

Carnal THIRST
MISLED

BOOK ONE

SYLVIA DAY



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DEDICATION

This story is dedicated to two fabulous women—Tawny Taylor and Jordan Summers. Tawny for holding the “Some Like it Hot” contest where it became a finalist, and Jordan for reading the contest entry, getting in touch with me and becoming a dear friend. Both women gave me a much-needed dose of confidence at the start of my career. Thank you both.



PROLOGUE

Sable Taylor was going to jail for sure this time.

And Derek watched the events leading up to her arrest with a slight smile.

Leaning back, he rested a broad shoulder against the wall and crossed his arms. Sable was no more than a blur to the humans who milled around Windemere Court's Palladian-style City Hall, but his vampire sight caught her movements without any trouble at all. The bounty hunter raced along the white stone walls, her lithe body moving with little strain as she chased the murderer they were both pursuing.

He could help her, he supposed, but Sable wouldn't appreciate it. Despite his job as a Special Task Force agent, he was the enemy to her, direct competition in the capture of wanted criminals. He did it for justice, she did it for money, but he didn't think less of her. She'd earned his respect, in addition to a more carnal interest. An interest she returned, but refuted at every opportunity.

When they'd first met he'd been a rookie and he'd learned a lot by watching her in action. He'd seen her in a flash, a brief moment of sharp recognition, before one of them, usually him, made off with their quarry. Every time he saw her she was more beautiful than he remembered. Sable honed her body with hard training and a diet of blood. Her hair was jet black, deeper in color than his own raven locks and completely straight, a long curtain of silk. Her skin was as pale as starlight and just as luminous. And her eyes—he dreamed about her eyes. They were a rich blue so startling the sight of them always caught him off guard.

He'd lusted after her since the moment he'd first seen her. He had smelled her lush scent and heard the barely there beat of her heart, and he'd known she was one of his kind. The last two years watching Sable work—admiring her skill, her daring and her bravery—had only made him want her

more. Their work, by nature, was a lonely existence. Always in pursuit, hunters never stayed in any one place long enough to become attached to anything. Or anyone. She knew what his life was like because she lived one similar to it. That commonality gave their inevitable pairing a common thread he looked forward to exploring.

But first they had to get through this capture.

They were hunting Jared Ione, one of their kind who'd crossed the line between drinking to live and drinking to kill. Jared was a vampire in his physical prime but he was barely staying ahead of Sable whose physical stamina made Derek's jaw ache and his fangs descend. Imagining all that energy in her bed was enough to make his cock hard. Just once he'd like a lover that gave as good as she got—a true equal, his match.

He expected it would take another minute at most before the authorities in City Hall put an end to the chase. Windemere had a law against vamps using their superhuman abilities in public buildings. Sable was considered too dangerous to the humans to be in the path of vampires running at full speed. A straight-on collision was often deadly. But Sable was known for ignoring any laws that got in her way. With her uncommon beauty and blatant, innate sex appeal, she could usually talk her way out of any scrape. But this time, Derek was going to step in and apprehend her before she had the chance to do any sweet-talking. He was tired of waiting for her to come around to his way of thinking, which included a couple of weeks and his four-poster bed. Two years, damn it. He'd spent two years lusting for her.

Today he was going to get what he wanted.

As he'd predicted, two Windemere officers stepped into view and one of them took aim with a net gun. The built-in tracking device locked onto the racing vamps and the officer fired, encasing the two straining bodies in a single net. With a stunning crash they fell to the floor, both of them growling in near-deafening frustration. Startled humans scattered with piercing screams. Derek pushed off the wall and strolled to the rescue, flashing his badge with a smile.

"Hello, officers," he greeted.

"Damn you, Atkinson!" Sable yelled, fighting futilely against both the entrapment and the vampire locked with her. With a low snarl, she reached for her blaster and neutralized Ione.

It took a few minutes to untangle her, then another minute more to cuff the unconscious vamp and hand him over to the waiting officers.

"He's my catch!" Sable complained, setting her hands on shapely hips and glaring at him. Dressed in a black sleeveless bio-suit, every ripe curve was displayed to his view.

Derek licked his fangs which had descended, as they did whenever a vamp was hunting...or lusting. It was part of the mutation brought on by the virus. *Damn, she was hot.* Long legs and curvy in all the right places, with full breasts and a lot of attitude. He really liked the attitude. She was one hundred percent pure alpha female. "Turn around."

“What?” She stood her ground.

“I’ve got to cuff you.”

“What?”

He stepped closer and breathed her in, his body instantly waking to full arousal. It took everything he had to fight off a hard-on. Her scent called to him on the cellular level, stirring his blood and then sending it straight to his cock.

“What the hell are you doing, Atkinson?”

He reached around her waist and set the cuffs against her wrists. They measured the circumference automatically and secured with a soft click. “Saving you from a month in jail.”

With her breasts pressing into his chest, Derek didn’t want to move. But he had to get her out of Windemere before the authorities changed their minds and decided to keep her. Since he had no intention of letting her out of his grasp, that wouldn’t be good. For a variety of reasons, he didn’t need to attract trouble from headquarters. But he’d do it for Sable.

He wanted her bad enough.

Derek set his hand on the curve of her ass and prodded her down the main hallway, then off to the transport bays. They weaved through the fluted columns, skirting the crowd that had gathered to watch the arrest.

“They can’t see us now,” she said in a furious whisper. “Let me go!”

He laughed. “That’s all the gratitude I get for saving that sweet ass of yours?” He gave a firm squeeze and then pushed her up the ramp of his waiting Starwing, following directly behind.

His gaze dropped to her seductively swaying hips and he was lost. Totally and completely consumed by lust. He hit the lock and the ramp lifted behind him. The sudden vacuum of the ship amplified her appeal. Finally, they were enclosed together, tucked away from the rest of the universe. Free to catch their breath and get to know one another. In every way possible.

Two damn years. He should have lost interest, but he liked her too much. She was unique. In all of his centuries, he’d never met a woman like her.

Sable’s eyes narrowed as he unzipped his bio-suit. Her fangs descended as she hissed at him. “I’m grateful, but I’m not *that* grateful. You just cost me one hundred and fifty thousand credits, that’s payment enough.”

Her frame was stiff, her glare unwelcoming but the scent of her arousal permeated the air. Sweet and ripe like cherries, it was intoxicating. The hard-on he’d avoided before swelled with a vengeance, his cock hardening instantly and painfully.

“If you’d shown a little patience, Ione would have left City Hall eventually.”

“I can’t afford to have patience, Atkinson, when you’re hunting the same bounty as I am.”

Derek let his suit drop past his hips to pool on the deck. He watched with satisfaction as her eyes darkened at the sight of his rampant erection.

“Stay away,” she said in a choked voice.

“Come on now, baby. Be honest. Staying away is the last thing you want me to do.”

Sable backed away warily. “You may be thinking about your dick, but I’m thinking about my accounts. And right now they’re in need of a credit infusion.” She tried to race past him to the cargo bay door, but he’d anticipated the move and easily blocked her exit.

“Since you took Ione right out from under me, I need to capture Castle,” she snapped. “He’s worth almost as much. I don’t have time for this if I want to pay my bills.”

Derek reached out and slowly lowered the zipper of her suit, giving her the opportunity to wrench away, if that’s what she truly wanted. He growled his approval when she didn’t move and she shuddered as the lush valley of her cleavage was revealed to him.

“We’ll get our man, baby,” he assured her in a voice made husky with desire. “I have it on good authority that Castle will be at Deep Space 12 in two days. We’ll catch him then. In the meantime, we have some time to spend together.”

His fingertip drifted across the soft swell of her breast. “I know you feel it, too,” he breathed, “the need between us. We’ve got two days, we’re going in the same direction, why shouldn’t we have a little R&R and burn this thing out. I don’t know about you, but it’s starting to affect my job. I can’t think about work when I’m thinking about you.”

“My ship—”

“I’m towing it,” he said quickly, jumping on that telltale bit of capitulation.

“You planned this!” she accused.

“Now how could I know you’d break the law in Windemere?” he pointed out innocently. “Don’t blame me for taking advantage of an opportunity you presented me with.”

As he studied the creamy beauty of her exposed skin, his voice lowered further. “Can I help it that watching you work makes me hot?”

She swallowed hard, her blue eyes wide. “It does?”

“Hell, yes. All that power and stamina. You think fast and act faster. It turns me on.”

“I’ve known men who are threatened by my work.”

“You’ve known idiots.”

He stepped closer, suppressing a smile as she continued to hold her ground. Sable was staying put because she wanted to, not because he was making her. He’d tried in the past to use his sensual call on her, a vampire survival mechanism that helped them subdue prey so they could feed. He was much older than she was and therefore more powerful, but she was always able to throw off his calling with ease. He didn’t mind, it meant she was seduced by *him* and not the vampire within him.

He, in turn, was seduced by everything about her.

Sable was too much of a novice in the ways of vampires to know how to use her calling, but she had just the same. Swirling around her like a thick fog, she radiated sex and desire. As he stepped closer

he was pulled into her sensual spell, pulled into her until he could think of nothing else. Wanted nothing else.

His hands reached out and tangled in the long silk of her hair. Clenching his fists, Derek pulled her head back, exposing the ivory column of her throat. He could hear her blood flowing and could see it pulsing the large vein under the nearly translucent skin. He leaned over her and stroked it with his tongue in a slow, deliberate back-and-forth glide. Sable moaned softly, her pose almost one of supplication, if not for the predator's fangs that betrayed her true nature.

It was her very nature that most appealed to him and in celebration of that, his mouth moved upward over her jaw. He licked her lips and then her fangs, growling when her tongue reached out and brushed against his.

With a quick tap on the cuffs they released and fell to the deck. He reached between the open flap of her suit, slipping his hands over her shoulders and pushing the bio-suit down her arms. The touch of her skin burned his palms and he knew she would scorch him alive when he fucked her. The mere thought of it made sweat mist upon his skin.

"Tell me to stop now," he groaned. "If that's what you want."

She bit her lower lip, her fangs causing tiny droplets of crimson to appear. The scent of her blood drove him to madness. The rest of her suit came off in shreds as his mouth lowered to hers.

Consumed by his frenzy, Sable gripped his shoulders and returned his kiss with equal passion. Her nipples, hard and peaked tight, stabbed into his chest. He pulled her closer until she spread her legs and rubbed the slick heat of her sex along the length of his cock. The warmth of her body, the sultry scent of her arousal, the sweetness of her blood, all combined to make restraint impossible. But he didn't need restraint. This was Sable, a vampire with the heart of a warrior and a body to back it up. He didn't have to coddle her. She wouldn't let him even if he wanted to.

"Touch me," she said into his mouth, and Derek realized he stood frozen and achingly aroused. Sable undulated against him, her thighs a firm cradle for his erection. He was covered in her cream and about to come from the sheer wonder of her cunt stroking back and forth across his cock.

Almost afraid to touch her and lose control, he placed his hands at her waist, his fingers gliding over her soft skin. Her tongue was fucking his mouth in the most erotic dance and Derek shuddered, loving how she took what she needed without hesitation. This wasn't just for him or just for her. They were the moment together, something he'd anticipated but still found wonderfully unexpected.

Sable placed her hands over his and directed them to her breasts, pressing the hard, tight tips deep into his palms.

"Sable..." He groaned, his eyes closing as he kneaded the breasts he'd dreamed of for years, awestruck by how full they were despite how lean she was. Bending over, he lowered his head and took her in his mouth.

She gasped and arched into him. "Suck harder."

Derek trapped a ripe nipple against the roof of his mouth and suckled her, his cheeks hollowing on every drawing pull. Sable began to quiver and then progressed to outright shaking until her legs gave way and he held her suspended in his arms, arched over his forearms, his mouth working her toward orgasm.

“Don’t...” she gasped.

He lifted his head. “Don’t what?”

“Don’t make me come like this.” Arching her hips, she ground her pussy into the root of his shaft, her short nails digging into his biceps. “Give me your cock.”

Tightening his grip on her torso, Derek leapt, pinning her against the bulkhead, their feet dangling as he plunged into her creamy pussy and sank his fangs deep into her throat.

“Derek!” she screamed in surprised pleasure and pain, bucking against him in a way that made rational thought impossible.

Her tight cunt clung to his aching shaft, warm and welcoming. Her legs encircled his hips, pulling him inside with the physical strength he so admired. She melted around him, his cock clenched in her slick fist and bathed in the juices of her arousal. And she tasted like heaven.

Sable had never called him by his first name before and somehow the simple familiarity touched him in a way he hadn’t experienced in centuries. Raw, carnal need burned through his veins as his blood gushed down his throat, settling heavy and insistent between his legs. He slid out of her, his cock drenched with her cream, and she whimpered, a soft sound of protest that urged him to fuck her with slow, deep plunges. Her moan reverberated through the metal confines of his ship.

Derek gripped her thigh, opening her so he could fuck her pussy with steady, rhythmic pumps of his cock. *Damn you*, he thought, awash in pleasure he knew would be addicting. The feel of her cunt as he circled his hips and screwed deep into her was dizzying. He felt drunk on her, intoxicated by her taste and scent.

Her left cheek rested against the cool bulkhead, giving him access to her lovely throat and the elixir that flowed in the veins just beneath the surface. Her eyes were closed, her mouth parted. “Derek,” she said softly, her voice slurred. “You feel so good...”

He was glad they had two days, because it would take at least that long before he had his fill.

He tore his mouth from her throat with a curse. “I need to fuck you. Hard.”

“Yes.”

His jaw clenched tight, Derek abandoned his leisurely pace and fucked her like the animal he was, pounding into her tight, hot pussy with such force he shoved Sable up the bulkhead and onto the ceiling. The sensations were too much, coming on too fast—her full breasts pressed to his chest, her cunt milking his cock rhythmically, her breath gusting across his ear as she moaned his name in a primal chant of mindless pleasure.

“Take me,” he growled, offering his throat to her. His eyes slid shut as her fangs pierced his skin.

flooding him with heat and burning desire. He was going to come, he couldn't hold it back. His balls drew up tight, heavy with the semen he was about to empty inside her.

He reached out with his calling, establishing a mental connection. Normally he kept his thoughts to himself when his orgasm was upon him. He considered it a personal moment, not something he shared beyond his outward appearance of pleasure. Sometimes he eavesdropped on his partner's thoughts just to make certain he was pleasuring her as much as possible, but his release was his own.

But this joining was different. He was so profoundly satiated by the act of fucking Sable that he felt almost...*grateful*. And he hated that he was so aroused, his balls rock-hard, his swollen cock aching that he wasn't going to sate her in return.

In seven centuries, he'd never finished before his partner. Never. So he decided to share his pleasure with her, hoping she would find some satisfaction simply from giving so much of it to him. He also wanted to know her, to see into her thoughts and ascertain the pureness of her motives, because suddenly he didn't want to be just another fuck to her.

She was writhing over him, pinned between him and the ceiling, purring like a wildcat as she fed him. He gripped her thighs and spread them wide, pumping his cock deep inside her.

The lushness of her body completely overwhelmed him. Sex wasn't meant to be like this, making a man mindless with need and out of control. This was deadly, ensnaring. He'd never get free.

Her silken pussy gripped his shaft in decadent ripples and he came, howling in rapture so intense it was painful. Derek poured the excess of sensation into her mind, showing her the dazzling blindness of his orgasm until Sable stiffened against him and burst into her own release, an orgasm so powerful she gripped his cock like a vise, holding him inside her as if she never wanted to let him go.

He didn't want to let her go either.

He had two days to convince her to give him a chance. After two years of waiting Derek didn't hold out much hope, but he'd try his best. Thankfully his best was pretty damn good.

Firm in his intent, he lowered them to the floor and carried Sable to his bed.



CHAPTER 1

Sable had found her prey. She could smell the fear pouring from him in misty waves, even over the odors of stale beer and cigarettes.

He knew she was hunting him.

Her mouth curved in smile so feral the men who watched her with lusty eyes looked away, the interest doused instantly. Stepping further into the dimly lit bar in the Deep Space 12 concourse, her hand dipped automatically to the lasersword held in the holster on her thigh. It was illegal to use weapons in the concourse, it was illegal even to carry a weapon but she had docked in the wasp removal bay, affording her the opportunity to slip past security.

Scowling, she sniffed the air to check on her fugitive, Butch Castle, but also to search for another scent—one so masculine and virile it drove her to madness. In fact she could still smell it on her skin and it was keeping her hot and horny, distracting her when she needed to be the most focused. She forced herself to concentrate, tuning out the background music in the small bar and the paging flight information echoing in the terminal behind her. Her focus narrowed, a huntress closing in for the kill.

Her shoulders relaxed when she confirmed she was the only vampire in the room. Still, Sable knew she didn't have long before Derek caught up with her. The handcuffs she'd used to shackle him to the bed would hold, but the bedposts wouldn't. She'd be damned if she'd let him steal another fugitive from her, even if he was the best fuck she'd had in over a century.

She stepped further into the bar...

“You know,” purred a deep velvety voice behind her. “A guy could take it personally when his woman fucks him senseless and then leaves without a kiss goodbye.”

Heat pooled instantly at the top of her spine and spiraled downward. Shocked, Sable spun around.
“What the hell?”

Derek Atkinson stood barely an inch away, his strong hands gripping his narrow hips as he eyed her with his silver stare—a stare still molten with desire for her. “I wasn’t done with you yet. I was just taking a power nap before we started again.”

A shiver went through her body at his words. His raking glance stripped her of her clothing and left her naked to his view. *He’d wanted more of her? After two days straight of mind-blowing sex?* The man was an animal.

Her nostrils flared. Standing this close to him she could finally smell his delicious scent buried under the overwhelming smell of herself. No wonder she hadn’t detected him sooner.

His eyes danced with devilish amusement. “I thought I was in pretty good shape, but I guess not. I’m falling asleep and you still have the energy to get up and chase my fugitive.”

That arrogant comment penetrated her astonishment. “He’s not *your* fugitive!”

He cupped her cheek with a warm hand. Instantly her skin grew hot, her pussy wet, her nipples hard. Even after two days straight of Derek’s addicting carnal attentions she was still ready to fuck him again. Immediately. Her fangs slid downward in anticipation.

“Sable, sweet.” He smiled, his sensual lips curling upward to reveal pearly white fangs even longer and more deadly than her own.

Her mouth dried instantly.

His voice lowered and she knew he smelled her arousal. “You’re a talented hunter, baby, no doubt about that. But your operation is small and you’re often ill-equipped. If you just let me—”

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Butch Castle edging toward the exit to the main concourse. Faster than the human eye could see her, she leapt over the tables between her and her prey. She tucked the man, easily twice her body weight, under her arm and left Derek without looking back. She heard him shout after her as she crawled along the wall to the traffic-free ceiling and ran to her ship. And then she couldn’t hear anything with Butch screaming in terror as they flew through the concourse upside down, his human eyes unable to see more than a blur.

Sable could sense Derek swiftly gaining ground and cursed under her breath. She was no match for him physically, as he’d proven on several occasions in the past, and she was weighted down with the screaming human. She saw her turn coming up but maintained her lightning speed, feinting to the left at the last possible moment. Derek blazed past them. The ruse bought her only a few seconds but was long enough for her to enter her transport and shut the cargo bay. Just as the portal locked with a hiss of air, she felt a thud as Derek slammed into the door. He’d probably dented the damn thing.

Sable shoved Butch Castle into the brig. “Take a shower,” she ordered. “Wash the stench of fear off you. I’m hungry, so after we take off I’ll be back to feed.” She saw his eyes widen in dismay and smiled. “Don’t worry, you’ll enjoy it. Humans always do.”

Moving to the deck, she sat in her captain's chair and secured the five-point harness. Then she activated the exterior communication link. "Move away, Derek. I'm about to take off."

"Damn it, Sable," he growled. "You bitch! Didn't the last two days mean anything to you?"

She swallowed hard. Mean *anything*? They'd meant *everything*.

What an idiot she'd been to give in to her longing to have him. *Burn this thing out*, he'd said, and she'd leapt at the excuse to have him even though she'd known deep inside that it would only get worse.

Glancing up, she saw him standing in the loading bay, one hand plunging through his thick raven hair in frustration. He was undeniably gorgeous. Tall, broad-shouldered and thickly muscled, he took up her entire view screen from the chest up. Her heart pounded against her rib cage and her chest grew tight. "Don't play me, Derek," she said in a voice that betrayed her with its hoarseness.

He glanced up sharply and bore his metallic gaze into hers through the video screen. He couldn't see her, but his gaze still searched for answers. "It seems to me that I'm the one being played. Was I just a convenient fuck for you, baby? A couple dozen orgasms and I've outlived my usefulness?"

"Go to hell," she bit out, even as she shivered at the memory. "You were going to do the same to me, I just beat you to the punch. Now back off!"

He backed away a few steps, affording her a clear view of the massive bulge of his cock straining through his suit. His handsome face was set in harsh lines, his gaze piercing in his fury. "If you believe that, Sable, after all the time I spent inside you, you don't know anything about me at all."

Sable closed her eyes for a moment, willing away the burning behind her lids that would prevent her from seeing her way out of the narrow docking bay. *If only things could be different.*

"Goodbye, Derek," she said softly as she terminated the audio. When she opened her eyes and looked at the screen he was gone.

And with a skilled tug on the controls, so was she.



Derek sat on the deck of his ship the *Viper* and watched Sable's sleek new model Starwing burst in at lightspeed and disappear. The ship suited her perfectly. She liked new toys—the faster and more powerful the better—which was probably why she was so hot for him.

His lips twisted wryly. The last forty-eight hours had been the most pleasurable of his life. Considering how old he was, that was saying something. He'd never experienced anything as powerful as being with Sable; his cock had been painfully hard almost the entire two days.

He waited until it was clear for him to follow, set the navigation for the jump and went to take

shower. As he stepped under the spray of water, the unmistakable scent of hard sex rose from his skin to dissipate in the steam. Derek closed his eyes and rested his forehead against the cool metal of the shower stall. It wasn't hard to picture Sable as she'd been only a few hours ago, imprinting her smile on him in a way that he knew would never leave him. She was the fuck of the century, several centuries actually. He groaned a low tortured sound. It would probably take several more before he burned her out of his blood.

Now that he'd actually had her...well, he wasn't sated yet. Not by half.

Derek sighed as he finished rinsing his hair and then stepped out of the shower, his mind weary and heart heavy simply because Sable was no longer with him. She'd become a complication in a way he should have seen coming.

Entering his cabin, he paused at the sight of his rumpled four-poster. Sable had been astonished and then delighted at the sight of the bed. It was a luxury he indulged in because he spent so much of his time in pursuit. He'd tied her to that bed, draped her over the edge of it, fucked her on the floor beside it, taken her standing against the posts at the foot of it. He knew he would never look at that bed again without thinking of her. And wishing she were in it.

That damned impossible woman. She was going to get herself killed. Sable was too reckless and too impatient to study the rules of the worlds she invaded in search of her prey. Derek had attempted to offer his assistance, but every time he'd brought it up, Sable had silenced him with her body until he was too exhausted to keep trying. Part of him was grateful to put off the conversation, feeling a strange desperation to enjoy what he could, while he could. Then he'd woken up this afternoon and found himself handcuffed to the bedposts, her ship no longer trailing behind his.

Apparently, she didn't know how powerful a Master as old as he was could become. He'd dissipated into mist and followed her easily. She'd looked so astonished to find him behind her in the concourse bar. Astonished and instantly aroused. Whatever her reasons were for leaving, it wasn't because she didn't want him anymore.

Derek knew she was headed back to the Gamma Sector to turn in Castle and collect her bounty. There were field headquarters in every sector, but she seemed to prefer the one in Gamma, which was his. She'd collect the updated list of fugitives, settle on the one worth the most credits and then immediately take flight again in the hopes of avoiding him when he docked for the same reason.

She was running from him, but he wasn't fool enough to take it personally. He hadn't missed the regret in her voice when she'd said goodbye or the emotion in her gaze the last time they'd made love. Despite her fierceness, Sable was a tender and giving lover and she'd worshiped his body in a way that had to mean something to her. It sure as hell had meant something to him.

But he knew she wouldn't let her personal feelings get in the way of her plans. She was very good at her job. He'd have to be better if he hoped to catch a hunter of her caliber.

So the hunt was on.

And Sable was his prey.



CHAPTER 2

Impatient, Sable tapped her boot in rapid staccato against the floor. Detained for almost an hour in the captain's office of the Interstellar Council's Special Task Force, her nerves were on edge. The Gamma Sector field office should feel like home considering the amount of time she spent there, but Captain Hoff didn't like vamps. He didn't trust them and he'd lobbied hard to get them removed from the Force. The field office was his bastion and because of his anti-vamp sentiments she didn't like being there.

Groaning with frustration, Sable looked at the framed picture on the desk for the thousandth time since she entered the room. She was sick of looking at the redheaded captain with his pretty brunette wife and two red-haired kids. She'd give him another minute or two to show up and then she was leaving, whether he liked it or not.

Suddenly, she stilled, wondering if Derek had comm'ed ahead and arranged this delay.

As quickly as the thought came to her, Sable wrote it off. She knew how deeply she'd pleased him—how could she not when he filled her mind with it?—but Derek Atkinson wasn't just known for his skills as an agent. He was also known for his prowess in bed, a singular skill he had no trouble sharing freely. She refused to believe she meant any more to him than the thousands of other women he screwed over the last six or seven hundred years.

But, damn, he knew how to fuck well. Sharing his bed had been so good, she couldn't regret it. There was something to be said for a man with several centuries' worth of experience in seducing women.

Okay. Who was she kidding? There was a lot to be said.

She'd always admired Derek's dark good looks and amazing body, but he'd been no more than the

a gorgeous man to drool over. She hadn't known anything more personal about him than she could gather from gossip and a few lines of text in a thin personnel file. Now she knew him as a man, every way possible.

Derek was beyond amazing as a lover, sometimes wild and animalistic, other times tender and reverent. His mind, which she knew as intimately as his body, was clever and intelligent. He had a deep sense of honor and a desire to give meaning to his endless life with the worthwhile pursuit of justice. In short, he was all the things she admired in the male half of her species.

Sable wished she could have found something wrong with him, any little thing that would have made him less appealing. But she hadn't and because he was everything she wanted, she'd fallen for him. Hard. When he'd looked into her eyes the last time he slid inside her, she couldn't make it impersonal, couldn't make it just sex. He'd built the mental connection between them and they made love. Just the remembrance of it made her ache for him.

But she couldn't have him.

The door opened behind her and she rose. "Captain," she greeted with relief, thankful it wasn't Derek and grateful for the respite from her thoughts.

Hoff's tall, lanky form dominated the doorway. "Have a seat, Special Agent Taylor."

Sable sank back into the chair as the captain took his place on the opposite side of the desk. Behind him was an expansive window with a view of space beyond. "Good work bringing Castle into custody."

"Thank you, sir."

"Were there other agents in pursuit when you caught him?"

"Only Agent Atkinson." Sable's cheeks heated just from saying Derek's name. She hoped the perceptive captain didn't notice.

"You seem to run into Atkinson quite a bit. Do you think he suspects you?"

"No way." She knew that for certain. Derek would never have fucked her if he'd known she worked undercover for Internal Affairs. Instead he'd have looked at her with disgust and considered her a rival for hunting fellow agents. Her chest tightened painfully at the thought. Losing his respect would be too much to bear.

"Have you discovered anything new since last I talked with you?" he asked.

She wrinkled her nose. "You know I can't share IAB information with you, Captain. Not while this investigation is still underway."

Hoff's pale blue eyes narrowed. "When you make your arrest I want to be the first to know. I can't believe one of my agents is selling information to the Federation. You've been under-cover for two years now and you haven't turned up anything incriminating. Maybe IAB is wrong about the lead coming from this field office."

Sable kept her face impassive. She knew IAB wasn't wrong. Within the last two days, the informa-

from this office had sold false information that she'd planted in the database. While she hated to have missed the opportunity to apprehend the traitor, she was relieved to exonerate Derek without a doubt. He'd been in bed with her for the last two days. And the shower. And the dining table. And the...

Damn, best not to think about that.

In any case, he hadn't gone anywhere near the controls of his ship to access the main computers.

"IAB is rarely wrong," she said with confidence. "There's a leak. And I'll find it." She stood.

As she made her way toward the door, the captain called after her. "You're dismissed, Agent Taylor."

She rolled her eyes.

Stepping out into the hallway, she crashed into a rock wall. At least it felt like one.

"Watch it," she ground out, as the wall steadied her. She looked into fiery silver eyes and bit back a groan. "Dere—er, Agent Atkinson."

Derek wore his dark blue STF uniform and she could barely catch her breath at the sight of him. She'd always been a sucker for a man in uniform and Derek made it look especially yummy.

He slid his hands down her arms, burning her skin and causing heated ripples of awareness to pool in her core. "Hello, Sable." His voice was rich and warm and filled with sensual promise. "In trouble with the captain again? What did you do this time?"

She scowled and shrugged off his touch, digging deep for the strength she needed to walk away. "I entered the docking bay a little too fast," she lied. Circumventing him, she headed down the hall with rapid steps.

He fell into step beside her. "Who are you tracking now?"

"None of your damn business," she snapped, trying not to look at his handsome face with its sexy smile and angry gaze. He was obviously still pissed about her leaving him at DS12 two days ago. In any way, she was glad. It showed that he cared, if only a little.

"Fine," he said smoothly, but she heard the frustration in his tone. "Is my cum still dripping down your thighs?"

She halted abruptly, her mouth agape. "What?"

He shrugged and tried to look innocent, which was impossible. "That would be my business, wouldn't it? I mean if *my* bodily fluids are in *your*—"

"Shut up." Arms akimbo, Sable was certain she'd never been as furious in her life, which was exactly what Derek had intended with his outrageous question. He was not a man who took well to being ignored and he fought back with no holds barred.

He mimicked her posture and raised a raven brow. Despite his fury, he looked like heaven, *h*heaven, but she couldn't do a damn thing about that as long as she was undercover in his field office.

Sable loved his smile and his body, his silky hair and piercing fangs. She admired his strength and his control. He was cool and levelheaded when she was hot and brash. He was pulled together and

quick on his feet, when she was falling apart and frozen in place. He complemented her in every way that mattered.

Except she wanted him forever and he wanted her for right now.

She used to love her job, used to love knowing she kept the Task Force clean and free of dirty officers. Now she hated it. She'd hated it ever since she met Derek two years ago, because her job prevented her from having him for however long he'd give her his attention. She was enough of a glutton for punishment that she'd be willing to take what she could get when it came to Derek Atkinson.

Sable closed her eyes and released a long, slow breath. When she looked at him again, she was much calmer and not as angry. "Listen, Derek. The time we shared was great, I have no regrets—"

"That's something, I suppose," he muttered.

"But it can't happen again. It really shouldn't have happened to begin with."

He snorted and his full lips tightened with displeasure. "How can you say that? I know you feel something."

"Maybe I did. But we both know you're not a long-term relationship kind of vamp—"

"How the hell would we both know that?" he growled.

"How old are you?" She arched a brow. "Several centuries old at least. And yet you've never been married, never been engaged."

"Maybe I hadn't found what I was looking for," he argued.

"Maybe you never will."

"Maybe I have."

Sable shook her head, squelching the flutter in her stomach, and started down the hallway again. "Whatever, Derek." She dismissed his statement with a wave of her hand. "It was fun, but now it's over. Let's not ruin the memory by arguing."

"Are you finished?" he ground out.

"Definitely." She kept walking as he slowed.

"Good."

He gripped her elbow and dragged her into an interrogation room on the left. Before she realized what was happening, he had her pinned to the wall, his mouth on hers, his tongue thrusting through her parted lips.

His long fingers moved through her hair, cupping the back of her head to position her as he wanted. The man kissed the way he fucked, deep and possessive, with a skill that stole her ability to think or move. His hips pressed hers to the wall, his erection hot and heavy against her lower belly. All around him she could smell his desire, heady and overwhelming, pure and gratifying.

Sable melted into him as his tongue stroked the inside of her mouth and his hands caressed her body with centuries' worth of devastating knowledge. He tasted so unbelievably good, like sin on a stick.

and she wanted more. Much more. Her job was so lonely, her work all-consuming. Only Derek understood the rigors. His body offered a solace she had found nowhere else. Touching him, holding him was a much-needed respite and an intimacy unlike anything she'd known before. It was wrong to want him and hopeless, but she couldn't help it.

Tearing her mouth from his, she tugged his head lower, bared her fangs and sank home in the powerful expanse of his neck, claiming him, because he'd claimed her. Instantly the rich, intoxicating taste of his blood, aged like a fine wine, poured down her throat. She felt him probing her mind, coaxing and encouraging until she didn't care where they were. All she cared about was Derek, his body and talented hands, the sinewy length of his muscles beneath her appreciative fingertips and the potent strength of his blood flowing into her.

Sable fed for long moments, writhing against him in an agony of lust. His blood should soothe her, calm her. Instead it heated her from the inside, making her skin tingle and her nipples peak tight. He caressed the length of her spine, holding her close, rocking his rock-hard cock against her clit. She ground her hips into that bulge, wanting to come with near desperation. Feeding was, by nature, a sensual act, but with Derek it was so much more powerful than the physical need to orgasm. It was almost instinctual.

"You know," he breathed, his deep voice vibrating against her lips. "It's never been like this for me."

Was he talking about the lust? She wondered.

That too, but also the gifting. I've never really appreciated it before.

Reluctantly, Sable withdrew her fangs, lapping at the tiny punctures with her tongue to seal them. When she leaned back to look at him, Derek's silvery irises were swirling like molten metal.

Gifting—the exchange of blood between vamps. It wasn't for sustenance. It was a gift, an exchange of the precious fluid that was the center of their existence. To some vamps, it was no more intimate than a kiss. To others, it was a deeply personal act, more so than intercourse.

He lifted her and carried her, his sexual intent clear. The room was small, windowless and metallic. The only items inside it were the small table he set her down on, a single chair, and a very horrible master vampire.

"Someone will come in here," she whispered, a token protest.

"I'll keep them away."

"How?" As soon as she asked, she knew, somehow, he could do as he said.

"Trust me, baby," he urged as he pulled her to the edge. "You're mine. I won't share even a glimpse of you with someone else."

Sable hiked up the short, flared skirt she wore and shimmied out of her thong while Derek hit the catch on his uniform and shrugged his torso out of it. He pushed the garment down to his thighs, releasing the magnificent cock that had driven her to insanity just two days before. It was long and

impossibly thick, beautifully shaped with a thick roping of veins that pleased her from the inside.

“I love your body,” she groaned as he stepped between her spread thighs, his cock in hand and aimed for her creamy opening. His chest was broad and sculpted, well-formed muscles flexing as he stroked himself, making his shaft harder and thicker.

“It’s all yours, Sable.”

She bit her lip, trying to dull the possessiveness she had no right to feel. Derek leaned over and licked her lip.

“Watch me take you,” he whispered, his free hand pressing her gently backward until she set her arms behind her to support her weight. He lifted her skirt to her waist, drawing her eyes to the glistening curls between her thighs and the ruddy cock that approached them.

Sable watched, mesmerized, as he entered her with exquisite slowness, the flared head breaching her, stretching her. Her eyelids grew heavy as Derek surged slowly inside, hot and hard, a silky instrument of sexual torment and ultimate relief.

She shivered and moaned as he slipped deeper, sliding through her cream, his impressive width and length like a warm inner massage. He buried himself to the hilt, his head falling back as a shudder shook the length of his body. He offered a soft smile, revealing wicked fangs and molten eyes made bright by the animal let loose inside him. He withdrew and then pressed forward again, his stomach rippling with muscle as he gave a long, deep plunge.

“So hot,” he said hoarsely. “So tight and wet.” He pulled out until only the tip remained inside her. “Look at all your cream on my cock. It’s the most erotic thing I’ve ever seen.”

She swallowed hard, her skin damp from the heat.

“Put your finger in my mouth,” he urged.

Leaning to one side, she freed one hand and did as he asked. His cheeks hollowed as he sucked, drawing on her with a steady suction, the tempo of which was echoed in the clasps of her pussy on his cock. She gasped, so aroused she couldn’t think.

“That’s what you feel like to me. It makes me want to come, Sable. It makes my balls ache. Does it turn you on? Watching me fuck you? Feeling me stroke you?”

“Yes...” Sable stared, her nipples so hard they ached, as he pumped his cock into her pussy, his rhythm so slow, his hips swirling and then lunging.

Nothing had ever felt as good as this. She’d never have enough of it, never stop craving it. The sex got better every time.

And more personal.

With a growl, Derek claimed her throat with his fangs as his thrusts picked up speed, propelling himself deeply into her with soft blows of his hips to hers. His thoughts entered her head with a clarity she was learning to treasure. *I’ve missed this, baby. I missed you.*

Sable wrapped her legs around his waist, adding her strength to his, making his cock strike deep,

deep. Derek wasn't like other lovers she'd had. Everything he did, every move he made was planned for her pleasure. His greedy mouth tugged at her skin, building an ecstasy so intense she came, bathing him in a rush moisture. He slowed, savoring her orgasm, his touch gentle as if he knew her fears and longed to soothe them. She longed to let him.

"So good," she moaned, her body on fire, and Derek growled his agreement as he drank. She gripped his flexing buttocks, urging him deeper when there was no deeper to go.

Sable felt him everywhere. He permeated everything with a merciless penetration that brought her as much pain as pleasure. Belatedly, she fought off his invasion, trying to shield herself from the devastation his loss would bring.

He reached a hand between them and stroked her clit in time with the thrusting of his hips. *You can't hold back. Stop trying.*

As her body tightened with another orgasm, tears slipped free and dripped onto her cheek.

Don't, he begged. Don't cry. It's okay. I'm here with you. You're not alone.

"I'm always alone," she cried softly. "It's the nature of our beast."

And her job.

He hunched over her, caging her to table, thrusting hard until she came with a scream. He released her neck and arched his back, a guttural cry torn from his throat as he spurted his seed deep inside her.



Derek stirred slowly, reluctant to lift his head from the pillow of Sable's breast. He felt drained and yet omnipotent at the same time. His strength was steadily increasing as he spent more time inside her. Sable charged him in some way he hadn't known existed, hadn't known was possible.

Was that why he craved her?

No, that couldn't be the reason. He'd wanted her before. The rush he experienced being with her was just an added enticement. It must be the virus. Perhaps together, he and Sable created a synergy. Even if he didn't desire her so badly, that alone was worth exploring.

He turned his head and looked at the two-way mirror on the wall. He saw nothing but an empty room, their reflections absent from the silvered glass. Sable was right. It was the nature of their beast to be lonely, set apart from others not of their kind. But they'd found each other. Against the odds and all of the rules.

He should have been more circumspect before taking her to his ship and fucking her for days. He should have known the lust riding him so hard meant more than he was willing to admit. If he hadn't been so blind, he could have courted her, wooed her, instead of getting his way with his cock. But the

was not the way it went down and despite his chagrin, Derek couldn't regret it. Sable was in his arms and he was deep inside her, soaked in their cream. They had the sexual part of a romantic relationship worked out to perfection. The rest would fall into place eventually.

He pulled himself upright, but remained a part of her. Sable couldn't deny their connection when they were so intimately joined. Reaching down, he brushed the silky strands of her hair away from her forehead. His touch was reverent and adoring, as was the stroking of her right hand against his hip. Closing her eyes, her breathing slowed to a soft pant.

"What are you doing to me?" she whispered brokenly.

His thumbs drifted along the impossibly long length of her lashes, brushing away the tears that had clung there. "What are you afraid of, baby?"

"I'm not afraid." She sat up. To his surprise, she wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head upon his chest. "But this can't keep happening. It has to stop."

"Why?" He pulled back to search her face. The sadness in her eyes arrested his gaze. He'd felt that during their mental connection and was frustrated by the wall she'd erected in her mind. She only let him see a tiny portion of who she was, keeping the greater part of herself tucked away.

What wasn't she sharing with him?

"There's more than lust going on here, Sable. I know you feel it too. You wouldn't be crying otherwise."

"There are things you don't know about me."

"I don't care what they are." He was startled to realize he spoke the truth. He was a curious man which made him good at his job. "I can wait until you're ready to tell me. All I care about is us—you and me and the way I feel when I'm inside you. The way you make me feel when you look at me like you're doing right now."

Sable glanced away and he gripped her chin, pulling her gaze back to his.

"Don't turn away from me, baby."

"Don't push, Derek. Okay?"

Derek released her and ran a hand through his hair. "I've spent six hundred years looking for this. I'm not about to let it go now that I've found it."

"Do you love me?" she asked bluntly, her sapphire gaze probing, invasive.

He choked at her directness and the questions it made him ask of himself.

"I thought so," she murmured without inflection. She shoved him backward, forcing his semi-erect cock from the shelter of her pussy, leaving him feeling bereft and rejected. She smoothed her short skirt over her thighs and slid off the table, pausing a moment to retrieve her thong. The wall between them was a tangible thing and it frightened him. And pissed him off.

"Damn it!" Derek tugged on his uniform, glaring at her. "Give me a chance to think."

"Forget it." Sable flew to the door before he could move. She paused on the threshold, her mouth

thinned with determination. “Stay out of my life, Atkinson. Find another way to pass the time.”



Sable sat in the cockpit of her Starwing and reminded herself that she was a strong woman who could handle anything. Rubbing her eyes, she leaned back in the captain’s chair and wished she had room somewhere, something that was hers, a place to call home. She’d taken possession of the highly desired ship compliments of a smuggler who’d been caught by Interstellar Customs. Almost everything she owned was confiscated goods from the impounds of half a dozen different law enforcement agencies. She had to have the best of everything to maintain the appearance of a money-hungry bounty hunter. Unfortunately, it also meant that Sable Taylor had nothing of her own.

She looked out the cockpit window at the half dozen ships docked around her. They branched out on spokes from the slowly spinning center that was the Task Force field office for this part of the universe. Derek’s ship was easy to spot. He drove a Starwing not much older than her own, but his ship was definitely more luxuriously outfitted.

Derek Atkinson had money—lots of it. Judicious investments made over several centuries would make anyone rich beyond measure. It was a testimony to Derek’s character that he chose to work for the STF rather than spend his days idly, surrounded by willing women. His imperviousness to bribes made him the least likely of her suspects. She was certain that no amount of money could entice Derek to whore himself to the Federation.

So who was the traitor?

She’d pondered that question a hundred times over. Starting the engines, she glanced down at the readout on the console. Jeffrey Leroy was next on her list of agents to investigate. He was in the Delta Sector tracking down a smuggler, so that was her next destination. Disengaging from the docking bay, Sable pulled the required distance away from the field office before programming the jump lightspeed. Then she stood, stretching muscles made deliciously languid from two fabulous orgasms.

Taking a quick shower, she tried not to think about what had happened at headquarters and failed miserably. How could she not think about it? She’d ignored every protocol of her job by getting involved with an agent. And she was definitely involved, no doubt about that. It would be so much easier to blame it on loneliness eased by physical pleasure, but that wouldn’t be true and she had to be honest with herself. Otherwise, she’d do something stupid, like fuck him some more, which was exactly what had gotten her in this mess to begin with.

Sable shut off the spray and towed her skin dry.

And what the hell had gotten into Derek? He’d almost made it sound like what they had was more

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