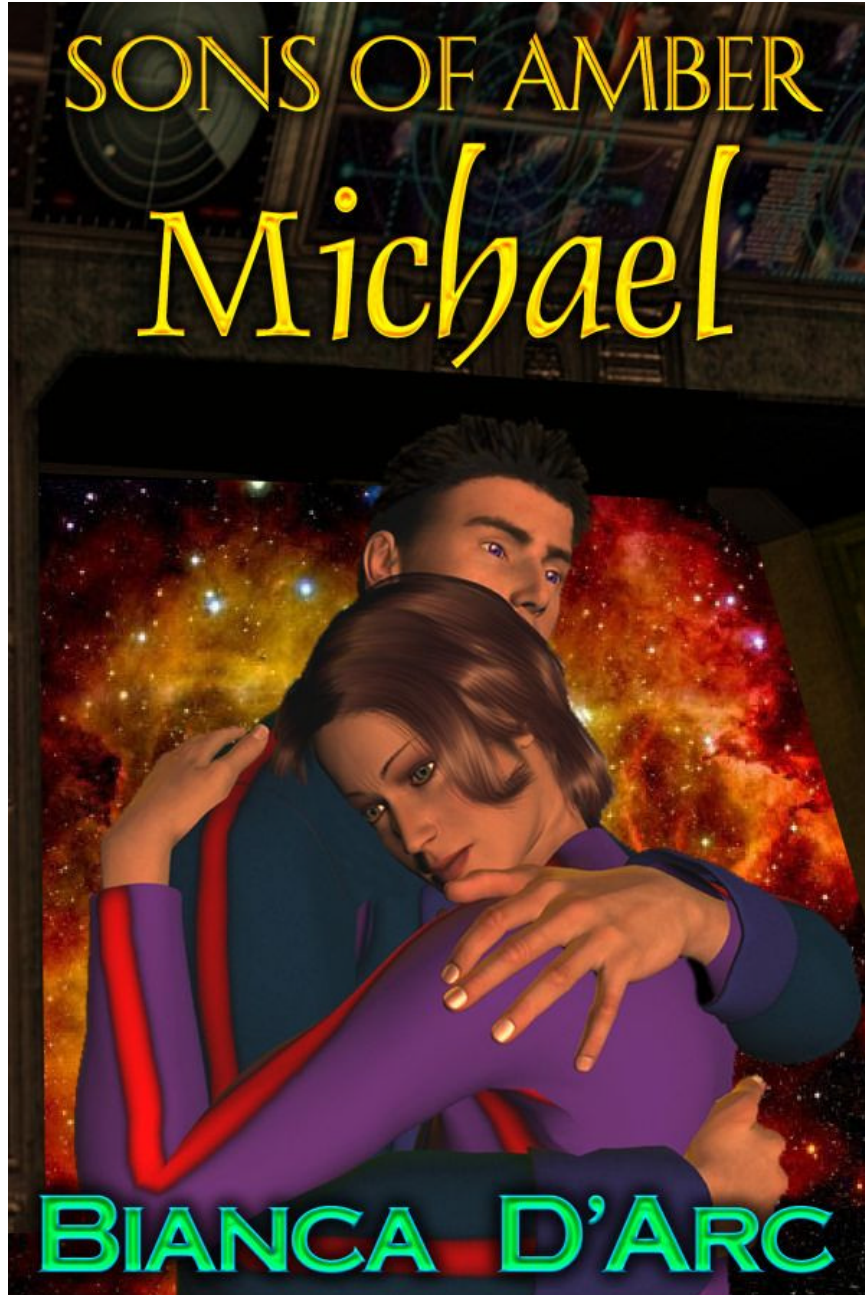


SONS OF AMBER

Michael



BIANCA D'ARC

# Sons of Amber: Michael

a novella of sci-fi erotic romance by

Bianca D'Arc

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## Also by Bianca D'Arc

*Sons of Amber: Ezekiel*  
*Fortune's Fool*

# Dedication

Many thanks to my friend Megan for the "Megnotes." Thanks also to Serena and the others who gave me an opinion on this piece, as well as some helpful criticism. And as always, to my family and especially my Dad, who shares my fascination with science and science fiction.

# Chapter One

Michael Amber couldn't believe the ineptitude of the woman. The so-called General on the other end of the comm had obviously been promoted through the ranks due more to her prowess at schmoozing politicians than any real ability on her part. But Mike didn't play that game. He'd lay this idiot out in the clover, general, political crony, or not.

"Smithson—"

"Sir," the gentle voice at his side calmed him almost instantly, "perhaps you'd care to take the comm from General Smithson in your office."

He'd been *that* close to blowing his stack in front of the entire chain of command in a full-out Dominant rage. Commandant Michael Amber normally controlled his baser passions in front of other people, but every once in a while he'd succumb to one of the near-berserker states that sometimes plagued Dominants like himself. Not often, but every once in a while.

His Executive Officer—XO for short—Colonel Leah Blackfoot, had seen him in towering rages before, but she'd never backed away. No, this small woman was more fearless than a platoon of jit'suku warriors. She faced him down and tamed his inner beast with just a few well-placed words.

She was magic.

Curtly, he nodded at Leah. "Just so." Drawing himself to his full height—almost a full foot taller than Leah's willowy form—he headed for his private office, motioning her to follow. He didn't quite trust himself to talk to the idiot general without Leah there to mitigate his temper.

It had been like that almost from the beginning. Leah had been assigned to his staff about two years before and, after an initial getting-to-know-each-other period, they'd worked together like a well-oiled machine. She was the most organized, skilled, and naturally attuned woman he knew. She was also gorgeous, but he tried his best not to think

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of her in any kind of sexual way. More often than he liked, though, he'd find himself watching her...wondering.

Michael was a Son of Amber—a genetically engineered male designed with the express purpose of repopulating the human race. The jit'suku enemy had launched a bio-weapon years ago, systematically killing off almost all human males. Some women became ill as well and were left sterile or worse.

A few dedicated geneticists, led by Dr. Amber Waithe, had stepped up to the challenge. She and her team devised a plan to restore the balance, engineering a group of males who were immune to the jit virus. Known as Sons of Amber, these men also bred about ninety percent male offspring. They'd been designed so each successive generation would yield more female offspring until normalizing somewhere around fifty-fifty several generations down the road. By that time, it was hoped the human race would be back on its feet as a species.

But Michael Amber was one of the first. He and his brothers had been designed in several discrete groups. Some were Risk Takers, designed to weigh the odds and take calculated risks that others would not. Some were Pioneers, given the skills and predispositions to conquer new frontiers in every field of human endeavor. Some were Moderates, designed to be the backbone of society, even-tempered and rock steady in character, and some were Dominants like Michael.

Dominant personalities were meant to lead in all aspects of life. It made them great military commanders, law enforcers, and the like, but it also gave them Dominant tastes in everything they did. In Michael's case, he was probably one of the most dominant of the Doms. He'd worked his way up to Commandant of the military forces in this sector. He led, and everyone followed. Just the way he liked it.

The way he *needed* it, actually. It was part of his physiology and his psyche. He needed to dominate the way others needed to breathe. And he needed to dominate sexually as well, though never to the point of violence. Violence was something Mike reserved for his enemies. He'd killed his fair share of jit'suku soldiers in his climb to the top of his chosen profession, but he never gloried in it. He just did what he had to do to protect his own. It was that simple.

Mike also understood the value of working with people. He had good working relationships with all his command staff and his people respected him. That was important to him. He cultivated friendships with

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his staff, who were mostly female, though he discouraged any interaction or discussion of a sexual nature.

While he still made regular deposits to the sperm banks, and made personal visits to as many civilian ladies as his schedule allowed, he never had sex with his subordinates. For one thing, it wouldn't be fair to take advantage of his position of authority. For another, he had definite sexual tastes and proclivities that required the full understanding of his partner. How could he be certain the woman consented out of her own desire or out of some misguided aspiration to get a promotion by doing whatever he wanted, regardless of her own needs? Mike couldn't take the chance, so military women were off-limits.

If any woman tempted him to break his own rule, though, it was Leah. Still, she'd never once given him any indication she desired him sexually. Perhaps that was why he found her so comfortable to be around. She was his friend, his confidant, his stabilizer when his Dominant genetics threatened to push him a bit too far.

Like right now.

Michael made sure the hatch was closed tight before switching the comm to his personal viewer. Leah remained just out of range of the viewer, but well within his personal sphere. He could see her, read her expressions, and feel her calming energy. He didn't quite understand how it all worked, but something about this woman made him a better leader. She made him stop and think through his decisions, made him want to be the best man he could possibly be. In short, she was an invaluable influence and if he had any say in the matter, she'd be part of his personal staff for the duration of his career. She was a keeper.

\* \* \* \*

Leah watched Michael Amber handle the moronic woman who had somehow been promoted to general. Michael was like no man in her experience. Leah was in her late thirties and had been briefly married before the jit attack that killed her husband and all her male relatives. She knew full well what Michael Amber and his 'brothers' were. They'd been designed in a lab and grown under accelerated conditions. They were genetic constructs, but she knew first hand from her dealings with Michael that he had a deep, feeling, sensitive soul.

He was one of the most complex and courageous men she had ever known. Her own brothers had been military men before the virus, as had her father and many of her ancestors. She came from a line of warriors, and she knew and understood the mindset. Michael was as good as the



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best of them—and then some. He was superior to most other men she'd known in almost every way. Especially in the way that mattered most. He was completely immune to the jit virus.

And so were his children.

Leah had wanted a large family, but her husband of just a year was killed early on by the virus. That was years ago now, and few men were left. There were no marriages in the old sense now, only Sons who would flit from woman to woman like bees pollinating flowers, never settling on just one to live with and love. Leah wasn't entirely certain the Sons knew what love was. They hadn't been raised in a normal family, after all. They'd been incubated and their growth accelerated so they were 'born' in adolescence, just as their reproductive systems came online. A few years of training after that, and they were loosed on society.

Their sperm was collected and made available to all the human worlds so women who wanted to conceive could go to fertility clinics and be impregnated with the sperm of the Son of their choice. Catalogs containing short bios and images of all the Sons were found in such places so women could have some say in what their children might look like or what traits they might inherit from their fathers.

It was all too clinical, but there was little choice. Higher ranked women like Leah could also opt to reserve time with one of the Sons as scheduling allowed, to try to get pregnant the old fashioned way, but that seemed even worse to her.

Nearing forty, Leah was starting to really worry about just how and when she would finally start her family. She wanted a baby. A little boy to raise and nurture. She wanted it desperately, but since coming to work for Michael Amber, all too often when she pictured her son, he had Michael's dark hair and flashing blue eyes. She could easily imagine the boy she would dote on and love with all her heart, as she couldn't afford to love his father.

Michael was a Son of Amber. He was also one of the most influential and successful of the Sons. Not a man who could settle with one woman—ever. Such daydreams were useless and could be dangerous to a woman who worked with the tempting man, day in and day out. She knew Michael depended on her. He might even feel some kind of affection for her, but he would never feel the love she desired with every fiber of her being.

She'd been married. She knew what young love felt like, and she missed it. Sometimes she ached for the half-forgotten feel of her

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husband's arms around her. It was so long ago, she barely remembered him now. Sometimes it all seemed so pointless.

The time was drawing near when she'd have to make a decision. Either she stayed working with Michael, watching him, wanting him, and knowing she could never have him, or she would quit. She'd resign her commission and visit the fertility clinic, choosing Michael's seed to produce her baby boy.

The choice was a cold one, but the result would warm her heart for the rest of her life. Michael's baby couldn't help but be a reflection of the great man she'd come to know...and love.

The thought jarred her as he ended the comm. Michael sighed heavily and sat wearily at his desk.

"Thanks. I definitely owe you one for that, Colonel."

Leah gathered her wits and sat as he indicated the chair in front of his desk. "Anytime, sir."

"Smithson ought to be court-martialed for her actions."

Leah chuckled dryly. "She's too well connected. They'll never go after her."

He sighed. Leah had to stop herself from staring at his massive shoulders as he sat back in his chair. The man was all too appealing for her peace of mind. Lately it had gotten harder and harder to ignore his incredibly masculine attributes. Ever since she'd decided she would have his baby, she found she couldn't look at him with the same detachment she'd cultivated since first being assigned to his staff.

"It's disgusting."

"You've got that right," Leah muttered, thinking more of her wayward thoughts and inability to focus on the task at hand than what he was actually talking about. It was time to quit thinking of Michael as a stud and concentrate on the work they had yet to accomplish. They had a lot to get through today and this little run-in with an idiot general had sidetracked them enough. "You'll be lucky if she doesn't start trash talking you among the other generals."

A cold look entered his icy blue eyes. "Let her try."

A shiver coursed down her spine and she understood what the gossips meant when they talked about Michael Amber's death glare. He'd become famous among the soldiers fighting to protect humanity for his skill and intense methods. Leah had never actually fought beside him, but she caught glimpses of the deadliness of the man every now and again.

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She'd trained in the gym with him just once, early on in her tenure as his Executive Officer. After that one, sweaty, dangerous run-in, she'd avoided being in the gym with him ever again. He was deadly with his hands and he moved like a serpent—sinuous, strong and lethal.

His physique was impeccable. His musculature made her mouth water in a way it should not for a man who was firmly off limits. His eyes were intent, his concentration total. He'd impressed her, and before the virus she'd been exposed to the best of the best of military men in her own family and tribe. She thought she was used to his kind of man, but Michael Amber was in a class by himself.

"The jits are getting too cocky, though. More and more of them are turning pirate and raiding fringe colonies, stealing supplies and women. It's got to be stopped."

Leah shook herself, trying to concentrate on what he was saying rather than the scandalous thoughts about her boss that came more often of late. "I agree. Especially when there might still be undiscovered pockets of uninfected humans out there like those Ezekiel found."

Mike nodded, turning to his read-outs. "Something's got to be done. Do you have the assignment roster for our intel scouts?"

She accessed her handcomp, which never really left her side. It contained all the pertinent data she might need in a hurry and connected her with other banks where she could access all kinds of things within a few moments. She lifted the small pad from her hip and switched it on from standby mode. A cheery blue glow greeted her.

"Anyone in particular, sir?"

Mike's glacial blue eyes narrowed. "Zeke would have been perfect for this, but he's retired." He was thinking aloud, a habit she'd grown used to over the years. "I need a Risker for this kind of mission. One who's available now or will be in the next week or two?"

"Male, then?"

Mike nodded. "A Son could possibly blend in with the jits."

She started to comprehend what he had in mind. Few humans had ever reported seeing a jit'suku female, so if Michael wanted to infiltrate their ranks, it had to be done by a male. Only a Risker would be fool enough to try, and only a Risker had any odds at all of succeeding. She consulted her lists.

"Silas and Tyron are free now. Smith, Hauer, and Billy come free within the next two weeks."

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"All right. Comm Ty and see if you can get him here tomorrow for a little strategy session. Last I heard, he had some pretty good contacts on the outer rim."

"Yes, sir." She made a note to contact the man on one of their high-security channels.

## Chapter Two

Tyron arrived on the interplanetary shuttle the following work period. He hefted his satchel over one shoulder and headed for the military wing of the station. It would be good to be on a mission again. He was getting restless more often lately, but doing a special job for his brother Mike was just the ticket to take him out of the doldrums.

His golden hair was a bit longer than standard military cut, earning him a few looks from the uniformed women bustling around. They knew darn well what he was, if not exactly who he was. Men were so rare, few seldom ventured off their home worlds, and even fewer took the risk of working actively in the military on one of the more vulnerable stations. No, the only males seen up here were Sons of Amber going to and fro on various missions, both military and civilian.

Atlantia Station was the most heavily defended orbital platform, seeing as it served as this sector's HQ. His brother, Commandant Michael Amber, ran the show from this orbiting gun platform and oversaw the defense of every planet, ship, station and colony in the sector. It was a big job and Ty didn't envy Mike the enormous responsibility, but he knew there was no better man for the job. He admired Michael and counted him among his closest friends.

Ty would do just about anything for Michael, and he knew the feeling was mutual. They'd grown up together—at least as much as Sons "grew up" after coming out of the incubator. They'd been in the same instructional classes and had partnered for fighting exercises and other tasks. They worked well together, their skill sets complimenting each other and, more than that, they genuinely liked each other.

The same could not be said of all Sons, though most of them shared some basic comradeship simply because they *were* Sons. They were the only males of their kind and that bound them together somewhat.

Ty smiled at the women who watched him pass, winking at a few—either making dour faces smile or young cheeks blush. He liked women of all kinds, though lately he'd found his many encounters with the

female kind lacking. He didn't understand it, and had no idea what he was looking for, but nevertheless, it was there. A vague sense of dissatisfaction.

Oh, he enjoyed the sex. Scratch that. He *loved* the sex. But he wanted something...more. What that 'more' was, he didn't quite know, but he was beginning to suspect, like some of his other brothers, he was looking for one special woman with whom to share his life.

He wasn't actively seeking her—he knew he had a job to do that precluded tying himself to just one woman—but he still felt the lack. Was it love he was missing? He didn't know. He wasn't sure he'd ever experienced love, but he was intrigued enough to consider the possibility, though he would never act on it. No, his duty lay in repopulating the human race. Even if there were one special woman out there for him somewhere, he couldn't commit to her and go against everything he'd been created to do. Better he go on these missions and do his duty, protecting the remnants of the human race and forget his foolish yearnings. Mike would help get his head screwed on straight. If there was one Son of Amber who always lived up to his responsibilities, it was Mike.

Ty found Mike's private apartment and announced himself at the door, which would relay the signal to those inside. Mike had to be off-shift at this hour, so Ty had come directly here, bypassing the office and more formal surroundings. Ty wasn't a formal man.

Mike answered the door with a drink in his hand and a look in his eye that said he'd had more than one. Ty was surprised. Mike had never been a drinker, or one to use a crutch of any kind. Dominant to the core, Michael was a straight shooter who muscled his way through life with both brawn and intellect.

"Rough day, brother?"

Mike leaned one arm up against the door frame and sighed.

"You could say that." He stepped back to allow Ty entrance. "Thanks for coming. What can I get you?"

Ty dumped his bag by the couch as he took a seat. Michael had nice living quarters—a bit Spartan for Ty's tastes—but still nice and comfortable. Big, solid furniture that he could sit in without worrying if he'd break it somehow, and strong enough to support his tall frame. Ty stretched his tired muscles as Michael moved to the sideboard where a number of decanters sat on a small tray with glasses.

"Some Scotch wouldn't go awry."

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Michael poured the alcohol and handed a glass to Ty before collapsing into one of the overstuffed chairs placed in a grouping with the couch.

"I'm glad you could make it."

Ty sat back, savoring his first sip of the fine brew. "I'm always glad to help, brother. Truth be told, I've been a little restless lately. This kind of assignment ought to be just the thing."

"Leah filled you in on the details?"

Ty noted the odd tone of Michael's voice and it puzzled him. Mike was usually the steadiest of men. The slight waver when he spoke his XO's name concerned him.

"She sent me the pertinent facts. I can infiltrate out in that sector pretty easily. I've laid the groundwork for years. A few of the tamer pirates know me and will vouch for me with the others."

"That's good." Mike knocked back his drink and leaned his head against the back of the big chair, stretching out.

"You want to tell me what's wrong? Does it have something to do with Leah?"

That got Mike's attention. His eyes popped open and glared in Ty's direction.

"I'm not even going to ask how you figured that one out." Mike sighed heavily and his eyes closed again. "It's nothing. She's the best damned XO I've ever had."

"And the most beautiful. Not to mention capable."

"She is that," Mike agreed. "But she's beside the point."

"Maybe." Ty decided to let the matter of Leah drop. He'd seen them interact. There was more to that story than either one would admit, but he figured they'd sort it out in time.

"So what's this restlessness about? Want to change careers?" Mike knew him better than that, but Ty recognized the wry, almost teasing tone. He decided to come clean. Mike knew him well. He was also highly placed. Maybe he knew more about the situation with the Sons who'd found life mates than he'd let on.

"I think it has to do with those marriages lately. I never thought Zeke would take himself off the market."

"Yeah, I was a little surprised at first, but his Angela is one hell of a woman."

"You've met her then?"

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Mike's eyes held a knowing gleam Ty recognized immediately. Every once in a while Sons gave each other a hand with a woman. It was rare, but they'd all done it a time or two. With the highly sexual way they'd been designed and raised, it seemed only natural for them to want to experiment with more daring forms of pleasure on occasion.

"Angela is perfect for Zeke. I think they'll have a happy life together."

"I hope you're right." Ty leaned forward on the couch. "Mike, do you think there's a woman for each of us? Lately I've been feeling...I don't know...a little incomplete. I feel something strange when I see some of our brothers partnering up with just one woman. Like maybe that's what I want."

"You got a special woman in mind?" Mike's eyes studied him.

"Maybe." Ty was reticent. "I don't really know what love is. But I think I want to find out."

"When you figure it out, let me know." Mike's eyes were haunted and Ty thought his brother might have a bit more knowledge than he realized.

They talked of the mission and set up lines of communication they could use. Leah had prepared a set of ident chips for Ty and they went through the details of the operation before Ty took his leave an hour or two later. He'd grab some sleep, then head out on the next shuttle. He had a job to do.

\* \* \* \*

That evening, Leah wrote out her letter of resignation the old fashioned way, as such things deserved, and left it on Michael's desk with a pang of regret for what could never be. She'd miss him—his rare smiles, his determination, his quick mind...and so much more, but she'd soon have his son to coddle and raise. He'd never know it, of course, but she'd cherish the child for his father's sake and for his own. It was her fondest wish to have a baby, and there was no doubt in her mind she wanted Michael Amber to be the father. She'd made her decision.

The only thing that could possibly have made it better was if she had the guts to actually ask Michael to do the deed himself. She knew she couldn't keep him, but spending even one night in his embrace would be a memory to last a lifetime.

But she didn't have that kind of courage.

For one thing, she didn't know how to ask for such an intimate favor. For another, she didn't want to ruin their easy friendship—which



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she hoped might continue from afar even after she left the service—with messy emotional entanglements. Michael had a strict rule about not having sex with any of his subordinates and she guessed it was because the man she'd come to know had more of a heart than even he realized. He genuinely liked the women who worked for him and he didn't want to hurt any of them. He was too astute not to realize the women he bedded often wished he could fall in love with them and stay forever.

But such was not his life and probably never would be. He was a Son. He had a job to do. He knew his duty and it was a vast one. He and the rest of the Sons had to spread their seed far and wide to save humanity from extinction. It was what he'd been created to do. He hadn't been engineered to settle with just one woman. It just wasn't in the cards he'd been dealt.

With a sigh of regret for what could never be, Leah left the letter on his desk and returned to her own office. She had to start setting the wheels in motion for her replacement. There were files to get in order and her belongings to remove. Her resignation wouldn't take effect for another few weeks, but this interim period had to be used to prepare for a seamless transition to a new XO for Michael—or, at least, as seamless as possible.

He'd probably never even notice the difference.

## Chapter Three

Michael couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the old fashioned slip of paper on his desk the next morning. He read it twice before swearing a blue streak and jumping up from behind his desk. He stalked into Leah's office without even the courtesy of knocking.

"What the hell is this?" Michael waved the paper in front of her face as she sat calmly behind her desk.

"It's my resignation."

"I can see that." He threw the paper down in exasperation. "What I want to know is why? I thought you were happy here. Dammit, Leah, I can't do this job without you." Sighing, he sank into the guest chair in front of her efficient desk, slouching in an uncustomary pose of defeat. "I can't accept this."

"Sir," she began, but he stopped her words.

"Don't you think you've known me long enough to use my name—at least when we're alone?"

Leah folded her hands in front of her, a pained expression on her face. "All right, Michael." She sighed. "Look, I really do enjoy working with you, but with recent developments, you don't need me as much as you used to. I'm getting older and, to be perfectly honest, I want to have a child before I'm too old to enjoy it. That's why I want to leave the military. I want to have a family."

Her words stunned him. And angered him.

"And just who did you want to father your child, Leah?" His voice was deadly and low. Leah seemed lost in her daydream, though, her lovely eyes clouded over as she thought of something only she could see. She didn't realize the danger that had crept into the room with her words.

"I made an appointment at the fertility clinic for as soon as my final paperwork goes through."

That made him sit back. At least she hadn't scheduled time with one of his brothers. She was highly-ranked enough she could request time

with a Son of Amber on pretty short notice, though she wouldn't be guaranteed which of the Sons she might get.

"But why quit? We still need you here, Leah, and many women work right up 'til their eighth or ninth month."

She cleared her throat, seeming a little uncomfortable, shuffling items unnecessarily on her desk. "I wanted to avoid any possible conflict of interest."

Mike sensed a victory, but he didn't quite understand it yet—at least, he didn't dare hope the odd thought he had might be true. "And just why would being pregnant create a conflict of interest?"

"Look, Michael, I'll come clean here. I respect you enough to give you the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it makes my last few days here." She took a deep breath, meeting his gaze with resignation, a becoming flush highlighting her high cheekbones. "When I made the clinic appointment, I requested..." She looked away, clearly flustered. "Damn, this is harder than I thought it would be, but you've a right to know."

"Tell me." His voice was low, commanding. He was all Dom in that moment, and she responded.

"When I made that appointment, I specifically requested your...um...semen be used for the implantation. I want you to father my baby. I admire your intellect, your decisive nature—all your abilities and attributes, really—and I couldn't think of a better candidate to father my little boy."

Mike just watched her. She grew nervous under his stare, but he needed time to regroup. She'd just pulled the rug out from under him, but in the best possible way. He took a moment to consider his options.

"I'm flattered," he said finally. "And honored." He lifted the resignation in his hands and quite deliberately tore it to shreds, placing them neatly on her desk. "I don't accept this." He enjoyed the dismay on her face as he stood and leaned over the desk, so close he could smell her unique perfume.

"I—"

"Cancel the appointment." His tone was soft, but the order in his words was clear. "If you want to have my child, I'll give him to you personally. No other way, Leah. I've wanted you for the past two years. I'm not going to wait any longer." As he spoke the words, he realized their absolute truth.

"Now just a minute!" She stood, outrage in her eyes, but he wouldn't allow it. He rounded the desk and caught her by the arms, dragging her against his body. His lips came down on hers and time ceased to exist. He'd wanted to kiss her from the moment he'd first laid eyes on her, but she never indicated even the remotest interest. Now, however, all bets were off. He could see the very real desire as she spoke, and taste the heated excitement in her kiss. She wanted him. Probably as much as he'd always wanted her.

"You're mine, Leah." He pulled away enough to whisper. "You have been since the moment I first saw you."

"Michael—"

He covered her lips with a light, chastising kiss. Everything had clicked into place when his lips first touched hers. All was right with the universe—at least, the microcosm of the two of them together. Now that he'd tasted her, he would never go back to the old, arms-length relationship. She was his. The sooner she came to terms with that—and with him—the better.

"You know I'm a Dom, Leah, but I've never dominated you in our working relationship, and I never will. I'll freely admit, though, I've wanted to dominate you in pleasure for as long as I've known you. I want to feel you come around me and I want to give you the greatest climaxes of your life. I want to imprint myself on you so you'll never, ever forget me."

She sighed, a small, defeated sound. "That's what I'm afraid of, Michael. I like you too much. I'm afraid..."

"Afraid of what, Leah? You're the bravest woman I know." His hand cupped her chin, raising her beautiful eyes to his.

She smiled softly and his heart clenched. "I don't want to fall in love with you, Michael. I want your baby, but I don't want a broken heart."

"Would it help you to know that by resigning, you're already breaking my heart? I honestly don't think I can continue without you at my side, Leah. We're a team." He rubbed circles on her back as she relaxed in his arms. She felt like heaven against him. "There's no reason you can't stay with me for a while yet. We can work together during the day and work on the baby at night." He winked, making her smile. He took her response as a good sign. "When you get pregnant, you can continue to work as long as you like and even after the baby is born, I have no objection to your bringing him to work. In fact," his head quirked to the side as he thought of it, "I think I'd like that. I don't know

any of my children. The chance to see one as it grows would be welcome, if you don't mind my taking an interest."

"Are you kidding?" She seemed surprised by his candor. "You're the father. Of course you can take an interest in him."

"That's not the way it's been 'til now."

She shocked him by reaching up to stroke his cheek. No woman had ever offered to comfort him before and he found the very idea of it intriguing, the feel of her soft hand, more special than anything he'd ever felt before. Leah was such a miracle to him.

"I've never said anything, but I think it's wrong the way they expect you to father all these babies, but never have a chance to raise any of them. I mean, I know it'd be impossible for you to know all your children, but why not at least a few? You could be such a good influence on a young boy."

He covered her hand with his own, loving the feel of her soft skin against his. "I'm glad you think so."

"I wouldn't have chosen you to be my baby's father if I didn't admire you, Michael. I just don't know if I—"

"What?" He had to coax her. She was blushing again and it charmed him.

"I don't know if I can be submissive. I'm not exactly a shrinking violet. Or hadn't you noticed?" She laughed at herself, charming him even more.

"You're a strong-willed, capable woman, but being sexually submissive doesn't require a weakling personality. In fact, I gain very little satisfaction from a meek woman's obedience. I can all too easily trample over a weaker personality. I know that much about myself, at least." He shrugged. "Which is why I've enjoyed your company for so long. You're the first woman who hasn't bored me to tears after a week or two, Leah. That's something unique in my experience." He pulled her closer, pressing his hardness against the soft V of her thighs. "I know I can make you want to follow my orders in the bedroom—or wherever we take our pleasure—and it will be pleasure, Leah. The greatest you've ever known, or will ever know. I can guarantee that."

Her breathless sigh thrilled him. He was getting to her. He knew it.

"I don't know, Michael." He loved the sound of his name on her lips. "I'm still concerned I won't be able to do what you want and I don't want to fight you."

He hugged her close. "I'll never force you, Leah. There's no satisfaction in overpowering a woman. What I want from you is your willing compliance with my desires." He pulled back to look into her eyes. "I know you want me. I can make you want my dominance, too. Give it a try, Leah. Have dinner with me tonight. Let's see where it leads."

"Michael—"

"Come on, Leah. We've shared a thousand meals together."

"But this is different."

Mike cupped her ass audaciously with one hand as he grinned down at her. "Very different. I dare you, Leah. Take a chance."

\* \* \* \*

Michael Amber always could talk her into doing things against her better judgment. Well, to be fair, he never wanted her to do anything that was dangerous or could be harmful. He just had a way of getting what he wanted. She guessed it was part of his Dominant personality, and to be truthful, it didn't bother her much. In a way, it was sort of endearing.

That was the truly dangerous thing. This man was all too appealing. She knew it wouldn't take much to turn her admiration for him into something much more intimate. Everyone knew it was impossible to keep a Son of Amber for longer than it took to get pregnant, but so many women tried and failed.

Although there were a few stories making the rounds of gossip lately, and she knew for a fact that Ezekiel had been reassigned permanently to the newly discovered uninfected colony of Espians. It was rumored he had married and was living monogamously with one of the colony women. Oh, he still made the required sperm deposits so his DNA could go further in repopulating the human race, but he didn't make personal calls anymore and had been taken permanently off the reservation lists.

"I don't know, Michael." She'd never dared call him by name to his face, though it had crept into her mind more and more often.

His lips nipped at hers playfully. This side of him was new, and very exciting. She'd seen him in full Dom mode as he ruled most of the human fighting forces in this sector. She'd seen him weighted down by the burdens of his position and role. Her heart had gone out to him as time and again he sacrificed his own desires for the greater good of humanity, and she'd admired him for his steadfast determination to defeat their enemies.

SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

This coaxing, cajoling, teasing hunk was something altogether new. His lips teased hers, his breath hot and sweet, mingling with her own. This man was born a Dom, but he was patient and kind in ways she never expected.

"Do it, Leah. You know you want to." He cuddled into her his chest, his cheek seeking her neck as he rubbed against her in the most delicious way. "Dinner. With me. What happens after that is wide open."

"But what about your rule? No fraternizing, remember?"

"Rules are made to be broken. Besides, you're the only woman under my command I've ever wanted to break that little unofficial rule with. No one else, Leah. Just you." He punctuated his words with small kisses to her face, teasing her until she smiled.

\* \* \* \*

"All right," she answered, finally. He wanted to pound the air with his fist in triumph, but refrained. "I'll have dinner with you tonight, Michael, but we'll discuss this. I won't be rushed into anything."

"No rushing." He nodded. "Gotcha." Pulling her closer, he kissed her, wanting to feel her response again and again. She was his. He knew it deep in his soul, though he didn't understand it at all. Now he just had to make sure she knew it, too. She would have his baby and he'd enjoy every moment of putting it in her womb and watching it grow. The very idea made something soft and fragile blossom in his sheltered heart. He didn't know quite what it was, but he definitely had his suspicions.

## Chapter Four

Mike had a plan. He'd spent time breaking her in to his ways when she'd started as his XO two years ago. She'd been skittish at first, and it took him a few weeks to get her used to being around him and his manner of speaking—and sometimes barking orders—when he was in full Dom mode. Eventually, she'd come to anticipate his wants and needs and turned out to be the best XO he'd ever had.

That was only part of the reason he didn't want to lose her.

The rest had to do with little things. The way she moved. The way she spoke. The way she could talk him down from a Dominant rage with just a few well-placed words of caution and sense. The way her mind worked. The way she smelled of clean woman and daffodils. The way her hair swayed on the rare occasions she wore it down, and the way she smiled at him every so often as if he personally hung all the moons of Jupiter.

He couldn't lose her. Especially not after she'd conceived his child. He'd fathered many children, but this one would be special. This one in particular, he wanted to see gestate and be born, grow and change. He wanted to know and love this child as he knew and...loved...its mother.

The thought stopped him.

Did he love her?

Mike wasn't sure. He didn't really know what love was all about. It wasn't something he'd ever come across before personally. He'd seen a few of his brothers succumb, and longed to learn what it was that made one woman preferable to all the others. If there was such a woman for him, he hoped she was like Leah.

Hell, perhaps she *was* Leah. He'd be damned if he'd let her leave him now. First he had to know for sure whether these odd new feelings could really be love. That question had to be answered first, before anyone left or retired or resigned. Mike knew from his research, and from watching his brothers, that love was too important to let go.

So, he had a plan.



## SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

Like he'd done when she'd first signed on as his assistant, he would gentle her to his ways little by little. He knew the demands of a Dominant could be difficult on the uninitiated, but he couldn't change what he was born to be. His only hope lay in the idea that she could adapt to not only accept, but revel in the kind of pleasure he could give her.

He'd start slow. He'd start with the basics. Never had he looked so forward to just kissing a woman for hours on end.

And that's just what he'd do. He'd train her to hunger for his kiss, to want it more than her next breath, and then he'd move the next level. He'd break her in gently. Unlike the way he'd been introduced to sex and what it meant to be a Dominant.

Michael's first memory was of a woman's hand on his cock. Woken in adolescence from the incubator in which he'd been grown at an abnormally fast rate, Mike's first memory was of pleasure. He supposed there were worse things to remember, but he hadn't understood much of anything at that point. He only knew the amazing feeling of the woman's soft hand massaging his cock until he spewed.

When he'd come five or six times—enough to fill her sample collection units—she left him to sleep. By that time he was tired enough to fall into unconsciousness while the doctors ran their tests on his semen to see if their experiment was a success or not. To see whether he lived or died, essentially.

He had some muscle tone, thanks to the automated units that were designed to move his limbs and the rest of his body while he grew at an alarmingly fast rate in the incubator, but motor coordination had to be learned the old fashioned way. The first few months out of the incubator were an intense time of learning and growing, though his rate of growth eventually slowed almost to the stopping point. He'd been designed that way. He grew to adulthood quickly, then practically ceased to age so he'd have many productive years in which to do his ordained work of re-seeding the human population of the Milky Way galaxy.

He'd been subject to data downloads that worked—for the most part—to bring him up to speed with linguistic skills and book learning, but there was a great deal to be gleaned just from existing and interacting with the scientists and his brothers. They formed a family together and there were real, caring relationships among them.

Though at first they'd been kept separate, until they learned the role of sexuality. Just hatched from the incubators and knowing nothing but

pleasure, most of the Sons tried to hump anyone who came into their chambers the first few weeks. It was a bit of a joke now, but the sad fact that the adolescent Sons were nothing more than sex machines when they were first born was an all too true urban legend.

*When your first memory is pleasure, it's kind of hard not to want to repeat the sensation over and over...and over again,* Mike thought with a small grin.

\* \* \* \*

Leah didn't know what to expect after the tumultuous events of the afternoon. She fussed over her hair, unsure what to wear for this...date. She hadn't been on a date since before the jit virus. Since before she was married. Women didn't date these days. For one thing, the men were few and far between. When you got one to yourself, you didn't waste time going to dinner and a movie. No, you kept him to yourself and enjoyed him while you could.

Michael had asked her to have dinner with him, but other than that, had given no indication of where they were going to eat, or whether she should wear her uniform or off-duty clothing. Nervous as she hadn't been for years, Leah decided to comm him to find out.

"Yes, Leah, what is it? Not chickening out on me, are you?"

"No, sir. I—" She faltered, feeling foolish.

"It's Michael when we're alone, remember?" His deep voice charmed her, even over the comm. "Unless I order you to call me something else."

The wicked purr in his words made her insides itch. She knew he was a Dom. He was designed to take charge, especially in sexual situations, but other than that, she was unprepared for just how far he might go in his Dominant games.

"Something else?" She couldn't help the words that escaped before she thought better of it.

He chuckled low, the sound stirring her womb. "Eventually. But we'll save that for later. Now why did you comm me? Not that I'm complaining."

"I wanted to know, uh, what time we were having dinner and where. I mean, should I wear my uniform, or—"

"Leah, sweetheart," he stopped her nervous words. "I was hoping you'd ask."

She knew that tone. "This was some kind of test?"

"Just a little one." He shrugged. "I wanted to know how you'd react. Would you come to me? Would you make assumptions without asking for my guidance? Or worse, would you forge ahead with some preconceived notion without considering my desires at all?" He smiled as her outrage grew. "I thought I knew you well enough after the past two years to judge your reaction, but I wanted to know for certain. It was a test of my own perceptions as much as it was a test of your reactions."

"I don't like being studied like a lab rat, Michael." She couldn't help the hurt that crept into her tone. The anger had been surprisingly short-lived.

On the other end of the comm, Michael straightened abruptly. "That wasn't my intention, Leah. I'm sorry. I know very well what a lab rat feels like and I didn't mean to do that to you." His eyes narrowed and she looked away, wishing she could just end the comm and crawl under her bed to hide for a few centuries. "Look, can we start over? It was foolish of me not to realize—"

She'd never heard Michael Amber so contrite. This was a man used to giving orders and not taking any guff from anyone. That he was sincerely sorry, she saw immediately.

"All right," she said softly. She raised her eyes to meet his across the screen. "What time do you want me and where?" His gaze sparked and she realized the double entendre in her innocent words. She laughed.

Just like that the tension between them broke and they were back on easier footing.

"Forget I said that," she joked.

"Never." Michael's voice growled across the comm. "But for dinner, I'd like you at my quarters in half a standard. Wear civilian clothes. A dress of some kind, if you have one handy, and leave off the underwear."

"Michael!" She was scandalized. "I didn't agree to anything other than talking tonight."

"But you're going to have my baby, Leah." His voice deepened as his eyes burned into hers through the screen. "We'll talk about it, sure. But then we'll act on it. I'm a Dom, sweetheart. You knew that. Now you need to learn what that really means. Leave off the panties and wear your hair down. It's a small enough request."

He cut the comm, leaving her muttering. "Damn you, Michael Amber." She stalked toward her closet to dig out a dress. She didn't wear them often, but she still had a few from the old days, when she'd been a

newlywed woman embarking on a happy life, not a career soldier living on a space station.

Things had changed drastically when her husband—and most other men—had died. She'd taken up arms and joined the military, taking the place of the many men in her family and tribe who'd defended humanity in centuries past. She'd never seriously thought of the military as a career, but found she liked the order and discipline.

The Blackfoot tribe had been cut in half, but her grandmother had been Leah's inspiration. General Adelaide Blackfoot was too old to serve now, but she helped guide the tribe as a member of the Council of Elders and kept tabs on her granddaughter, following Leah's career from afar. Leah looked forward to the letters and comms her grandmother sent every standard month or so. She wasn't the only Blackfoot woman serving in the military now, but she was the highest ranked and the closest relation to the old general. Leah liked carrying on the tradition of service. She also liked the idea she was helping protect what was left of the human worlds after the plague had nearly destroyed them all.

Then there was Michael.

She loved working with him. His decisive nature reminded her of her lost family members. In that way, at least, he was very much like her father and brothers had been. He didn't wait to gather consensus. He saw his way forward and acted on his decisions. He wasn't foolish or rash, but he was definitely a leader, not a follower. She liked that. Perhaps more than she should, considering they worked so closely together.

Tonight would take that working relationship and change it forever. Tonight she would see him as a woman sees a man, not as a subordinate views a superior officer. She was looking forward to it, but at the same time, she was scared to death.

Deciding to put it out of her mind for the moment, she chose a short, cobalt blue dress and dressed for dinner. At the last moment, she decided to leave off the underwear, feeling scandalously decadent as she walked down the corridor toward Michael's private quarters. Luckily, she didn't pass anyone in the hall. This area of the station was restricted to the highest ranks and contained only private quarters, so the chances of running into anyone at all weren't high.

Before she could chicken out, she pushed the chime. A moment later, the door slid open and Michael's voice came to her from the dimly lit interior of his living room.

## SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

"Come in, Leah." She entered hesitantly, unable to see well for a moment as her eyes adjusted from the brightly lit corridor to the dusky twilight inside. "Close and lock," Michael commanded the computer that regulated the door. She heard the panel slide shut and then snick into secure mode. They were locked in until Michael's voice command released them.

As her eyes adjusted, she noted candles burning on a small table set for two. Michael sat just behind the candles on the far end of the room, watching her.

"I'm glad you're here, Leah." He glanced at his wrist chrono. "On time, too."

She squared her chin, refusing to be unsettled by his burning stare. "I told you I'd be here and here I am."

He stood and skirted the table, walking toward her. She held her ground, unwilling to be intimidated by his almost predatory walk. Their eyes met and held as he drew near.

"I've always admired that about you, Leah. You're a woman of your word." He stopped just a foot away, his fingers tracing over her cheek as gentle as a butterfly's wings. "Your beautiful hair is loose." His palm opened to caress the back of her head and down her back. "So then, I can assume you've followed my instructions to the letter?"

His hand slid lower, over her ribs, into the curve of her waist, and then down over her ass. He squeezed, making her gasp.

"No panty lines." His smile was downright wicked. "Good girl, Leah."

"I could be wearing a thong." Some devil of mischief made her want to tease him. His eyes sparkled with challenge as his lips curved upward and his hand roamed even lower, dragging up the short skirt of her soft blue dress.

"You like to live dangerously, don't you?" He pulled her closer, his other hand working at raising her skirt now as he grinned. "If you disobeyed me, you know I'll have to punish you, don't you? Or is that what you're hoping for?"

She gasped as his hot palms found the skin of her naked ass. He cupped her, stroking in a circular motion as he pulled her hard up against him. His cock burned her, a hot, long length pressing into the swell of her belly.

His fingers moved then, as his gaze held hers, sweeping inward as he sought the dark crevice between her cheeks. At the first touch of his

blunt fingers, she started, but he gentled her, drawing her closer as he swept his hand downward, trailing the crack of her ass provocatively.

"I don't feel a thong, but maybe I should inspect a little more closely."

His devil's grin teased her as he lifted her clear off her feet. She wasn't a small woman, but the easy way Michael picked her up and carried her around made her feel downright delicate. He walked her backwards, toward the overstuffed couch and lay her down upon it.

"Michael, I—" She placed one palm against his muscular chest, but he stilled her objections with a light kiss.

Before she knew it, she was on her back on the wide couch, Michael's hard body pressing her in to the soft cushions. His mouth searched hers, driving her temperature higher and hotter. At length he broke away, his hands were under her skirt. In fact, the dress had been lifted clear up to her waist, exposing her lower body to rub against the soft fabric of Michael's black trousers.

"I meant to take this slow, but I can't Leah. I want you too much."

The look in his eyes stilled her objections. She read real need there. Need for her.

Touching his face, she reached up and kissed him lightly. "Don't wait, Michael. We can talk later."

He groaned, but his eyes were torn. She knew every look, every nuance of his expression. She'd read them all over the past years of working with him. She understood his desire now, caught between having her and giving her the words he thought she wanted to hear.

She stroked his beloved face again. "Make love to me now, Michael. I don't want to wait anymore." She took a breath for courage. "I've been dreaming of what it would be like for too long."

"You, too?" A spark lit his eyes. "I thought it was just me, wondering how I would fit inside you, how you would scream when I made you come. I want to know, Leah. I've wanted to know for more than two years."

Her womb clenched as she read the truth of his words in his expression. To think, he'd wanted her too. It was a heady thought.

"I'm going to make this so good for you," he promised, kissing his way down her throat, over her breasts, still covered in fabric, and down to her bare waist. Stopping there for a moment, he leaned back, hovering over her as he looked downward. She'd groomed for him, trimming the curling hair she liked to keep short for comfort.

Once upon a time, she'd shaved there all the time, but for the past few years, she hadn't gone to that much trouble. She hadn't been entirely sure where this night would end, but she'd wanted to be prepared. Still, she hadn't counted on jumping him the moment she walked in the door. Yet she had a good idea where her provocative words would lead and still, she'd uttered them.

"I like the look of your pussy, Leah. Neat and orderly, just like you." He grinned up at her. "It'll be my pleasure to corrupt you."

She laughed as he moved lower, his warm hands settling on her thighs. She hadn't had a man since before her husband took ill with the jit virus. It had been years, but her body knew what it wanted—or rather *who* it wanted. She felt her cream flow, dampening the insides of her thighs as Michael's powerful hands spread her legs apart.

Rough fingers stroked through the slickness, parting her outer lips as his eyes devoured her. She felt utterly exposed and yet completely safe and protected. Michael had that way about him. His eyes practically glowed as he learned the shape of her. His fingers delved deeper, circling her clit and making her squirm before diving into her darkness.

His eyes held hers as two long fingers learned the depth and breadth of her passage. The expression on his face was one she would never forget. She felt stunned, feeling even this small part of him within her for the first time. It had been so long, and never had she been touched with such decisive, knowledgeable hands. It was true, she was learning, that the Sons of Amber more than knew their way around a woman's body. At least Michael did, and she was loving every minute of it.

"Do you like that?" His voice tempted her.

"You know I do." It was an effort to speak, but she managed it, barely.

He grinned at her, adding another finger to the two already stretching her. "I'm going to love planting my baby in you, Leah. I've never felt so strongly about a woman before. Never wanted one as much as I want you."

She moaned a little as he started to move within her, rubbing that little spot that made her breathless. "You don't...have to...say that, Michael. It's all right."

He stilled.

Her eyes shot open and met his. He looked like a thundercloud, though he seemed just the tiniest bit unsure of himself, which was definitely out of character for him.

"You of all people know I don't say things I don't mean." She nodded, and he rewarded her by moving his fingers gently within her. "I don't understand it myself, Leah, but it's true." He lowered his head and kissed the slight swell of her belly, moving lower. "I want you. More than I've ever wanted any other woman." His words teased her curls, then her clit as he licked out and teased her with his tongue. His hand moved faster as his breath sighed over her most sensitive skin.

When his mouth opened directly over her clit and fastened on, she came harder than she ever had before. Michael rode her through the climax, his hands gentling her as he let her come and come. She'd never climbed so high, so fast, and she didn't come down. Although the climax faded after a while, Michael kept her on a plateau near the summit of her pleasure. He was a master at playing her body and he proved it to her in those long minutes of foreplay while he learned her body and taught her a thing or two about it as well.

By the time he stalked back up her body, she was ready for anything. Except for him to leave her.

Michael stood, his gaze sweeping over her as she lay, exposed—probably like some cheap hooker on the couch. Leah felt her skin heat with embarrassment, but Michael moved, lifting her into his arms as he strode forcefully toward the door at the far end of the room. His bedroom, she guessed.

She hid her face in his neck, loving the smell and feel of him. He was so strong, carrying her around like a kitten, he made her feel small and protected. It was something she hadn't felt since she was a child. Since before the jits attacked so devastatingly.

Michael sat her on the bed, then swept her blue dress up and completely off in one swift movement. He nudged her back onto the wide bed, directing her with a pointed look.

"It's going to be fast this time, Leah. I can't wait anymore."

Reading the urgent look in his eyes, Leah understood. He'd held off to pleasure her, but this time would be for him. She wanted to give him whatever he wanted. Especially after the generous climax he'd given her.

Scooting back on the soft bed, Leah felt no embarrassment as she spread her legs wide. Michael stood to the side, watching her every movement as he stripped cleanly and efficiently. His clothes went flying somewhere behind him as Leah watched.

His chest was a thing of beauty, sculpted perfection of hard muscles and sinewy strength. His legs were the same. Long, lean and muscular in



## SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

a way that made her mouth water. But his cock. Now that was a work of art.

Thick, hard and ready, Leah knew Michael would bring her more pleasure than she could ever remember. He was built on the large side, with heavy balls that she knew held a large amount of sperm. He'd been designed that way, so he could play his part in helping repopulate the human worlds.

But all she cared about just then was how he was going to empty those balls into her. Sons of Amber, it was rumored, were always ready. They didn't need much down time because of their superior genetics and they'd even been known to wear a woman out if given half a chance.

Leah, though, had always had a strong sexual appetite. She wondered which of them would give up first. It would be her pleasure to find out.

Licking her lips, Leah sat forward. She wanted to taste that cock, if he'd let her.

## Chapter Five

Michael couldn't believe the sex kitten hidden under Leah's starched uniform. When she'd walked into his quarters wearing that sexy blue dress, it was all he could do to speak. Then that daring comment about the thong had teased him beyond reason. He hadn't meant to move quite this fast, but there was no going back now. Leah was a siren and he was glad to take the plunge. He'd die for her. Happily.

He saw her coming toward him, her intent clear, but he was in charge here. Not that he objected to her wanting to touch him. Just not now. Not when he was so close. This woman challenged even his legendary control.

"Lay back, Leah. Spread your legs and show me where you want me."

She pouted for a second, but moved to comply. He liked the way she followed his orders. This wasn't like when they were in the office. Then, she behaved like any other soldier under his command—though she was incredibly intuitive about what he wanted. Often she knew what he wanted before he did himself, which is what made her indispensable as his XO. But this was different. This was a woman—not a soldier—giving over control to her man.

She did it almost unconsciously, as he'd hoped she would. He got the feeling they'd be compatible this way, judging from their long acquaintance. Leah wasn't anyone's pushover. She was a strong woman with very definite opinions, but she was willing to let him lead here, and that's what counted. They worked together so well because he respected her ability just as she respected his authority. They trusted each other to know and understand what the other could handle.

Michael was gratified to see that carried over. Leah followed his lead, not because she was weak and needed to be led, but because she trusted him. Without that trust, Mike would never have agreed to take this to the next step.

SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

Leah lay back on the bed and did as he asked, pushing her legs wide apart. He licked his lips, marveling at the sight. She held out one hand, beckoning.

"Come to me now, Michael. I need you."

Her voice whispered across his senses. How many times had he dreamed of just such a scene? And here she was, finally, in his bed. He could wait no longer.

Michael knelt on the bed, crawling over her until her much smaller frame was bracketed by him. His cock nestled into her slick folds, his gaze holding hers as he held himself up on his elbows above her. Bending his spine, he bent to kiss her voluptuous breasts. He hadn't paid them nearly as much attention as he wanted, but they had all night. For now, he had to be inside her or he'd go insane.

Pushing as gently as he could manage, he slid into her channel, watching her eyes for any sign of distress. He was big and she was tight, though he didn't sense any discomfort on her part, which was a relief. He pushed further inside, loving the way her lips fell open and her eyes half-closed. Those pretty eyes of hers held him spellbound as he shoved all the way home, resting there for a moment while she caught her breath.

"How are you doing?" He nipped her lips, waiting for a reply.

"I'm good. Oh, God, Michael. It's been a long time."

"It's never been like this before."

She laughed as he lifted up to scan her expression. He read joy there.

"That's what I was going to say."

He leaned back to kiss her face. "It only gets better from here."

Her hands swept over his shoulders and around his neck as she dragged him down. "Show me."

Michael started to move, gently at first, but then with increasing enthusiasm. He was barely holding on to his control, though this was by far the tamest sex he'd engaged in for years. Straight missionary without even a hint of kink. His brothers would never believe it.

Mike had earned a bit of a reputation among his kind for rather inventive bedroom play, but nothing before could compare to this simple pleasure with this special woman. Michael realized it was the woman who made the difference, not any special technique he could dream up. Though he'd love to try a few things with Leah, if she'd let him.

But that was for later. For now, he was nearing the end of his rope as she came around him. He drove her up the crest again, wanting her to

come at least once more before he did. He inserted one hand between them, playing with her clit as she gasped and moaned beneath him. *That's it*, he thought, as he felt the tremble in her limbs, the clutch of her inner muscles around him. She panted as she came again, pulling him along with her.

He erupted within her, bathing her womb in a torrent of his seed. He knew that's what she wanted. She wanted his baby, but she hoped she wanted him, too—at least a little.

He'd never wanted that before, but with Leah, he was learning fast, all bets were off. He'd never wanted to break a woman's heart by having her care for him and then leave her. He'd always done his best to remind the women he bedded that he was not available for anything long-term. Hell, he didn't even do short-term. He did appearances. That was it. One night stands. Then he was gone, never to be seen again. It was best not to encourage those women to care for him. He didn't like hurting them when duty called him away.

But he wanted Leah to care for him. He wanted to have a relationship with her—something he'd never wanted before. He wanted to fuck her over and over, for many nights to come. As long as she'd let him. And he wanted her to want him to do it. Not because she wanted his child, but because she wanted him.

Coming down from the most amazing climax he could ever recall, Michael rolled, clutching her body close to his as he positioned her over him. He stayed within her body, wanting to be part of her for a little longer. That was new, too. This woman was showing him things about himself he'd never seen before and it was heady stuff, as well as a little frightening.

He kissed her shoulder, her neck, the ridges of her ear as he settled her on top of his body like a living blanket. She was sleepy and compliant in his arms, nuzzling into his chest in the most satisfying way.

"I think I'm going to keep you for a while, Leah." He licked her earlobe. "How does the next year sound?"

Drowsy eyes met his as she levered up on one arm to see him. Her expression was adorably confused.

"Do we have that long? I mean, don't you have to...um...service others?"

"As long as you want me, Leah. I'm yours. Nobody forces Sons to take appointments. I'll still make my deposits, but I'll cancel the few

appointments on my calendar. I don't want any other woman. Not while I have you."

Her eyes narrowed and he thought he saw hope flare in them before she shook her head, just once. Lowering herself back to lie on his chest, she snuggled into him.

"I won't presume, but I'll take whatever you'll give me, Michael. I've missed this."

"Sex?"

"No. Well, yes. I've missed sex, but mostly," he felt her little fingers tangling in the hair on his chest, "I've missed this closeness. This sharing with a man. It's one of the reasons I love working with you so much. I was used to my family—my father and brothers. I was the only girl and I spent a lot of time with them, and then later, with my husband. We were friends. I missed having that male perspective and when I started working for you, I found that again. I valued your friendship, Michael. I never told you that, but it's true." His arms stroked over her soft skin as he took in her words. She was saying something important here, though he didn't like thinking about all she'd lost. "I loved my husband, but he was never like the other men in my family. He wasn't military, so he didn't understand my roots and he let my father and brothers walk all over him." She laughed softly, but it was a sad sound. He hugged her close. "He wasn't at all like you, Michael. I think—" She kissed his chest, her voice lowering. "I think if I'd known you back then, I would never have married him. God, that's a terrible thing to say."

He held her tight, floored by her admission. "Never fear the truth, Leah. We can't change the past, but we can decide our future. I want us to continue working together and sleeping together. I want you in my office and in my bed. Even after you get pregnant and the baby comes."

"But we were only supposed to be making a baby here."

"I know," he prayed he was right about her feelings. "But I want more. I'm hoping you do to. I'm hoping you want more than just my baby. Am I right in thinking that maybe you want me—at least a little?"

She lifted up and met his eyes. "Oh, Michael. I do want you. I've wanted you for a very long time." She kissed him then and he felt as if he'd been given the world. He felt the truth of her words in her kiss and returned the sentiment. She pulled back far too soon. "I mean," she smiled sheepishly, "I want a baby too, but I've admired you for a long time. If—no, when—you move on, I'll treasure the baby we make together."

His cock hardened again within her and he began to move. "Right now, I can't imagine a time I won't want to be with you, Leah. Let's take it one step at a time. Tonight we'll get a start on that baby, and eventually have some dinner." He grinned at her as she began to move in counterpoint to his thrusts. "Maybe I'll even show you a little bit of what I like in the way of Domination. If that doesn't scare you off, we'll proceed from there." He reached up and bit her neck lightly. "One thing is sure, though, we can never go back."

"No," she leaned up and stroked his hair back from his face, "there's no going back. But I really don't want to."

"Good." Michael lifted her so she sat astride him and put a pillow behind his head so he could view her better. "Then ride me, woman. Do it right and I'll feed you dinner." He winked and growled when she responded by squeezing her inner muscles around his cock.

\* \* \* \*

Eventually they ate dinner, but it was a strange affair. Michael hand fed her every bite and demanded she suck his cock between dishes. Leah really didn't mind that at all. Especially when he sat her on the table and declared *she* was desert.

The next morning her nipples were sore from his lips and teeth, her pussy was tender, but her mouth could only grin. She stumbled back to her quarters, which were close by his, early in the morning to shower and change into a uniform. They were going to have to devise some kind of plan if this kept up. She'd almost run into two of her junior officers on her way back and only ducking behind a bulkhead had saved her from speculative looks and being the talk of the station grapevine.

Michael had Dominated her a little last night, though if the rumors she'd heard about some of the bedroom antics he'd gotten up to in the past were to be believed, he'd been very tame indeed. Still, she didn't mind following his orders as much as she thought she would. In fact, there was something incredibly sexy about a man who knew exactly what he wanted and didn't mind telling you how to go about pleasing him.

She worried as she entered her office, wondering how they would interact today after the marathon session last night. They never did get around to talking much about their relationship or how they'd deal with her plan to have Michael's baby. She knew Michael assumed she'd continue working for him even after the baby was born, but she just didn't know if she wanted to do that.

On the one hand, she couldn't stand the idea of leaving Michael. Especially now. She'd resigned herself to quitting when she'd made the decision to be impregnated with his sperm, but now that they'd changed the nature of their relationship and Michael knew about the baby, she didn't think she could go through with that part of her original plan. No, now she was warming to the idea of having Michael know his child and be part of their lives for as long as he could.

She knew she couldn't keep him, but by the same token, she wanted to give him the chance to know his baby. She didn't believe it was fair to ask him to father a baby he would never know. He had a right to be involved in her child's life, if he wanted to. And if his duties allowed.

Thoughts jumbled in her mind as she sat down at her desk and began her day. She was habitually the first person in the office. Michael usually came in right after her or sometimes they arrived together and worked companionably in their respective offices until the rest of the staff arrived.

Other parts of the station had control during the main command staff's off-shift and Leah's subordinates officially took Command and Control back an hour after she started her workday. In this way, she got a head start on anything that might've happened during her sleep interval and was ready to deal with it.

Luckily nothing of much import awaited her that morning. She didn't know if she could have dealt with a crisis on top of the nerves churning in her stomach as she prepared to face Michael after their night of passion. She'd left awkwardly this morning, stealing out of his suite while he was in the shower, like a thief in the night. She knew he wouldn't be happy about it, but she'd needed time to think—and clean up—before facing him again.

She heard his deep voice ring through the outer office as he greeted one of her junior officers who sounded as if she was just arriving herself. The floorplan was set up so that her office was the buffer between Michael's and the bustling C and C. Anyone wanting to get to the Commandant had to go through her first and she had enough rank and authority to deal with most matters without having to bother Michael for every little thing.

She had an assistant who sat just outside her door and acted as a further level of screening, also keeping a constant eye on the goings on in C and C, ready to call her if needed. In addition, both Leah and Michael had heads up displays they could monitor to keep track of operations

throughout the sector. C and C was the gathering point for information and both Leah and Michael had stations there when needed, but preferred to spend a good portion of their day—barring a crisis—in the quiet of their offices, away from the bustle of C and C.

Leah gathered her wits, trying to be as nonchalant as possible when Michael strode in and shut her door behind him. She knew from long experience that once the door was sealed, the office was sound tight. No one would hear anything they said, which was both a blessing and a curse at the moment.

Michael walked right up to her, not stopping until he'd taken her in his arms and kissed her to within an inch of her life. Her senses spun, her mind overloaded and all she could think of was the feel of his lips on hers, the flavor of him, the strength in his hands holding her tight against his powerful body.

When he drew back, she was dazed.

"Good morning, Leah." His voice was a husky whisper.

"Good morning, Michael."

"Now that's the way I wanted to start my day. Instead, I came out of the shower to an empty room. Why'd you sneak out?"

She could see the disapproval in his eyes. "I..." What could she say that wouldn't make her sound foolish? "I needed some time alone. To think."

"All right," he let go and set her away, stepping back. "Did it help?" His gaze studied her.

"To be honest, not really."

"I know you wanted to talk last night, but the situation got out of control fast. How about we try again tonight? Bring a change of clothes with you this time and maybe we can shower together tomorrow morning. Start the day off right. And maybe this time we'll actually get to talk a bit before the fireworks begin. What do you say?"

Relieved, she nodded. "I'd like that."

"Good." His smile warmed her as he moved away, heading for his office door. "Now, what have we got on the agenda for today. Lunch with Admiral Watts, right? I'll need those force reduction figures and redeployment schedule. And I don't care what the Admiral's staff says, I want you at that table with me. No way am I going to sit through another one of her poorly veiled innuendoes or blatant attempts at seduction. With you there, she'll think twice before putting her foot in it again."



SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

She laughed. "Poor Commandant. All his subordinates want to seduce him."

"Maybe so," he winked at her. "But you're the only one I'll actually let do it."

She knew everything would be all right then. Michael was in a great mood and it carried over to everything they did that day and for the days after. Each night they dined together and she stayed over, being careful not to be seen. They made love long into the night and woke together in Michael's big bed the next day, starting it together before they headed for work. Together.

They never did manage to talk all that much. They were always too hungry for each other by the time they were alone at night. It didn't seem to matter much until those times when Leah thought about the future. Then she'd worry until Michael caught her eye and winked. He had to know there was something preying on her mind and he probably had a good idea of what it was, but neither of them had the strength to resist the other long enough to discuss the nitty gritty of what would happen in the future.

Three, then four days passed, and they fell into a routine of sorts, until one morning they arrived at work to find a report from Tyron. Michael took it into his office and closed the door. An hour later, an urgent transmission came through and she entered the office, knowing this was important enough to interrupt whatever he was doing.

## Chapter Six

"Ty is on tight beam."

Leah's voice caressed him as she bustled into Michael's office, all business. She came around his desk and flicked on the controls that would bring the highly irregular signal to his comm unit. If Ty were contacting them this way, something was definitely up. His brother's face came up on the unit, a bit grainy, but Mike could read the urgency in Ty's eyes.

"Brother, things are worse than we suspected. Someone very highly placed is collaborating with the jits, allowing them to capture and transport human women and turning a blind eye as long as the jits pay up. Mike, someone is selling human females to the jit pirates." Mike's fist hit the desk as anger rode him. "Look, I don't have enough proof to nail anyone yet, and I think I'm close to finding out who's behind this, but my cover is a bit precarious. I may need more help here, Mike. Send a brother."

"Dammit! I'll come myself. This is too serious." Mike sent back the immediate, furious reply, knowing he'd have to wait the few moments it took for the tight beam signal to reach Ty. He turned to Leah. "What've we got in that region? Can we use a legitimate trip out there to cover our real purpose?"

"There's Smithson. She's got jurisdiction. We could always do an inspection tour and it wouldn't raise many eyebrows after her latest snafu."

"Good thinking." Damn, he loved this woman's quick mind and capable intellect. "Set the wheels in motion, Leah, but I want you to stay here."

"Like hell."

"Leah, I don't want to put you in danger. If Smithson or one of her people is in on this plot, they may try something."

"All the more reason for me to come along and watch your back. They'll be gunning for you, if anyone. Not me, Michael. You know that's

the truth. And I can talk to the other women. They won't talk freely to you, but they'll do so around me."

He hated that she was right.

"If I allow this, we'll have to be all business once we hit Smithson's domain. I don't want her to know I've broken my famous rule for you, Leah." He stood and reached out to stroke her hair back from her face. "Smithson already hates me, and all my staff by association. If she makes a move against me I don't want to give her any added reason to target you specifically."

"Do you really expect she'll make a grab for power? I don't think she has the nerve."

"She acts stupid, but I'm convinced it's all an act. That woman has ambition and I'm the one standing in her way. If she sees an opportunity to discredit me or take me out completely, she'll take it."

Leah came to him, hugging him close. Mike was astounded and very moved that she would show such open affection. It was one of the few times in his life a woman had sought to comfort him, to hug him in reassurance with nothing sexual about it. It was beautiful. No, *she* was beautiful. This woman was so incredibly special.

"Then we won't give her an opportunity, Michael." She snuggled her head into his chest as if it belonged there. Mike brought his hand up and stroked her hair, her back, emotion crowding his senses along with her delicate fragrance. "That woman is a viper."

"I couldn't agree more."

Mike just held her for long moments, enjoying the sensation of her in his arms. He'd never forget this moment.

\* \* \* \*

A day and a half later, they were underway. The trip was relatively short, though Mike didn't like being out of touch with Ty while he was undercover. Who knew what the crazy Risker would get up to?

They arrived with little fanfare, an unannounced inspection tour taking Smithson and her entire staff by surprise. Just the way he wanted it.

They were given the best suite the small station had to offer and Mike installed Leah in one of the two bedrooms. He knew they were under surveillance, so he kept Leah close, but not too close. He wouldn't put Leah in even more danger should this mission go wrong by letting Smithson know just how deeply they were involved personally.

When Mike switched on the jamming devices he did it in private, smiling sinisterly at Smithson's badly hidden cameras in the moment before killing them all with the pulse of interfering frequencies. She had to know now that he was on to her surveillance. It was a dare of a kind, but he didn't expect her to do much about it, and Mike needed the privacy to contact Ty.

"Brother?" Michael was careful of his wording lest others somehow tap into the secure signal.

"What took you so long, Mikel?" Ty's use of the slightly different name alerted Mike to the fact that Ty thought others might be listening. It also spoke of just whom he thought could be monitoring the conversation. Jits, no doubt. The crazy Risker had gone deep undercover and was probably up to his ears in pirates.

"You know how it is. When can we meet up?"

"I'm with some friends right now. How about I comm back when I know what my schedule will be like? Say in about two standards?"

"I'll be here. Don't be late."

"Wouldn't dream of it. Take care, brother."

Leah was with Michael two standards later when his secure comm beeped. Michael turned on the jamming device and answered promptly.

"Can't talk long, Mike," Ty's voice came urgently over the unit. "Meet me at the following coordinates in exactly three standards. Don't be late." A string of coordinates lit the screen of Michael's secure wrist comp.

"I'll be there." He signed off and turned to face Leah's determined expression.

"I'm coming, too. You can't go out there without anyone to watch your back."

"Leah, be reasonable. Most likely Ty's infiltrated the pirate network I bet is running in the background of this station. That's no place for a woman, even one as capable as yourself."

"Thanks. I think. But the fact remains. You can't go in there alone. What if it's a trap?"

"What if it is? Do you think you'll fare any better with jit pirates than I will? They'll have you naked and spread before you can say hello." He recognized that stubborn set to her chin. Mike sighed, knowing she would follow whether he allowed it or not. Some Dom he was turning out to be. This woman always seemed to get her way. He could deny her

nothing. "Dammit, Leah! If you do this, you'll do it by my rules. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, so now you want to play obedient little soldier." He had to chuckle at the mischief in her eyes. "I'll remember this, sweetheart. Believe it. Now, if you go, you go as a civilian. You'll leave behind all identification. Do you have anything sexy to wear?"

\* \* \* \*

Leah had packed a few pieces for casual wear, and with a few adjustments and some quick thinking, she had a reasonably nice outfit in her carryall as they snuck out of the visiting officers' quarters later that night. They'd go in uniform until they hit a station hotel, then go in separately to use the facilities and stash their uniforms in the room she'd rent on her altered civilian ID chip. They'd rendezvous in the hall and work their way to the more deserted parts of the station—the mechanical sections—where they'd meet with Tyron.

Everything went as planned. The hotel was as nondescript as possible with no live staff. Everything was handled by computer and the rooms were incredibly small, but suitable for their purposes. No one would remark on a male human entering or exiting because no one was around to see.

It was off-shift so most of the station was either sleeping or on duty at their various posts. Few, if any, saw them in the halls as they made their way stealthily forward. When they reached the coordinates Ty had given, Mike pulled Leah close to his side. She trusted his enhanced senses to ferret out threats her regular human ears couldn't hear. She knew Sons were gifted with superior genetics that made them smarter, faster, and sharper than regular humans.

"Long time, no see, brother." Ty's voice came to them from just ahead as the man stepped into the bare light of the poorly lit hall.

"Good to see you too, Ty. How goes it?" Michael was being cautious, Leah sensed, feeling the tension in the arm wrapped possessively around her waist.

"I see you've got a new toy." Ty nodded in her direction. She wanted to be appalled by the phrasing, but she sensed more was being said here than met the eye. Ty knew full well who and what she was. She didn't look *that* different in civilian clothing. He had to recognize her, yet he was acting as if she were a stranger. That meant they were being

watched. She played along, knowing the men were posing as jit'suku pirates.

They could do it, too. Where regular human males didn't usually grow to the size of jit'suku males, Sons of Amber were as large, hard muscled, and every bit as fierce as the alien warriors. Sons could easily pass as jits and it was rumored some jit DNA was actually used in their design, which was probably a big part of what made them immune to the jit virus.

But if they were posing as jits, what was she? Girlfriend? Not likely. She was probably relegated to the role of sex slave. She would have objected, but being Michael's sex slave held a certain amount of forbidden appeal, and they really needed to get more information in order to break up this smuggling ring.

"I'm still training her." Michael let her go. "Turn around, Lilla. Show my brother your perky ass."

She gasped at his command, something inside her squirming to heated life. Slowly, she turned, uncertain at first, following the silent direction of his spinning finger, indicating he wanted her to twirl slowly. He stopped her the same way, shocking her when he reached out and grabbed her ass with a firm hand, squeezing snugly as she rose on her toes.

"Take a look at that." Michael's voice was admiring as he acted out a very frank and tactile appraisal of her posterior. Warmth flooded her womb as his fingers caressed down her crack.

"Nice piece," Ty said, patting her other cheek familiarly as she gasped. When she looked over her shoulder at him, he winked with that devilish smile he was famous for. Women sighed over Tyron's smile. Little did Leah ever imagine he'd be fondling her tush in a public corridor in front of Michael and whoever else might be watching, and even more, that she'd like it. "So what brings you here, brother?"

Just that easily, she was dismissed. She kept silent, walking behind Michael as he'd instructed her to do when he went over the exhaustive list of possible scenarios before they ever left his quarters. He'd prepared her for all contingencies and though this was one of the less likely occurrences, she was ready to act the slave—as long as that's all it was...an act.

"I'm looking for a few more like her. I've got a buyer lined up who can take at least fifty if I can get my hands on them."

"Fifty?" Ty whistled as they walked. "That's more than you've ever handled on your own before."

"I know. That's why I came looking for you, Ty. I'll cut you in for half if you'll help me."

Ty made a show of considering his offer. "I don't know, Mik. I'm working for someone else now and he's got a sweet deal here."

Michael made a show of looking around. "Yeah, I was kind of surprised when your coordinates led me to a human military station. You've got brass balls, brother, or friends in very high places."

Ty held up his hands, palms outward though he smiled craftily. "Not my friends, Mik. Like I said, I'm working for someone else now. He's the one with the connections."

Michael tilted his head, as if considering. "You think he might be up for the job then? I still need to come up with fifty women pretty quick."

"I'm not sure, but I'll introduce you. You can ask him yourself."

They'd stopped in front of a small hatch and Ty motioned them inside as he opened the door. It was a small bedroom, undoubtedly with surveillance. *Perhaps, she thought, the jit leader wants to see if we're on the level.* They'd have to put on a bit of a show, but she was willing to trust Michael to know her boundaries. Though she was fast discovering where Michael Amber was concerned, she had precious few.

"What's this? Can't we talk to him now? I'm in a hurry to get this job completed, Ty."

Ty smiled and stepped back. "It's off-shift. Nothing goes on here during these hours. Rest, sleep, whatever you like. I'll see if I can arrange a meeting for early next shift. Until then, stay here. I'm going to lock you in, Mik. It's for your own safety. As you said, we are on a human military station, after all."

"I don't like this, brother." A hint of steel entered Michael's voice as he held the door open with one hand as Ty stepped through back into the hall.

"Trust me, Mik. This is the way it has to be."

Michael sighed and stepped back, allowing Tyron to close and lock the door from the outside.

Then he turned to her.

## Chapter Seven

"Strip."

Mike liked the way her eyes flared at his order. She was playing the submissive now, and he loved the rush of power he felt at her willing acquiescence. She'd been with him every step of the way on their journey of sexual discovery so far, but now he'd have to push her farther than he'd ever pushed her before. Their very lives depended on it.

Ty had gotten them into something much more dangerous than Mike had bargained for when he'd let Leah to follow him into the bowels of the station. If he'd known they'd end up going undercover with jit pirates right here, Mike would never have let Leah out of the cabin. He'd have tied her up, if necessary, but he wouldn't have allowed her within a light year of this kind of danger.

There was no law in this part of the station. He knew Smithson—or someone equally high ranking—had to be in on this in order for a population of male pirates to have taken over this much of the predominantly female-run station. Something very strange was going on here and Mike vowed to get to the bottom of it. One way or another.

But right now he had a little show to put on for the cameras undoubtedly watching his every move. He hoped Leah realized it too, but judging from the way she followed his lead, she knew something was up. Good. That would make this easier.

"I said, strip, slave." He moved around her, waiting just a moment before reaching up and ripping off her tunic, reducing it to shreds. She cried out and he smacked her ass once as a reminder. She quieted beautifully. "You disappoint me, woman. When I give a command, I expect you to obey immediately. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?" She hesitated and he tugged her head back, yanking her hair gently. "Who is your master, little one?"

"You are." Her voice washed over his senses, sending him into orbit with an arousal the likes of which even he had never before experienced.



Having Leah at his full command was a new and very exciting experience.

"Very good. Now what do you call me?"

"Master." Her whisper floated to his ear, pleasing him greatly.

"Good girl." He patted her ass, caressing the soft skin almost absently, though he would never forget anything about this moment if he lived forever. "Now get on the bed and spread your legs. Show me your pussy."

He stood at the foot of the bed as she scrambled onto the platform, obeying him with grace and speed. She seemed eager to please him, causing his cock to jerk under his clothing. Quickly, he stripped out of his nondescript flight suit and grasped his cock in one hand. It was fairly screaming for release.

"Rub yourself, kitten. Make yourself wet and ready for me." From what he could see, she was already quite wet, which worked to his advantage. He didn't think he could hold back much this first time. He wanted her too badly.

No, this first time would be hard and fast. He'd waited too long. He needed her now. In the back of his mind he also knew the watchers would expect little in the way of care be shown to a slave girl. They expected him to be just like them—taking what he wanted brutally with little regard for the human woman the jits considered inferior.

It might look brutal to those who watched, but Mike would make sure Leah enjoyed every minute of his domination, his desire...his loving. Because that's what it felt like, though he'd never really experienced such a thing before. He felt things deep in his soul for this woman. If it wasn't love, it was something very close.

Mike knelt on the bed, throwing the rest of his clothing to the floor negligently as he crawled between Leah's spread thighs. She was wet and glistening, her abdomen palpating as she neared a peak. And he hadn't even touched her yet. She was eager for him...for his dominance.

"Hands up, woman. Above your head and don't move them. This is going to be hard and fast. Just the way I like it."

He winked at her as he came over her body, leaning on his hands as he bent down to kiss her nipples, sucking them deep, one at a time. She moaned and writhed enticingly beneath him as he seated his cock at her dripping entrance. He rubbed his length against her, up and down her slot as she moaned again.

"Please," she begged. It was music to his ears. "Please, Master!"

Unable to hold back another minute, Mike reared back and plunged his cock home within her tight sheath. She cried out at the sudden entrance, but he could feel her with him every step of the way. She climaxed as he pumped just once, deep inside.

"Hang on, sweetheart," he whispered in her ear as he gathered her hips in his hands, preparing for the ride yet to come. When her contractions slowed, he began thrusting. Slow at first, he built his strokes, angling this way and that, loving the feel of her gloving him in warmth. She was built for him. For this. He'd never had any other woman feel so right.

Mike fucked in and out of her tight pussy, reveling in the feel of her, the little sounds she made as she rose higher in passion once more. She was so responsive to him. Even playing the role of slave. She was like a dream. The perfect woman to match his Dominant nature.

He'd never dared push her this far when they were together. He'd tempered his dominance so as not to scare her off, but circumstances had played right into this. Michael had to act the role of master here, fulfilling some of his baser—and very real—needs at the same time. He thrilled inside every time Leah called him master. He'd heard the word from many other women, but never one he admired this much. Never one he knew whose will was as strong, if not stronger, than his own. Never had it felt so damn good to know the woman he fucked surrendered to him utterly, and by surrendering, captured him completely.

Michael shoved into her a few more times, pushing her, sensing her nearing a peak. This time, he went over with her, shooting his load within her hot depths. She cried out, but he captured her words with his mouth, kissing her deeply as he groaned his own completion.

Damn, the woman made him hot. Each time with her was better than the last.

He withdrew, gazing down at her with a feeling of satisfaction. Her eyes were dazed, her body covered with a fine sheen of perspiration that made her sultry skin sparkle. She was magnificent.

He hadn't been able to fuck her on their trip out and going without was difficult. Michael stood from the bed, holding his cock to hide the instant hardening as much as he could. Let the watchers think he had to work to get himself hard again—as they probably would have to do. He needed more of Leah, but he also needed to keep his head. They were no doubt being observed. He had to behave as a jit would. Not as a Son of

Amber, who had recuperative powers greater than any other humanoid male.

"Come here, woman, and suck my cock."

Leah's eyes widened, but she moved to comply, playing her role to the hilt. Michael knew her well enough to see the little spark of excitement in her eyes as she sat on the edge of the bed before him. But it wasn't a submissive enough pose for the cameras. Michael stopped her, grabbing a pillow from the bed and tossing it at his feet.

"Kneel."

She blinked up at him only once before complying beautifully. If he wasn't much mistaken, she was enjoying this every bit as much as he was. She actually liked following his orders—even when they were issued roughly. Perhaps even more so.

Michael watched her reactions carefully, cataloging her likes and dislike for future reference. So far, she was with him. More than with him. She seemed eager to know what he'd order her to do next. Hell, she'd even liked it when Ty was palming her ass at his suggestion. He wondered idly if she'd have enjoyed Ty's attentions even if he wasn't around, but decided against it. For one thing, Ty had tried his moves on her a few times over the years when he'd come to see Michael and been shot down every time. Leah was nobody's fool. She liked Ty as a friend, but not as a potential lover. It was Michael's sperm she'd chosen, after all, to make her baby, and Michael's bed she'd been sleeping in for the past weeks.

Her little hand took over from his as she licked the head of his cock. She was very good at giving head and Mike planned to enjoy every moment of it—audience or no. Still, his thoughts raced.

"Did you like my brother, little one? Did you enjoy his touch?"

Wide eyes stared up at him as her movements slowed. He heard a smacking sound as she drew away.

"He's nice, Master," she said softly, "but he isn't you."

Mike's cock twitched in her hands. How did the woman know exactly what to say to send his temperature soaring even higher? She was a mind reader of some kind. Had to be.

"Did I say you could stop?"

"Sorry, Master." She smiled at him before resuming her duties, taking him deep into her throat the way she knew he loved. She was very talented and it wasn't long before he came down her throat, some of his cum spilling out to drip down her flushed cheeks.

When he could stand without swaying, he cupped her cheeks with his palms, wiping away the excess. There was so much he wanted to say but couldn't. Not with the jits watching their every move. He hoped she knew how much she meant to him.

If he'd known they'd be in the thick of things, he never would have taken her with him on this mission. He knew she was a skilled officer who could more than take care of herself, but he hated to see her in danger. It went against his grain to put her in peril, especially now that they were lovers. Even before they'd become intimate, Leah had held a special place in his life. He would send himself and others into the field, keeping her in relative safety on the station, unwilling to risk her more than necessary. She was his anchor and he didn't know what he'd do if anything happened to her.

"Under the covers with you, girl." He couldn't help the affectionate tone in his voice anymore than he could help the gentle way he touched her. He only hoped it didn't look or sound too suspicious to their watchers.

She scrambled into the bed, holding up the corner of the spread for him as he followed. When he tugged her into his arms, she went willingly, snuggling into him as if she belonged there.

They slept for a while, but Michael kept alert for any possible threat. Sons didn't require as much sleep as regular humans, but he put up the pretense of sleep to fit in. Leah slept deeply, secure in his arms. He loved the way she felt there and he spent much of his energy trying to stop thinking about her and focus on the mission. It was difficult, to say the least.

But when the hatch unlocked and slid open, Michael was instantly alert. He didn't move until he recognized Ty's grinning face in the doorway.

"Come on, Mik. You've been invited to dinner." Ty stepped in and threw his pants at him. Michael caught them reflexively as Leah stirred and woke next to him.

Ty looked at the sheet she clutched to her chest and then up to Michael, winking. Son of a bitch, the man was going to get a show, and he knew it. Michael's gut clenched, knowing there was no way to protect Leah's modesty in such a situation. The false expression on Ty's face was enough to tell him they were still being monitored closely.

"Up, girl. We're going to dinner." Michael ripped the covers away and slapped Leah's pretty ass.

Ty whistled between his teeth as he stared at Leah's bouncing tits. She had bigger breasts than anyone had guessed hidden under that uniform, and Michael well knew his brother's preferences. Ty got an eyeful as Michael dressed, then threw Leah's clothing at her. She squirmed into it, Ty watching all the while and enjoying the show, judging by the tightening fit of his pants.

But Michael couldn't object. Neither could Leah, but one look at her flushed face told Michael she enjoyed this a little more than he'd expected. Rather than shame, he read titillation in her eyes—and her perky nipples. They were pushing against the soft fabric of her dress as she smoothed it down. The thin material did nothing to hide her rather obvious excitement.

Michael did his best not to notice the way Ty looked at Leah. It was all part of the act, after all, though Michael knew his brother was duly impressed with Leah's...attributes. They exited the room and Ty led them down several small corridors to a much larger room. Men's voices could be heard and as they entered, Michael counted about fourteen pirates, already seated, eating. There were three tables—one large one in the center and two smaller, flanking it. At the largest table sat what Mike assumed to be the leader of this ragtag group. He had a girl on each knee and one on the floor between his legs.

Ty brought Michael to the chair opposite the leader and introduced them. There were a few tense moments before the jit man nodded and motioned them all to sit and then dinner was served.

A group of women brought the food out and then stayed with the men, to serve it and eat themselves. Some were treated as equals, most as slaves. Michael took his cue from those around him, issuing instructions for Leah as the food was placed before him. She sat on his knee and cut up the meat, serving him first, then herself at his direction.

So far so good.

Everything rolled along fine until the food was gone. Then some of the pirates began desert, but it wasn't sweet rolls they were after.

"So, Mik," the pirate leader leered at Leah, "you want more like her?"

"If at all possible," Michael answered neutrally. He didn't like the look in the man's eyes as he watched Leah.

"Well, let's have a look at her." Some of the other pirates cheered at their leader's words. "Got to know what we're aiming for, don't we?"

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Michael felt Leah tense on his knee and her eyes widened with just a hint of fright. Michael tried to sooth her, running his hand over her thigh and squeezing gently where no one could see.

With a little shove, he pushed her off his knee to a standing position between himself and Ty. He could use his brother's help here and knew Leah trusted them both to see to her safety. The next few minutes could get interesting, depending on how these heathen pirates reacted to what he had in mind. Mike had a plan. It was daring, but it might just work to protect Leah and their cover all at the same time.

"Take off your dress, Lil, and show them your tits."

Her eyes widened, but he couldn't back down. This was too important.

## Chapter Eight

"Drop the dress, Lilla."

Michael's voice sounded loud to her in the room full of watching pirates. She couldn't believe what he'd just ordered her to do. Yet, she didn't see any way out of this situation. They were badly outnumbered. She had to trust him and hope he had a workable plan.

Her gaze shot to Ty, seated next to Michael at the table. Ty watched her with amused speculation. Only she saw the little wink of reassurance. These two men would look after her as much as possible in this crazy situation. She knew Michael would protect her with his life, but having Ty there as backup—and to stabilize Michael's volatile temper—made her feel just the tiniest bit better, and somewhat disloyal at the same time.

Michael was a Dom. He couldn't help the temper, but Ty didn't suffer from the same affliction. As a Risker, he was always aware of the odds of any given situation and his judgment would be invaluable in this amazingly tense situation.

Still, she hesitated. She was completely naked beneath the dress. She clutched the edges of the neckline as the pirates laughed uproariously.

"Can't control your woman yet, eh, Mik?" One of the jits leered at her. "Give her time. She'll learn who is master. Of course, I'd be more than happy to help you teach her that lesson."

"Thank you, friend," Michael's voice was smooth, but held recognizable threat. "This wench is mine to teach and I will do so." He snapped at her. "Lilla, come here."

Hesitantly, she shuffled her bare feet to stand even closer to his side. His face was so hard, she barely recognized him under the facade he had to put on in front of these hard alien men. All but his eyes. She could see his desire when he turned his eyes to hers.

His hands moved up to hers, grasping the dress and tearing it down the middle with one powerful tug as the jit pirates cheered lewdly. As she

gasped, he slid the remnants down her arms, leaving her completely bare in front of all those men.

"When I give an order, I expect it to be followed without question or demur, Lilla." Michael's eyes bore into hers, lighting a fire in the pit of her womb that shouldn't be. Not here. Not in front of all these people. "You have earned punishment for your failure to comply. Don't make it any worse. Do as I say now and I will wait to punish you until we are in private. Any further disobedience and I will punish you right here and now. Do you understand?"

Slowly she nodded.

"Speak when I ask you a question, Lilla. Do you understand?"

"Yes...Master." Her pussy grew warm as she felt the multitude of eyes on her bare body, but most of all, the expression in Michael's eyes made her want to submit in a way she'd never felt before.

"Good girl." Michael caressed one nipple, tugging at the point and raising a flush of heat to her skin. "Now go sit on the table in front of Ty and show him your pussy."

She jumped, her gaze shooting to the other Son of Amber as he grinned back at her lasciviously. She trusted Michael implicitly, but this...this was a bit much. Michael's hand smacked her ass, bringing her attention back to him sharply.

"I gave an order, missy. Do you wish to disobey?"

"No, Master, but—"

Michael sat back, shaking his head. Disappointment shown on his features, but she could also see something like satisfaction sparkling in his eyes. The men in the room watched too, eager to see how the newcomer would handle his woman.

"Without demur, I said. You've disobeyed me again, woman." Faster than she could blink, Michael had her over his knee. Her bare ass faced Ty and the rest of the men on that side of the room as Michael ran his palm over her cheeks. "You've earned punishment and I warned you it would be public this time, Lilla. Do you understand me, woman?"

"Yes, Master." Her breath came in short pants as her head hung down over Michael's thickly muscled legs.

He smacked her hard, soothing between the open-palmed slaps with circular rubbing motions. He alternated cheeks, hard hits with softer ones, then when she thought this couldn't get any more embarrassing—or arousing—he cavalierly spread her thighs apart and delved into the wetness gathered there with strong, knowing fingers.



"Look at this brother," he talked over her head to Ty and a moment later she felt other fingers probing her cunt. Ty stuck two fingers right up her pussy, stroking deep and rubbing that secret place within her channel that brought her the greatest pleasure. She tried to bite back a moan, but wasn't entirely successful.

"The wench likes her discipline, Mikel. You're a lucky bastard. And her pussy's tight as a drum."

"These human wenches don't see a lot of action with all their males gone. I've had quite a few cute little virgins in the past weeks," one of the pirates boasted from behind Michael. Leah looked up through her hair to see the man's face. When this was all over, she'd personally like to kick him in the balls. She'd remember what he looked like and if she got her chance later, she'd take it.

Michael regained her attention with a few well-placed swats to her ass and lower, on the edges of her pussy. That made her squirm and flood the fingers still rubbing her clit. Ty was certainly getting a handful. Leah wanted to die of embarrassment. Either that, or pleasure. Who knew being spanked in front of a room full of alien men and two eager Sons of Amber could make her this horny?

The fingers left her and Michael tossed her back to her feet so quickly, her head spun. She brushed hair out of her face with shaking fingers, her eyes glued to Michael's. His face nearly glowed with satisfaction. She'd done that. Her submission to him had put that look on his face and she reveled in that for just a quick moment. Michael placed one strong arm around her waist and pulled her close, nipping lightly at her nipple and tugging it taut with his teeth. The sensation made her tremble and reminded her of the predicament they were all in as the pirates hooted and called out encouragement. She felt heat rise to the surface of her skin as she blushed, probably just as Michael had intended. The man was an expert at getting her to respond in just the way he wanted. The thought should have annoyed her, but it didn't really. She'd do anything for Michael and she really didn't mind that he knew it.

"Now," he said in a voice the brooked no argument, "go sit on the table in front of my brother and spread your legs for him. Use your fingers to spread yourself. Show him your pussy."

She wanted to protest, but she also didn't want another spanking. Sitting on the hard table would be uncomfortable enough after just a few stinging swats of Michael's hand. She didn't want to disobey again and earn more. At least not right away.

Rubbing her sore cheek, Leah sat gingerly on the table, shifting around Ty, who didn't move to make her life easier. No, he sat there, making her brush against him and work around his muscular bulk, lifting her leg high in the air, over his lap. He surprised her by catching her calf in one big hand, coaxing her to place her foot on the edge of the table, then lifting her other foot to the same place on the opposite side. This position opened her wide, exposing both pussy and ass as he used his hands to spread her legs as wide as they'd go.

"She's a flexible little thing," Ty commented to Michael, talking over her in a way that drove her crazy, but also made her hot.

"Use your fingers, Lilla," Michael reminded her. She balanced on one hand, leaning back slightly, using the other to hold open the outer lips so Ty could get a good view. All the pirates rapidly filling the space behind his chair were also getting a good show, she realized, but she knew Michael wouldn't let anyone touch her...without his permission. She wondered just how far he'd go in proving his worth among these alien pirates and how far he'd push her.

So far, everything he'd done and asked of her had only driven her arousal higher. She hadn't known she would ever engage in this sort of behavior, but it felt good. Better than good, if the sticky liquid flooding her pussy was any indication. She never knew she had exhibitionist tendencies, but then she'd led a pretty tame life since joining the military. The absence of men made sexual self-discovery a bit difficult at best.

She wobbled on her precarious perch and Ty covered her hand with his own. "It's all right, doll. I'll take over from here." She moved her hand back as Ty's large fingers began stroking up and down, around her pussy. He lingered on the sides of her clit, never quite touching as he dipped his blunt-tipped fingers into her well over and over. One, then two, then three fingers found their way up her channel, spiking her arousal higher as she pressed back against the hard table, squirming against the pleasure. "I bet she tastes sweet," Ty shocked a gasp from her as he winked. "Most human cunts do."

"Try her and find out, brother." Michael's off-hand permission stunned her, but the fire in his eyes when she looked over at him ignited a fire in her womb. He was enjoying every moment of this—her compliance with his wishes, her submission.

She held his gaze until Ty's lips closed over her clit, shocking her into a convulsive shudder that took her by surprise. The pirates laughed and cheered as Ty rode her through a small completion. She felt him

licking at her cum, probing her hole with his tongue and stroking her clit as he ate her more thoroughly than she'd ever experienced. The man had talent.

Leah panted as Ty came up for air, his concentration seemingly total on her pussy as he inserted one finger from each of his hands into her channel. He tugged gently in opposite directions, perhaps to see how wide she'd go, perhaps to open her up for later. She had no idea, but she loved the sensation, creaming for him again and again as he spoke encouragement.

"She tastes good, brother. She has a sweet pussy and a hole wide enough for either of us—or both." A shiver took her at his startling words, but Ty only winked, his devilish expression telling her he was teasing. *Wasn't he?*

"What about her ass? What do you think of it?" Michael's lazy question didn't fool her. He was probably hard as a rock beneath the table, ready for action.

"I'm not sure. Let's see." With shocking speed, Ty rearranged her legs and had her off the table, twirled around to face it. Gently he pushed down between her shoulder blades until her torso lay on the table, her ass sticking up in the air between Ty and Michael's chairs. Two very different male hands stroked her cheeks. Michael's touch was possessive, Ty's merely arousing.

Ty's hands moved, spreading her cheeks as she was pressed forward against the table. "Looks tight," he commented as Michael's fingers moved within the crevice to tease her.

"That can be remedied."

"Brothers, allow me to give you this." The pirate leader rolled something across the table at Michael. Leah couldn't see what it was, but when she looked up, she saw other human women already being fucked by the pirates all around. The leader of the group had a wench riding his cock as he sat in his chair and his second in command stood over another girl who lay writhing on the table as he rammed an impressive organ between her legs. Other women were being similarly used all over the large room. It was a full out orgy and Leah guessed she and the little show Michael was making of her was one of the main entertainments.

She understood his plan all at once. In order to keep her safe from being jumped by every pirate in the room, he made damn sure they were all too hot to wait. He'd used her body and her reluctance to show it as a way to inflame the jits, letting them watch her be punished then

pleasured until they found women of their own to take the edge off. Michael's slow and very public path to pleasure ensured that Leah was left to them—Michael and Ty alone—for as long as they proved good entertainment. Little did the jits know they'd tangled with a sexual master. Sons of Amber knew how to prolong pleasure. They were probably the most skilled males in all the universe at such things. The pirates would tire long before Michael ever ended this little show.

A tongue shocked her back to the moment. Ty, she guessed from the angle, was licking her ass! The thought should have disgusted her, but the sensations riding up her spine were anything but disgust. She felt an object—cold and wet—swirling through the juices of her pussy and upwards as Ty moved away. The object warmed as it spent time next to her skin, but it was definitely foreign.

She gasped as Michael's sure hand slid the hard thing partway into her ass. It was some kind of dildo, she guessed, or a plug. Yeah, it had to be a plug of some sort, intended to train her to take a cock back there.

She'd never thought of doing such a thing before, but suddenly she wanted to try whatever Michael wanted. He was the expert, after all. If he thought she'd enjoy taking a cock up her ass, she was willing to give it a try. He was her trusted guide on this journey of sexual discovery.

Michael leaned over her as his hand pushed the plug deeper, little by little. He breathed in her ear, whispering low as his chest brushed her bare back.

"Take it for me, baby. Push out and accept this. Accept me. Accept all that I am and all that I want of you."

His hot words fired her soul as the plug inched deeper. Michael pressed tight against her back, pushing her into the table, placing a bit of his weight on her, trapping her in his desire.

"That's good, sweetheart. So good. It'll be even better when it's my cock up in there. Good and tight and a sweet, sweet burn." He eased up as she sucked in deep draughts of air. "Or maybe it'll be Ty's cock up your ass while I'm in your pussy. What do you think of that, Lilla?" His voice sounded louder now and she looked up to find the pirate leader's eyes riveted on her body as his muscles tightened and he shot his load into the pretty girl riding his cock.

Leah moaned as Michael played with the plug. It burned, creating sensations she'd never even guessed at before. It was strangely pleasurable, but mostly because of the pleasure it gave Michael. Her subservience was firing him higher, she could feel it in his touch and see

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it in his eyes. She'd never seen him so impassioned before unless it was in anger, but this wasn't anger at all. This was desire. Stark, brutal, steaming desire. For her.

The thought made her knees weak.

The plug in her bottom seemed to get bigger and she squeaked, unable to hold back her surprise. Michael chuckled low in her ear.

"This toy grows, Lilla. Every time you accept a new level of entry, it pushes you for more. Just like I will. Until you're mine in every sense—in every orifice—in every way."

"Master!" She gasped as the plug grew larger again. It seemed also to secrete some kind of lubricant that kept replenishing so she was never dry, never too uncomfortable.

"I like the sound of that," Michael growled, moving back to sit behind her, his hands never leaving the round planes of her butt. "Now come here and sit on my lap." His hands guided her gently, brooking no argument when she tried to ease down on his lap. The plug gave her pause, but Michael wouldn't let that stop him as he pushed down steadily on her waist until she was seated on one powerful thigh.

He had one arm casually draped around her shoulder, plucking at her nipple with a relaxed rhythm that did nothing to calm the escalating fire in her loins. Michael was playing with her, teaching her body how to respond to him and she liked it all too much. She could easily become his slave in truth if she weren't extremely careful, but that could wait. For now, she was enjoying his touch—and his orders—too much to complain about much of anything.

## Chapter Nine

The pirate captain, Nik'ael Jetsurat, was finished with his woman for the moment and leaned back to appraise Mike. Sure, he was looking at the pretty picture Leah made on Mike's lap, but the Son of Amber knew the other warrior's eyes were assessing what he could see of the new man in his midst. Mike knew how to play this game. Don't give an inch and don't make trouble. As a Dom he was good at the first part. It was the second half of the equation he sometimes had problems with.

But his steadying influence was perched naked on his knee. Like nothing else, Leah's presence here warned him to keep his cool. He would do all he could to keep her safe, including swallow his pride. For her, he'd do anything.

"Your woman," Nik'ael gestured with a full mug of beer towards Leah. "Where'd you get her?"

Mike thought fast. "I came across her ship about a month ago. A luxury yacht, if you can believe it. She'd taken off on her own. Just this one and a co-pilot that I gave to a friend on the way. I thought I'd keep this one," he hoisted her a bit higher on his knee, setting her breasts to jiggling enticingly, "for myself. It's taken a while to train her and she still has lapses, but eventually I'll get her to obey."

"You like them submissive, then? It's not an easy road, brother." The pirate shook his head as if he knew of whence he spoke. Mike looked at the man with fresh eyes. This was a man who'd tried to dominate a woman and failed utterly. Out there somewhere was the woman who had bested this pirate chief. The idea gave Mike hope, for if a man had once known defeat, he would have either learned from it or remained foolish. This man looked like nobody's fool, though he struck Mike as an odd sort of pirate.

Mike picked up his mug of beer and drank, holding the other man's gaze. "It's the only road for me, Captain."

"It's like that, eh? I guess you wouldn't be willing to share her around then? Pity."

"Not until I've conquered her completely. Perhaps then, but not before."

The pirate captain laughed and drank deeply of his beer. "The mother goddess probably hates your guts, Mik. I hope you find it's worth Her damnation."

Mike shrugged. "For me there's no other way. It's just the way I'm made."

The jit leader leaned back in his chair. "I knew a set of brothers like you once. They came to no good end."

"I'll take my chances."

The pirate nodded and settled down to business. "So, why have you come to me?"

Mike set about explaining his need for fifty human women and they negotiated an arrangement where Nik'ael might supply the women for a hefty portion of the cut. Mike asked a few pointed questions, but the pirate was irritatingly circumspect about details. Only Leah's calming presence kept Mike's temper in check. Just by being there with him, she cemented the deal, allowing him to act like any other jit'suku pirate, interested only in profit and sex.

They talked business for about half a standard before they concluded their negotiations. The pirate would make his decision and let them know by the next morning if they were going to do business or not. Then he turned back to his slave girl and Mike got up to leave with Leah, inviting Ty to join them.

He'd gleaned a few important things from his conversation with the pirate captain. For one thing, jit women were scarce enough to create a high-paying market for human women. The why of it, he didn't know, but he'd find out. Somehow.

The pirate didn't even blink an eye when Mike said he wanted fifty women. The thought that this bastard might be used to sending even larger quantities of human women to the jit'suku home galaxy made Mike wince. This smuggling ring was much worse than he'd thought.

He also wondered why jit'suku women were so rare. From all reports before the war had started in earnest, jit'suku were much like humans in that about fifty percent of their population was male and roughly fifty percent female. Certainly the cultural differences were great, causing most jit women to stay on their home worlds with only the males venturing to the stars and making war on the Milky Way Galaxy.

Mike couldn't come right out and ask why women were suddenly such a rare commodity, though he'd sorely wanted to. The pirate leader's words had alluded to some great tragedy and Mike had a sneaking suspicion—based on mounting evidence—the jit civilization was in dire straits.

But he couldn't talk freely about any of this. Not yet. He knew they were most likely still being monitored. There was no help for it. They'd have to stay the night in this sector of the station, which would probably cause havoc on the legit side of the base. Smithson would be wondering where they were, trying to find them and figure out what they were inspecting incognito for so long. It would drive the woman crazy. Mike liked the idea of that—as long as she didn't figure out exactly where they were. He'd laid the groundwork before ever leaving Atlantia Station and contingency messages would be sent from his base that would send her searching for them in all the wrong directions.

They arrived back at the small compartment they'd used earlier and Mike motioned for Leah to precede him through the door. He couldn't keep his eyes off her pretty ass, plugged and primed, ready for him. Ty would be part of this, too. Mike had noted the way Ty's touch excited Leah when they'd played to the crowd. He wouldn't let Ty take her pussy—that was for Mike alone—but he'd let his brother participate in other ways. Ty probably needed relief as badly as he did, and Mike wanted to give this experience to Leah. Few human women even knew one lover in these dark days, much less two at once.

If any woman deserved all the pleasure he could bring her, it was Leah. She was the most important person in the universe to him and he'd keep her safe any way he could. For now, if keeping her safe—keeping their cover story in tact—meant showing her a pleasure she'd never had, so be it. She'd love it. He'd make certain of it.

\* \* \* \*

Leah walked gingerly into the small cabin. The plug wasn't exactly uncomfortable, but it was definitely strange. Michael's possessive gaze seared her skin and she schooled herself not to show too much alarm when Ty followed them into the compartment as if he belonged there. No doubt the jit pirates who were monitoring them expected both men to have her. The forbidden thought of such decadence sent a secret thrill up her spine. All she really needed was Michael, but she'd be lying if she said she didn't think Ty was gorgeous. She knew he liked her as well. He'd flirted and propositioned her so many times, it had become a joke



between them, but she knew deep down, he truly admired her. Had her heart not been set on Michael from almost the first moment she met him, Ty would definitely have been on her "to do" list.

She chuckled inwardly, knowing the wickedness of her thoughts reflected in the sparkle of her eyes. Michael was watching her every move, searching her expression subtly, while Ty's gaze feasted on her body. Between the two, she counted herself a very lucky woman indeed.

"Get on the bed." Michael's commanding voice sent a shiver down her spine. She moved past him toward the bed, yelping when his open palm smacked her ass. "Get a move on, girl." Both men chuckled as she scrambled onto the bed. "Hands and knees, Lilla," Michael instructed. She moved quickly to obey, feeling dreadfully exposed. She looked back at the men over her shoulder, a little thrill going through her as she caught the expressions of lust in their eyes—focused on her. Who'd have believed it?

"She has a great ass." Ty licked his lips as she watched, her own mouth going dry at the flare of heat in her body.

"I'll let you have it later, but you aren't getting any pussy. I'm trying to breed her." The bold statement got Ty's attention, she saw. The men shared a long, penetrating look before Ty nodded and moved toward the head of the bed. She followed his progress, feeling the heat of Michael as he took his position behind her. His hands flowed over her back and waist, down to the cheeks of her butt and lower, over her thighs. His caresses brought a moan to her throat as she closed her eyes in ecstasy.

"Eyes up, girl," Ty's voice came from just in front of her. She opened her eyes to discover a long, thick, hard cock positioned just in front of her. Ty. He waited for her to look up, coaxing her with a finger under her chin. His smile was pure devilry as he winked at her. "Lick me, sweetheart. I've been dreaming of this."

"Do as he says." Michael's voice challenged her, the Dominant tone exciting her even more.

Swallowing hard to gather her courage, Leah bent her head the short distance needed to touch her tongue to Ty's magnificent cock. She noted the slight tremble of his limbs with satisfaction, but lost her train of thought when Ty pushed forward, invading her mouth at the same moment Michael tugged the plug from her bottom in one smooth motion.

The dual sensations made her gasp, but Michael soothed her with gentle hands on her bottom as Ty filled her mouth with a demanding hardness.

"She's good, Mik. With a little training, she'll be an expert."

A dark chuckle sounded from behind her.

"She's already come a long way, but I'm enjoying every minute of the process."

"I just bet you are." Ty dug his fingers into her hair. The move probably looked fierce to an observer, but his fingers were gentle as he coaxed her eyes to his. "You're beautiful, doll. Just keep doing that." She pulled strongly, holding his gaze. "Oh, yeah. Suck it, baby."

She was getting into a rhythm, coached by Ty's demanding hands in her hair, when Michael pushed into her with no warning. She was so ready, though, it didn't matter. He slid home with little fuss, causing the most delightful chills up and down her spine. The two men set to work then, one moving forward while the other retreated. She was being fucked on both ends with little to do except try to keep up.

She was on the verge of being completely overwhelmed by two Sons of Amber working in concert. One was more than enough for any woman, but to have two pleasuring her went beyond the realm of dreams. Her passion drew higher, into a place she had never quite reached before.

Ty came first, shooting down her throat. He eased up, giving her a chance to breathe at the very last, but she took all he offered and finished him with stroking licks that made him grin. Then it was Michael's turn.

He powered into her, climaxing with a grunt that she'd never heard from him before. He splashed her womb with seed while Ty held her shoulders, helping her withstand the force of Michael's final thrusts as well as her own shuddering orgasm. Her arms went weak and only Ty saved her from flopping face-first onto the bed. He stroked her shoulders as she gasped, holding her close as he sat on the bed, cradling her head with his strong thighs.

Stuck between two lusty Sons of Amber was a position she'd remember fondly for the rest of her life.

\* \* \* \*

She collapsed on the bed, wrung out and asleep almost as soon as he moved to take her in his arms. Michael felt a pang in his heart as he held her, stroking her hair. This woman was so special to him. He'd liked giving her an experience few women knew these days, but at the same time he worried.

It was an unfamiliar sensation. Michael Amber seldom worried about anything, much less a woman's affections. More often, he was dodging unwanted declarations of undying love. This time, he worried

about hearing just such words from Leah—for him alone. He realized with some shock he was actually jealous of Ty's role in bringing her to fulfillment. He wanted to reserve her cries of joy for his ears alone.

While he didn't begrudge his brother, or Leah, this moment out of time, he knew he didn't want to repeat it. But what if she did? What if he wasn't enough for her? That had him truly worried.

Ty caught his attention as he stood from the other side of the bed and shrugged into his clothes.

"You've got one hell of a woman there, Mik. Thanks for sharing."

"Anytime, my friend." The words were said carelessly, but the silent message in Michael's eyes was seen and understood as Ty nodded just once.

Mike wanted to talk to Ty about the conflict inside him. His brother would understand, if anyone. But they were still being monitored by the pirates and the mission had to come first.

"I'll leave you to her, then," Ty nodded at the unconscious woman in Mike's arms. "See you tomorrow."

With a parting wave, Ty left and Michael pulled the thin cover over Leah and himself, wrapping her in his arms. He held her through the night, lying awake for hours, contemplating the warm feel of her, the delicious taste of her skin, and the uncertainty of their future. Could he make a life for them together? Would she welcome the idea? It would be hard for a Son to take himself off the market, but a few of his brothers had done it. The question was, could he? He didn't know, but with Leah—for Leah—he'd like to try.

She meant more to him than anything, or anyone, in the universe. When this mission was over, he'd take the plunge. He wanted her in his life on a permanent basis. He wanted her tied to him with irrevocable bonds. He wanted her. Period.

Now the question remained to haunt his sleep—did she want him in return?

## Chapter Ten

Michael was sleeping soundly when Leah woke the next day. Unaccustomed to lying about when there was work to be done, she decided to do what she could for their mission. She doubted any of the pirates would give her trouble. Michael's ownership had been clearly established the night before.

Rummaging through the small closet quietly, she found some clothing to wear before peeping out into the hall. It was deserted, but she smelled the faint aroma of cooking food. That's where the women would probably be, considering the jits had specific gender roles and food preparation was firmly in the female realm of responsibility.

Following her nose, Leah was pleased when her scouting mission ended in a relatively large kitchen compartment where about a half dozen human women worked and talked quietly, preparing breakfast. One of them saw Leah standing in the doorway and beckoned her over.

"Fetching breakfast for your man?"

The woman's expression was friendly enough. Leah nodded, not sure what to say to these women. They seemed happy enough to be prisoners of the jit'suku, which struck her odd at first. But then, there were few human men left and there had always been women who reveled in being simply the companion and bedmate of a male. Leah didn't quite understand it herself, but she knew enough about human psychology to at least guess at what might motivate some of these women.

"I'm Lilla." She decided introductions might start the ball rolling.

"Nedda," said the woman while stirring a big pot of protein porridge the jits seemed to favor. "That's Julie," she pointed to a pregnant woman sitting at the table, "Billy Jo and Una are over there by the refrigeration unit, and Cassie and Kim are working on the bread."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Her offer was met with a friendly smile as Nedda handed her a grinder and something that looked like a root.

"Hold that over the pot and grate this *snillet* until I say stop."

SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

Leah did as she was told, gratified by the slightly cinnamon smell rising from the alien *smillet* as she ground it up into little slivers that fell into the porridge pot.

\* \* \* \*

Leah returned to the bedroom compartment about an hour later with breakfast and a great deal of information. She knew the smile on her face was smug, but she couldn't help herself. Michael would be proud of her, once she figured out how to convey her intell without alerting those who were undoubtedly monitoring them.

That might prove difficult, but she'd come this far. She'd figure a way to drop it into the conversation.

"Where've you been?" Michael's harsh tone put a little damper on her spirits, but she wouldn't let him get to her.

"I got breakfast, Master."

Just that quick, the worry in his eyes changed to guarded observation. Slowly he nodded. "You may serve me."

She had to stop herself from laughing at his kingly tone and set about serving him breakfast in bed like the dictator he was pretending to be. His gaze followed her every move.

"Where did you get this food?"

"I found a kitchen where some of the other women were cooking breakfast for the group. I helped and they let me borrow the tray and utensils when I left. They're very nice, especially since most of them are here by choice."

"Unlike you?"

"No, Master," she was quick to answer as he pulled her down by one hand to sit on the side of the bed. "Like them, I started out as your prisoner, but now I want to stay. I like having a man in my life again. Truly." She was playing a part, but the love in the hand that rose to stroke down his shoulder to his chest was real. Still, she had to stay on track here. There was something Michael really needed to know. "Especially since all your jit women are dead. Don't you think it's fate? That the virus that killed all our males turned back on your people and killed your women?"

She felt Michael's muscles tense, but his expression stayed cool. "Perhaps only fate could be so cruel," he said after some moments. His hand cupped the back of her neck and he pulled her in for a kiss. "You're a beautiful woman, Lilla, and an obedient slave. Sometimes."

He was teasing her. "But you like it when I disobey. Don't you, Master?"

He nodded, nibbling at her lips. "As much as you do, sweetheart."

She reveled in his kiss until her conscience stopped her. She had to tell him the rest. She pulled away just slightly. "I'm glad the mutated virus doesn't affect human women. I understand now why you captured me, Master. If I were a warrior, I'd have lassoed any man I could find when all of ours died. Your people are suffering, just like mine did, and I'm sorry for it."

"You have a compassionate heart, Lil."

\* \* \* \*

He'd be damned if Leah hadn't just handed him the biggest piece of intel he'd received thus far. Could it be true the jit virus had turned back on its creators? That would certainly be some kind of poetic justice, though a tragedy to be sure.

Mike worked hard to hide his racing thoughts. Kissing Leah was a good way to disguise his internal upset at the news of such staggering death in the jit'suku galaxy, but it was also distracting. He set her away and tried to smile.

"No time for that now, wench. I have work to do today." He slapped her curvy ass playfully as he rooted around for his clothes. She'd folded them and placed them on the room's only chair like a good little slave. Playing the part, he knew, but it felt kind of nice to have a woman care for his things. "Gather our stuff, we're heading out."

She buzzed around the small room, doing his bidding. They didn't have a lot of things with them, but it wouldn't do to leave anything behind. Leah was ready by the time he'd dressed. They ate together quickly and then headed out of the small compartment. Michael wasn't letting her out of his sight for a moment. Not now. Not ever.

He found the pirate leader in the same common room from the night before, eating breakfast. A few of his men were there as well, but most looked half-awake after a night of debauchery.

Michael sat opposite the captain and tried hard to repress his excitement. This op was nearing its conclusion. All he had to do now was finesse all the players into position. That would start now, with this man.

"I have some other business I need to attend to," Michael said. "Can you help me with the fifty or not?"

## SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

The captain sat back, eyeing him. Just when Michael was sure he'd overplayed his hand, the man dug out a crystal from his pocket and rolled it across the table.

"The information's on there. Coordinates, instructions for credit transfer, and everything else you'll need. Be ready tonight at seventeen hundred station time."

Mike thought fast. That would be cutting it close, but it could be done. He had his troops on alert, waiting for his signal. He nodded to the jit captain.

"I'll be ready." Michael stood, noting Leah's warm presence behind him. "Thanks for your hospitality, Captain." He reached across the table to shake hands the way jits did—a bone-jarring elbow clasp—and quickly took his leave.

On the way out of the room he caught Ty's eye and with a silent signal, their plan went into motion. Michael knew Ty would be taking his leave of the pirates shortly, though he'd be monitoring their movements closely while the strike force prepared. As for the troops, Michael would take great pleasure in leading the team himself, though of course he'd be helmeted like all the other troopers, so it was likely the pirates wouldn't even recognize him.

He'd remember them, though. And he'd be on the lookout for certain particular devils he'd taken note of last night. Some of these men were worse than barbarians. They were downright cruel in the way they treated the women.

Mike knew they were being followed as they ducked into the access tubes that would bring them to the docking area. No doubt the pirates wanted to be certain just where their new contacts were going. Of course, he'd planned ahead. There was a small civilian craft waiting for them, which they used to their advantage. Mik and Leah got on the craft, greeting the specialist they'd assigned to this particular task, a veteran named Suzette. She was a crack pilot and something of an ace. She was also one of Leah's closest friends and a trusted member of the command staff.

Suzette looked them over as they entered the craft. One dark eyebrow arched and her sparkling eyes danced with humor, but she refrained from commenting on their appearance. She had a change of clothing waiting for them and they took turns in the ship's small necessary. Michael contacted his strike team through the secure comm while Leah changed.

## BIANCA D'ARC

After setting the wheels in motion, Michael went aft to change out of his pirate garb and into battle armor. He'd stripped down in the hall, not waiting for Leah to finish up in the even smaller sanitary compartment. He'd donned the lower portion of the battle suit, letting the sleeves of the flexible underskin hang around his waist while he fastened his boots and the armor plate that went over his legs. He heard the compartment door slide open and looked up to find Leah standing before him.

The sex kitten was well hidden under her starched battle dress uniform, but there was a knowing light in her gaze as it roved over his bare chest. He walked right up to her and cupped her cheek.

"It's good to have you back, Colonel. Not that I didn't enjoy Lilla." He winked and she laughed.

"It's good to be back, Commandant. And it's good to finally know what's going on in this sector." Michael nodded and stepped back, turning so she could help him with the sleeves. He could do it himself, but it'd be awkward, and soldiers often helped each other. Leah knew just what to do, setting to work dressing him with her usual efficiency. If he noticed the brush of her fingers over his skin more now than he ever had before, he supposed that was to be expected after the intimacy they'd shared.

Of course, they'd never gone into battle together before. All the time Leah had worked for him, he'd never taken her along on a mission where he knew he'd see fire. That she was here now was both troubling and uplifting. There was no other woman he wanted by his side, through thick or thin, but he couldn't find the words just yet to tell her. He didn't know how she'd respond and the uncertainty chipped away at his normal calm. Plus, there was a lot to get done tonight and in the coming days in this messed up sector of space. They had serious amounts of work to do and he didn't feel quite brave enough to broach the subject of the future and his uncomfortable feelings just yet.

First they had to clean up Smithson's mess and put an end to the slavery ring. Leah would play her part, as would he.

"I agree wholeheartedly. And even better," he turned back around to face her, "we finally have a reason to get rid of Smithson."

"You took a look at the data crystal then?"

"First thing. That...woman." He bit back the curse he would rather have used. "Is in this up to her eyeballs. She's the pirate contact. And the payment account is her very own."



"The bitch!"

Michael nodded. "You know what to do, Leah. I'm counting on you to get the station under control while I go after the pirates."

A steely light entered her eyes. "It will be my pleasure. I've been wanting to kick Smithson's ass for quite a while now."

He leaned in to peck her cheek. "God, I love it when you're fierce."

She surprised him, placing both her hands around his neck and drawing him close. She cradled his head in her soft hands and looked deeply into his eyes.

"Be careful, Michael. I—" She swallowed hard. "I don't want to lose you."

"You won't ever lose me, Leah. I'll be careful, but you know I have to do this. I can I.D. the pirate leaders and do this part of the job more efficiently than anyone else. Trust me, I won't take any unnecessary chances. I'm a Dom, not a Risker like Ty."

\* \* \* \*

His lopsided smile melted her heart. "Thank heaven for that."

She bit back the cautions she wanted to voice. She knew he was a warrior of the highest caliber. He was one of—if not *the*—best. She shouldn't worry, but she did. Still, they both had tasks to perform. That he'd leave the station side of things in her hands was a matter of trust that was very flattering.

Sure, she knew she could handle anything Smithson could dish out, but for Michael to trust her with such a task indicated just how much he believed in her abilities. How much he trusted her to get the job done right. She had to trust him just as much. Still, it wouldn't prevent her from worrying...just a bit.

She reached up to kiss him one last time, then helped him on with the rest of his battle armor. His body would be well protected behind layers of flexible armor. He'd be fighting the pirates while she conducted her own battle on the station.

He pressed a small data crystal into her hand. "Here's everything you need to arrest Smithson and her entire command staff. I want them all confined and separated until we can investigate and discover which of them were in it with her. I'm also giving you full authority to deal with anything on the station as you see fit. You'll be acting Commander in this sector until we can get someone else out here."

"Colonel," Suzette's voice piped in over the comm. "Your ride is here."

BIANCA D'ARC

Leah clutched the crystal and gave Michael one last hug and kiss. They'd arranged for Suzette to pull away from the station and rendezvous with the troop carrier that held the strike force Michael would be leading. They'd docked with the larger ship and the small shuttle that would take Leah back to the military side of the station was now docking on the other side of the ship. Within a few minutes, Colonel Leah Blackfoot would be back in her domain, on the military side of the station, kicking butt.

"Give 'em hell, Leah." Michael winked at her.

"You too, Michael."

She left through the small hatch that would take her to the shuttle. She wanted to say more, but there was no time. And truth be told, she wasn't quite brave enough to tell Michael of her feelings. Not just yet. Maybe not ever.

She boarded the shuttle, drawing her mantle of authority around her like a protective shield. There was work to do. Hard work. She had to capture and confine a general and all her staff, and do it without giving any of them a chance to warn the jits of what was coming. Tricky business, but Leah had a plan, and several of her own people in key positions, ready to execute it.

## Chapter Eleven

"Is your team in place, Tracey?" Leah spoke softly into the battle comm. They were communicating through shielded headsets on a coded frequency that only her group could access. None of the station personnel would know what hit them—if this went off as planned.

"We're ready when you are, Colonel." Tracey's quiet voice came back within moments.

So far, so good.

Leah straightened her spine and pressed the access panel that would open the command and control center's doors. She also had it rigged—courtesy of one of the women who were standing behind her, a wizard tech named Jane—to lockout all command functions the moment Leah entered the proper code.

She keyed it in. Immediately, all station systems would be locked down, waiting for her special override. It would only come when she had the station secure.

Once again she keyed the headset. "Go code Lima Bravo Foxtrot. Repeat. Lima Bravo Foxtrot. You have a go."

Just that easy, the plan was activated. Leah punched the door hatch and strode into the room, her team flanking her, their weapons at the ready. General Smithson stood angrily from her command chair.

"What's the meaning of this, Colonel?"

"By authority of Sector Command, I hereby place you and your staff under arrest pending further investigation."

Smithson reached for her console, but Leah knew it was already deactivated. Any hope the woman had of erasing evidence or getting word out to her conspirators was long gone.

"You can't do this!"

Leah advanced, noting the rapid deployment of her squad of armed soldiers around the room.

"Kidnapping and turning a blind eye to the imprisonment and slavery of human women is a serious crime, General. I believe you should seek legal counsel before saying anything further."

"You bitch!" Smithson rushed her, but Leah was prepared. She hadn't had to call on her hand-to-hand fighting skills often, but she was no lightweight. She downed Smithson with one quick move, grabbing the woman's wrist as she tried to punch Leah in the face, and twirling her around into a prone position on the command deck. Leah held Smithson's arm out at an angle, one knee planted hard in her back, retaining control of the struggling woman. Leah looked up at the general's staff gathered all around, noting the expressions on each face carefully. Some were plotting, some simply stunned.

"You ladies can do this the hard way and end up like her," Leah chucked her chin toward the fallen woman, still struggling uselessly in her hold, "or you can go with my people quietly. We'll be questioning everyone and sorting out just who's involved in this despicable crime ring. If you've got nothing to hide, you'll be freed. As simple as that."

One by one, the wide-eyed ones stood, followed more reluctantly by the others. They filed out quietly, each put into restraints and escorted to the door by one of Leah's team. More of Leah's specially chosen troopers waited outside to take them to detention. The women of Smithson's command staff would be separated and questioned until Leah's people got to the bottom of the matter. Already, she had special investigators on site and more coming from Alantia Station. It had been a busy day, and it was about to get even busier as Leah and her team secured the station and restarted the computers, preserving evidence while getting on with the ordinary business of running the station.

She set to work, doggedly ignoring the impulse to check on how Michael's combat team was doing. They were on comm silence until their mission was secured and she wasn't going to be the one to break it, though she was tempted to report on her progress, just to hear Michael's voice. She had to trust him to stay safe and do his job...as much as he trusted her to do her part.

That thought in mind, she began the arduous work of documenting any possible mischief by Smithson's crew as she made decisions for every sector of the station. It was hard work, especially as they had to deal with ship crews unhappy with the station lockdown, but Leah wasn't letting anyone leave while Michael and his men were out there battling the pirates.

SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

\* \* \* \*

Michael advanced into the jit areas of the station with his strikeforce. He wore full armor like the rest of the team, only his size and stature setting him apart from the female soldiers he commanded. He wore no insignia, nor did any of his troops. Coded comms delineated who was who among the helmeted, incognito warriors. Only they needed to know who was in charge, after all. Identifying the leaders to the enemy would only make them targets.

He enjoyed the adrenalin rush as he commanded the elite group of fighters. They were the best he'd ever worked with, and that was saying something. Many of them were smaller than him, but he knew beyond a doubt, they could more than handle a man of his size—or the jits for that matter. After some initial resistance, the pirates had been subdued with relative ease.

Ty—also in full armor that easily disguised his identity—sidled up next to Mike. To preserve Ty's cover, they'd arrested him along with the other pirates, then separated him out when they split up the pirates, with none the wiser.

"How are we doing, brother?" Ty asked on a private comm channel as he checked his weapons.

"We've got most of the main players, but can't seem to find the captain."

Ty's helmet bobbed as he nodded. "That's because he went back to his ship a few hours ago. Some kind of surprise inspection. He likes to pretend he's still military."

"Damn. Well, we'll get the captain when we take his ship. Everyone else has been rounded up and ferried out to our ship's holding cells. Just a few left here on the station. Comms reports no transmissions left the station." Michael nodded in satisfaction.

"Leah came through."

"I had no doubt she would. She's the most capable officer I've ever served with."

Ty pounded him on the shoulder. The armor took most of the friendly blow, but Michael still felt it. "Is that admiration I hear in your voice, Mike?"

He noted the teasing in his brother's voice, but refused to rise to the bait. They still had work to do. It was clear Leah was doing her part, now it was up to them not to let any of the pirates slip away.

"Let's load our troops into the pirate shuttle and take their ship."

The plan had been hatched hours before. The pirates kept a troop shuttle nearby to transport them back and forth from their ship to the station. Ty had supplied the intelligence that most of the pirate crew was on the station at the moment, and it certainly looked like they'd rounded up most, if not all, of the command staff. With any luck, only a skeleton crew would be left on the pirate ship. When Mike and his crew arrived in the pirate shuttle, they'd swarm on board and take them by surprise. If all went as planned.

They left the cleanup to troops that had been selected especially for the mission of ferreting out the stragglers who hid in the bowels of the station. They were under Leah's command and would be reporting back to her from the moment Mike left the station.

The pirate shuttle was cramped, but the design would stand his team in good stead. Used for raiding parties, the shuttle had been equipped with quick-release hatches that allowed the maximum number of fighters off at one time. It would be relatively easy to board the pirate ship with this kind of equipment, and better yet, the crew left on board the pirate ship wouldn't realize, with any luck, that they were being boarded until the last possible minute.

Ty had secured the comm codes necessary to dock with the ship and all went off without a hitch, until they hit the hangar. Mike offloaded with the first group of troopers, only to meet heavy resistance. This was no skeleton crew.

It wasn't the full contingent of pirates, but this crew was more battle-ready than Mike would have liked. Apparently their captain routinely ordered any and all approaching shuttles to be greeted with maximum firepower, and this was no exception. The bloodthirsty bastards opened fire the moment they saw the battle armor. Their own crew wouldn't be armored and armed, ready for a fight.

Mike dropped to one knee, laying down suppression fire as best he could while his troopers swarmed around him, searching out covered positions. They leapfrogged their way across the hangar, suffering a few casualties, but nothing life-threatening thanks to their superior armor. Mike's own armor took a few hits, but he was leading the charge, in the thick of the fighting.

God, how he'd missed this!

Being in command was a deep seated need, but there was something about putting your own life on the line that fired adrenaline like nobody's business. Mike had worked his way up, fighting and then leading as he

learned and excelled. He hadn't been in combat in far too long. Not that he relished bloodshed, but he felt a sense of purpose on the battlefield that was all too often lost in the offices of command. Here he knew clearly who the good guys and the bad guys were.

In this case, the bad guys were jits. Kidnappers and slavers, these men were scum and Mike had no qualms about blowing them away when they tried to do the same to him.

\* \* \* \*

Leah sat in Smithson's old command chair, working steadily, when a comm interrupted on a private channel. Leah motioned her comm tech to record and punched the receive button.

"Where's Smithson?" The pirate captain looked angry. Very different from the over-the-top barbarian she'd met earlier. He didn't seem to recognize her at first—until she smiled. "You!"

"Colonel Leah Blackfoot of Sector Command." She nodded her head politely, while the pirate sat back, clearly shocked. "You're under arrest, Captain. You and your men are ordered to stand down immediately and surrender your ship to the forces already on board your ship."

The man stared at her for so long, she wasn't sure what he might do. Then he started to laugh, shaking his head as a grudging sort of respect entered his eyes.

"You're good, Lilla. Or should I say, *Colonel*? You had me fooled. I was scrutinizing the men when all along I should have suspected the girl. Damn, but you've got brass balls, woman!" Leah had to stifle a laugh. "What happened to Smithson?"

"She's currently enjoying the hospitality of the brig. I'd be delighted if you'd join her."

"A captain never surrenders his ship."

Leah watched the door behind the man open over the comm. She thought she recognized the big build of the two soldiers who entered first. It had to be Ty and Michael. The pirate captain saw them as he turned—too late to get off a shot.

"Looks like you don't need to surrender, Captain. You've been taken honorably in battle."

"You're a worthy adversary, Colonel." He bowed his head, surrendered his weapon, and spoke a few words in his own tongue she didn't quite follow as Michael and Ty cuffed him and passed him over to the waiting troopers.

One of the armored men stepped forward to face the screen and nodded as a transmission came through over the headset all members of the operation wore.

"We've secured the ship and will be heading back shortly." Michael's voice came through loud and clear. Leah had never felt so relieved. He was alive and sounded just as in control and strong as he always did, though his armor was blackened in places. He'd taken a few hits, but looked like he was moving all right to Leah's eyes.

"Glad to hear it, Commandant. We'll leave the light on for you."

"Good work, Colonel." Did she hear a hint of pride in his voice? She wasn't sure, but the approval felt good. "We'll be there shortly. I'll meet you in Smithson's quarters. Bring your best evidence team. I want to see what we can learn from her belongings. If this crime ring goes any further, I want to know it. I'll also need a second evidence team to comb this ship for information."

They'd discussed this earlier and Leah knew Ty would be staying on board to help gather evidence from the pirate ship. He knew the codes and language of the jits better than anyone.

"Ready and waiting for your arrival, sir."

"You're the best, Leah. We'll see you in two standards."

\* \* \* \*

Michael met Leah in the hallway in front of Smithson's private quarters. There was a team of women behind her, or he would have dragged her into his arms for the homecoming kiss he really wanted. Aside from that, he was still in full armor and he wouldn't be able to enjoy her soft body against him as much as he wanted. No, the hug could wait until they were alone. For now.

She reached up to help him with the fastenings on his helmet without being asked and then they were face to face. There was so much he wanted to say, but he wasn't free to speak his mind. Not yet.

The moment would come soon. He'd had time to think while he was out on this mission, time to realize what was important and what wasn't. Leah. She was what mattered most to him. She mattered more than any person he'd ever known, any woman he'd ever bedded, anyone, anywhere.

"Good to see you safely returned, sir." Her eyes spoke more than her words and Michael read every nuance.

"Good to be back. Are we ready, Colonel?"



## SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

"Yes, sir." She turned to the evidence team behind her, signaling them to begin recording. "Override codes, sir?"

Michael did his part, entering the command codes unique to him that allowed access to all parts of any station or base under his command. The doors to Smithson's private domain opened after a moment and specialized members of the evidence team entered first, lest the place be booby-trapped. When the initial guard called the all-clear, Michael and Leah entered, observing as the team tapped into Smithson's personal files.

"Encrypted media here, sir, and lots of it," one of the techs called. Michael walked over to investigate while Leah continued to assist with the initial search of Smithson's personal effects.

"Box it all up for the experts, Ensign. I want everything about this search to be totally by the book." Michael noted the rows of encrypted data crystals. There was too much here to delve into now.

"I've got a cryptography team on standby in case she had anything encrypted more tightly than I give her credit for." Leah came up beside him, a comfortable, welcome presence at his side. Damn, she felt good there. Next to him, under him, astride him.

Michael squelched his wayward thoughts. Time enough for that later. For now, they had to oversee this critical gathering of evidence. There was no way he'd let Smithson slide through on a technicality. The case against her was going to be tighter than a drum.

## Chapter Twelve

Two standards later, Michael and Leah finally retired from the room, leaving the techs to mop up the remnants under supervision of the ranking officer. The woman was good and Leah trusted her, which was enough for Michael. He had to get Leah alone. There was so much he wanted to say...and do.

She followed him into an empty guest chamber in the command section he'd reserved for their use. The door slid shut as he pulled her into his arms, armor and all. He couldn't wait to kiss her, to feel her under his palms.

"God, I've missed you." Michael muttered against her lips as he drew her in for a long, deep kiss. His tongue claimed her mouth, his body seeking the warmth of hers, but the blasted armor got in the way. When he could draw the strength, he pushed away a little. "Help me get this armor off, Leah. I need to feel you against me."

Her smile lit his world. "You won't get any argument there." She giggled like a carefree schoolgirl as their hands tangled, trying to remove the armor as quickly as possible and only prolonging the agony as they fumbled. He liked the sound of her laughter. There had been precious little laughter in both of their lives recently, and his heart felt good they could find it together. There was a lot he wanted to share with this special woman, if she'd only give him the chance.

The chance of a lifetime.

His hands stilled as his eyes searched her face. After a moment, she became aware of his scrutiny, her small hands stilling over his heart as she looked up at him. They'd managed to get the top part of the armor off at least.

"I haven't thanked you yet."

"For what?" Her voice was breathless.

"For the way you handled this mission." He pecked her lips. "Your cunning intellect." He kissed her brow. "And your beautiful submission."

He breathed against her lips. "It was the greatest gift I have ever received."

When he let her up for air, she drew back to meet his eyes. Her expression was clouded, a small frown marring her lovely brow.

"You know I'd only do that for you, Michael, right? I never was promiscuous."

"I knew." He bent to kiss her cheeks. "It meant even more to me, knowing you did it for me and me alone."

"I'd do anything for you, Michael."

The sheer honesty in her voice made his heart contract as he stared down into her lovely eyes. She fidgeted under his scrutiny and he let her go, just a few inches. He couldn't bear to be parted more than that from her at the moment.

"As it stands," she looked away, "I'm glad the mission was a success. Aside from a few minor injuries, we came out of this clean and with solid evidence to hang Smithson and her cronies."

Mike allowed the change in subject, knowing there were still a few things that needed saying before the air was clear between them. He feared and anticipated the next few minutes with equal fervor. If she responded the way he hoped, he might just be the happiest man in the universe. If not, he didn't know what he'd do. Perhaps chain her to his bed until she agreed? The thought had some merit, but first he'd see how she took his proposal. He had to work up to it though.

"You were brilliant, Leah." His hands stroked her back, gentling her. "Ty's cover is intact and the pirates think you were the sole agent involved in infiltrating their ring. I couldn't have planned it better myself." A smacking kiss followed his words. "You're going to get a promotion out of this, I think."

"To be honest, I don't want it if it means I can't be your XO anymore." She took a deep breath. "I was ready to resign my commission, Michael. I'm only staying because of you."

His heart stuttered. Could he be hearing her right? Things were looking promising for his plans, but he wasn't taking anything for granted.

"You honestly think I'd let you go?" He pulled back to meet her eyes. "If anyone tried to take you from me at this point, they'd have one hell of a fight on their hands. Leah," he knelt before her, grasping her hands tightly. "Marry me."

She gasped. "Are you serious?" A smile bloomed over her lovely face, then dimmed slightly. "But—"

"But what? Leah, you know you can ask me anything. Don't go shy on me now." He stood, capturing her once more in his arms.

"Well," still she hesitated, her face coloring ever so slightly. "What about your, uh, duties? Can Sons even get married?"

He laughed, his fears calming. "A few of my brothers already have, so I don't see why not. I'll still have to make deposits to the fertility banks, but you're my woman, Leah. I only want you from now on."

"Oh, Michael." Tears gathered in her eyes and he took it as a good sign, though she still hadn't said yes.

"I never knew what love was until I met you. I've never said this before to anyone, but I love you, Leah, with all my heart." He drew one of her hands up between them, placing a kiss gallantly on the back of it. "Will you be mine? Marry me, work with me, let us raise our sons together? I need you more than I need my next breath, woman. Say yes and put me out of my misery." His hopes grew with each sharp intake of her breath, each tear that rolled down her soft cheeks.

"Yes, Michael. Yes!" She sobbed as she threw both arms around his neck, kissing his face with eager lips.

Within moments the rest of his armor was thrown off and Leah's clothes made a heap at the foot of the bed. They clung together, each refusing to let the other go far until Michael asserted his authority. He rolled them so she lay astride his hips and pushed gently at her shoulders until she sat up, sheathing him in her tight warmth.

"Ride me, woman."

"My, you're bossy." She smiled down at him as she undulated over his hips.

Michael smiled. "You love it, though. And you," uncharacteristically, he paused as if unsure, his gaze narrowing, "love me." She gasped as he tugged at her hips with his hands. "Don't you, Leah?"

"Yes, Michael." Her voice was sure, her eyes speaking volumes. "I love you with all my heart."

\* \* \* \*

Hours later, Michael stroked Leah's shoulder as they lay twined together in the big bed. They'd have to get dressed and see to the cleanup of the station in a few more minutes, but they'd do it side by side. As it would be now, forever. Michael still couldn't quite believe it.

SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

"When we get back, I'll have to ask the elders if you can be inducted into the tribe."

Leah's voice startled him out of his thoughts and her words had him scrambling for meaning. His confusion must have been written on his face. She leaned up on one elbow to look at him.

"Blackfoot is more than my family name, you know. It's also the name of my tribe. I'm descended from a long line of warriors, and now by marrying me, you'll be joining their ranks." She leaned back, snuggling into his chest. "If the elders think you're worthy, of course, but I wouldn't worry about that." She chuckled and stroked his chest the way he liked.

"I can see I'm going to have to do some research. Just how does one join your tribe?"

"Well, there's a ceremony and a big celebration. In the old days, the warriors—mostly men—would spend the day in games of skill while the women prepared a feast. Nowadays, with no men left in the tribe, the few women warriors usually compete, but it's much more low-key. The food is still plentiful though, and quite tasty. Then the medicine woman will say a few words and you'll be inducted. Come to think of it, she could marry us, too, if you don't mind a traditional ceremony. Our medicine woman is licensed to perform legal marriages, though it's been quite a number of years since she's been called upon to do so." Leah kissed his collar bone. "I think it would bring a lot of joy to all of them to see the old ways live on a little with us and our children. It would bring hope too. A new start for the tribe. What do you think?"

"I'd be honored to marry you in the traditional way, Leah. Bringing hope is what we Sons do, more than anything else. This'll just be a different way of doing it, but I'm all for discovering new things." He sipped from her lips, sealing the thought with a tender kiss.

\* \* \* \*

Weeks later, Michael and Leah met with her grandmother, the matriarch of her family, and one of the most powerful elders of the tribe. They'd taken precious leave time and traveled to Pacifica Tert, the planet on which Leah was born and where her family lived still. Michael had learned about the tribe in the intervening weeks, meeting with a few of the other elders who lived on stations and worlds roughly on their path to Pac Tert, as the natives called it. The tribe, it turned out, was spread over the galaxy, with thousands and thousands of members, though their

numbers had been cut in half by the virus, just like every other human population.

Every elder looked at Michael with an appraising eye—something he was used to as a Son—but in an entirely non-sexual way. They evaluated his character, his strength, his will, and his suitability to join their tribe. They all held great respect for Leah, welcoming her as a long-lost daughter who'd become a hero in their eyes. He liked the way they interacted with her and cared for her comfort. Their hospitality was undeniable, as was their acceptance of him after their initial appraisal. Things had gone well, but the most important hurdle was yet to be jumped.

Leah's grandmother. Retired General Adelaide Blackfoot herself.

Michael had never really connected Leah to the famous woman in his mind. General Blackfoot was a legend among the space-going soldiers of the line. Michael had studied her strategies from the early parts of the war between humanity and the jit'suku when he'd still been under Dr. Amber's care. Now that he put two and two together, he realized Leah Blackfoot came from a long line of military commanders. Her grandmother wasn't the only famous Blackfoot general. Leah's father and brothers had acquitted themselves more than honorably in the ongoing war before succumbing to the alien virus. Losing them had been a fierce blow to humanity's forces, but the women picked up and soldiered on.

Leah herself had done so, even after the tragedy of losing her husband so young. His admiration for her only increased when he realized how much she'd lost and what her bloodlines must have instilled in her. More and more, he began to feel almost unworthy of her, but there was no way he could ever let her go.

The old woman was still spry, though well into her retirement. Her shrewd eyes made Michael feel like a young recruit as he was introduced to the living legend, Adelaide Blackfoot. He shook her hand respectfully, surprised by the strength of her gnarled grip. Leah hugged the old woman close, tears of genuine joy and affection in her lovely eyes.

"So you want to marry my girl, eh?" the general asked.

Michael nodded. "I do, ma'am."

Shrewd eyes studied him. "I've heard all about you Sons. I even had a little input when Amber Waithe suggested the project. I bet you didn't know you have Blackfoot DNA in you." She chuckled.

SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

"I know little of my genetic origins, ma'am, but I'm intrigued to learn whatever you can tell me."

The old woman settled into her chair. "I'll tell you what I know, young man. Pour the tea, Leah," she directed her granddaughter to a tea service that had been laid out on the table. "I knew Amber Waithe when she was just an upstart geneticist with a brilliant idea. She wanted to combine the DNA of the best of humanity to come up with you Sons. Judging by the look of you and the stories of you and your brothers' exploits, she did a damn fine job of it, too."

"Thank you, ma'am. But how—?"

"How do I know where at least part of your DNA came from?" She cut him off with a knowing grin on her wrinkled face. "Because I'm the one who gave it to her." She sipped her tea, leaving him hanging while her eyes twinkled. "I'm not a Blackfoot by birth, you understand. I married in. My people were of another tribe, now mostly lost. When Amber came looking for warrior DNA, I gave her a sample of my husband's. I had his old hairbrush and it contained—according to Amber—enough hairs with root follicles to give her at least a little of his genetic code. I gave her my own DNA as well, since she wanted diverse samples to combine together. I don't know how much of it ended up in the final mix that created you, but I like to think we did our part and that something of my husband lives on in you and your brothers."

Michael was stunned as he sat back in the chair. Leah looked about the same as the old woman continued talking.

"It all comes full circle now, of course. The Great Spirit has seen fit to bring you back to the tribe, to renew and rejuvenate our dwindling numbers and hopes. I like it. It has a sense of destiny about it and a feeling of rightness. What say you?"

She sipped her tea in the silence that followed.

"I honestly don't know what to say, ma'am."

Leah looked worried though. "But what if—?"

"I thought you might worry." Adelaide leaned forward and tossed Leah a data pad she'd had hidden under a pillow at her side. "I combed Amber a few days ago and asked her if there would be any complications. This is what she sent back."

Leah scanned the pad and her eyes widened, but she didn't speak. A moment later, she handed the datapad to him. Michael read the words, amazed by what he was seeing. Dr. Amber had run an analysis of his DNA against a sample of Leah's obtained from her service file. The

bottom line conclusion was that they'd have healthy, happy offspring and weren't a close enough genetic match to make any difference.

Amber had also included a private message at the bottom for Michael, wishing them well.

"Now that's out of the way," Adelaide went on, "I'm pleased to welcome you to the family, Michael, and to the tribe."

Leah grasped his hand, squeezing tightly. "Thank you, grandmother."

\* \* \* \*

A week later, they were married in an elaborate ceremony and Michael was officially inducted into the tribe. A huge party followed at which he was astounded to find not only his superior officers, but Dr. Amber Waithe and the Leader of the Governing Council herself, Mathilde Gray. It was a high honor that such important women would come to witness their marriage.

They took a few minutes out of the party to present both bride and groom with Distinguished Service Medals for their work in busting up the piracy ring in Smithson's sector. Leader Gray spoke glowing words about them both, much to the crowd's delight. Most of the tribe came to the wedding from planets near and far, summoned by the elders to witness what they were touting as the rebirth of their people. It was a heavy load to bear, but Leah handled it well. Michael was used to the pressure of having most of humanity depend on him for one thing or another, but this was slightly different. This was somehow more intimate. He was no longer just another of the Sons, but Michael Amber, husband to Leah Blackfoot-Amber, the first male to marry into the tribe since the virus struck.

It was a new beginning in many different ways.

"To the newlyweds," Leader Gray toasted them as they gathered for dinner in the formal dining hall that had been decorated by the tribal community in garlands and shimmering beadwork tapestries. "May they live long, healthy, fruitful lives, serving both the Blackfoot people and all of humanity."

A chorus of answering wishes rose from the assembly as they raised their glasses over and over. Michael rose, taking the occasion to put into words the feelings he'd never been good at discussing. Now was the time to let the women in his life know what he felt. Plus, the alcohol he'd already consumed helped loosen his tongue.



## SONS OF AMBER: MICHAEL

"I'd like to thank Dr. Amber Waithe." Michael spoke into the silence, raising his glass toward the scientist who'd designed him. "We call ourselves her Sons, but in every way that really matters, she truly is our mother. Thank you for being here to witness my marriage. Your presence means more than you can know." The woman teared up, smiling lovingly at Michael as he paused to recognize her.

"Thanks also to Leader Gray and those members of the Governing Council and the chain of command who came all this way to join our celebration. Leah and I have lived much of our lives in the service. The military is our family as well and we're proud to have you here and have your blessing as we join our lives together." Murmurs of agreement sounded as the many uniformed officers and politicians in stylish suits bowed their heads or nodded and smiled in approval of his heartfelt words. But Michael wasn't finished.

"And thanks to my new wife, my heart, Leah." He turned to her, seated beside him, looking up with love in her eyes. She'd declared her love for him, but he hadn't reciprocated. Not in so many words. "I didn't know love until I met you, Leah. You've taught me so much I never imagined about being human. I value you as my best friend, the other half of my soul and the best damn Executive Officer I've ever had. I fully expect you to run the rest of my life as efficiently as you've run my command these past years." The crowd chuckled as he'd intended. He reached down and raised Leah by one hand until she stood at his side, gazing up at him. "I love you, Leah, with all my heart and forevermore."

He tugged on her hand until she was in his arms, his lips on hers as the crowd sighed. He kissed her with all the love in his heart, glad to finally be able to articulate at least some of the amazing feelings coursing through him. He tasted the salt of Leah's tears and broke off, folding one of her hands against his heart as he gazed into her weepy eyes.

"I'm glad you said that, Michael, because I love you, too." She breathed deep to try to control her tears, but the smile on her face was full of joy. "And I have something to tell everyone, too." A little devil of mischief entered her twinkling eyes. She squeezed his hand, holding his gaze as she spoke outward in a strong voice, to the assembly. "I'm pregnant."

Cheers erupted along with a flurry of congratulations. Everyone drank to the toast, but Leah's crystal flute of champagne was quickly replaced with a glass of water as she laughed at the fuss everyone made. Michael couldn't let go of her hand. He'd made many women pregnant,

## BIANCA D'ARC

but never his chosen lifemate, the miraculous woman who'd brought him into her family, her tribe, her life. He'd never belonged before—not the way he belonged now. Michael felt as if he'd finally found his place in the human race. He'd found a family to belong to, and suddenly the future generations seemed much closer than they had before. Michael looked forward to raising this child, and any others they might have together.

The soldier Son of Amber had finally found a home.

## About the Author

A life-long martial arts enthusiast, **Bianca D'Arc** enjoys a number of hobbies and interests that keep her busy and entertained such as playing the guitar, shopping, painting, shopping, skiing, shopping, road trips, and did we say shopping? A bargain hunter through and through, Bianca loves the thrill of the hunt for that excellent price on quality items, though she's hardly a fashionista. She likes nothing better than curling up by the fire with a good book, or better yet, by the computer, writing a good book. Learn more about Bianca D'Arc and her books at [biancadarc.com](http://biancadarc.com). Read Bianca's blog at: <http://biancadarc.blogspot.com>.

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