpose. That you both are using this as a defense for your actions shows you are not honorable."

Kerrek took a deep breath, obviously not liking what he was about to do. "Mikkril, you are found guilty of all the accusations against you. For your crimes, you will forfeit your life. For forsaking your honor and tarnishing the honor of my son and therefore myself, the king, your death will be prolonged and most painful. My son and I will decide your fate within the day." Picking up a previously unused gavel, he said, "So be it." And slammed the instrument against the desk with a resounding *whack*.

* * *

Kahn looked into the eyes of his half uncle as his father pronounced his judgment. Absolutely nothing. Mikkril gave away nothing of what he thought or felt. It wouldn't be like Mikkril not to try something violent. No man who had so brutally murdered children would go quietly to his death.

Anna clutched her child and seemed to turn her concentration to the sleeping boy, kissing the back of his neck as his head lay on her shoulder. Mikkril lunged for her, but she didn't turn to face him until it was too late.

* * *

Anna! Kahn's voice inside her head snapped her to attention. Mikkril was almost upon her. With one mighty lunge, the evil man grabbed for her. Anna tried to swing away from him, putting herself between Mikkril and Alex, but her movement was too late. Mikkril had already gained a solid hold on Alex and her momentum only served to rip her child from her arms.

Her anguished shriek filled the hall and she threw herself at Mikkril but he was ready for her attack. He backhanded her as she approached, once again using her

momentum against her. With a battle cry he darted up the steps toward the back of the hall, Alex, now awake and screaming in fright, tucked under one arm.

Heedless of the pain that exploded through her skull, Anna scrambled up the steps after him, her only thought to get to Alex. An arm around her waist restrained her, and she fought it like a wildcat.

“Let me go! Alex!” she screamed over and over, a mad, hysterical scream. It was just like the nightmare she’d lived for over two years. In her dreams, she was never able to get to her son.

“Please, madam. Let the general take care of this.” She didn’t know this man, but he was wearing the uniform of the Gothe’maran. Anna looked around her and saw that Kahn and Kerrek were both racing after Mikkril along with a host of soldiers.

Kahn, please save Alex. She willed him to hear her. She wasn’t yet as sure of the bond as Kahn was but put all her faith in it and in Kahn.

She stilled. Trust Kahn to save Alex? Did she? Only a couple of hours ago she thought she would likely never trust Kahn with Alex’s life. She had to get to Alex, no matter what. No matter who was trying to get him back for her. She would not lose him again!

Kahn raced down the back steps into the bowels of the great hall, his father just behind him. Mikkril might not live long enough for that long, painful death he had coming. How Mikkril thought stealing Alex would help him he had no idea. Maybe a quick death was what he wanted. Kahn growled as he tried to devise ways to take out Mikkril without harming Alex. The trick was to get Mikkril close. Kahn had to make sure he either had a clear view of him or that Mikkril put the child down. Anything else would put Alex’s life in jeopardy and that was something Kahn would not even consider.

Destabilizer in hand, Kahn rushed through the dimly lit passageway, listening for any sound that might indicate which way Mikkril was headed. When he stopped at an intersection, his father stopped at his side. “Do you hear the child, Kahn?”

“No... wait!” Kahn tilted his head. “There. A muffled cry. Left.”

Without another word, both men sprinted down the hall as quiet as the warriors they were. It didn't take long before they could hear more.

“Are you sure taking the Earth whelp was a good idea?” Darkin. For him to be there so fast, this had to have been planned.

“It was the only way I could be sure I'd make it out of the hall alive. Kahn would never risk hitting a child, no matter what race it is.” Mikkril's voice oozed contempt.

“Its cries will lead them right to us. You're a fool, old man!”

“So... silence... it!” Mikkril hissed through his teeth.

Kahn rounded the corner just as Darkin raised his own destabilizer and aimed it at the now screaming infant.

“NO!” With a battle cry he fired at Darkin, hitting him square in the chest. The man howled in agony, his clothing burning away, then his flesh. In moments, Darkin was nothing more than a pile of ash.

Behind Kahn, Kerrek fired at Mikkril but his shot went wide and was absorbed by the wall. Mikkril shot at Kahn, just missing his head, as he snatched up the child and sprinted down the corridor. He had to get to Mikkril before he made it to the spaceport just outside the Judgment Hall. If that happened, he would lose Mikkril in the crowd.

Fortunately, someone had thought of that. Mikkril had just reached for the door adjoining the spaceport when it burst open to reveal about twenty warriors. Caught, Mikkril turned around and looked at Kahn.

“You have me, Kahn,” he said, menace dripping from his every word. “But I have the Earth bastard. Guarantee me safe passage out of the empire and I'll spare its life.”

“I cannot do that. You have been fairly tried and sentenced.” Kahn's voice was hard, but reasonable. “Have the honor in death that you forsook in life.”

“Will the little Earth bitch forgive you when she finds out you could have saved her son?” He sneered. “I bet she won't be so accommodating between the sheets. I'm doing a service to the empire by getting rid of both of them. You could have never taken

her to mate anyway. The people would not stand for it.”

“Your words are for nothing, Mikkril. I will kill you, the child will live, and Anna will be my mate and the future queen of Gothe’mar. There is no other option.”

“There are always other options!” Mikkril was obviously losing his control. Kahn knew he had to do something fast or Alex was as good as dead.

“Not this time.” Kahn fired.

* * *

“Alex!” Anna pushed her way through the crowd of warriors that surrounded her as she chased after Kahn. She was just in time to see him drop Mikkril with a single shot to the head. She moved as quickly as she could, but Kahn reached Alex first, catching the child as Mikkril’s grip slackened. The large man toppled to the floor minus his head, shoulders and most of his torso.

Kahn’s mind was blocked to her, but she could see his rapid breathing and the pulse beating frantically at his throat. When he handed Alex to her, his hands shook.

Anna hugged her child, soothing him as best she could, and watched Kahn. He had fallen to his knees when he made the dive to catch Alex. Now he sat flat on the ground, arms braced on his bent knees. He was still breathing hard as Anna cautiously approached him.

“Are you all right?”

Kahn looked up at her, anguish on his face. “Alex?” he croaked.

Anna blinked. “He seems to be fine, but I’ll feel better about it once I get him to the doctor. I need to make sure.”

“Thank the Universe.” A smile played at his lips. “Let’s see to Alex.”

“Yes. Then we need to talk.”

“Of course, *tarae*.”

Chapter Six

The doctor gave Alex a mild sedative and placed him into the same tanning bed look-alike that had healed Anna's injuries before. She was reluctant to leave him, but the doctor assured her Alex would be well watched after and any injuries he had sustained would be completely repaired. Still, she refused to go far. Kahn did manage to get her into a lounge of sorts equipped with a food dispenser and a couch.

After getting her a cold drink, Kahn sat down with an arm around Anna and said, "Don't worry. He'll be all right."

"I can't help it, Kahn. I just got him back and I'm so afraid I'm going to lose him again." Staring at her untouched cup, she sounded bleak even to her own ears.

"Anna, look at me." When she complied he said, "No matter what, no matter who tries to say differently, I swear to you on my life and the life of my family and my people, I will never let anyone take Alex from you or harm him in any way. You're my mate, Anna. Your family is mine as mine is yours."

"I've not consented to be your mate. I'm still upset over my arrival here." Anna pouted but she wasn't really mad. Her heart rejoiced that he still spoke in the permanent sense.

Kahn chuckled. "You're my mate whether you want to be or not. The Universe has already decided for us. Your only choice is whether or not you choose to stay with me."

"Oh, Kahn." She loved him, she really did. But there were still some considerations. Unfortunately, Kahn was intent on distracting her from dealing with those issues. He placed a gentle kiss just below her ear, then sucked the lobe into his mouth and nibbled just a bit.

"Now," he said between kisses as he made his way down her neck and moved a

hand to the buttons of her blouse. "What did you want to talk about?"

"Um, Kahn..." She breathed his name gently, her mind and body turning eagerly to the pleasures he was offering. "I can't stay here. On Gothe'mar. Oh heavens don't stop that!" The only thing separating his hand from her taut nipple was the lace of her bra.

"And why is that, *tarae*?" His voice sent chills down her back and heat coiling in her belly. She was sorely tempted to simply let him take her however he wanted.

"Because you're going to be a king." She was rapidly beginning to lose her ability to carry on any sort of intelligent conversation.

Kahn pulled back to look at her. "Now why would that make you want to leave? I would have thought any Earth girl would want to be a queen." He smiled teasingly.

"Kahn, I can't change what I am. I'm not Gothe'maran. Even though your people aren't the bloodthirsty savages I once believed, I don't think that they would accept me as the wife of their king. I might be happy for a while, but seeing you and Alex both miserable wouldn't be worth it."

"You've heard several of my people agree with Mikkril, haven't you?"

"It's pretty hard to miss."

Kahn traced circles on the expanse of soft flesh left bare by the modest length skirt he had slid up her thigh. "Did you happen to notice all the ones who were determined to make sure you were unharmed when you rushed after your son?"

"What?" Anna was genuinely perplexed.

"All the soldiers you had to push your way through to get to me and Alex after I killed Mikkril." He waved his free hand in the air for emphasis.

"Well, yes. But I thought they were going after you."

"Did it *look* like I needed their help?" He sounded and *felt* almost offended.

Anna couldn't help but giggle. "You were doing pretty well on your own, but they were your warriors. It only stands to reason they would follow you."

"And did you happen to notice that the majority of them were forming a defensive ring around you, not trying to find an opening to help me?"

“Well, now that you mention it...”

“Anna, the people of Gothe’mar are more adaptable than even I realized. We guard our loved ones zealously and my family has ruled for over a thousand years. Not because the line was unbroken, but because the people loved us enough to *allow* it. We’ve always held our honor above all else and did the right thing, no matter the personal cost.

“My father and I had a long talk while you slept.” He took a breath. “I’m not sure how to explain all this to you, but I’ll do my best.

“It is a Gothe’maran belief that each soul has one true mate. Each life, the souls seek out one another in hopes of mating yet again. The problem is, there is no predicting where in all the Universe one soul will find the other, therefore the odds of finding one’s soul’s mate are extremely low. But --” He lifted a finger to punctuate his point. “-- if the souls do manage to find each other, they create a bond like you and I share. The more lives they spend together, the stronger the bond becomes.

“Usually, it takes several years of being with a mate before the bond starts to manifest itself. The more lives spent together, the quicker the bond is established. We shared a bond from the moment we first saw each other. According to my father, there has only been one other couple in living memory to have accomplished such a thing: he and my mother.

“It is one of the reasons my family has ruled as long as they have. The very foundation of this belief demands that the ruling family be true to each other. The very fact that we are soul’s mates guarantees Gothe’mar will accept our union.”

“Just how do we go about proving such a thing? Surely everyone won’t just take our word for it.” Anna was enchanted, yet still a bit skeptical.

Kahn chuckled and brushed her nipple through the lace again, lazily. “In part, yes. But should there be a challenge, we will have to prove our link. A simple matter really.

“Anyone wishing to challenge our mating may do so. Once a challenge is made, the couple and the challenger must go to the Chamber of Souls. The Chamber houses

souls awaiting rebirth and they alone can attest the validity of the claim of mates.” Kahn tucked his fingers under her bra to gently pinch her nipple, eliciting a groan from her. “What you are forgetting is that Gothe’mar is home to a race of people who value honor above all else. If the people questioned my honor, I would not be accepted as king in the first place. With Mikkril’s disgrace and conviction, there is no one who would question my honor.”

Anna’s senses were beginning to overload again. She loved what he was doing to her body and was not ashamed to let him know. She purred and stretched against him, inviting him to do more. He was only too happy to oblige.

Kahn sank to his knees before her, wrapping his arms around her middle, and took her taut nipple into his mouth through the lace of her bra. Anna’s fingers twined in his hair, hugging him to her as she whimpered in need.

“Feel good, *tarae*?”

“Oh yes. Sweet God, yes!”

He grunted his approval as his clever fingers found the clasp and unhooked the lacy scrap, pulling it away to reveal the creamy treasures before him. He buried his face between her breasts and kneaded them softly as he occasionally lapped and nipped each ripe peak.

Anna knew the pleasure he could give her and surrendered to it. He would take care of her. He would take care of her and Alex. Everything was going to be fine. She smiled as she hugged him to her. Everything was going to be fine. Except...

“Kahn?” Her voice was a squeak as he started moving down her belly, gently pushing her into a more reclined position as he did so.

“Hum?” His slide southward didn’t hesitate in the least, even when he reached her skirt. He simply pushed it past her hips and slid her panties to the side. Slowly, he swiped his tongue from her opening to her clit.

“You said your family... dear God, what are you doing?”

Kahn circled her anus with his tongue before sliding one finger gently inside. “Making love to you, sweet. Now what were you going to say?”

His voice was annoyingly calm and Anna puffed a breath of air upwards, causing a tendril of hair that had fallen over her forehead to stir. How could he be so calm when he had her tied in knots?

Kahn looked up at her and smiled. "A warrior's control is almost limitless."

Anna snorted. "We'll have to see about that," she said as she squeezed his finger with her inner muscles. "Just how in control would you be if your cock was buried there instead of your finger?" Their link flashed with heated lust and so did his eyes. Anna smiled wickedly.

"Say what you will so that I can take what you so generously offered." If talking dirty to him was the key to his lust, then Anna figured she was going to have loads of fun in the future. The not-too-distant future from the looks of things.

"You said your family has ruled for a thousand years. Do you mean passed down from father to son?"

"In most cases, yes." Kahn slid another finger into her ass and idly circled her clit with his thumb. "If a son is too young or unable to assume rule, an elder sister or uncle is sometimes appointed."

Anna stilled even though the sensations he was creating were about to drive her crazy with needing him. "What if a king can't have a son?"

Kahn shrugged. "Such has never happened. I don't think a man has ever sat on the throne who wasn't capable of producing an heir."

"What if it wasn't the king, but his wife? What if she couldn't have children?" Her desire was waning. She wasn't going to cry. No way. If this was the end, then she'd take what he wanted to give her and pleasure him in return, but she would leave. She would not tie him into a marriage that could not produce an heir to a thousand-year heritage.

Kahn stopped the slow play of his fingers. "Anna, love. What are you trying to say?"

"You know what I'm getting at." She shoved him away, but he only leaned into her.

"Why is this bothering you? It does not even apply."

"Of course it does! Kahn, let me up."

"No. Not until you say what is in your heart, Anna."

"Can't you tell?" she asked, almost bitterly. "You seem to have a pretty good grasp on this thing between us. Tell me what I'm thinking."

"All right." Kahn didn't move an inch. His face became blank as he looked intently at her. "You think to leave me because you can't have children. You think that tradition will ultimately be more important to my people than the happiness of their future king. You think --" He paused, capturing her chin and turning it back to him when she looked away. "You think that I will become bitter or dissatisfied because I will not father a child to ascend the throne when I give it up."

"Okay. So you summed that up nicely."

"Have you learned nothing about me?" he said softly, and Anna caught the hurt in him.

"I know you love me, Kahn. But this is serious stuff."

"First of all, if it had been that important to me, I could have fixed your reproductive system when you were injured upon your arrival here. I could also have had the doctor repair the problem that made you have a difficult delivery of Alex in the first place."

Anna sucked in a breath. "Really?"

"Oh yes. In fact, the doctor at Medical suggested it but I told him not to. If you want that procedure done, it is up to you. But it will be because you *want* more children, not because you think I *need* them." Kahn raised a hand to her mouth when she would have spoken. "Secondly --" His fingers, meant to silence, turned caressing as his gaze lingered on her lips. "I already have a son to take the throne so there is really no need of any of this discussion."

Anna stilled, truly puzzled. "You never mentioned you had children."

"I do. He's a little over two years old, though he has the mind and body of a five-month-old."

The breath rushed into Anna's lungs as she stared, not daring to believe what she was hearing. "What?" she whispered.

"Perhaps you've met him. His name is Alex and his mother is a hellcat when it comes to his safety so I know nothing will happen to him. If you choose not to become fertile again, I see no reason you should have to."

Tears overflowed her eyes as she flung her arms around Kahn. He was accepting Alex as his. But what of the Gothe'maran people?

"They will gladly accept him. You'll see. Everything unfolds as the Universe intends. They will accept him and love him."

The fingers Kahn had in her anus slid almost free only to be reinserted with a third. His thumb on her clit resumed its lazy circles. "Now. Where were we?"

For the first time since he met her, Kahn felt Anna give herself fully into his care and he was determined he wouldn't let her down again. Starting right now. He would love her good and proper this time.

His head dipped to her cunt once again and he tasted her, pulling gently at her engorged clit. The fingers he had embedded within her slid free and he crawled up her body to press his full weight on her. His hand fisted in her hair and he searched her face.

"Tell me you want this union, Anna."

"Yes. I want you."

"Now and forever?"

"Always," she breathed.

It only took a swift tug of his breeches and his cock slid free. He rolled off her to his side, maneuvering her so that she rested her back against his chest. Positioning himself at the slick entrance to her pussy, he paused once again.

"Tell me you love me." It was not a request or a question. He demanded her love.

She smiled. "With all my heart, forbidden or not, I love you with everything that I am."

He surged forward, groaning as he thrust into her body. Her soft cries were music to his ears as he slowly, but deeply took her. She met his forward push with a backwards one of her own and soon the writhing of her lithe little body made him hunger for more. Harder. Faster. Deeper. He wanted all she had to give him. He wanted to give her all he had to give.

Lifting her leg, he slid down to give himself better leverage and began to thrust in earnest. The sharp, staccato rhythm of flesh slapping flesh was punctuated by her cries of pleasure with each smack. He knew he wouldn't last long, but he wanted all of her. His body and his link as her mate demanded it. He knew she was on the edge and would soon find her own release, but not yet. He stopped and pulled out.

"Wha -- Kahn, why did you stop? I need..." She was struggling to turn over. She wanted to mount him and bring release to them both, he knew.

"Hold still, *tarae*." He pulled his cock back just a little to the entrance of her ass and pushed slightly.

"Kahn. I'm not sure about this."

"Just relax. You know I'll make it pleasurable for you." He kissed her cheek and whispered, "Trust me."

She relaxed immediately and turned her head to smile at him.

"Push outward with your muscles. Push against me and it will be easier for me to get inside you."

Anna did as he asked and he slowly entered her. He knew he caused her some discomfort, but he also knew he made her hot. She was even more eager than before, if that was possible.

"That's it. Let me fuck your sweet ass, just like you wanted it."

"I did offer, didn't I?"

Kahn chuckled. Once he had worked himself all the way inside her, his balls resting against her upper thighs, he reached around her and pulled her back to him by her breasts.

"Now. I fuck you."

And he did. What started as something slow and gratifying turned almost savage in its intensity. Kahn surged into her again and again until sweat slickened his chest and back and ran down his temples.

Anna desperately sought leverage so she could meet him thrust for thrust. Finally, she blindly grabbed his hip and found what she needed.

Their lust was mutual. Each felt the need of the other and it only increased as they reached their climax.

Anna came first. She screamed and bucked, digging her nails into Kahn's firm ass as she pulled him to her. Kahn's cock pistoned rapidly until his own orgasm exploded from him in great spurts. He held her, his cock still buried, until the last of his seed was spent.

They lay like that for a time, catching their breath. Then a soft chime interrupted their peaceful afterglow.

"General. There is a problem. You and Ms. Garrett are to report to the Temple Beyond immediately."

Kahn froze. "Explain," he barked.

"Mikkiril's son."

Fucking damnation! The little bastard was going to try to avenge his father. *Of all the idiotic things!*

"I would speak with Kazar before this."

"Not possible, General. He has already entered the Temple Beyond."

"What is it?" Anna asked tentatively.

"Mikkiril's son, Kazar, is questioning our union. He shares his father's prejudice. He will not want you in a position to be queen so he seeks to discredit both of us."

"Maybe you'd better explain this a little better."

Kahn helped her to her feet, straightening their clothing, then ushered her out the door. He took her to a transportation unit that would take them across the continent to the Temple. Once they were seated and the unit was moving, he began to speak.

"Within the Temple Beyond lies the Chamber of Souls. When a challenge of

mates is made, the couple and the challenger enter the chamber. If the couple are true mates, the souls rejoice and the Temple is filled with an amber light as witness to their happiness." Kahn looked at the rapidly moving scenery, obviously not liking what came next. "The energy needed to do this is drawn from any life within the chamber. The only way to survive is to be joined physically with a mate. Under normal circumstances, the challenger would appear to age a few years at most. But the stronger the connection between mates, the more energy the waiting souls will draw."

"Hm. Sounds a bit dangerous," Anna commented.

"It can be. Which is why it is seldom used. And then only when the throne is in question." He turned to her now. "A link like ours will destroy Kazar. But I'll just bet there'll be no talking him out of this."

Chapter Seven

The Temple Beyond was the largest structure Anna had ever seen. Its four spires rose elegantly into the clouds and the sun reflected off its walls and windows like gold and diamonds. It looked like a massive cathedral, only hundreds of times bigger and more ornate.

At the top of the steps leading to the temple doors, they were met by a thin, aging man dressed in gold from head to toe. The High Priest, she figured.

"The situation is grave, my son. Kazar will listen to no one, including myself and the king."

Kahn's expression was neutral, but his feelings were volatile to say the least. She was afraid he'd explode any second. She was definitely glad she was not Kazar. "And you expected anything different? If the souls do not kill him when this is over, I probably will."

The priest gave Kahn a stern look. "You will do no violence in this temple, Kahn. Future king or not."

Kahn growled and tugged Anna after him as he made his way through one great hall after another. Finally, he came to an intricately carved door plated in silver and surrounded by windows. Anna couldn't see anything inside. It was either pitch black, or the windows were tinted.

"Kazar!" Kahn bellowed. "Get your sorry carcass over here and let's be done with this."

A man almost as tall as Kahn and even more solidly built approached them. Anna stepped behind Kahn as she saw the menacing look on the man's face.

"Gothe'mar will never have a human, or anyone not of Gothe'maran heritage, on the throne. You lie about your claim that she is your soul's mate."

"You're a fool, Kazar. If we step into that chamber, you'll die. My link to Anna is at least as strong as Father's was to Mother."

"My father risked everything rather than see a human share the throne. I can do nothing less," Kazar stated. He seemed resigned. He was obviously doing what he thought honor demanded.

"You disgrace your family and dishonor me," Kahn growled. Anna took his arm, guiding him away from his cousin.

"Let's just do this. If he dies, then you'll have satisfaction without getting that priest all upset."

Kahn turned to her. "Do you know what I meant by 'physically joined'?"

Anna took in an exasperated breath. "So we'll hold hands going in. Let's just get this over with."

"No, Anna." He grabbed her shoulders and looked at her. "We have to have sex and this little worm will be there the whole time."

"So," Anna swallowed, self-consciously looking at Kazar, "if we aren't... *joined*, then we age too?"

"Exactly."

"Do we have to enter the chamber joined?" Anna was getting a bit apprehensive. No way did she want to have sex for an audience.

"No," the priest supplied. "You will have several minutes to complete the union. You will know when the time is right to join your bodies."

Anna looked to Kazar. "Where will he be?"

"On the far side of the chamber. But he will be able to see us the whole time."

"What if he tries to stop us from joining? You know. Tries to take us with him?" Anna was getting really concerned.

"The souls will not let that happen, assuming you are true mates," the priest said. "This is usually done to embarrass the couple held in question. However, if your link is as strong Kahn has suggested, it could very easily, and most probably will, kill Kazar."

Kahn walked to his cousin to stand toe to toe with him. "Do you understand that once you enter that chamber with us, you're as good as dead?"

"If the souls even recognize this human. I'm betting you're the one who will be sadly mistaken." Kazar turned to the priest. "Open the doors."

The priest shrugged. "So be it. Let it stand that Kazar, son of Mikkril, so challenges Kahn and Anna, son and near daughter to Kerrek, in their claim of soul's mate. Enter the Chamber of Souls."

Kahn tugged at his clothing angrily. Anna assumed she was to do the same and removed all but her underwear. "Can I leave this on until we get inside?" she whispered to Kahn.

"No. You must enter the chamber as you will be born again. Flesh only."

Anna couldn't help herself. She glanced Kazar's way and sure enough, he was stripping as well. *Well, shit.*

Kahn entered first, a few steps ahead of Anna, followed several seconds later by Kazar. Once he and Anna were both inside, Kahn immediately began to feel a sharp rise in energy. Then he understood.

Kazar knew they were mates. And if he didn't know the power drain would start immediately, he probably suspected. Looking to Kazar, the man had his eyes closed as if meditating.

"Anna! Get out of the chamber!"

She looked at him in alarm as the heavy door shut with a deafening *clang* before she had even a chance to obey him. "What's happening? My skin is crawling."

"If we don't join immediately, we'll be killed along with Kazar."

"So, join with me! What's the problem?"

The power around them glowed a brilliant amber and was growing brighter every second. Kahn could feel his life being drained. All the while Kazar never made a sound. The energy began to hum all around them, focusing on Anna and himself.

Then everything stopped.

Kazar stood frozen, his face considerably older and his hair whitening at the temples. The priest's face was immobile at the window, his mouth open as if he were stopped in mid word.

Kahn looked at Anna and immediately went to her. She looked at him questioningly. He shrugged, not knowing what was happening as he took her in his arms.

Brother and sister. Welcome. Do you wish to join us? The voice was neither male nor female, one voice, yet many voices.

Kahn blinked and looked at Anna. "Join you?"

In life before life.

"You mean, our souls joining you here? In this chamber?" Anna asked.

Yes. If you release your bodies, you can live here until needed.

"But," Anna said, "we are needed. Right here. Right now. Kahn is the future king of Gothe'mar. He can't leave now."

Ahhh. I see. You have mated in many lives. Your essence sings to us. Join, so that we may rejoice in the union.

"You mean, right now?" Anna squeaked.

Kahn chuckled. "I think they're giving us the opportunity to join before they use up our life force."

"But they're watching!"

"So is Kazar. What's different now than when you stepped into this chamber?"

"I thought Kazar and maybe the priest would be the only ones. But now we're being watched by God only knows how many!"

Kahn lowered his voice. He knew the effect he had on her when he talked dirty. She might think he was the only one affected by it, but he knew better. "Let them watch. I'll fuck you senseless and every soul for a thousand generations will bear witness to your screams when you come. We'll fuel their lusts until they assume their next life."

Anna drew in a sharp breath. Kahn knew she would definitely give him all she

had now. He'd have to make a note for future reference: Anna liked to be watched. She let her nails lightly score his rigid chest before dropping one to his rapidly hardening cock. "Hm. You know, there's one thing I've wanted to do since the first time I fucked you."

And she dropped to her knees.

Anna's hands slid up and down the powerful column of Kahn's thighs. Looking up at him put her almost at eye level with his cock. As it was, his balls were right there, just begging for attention. Without touching his now very rigid shaft, she sucked one testicle into her mouth, licking it gently before repeating the motion with the other. Kahn's groan caused a trickle of moisture to escape her cunt and a single drop fell to the tile underneath her. Continuing her erotic exploration, Anna gave his cock a wet lick from base to deep purple tip. She caught the drop of pre-come on her pass before she took half of him into her mouth.

He hit the back of her throat and she almost gagged before she could relax enough to swallow. That done, she was able to get a bit more of him into her mouth with little trouble. Kahn's hands grasped her hair tightly as his hips gave a little thrust and he shouted out as her throat contracted around his cock head. Anna was afraid he might lose his load before he got inside her, but that was all right with her. She was enjoying this more than she ever thought possible. She could hear the moans and echoes of pleasure all around her and could have sworn she was in the middle of an orgy. But one swift glance around her showed only Kazar, still frozen. And the amber light getting brighter and brighter until it was almost crimson in its intensity.

Kahn dragged her away from him, pulling her hair hard. "On your back. Now!" he barked, but his hands shook as he followed her and attempted to guide himself within her. It took two tries before he hit what he wanted and without another wasted second, Kahn plunged into her.

The energy swirling around them built their own sexual energy to an impossible high, which, combined with their unique bond, created a maelstrom of erotic bliss unlike anything ever before experienced by either of them. Anna wasn't aware of

Kazar's sudden and immediate decline as his life force was sucked out of him. Neither was she aware that the crimson light had now become a brilliant yellow and was rapidly increasing to a blinding white. All she was aware of was Kahn's savagely handsome face above her, his cock inside her and the orgasm to end all orgasms approaching with brutal speed.

She locked her ankles around Kahn's neck, lifting herself to meet his every thrust. He stayed on his knees, locking his hands and forearms around her thighs to give him leverage in the pounding he was giving her. Her breasts bounced violently as he slammed into her again and again, over and over. Sweat slickened both their bodies and puddled where their skin touched the tiled floor.

"Fuck me, Kahn! The energy..." Anna cried.

"Come! Now! Come, Anna!" Kahn bellowed his climax as Anna convulsed and writhed so that he was barely able to stay joined to her. They rode wave after wave of white-hot pleasure, their bodies using every last ounce of energy they had to give. As the spasms faded, so did the light, until a soft amber glow was all that remained.

Too tired to do anything but pull his spent body from Anna's, Kahn tugged her close and gave in to the blackness.

Epilogue

He awoke with Anna still at his side, but they were in his bed chamber, in his bed... and across the room a stout woman sat with Alex in a rocking chair, giving him a bottle. Kahn wearily pushed the hair out of his face and carefully sat up so he wouldn't disturb Anna.

"Ah, the sleeping beauties awake," the woman said with some amusement. "We were beginning to think you would sleep the rest of the week away."

"Week?" Kahn said, confused.

"Oh, yes, sir. You and your lovely lady have been asleep for three days and nights. This little fellow has been missing his mother." Alex turned his gaze to Kahn and smiled, letting milk dribble out of the corner of his mouth before going back to his bottle.

"Alex?" came Anna's sleepy voice.

"He's fine, *tarae*, and in good hands from the looks of things. Do you need more rest?"

"No, but I could use a toothbrush really bad."

Kahn laughed. "In the bath chamber, love. I think I'll join you."

Once they had showered and taken the necessary grooming and personal hygiene steps, Kahn and Anna entered the bed chamber once again. Alex had finished his bottle and gone back to sleep. The nursemaid stood with the little boy in her arms and looked to Anna.

"Would you like to hold your son, madam?"

Anna looked at Kahn. "Perhaps his father should have that honor."

Kahn was startled -- moved to tears. One escaped before he could stop it as he looked at the sleeping boy who was now his son. Taking Alex in his arms, Kahn just

stared at the perfect little human. "He's so beautiful." He looked at Anna. "Thank you for allowing me this. For trusting me."

"I love you, Kahn. Thank you for saving my son."

"Thank you for giving me a son to love, for giving Gothe'mar a future to look forward to. And thank you for loving me. I love you, too." He watched as Anna brushed a tear from her own cheek.

"Let's go introduce Alex to his people," Kahn said as he put an arm around his beloved mate.

"With pleasure."

The End

Marteeka Karland

Marteeka makes her home in Kentucky with her brat husband and her darling son. (Or is that the other way around?) Family has always and always will be her passion in life. She works as an Emergency Room Technician and has for the past eight years.

She has been writing for most of her life, but has only recently realized her potential when she found erotic romance. This genre opened up a whole new world of possibilities for Marteeka and she is thriving on the endless promise of what is to come. Science Fiction has been her favorite topic since she saw her first episode of *Star Trek*. Now she combines Sci-Fi with erotic romance and feels she has found her place in the writing world.

Marteeka welcomes comments from her readers. You can contact her at mkarland@net-power.net.