



# TAILWIND

By

Charlotte Boyett-Compo

© copyright May 2006, Charlotte Boyett-Compo  
Cover art by Dan Skinner & Kat Richards, © copyright May 2006  
New Concepts Publishing  
Lake Park, GA 31636  
[www.newconceptspublishing.com](http://www.newconceptspublishing.com)

This is a work of fiction. All characters, events, and places are of the author's imagination and not to be confused with fact. Any resemblance to living persons or events is merely coincidence.

Barefoot, Blaez Dolan stood six foot six inches tall in his blazing glory--a slight pun on his name. His shoulders were broad, his waist was lean, he had chiseled pecs, his biceps bulged, and his abdomen was flint hard. The pelt of crisp dark hair on his muscular chest dipped down to his loins in a well defined tiger line, drawing the eye of every female who had the pleasure of seeing him without his shirt. With a head of thick black waves that fell loosely to his shoulders, finely arched brows with long, spiky eyelashes, amber tinted eyes, full lips and startlingly white teeth, he had been likened to an ancient god stepped down from the vault of the heavens.

In realty Blaez was as cold as ice mercenary with a smile that could best be described as deadly and with a penchant for frivolous blondes with few brains and large tits. With no roots, no attachments, no stable place to call home, his was as solitary an existence as money and power could buy. He was so far off the radar of those around him he might not have been there at all.

What set Blaez apart even farther from everyone else was that he hailed from Lupinia, a planet two star systems over where the inhabitants had the ability to shapeshift into dangerous creatures the megaverse called werewolf. Though Dolan was an extraordinarily handsome man with a knockout physique, he could change into a snarling, vicious, shaggy wolf with sharp fangs, even sharper claws, and a propensity to make mincemeat out of those who annoyed him and he could do so in the blink of an eye.

Sitting in a seedy bar on a backward world--the name of which he hadn't even bothered to remember once he'd been cleared to land--he was there waiting for his runabout to be refueled. Blaez was nursing a shot of potent Ionarian whiskey and brooding so fiercely no one dared come near him. They knew where he was from by the dark blue tribal tattoo of a stylized wolf that curved down the left side of his face, and they were giving him a wide berth. Even the most down-on-their-luck whores kept their distance, sensing a man who'd just as soon slit their throats as give them a quick look. Staring into the dusty mirror behind the bar, he almost smiled when the bounty hunter moved into position behind him.

"Hello, Brewton," he greeted the man.

The people in the bar scattered like chaff in a brisk wind and with just

as much noise, no one wanting to garner the werewolf's notice as he sat watching Brewton's reflection in the mirror.

"Set the drink down, Dolan," the tracker said, "and keep your hands where I can see them."

"It took you long enough to find me," Blaez replied. "I've left bread crumbs all over the megaverse. I've done everything but put up a flashing red neon arrow pointing to my head. Had a little trouble reading my trail, did you?" He brought the glass to his lips and knocked off the remainder of the whiskey.

Al Brewton tightened his grip on the laser guided pistol he was clutching. A small red dot shone in the middle of Dolan's back, lighting the way to his heart. "Don't make me have to put you down, wolf boy," the tracker snarled. "If I have to, it won't be easy and it won't be pretty."

"Yadda, yadda, yadda," Blaez drawled. "Really, Brewton, you need to come up with a better line. That was sounds so fucking lame."

Brewton was standing with his knees flexed, both arms straight out in front of him in the shooter's stance he'd no doubt learned from watching too many old vids.

"Put that drink down, I told you, and get your bond-jumping ass off that fucking stool!" Brewton yelled and even an imbecile could hear the fear making his raspy voice shake.

"Brewton, if I get up off this fucking stool," Blaez said, "you'll have just enough time to take one last breath before I slice that nappy head of yours off that dirty neck you haven't washed in--oh, I'd say from the smell I'm guessing--at least a week." He met the tracker's eyes in the mirror, his own twin orbs of brutal intent." Now, do you really want me to get up?"

"Aye, I want you to get the fuck up!" the bounty hunter screamed.

Hovering in the corner of the room was a vid-com, one of an ancient variety that had seen better days. Its titanium surface chipped and pitted from the drunken target practice of the bar's patrons over the years, miraculously the plasma recording device still worked--a testament to the fine *an Ghermáin* engineering of the Tappa Industries. What the vid-com recorded for the Aneas Quadrant Tribunal that afternoon would be replayed over and over again and examined closely by dozens of officials who would finally file the recording away, none of them keen on sending yet another bumbling bounty hunter after Dolan.

For those who would view the action later, the bar had been dimly lit, smoky, the herky-jerky movements of the participants appearing on the

screen caused by the slowly disintegrating integrity of the vid-com tape. Rolling blips and white streaks of interference, caused by passing spacecraft, interfered with a strong, clear signal and thus distorted the confrontation--but it was obvious what had happened. Only the werewolf and the bounty hunter appeared on the viewback. However, it would be enough for those who studied it to have it brought forcefully home to the members of the Aneas Quadrant Tribunal that Dolan wasn't a man to mess with. He could be one mean motherfucker when angered.

There was the skirl of the bounty hunter's silver bullet tumbling through the air, the mirror behind the bar shattering. Blaez, the man for whom that deadly shot had been intended, was lying on his side on the floor, his left hand wrapped around a ten-inch long handle with a dragon perched at the base. The laser light of his whip wavered for a moment then retracted into the dragon handle with a sharp sizzle.

For a moment Albert Brewster stood where he was--knees still bent, arms stiff as a day-old cadaver. His pale blue eyes were wide, his mouth ajar with a thin stream of spittle seeping from one side. He made a strangled sound, and then his head fell from his shoulders to roll beneath one of the gaming tables.

Blaez was lying at eye level with the gruesome trophy for a moment then got easily to his feet, dusting off his black jeans, snapping the handle of his laser whip back into its leather sheath. He straightened his shoulders, reached for the bottle of whiskey, poured himself another drink, downed it, slammed the shot glass on the bar and fished in his pocket for a beryllium slug, slapped it down, then walked out of the bar without a second glance at the man he'd killed.

Outside the bar, it was colder than a witch's teat. A thick rime of frost lay on the ground and it crunched as he walked toward the refueling station at the edge of the shoddy little town. A single light glowed in the station but all around him the windows of the buildings were dark and not one single curtain, one single blind moved as he made his way down the street.

The air reeked sharply of sulfur and something even more obnoxious. With his keen sense of smell, the odors were combining to give him a wicked headache. That did nothing to elevate the black mood into which he'd been sinking since landing on Gelal.

His ship was sitting where he'd left it. The fuel had been brought to it for he didn't trust--or allow--anyone to touch his baby but him. "Hello, gorgeous," he said, reaching out to stroke his hand down the gleaming black

hull of the Fiach class runabout that was his pride and joy.

Glancing around, he didn't see the station attendants but that neither surprised nor alarmed him. His kind were feared--and rightly so. Taking the wallet from his back pocket, he opened it and counted out what he felt should cover the refueling. If it did, that was okay. It is didn't, tough shit.

Climbing into the cockpit of his baby, he glanced out the windshield and saw people milling around outside the saloon. Some of them--obviously braver than the others--turned to look toward the refueling station. He snorted disdainfully as he sat down and buckled himself into the safety harness crisscrossing the command chair. He flipped switches, pushed a myriad of buttons, keyed in coordinates and instructions, checked the fuel tanks to make sure they were filled to capacity with crystals, engaged the engines, and then pushed the throttle to 10 percent. The Fiach lifted like a feather floating on the breeze with barely a disturbance of the dirt beneath her keel. Rising into the air with hardly any noise at all, the black runabout hovered there for a moment as its pilot made a few final adjustments. Gently nosing the sleek machine ninety degrees to the starboard he settled back in the form-fitting leather chair and pulled back on the stick. Lifting with a roar of its mighty propulsion tubes, the Fiach shot into the sky as though flung from a catapult.

"Holy, Mother of Alel!"

The voice startled Blaez so violently, his hand jerked back on the stick and the runabout screamed upward almost vertically.

*"Cut it out!"*

His head snapped around and his eyes flared wide as he saw a woman sprawled at the rear of the cabin, struggling to get up from the floor. Her skirt was peeled back from her legs and she was floundering in her effort to right herself. Cursing, he eased the stick forward, but it took a moment to level the craft and all the while, he was grinding his teeth, his body as tense and rigid as steel.

Once the Fiach was flying sure and true, he engaged the autopilot and his hands flew over the buckles of the safety harness, flinging them aside, shooting up from the chair with every intention of strangling the stowaway.

Rozenn Quinlan was grumbling as she smoothed her skirt down over her bare legs. She had just enough time to sit up before he was on her, bent down toward her, his snarling, infuriated face in hers, his lips peeled back, fangs extended. Her eyes widened for a moment, she stared at him, he glared at her, he growled, and then she began to laugh.

It was the laughter that stunned the werewolf and made him straighten up. The woman was laughing so hard, tears were gathering in her eyes and she was practically rolling on the floor with mirth.

“Stop that!” he yelled at her, the words garbled for his fangs were still out. He had never mastered the art of controlling his volatile temper no matter how often his instructors had smacked him on the back of his head. When anger or fear or just plain overwhelming irritation got the better of him, his canines had the tendency to elongate into fangs quicker than a randy sailor's pants in a bordello.

“Oh, this is just too much!” she laughed, slapping her thigh.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” he bellowed and reached down to snag her arm and jerk her to her feet.

The strength in his hand, the power behind his movement was enough to squelch Rozenn's laughter. As his grip tightened to a painful hold, she sobered and met his raging glower with a lifted chin. “You're hurting me,” she said softly.

Blaez's eyebrows drew together, his fangs retracted so quickly they sliced into his gums and he felt the wash of blood on his tongue. Shaking his head, he let go of her as though the touch had scalded him and stepped back.

“Thank you,” she said, adjusting the bodice of her gown and extending a hand to him. “I am Rozenn Quinlan.”

His gaze lowered to her hand for an incredulous moment then slowly lifted to her face.

It wasn't a pretty face. The woman was overweight--or pleasingly plump depending on which man you might ask. She had chopped off mousy brown hair that was quickly running toward gray and slight pouches beneath her eyes. Her face was broad, her lips thin, her earlobes protruding almost comically. The only arresting thing about her face was her eyes. They were a striking emerald green and framed beneath perfectly arched brows that--however--were in need of a thinning.

“Hello?” she said, waving her hand at him. “I'm introducing myself.”

With a menacing growl, he spun around and stalked back to the command chair. Slamming down into it, he jerked the safety harnesses in place and began to mumble under his breath.

“You're a rude werewolf, aren't you?” she asked, calmly taking one of the two jump seats that sat along the port side of the ship. With care, she strapped herself in.

“How the hell did you get on my ship, wench?” he snarled.

“I stowed away,” she replied. “I’ve gotten really good at it, actually. Usually they don’t even know I’m there until I get off.”

As attuned to his ship as any considerate lover, Blaez heard the noise even over her words. He turned his head, his ear toward the engine, listening to a grating sound.

“I ran away from the convent at Galrath,” she was saying. “Couldn’t take another day of that hellish place.”

“Shut up,” he said, straining to make out the resonance that was making the hair stand up on the back of his neck.

“Of course I didn’t have any money so I was forced to stow away on quite a few ships. I’m heading for Gaoithe. That’s where I’m from although I haven’t been there in over twenty years.”

There was an odd knocking sound that sent a tremor of concern down the werewolf’s back. His fingers flew over the computer’s keyboard, his eyes shifted uneasily among the dials, the readouts.

“If I’d known I’d catch a ride with one of you ...”

“Shut the fuck up, woman!” he barked. “Don’t you hear that?”

Rozenn clamped her lips together. She heard a loud whine, a sort of screeching like someone dragging their fingernails down a chalkboard. “Well, that certainly doesn’t sound good,” she said. “Is your ugly little machine going to act up?”

As her insult registered, he actually saw a red haze of fury washing over his vision. His hands itched to snap her neck, to rip off her head, to thrust into her belly and pull out her innards. He was contemplating other brutal ways of ending her useless life when the Fiach dropped twenty feet straight down, bringing his stomach up into his throat.

“What’s wrong with the ship?” Rozenn asked, gripping the safety harness. There was no fear in her voice, just mild concern. “Are we going to crash?”

He was struggling too hard to keep the craft flying to answer her inane questions. The engines had stalled and he was quickly losing control over the runabout’s stabilizing gear. The ship was dropping slowly.

“We’re going down, aren’t we?” she asked just as the cabin lights flickered and went off. He heard her say, “Uh oh.”

\* \* \* \*

Blaez reached for the emergency lights but they weren’t working either. He toggled the switch several times to no avail. With no lights by



which he could see a guidance system he was fairly sure had also failed, all he could do was sit there. He had no idea where they were. At least the runabout had leveled off and was just floating now, as quiet as the tomb.

His life--such as it was--passed before him. He slumped in his seat, his mood having gone from brooding black to crimson red and now had returned to a stygian darkness so thick it threatened to suffocate him.

"Is there anything I can do to help you?" she asked quietly.

Blaez Dolan had been alone all his life. He had no memory of the dam who had birthed him, had never known the wolf who had sired him. He'd grown up in a kennel with others like him and from early on there had been nothing but vicious rivalries that had passed for a way of life. Fighting for food, for shelter, for even a drink of fresh, clean water had taken every ounce of his strength. He had been forced to kill just to survive. Brutal battles had left deep scars on his body but they had toughened him, had honed him into a man without conscience, without mercy, without kindness.

His inability to tow the line, to do as he was told without arguing, to keep his smart mouth shut, had gotten him shipped in chains to a facility on one of Lupinia's five moons when he was barely out of his teens. The brutality of his jailors and the cruelty of the instructors assigned to bring him down a notch or two had done nothing to soften Blaez's personality. If anything, his time in the internment center had worsened his attitude and made him meaner still. He had left there unrepentant, unremorseful, and unapologetic.

The next ten years of his life had taken him from Lupinia to every half-ass mercenary haunt from the Rigel System to the Aneas Quadrant. He'd committed every crime that had ever been set down as such and had gone on to commit a few transgressions that should have been declared illegal. Not once had he regretted his actions as he slipped away from traps set by greedy bounty hunters and determined lawmen in four galaxies.

And not once in his thirty-odd years of living had anyone ever asked if they could help him. The question rankled worse than her insult to his ship.

"Wench, if you don't keep your mouth shut, I'm going to take a big bite out of your jugular," he said in a low, hateful voice.

"Oh, phooey," she snapped. "Who pissed in your kibble?"

The werewolf put his hands to his head, raking his hands through his hair. He tugged at the strands until it hurt, wishing he could pull the woman out of his brain for she had somehow slithered in there to torment him.

It happened so quickly he barely had time to react. The ship shuddered violently then began to plummet. So fast was the ship falling, the hull was beginning to heat up from the friction. With the cooling coils out of commission, there was no way to ward off the build up of hot air that began bearing down on them.

“What’s that?” Rozenn asked him.

He wanted to throw his head back and howl loud enough to shatter the porthole temperplex. Why did the bitch continue to flap her mouth? If she said one more thing ...

“Wolfie, look! Look!” she exclaimed. “What is that?”

Pressed back into his seat as the Fiach continued to drop, it was all he could do to turn his head toward her. His intent was to level a savage snarl at her that would keep her from talking but behind her, he could see a strange glow that was increasing in brightness the lower the Fiach fell.

“Is that a tractor beam?” she demanded. Although she was strapped into the jump seat, she had twisted her head so she could look out the porthole. “It is, isn’t it? It’s a tractor beam!”

The glow was intensifying and the ship was slowing. The cabin was bathed in a strange greenish light that made the woman’s face look ghastly as she turned to look at him.

“We’re being pulled down to something,” she said as though he didn’t have sense enough to realize what was happening.

“You think?” he sneered.

“Aye,” she said, smiling, and looking back around, trying to get a glimpse of the source of the light. “I think I see a planet down there.”

When the greenish glow became so bright they both had to shield their eyes from its intense brightness, the ship seemed to sink gently to ground, the slightest bump signifying the landing skids had touched down on something solid. The bright light began to decrease in strength.

Blaez’s fingers flew over the safety harness buckles once more and he was out of his seat like a shot. Rushing to the porthole beside her, he looked out, squinting as the brightness died down completely. Beyond the temperplex there was pitch black and he could see nothing.

“Where are we?” she asked.

He ignored her and stomped to the hatch. There was a manual release and he pulled it, shouldering the hatchway door up so he could peer out into the darkness.

“I can’t see a gods-be-damned thing out there!” he snarled.

“Here,” she said, startling him for she’d crept up on him so quietly he’d been unaware of her. She pressed a phospho torch into his hand as he reached out to shove her away.

Almost dropping the torch, he nudged her aside with his hip for she was much too close to him for comfort. He didn’t like anyone that close without having pulled them there in the first place.

“Get the hell away from me, wench,” he ordered. He heard her sigh loudly as he flipped on the torch.

The darkness beyond the ship was oppressively thick. Even with the superior light quality of the phospho, the beam only went so far out into the gloom then seemed to be swallowed up.

“It almost feels like the air is breathing, you know?” she commented from behind him.

He stiffened for her hand was on his shoulder as she peeked her head out the hatchway opening. Once more she had gotten close enough to touch him without him noticing and he wanted to plant his fist in her pudgy face. Before he could order her away from him again, her hand tightened on his shoulder.

“Do you see that?” she asked, her voice very low. “The air is moving.”

Pulling his mind from her distraction, he forced himself to look for what she was seeing and was surprised to find the air was, indeed, moving. Not swirling or blowing, but moving as though it was alive.

“Is that fog, you think?” she questioned.

“How the hell should I know?” he asked.

“Well you do know what fog is, don’t you?” she asked as though talking to the village idiot.

“Aye, I know what fog is,” he sneered.

They stared into the darkness for a long time and the feeling that settled between their shoulders made them both uneasy. Together, they stepped back--almost as one--and Blaez shut the hatchway and secured it.

\* \* \* \*

“Gods-be-damned Brewton,” he cursed the bounty hunter as he worked to get the panel off the engine. “I should have known that bastard would have paid someone to sabotage my ship.”

“Who’s Brewster?” she asked.

“Brewton,” he corrected her with a hiss. He grunted as he plied the wrench to the bolts holding the panel in place.

“Okay, so Brewton, then. Who is he?”

“Was,” he growled, removing the panel. “Hold that damned light steady, woman!”

Rozenn rolled her eyes. She leveled the phospho torch so that its beam played over the panel. “Okay, then, who *was* he?”

He wiggled some wires, a spark flared and he jerked his hand back, shaking it, cursing in a language Rozenn did not recognize. He got to his feet, his hands on his hips.

“Well?”

“It’s going to have to be re-wired,” he said with disgust. “I can’t do it without a hell of a lot more light than what we have with that dying torch.”

“No, I meant Brewster. Who was he?”

He turned to look at her. In the glow of the phospho light her face was mottled with shadow, accentuating the broad planes of her cheeks. Her eye sockets were deep black holes, her mouth a thin dark gray slit.

“Was he an enemy of yours?”

“If you just can’t live another minute without knowing, he was a bounty hunter,” he told her. “Satisfied?”

“What happened to him?”

Blaez took a step toward her, annoyed when she didn’t move back, didn’t give an inch. She was staring directly into his eyes--something few people dared to do--her head tilted to one side as though his answer was of the greatest interest to her.

“I took off his head,” he replied in a low, deadly voice.

“Huh.” Rozenn dropped the word like a heavy rock. “Do that often, do you?” she inquired.

One more step and he was toe to toe with her, glaring down into her upturned face with enough venom to quell the bravest man. “When I’m not pulling out the tongues of irritating women,” he answered.

She simply looked at him. There was no fright in her green eyes, no wariness, or even the slightest hint of concern. Then she smiled slowly and turned away.

“What was that?” he demanded.

“Big bad wolfie,” she said, sitting down in the jump seat. “Him gotta try to scare the poor old nun.”

“Nun?” he repeated, frowning.

Rozenn sighed. “Didn’t you hear anything I said to you, wolfie.”

“Stop calling me that,” he warned, his hands clenching into fists at his

side.

The phospho torch was slowly dying. She shook it and for a moment it got brighter but then began to fade again. "Do you have another one of these?" she asked.

"You said something about Galrath," he said, ignoring her question. "Is that where you were?"

"That's the hell-hole from which I tucked my tail and ran," she replied with a yawn.

Blaez had heard bad things about the convent. It was supposed to be a cruel place where women were treated more like prisoners than members of a religious order. Curiosity got the better of him and he hunkered down in front of her.

"How'd you get sent there?"

She shrugged. "Nobody wanted me," she said. "Never knew who my parents were. I grew up in an orphanage and when I turned eighteen they kicked me out and the next thing I knew a man whose name I was never told picked me up and took me to Galrath. That same day, by the by." She yawned again. "Sound to you like somebody was trying to get rid of me?"

"I know the feeling," he mumbled.

"Are you going to tell me your name or am I going to have to keep calling you..."

"Don't say it," he warned.

"I bet it's something like Lupin or Lobo or Loupi or Lupo or..."

"Blaez," he cut her off, his teeth clenched. "Blaez Dolan."

"Well, see? I knew it," she said. "Blaez is the Chalean word for wolf and Dolan means challenge." Her gaze moved over his black long sleeve cotton shirt and black jeans. "It fits."

"Oh, goody," he growled. "I'm so glad you approve. Actually, Dolan in Chalean High Speech is *O Dobhailen* and that's the name of my ship, *The Black Defiance*, another meaning for the word." He pushed to his feet and went to the command chair, plopping down and swinging his left leg over the arm.

She arched a brow. "Name fits this ship. Was the bounty hunter after you?" she inquired.

The air inside the ship was getting warm. Sweat was gathering under his armpits and at his temples. He released a loud sigh. "Aye, he was after me."

"What'd you do?"

He laid his head on the tall back of the chair. "There was a slight problem between me and a dead man."

"A different dead man than the one you dispatched in the bar?"

"Aye," he hissed, a muscle working in his jaw.

"Who was the first dead man?"

"Wench, do you just live to annoy the hell out of people by asking stupid questions?" he snarled.

"How will I learn if I don't ask?" she inquired then switched off the phospho light, casting them into utter darkness.

"What the hell did you do that for?" he demanded.

"We need to conserve as much of what's left as we can in case we really need it, don't you think?" she asked.

He grunted.

"Who was the first dead man?" she repeated.

"A prick by the name of General Alphon Morrison of the Coalition of Federated Worlds. He was the Chief of Command Central."

"Sounds like someone important," she mused.

"He thought he was," Blaez said with a snort.

"Did the problem occur before or after that man died?" She heard him yawn and followed suit.

"After."

"Did you make him dead?"

"I wish. He was dead before I got to him but he'd have been dead anyway if I'd gotten to him first," he answered.

"I assume he didn't die of natural causes."

"You assume correctly unless you consider swinging from a tree upside down with your guts hanging out is natural."

Her eyes widened. "He must have made somebody really mad."

"He made a lot of somebodies really mad, wench," he said with a snort. "I just happened to be the one found standing under him as he swung in the breeze."

"And was arrested."

"And was arrested," he agreed.

"You made bail then ran, huh? Didn't think you'd get a fair trial."

He smiled though he knew she couldn't see it.

"Why'd you run?"

"Somebody wants me to take the blame for General Morrison's untimely demise and there ain't no way I'm going to do that. Whoever paid

my bail knew I'd skip and I'm sure they counted on bounty hunters coming after me in the hopes one of them would kill me before I could ever stand trial."

"So you're thinking that whoever paid your bail offed this guy, Morrison, and set you up to take the fall for them," she said. "Man, that's cold."

"It worked," he grumbled.

"Sure looks that way to me, wolfie."

Perfect silence descended on the ship. With the absence of any light at all--not even a hint of sky glow coming in through the portholes--the warm air became even more oppressive, weighing down on the werewolf and his uninvited guest. It almost seemed as though the blackness outside the ship was sucking up all sound as well as all the light and coolness.

"How did you escape Galrath?" he finally asked and when she didn't answer, he attuned his acute hearing to the place where he knew her to be and realized her breathing was soft, rhythmic and concluded she was asleep.

Instead of welcoming the peace of not having to hear her talk, Blaez felt a tiny tug of loneliness creeping over him. He closed his eyes, settled more comfortably in the chair and was soon asleep himself.

\* \* \* \*

When Dolan woke to what he thought was early morning light, it was to find his unwanted guest kneeling on the jumpsuit and peering out the porthole. From the rear, her ass looked huge in the shapeless drab gray of her gown. She was wearing utilitarian sandals that looked clunky and uncomfortable.

"Why didn't you tell me you had a couch?" she asked. "At least one of us could have been comfortable last night."

He turned to look at the long couch that served as his bed then looked back at her ass.

"Are you going to ogle me or are you going to come look at one of the strangest things I think you'll ever see," she said, not bothering to look around at him.

He tore his eyes from her derriere. "I've seen some pretty strange things in my day, wench," he muttered but peeled himself out of the chair, wincing as his neck muscles let him know they hadn't been happy about his sleeping arrangement. He put a hand to the small of his back and stretched. Sauntering over to the porthole, he bent forward and looked over her shoulder since it was obvious she wasn't going to move aside to allow him

access to the view. What he saw stilled the breath in his lungs.

“Pretty bizarre, huh?” she asked, twisting her head to look at him.

Blaez had to admit what he was seeing was, indeed, bizarre and unlike anything he’d ever encountered. There was a soft, grayish light spreading around the ship and out from it for about twenty feet or so but beyond that was the roiling darkness they’d encountered when they’d landed. The ground was mottled with what looked to be pale pink cobblestones but the stones were shifting, buckling as though they were breathing.

“If that was a tractor beam that pulled us down, could we be *inside* something?” she asked.

He turned to her, almost bumping his nose on hers. He pulled back. “Inside something?” he echoed.

“Like the belly of some kind of living beast,” she said softly. “Could that be alien flesh we’re looking at? It looks slick on the ground.”

Anything was possible, he thought, but what kind of beast would have a light in its gut. “It was a tractor beam, wench. That much I know. More than likely, if we’re inside anything, we’re inside the belly of some kind of vessel,” he told her.

“Huh,” she said and turned to look out the porthole again.

Without having a hand laid to it, the hatchway door lifted and they looked around. Blaez’s left hand automatically went to the handle of the whip on his thigh and Rozenn reached out to grab his right arm in alarm. He shook her off with a snarling admonishment and stepped to the hatchway opening, expecting to find company, but there was no one there.

“What the hell?” he growled, looking out into the strange light and the tumbling darkness beyond.

“There’s no one there, is there?” Rozenn asked. She had moved close to him.

“Wench, get the hell back to your seat and sit your wide-load ass down!” he hissed at her.

Rozenn jumped back, more hurt by his insult than from fear of his tone of voice or the blazing amber eyes he turned on her full force. She blinked when he bared his fangs at her and plopped down in her seat.

Goaded to beyond endurance by the female’s nearness, Blaez did something he would not normally have done without a great deal of thought or planning--he stepped down from the hatchway steps and onto the heaving ground upon which his ship was sitting. As soon as his booted foot touched one of the ‘cobblestones’ the heaving motion ceased. Frowning heavily, he



looked down at the runabout's landing skids and realized where the metal touched the ground, the expanse was as solid as the ones on which his feet were planted.

"This *is* bizarre," he mumbled to himself. He took a step forward and the stone under his foot solidified. Another step, another solid surface upon which to stand. Two more steps, two more firm, unyielding stones.

His fingers flexed around the whip's handle and he took several more steps from the ship toward the expanse of darkness. The closer he came to that swirling gloom, the harder it became for him to draw breath and he realized the light around him was slowly fading. He looked up, squinting against the brightness overhead but even as he watched, the light lowered as though being turned down with a rheostat.

Something swished in the darkness in front of him and he took a step back, thumbing on the whip until a coil of light pulsed from the handle to lie on the ground and sizzle. The same swishing noise came from his left and he turned that way and his eyes narrowed.

There was a tree standing off to one side and it was laden with fruit. Beside it, a stream trickled over pristine white rocks. He knew damned well that tree and that stream hadn't been there when he'd stepped down from the hatchway. The terms forbidden fruit and fruit of the poisoned vine came into his mind like a lightning strike and the light around him dimmed even more. It felt as though he was being given a three minute warning to grab the fruit, the water, and get the hell out of town. He stood there--indecisive--for another moment and when the light lowered even more, he hurried to the tree, thumbing off the whip as he walked.

Pulling his shirt out from the waistband of his jeans, he plucked the rosy red fruits and dropped them into the makeshift bowl then hastened back to the ship, sprinted up the steps and dumped the fruit on the floor, grabbing the two water jugs he kept handy and jumped from the ship, making his way quickly to the stream. Even before he had the first jug filled, the light had lowered to such an extent he could hardly see. By the time the second jug was filled, he was stumbling back to the ship--heaving to breath and fearful he would become lost in the pitch darkness. Stumbling up the steps, he felt Rozenn move in behind him to shut the hatchway.

"That atmosphere is vile," she said as she secured the hatchway.

"You can barely breathe in it," he told her, gasping.

While he had been fetching their water, Rozenn had picked up the fruit he'd drop and had already eaten one of the rosy globes. She told him it

was a nectarine and that it was good. "Whoever has us at least is providing."

"That tree and stream came out of nowhere," he said.

"Aye, well, someone has a helluva lot of time on his or her hands, huh?" she countered.

Blaez didn't answer. He couldn't see her in the darkness but he could feel her near him. When her hand touched his, he snatched his back until he realized she was extending a handful of nectarines to him. He fumbled in the darkness until their fingers connected and he had the fruit in hand.

"Do you think he's going to keep us in the dark the rest of the day?" she asked.

"I don't like being kept in the dark," he growled and took a bite of the fruit which proved to be delicious and juicy.

"Neither do I but I hate to use up what we have the phospho."

"Aye," he agreed.

"I figure that light lasted all of about fifteen minutes, maybe less," she said. "Do you think you can fix the wiring in that little amount of time?"

He shook his head then realized she couldn't see him. "No."

"So if he allots us fifteen minutes of light every day, how long do you think we'll be here?"

He could feel his fangs extending. "Just shut up and let me think, wench," he ordered.

He finished the four nectarines and washed them down with several swigs of water from one of the jugs. The thought of what he'd consumed and drank being poisoned or drugged flitted once more through his mind but he pushed it firmly aside. They had to eat and they had to have water or they'd die anyway.

"You want some water?" he asked grudgingly.

"I've got the other jug," she answered.

The werewolf clenched his jaw. Once more she'd made a move without him being aware of it and that unsettled him something awful. He was unaccustomed to having his control of a situation slip. Opening his mouth to berate her, he snapped it shut and sat there glaring into the darkness until his eyes ached and he closed them.

He must have slept or the food and/or water he'd consumed had been drugged for when Blaez opened his eyes, the light was back but Rozenn was gone. Jumping to his feet, he searched the cabin of the runabout but she was nowhere in sight. The hatchway was still secured from the inside so how the hell had she gotten out?

Jerking the hatch open, he moved outside, turning his head this way and that but he didn't see her. He walked around the ship--uneasy with every step he took--but he didn't find Rozenn. With his fingernails digging into his palms, he called out to her.

She came out of the darkness, the mist sweeping away from her as she stumbled forward. Her eyes were glazed, her face as white as snow and when he rushed to her, she collapsed in his arms.

He carried her into the ship and laid her on the couch that ran along the starboard wall. The light in the cabin was already beginning to dim. There was what looked like blood on the hem of her skirt and when he lifted the material to search for injuries, he found scratches all down her legs. Likewise the backs of her hands were scratched. As her eyelids fluttered open, she stared at him for a moment as though not recognizing him then burst into tears, flinging her arms around his neck.

Blaez Dolan wasn't used to women crying in his arms. He was a love-and-leave-em kind of man and her tears gave him a decidedly bad case of the willies. "Stop it," he ordered. "Where the hell did you go and what were you doing?"

"He hurt me," she said.

Pure unadulterated rage passed through the werewolf. "Who hurt you?"

She removed her arms and turned over, her back to him, her shoulders shaking as she sobbed. "Leave me alone. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to think about it. I just want to lie here and die."

There was a wide dark stain on the back of her gown and Dolan knew. He felt something turn inside him, something break loose, and put a hesitant hand on her shoulder. "Rozenn," he said softly. "Tell me what happened."

Her entire body was trembling and he could hear her teeth clicking together. He didn't stop to think but since the couch had been designed to fit his tall lanky, broad-shouldered body comfortably, he sat on the edge and stretched out beside her, putting his arm around her.

If he lived to be a hundred--and werewolves lived much longer than that if a silver bullet never found its way to their heart--he would not know how it happened. One moment he was lying on his side, his front to her back, clumsily trying to console her but then in the next she was facing him and their lips were touching, his fingers moving over her tearful face.

"Tell me," he whispered, fierce protectiveness welling up inside him so completely, so unexpectedly he felt his heart clench.

"I woke up and he was on top of me," she said. Her breath fanned across his face as her eyes locked with his. He put his hand over my mouth and I couldn't yell. I was pinned down and I couldn't move. He ..."

Tears spilled to her cheeks.

He laid the tips of his fingers over her lips to silence her. There was no need for her to finish. He could see the devastation, the *knowledge* in her wounded gaze and he knew hatred so deep, so virulent, it threatened to consume him.

Blaez had spent a lifetime looking out for number one. There was neither room nor space in his black heart for anything other than the ship he had toiled so long and hard to acquire, the first thing in his life that had ever been entirely his.

She was a fragile flower, this rose. Her petals had been crushed, her stem broken, and she lay limply in his arms, her head to his shoulder as the light died completely and they were cast into utter darkness.

Instead of railing against the abolishing of the light, Blaez tightened his grip on the woman lying beside him and though she eventually relaxed and fell into a whimpering sleep, he lay awake and glared into the darkness, promising retribution for whoever had dared hurt her.

Some time during those long hours of glooming, her hand moved to his chest and she caressed him, her fingers moving over the hairs at the V of his shirt. It was a silent need she was putting forth and he understood it. He had the means to wipe away the brutality of what had been done to her, to make her whole and she was pleading voicelessly to him to help her.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Her answer was a tiny sound--"Aye."

He'd had his first woman at an early age and had discovered a world of heady delights with her that had given him the only pleasure he'd ever known up until that night. Under a glorious full moon he had taken her with a wild soaring lust that had left them both satiated and sore. Since that time, he'd used sex to do many things--to calm his nerves, deplete his body when he was on an adrenalin high, for revenge, for reasons only he would ever know. He'd fucked more than his share of bitches but never had he undertaken to make love to one.

Amazed to see his hand shaking as he laid his palm on Rozenn's breast, the sound of her indrawn breath made him feel manlier than he ever had before. He felt other emotions as well and none of them were selfish.

"Be gentle with me," she begged, her fingers plying the hollow at the

base of his throat.

“Always,” he whispered.

Gently, tenderly, he caressed her, his thumb barely stroking her nipple through the coarse fabric of her ugly gown. She was trembling beneath his touch and when he slid his hand down her side and to the skirt of her gown--inching it slowly upward--he heard the slightest of moans escape her throat.

He was hard, thick, aching with a need of his own. He could not see her--even his lupine sight could not pierce the strange darkness--but he knew her eyes were on him. Knowing they would be trusting eyes, nervous eyes, eyes filled with the fear of being hurt again, he went slowly, drawing the hem of her skirt up slowly. When the gown had been brought up to the juncture of her legs, he laid his palm on her thigh--softly, gently--and let her accustom herself to its weight, its feel, the heat of his flesh. After a moment or two, she relaxed beneath his touch and he slid his palm to the apex of her thighs, cupping her, surprised there was no undergarment to shield her from his touch.

Rozenn sucked in a breath the moment he laid his hand upon her. She was damp and aching between her legs and the touch of his flesh on hers sent shivers up her spine.

“You are wet, wench,” he said and gently stroked her, his hand moving up and down over her heated core. With each descent downward, his middle finger grazed the opening of her sheath and dipped just a little ways inside.

“Oh, my,” she whispered. Her breath was coming in shallow little hitches and he could feel the pulse beating fiercely between her legs.

He moved so he could take her mouth with his. Her lips were closed and he nibbled on the lower one until she opened her mouth and he could slip his tongue inside. Her groan increased the desire that was building in his loins.

The kiss was long and filled with passion. He swirled his tongue inside her mouth, over her lips, and planted soft little pecks along her chin and down her neck. He swept his tongue over that precious hollow at her throat. As much as he wanted to rip the gown from her, to feel her naked flesh against his, he did not want to alarm her, to cause her any further fright.

With infinite care, he eased his middle finger into her, going deeper and deeper in minute degrees until he was seated as far in as he could go. He turned his palm up and sought along the roof of her vaginal wall for that spongy spot he'd once heard was every woman's greatest source of delight.

“Oh!” Rozenn said for he’d apparently found that mysterious spot on the first try. Her hips arched up and she bore down on his hand, burying her face against his throat as though embarrassed.

“Relax, wench,” he said in a soft voice. “Just relax.”

In and out he moved his finger, feeling her quivering beneath him. Slowly, surely, with the greatest of care he stroked her. His thumb grazed over her clit and she writhed on the couch. Her arm was draped over his hip and she dug her nails into his back. When she realized she’d done it, she started to move her hand.

“Claw me if you need to,” he said in a low, gravelly voice. “Claw me, scratch me. Do whatever pleases you.”

She put her hand on him again but her touch was easier. She did not dig her nails into him though her fingers tensed on his flesh.

Blaez smiled and moved further down the couch until he could put his mouth over her breast and suckle her through the fabric.

“Wolfie!” she cried out and her hand left his hip again. She buried her fingers in his hair and held him to her.

He worried her nipple through the material and soon had the fabric wet. Withdrawing his finger he inserted one more with it, easing in and out of her again but at a faster speed. She was groaning and pressing her breast harder to his mouth so he added a third finger to his arsenal and went deep inside her, twisting his fingers gently from side to side as he moved in and out of her.

“Aye!” she said and brought her hips up from the couch.

He increased his speed, plucking at her nipple with his teeth, going deep inside her, twisting, withdrawing almost all the way out then pressing hard into her, holding it there for a second or two until she groaned again.

Hot fluid gushed over his fingers and she bore down hard, making a trilling sound as her vaginal walls contracted, quivered, gripped him tightly. Her climax was shattering and when she collapsed beneath him, he withdrew his fingers and enclosed her in a tight embrace.

“I’ll never let anything hurt you again,” he said. “If any man dares to lay a hand on you, I’ll bite it off.”

She giggled, snuggling closer to him. “That’s nice to know, wolfie.”

Sleep reached up to gently lower them into its comforting arms.

\* \* \* \*

She was gone again and he knew a savage fury unlike anything he’d ever experienced. He practically tore the locked hatchway door from its

housing as he jumped down from the ship, yelling her name, his eyes wide, his fangs hooked like those of a serpent as he threw back his head and howled.

In a split second he was no longer human. His face was thickly shadowed with coarse dark fur, his eyes gleamed a piercing, pitiless blood red. His canines had elongated and glistened with saliva, his claws were unsheathed, having shot out from the tips of his fingers to arch inward toward his palms. A thick mat of fur had sprouted to cover his arms and legs and torso but he stood upright, unbent. This was no hunched-over, clothes-splitting monster of myth but a man whose body bristled with the outward sign of his latent savagery and whose countenance bore the imprint of his animal nature.

“Blaez.”

It was the smallest of sounds and when he whipped his head around, he saw her just at the edge of the boundary where light and dark blended, about twelve feet away--obviously the darkness had advanced within the last two days. She was standing in a high-domed gilded cage, her hands wrapped around the bars, and her dress was in tatters around her, her feet bare. With a growl of pure venom, he started toward her but she yelled at him, thrusting a staying hand from the bars to halt him.

“Don’t take another step! Look down!” she ordered.

The ground around his booted feet was heaving like the turbulent waves of the ocean. Where the plates of the stones lifted, fiery heat shot up, the deep crimson glow hissing like a coiled serpent. Stones sank then bubbled up, emitting a vile odor that made him lightheaded then rolled like magna in a moat around her cage.

Blaez tore his gaze from the stones and sought hers. Her face was bruised, her lip torn, her knuckles scraped and bleeding. He whimpered for the first time in his life. The solid ground beneath him shifted toward her, her cage shifted toward him but there were still a good nine feet, then eight, then seven between them. The bubbling, hissing moat would not allow him to get to her.

“Who did this?” he asked, experiencing an emotion that was threatening to tear him apart. He was so enraged he couldn’t re-take his humanoid form and stood there in his werewolf state, shamed that she was seeing him as he truly was.

She stretched her hand toward him for the cage and land had shifted again. Tears were in her eyes. She wanted--she *needed*--to touch him. He

extended his hand toward her, balancing precariously on the stable ground but wanting to touch her just as desperately. He shifted his shape in a heartbeat, his humanoid other half reaching out to her. He strained forward until the tips of their fingers met and hooked together--his palm down, hers up.

"I need you," she said. "Please help me." Fresh tears spilled down her bruised cheeks.

"Rozenn." He said her name so softly, so achingly. "Your tears are breaking my heart."

And with that the cage and the land on which he was standing began to separate again, pulling them apart.

"No!" he howled, struggling to maintain contact with her without falling into the roiling lava but he lost his grip and as soon as he did, the cage was sucked back into the darkness, Rozenn's scream reverberating all around him. "No!"

His own scream of denial echoed a dozen times. The heat of the buckling stones seared the toes of his boots and he moved back instinctively.

*"Give me back my woman!"* he thundered.

The light vanished completely as though a switch had been thrown. Not even the slivers of light around the edges of the stones could be seen. Thick, cloying, oppressive air wrapped around him and he took a step back, his foot touching something spongy, something that gave. He stilled, testing the ground to his left. It, too, gave. To the right--the toe of his boot pressed into nothingness.

He dared not move for fear he'd fall into some bottomless miasma between him and his ship. Frustrated, sick at heart, he hunkered down like a wounded animal and for the very first time in his life, he began to cry.

"Rozenn," he groaned, wrapping his arms around himself.

Having spent a lifetime scoffing at the follies of men who allowed women to rule their hearts and souls, he now knew how easily such a thing could happen. He had not been seeking a mate, had never wanted one. He'd always been a lone wolf, an alpha male who took his pleasures when he wanted. Love- 'em-and-leave-'em had been his motto but love had meant 'fuck' to him before now.

Hot tears scalded his cheeks but he made no move to brush them away. He didn't even realize he was making a keening sound low that seemed to come from his very soul. Unable to keep his mate safe, he believed he had failed his job miserably and not only his ego had been



damaged but his pride had as well.

"I didn't know werewolves were capable of crying."

Blaez heard the male's voice and slowly lifted his head, his upper lip curling back, his fangs extending. A low growl started deep in his gullet as his hot amber eyes locked on a man sitting on a throne-like chair, a triangular wedge of light spearing down to illuminate him.

It was surreal as he stared at the man. Where had he come from? Where was this place? *What* was it? But the most important question came out of him with force.

"Where is she?" he asked in his most lethal tone.

The man was sitting there dressed in a long red hooded robe, the cowl of the robe framing hair as white as snow. With elbows braced on the arms of the throne, the long fingers of his hands--upon which a sharp chin rested--pressed together, long legs casually crossed, the man gazed back at the werewolf with piercing blue eyes set in a rather arresting face that held no expression at all.

"Where is Rozenn?" Blaez demanded.

"I do believe you have found something you desire in which neither your fists nor your deadly temper will be of any help," the man said. "Doesn't feel good, does it?"

"You hurt my woman and ..."

"And what, werewolf?" the man asked. "What can you do?" A vague smile tugged at the man's thin lips. "You know as well as I that you are helpless here."

"What do you want?" Blaez asked, coming to his feet. He swiped an arm over his face to rid himself of the tell-tale tears.

"I am the Evaluator," the man replied. "You were brought here for me to judge."

"Brought here by who?"

"I believe the correct word is whom. I ..."

"Don't play games with me!" Blaez shouted. "I don't give a gods-be-damned fuck who you are or who wanted me judged. Just tell me what you want me to do to get my woman back!"

"Which woman?"

"My woman!" the werewolf howled with frustration.

"Ah, the very needy Rozenn Quinlan. Is that who you mean?"

"Just tell me," Blaez pleaded. "I'll do anything to get her back."

"Aye, I'm sure you will."

The werewolf hung his head for he knew the man was playing him, taunting him. He feared the man had no intention of giving Rozenn back to him.

“Your ship is ready,” the man said and when Blaez slowly lifted his head, the man nodded. “It is ready and waiting for you to leave.”

Clenching his fists, Blaez shook his head. “Not without Rozenn. I won’t leave her here for you to ...”

“She’s not here,” the man said. “She’s never been here.”

He could not have explained under penalty of the most brutal of tortures how he knew but he did--the man was telling the truth. “Where is she?” he asked.

“At Galrath,” the man replied. “Where she’s been all along.”

The engines of The Black Defiance came on and Blaez jumped, spinning around to see his ship also illuminated by the mysterious cone of white light. Hatchway open, the dust beneath the landing skids blowing like wisps of smoke away from the keel, the ship was priming itself for flight.

“You have never done anything for anyone unless you were either paid to do it or it was to your advantage to do,” the man said. He brushed the lap of his robe with the backs of his fingers as though flicking away unwanted lint. “You’ve never had feelings for another living being in all the years you have drawn breath. It is time you put aside the selfishness and come into the light, werewolf.”

The roiling darkness behind the man swished, the black mist swept back and there seated on twisted black iron thrones with serpents slithering up the legs of the thrones were four horrible beings--two sitting to either side of the Evaluator. As different from the first man as night was to day, the beings were ugly beyond belief, misshapen, bearing the countenances of vile monsters, and they were staring at Blaez with spiteful, glowing red eyes.

“Let me introduce you to your inner beings, werewolf,” the Evaluator said. “Here is Greed, Lust, Anger, and Pride. Each--in you--is uglier than the next. How do you like looking at your inner soul, Blaez Dolan?”

Blaez turned his head away. He could not bear to look at the things sitting to either side of the Evaluator.

“Let me show you the inner beings that reside in Rozenn Quinlan,” the Evaluator said.

A pale pink light spiraled down from above and the darkness to the right of the seated beings flowed back to reveal a bright, shining meadow where birds sailed across a cloudless blue skies and butterflies fluttered

among lush green foliage. Sitting on regal gilded thrones were four very beautiful young women, each of them smiling sadly at the werewolf.

“The Lady with the yellow gown is Humility. The Lady in the blue gown is Patience. The Lady in the maroon gown is Charity and I believe you already have ascertained the Lady in white is Chastity.”

“You took away Rozenn’s chastity!” Blaez accused.

The Evaluator shook his head. “She is still as pure as the day she was born, werewolf, but unless you go to her aid, that will change within the day.”

“She’s in danger?”

“The man who put her there is coming to retrieve her. His wife has died and he intends to make Rozenn his whore.”

“No!” Blaez stated.

“He will abuse her, mistreat her, and eventually, he will take her life if he isn’t stopped.”

“Don’t! Why are you doing this to me?” Blaez shouted. He buried his face in his hands.

“Do you think this only about you, werewolf?” the Evaluator asked, his voice sharp. “Do you not yet realize there are other people in your world besides yourself?”

“Rozenn,” he groaned.

“These wondrous beings who reside inside Rozenn Quinlan have the ability to negate the evil residing inside you,” the Evaluator said. “Humility can destroy Pride. Patience can defeat Anger. Charity can conquer Greed and Chastity can temper Lust. Each is on a two-sided coin, my friend. It is up to you to lay them down in your life the way you truly wish them to land.”

“I only want Rozenn,” he said miserably.

“Then go after her,” the Evaluator said. “Overcome the sins you have made a way of life, and embrace the sweetness, the harmony that is in Rozenn Quinlan.”

Hope filtered into Blaez Dolan’s heart. “Is that true?” he asked. “Can I really go after her?”

“Dreams come and dreams go,” the Evaluator said. “We can only show you the way to go, my friend. You must be the one to decide if you are willing to make the journey and just how far you will go.”

“Dream?” the werewolf repeated.

The light before him vanished completely and long with it the beings--both monstrous and angelic--that had faced him. Blaez felt warmth on his

back and turned to see the light still wedging down upon The Black Defiance. His heart was trip hammering in his chest as he ran for the hatchway. With the blood pounding in his ears, he slammed and secured the hatch and hurried to the command chair, his fingers dragging on the buckles quickly.

He knew the coordinates for the convent would have already been entered into the runabout's computer and when he checked, there they were. The fuel tanks were just as they should be and a quick run-through assured him every part of the ship was in top working order.

"I'm coming, baby," he said in a throaty growl. "Just hold on, Rozenn. I'm coming."

\* \* \* \*

Rozenn Quinlan looked up from her daily prayers to find the most handsome man she'd ever seen striding toward her. There was a determined look on his face and a slight grimace of a smile on his full lips. She slowly stood up, her book of devotionals falling from the lap of her coarse gray gown.

"Come, wench," he said, holding his hand out to her. "We've little time before your custodians realize I've crashed the gate."

She didn't know who this handsome intruder was, had never met him before, but she knew exactly what he was. With his black shirt and black britches, his wild mop of curly black hair and bright amber eyes, he was a werewolf. She'd heard all the old tales spun late at night in the dormitories where hungry women lay with desires and needs that would never be satisfied.

She cocked her head to one side, briefly studying him. She had no notion how he came to be at the convent, why he was here, but she was very happy to see him. Like all the women with whom she lived, she'd been dreaming of this moment all her life. A handsome man coming to rescue her, to take her away from the life of drudgery, to show her the light was a dream they all shared. Here was her dream come true and the thought of saying no to him never occurred to her. Kicking her book aside, she took his hand. "Are you sure you're looking for me, wolfie?" she asked, smiling brightly.

"Aye, wench," he said, bringing her hand to his lips. He planted the most gentle of kisses on her fingers. "I am very sure. I am here for you."

He swept her up into his arms.

"I'm not too heavy?" she asked as he carried her over the lush green

grass of the convent yard.

“Nay, wench. You are well cushioned, not heavy.”

She curled her hand around his neck. “I’m not too old for you?”

He grunted as though the question was silly.

“I’m not pretty,” she said. “I’ve wrinkles and red moles and ...”

“Wench,” he said with an exasperated sigh. “You talk too much.”

The gate he had kicked open stood open and beyond it on a small knoll was a black runabout, its engines purring softly in the morning air.

“That’s the ugliest thing I’ve ever seen,” she said of the ship as he carried her toward it.

“You insult my ship, you insult me,” he warned. “I’ve been known to relieve women of insulting tongues.”

“Oh, phooey,” she said. “You’ve done no such thing.”

He stopped walking and looked down at her to arch a fine black brow. “There’s always the first time.”

Her arms tightened around his neck and she smiled, laying her head on his shoulder. “Wolfie, you’re a howl.”

Blaez Dolan threw his head back and laughed and it was the first time in his life he could ever remember laughing with his heart and not with the sarcastic mouth of Pride.

Once inside his ship, he helped her to buckle into the jump seat then he locked and secured the hatch and went to sit in the command chair. He saw her twisted around to look out the porthole. “What do you see, wench?” he asked.

“The Mother Superior and a man running toward us.”

Anger and Greed rose up inside the werewolf but he buckled himself into the safety harness. “Turn around,” he told her. “We’re about to take off.”

“You’d better hurry, then,” she said, doing as he bid. “They are getting closer.”

“Hang on, wench. We’ve a journey to make together!”

The Fiach lifted off the ground, washing dirt over the man and woman who were staggering under the onslaught of the flying debris. As Blaez swung the nose of his runabout around, he saw the two just for a few seconds with their arms over their faces before he pulled back on the stick and the runabout steeply rose into the clear morning air. Banking the flashy black machine, he flew low over the convent, smiling to himself as he looked down to see dozens of women waving to him as he passed over them.

“I’ve got really yucky hair,” he heard Rozenn said. Turning his head

toward her, he saw her pulling at the short nap at the back of her neck. "And it's pretty thin on top."

"You are what I want, wench," he said.

"My waist is thick and my thighs are thunderous," she said, looking into his amused eyes. "I have a broken little toe on my right foot and it's sort of crooked up."

He shook his head and let his fingers fly over the keyboard, typing in coordinates for the Green Sector, not even questioning how he knew them or from where they had come. He glanced at the screen and saw the destination was Theristes. He'd never heard of it, didn't care where it was. The Evaluator had chosen the end of their trip and that was good enough for him.

"I really am a mess."

He engaged the autopilot and unbuckled his harness. Like the predator he was, he walked to her and stood towering above her, his eyes fused with hers.

"Are you very fond of your virginal state, wench, or would you like to be rid of it?" he inquired in a polite voice.

Rozenn's brows drew together over her pretty green eyes. "I could do well enough without it, I think," she replied.

He bent over and unhooked her safety harness then stepped back, once again holding out his hand to her. "Let's see if we can't do something about that, then."

She nestled her hand in his and he turned, pulling her behind him, his forearm resting at the small of his back and he walked.

"My boobs droop," she said and she heard him sigh deeply.

He led her to the couch then turned, letting go of her hand. "Wench," he said, "I have never been a patient man. Patience is something you will have to help me learn. I've never been a generous man. That's something else you are going to have to teach me to be. I get angry a lot and I've been known to do things--violent things--without giving them a thought. You're going to have to put a leash on me to make me to heel." He held her gaze with his. "Do you think you can do all that?"

Rozenn put an index finger to her lip and thought about it for a moment. "What about lust?" she asked. "Is that one of your faults, too?"

"One of my worst," he said, his eyes gleaming.

"Well, I don't think I'd like to curb that one just yet, but the others we can work on."

He put his hands to his shirt and began unbuttoning it.

“What are you doing?” she asked, eyes wide.

“I’m hot,” he said, peeling the shirt from his broad shoulders. “Are you hot, wench?”

She stared avidly at his heavily-furred chest. “A bit,” she whispered.

He lifted his leg, crooked it over his knee and pulled off his boot. He smiled as her gaze went to his bare foot and she whined low in her throat. Making quick work of his other boot, he fanned the air across his face. “It’s much too hot in here, don’t you think?”

He unbuttoned his jeans and pushed them down until his tiger line and the broad V of his pubic hair came into view.

“Actually, it’s too damned hot, wolfie,” she said, licking her lips.

He smiled and pushed the waistband of his jeans down his lean flanks, his heavy erection springing into view.

Rozenn swallowed hotly. “And getting hotter by the second.” She snatched up the skirt of her gown, grabbed handfuls of it and jerked it over her head, revealing--just as he had--that there was no underwear beneath her ugly, shapeless garment that hide her from view.

He shot out a hand and snagged her around the waist, pulled her off the couch and onto the floor, drawing her naked body under his, grinding his steely arousal against the apex of her thighs. Slanting his mouth over hers, he took possession of her lips, thrusting his tongue into her sweet cavern, tasting her, reveling in having her in his arms and all to himself without there being a fear she’d be snatched away again.

Her breasts were tipped with fiery little points pressing into his chest and she moved them back and forth across him, apparently delighting in the feel of the coarse hair abrading her nipples.

He reached down to cup the cheeks of her derriere and mold her to him.

“Damn woman,” he said. “You are as hot down there as a volcano.”

Rozenn giggled. “Didn’t I tell you I was hot, wolfie.”

He growled deep in his throat and slid down her until his teeth were plucking at the wiry hairs of her triangle, his hot breath on her most sensitive flesh.

Rozenn shivered. “Oh, wolfie!” she whispered. “That feels ... that is ...”

When his tongue stabbed at her clit then licked it, she squealed and buried her hands in his thick hair.

“Like that?” he inquired.

“Damn straight, I do!” she said, her voice husky. “Do that again! Can you do that again?”

“Baby, you ain’t felt nothing yet. I’m a wolf. I can do it all night long but I don’t think you could take it.”

She gave him a challenging look. “Try me,” she said.

He arched a dark brow and the devilish grin that tugged at his full lips was pure evil intent. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” he growled.

Blaez dragged his tongue from the bottom of her cleft upward and then along each fold. He licked at the tender insides of her thighs then stabbed the tip into her sheath. Her fingers had tightened in his hair and her hips were arched up to give him free reign. He lapped at her warm moistness again--and still again--before slipping his middle finger into her anus and his thumb into her cunt.

“Sweet Merciful Alel!” Rozenn cried out. Her body was on fire with a need she could never have imagined. She was panting as he worked his fingers in and out of her, all the while slathering her with that wicked tongue.

The werewolf could feel the tension building in his lady and he didn’t want her to come on his fingers. He wanted her to feel the full depth of his cock--the hardness of it, the length of it--and the spurt of his cum filling her hot sheath. He knew she wasn’t that far from a climax and he wanted to prolong it for a bit longer.

“No!” Rozenn complained when he withdrew his fingers but had to bite her lower lip when he pushed up and over her and put his delicious shaft at her entry.

“Rather have my fingers and tongue, wench, or do you want a big, bad wolf pumping into that sweet little cunt?”

She lifted her legs and wrapped them around his waist, pulling him down atop her, reveling in his weight, in the heat of his body, in the stiffness of him as he rammed his tool deep inside her. “Give me what you got, wolfie!” she ordered.

He thrust hard enough inside her to push her upwards along the floor.

“Aye!” she shouted, arching up to meet him thrust for thrust.

The slap of their bodies against one another was an aphrodisiac in itself. His grunts, her whimpers of delight--their combined gasps as the sweet little pulsations began deep within her and spiraled up faster and faster until she was screaming his name, digging her nails into his back and her heels into his ass. His hands were beneath her and he lifted her higher to



thrust deeper, harder and at the moment he came, he held her still and let her feel the entire quivers of his cock buried within her.

Together they came down from that decadent high and he collapsed atop her, his cheek against her sweaty breast, his warm breath blowing over one turgid nipple. She had lowered her legs to slide them along side his and had wrapped her arms around his shoulders. For a long time they lay there trying to get their breathing under control, to bask in the precious afterglow of the great pleasure they had given one another.

“Wolfie?” she finally asked.

He sighed and raised his head to look up at her sweet face. “Whatie?”

She grinned. “Did I tell you I have cellulite on my ass?”

THE END