

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

A DOMINANT
FOR
Desela
MORE THAN MALE

REESE GABRIEL

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A Dominant for Desela

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MORE THAN MALE:

A DOMINANT FOR DESELA

Reese Gabriel

Chapter One

The Colony Marshal was waiting for Desela at customs as soon as she got off the spaceship. Two hundred pounds of solid muscle, his vee-shaped frame mouthwateringly accentuated by the black skintight shirt and the exosteel vest with the laminated star identified him as the sole extension of Earth law and order in this remote and rugged outpost of space.

His hair was dark and short and his eyes were cobalt blue. His features were chiseled and well proportioned. Under different circumstances, he would be regarded as dreamily handsome. At the moment, however, he looked more like a hawk about to spring upon its prey.

"I just want you to know," he told Des as soon as she passed her identification cube through the robotic scanner located in the ramshackle metal and plastic building that served as a combination cargo port, passenger deck and mercantile exchange. "I am dead set against you being here. You're going to stir up nothing but trouble and that's the last thing I need. Apparently you pulled strings to get yourself a visa, which means I am stuck with you. Just be aware I am watching you like a hawk and I'm going to deport your pretty posterior the minute you slip up."

Desela felt a tingling at the mention of her posterior. She was by birth an obedient, biologically engineered to respond to testosterone. At one point, she had been engaged to marry Korlon, a young officer of the Guardians. He had left her for another and in the five years since she had focused her life in a different direction—one that did not include men.

By and large she was successful in resisting her urges to submit, but every now and then she ran across someone who broke through her defenses, leaving her hot, wet and confused.

Desela managed a smile, attempting to hide the effect he was having on her hormones. "So what you're telling me is, don't hold my breath for any welcoming parade, is that it?"

The no-nonsense Marshal seemed momentarily taken aback by her show of humor. "Just consider this your one and only warning," he grumbled.

"Thank you for your candor," she replied, stepping aside to allow a dented spindle droid to pass, a rope grasped in one of its appendages to which was attached a small six-legged cow.

The Marshal narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "If you think you'll impress me with sarcasm, young lady, you are very much mistaken."

"Sarcasm isn't in my blood, Marshal... I didn't catch your name." She had almost called him "Sir". What was next, telling him how his threats were making her nipples tight and hard and moistening her throbbing sex in anticipation of submissive sex-making?

This was the really hard part about being an obedient. Saying no was so damn difficult. Even when a man didn't ask for sex-making, her body was forever screaming out, wanting to beg for it.

"Marshal Trajan," he supplied, with obvious reluctance.

"Trajan," she repeated. "After the ancient Roman emperor?"

He tried not to seem impressed. "So you've studied history," he said. "Would you like a medal?"

By this point she would have been well within her rights to call him on his rudeness. But something told her there was more to the man than met the eye. A hidden core that she longed to touch. "I would settle for being able to do my job on this colony and move on, just as you said."

Marshal Trajan tucked his thumbs into his gun belt. Waiting a moment for the conclusion of some overhead announcement, booming and utterly incomprehensible, he said, "You call what you're doing a job? No one invited you here and I can assure you, none of the men on Unicorn Three want your services. They are perfectly happy alone."

Desela's eyes strayed in quick succession from his magnetic round belt buckle to the outline of his large cock under his heavy pants to the blaster hanging from his lean waist. These last two were both stark reminders of power—the one used to keep civil order on a colony full of rowdy miners, the other used to subdue females in scorching passion.

"I would be happy to show you my references." Des stood her ground. "I have matched nearly a thousand couples so far, in over a dozen worlds."

"Sure," he snarled. "You can come by my office and we'll get out some tissues and a little wine and have a nice, happy little cry-fest."

"You will find, Marshal," said Desela, feeling surprisingly confident as the conversation proceeded, "that sarcasm doesn't impress me, either."

Trajan frowned, not looking very happy about getting back a dose of his own medicine. "I don't like smart-aleck women," he said. "I don't like women, period."

"Maybe not for some things," she countered.

Des couldn't believe the words coming out of her mouth. Not even with Korlon, after all their time together, had she felt this confident interacting with a primale.

"What is that supposed to mean?" the Marshal asked.

"Nothing," she shrugged. "Although it is common knowledge that Unicorn Three has more pleasure houses per square mile than any other colony in this quadrant."

"Men need sex—so what? If there are more whorehouses here, that's because the men here are tougher," he declared.

"You keep telling yourself that, Marshal Trajan."

"I do, every day."

"You must be quite satisfied with yourself."

"Don't I look it?"

"Actually, you look miserable."

"Life outside the domes does that to you, missy. It ages a man, gets under his skin."

"Marshal, I don't want to fight with you," Des conceded. "It's been a long flight and I am very tired. If you could point me to the nearest sleep facility."

Trajan backed off at once. "I'm sorry. I forgot my manners. Also a side effect of life in the colonies."

"It's all right, really."

So she was right. There was more to the man than explosive first impressions would indicate. The question was, how much more bluster and torture would she have to get through to find it?

Listen to her—she was sounding like she wanted a relationship with this Marshal Trajan. That wasn't her place. She was the matchmaker. The sole proprietor and operator of Des' Dream Mates—an organization dedicated to fomenting happy unions between obedient females and primale men.

Her work gave her true peace and allowed her to draw on all her experience with Korlon and with his eventual mate, Jaxey, whose unique biology had given Des insights into the true meaning of submission.

As long as Des was helping others unite, she felt her own life had purpose. By staying single, she could act on others' behalf, playing a small role in creating their happiness.

She considered herself very blessed. For a woman born with a servant's heart, she had found a way to serve not one man, but hundreds, and females, too.

If only she didn't feel so lonely sometimes.

"The best sleep facility is the Golden Orb. It's on Rainbow Street." He squinted, studying her. "You have been in the open air before, haven't you?"

"Of course," she smiled. It wasn't an entirely foolish question to ask a civilian from the inner worlds, where nearly all of human life took place either beneath domes or within the protection of an airship's cabin.

Some people were known to have attacks of terrible anxiety from their first exposure to the naked sky. She herself had suffered her way through as part of an outer rim tourist group. Her main problem, aside from a bout of nausea, was the distinct jealousy she felt seeing how other obedients on the trip were able to draw on the strength of their primale Dominants for comfort.

All they had to do was melt into the arms of their Masters and all was right with the world. Indeed, what worry had an obedient woman in the world except to please her man? And should she fall short, she need carry no guilt or doubt around inside her. Primales loved their women too much to torture them in such ways. Instead, they were treated to immediate and cleansing discipline, the pain of correction providing them a concrete way to expiate their sins.

There were some who objected to the strict domination of primales over their females. They saw things only in terms of whips and chains, collars and sexual control. What they missed—aside from the thrill of being subjected to those very tools—was the love and devotion each primale showed to his woman.

He cared for her above all things and would never let anything stand in the way of her happiness.

The Marshal nodded. "I had hoped you had at least that much preparation for life on a colony." He put his hand to the center of her back. "I will take you to the Golden Orb in my hover. I'll see to it your luggage catches up with you later."

Desela felt warmth throughout her body in response to his touch. It was gentle enough, but still firm and commanding. She had no doubt those hands were capable of doing whatever it took to defend the law.

How would they be in bed, though? Would they manipulate a woman to ecstasy as she suspected? There was little doubt from looking at the man and watching him in action that he was a primale. No mem would ever be able to withstand this sort of job, anyway. The miners and trappers would eat him alive, not to mention the other sorts of drifters and traders who came through the colony's main spaceport.

"Thank you, Marshal, that's very kind of you."

"Call me Trajan."

"Trajan," she whispered. It sounded wicked on her lips and more than a little suggestive. If only he knew her thoughts right now, he would not have been so quick to let her drop his title.

Trajan...

She could imagine crying out his name, begging his touch, lying on her back, her legs spread wide, aching, waiting to be filled, her sex wet, open and ready for his hot, thick cock. His glorious muscled body on top of her, pressed against her, close enough for her to run her fingers over his corded back, across the smooth surface of his pectoral muscles, teasing downward over his stomach.

Would he have hair on his chest? Would his skin be leathery or would it be soft? How about his nipples—what color, how large, and what would they look like erect, glistening from her suckling lips?

Des would play her hands everywhere on his body, over his lean ass, his strong thighs, and she would cup his balls, too, feeling them fill with the semen that he would emit inside her grateful, yearning body.

As delicious as it might be to have free rein, though, it could be even sweeter to have her movement denied. A man like Trajan might like to hold his woman's wrists over her head. He might not ask her to open her body, he might command it, telling her to spread her thighs in preparation for penetration.

She would have no choice but to comply...lust would dictate it and her own desire would make it so. Yes – a female could not help but submit to a man like that.

Did he have a mate? Doubtful, given his stance on women.

Like many of the primales in the outer rim, he was a confirmed bachelor. They had their reasons, sadness from the past, restless spirits, things few other men and no women could ever hope to understand.

"You won't be traveling anywhere on your own," Trajan explained, ushering her by the elbow past the obstacle course of sales druids, drifters and mine recruiters. "This is not a safe place for females of your type."

Des noted the eyes following her, burning holes through her tight tunic, short skirt, leggings and liquex boots. Male eyes of all shapes and sizes, milling about or standing along the walls, in strange costumes, some of them a bit shifty-looking, she had to admit. "And what type of woman is that?" she inquired.

"You're not a prostitute," he said bluntly. "The men here won't appreciate it when they find out they can't buy your services."

"You're assuming they would even be interested," she quipped.

Trajan directed her through a doorway into a long, rounded corridor. "They'll be interested," he replied. "Trust me."

Des' stomach did a tiny flip. Despite her best intentions to stay neutral, she found herself needing to know what he thought of her. It was her obedient nature coming to the surface. Trying to keep her tone light she said, "Is that your way of telling me you think I'm attractive?"

He stopped before a door marked "Emergency". "It's my way of telling you that you won't be traveling anywhere by yourself," he said flatly, punching a red button on the wall.

The door slid open.

"Yes, you did make that clear."

The flyer was parked on the other side in a hangar, along with about half a dozen others. It was silver and black with the insignia of the Colony Marshal's office. The doors opened automatically on both the passenger's and driver's side. Showing every bit as much gallantry as a high-class mem, Trajan took her hand and helped her into the police vehicle.

For just a moment, as his fingers encased hers, she felt a connection. Did he feel it, too, as he stood there, that look in his eyes? Suspicion? Accusation? Resentment?

She bit her lower lip. Something struck a chord. Her impulse was to kneel, to beg forgiveness for whatever was displeasing him. But she hadn't done anything, not a

damn thing, other than show up on this bloody rock, which he didn't even own in the first place.

Luckily, the instant and the feelings passed—all of it conveyed in the spark of energy between them, his grip incredibly complex and vital.

Everything about him said he was a mystery waiting to be solved.

Desela got into the vehicle, conscious of his eyes watching her. Was he regarding her as a nuisance, like he had said, or did he have other motives, more primitive, purely male ones? He wouldn't be the first. She had been deliberately designed for maddening blonde beauty, with a perfect face and lithe body. Plenty of times she would have traded her raw desirability for something plainer and easier to manage.

Shutting her door, he climbed into the driver's side. The ease with which he settled himself, flipping on the hover's ignition and shifting it to fly-power made Des tingle all over. The man was in his element, clearly in command of his environment.

She tried not to make it obvious, watching the motions of his hands, so very close to the level of his crotch. What would he do if she buried her head in his lap, shocking the starch out of him with a delicious blowjob?

There she went again, thinking things she shouldn't, ideas that went nowhere.

"Buckle up," ordered Trajan.

Des did as she was told, reaching for the series of heavy belts and buckles. The design was that of a harness, which fit over her shoulders, crisscrossed her breasts and connected to another belt at her waist.

The sound of the metal clicking made her think of chains. Did Trajan like to chain his women? Most primales did at some point or other during sex-making. If not metal, then rope, or barring that, the irresistible power of the voice, ordering them into a position which they were not allowed to break without a counter command.

On their backs, perhaps, legs spread wide, or on all fours in readiness to receive their Master's cock. Or kneeling, eyes downcast in submission, thighs wide, the liquids pouring from their sex in anticipation.

"Tighter," said Trajan, noting the results of her effort.

Des complied, not entirely sure if this was a safety issue or something else...

The belt pressed between her breasts, which were already quite sensitive. It was snug at her waist as well, accentuating her figure. A man could take definite visual advantage of a female in this condition, she noted.

If he wanted to.

Des felt the powering up of the hover directly between her legs. A steady humming that added to the general feeling of liquification she was experiencing.

The whole thing, the commanding tone of his voice, the bondage-like restraint, not to mention the way he was shifting the levitation stick like a gleaming silver cock, was one huge aphrodisiac.

"Hold on," he said. "Sometimes she's a little rough on the takeoff."

The hover jerked sideways, causing her to grab on to his arm. It was solid. Pleasingly firm.

"I warned you," he declared, in a tone meant to confirm the whole of his case against her being on Unicorn Three.

"You don't hear me complaining, do you?" She righted herself, trying not to panic at the fact they were only about an inch away from the flyer next to them, hovering at a forty-five-degree angle.

"You will soon enough," he predicted, pushing the lever forward to lift the craft directly up in the air. "You're a woman."

Des gripped the armrest, wondering how they were going to make it through the roof. "I'll say one thing. For a man sworn to blindly uphold justice you have a lot of prejudices, do you know that?"

They were an inch away from the roof when it finally retracted, letting them through. The sky outside was bright pink and orange, brilliant and sparkling. Mammoth mountains, colored in grays and purples and reds, rose from all directions. Des took a deep breath, marveling.

"It's not prejudice," Trajan retorted, "if it's based on experience."

Des was amazed at what she was seeing. She had been to several planets before in the open air, but she had never seen anything like this up close—or anything like him, either.

"That might be," she conceded, dividing her attention between his gorgeous profile and the planet down below, the natural environment beyond the series of flat, circular landing pads and adjacent structures. Unicorn Three was a rocky, inhospitable world, though it was certainly beautiful, what with all the colored rocks and the snaking green plants tipped with red and yellow spikes. "But you haven't experienced me."

Trajan arched a brow on his perfect forehead. "You won't be offended if I say I'd like to keep it that way, will you?" he said, banking the hover to the left and away from the port.

"I couldn't be more pleased," she lied. Changing the subject quickly, she added, "It certainly is a spectacular view."

"Everything that you see down there is potentially deadly." He saw fit to pounce on her words. "The plants, the rocks, the air, even the insects. You wouldn't last five minutes out there on your own."

Desela felt her blood boiling. Couldn't he just for once give her a friendly or even a neutral answer?

"I wasn't trying to pass myself off as a survivalist, Marshal—I was just making polite conversation."

"Polite conversation is an oxymoron," he said gruffly. "And I thought we agreed you would call me Trajan?"

Desela laughed in spite of herself. "What difference could it possibly make to you what I call you when you obviously hate me?"

"I don't hate you." He leveled off the flyer, accelerating it slightly. "I just want you gone, I already told you that."

"You're not even giving me a chance."

He turned, looked her square in the eye. His jaw squared, lips thinned but still incredibly expressive. A man like this could affect a woman deep down, she thought. It was best to stay neutral, not to react. But for some reason this was nearly impossible to do. Her impulses were contradictory. Part of her wanted to kiss him, part of her wanted to punch him.

His tone was slightly more intense. She couldn't read the emotion. "I let you past customs, missy, that's giving you a chance. You have three days, so I suggest you make the most of it."

Her mouth hung open. "Three days? But I have a two-week visa."

Personally endorsed by Nyssa, Head of the Galactic Council, she might add, though she didn't think he would appreciate being reminded of her friends in high places.

"It's been amended. Public Security Order 101," he declared. "I have full authority. Feel free to whine to your puppet masters back on Earth, because I am not backing down."

Des turned her head, glaring out the front view screen. Now what? She could call Korlon, her ex-fiancé, who would call General Theron, the commander of the Guardians, who could call his wife Nyssa, but that would only make a worse enemy of Trajan. And without his help, she might as well pack it in and head for her next planetary destination.

No huge loss for her, maybe, but for the men she might have matched up with lifemates, it would be an unspeakable loss.

Three days it was then, though Des didn't have to like it.

"You are not a nice man." She folded her arms over her chest.

"I'm not looking to win any popularity contests," he assured her.

"Good, because you would lose," she shot back.

Trajan said nothing.

"By a landslide," she added.

"I get the point."

"Do you? I wasn't sure you wanted to hear a thing I had to say."

Trajan snorted. "Typical woman."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Women always claim they aren't being heard. They want to talk, talk, talk."

"It's a little hard to have a relationship without some talking," she defended.

"That's why I avoid them like the plague. If you ask me, all men should, especially primales."

"Primals take mates all the time," she countered. "That is why obedients were made."

"If it were up to me," he said with surprising venom, "they wouldn't make obedients at all. Just fem pleasure women."

Des tried not to take it as a personal attack. "Lots of primales are happily mated with obedients. Don't you believe in love?"

"I believe in basic human instinct," he said bluntly. "Survival and pleasure seeking."

"That's a pretty sad way to go through life," she said. "Being so cynical."

"I call it realism. It's kept me alive this far. Love is an illusion—it's dangerous. You'll learn that when you're a little experienced."

Des could feel the resentment building. Who was he to judge her experience or anything else about her? At the same time, there was something about a man being this arrogant with her, this totally superior that made her submissive pulse race.

"You're entitled to your opinion," she declared. "Personally, I don't want to learn the things you're talking about."

Trajan angled the flyer downward. They were heading toward a collection of buildings arranged loosely on either side of a concrete road. "So what do you want?" He cast a glance, eyebrow arched. "You're so gung ho on love. Why aren't you mated yourself?"

Her nipples burned hot and hard. Hearing the word mated...from those lips...

"How do you know I don't have a mate?" she challenged.

"I can tell," he said mysteriously. "I'm a cop."

Des wondered just how much he could see inside people. The idea made her a little uneasy. "For your information I'm a fem," she said. "Fems aren't designed for lifelong relationships," she told him. This was her cover story, the one she used in her capacity as a matchmaker. She couldn't afford for people to know she was an obedient. Men would take advantage. She would never be able to carry out her negotiations.

Hiding her true nature was impossibly hard at times. Jaxey had helped her enormously. It was a matter of willpower. And masturbation. Fantasies to alleviate the pressure on her raging hormones.

You could bet Marshal Trajan was going to be finding his way into those masturbatory fantasies, too.

"So you let biology be your excuse not to live happily ever after?" he queried. "That's kind of passive for a woman who's trying to single-handedly save the universe from loneliness, isn't it?"

What an exasperating man! No matter what she said, he had some way to get under her skin.

"I am not trying to save the entire universe and I don't appreciate being mocked," she declared.

"You think I'm mocking you? This is nothing, missy. Wait until you deal with the rest of the men on this planet."

"I can hold my own," she informed him. "And I will thank you not to call me missy anymore. It's demeaning."

Demeaning, but also exciting. A thrill to her obedient blood to hear him use a term of such dominant affection. If he were to lean across the seat and whisper such a name in her ear, what couldn't he make her do—this powerful, rugged, armed primale responsible for the security of an entire colony?

Open your lips for a kiss, missy...

Arch your back and thrust out your breasts for my inspection, missy...

Submit to my touch, missy...

His jaw set more firmly. Was she trying his patience? If she belonged to him, if he knew what she really was, if he chose to claim her as his, then she would not be allowed to irritate him so blatantly.

He would surely put her under domestic discipline. Like it or not, her ass would be bared and turned a flaming red by his hand or some other instrument. And then would come the sex-making, because primales were inevitably aroused after punishing their women. Des would find herself possessed, completely and absolutely, used as a slave for his pleasure.

Far from resisting, her own body would crave being turned into Trajan's plaything. She would ache and beg for his cock, in every opening of her body.

More than anything else, she would want to belong...to feel the fulfillment, sexual and spiritual of having her man empty himself inside her, filling her with his semen and driving her to orgasm after orgasm of her own, driving cataclysms that would plunge her to the very depths of the universe.

"Hopefully I won't have to call you much of anything," he interrupted her reverie.

"The feeling is mutual," she said, her voice a little shaky.

She only hoped he would not smell her arousal, here in this small cockpit, surrounded by the humming machinery of manly power, in the center of which was this incredible specimen.

Every bit as tough as a Guardian, but edgier, more gritty. Wherever things were leading with the man, it was safe to say that Trajan was managing to impact her in this short time in ways her handsome fiancé had never been able.

Things with Korlon had been so...by the book. He had handled her with reserve. With Trajan, she would have no idea what to expect. He was acting like he had total contempt for her. But he seemed to be enjoying the interaction. At least to the extent he kept talking to her.

"I'll see you get checked in to your room," he informed her as he set the flyer down on the roof of a two-story stone and steel structure colored in blue and yellow stripes. "And I will have a guard placed outside your door."

"A guard?" Des jolted slightly as the flyer's tentacle legs absorbed the slight impact. "You make it sound like I am a prisoner."

"For all intents and purposes," he said, switching off the flyer, "you are. You can't go about freely in a place like this and if I don't keep the men off you, you will find yourself in a world of trouble."

"How will I do my work? How will I find men to match?"

"I haven't a clue," he said gruffly. "We'll have to set up interviews or something."

"But I need to be able to recruit. No one will come to me on their own."

"That isn't my problem. My job is your protection."

He wanted to protect her...

Des felt a sudden rush of warmth as she fidgeted with her seat belt. "I can't get this stupid thing," she complained, hopelessly clanging the buckles.

She felt like a fool. Did Trajan have her that rattled?

"Sit back," he ordered.

Des sucked her lower lip between her teeth as he leaned across. She could smell the musk on his skin, mixed with that slight hint of male sweat and testosterone. It made her instantly weak and horny.

Her entire body went limp. Instinctively, very subtly, her legs parted, raising the hem of her thigh-high skirt just a little higher. She prayed he wouldn't notice.

Concentrating on his work, Trajan released the buckles one by one. She gasped slightly as his fingertips came within a hairsbreadth of touching her left nipple in the process. When he reached the main buckle, just below her belly button, she nearly released a soft moan.

As the metal mechanism gave way, so did she. She imagined him, his hand between her legs, parting her labia, making her inner core sing with need and desire. She would be his at a touch, fully available to his rock-hard primale body, a soft and submissive dream of pleasure, her mind and being focused on nothing but him.

Her flesh, heated to boiling, her mind wrapping itself around one big giant "Yes" of surrender and servitude.

Her eyes transfixed by his as he stripped away her clothing, removing all petty obstacles, including his own uniform beneath which lay his lean and luscious muscles.

Chief among them his proud, erect cock.

It would be big and thick and scrumptious—she knew it would. It would also be burning hot and commanding as it worked its way inside her, piercing her helpless canal, filling and fulfilling. Taking the form of everything an obedient, lonely and lost, could dream of.

Something clouded his eyes as he looked at her. It was a complicated expression. Disapproval maybe? She didn't dare move or think or react. His fingers were hesitating, hovering a second too long. Did he share her thoughts, could he read her mind?

Did he know that she wanted him to recline the seat and ravish her, thrusting himself deep inside, forcing her to experience orgasm after orgasm? Could he guess the secret need to have her nipples sucked and chewed and pinched? Could he fathom that in his clutches, free for the asking was a secret obedient, utterly powerless to resist any advance he might make, any sexual demand, no matter how humiliating?

Her cheeks tinged with red. She could scarcely stand the power of his glare. "What do you want?" she demanded. "Why are you looking at me that way?"

His body was still so dangerously close, turned as it was toward her, his hand on the strap from which he had only just liberated her. If he wished he could confine her again, touch her, even intimately. He was not at all troubled by this potentially sexual proximity, not at all self-conscious. "I'm trying to figure out what makes you tick," he explained.

"Isn't it clear? I want to make people's lives better."

He shook his head. "No, there has to be something in this for you. Nobody acts except for self-interest."

"That's right I forgot...you're the universe's greatest cynic."

"I'm a realist, I told you. And a cop. That means I don't rest until I figure out people's hidden motives. Rest assured...Miss Desela, I will find yours."

With that, he got out of the flyer. She watched him walk around the front, long loping strides like a jungle cat, confident, cool and in charge. There was no mistaking, this was his turf and she was going to play by his rules. If he wanted to know her secrets, and clearly he did, then he would find them out.

Given time and persuasion. Whatever form of persuasion he might want to use. She shivered at the possibilities.

He need only speak to her in a particular tone of voice or press his lips to hers and she would crumble, absolutely crumble. Things would go even worse for her if he started poking into her background, trying to look behind the altered identity history which had been loaded into the Galactic Databanks.

If he should find out she wasn't really a fem, but a sexual obedient, running around unattached, stirring up trouble among his hormone-crazed men, he would be furious.

Trajan opened her door. "Out."

She stood unsteadily in the doorway. Her sexual heat had robbed her of much of her strength. Or was it the slight difference in this planet's gravity and air composition? "I...feel...woozy," Desela reported.

The next thing she knew, she was tumbling downward, into a pair of stronger than steel arms.

Des vaguely remembered mumbling something to Trajan as he held her aloft, cradling her...and then everything went black.

She was in his arms, helpless, unconscious, the most beautiful woman Trajan had ever seen. And the most desirable.

How quickly the situation had changed.

A few moments ago she had been a feisty, overly talkative and argumentative annoyance. A complication of the worst kind, a distraction and a genuine danger to the peace of the colony.

Now she was posing a danger of a different sort. One he was not going to be able to resolve in his small patrol craft.

Because somehow he was going to have to lay her down on a bed in a room inside the sleep facility at the Golden Orb without giving in to his nearly irresistible urge to make sex with her.

From the moment he laid eyes on her, Trajan had wanted her. And the more she defied him, with her quick tongue and fierce green eyes, the more he had been aroused. The record indicated she was a fem, but the way she got his testosterone pumping, he could swear she was of the other persuasion of female – an obedient.

At points he had almost felt she was egging him on. Daring him to take the situation in hand – to take her in hand.

The little beauty was practically begging punishment, and oh would he love to deliver it right on Desela's pert, shapely ass. She would squirm and complain so richly, but in the end, she would beg like any female, for mercy.

Standing outside his patrol flyer right now, he could barely control his erection. As a primale it was supposed to be a matter of will, but a man could only take so much, what with this sweet-smelling body against him, curves fitting into all the right places. She was so light and so small, but so filled with passion.

She wanted the whole universe to fall in love. How much more naïve could anyone get? But she was tough too – tough enough to put her credits where her mouth was and come all the way out here into no-man's-land.

How could he not respect that kind of integrity?

Misguided as it was.

Clearly, the sooner she finished and got off this planet the better. Her friends high up the food chain, whoever they were, had gotten her here and three days was the bare minimum he could shave her visit down to.

For now, he needed to get her to bed...alone.

Pushing open the swing doors of the Golden Orb with his foot, Trajan announced his presence in the lower portion of the establishment, which was modeled loosely after an ancient saloon from the Earth historical period known as the Old West.

The floor was pseudo-wood, with a series of round tables at which sat a number of men, drinking from steel cups full of fermented narn, soy liquor and various other intoxicating beverages.

On Unicorn Three, the saying was that men would drink anything that didn't kill them and a few things that would, depending on how much fun one might have along the way.

Along the back wall was a bar behind which hovered the perfect bartender, a droid with ten arms—nine for mixing, stirring and serving and one, kept discreetly at the droid's side, was a needle blaster used for dealing with unruly customers.

Four men were at the bar, leaning heavily over the polished surface. Although it was still midafternoon, they were already far gone. He knew three were prospectors who had recently hit it big, bringing in a nice haul of trilitol crystals. The fourth was a freelance cargo pilot between runs. In a few days the pilot would be hired out and the prospectors would run out of cash and head back to the mountains.

Two pleasure women were coming on to the prospectors. They were pretty enough in low-cut green gowns with too much makeup.

On the side of the saloon, a second droid was playing an instrument resembling a four-decker piano with horns protruding from the side. Trajan knew the tune well—it was one of only two the droid was capable of playing. Many a drunken prospector and space trader had threatened to blast the sorry machine and a couple had come close, as indicated by the dents and scars on the droid's outer shell.

The one thing Trajan had hoped for was not to draw too much attention to him and the woman. Coming in the front way as he had done wasn't the smartest way to accomplish this, but he was also dealing with a need to move fast. Time was of the essence.

If he didn't deposit Desela soon in a neutral place, he was going to take her home instead. And that would surely defeat his purpose of keeping things on platonic terms.

Trajan feared he would attempt to lay her down but then he would wake her up with his lips on hers, or maybe sealed to her nipple. What treats they were, too, looking so luscious and full, distending against her tight top. She was excited, it was clear. Was it some dream she was having? What sort of man would a woman like her desire? She could have anyone she wanted. A general, a councilor. She would hardly show interest in a mere Marshal on a remote world, with a renegade past.

"I need a room," Trajan told the bartending droid, who doubled as the manager for the sleep units upstairs.

"I'll bet you do, Marshal," drawled one of the prospectors at the bar, a bearded lout busy trading in his stakes for alcohol.

Several of the others laughed.

Trajan didn't appreciate the humor. "I'd advise you to keep your comments to yourself, Mendor, unless you'd like to sleep off your drunk in lockup."

"Just making conversation, Marshal." Mendor gulped down the contents of his battered metal cup and passed it to the bartending droid for a refill. More than one of those dents had been made from his own head in barroom brawls over the years.

These men were predictable if nothing else.

"Going above and beyond the call of duty, aren't we, Marshal?"

Trajan knew the voice. Slick and smooth. And sober. "We all have our part to play," he turned to Gideos, his body tensing instinctively.

The tall, silver-and-black robot piano player stopped, sensing that a more interesting show was about to take place.

Gideos smiled—the look of a predator. He was a trader by calling. Semi-legitimate and untouchable at the moment because of his connections with Quadrant Customs. One day soon, Trajan would uncover his operations and put him away for good.

"Indeed, Marshal, and yours looks to be a pleasant part, at least today."

The man was rapaciously eyeing Desela. Among other things, Gideos ran pleasure women planet to planet. Trajan's protective instincts roared to the surface. This went beyond law enforcement. Should this man threaten Desela, he would literally tear him limb from limb.

"This female is off limits," he warned. "To you, to me, to everyone. She's in a different league from us."

"Really?" Gideos arched a brow, black and slick as were his hair and beard. A good match to his red suit. "An angel among the damned. How droll."

Trajan took a step toward the man. "Let me be clear. She's here for three days. So much as a hair on her head gets harmed and you and I will have a problem. As a matter of fact, you and your men so much as look at her and we have a problem."

At once Gideos' two guards pressed in on either side of him, their ugly faces spoiling for a fight.

The pair's brutishness was only matched by their stupidity. Trajan would demolish them—he need only find a safe place to deposit Desela for a few moments' time.

Gideos pursed his lips. He was a powerful man on his own terms, but he was not foolish enough to challenge Trajan head on. "As you wish, Marshal." He bowed his head. "Far be it from me to step on the toes of gallantry."

He signaled for his green-suited thugs to back off. They did so reluctantly.

"A room," Trajan repeated to the barkeep. At this point he would just as soon Desela be kept in the jail for her own safety. He would definitely post guards. Maybe two of them.

The bartending droid pulled a glowing disc from underneath the counter with one of its arms and slid it into a receptacle in the bar computer for validation. There was a brief whirring noise, followed by a click.

"Unit two-twenty-two." The bartending droid passed the disc to Trajan.

Trajan nodded, heading for the stairs. He took them two at a time, in plain sight of the saloon's customers. He was all the way at the top when he remembered he had yet to call for any of his deputies to provide security for Desela.

Oh, well, he had time. He would get her settled in first and then arrange security. The fact that this would leave the two of them alone was something he was not considering—or was he?

Maybe at some deeper level, he wanted a chance for something to happen?

Unit 222 was straight down the hall. The door slid open with a mechanical whir revealing a stark interior. White walls, a gray foam-mat bed and a single round viewing port out to the street. Still holding on to Desela, who had managed to turn toward him and tuck her head against his chest, he activated the window blocker and adjusted the temperature.

It was ungodly hot. Obviously the barkeep was not expecting the unit to be occupied today.

Desela was sweating, her face drenched. He was concerned about fluid loss. He might need to remove her clothes.

She did not want him to let go of her. As he lowered her to the bed, her arms wound around his neck. Trajan's blood heated instantly in response to the feel of her breasts, urgently pressed against his chest and her lips softly cooing against his throat.

Asleep though she was, Desela was playing with fire.

"Desela," he whispered. "Let go of me."

She was saying someone's name. "Kor" something. His heart sank a little. So she was dreaming of another. Wasn't that just like a female, to lead him on, only to reveal herself to be in love with another?

He cursed himself for nearly being fooled...again.

Desela moaned slightly. She was offering herself. But under false pretenses. He couldn't follow through on what his cock wanted him to do. He couldn't get inside those skimpy clothes and have his way with her. Sure, she would yield to him. She was probably wet already, but it wasn't right. Those swollen, soft lips weren't for him. That arched back, the proffered breasts...

"Wake up," he ordered, a bit more harshly than he had intended.

Desela's eyes snapped open. Her face reflected shock. Realizing what she was doing, she released him. "What? How?" she stammered.

"You passed out." He straightened himself, hands on his gun belt. "I brought you up here to your room."

Desela blinked, apparently putting things together in her head. "You brought me up here, all right," she accused. "To rape me."

"Rape you?" He couldn't be hearing her right. "Are you out of your mind?"

She scooted backward, against the wall, pulling her knees to her chest defensively. "You were trying to take advantage of me...while I was unconscious."

Trajan's jaw set hard. "You are very lucky, Desela, that you are a female. Were you a male, I would hold you accountable for a lie like that."

Her face reddened. He could see her chest rising and falling more quickly, almost as if his anger were turning her on somehow. The reaction was odd indeed for a fem.

"Get out," she demanded. "Leave me alone."

Trajan drew himself to his full height. "I will leave you alone, all right. For good. You will remain in this room until the next interplanetary shuttle, at which time you will be escorted onto it."

She looked at him in shock. "But that's three days from now. You can't lock me up until then in this little room."

"Try me."

"I will protest this," she promised.

"Be my guest. I'm sure you'll have all sorts of lies for your friends back on Earth."

"You'll lose your job," she warned.

Trajan was past the point of no return. "You think I give a damn, Desela? I've lost more jobs than you have changed hairstyles. I have one principle I live by and that's my own. I'll face a firing squad before I compromise it."

Desela's eyes were watering. "I do not change hairstyles that much."

Irrationally, Trajan's cock surged. A full-on erection. Something about those last words—her petulant protest had pointed out Desela's complete and utter femininity. So sexily, maddeningly different from his own way of thinking.

"Just...get some rest," he told her. "You're probably exhausted. You'll understand things better after a nap."

A boot hit him in the back on the way out.

"Condescending bastard," she accused.

He didn't dare turn around on account of the inexplicable smile on his face.

Sealing the door, and feeling a particular sense of satisfaction in having contained the little blonde wildcat, he pulled out his com link. "Trajan to Rather."

"Rather here," rasped his top deputy, not missing a beat. "Go ahead, boss."

"I want you over to the Golden Orb, on the double. Security detail, Unit twenty-two."

"Yes, sir. Is it the Varlian trade delegation again?"

"I wish. It's worse. A woman."

"Is she single?" quipped the tall, wiry deputy.

"Don't even think about it," growled Trajan.

"Joy killer," complained Rather.

"You can file a grievance. As soon as you learn how to read."

"I'm laughing on the inside, boss."

"So long as you're rocketing on the outside. Why aren't you here yet?"

"Didn't you hear the thud on the roof?"

Trajan heard the flyer land. "Yeah. You drop in on your head again?"

"Only way to fly, boss. Over and out."

A minute later, Rather came bounding up the stairs, a study in lean, lanky motion. Trajan filled him in on the story of the occupant of Unit 222, leaving out the details of their near sexual combustion.

In conclusion, he made it clear that under no circumstances was Desela to be allowed out.

"Any questions?" Trajan asked.

"Sure." Rather was busy manipulating a toothpick, from one side of his mouth to the other. "Do I get to peek?"

"You do and I'll feed your balls to a vekwolf."

Rather nodded. He might come across as a smart aleck, but the man was all business. There was no one Trajan would rather have at his back in a fight. "Sounds like I'll have a fun afternoon, boss. Mind sending me up something to eat?"

"You just ate. I can smell onions on your breath."

"I work up an appetite easy." He shrugged, brushing crumbs from his mustache.

Trajan went away shaking his head. "You and your appetite are going to bankrupt me yet," he quipped.

Actually, Desela was the one worrying him. Trajan didn't like the feelings she was invoking in him, not one bit. They were disturbingly reminiscent of primale mating urges. Once before he had almost succumbed to them only to be scorned and betrayed.

Since that time he had vowed only to fight, only to provide for his basic instincts, sexual relief and food and shelter. With as much room as possible along the way for exercising his natural pleasure in squashing bugs—like Gideos.

Because of the inevitable corruption of things, he didn't always find himself on the right side of the law. But he was consistent. To himself.

Emphasis on self. Alone. No complications.

Three days, he told himself, *and she will be gone*.

In the meantime, he would just have to suffer.

If things got really bad, he could always lock himself up—if that's what it took to keep his hands off her.

* * * * *

Desela was furious. Furious at Trajan, furious at herself. She had thrown herself at him, giving him full license to use her as an obedient. Thankfully he had thought she was still unconscious. It had started that way, in a kind of fog, like a sex dream. His

arms about her. Carrying her, watching over her. Dimly she remembered bad men out to get her, and Trajan protecting her honor and her person.

She wanted to be thankful—she wanted to give herself in accordance with her biology. She didn't want him to let go of her. She didn't want to be alone on the bed.

Not then and not now, either.

Tearing at the opening of her clothes in frustration, Desela sought desperately to reach bare skin. She cried out as she pinched her exposed nipples, needing the tension, the pain to focus her.

It should have been his hands on her. His body pushing her down. He could have done anything to her. Flipped her onto her belly for a spanking, for hard penetration from behind.

Des ran her hands down her belly, greedily reaching for the hem of her skirt. She whimpered, unable to get at her pussy fast enough. Damn this skirt, too short for modesty but way too long when it came to instant access.

Her heart was pounding. This was a dangerous path. If she should become too fixated on the man, she might not be able to hold back her heart and soul. She was, after all, an obedient despite her tremendous powers of will and redirection.

A man or two had tempted her and she had resisted. This time, however, with Trajan there was no holding back.

Des had panties on underneath her leggings, both of which she had to pull down. The panties were sopping wet. She plunged her hand inside, between her gaping thighs. There was a barrier, she knew, the hymen, the breaking of which was a man's prerogative, Korlon's had he wished. She could not breach it herself, though. Instead, she sought her clitoris—that button of pleasure which Korlon used to find so easily with his tongue in his oral pleasuring of her.

The tiny clit swelled instantly.

Trajan...

Instantly, his name, his reality filled her. What a close call it had been. Had he put his cock inside her, even for a second, he could have claimed her completely. Try as she might to fight him afterwards, a part of her would have become immediately his slave. At his beck and call. Forever.

She clenched her pussy muscles as the first of the orgasms overtook her. It had been too long in coming to hold back. She had been ready back on the flyer as he took her soaring through the heavens, her body tightly confined in the seat belts. She had been ready in the spaceport, too. Practically from the moment she had laid eyes on him.

All that pressure building, until at last she had passed out. From the heat or the change in atmosphere, technically, but she knew deep down it was passion. An obedient's passion.

Sheer instinct kicking in, making her fall into the arms of the man she wanted—the man strong enough to claim her, to break through years of defenses.

She moaned, arching her back, lifting her pelvis into the air. Her body craved fulfillment, the experience of a man inside her, his hard shaft plunging, claiming, pleasuring. Korlon had been so expert at oral sex, but he had never seen fit to consummate their relationship with intercourse. Because he had loved another, Jaxey, though neither of them had known it at the time.

Desela's body continued to be racked with the shock waves. Though not entirely naked, she felt completely exposed, vulnerable in a way she had never known. Tears blurred her vision. A gaping loneliness marred the pleasure, like a quiet taunting.

Korlon's ghost from long ago.

She had loved him and been forsaken.

A dark feeling overcame Des as she remembered.

She had called out his name unwittingly, while reaching for Trajan. She hadn't meant to do that, had she? Korlon was ancient history. But what was Trajan? Hardly the future and not much of a present.

Turning onto her belly, Des tucked her arms beneath her body, clutching at her breasts, driving her pelvis down into the mattress, riding the storm out. No controlling it now, it was a matter of letting it ravage her.

Among the numerous overwhelming sensations was a tingling in her well-displayed buttocks.

A kind of craving for a hand, Trajan's hand, smacking down, putting her in order, centering her.

Punishing. Arousing. Pleasing.

She moaned, because it was only in her imagination. A cruel dream, never to be realized.

And thank the stars, too, because realities were seldom like dreams.

Trajan would let her down, inevitably. Even Korlon had done that.

Gritting her teeth and grinding her pussy, she finished herself off. One last catapulting, like Trajan's flyer shooting out of the spaceport into the clear skies. And then the descent into loneliness, good old, comfortable loneliness.

Except now it hurt.

Damn that man, she thought. Damn Trajan for waking things up inside me. For getting me worked up when he has no clue what to do with me. And no desire to learn.

You are alone, Desela. It's your fate. Why can't you learn that?

Three days. That's how long I have to stay on this miserable rock. It might as well be eternity, as long as Trajan is here, too.

Somehow she had to get through it.

The best thing was to lie low, like a good girl, in her room.

But that would give Trajan the satisfaction of having bested her.

She couldn't allow that, no matter what.

What could she do, though, trapped like that?

Just then a ray of sunlight hit the bed through the filtered window. It spoke to her, lighting her mind with an ingenious, dastardly idea.

She sat up, a smile crossing her face.

Could she really pull it off?

Trajan would be furious with her. He would have her hide.

It was perfect.

Absolutely perfect. All she needed was her luggage. And a few minor adjustments to the window.

Chapter Two

"Sir," Deputy Feranto poked his head through the door of Trajan's office, "there's a communication for you."

"Take a message." Trajan spoke from out of the darkness, his radio on the desk shut off, next to the blaster and a bottle of antique Scotch whisky, Martian-produced. "I'm busy."

Busy thinking, busy drinking, trying to anesthetize his leaping synapses and wildly surging libido.

Feranto hesitated a second. Clearing his throat, meekly, he said, "It's urgent, sir. From the Golden Orb."

Trajan felt a clenching in his stomach. A call from the Orb could mean a lot of things, so why was he so sure it had to do with her—the woman he could not get off his mind no matter how hard he tried? "Patch it through," he said, using his primale powers to zap the alcoholic buzz from his system. "No, wait, on second thought I'll go over there myself. Mind the store while I'm gone."

"Yes, sir," said the young man, offering a crisp salute. He was just six months out of the Law Enforcement Academy and still green as a Narthian larvae pod. For now it was safer to keep him around the office where he couldn't hurt anyone, himself most of all.

Force of habit caused Trajan to take a rifle blaster off the wall. There was a rack of them, an assortment of heavy weapons for special occasions. If things got too rough, the Marshal's office-jail could go into heavy lockdown until reinforcements could be called in from the next colony or from a passing military ship.

Trajan had never allowed such a thing on his watch and he never would.

Checking to make sure the gleaming blue-and-silver weapon was fully armed, he hoisted it over one shoulder and called Rather. The man was already at the Orb and theoretically ought to be in the middle of things if not on top of them.

"Just a little glitch," said Rather. "Have it taken care of in a minute."

Trajan could hear banging in the background. "What in blazes is that?"

Rather cleared his throat. "Like I said, I'll have it in a minute. Why didn't you tell me she knew how to jam doors?"

"Jam doors?" Trajan hopped in the flyer. *Prospector's balls, what was Desela up to?* "Don't do anything further," he ordered. "Hold your position."

"For what it's worth, boss, she's still in there. Safe and sound."

"I take that for granted," said Trajan.

"If that's a compliment, I don't deserve it."

"We'll see. Over and out." He switched off the com link.

Setting the flyer for low-level pursuit, Trajan went right down Rainbow Street, lights flashing. The usual drunks were out, teetering this way and that. Brightly colored female faces, and some male ones, too, watched from the bordellos.

The sky above was pitch-black, sprinkled with a handful of stars. A single artificial satellite pulsed brightly. A vekwolf howled and a man staggered, collapsing into a gutter.

A typical night on Unicorn Three.

It didn't take Trajan long to find the trouble. A crowd had gathered outside the Orb. They were looking up at a window on the second floor. Desela was leaning out, calling to the crowd, advertising free chances to sign up for a mating service.

She had a holo projector with which she was beaming pictures of gorgeous women, half-naked obedients, all of whom were available to be taken as lifemates through her service.

Men were shoving each other, grabbing for the membership discs she was throwing down. A few of the drunker ones were fighting over the holo images, as if they were real.

Son of a bitch. She was on the verge of starting a riot.

Rather called him on the com link. "Boss, I'm hearing a lot of noise out front..."

"Already on it." He switched to the general signal, setting the flyer down about twenty feet away from the melee. "All units respond. We have a Situation Alpha, Rainbow Street in front of the Orb."

A lesser man—a sane one—might have waited for backup. Not Trajan. Swinging his leg out from the flyer he hoisted the blaster high in the air. A single pull of the trigger and the sky flashed neon blue.

That got their attention.

Trajan leveled the gun, having reset it to stun. "Next one of you numbnuts raises a holler gets a taste of the beam."

"Aw, come on, Marshal," slurred a prospector.

Trajan aimed at his midsection. More than enough to knock him down for the count. The medidroids would make sure he didn't suffer any lasting damage from the shock.

"Who's next?"

"You can't take us all on with that thing," called out another man, one Trajan recognized as an agent of Gideos. "Unless you want to kill us."

Trajan pulled the cartridge from the gun, pocketing it. "We could try hand-to-hand combat if you prefer. Like you said," he dropped the gun, legs akimbo, "I can't take you all on."

The crowd took a step back. Trajan might not get them all, but he would dispatch the first dozen, maybe more.

"No takers?" He waited a moment longer, and then dismissed them. "Consider this your dispersal order. Last warning."

The drunks shuffled away in twos and threes. Three units roared up the street simultaneously, the sum of the night shift. Six officers piled out, heavy guns and helmets at the ready.

Jacon, a sergeant, shook his head, noting the situation's easy resolution. "I'm not sure why you bother to pay us, sir. You do it all yourself."

"I might retire some day." Trajan slapped him on the shoulder. "You never know."

Upstairs he found Rather still trying to open the door. "It's the damndest thing." He scratched his head. "The lock is frozen solid. I can't decrypt it. And I can't break it down either. She must have something wedged on the other side. The only other thing I can do is blast it."

"Stand back," Trajan ordered. He pounded the metal surface with his fist. "Desela, open the door. Game's over. Your audience has gone home for the night."

He could hear her breathing, just on the other side of the door. Instinct told him what to do. "Open the door, Desela," he repeated with calm but indisputable authority. "Now."

Trajan heard a whirring sound. Machinery backing up. A moment later the door slid open, nice as could be.

Desela was standing there, a remote control in her hand. She had changed clothing, from her original skirt outfit into a short dress of blue liquex material that hugged her hips and thighs. Her breasts were well revealed as were her legs, which were bare, along with her feet. She had her hair in a topknot, the light, fun style belying the blatant sexual heat of the rest of her.

Trajan managed to peel his eyes away long enough to see the spiderlike device standing next to her. It was around five feet tall with a small spherical center and a series of protruding, outstretched arms with suction cups. The thing might look flimsy, but it was designed to provide powerful support to locked doors. A moment ago it had been attached to the back of this one, rendering it impregnable.

"It's a nano," she explained. "I had the seed droid for it in my luggage."

"I'm aware of the technology," he said flatly.

A simple, pocket-sized droid built the larger one, using the molecules at hand in any environment. There were any number of models for security, cooking, even pleasure.

"You can't blame me." She sought to defend herself. "I do have a right to privacy. And you said yourself this was a dangerous planet."

"So by all means, hang out your window half naked, attracting every male on the colony," he said.

"I am not half naked."

Trajan ignored her, locking the door from the inside and resealing the window.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, watching as he pulled out the chair from the holo link unit against the wall.

"Getting myself something to sit on," he informed her, "while I spank you."

Desela turned pale. "You wouldn't dare."

"I run a disciplined community." He set the chair strategically in the middle of the room. "And you have defied me."

"But you can't lay a hand on me." Her eyes were like a rabbit's, quick, darting – full of apprehension, and maybe something else besides.

"This is for your own good, Desela."

She reversed herself toward the wall. "Good for you maybe."

"You think I enjoy this sort of thing?" he inquired.

"I don't know," she challenged. "Do you?"

Her question cut through him like a hot laser. "I'm just doing my job."

A job which was about to allow him to put this gorgeous creature over his lap, squirming, helpless, her ass twitching for his visual pleasure as he laid his hot hand on it again and again.

"And what job is that exactly?"

"Desela, I am not arguing with you anymore. If need be I will gag you." *With your own panties if I can find them.*

"You just keep away," she warned, backing into the corner.

"You're only making this more difficult, Desela."

"You expect me to make it easy?" she exclaimed.

"As a matter of fact, yes."

"Don't come near me, I know Guardian self-defense techniques." She put up her hands in a sad imitation of a martial arts stance.

If he weren't so miffed at her it would be cute.

"Ow," she cried as he took hold of her wrist. "You're hurting me."

He spun her about effortlessly. "The only thing being hurt, missy, is your ego."

Trajan pinned her arm up behind her back, forcing her to tiptoe. "Are you ready to cooperate?"

"All right," she squealed. "You win, you bully."

He moved her forward, firmly but not harshly. "Do you have panties on?" he inquired, stopping her just in front of the armless white chair.

"None of your damn business," she sputtered.

Trajan lifted her tight dress to see for himself. She had on a thong, black silk. Rare and expensive. "Take it off," he ordered, releasing her.

She spun about to face him, her beautiful eyes full of venom. "Never!"

"Would you rather I rip it?"

Her hands moved to her hips. "I hate you," she informed him, pulling the dress out of the way so she could slide the garment down her perfect hips and thighs and past her delicious calves.

That might be, he thought, but she was obeying, and the more he pushed things, the more excited she became.

"Satisfied?" she asked, stepping from the tiny scrap of black material.

"No, I'm not. I want you to pick them up. Put them to your nose."

Desela gasped. "What kind of lawman are you?"

"The kind who gives orders." He clenched his fists. "Orders he expects to be obeyed."

Her entire body was tense with desire as she lifted it.

"Well?" he demanded. "What do you smell?"

"Sex," she whispered.

He smiled thinly in triumph. "Does playing to a crowd of drunken prospectors really turn you on that much? Or are you thinking of that other man? What was his name? Kor-ban?"

She looked like a tri-deer in front of a flyer beam. Completely pinned down and paralyzed.

"Yeah, I heard you calling his name," he pressed. "Or did you already know that?"

"You're...you're a cruel man," she said in a small voice.

He felt conflicting emotions. "You think those men out there would have done better by you, sweetheart? You were damn lucky they didn't get around to climbing up here and grabbing your pretty ass. You would be across the street in one of Gideos' brothels."

"I...I don't believe you," she retorted.

Trajan sat down heavily. "Ask me how much I care what you believe right about now."

She tried to escape, but he had her by the wrist again. Effortlessly, he hauled her over his lap. She screeched for him to let her go, but he made easy work of her, positioning her crotch over his.

"Brace yourself," he warned.

Desela was trying to make a bridge of herself, avoiding contact with his sex. He gave her no such opportunity, pushing her down hard with his hand. Peeling up her skirt he got his first close look at her naked flesh, the dual globes smooth and pink and just aching for strict punishment.

"You're a monster," she cried.

He laid his hand down, feeling her skin. She was so tight, every bit as arousing as he had imagined. "I saved your life," he declared. "Not that I will ever receive a thank you."

"Not in this lifetime," she vowed.

Trajan rubbed lightly in anticipation. This was the moment a primale cherished most, just before he unleashed his erotic power upon the female. The silence before the storm, the peace before the inevitable struggle and surrender.

His mind ran wild with possibilities. But he could only wait so long. Lifting his hand, he delivered a single blow, expertly placed, high on her left cheek.

Desela cried out as if he had entered her. His pulse racing, he spanked her again, leaving a second spot, red and warm like the first. She was twitching, her entire body vibrating.

Two smacks later and she began moaning in time to the punishment, her ass lifting up to receive the blows. He could smell her fresh arousal. There was no mistaking it. Nor could he miss the beautiful pout of her pussy lips swelling for him, the crack between them glistening, oozing with sexual liquid.

Unbelievable. What kind of fem got turned on by a spanking?

His cock responded in kind, pushing hard at her midsection. Before long she was grinding downward, alternating with her tempestuous upward wiggles.

"Trajan...oh god," she croaked. "What you're doing to me. Please...let me submit to you."

Trajan fought to keep his head clear. Her reaction, even the words she was using weren't right for a fem. Nor was his treatment of her appropriate to that subgender. He was treating her differently, dominantly.

Almost as if she were...

"Fems don't submit," he reminded her.

"Just use me," she begged. "As you would a female..."

"You mean like an obedient?"

"Yes," she groaned, as if she was releasing something from deep down, pent up forever. "Oh god, yes. Just like that. Like your little obedient pet."

Trajan could stand no more. He stood her upright, taking hold of her golden topknot. "Ever heard the saying, missy, be careful what you wish for?"

She bit down on her lip, her eyes wild with desire.

"That mouth of yours gets you in trouble, doesn't it? Well, this time it's taking you all the way down," Trajan ordered. "Hold still."

He seized the material of her dress, grasping either side of the neckline in his hands. In a single motion, he tore it asunder, exposing her from her breasts all the way down to her delta.

She offered no resistance as he yanked the material off her shoulders. She was naked now, in all her golden magnificence. Standing perfectly still, hands at her sides, she awaited his next move.

"What will you do to me?" she murmured.

He settled his hand over her sex, enjoying the feel of it pulsing against his palm, her golden fleece deliciously soft over her nether lips. "Whatever I wish," he replied.

She smiled, her face lighting up demurely but passionately. "I am yours, Trajan."

Trajan took her lips between his thumb and forefinger, molding her mouth for a kiss. He took her hard, stealing her very breath. She was left no choice but to press her body helplessly to his, seeking desperately to please.

By the time he released her, she was panting.

The time of her submission was nearly at hand. As soon as he had completed the task of breaking her to his sexual will.

"Do not tell me," he said, pulling the knot from her hair, allowing her blonde tresses to tumble free and damp about her face, "what I already know."

She looked up at him moist-eyed, her nipples rubbing against the material of his vest, her belly quivering against the buckle of his belt. "Yes," she whispered. "Master."

Trajan reacted as if struck with a dagger to the heart. The word had spilled from her lips so naturally and yet so unexpectedly. It brought back memories—old disappointments still unhealed.

"Why do you call me that?" he demanded.

Desela had no answer, except to sink to her knees in front of him. Trajan felt the power surging through his veins as she kissed him, a single petallike press of her lips against his roaring erection. The temptation to pull out his cock and sink it deep into her mouth was mighty, but he wanted in her pussy worse.

Reaching down for her, he lifted her by the upper arms. A moment later he held her aloft, cradling her as he had before. This time there was no mistaking the intent—clear, erotic and possessive. She was so lovely, her belly flat, her breasts gently rising and falling, her pink nipples swollen, shyly ready for his touch. She was looking at him adoringly, with the wonder and anticipation of an obedient.

Once again, he suspected her real genetics.

Unable to postpone his pleasure any longer, he carried her to the bed. He could feel the heat of her behind, where he had spanked her, delivering his loving correction. Laying her down very gently, he moved to strip himself.

Desela's arms went over her head, in instant surrender, her palms facing upward. She kept her lips parted and wet. One leg was raised slightly, her thighs pressed coyly together. The posture seemed unintentional, something entirely unwitting, designed by biology to attract a male, a conqueror.

The command could be given by voice—open, female—or else the male could employ his hands, viselike, wrenching them open to reveal the treasure within.

His eyes glued to her beauty, Trajan kept his options open, even as he shed his vest and shirt, baring his chest. A moment later, he was removing his boots and opening his pants.

She gasped at the sight of his cock, the word escaping her lips once again.

"Master..."

Desela's heart pounded in her chest. She had called him Master a second time. She could not help herself. An obedient could not make sex except as a slave. The word, the reality, was as biological to her as the stiffening of her nipples, the swelling of her clitoris.

Thus had her body responded to Trajan, and thus would it continue.

His cock was a beautiful thing to behold. Magnificent and sculpted, very large and thick, with powerful veins. The largest of these was underneath. Primals were most sensitive in this place. To a woman's tongue, to her proffered lips.

What full balls he had. So much semen stored inside. Primals possessed great prowess and considerable control over their ejaculations. If he wished, he could pump her full of his cum or give her a small dose.

He could do so in her mouth, between her legs. In her ass if he chose. Or on her face and body. An obedient accepted semen as a gift. Should he ejaculate between her lips, she would greedily swallow every drop. So, too, would she lick his precious fluids off her fingers.

She was submissive. Designed to submit.

The punishment had turned her on, hard as she had tried to hide it. His hand on her ass was like a switch, converting her from the carefully scripted surface Desela to the wanton wench underneath.

Fully naked now, Trajan came to her, his eyes full of mystery. What did he intend? How would he use her?

Crawling onto the bed, he placed a hand on her breast, cupping it, controlling it. "What do you know of slavery?" he queried.

She tried to look away. This felt too much like interrogation.

"I asked you a question."

Her gaze snapped back to his. She cringed in spite of herself. "Please don't hurt me, Master."

"If I am your Master," he clamped hold of her nipple, "then I will do as I choose."

She arched her back, feeling an instant flood in her pussy. "Yes, Master, forgive me, Master."

"Answer the question," he growled. "What do you know of slavery, *fem*?"

"I know nothing," she replied honestly. "It is only...a dream."

He studied her, stripping her to the core. "You're an obedient," he decided.

Desela melted, her secret exposed. "Yes, Master."

The answer did not please him. "What game are you playing at?"

"No game, Master. I intended nothing —"

"Well, you're going to get something," he declared. "You're going to get fucked. And lest you think there is going to be a relationship out of this, I can promise you, I'm not the settling down kind."

Her eyes watered. "I-I never asked you to —"

"Open." He slapped her hip. "Open those pretty legs for Master."

Desela did as she was told. "I hate you," she hissed.

He moved to mount her, clamping her wrists in one of his hands. "But you will beg me to penetrate you nonetheless, won't you?"

She turned her head.

Trajan punished her nipples, one after the other, alternating stern pinches with soft caresses.

Desela squirmed, helpless, succumbing to agonizing torture. "Master, stop."

"You may not call me that. I'm not your Master and you won't rope me into being one. I'm a stranger, taking advantage of a foolish woman. One who should have stayed home."

"I really do hate you," she declared. "More than anything."

"You can swear at me all you like while we're making sex," he said. "But I want you begging first."

"N-never." Her teeth chattered, fighting the hot chills.

He teased her neck with cruel kisses. "I have all night, stall as long as you like."

"Why," she gasped, "are you doing this?"

"I told you, I don't like women."

"That's not true," she insisted.

"How would you know the first thing about me?"

"Oh god," she moaned. It all felt so wickedly good. There was no way he could be the kind of bastard he was pretending. She was so confused. "Trajan...just...just take me."

"Beg."

"Please, please take me."

"You want to be fucked, is that it?"

"I beg you to fuck me," she agreed. "Is that what you want to hear? I want your hard cock pounding sense into me. I want to be used like a foolish woman. I want to be put in my place so you can send me packing and I'll know I should never have come here."

Trajan growled, moving into position.

The moment of truth...

His cock plunged to the depths of her being.

Her untried being.

There was a momentary sting, a catch in time as he descended. Trajan's eyes widened in recognition. He seemed to want to stop but he was committed.

All the way in he went to the hilt. His eyes registered the shock. "You're a..."

"A virgin," she completed the thought.

Trajan arched his back, supporting himself by his palms. His enormous biceps flexed deliciously. "But...how?" he stammered, his bravado and bluster all but shattered.

"Virginity is the result of not making sex with a male," she said dryly. "I would have thought a man of your experience would know the condition."

"You didn't tell me," he accused.

"I didn't think it would come up."

He pulled out, kneeling between her legs. "How could it not come up?" he asked in disbelief. "It was obvious we were going to make sex."

"There just wasn't a good moment," she insisted. "Unless you wanted me to tell you at the spaceport? That would have gone over big."

He ran his hands through his hair. "This is insane."

"You started it," she reminded him, "by spanking me. What kind of law enforcement do you call that?"

Trajan shook his head. "I must be losing it," he said, speaking to no one in particular.

Desela sat up, kissing his chest. "You're not losing anything. I'm the one who's going to lose something."

They had come too far and she was not going to back down. Trajan would be her first, if it killed them both.

"Desela, stop, you'll get me all worked up again."

"Good." She licked at his pectorals, circling his nipples enticingly. They stood at attention, sweet and brown.

"I said stop." He took her by the back of her hair, bending her neck.

"Yes, Master," she said demurely.

His gaze narrowed. "You're not going to manipulate me into sex-making, missy."

"No, Master."

"Don't call me that."

"Sorry, Master."

Trajan's jaw set hard. She knew what was coming next and she couldn't wait. Forcing her down to the bed he turned her over onto her belly.

She took ten smacks. Hard.

They fell in rapid succession, leaving her behind a blaze of fire. Still, it was dwarfed by the heat in her pussy.

"Are you ready to behave?" he said.

"No, Master," she rasped. "I need...more punishment."

Trajan swore under his breath. "I should have known this would only get you hotter."

Desela lifted her ass off the bed, tucking her legs underneath her. "Punish me," she begged, "with your cock."

"You're pushing it," he warned.

"I am," she agreed. "I need discipline, Marshal. I need to be fucked into submission."

"Fuck," he growled. "I know we'll both regret this."

"This" was his hands grasping her waist. Followed by his rock-hard cock at the opening to her labia.

"Up," he commanded. "On all fours."

Desela put herself in position for penetration. Her pussy ached with need. It was like she knew the man already, the feel of him, and was missing the sensation.

Was he the one? The primale for whom she was made and to whom she would give her body and heart for life?

"This won't mean anything," he said, plunging his cock inside her for the second time.

There was no barrier now, nothing to prevent his smooth and masterful entry, all the way to the hilt. Desela cried out. She was taking him inside her, all of him, she was about to be fucked.

Trajan released a deep guttural sound, pressing his hand to her back. He paused a moment and then retracted, not all the way, but nearly to the tip. Again he paused, driving her half mad with the feeling of sudden emptiness.

A moment later he refilled her and she came, her body shuddering uncontrollably. "I can't...help myself," she cried.

"I don't want you to," he said. "I want you to cut loose."

It was all the permission she needed. With each subsequent thrust, she let herself go to higher and higher release. She was coming for him, under his command, for his pleasure.

Which in turn was her pleasure.

Trajan rode her hard, the primale way. Though small in stature and perceived as frail, obedients were designed for vigorous, rough sex-making. Desela was no exception. With every thrust, she countered, giving him her softness, her pliancy.

They spiraled upward together and as he readied for his climax, she prepared for her own ultimate release. Her fingers gripped at the bed, her nails digging in. She ground her teeth, unable to utter a sound. Every part of her went tense and slack at once. The bed was absorbing most of the impact but they were still bouncing up and down like a ship in a storm.

Every time he filled her was like the first and with every withdrawal she felt like an eternity passed, alone and empty. She didn't want it to ever end, yet a part of her wanted it to stop, so she could catch a breath and suck in a bit of the life that was being sapped from her.

Above all she wanted to hold on to the feeling of being enveloped, her body sheltered beneath this man of muscle and steel and hidden pain. Nothing would ever hurt her down here, she was sure of it. And yet he himself was burning from within.

Why? The question raged even as he reached his pinnacle.

His deep primal groans gave way to a roaring noise. She cried out in unbridled joy. This was on account of her—this pleasure was being found with her, between her thighs, in her company.

Her own orgasm poured out as a libation, an offering to her newfound god. Trajan continued his exclamations as he began to come, one blast after another until she lost count.

He is emptying himself...

She was being honored. He trusted her, giving her all he had.

Or was it simply a mechanical action, with no emotional repercussions, just as he had promised?

Desela could feel the semen leaking out of her along with her own liquids. Trajan's thrusts lessened in intensity and they both came back to reality. He stayed hard as his breathing slowed. A primale never withdrew flaccid. He kept control even after ejaculation, making a fully erect retreat.

Des turned her head, nuzzling his neck, a silent thank you. For her first time, her best time, a time she doubted she would ever equal as long as she lived.

You've spoiled me, lawman...

Trajan rolled onto his back, his hands interlaced behind his neck. Desela crawled onto his chest, covering it with small kisses as thoroughly as she could manage before laying her head down.

She could hear his heartbeat. Steady and true. "That was...beyond words," she sighed, resting her palm on his muscular stomach.

He took hold of her wrist. "Easy, woman, you're liable to get me worked up all over again."

"And that would be a bad thing?" She moved her lips to his nipple, nibbling, sucking. His cock responded instantly, returning to full erection as though he had not come in a year.

Trajan growled. "This is your last warning."

"Or what, Marshal?" she challenged, sitting upright to examine his cock. "Are you going to beat me with that club of yours?"

"I'm going to lock you up is what I'm going to do."

"Really?" She grinned. "In that case, do let me commit a better crime. Say assaulting an officer?"

Desela climbed right up on top of him, placing his cock between her legs. She did so with practiced ease, like she had been doing it for years. Maybe she had been—at least in her dreams.

Clenching her pussy muscles tightly she sought to encourage him. "Shouldn't you be trying to apprehend me?" She touched her left breast and then her right. "Here? Or here?"

He clamped his hands on her waist instead, locking her in place. "You really shouldn't tease a primale."

"Who's teasing? I want everything that's coming to me."

"There can't be any future between us," he said. "You know that."

She pressed her body forward, creating as much pressure as she could against his hands, against his cock. "Who's talking about a future? I want what we have now."

This was true, yet not true. She did crave everything he would give in the present, but she would be lying if she said a part of her did not hold out hope for something more. Didn't every obedient wish in her heart for her one true lord? Her one and only Master?

Trajan might be rough around the edges, but he was every bit the alpha male, the stuff of female dreams. Sure, she held out hope. Who could blame her?

"This will be the last time, it has to be."

Desela leaned forward, licking her lips, trying to kiss him. "I know, Trajan, I know. Just...just let me do this, will you?"

He had her by the upper arms now, immobilized. She whimpered in frustration. Even on top she was completely overpowered.

"You'll be satisfied with this?" he asked.

"Yes." What else could she say? He couldn't really mean it, the stuff about it being the last time. His cock would want her again. It had already come back at her more than once.

"Fuck me then," he said. "Move your ass for me."

"Yes, Master...thank you, Master."

He didn't correct her. He was far too preoccupied enjoying the feel of her warm, gripping sex as she lifted herself, exposing his cock inch by inch. "Mmm," he offered his approval, closing his eyes. "That's good, Desela."

Desela was so excited to be pleasing him. "I want to be good for you, Master. I want you to enjoy my body."

"I am," he assured her. "And I think you enjoy mine as well."

Did she ever!

"You are heaven, Master. To touch you, to have you inside me, it is all I have ever dreamed of."

"You should dream bigger," he quipped.

Desela lowered herself again, impaling her superheated sex once more on his primale shaft. "This is as big as it gets."

His cock, his body, his presence—cool and masculine, commanding and deeply mysterious. "I want to know you, Master...who you are."

"No." He shook his head. "This is the end, remember? No future?"

"Yes... I am sorry."

He put his hands on her breasts, molding them. "Writhe for me," he urged. "Writhe, my little beauty."

She obliged him, her body releasing its tensions into his hands.

"Faster," he gritted his teeth. "Faster."

"Yes," she screamed. "Oh, stars, yes."

Desela was bucking wildly, her hands braced against his chest. If not for his hands on her breasts, she feared she might launch herself off the bed. Her entire body was clenched in anticipation, the energy built in her pussy and ready for explosion.

"Need...to...come," she hissed.

"Yes, come for me, come, Desela."

She dissolved at the sound of her name from his lips, her flesh turning to flame, to shooting stars of pure energy. Trajan was climaxing, too, finding more semen inside himself to release. She took his offering, letting it fill her like a warm and sticky geyser. Up into her canal, up into her core, her very soul, commingling with her spirit. Her heart.

No attachments. No future.

She had to remember that at all costs.

Trajan's hands moved across her body, touching and playing her, fusing them, two bodies into one. It was symbiosis, harmony and union. Intertwined ecstasy.

But it couldn't last. They would have to fall. Alone and separated. Suddenly Desela felt darkness inside her. A sense of panic.

"Hold me," she begged, fearing complete dissolution. "Don't let...go."

Trajan held her face, his palms on her cheeks. "It's all right," he soothed. "It's all right."

She believed him. She had to, for his was the only hand to pull her out. The only hand to sustain her.

The only hand.

"Trajan." She fell against his chest, clutching him, her smaller body seeking the shelter of his own. She shivered. Overcome. For the first time since losing Korlon she felt like she could let it all out.

The tears, the anger.

She cried at the same time that she pounded his chest.

He did not react, but continued to hold her. Silent and strong. Strong as polysteel. Solid as the planet on which this bed was resting.

If only it were possible to remain this way forever. She couldn't, though, and the longer she waited to make the separation, the harder it was going to be.

The trouble was she couldn't make the first move. She was submissive, not dominant. Trajan stroked her hair, soothing.

"Are you all right?" he asked as her storm of emotion eventually passed, the sobs giving way to soft, hollow breaths.

"I'm fine," she lied.

Trajan was silent. She would give anything in the universe to know what was on his mind. Was he itching to get away? Dying to get closer to her? Bored beyond imagination with a woman whose sexual charms he had already sampled thoroughly?

"I'll get you a towel," he said, turning her gently onto her back. "You need anything else?"

She lay like a rag doll, uncovered. She wanted so much more than a towel. Where to begin? "No, I don't need anything."

He nodded, his face all business. He might as well have been staring down a criminal or directing traffic. Impulsively, she turned onto her side, looking away.

This whole thing made no sense. She couldn't exactly compare him to other lovers, being a virgin, but Desela was sure that Trajan had treated her with respect and devotion. She had seen how Korlon was with Jaxey and it looked the same.

The way he held her in his arms. That spoke louder than words. And yet when he looked at her, she could not see a thing, nothing past his tortured eyes.

He would never harm her. But here he was, unable to stay on the same bed with her for even a little while after making sex.

She heard him clearing his throat. He was standing behind her, standing literally at arm's length. She took the towel from his outstretched hand. "If you're worried about catching something from me," she quipped, "it's probably a little late for that."

"I'm not worried about that," he said, his voice flat and unaffected.

Desela wiped herself with the warm, wet towel. The sensation was unusual and sensual. In the domed cities, cleansing chambers with dry beams were used. "This is

really an experience," she said. "Do you actually get this water from the ground or do you synthesize it?"

"There's ice in the mountains," he said, his splendid nude body still completely available for her visual inspection. "We melt it, treat it chemically and pump it down."

"How fascinating." It wasn't really, but she was stalling for time, trying to think of some way to keep their intimate, personal connection going, if only on a verbal level. "Trajan, listen, about what happened —"

"I've been thinking," he interrupted. "We might be able to get you out of here sooner than three days. There's an ore freighter. I know the captain. He takes on passengers from time to time as a personal favor to me."

Desela went stiff. Was she hearing him right? Did he want to be rid of her even sooner? She sat up. "An ore freighter?"

"I know, it's not first-class accommodations," he spoke to her, sounding like some kind of droid travel agent, "but it leaves tomorrow morning and that's the important thing."

Her mouth hung open.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

She struggled to keep herself together. "If I have to even say it..."

"Well, you do have to say it," he declared, sounding cross. "Because I'm not a mind reader."

"Just forget it." She reached for the sheets, trying to cover herself. "Forget I said anything. I'll be on that ore ship and off your precious planet, just like you said."

"I don't see why you're so upset," he probed. "This is what we both want. Considering all the friction we've had, it's obvious we don't get along and it's damn clear your matchmaking service is a flop on Unicorn Three. What possible reason could you have to stay?"

Pick a reason, you blockhead. Maybe it's because you're the man who took my virginity, because I have feelings for you, because I have no idea what my life is supposed to look like without you.

"None," she spat back, not giving him the satisfaction of an answer. "Not a fucking one."

"You're being irrational," he accused.

"Just get out." She pointed to the door. "And leave me to my sorry, irrational self."

"Suit yourself." Without another word he began searching for his clothes.

She buried herself under the covers, not wanting to see any more of him or his gorgeous body.

"The ore ship leaves at seven," he told her by way of goodbye. "Be ready at six. One of my deputies will escort you."

She didn't give him the courtesy of an answer. She was too close to tears anyway. Waiting until he closed the door behind him, she let loose a hot fresh stream of them, enough to soak the sheet.

What irony, to have her body awakened and her spirit crushed all in one night. At least Korlon had the dignity to let her down easy.

Who was she kidding, though? Hadn't Trajan been upfront all along? Hadn't he made it clear he was only interested in sex? Whose fault was it she had involved her heart?

Not that a woman could control such things. Especially an obedient. She had opened to him, put herself at his mercy, and now she would pay the price. Yet again.

All that training in keeping down her feelings. All those years of learning not to react to a man. Gone, shot down in a single explosive burst. What would become of her now? What was left, except to crawl away, tail between her legs?

Trajan had rejected her. He did not want her and he never would.

She would mourn that loss forever. Far more than anything that had happened with Korlon.

Closing her eyes, she willed the morning to come. So she could escape.

Something inside her bristled at that word. One of the things she had learned from Jaxey was to stand her ground, to fight for what she believed in. And what she wanted.

She wanted Trajan, didn't she?

So why not fight for him?

But how? He intended to ship her off at first light. A deputy would take her straight to that silly ore ship. She would never make it back here, Trajan would see to that.

Unless she found some other means of returning.

Say a Guardian ship, a small one that might slip through undetected?

She smiled. Jaxey and Korlon would help her, she was sure of it. All she needed was a chance to make things right with Trajan, a chance to explain herself, to show him she wasn't a bad thing, not like whatever women had hurt him in the past.

She would be good for him, only good. And he for her. She loved him, he made her laugh, he made her feel strong and he made her feel passion like she had never dreamed possible.

It was the last thing she had expected to find, and certainly not at lightning speed. But a person didn't control those things. Falling in love was just that, a sudden unexpected plunge. The last time that had happened, she had nearly lost herself in the depths of rejection. This time there was a man to catch her and hold her. A man she would never have expected or sought out on her own.

If that was not fate, nothing was.

And she should know. She was, after all, a matchmaker.

* * * * *

Trajan did not look back after leaving Desela's room. Stopping just long enough to make the flight arrangement and put guards in place outside her door, he climbed into his flyer and headed due west into the darkness.

He pushed the machine full throttle, not daring to stop until he reached the point of no return, that critical distance beyond which he could not return to the spaceport to stop Desela from leaving even if he wanted to.

He trusted nothing to fate, least of all his own volatile emotions.

Desela had looked downright heartbroken by his seemingly callous attitude following their passionate encounter. If she thought him indifferent, however, she could not be farther from the truth. The lovely little blonde had in fact affected him more deeply than he dared recognize.

It wasn't just sex at all—she had invoked all those feelings of primale domination and ownership which he had been suppressing for years. Had he not gotten away from her quickly, he would have staked a permanent claim.

Making love to her another time, slow and lingeringly, after which they would be bound together for life—his lips like a branding iron on hers, his hand marking her thighs, her breasts, spoiling her for the touch of anyone else. The seal would bind them both. He would no more be able to leave her than he could turn his back on the law. Gone would be his freedom, and hers. No longer would she roam the galaxy, her shapely body under the lustful eyes of strange men.

She would be at home. In his home. Properly collared.

And he would be there at home, too, taking his suppers, making sex each night, playing with her, toying with her, enjoying and using her, driving her to distraction with all the tools known to a dominant man.

It would be a disaster for both of them. She would be miserable, and rightly so. He was not husband material. Too many years of living alone, of seething in his cynicism had made him unsuited for an obedient's love. And she had her hang-ups, too. How else could you explain a submissive woman pretending to be non-submissive, acting as a matchmaker for everyone else while avoiding any love union for herself?

No, he was doing the right thing, for both of them. Someone would get hurt. They would disappoint each other in the long run. Better to do it now in one fell swoop, a quick cut before things got any more complicated between them.

She would thank him eventually. Maybe not now, but one day.

And he would be thankful, too. As soon as he got over hating himself. For abandoning her in her sexual need. For making her cry.

How did he know these things?

Primale senses, that's how. He had been able to hear the soft sobs behind the closed door before he left. So, too, had he caught her scent, delicious and delicate in the air.

Trajan pulled back on the throttle, lifting the craft as high into the air as it would go. If he could escape the atmosphere, he would.

But that would not stop the thoughts, the images in his mind. The accusations reverberating in his skull.

He could only hope the end justified the means, that his attempt to protect them both warranted his cruel departure.

If so, then the gods would reward him. If not, then he would be cursed, just as Lysia had been cursed for leaving him, alone and raging in a black hole of despair.

Lysia was a woman too beautiful for words. A breathtaking spider soul, with hair as dark as a raven's wing. And a heart just as devoid of light. Obedient she might have been by design, but there must have been something of the ancient devil in her to do what she had done.

The counselors he had visited later attributed it to some reverse submission effect, a kind of sadistic streak which caused her to want to hurt the very men who could help her. Trajan called it evil and it nearly drove him mad.

For years he had lived on the edge, only lately righting himself as a Marshal in the outer quadrants.

How unlike Lysia was Desela—fair instead of dark, innocent and pure instead of treacherous. A woman like Desela belonged nowhere near the likes of Lysia. Nor should she be exposed to a man like himself. She needed an upright man, a Guardian, perhaps, or a civil servant.

Yes, she would thank him one day, and if not, at least he would know she was happy. For himself that would be enough to sustain him. It would have to be, wouldn't it?

Dawn was behind him when the com link activated.

"The ore ship's lifted off," reported Rather. "The package is aboard."

Trajan said nothing.

"Just letting you know, boss, like you said."

"Over and out," he said gruffly, clicking off the link.

He hadn't trusted himself to say more. Not with his emotions backing up like they were.

The hell of it was that in another time and place he could have loved Desela. But not everyone got a happy ending in this universe, did they? Otherwise there wouldn't be any Lysias running around, or Narthians for that matter, slaughtering humans by the thousands in war after war.

The universe was brutal, all right. But it was real. And as long as a man woke up honestly each day to his fate, then he had no need to hang his head in shame.

He heard the roar of the ore ship overhead, heading to the outer atmosphere.

Trajan kept his thoughts to himself.

And his regrets, too.

"Goodbye, little missy," he whispered. "The stars go with you."

Foolishly, inexplicably, he held up his finger, touching it to his lips first. It was a kiss. Blown from him to her, across the brilliant pink dawn sky.

Would she remember him? Hopefully not.

That was *his* job. Remembering...and suffering. For both of them.

Did he love her?

Maybe. And that's why he was letting her go.

Safe now, he turned the flyer around, heading back to the colony.

There was work to be done. Drunks to roust, villains to lock up. Pleasure women to chase.

He forced a smile, wan and hollow.

Would he ever manage a real one again?

No matter, as long as Desela was happy.

Happy...and free of him.

Chapter Three

Jaxey and Korlon looked at one another, side by side in the booth.

Desela had finally wound down, having spent the last half-hour relating the story of her adventure on Unicorn Three with barely the benefit of a breath of air to interrupt her exuberant monologue.

As if to make it more incredible, she had capped it off by sharing her desire to be secretly smuggled back to the planet so she could have a second chance at wooing this man who had treated her with such apparent disregard.

"Oh, dear," she fretted, "I must sound crazy talking like this."

Korlon cleared his throat, earning a glare from his wife. As a genetic primale, she was his equal in most ways, though when it came to their sex life he was most definitely the superior.

"You don't sound crazy." Jaxey reached across the diner table to squeeze Des' hand. "You sound like you're in love."

Desela managed a smile. "You're humoring me, I am afraid."

"No, we aren't. Tell her, Korlon."

Korlon, the handsome Guardian once Desela's betrothed, the intended lord and Master of her life, squirmed uncomfortably. "You know I'm a bad judge of these things, Jax. You're far better suited to understand emotions than me."

"Why? Because I'm a woman. Posh," she dismissed. "That is sexist nonsense. You are very sensitive."

"I can tell you one thing," Korlon declared, "this Trajan of yours has a checkered past. He's done everything from gun running to mercenary work to bounty hunting."

Desela nodded. She had given Korlon Trajan's name prior to this meeting in their favorite old diner from Korlon and Jaxey's Guardian Academy days. He had researched it thoroughly, using the access codes available to him as an aide to General Theron. "I can handle the truth. I'm not afraid."

"He's never worked directly against Earth interests," Korlon continued. "And he has never supported organized crime. Never seemed to make much money for himself either. It's almost like he was trying hard not to be a good criminal, though he wouldn't fly exactly right until he joined the Marshal Service."

"There is something in his life," said Des. "Something personal that he is running from. Did you find anything like that?"

"He was betrothed at one point to a woman named Lysia. Seems she was a real piece of work. She was an obedient but she had some sort of character defect. She

cheated him out of a good deal of credits and left him high and dry. Luckily he had not completed the lifebond before that all came to light. It was after that he turned to the seamier side of life, shall we say."

"I knew it," Des exclaimed victoriously.

Korlon wrinkled his brow, taking on his protector mode. "Des, I hope you're not building him up to be more than he is. The galaxy is full of men like that. Most of them aren't worth the time of day. You're special, Des, you deserve the best."

"Trajan is the best," she insisted. She lowered her eyes. "In any event, he holds my heart. I must return to him."

Korlon was clearly troubled. "Couldn't you just hash this out with him by com link or holo?"

"I have tried," said Desela. "He won't talk to me."

"And that doesn't worry you?"

"No," she said firmly. "I saw the look in his eyes over the holo. Even a split second looking at him told me what I need to know."

At least she hoped it did.

"I just don't want you getting hurt," Korlon exclaimed.

Des smiled, feeling the kind of odd, calm confidence that had come over her since leaving Unicorn Three in the still, quiet dawn. "Life is risk, Korlon. A person must follow their destiny, their genetics. Didn't you tell me that when I used to fret about the dangers to you, being in the Guardian Corps?"

Korlon sighed.

"She's got you, my dear," exclaimed Jaxey. "Dead to rights."

"Hush, woman," he said good-naturedly, "or you will find yourself ass end up over this table."

"Promises, promises," she whispered demurely.

Desela felt a stab of jealousy, mixed with a ping of excitement. This was more than mere idle banter. Society fully accepted the relationship between a primale and his mate and it was fully acceptable for a woman to be disciplined in public.

Desela could see the arousal on Jaxey's face. It took so little to get her going.

Korlon leaned over to her, whispering something in her ear. A shiver passed down Jaxey's spine. For a split second she was lost in that place of complete, transcendent submissiveness.

"Yes," Jaxey whispered back. "Master."

Master...

Des had called Trajan that, in a blatant overreaching of her true status. It was no wonder the man had begged off having anything to do with her. She had overwhelmed him. She would be more careful next time. She would do more to prove herself, to show she was worthy of being his slave.

One day, he would treat her like this, lovingly teasing, whispering sadistic nothings into her ear, making her hot and wet and helpless in front of others.

Jaxey wanted to hold hands with Korlon. He allowed her to interlace her fingers. Des was sure the woman was quite horny, anticipating whatever Korlon intended for her.

Stars, Des herself was horny thinking of it.

"Desela," said Korlon, getting back to the subject at hand. "You are certain you want to pursue this? Even knowing that your protection may not be guaranteed?"

"I am certain," she said.

"The risks are considerable," he reminded. "You're asking to be cut loose, no escort, no protection. You said yourself how dangerous it is there. And we don't know how this Trajan will react, either. He has put a ban on your return and he has the authority to do so."

"He won't hurt me. I know he won't."

"But will he protect you? Like I would?"

"With his life," vowed Desela.

She knew what a leap of faith that was. How could she explain it to another when she scarcely understood herself?

"I belong to him, Korlon. I am his. He will see that, he will accept me."

Korlon rubbed his chin, thinking. "I'll tell you what. I'll let you go on one condition. You wear a subcutaneous transponder. I will have a rapid reaction force standing by at all times. We'll keep it covert—disguise the ship as a cargo transport. We'll land, smuggle you in and give you, say, ten hours to do what you need. Then we'll pick you up."

Desela frowned. She was beginning to hate time limits. "Ten hours might not be enough."

"It will have to be." Korlon shook his head. "That's my final word."

"Yes," said Desela, deferring. "Thank you, Korlon."

As a man—the primale with the closest interest in her life—he did hold authority and she would not defy him. Besides, she trusted him and knew he would never order precautions unless absolutely necessary.

Jaxey was squirming in her seat. Korlon's show of authority was affecting her, too, though in a different way.

"My woman is restless." He winked to Desela. "I'd better be going. Can you be ready to go by morning? Say eight, at Port Command?"

"I'll be there," she promised.

"Good." Korlon slapped Jaxey's thigh. "Let's go," he told her.

Jaxey rose from the seat, her eyes a little glazed. She gave Desela a hug.

"Have fun," whispered Desela. "On the ride home."

Jaxey chuckled. "It's going to be interesting, that's for sure." She squeezed Desela tightly. "I wish you all the best, Des. I want happiness for you, more than anything. If he's the right man..."

"Thank you," Desela said. "And if he isn't, don't worry, I won't do anything rash. I love the two of you too much, and myself, too. I have standards he has to meet."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"You are the one who taught me to stick up for myself," Desela pointed out.

"And you taught me not to be afraid to go as deep as I could into my femininity."

Korlon put his hand on his wife's back. "To the flyer, Jaxey."

"Yes," she said softly. "Master."

Korlon embraced Desela. "I'll put together the best team. You have my word."

"I know that." She relished his strength. "Thank you."

"You'll be all right?" he inquired. "Tonight?"

"I'll be fine," she assured. "Now go and tend to your wife, before she melts all over the seat of your flyer."

Korlon grinned. "You're the best, Desela. I love you."

"I love you, too," she said, knowing its meaning was platonic only.

One day soon, she prayed, she would say that with different intent, to a different man. To Trajan, if the gods would have it, and the man himself, who she was quite sure was the only force in the universe equally obdurate as fate itself.

* * * * *

Korlon found his wife waiting in the flyer as ordered. This simple act of obedience on her part caused his cock to push against the material of his uniform trousers. She was an incredibly gorgeous creature, and the thought of his ownership of her body and heart made him happy inside and aroused to a degree no non-primale could understand.

Some called this sort of relationship exploitation but they failed to understand that primales were designed to love and care from a standpoint of total domination. Their women were their lives, the heart of their souls. They could accept nothing less from them than utter and absolute submission to their love and their will.

The chains, the ropes, the power of voice command, even the spanking hand and the whip were but signs of love in the hands of a mated primale. His submissive mate would never want for anything, she would be spoiled beyond all regard. She would never be cheated on and she would never, ever, know the shame of violation to her person.

To touch a primale's woman was a sure and certain ticket to death—swift and unpleasant—even to another primale.

Korlon climbed into the driver's seat, turning on the engine. Placing one hand on the throttle and the other on the wheel with practiced ease, he steered the flyer up out of the parking port beside the diner and into free airspace.

Turning with false innocence to his wife, he asked, "Jaxey, my dear, do you recall what I said to you back in the diner?"

The question was rhetorical, of course. She had heard his intention only minutes before. Not that the timing mattered. As a submissive, his every command was ingrained in her, from the first to the last. Years from now, she would remember this day, and grow wet from the reliving of it.

"I do, Korlon," she said, attempting to revert to their mode as equals. "But I want to talk about Desela first."

"Of course," he humored her.

"Are you really sure it's the right thing to do, letting her go back to Unicorn Three?"

"Nothing is one hundred percent certain. I told her that myself," he pointed out. Korlon's hand moved to her lap. "Open," he commanded.

"Korlon, I really want to settle this."

Korlon pressed his fingers home. "Open," he repeated.

Jaxey's thighs slid apart in a single, reflex motion. He had employed a particular tone of voice, one that invoked training. Long, sweaty hours, his bride naked and collared, learning the true meaning of her sexual slavery.

"Present breasts," he said now, in that same clipped tone.

Jaxey arched her back, pushing out her bosom for his inspection or groping. He gave her the merest glance, not deigning to take his eyes off the rather light traffic. "You may continue with your comments."

She was panting. "Des is...our closest friend. I don't want to see her hurt."

"Nor do I. But as you said yourself, she has to follow her destiny. She will never be happy without a mate, hard as she tries to be a fem. Even you needed one and you are primale."

"I agree. I just worry."

"So do I. That's why I'm taking you along with me."

"That's good," she said.

"Why are you so out of breath?" he asked, as if he didn't know.

"Because...of what you told me in the diner."

"And what exactly did I tell you?" He returned to the salient point.

"You told me," she licked her lips, "that you would make me strip naked in the flyer and...and play with myself."

"And that makes you nervous?"

"Yes."

"So just ignore me," he teased. "Don't do it."

Jaxey swallowed. "I have to do it."

"Why?"

"Because," she gritted her teeth against the inevitable onslaught, "my body is yours. You can do as you please with it."

"And you hate that idea?" He tweaked her nipple.

"No, Master," she moaned. "It makes me wet. And horny."

He moved his hand over her breasts and down to her belly. "You are my sex slave, Jaxey, isn't that so?"

"Yes, Master," she acknowledged. "I am your sex slave."

Korlon never tired of hearing her say the words. Each time brought fresh humiliation to his proud partner, and fresh excitement for them both.

"What do sex slaves do?" he rasped.

"They obey, Master."

He put his hand inside her uniform pants. "And if they fail to obey?"

"Lack of obedience brings punishment, Master," she recited.

"Good girl." He stroked her pussy. "I have trained you well, haven't I?"

Jaxey sat on her hands, careful not to interfere. "Yes, Master, your slave girl is well-trained."

"Is my slave girl satisfied that I will protect Desela?"

"Yes, Master." She was writhing against his hand.

"Will you question me again on this matter?" Korlon adjusted the knob on the dashboard, turning the windows from clear to opaque.

Jaxey knew well the implications. Whatever he did to her now would be hidden from prying eyes. "No, Master," she vowed somberly, "I won't."

Korlon twisted his fingers, deliberately pushing her to the edge.

"Oh..." She wriggled, as if sitting on an increasingly hot seat. "Please, Master, may I come?"

"No," he denied her. "You may satisfy me instead." He gave her his fingers, soaked in her own cum, to lick off. She did so eagerly, sucking them deep, her eyes half closed with passion.

He let her lick him for a while, and then took his hand back. "Satisfy me," he ordered, opening his pants.

His cock burst free, fully at attention.

Jaxey lowered her head to his lap. "Thank you, Master. Thank you for your cock." She kissed and licked him, desperate to please. Should she fail him in any way, he would tan her hide. And limit her freedom, too, forcing her into chains for the rest of the day.

He balled his hand in her hair, making it clear who owned her. She took the tip of his cock into her mouth, swirling her tongue.

"All the way," he commanded, not wishing to play it slow this time.

Jaxey deep-throated his shaft. He held her this way for a moment, giving her a chance to suck him, employing her cheeks and tongue.

"When I release you," he told her, "you will strip naked. You will place your feet up on the dashboard and put your hand in your pussy. You will then give me a reason why I should not turn the window clear again so the entire city can see what kind of female you are."

Jaxey's sucking became instantly more enthusiastic and servile. A dominated woman was a pleasing woman and the more you controlled her, the better she was.

He allowed her some time to move up and down his shaft, showing him just how adept she had become at mouth fucking. This, too, was part of her training. Wife or no wife, he had employed primale techniques, enforcing her full and abject submission.

Korlon made no bones about it, though his beautiful wife was a Guardian and his equal in all matters outside of sex, she had spent more than her share of time on her hands and knees, learning to give oral sex under the harsh tutelage of the whip.

"You're sucking well today," he praised. "You must really not want that window changed back, eh?"

Jaxey slurped unceremoniously.

Korlon grinned, deciding to take his immediate pleasure inside this deliciously warm receptacle. "Prepare yourself, girl." He announced his imminent orgasm.

Jaxey braced, ready for the spurting cum that would fill her mouth.

Ordinarily he would have her swallow, especially in the car, but he had something more deviant in mind this time. "Hold it," he ordered, releasing the first burst.

Continuing to offer hard suction, she dutifully collected every drop of Korlon's emission, holding it in her mouth. He made sure to give her a healthy dose, to make it interesting.

Grasping her hair once more, the final surges passed through him and he lifted her up. Her cheeks were swollen like a chipmunk's. Cum was dribbling out the left corner of her mouth.

"Hold it," he reminded.

Her eyes widened. She could not speak. Moving her eyebrows, she begged mercy.

It must have been hard, he imagined, to contain so much semen.

Though it was hardly his problem.

"Your clothes," he prompted the bewildered Jaxey.

Gingerly, trying her best neither to swallow nor spit, Jaxey lifted her bottom off the seat, pulling down her pants and underwear. Her legs were slim and nude underneath.

Managing to kick off her shoes, she slid the pants all the way to her ankles and stepped out of them.

Korlon admired her wet pussy. "Mine." He laid his hand over it.

Jaxey shuddered, not daring to intervene. He could see the torture on her face, how difficult it was to keep the semen in her mouth.

He offered no mercy, flicking her clitoris back and forth as she tried to focus on removing her top. Jaxey was doing her best not to orgasm. She had little hope, though, for she was only going to be more exposed, more vulnerable.

She opened her top right down the middle, allowing her breasts to pop free. Her nipples emerged pink and hard. Delicately, she shimmied the top over her shoulders, arching her back, as if in acknowledgment of what she was.

"Yes." He admired her nudity. "That's the way you belong. At least when you aren't tied up."

Her nostrils flared, her eyes pleaded. She was not going to be able to hold out.

At long last, he gave her the relief she craved, though not exactly in the form she might have chosen for herself. "Spit it out," commanded Korlon, as though this were the most natural order in the world. "Rub it on your breasts and belly."

There was not a shade of disobedience in Jaxey at that point. There was, quite simply, no other option for her but to comply, placing her hands under her mouth, she collected the full measure of Korlon's milky white release.

The semen made for a rich mix with Jaxey's saliva. She spit it out slowly, reverently, allowing it to dribble into her hand. When she had it all, she offered him her thanks once again, immediately sliding her hands downward, cupping her breasts.

She sighed at the feel of it, coating her swollen globes. Like a good slave girl, she massaged herself, making sure to cover every inch of skin. There was plenty to go around. Ssensuously, with her fingertips, she smeared it on her stomach, filling her belly button.

Her flesh undulated in response. Lifting her pelvis into the air, she touched her pussy.

Korlon reacted at once. "No!"

Jaxey retracted her fingers as if electrocuted.

"Were you given permission to touch yourself?" he queried harshly.

"No, Master," she croaked.

"Two slaps penalty," he dictated.

Jaxey cringed. It was to be a painful punishment, one she would have to administer herself. "Yes, Master."

Locking her pelvis in midair, she took aim with her hand. A single flick of the wrist and her fingers landed on her pussy with a thwack. Jaxey hissed in response, partially from the sting of the blow and partially in anticipation of the next one.

The second was always harder, following as it did on the heels of the first. Having Jaxey give herself pain aroused him no end. Mild though it was, its effects moved him powerfully.

Even now, he was erect, ready for a second climax inside Jaxey's gorgeous body.

She cried out as she slapped herself a second time. It was more of a moan this time. The pressure on her sex was causing her pleasure as well as discomfort.

He decided to make her come this way.

"Light slaps," he ordered. "Keep going, don't stop."

Jaxey thrashed her head as she assaulted her body, her attacks maddeningly light. "Oh god, Master." Her voice shook.

She clenched her teeth, matching her pace to the acceleration of the flyer – up above the cylinders, on a direct course toward the city dome, massive and pure as crystal.

"Come," he coaxed. "Come for your Master, like a good little slave."

"Y-yes," she stammered. "M-Master."

Her body was spasming. With each tap of her hand she spiraled higher into the inevitable vortex. It would suck her in, and then spit her out. And she would feel the rush, of pure ecstasy.

"Master...Master," she screamed, head thrashing.

Korlon let her go wild, giving her no further instructions for the moment. Nothing was more beautiful in the universe than a woman coming. Nothing at all.

She cycled through several large climaxes before collapsing on the seat, covered in sweat. No ordinary woman could channel this much sexual energy, not a fem, not even the most well-intentioned of obedients.

This was where Jaxey's primale biology came out – that rare strain within her which made her a superwoman, just as he and all the other primales were supermen.

"Thank you," she murmured, purring like a kitten.

He let her lay her head on his shoulder, wrapping his arm about her. In the end, she really was a female, in need of his male strength and comforting.

Were he a different kind of male, an easygoing mem, he would have let it go at that. But Korlon was not that kind of man.

When at last she had recovered herself and her breathing had returned to normal, he ordered her to begin again, this time with her feet on the dashboard, as originally promised.

"Shall I unshield the window?" He reached for the switch.

"No, Master." She planted her heels, thighs wide apart. "I beg you...don't let anyone see me."

"You were told to come up with a reason. Do you have one yet?" he queried.

Jaxey swathed her sex, scooping her warm, fragrant liquids. "Yes," she put her fingers to his lips, "I do."

Korlon tasted her essence greedily. "That is not a reason."

"Isn't it, Master?" she said huskily.

He arched a brow. "You had better not be bribing me with that pussy...which is already my property."

"Never." She sought to keep down a catlike smile.

"Yes," he grumbled. "And I'll believe that when Narthians come calling for a tea party."

"Ooh," she said. "Tea. That sounds wonderful, Master."

"I am going to unshield this window," he warned. "And when we get home, I will march you naked to the roof and hang you by your wrists in the open air for the rest of the day."

"And miss having me in your bed?" She grasped his cock with her hand.

"You are not nearly as charming as you think," he informed her, removing her wrist.

"That's too bad, Master," she lamented.

Korlon saw the twinkle of mischief in her eyes but he did not manage to intercept her hand in time.

Damn, the vixen hit the shield button herself.

They were right next to a transport module, an extended model, occupied by a dozen senior citizens, gray-haired men and women, all wearing the sashes of Diplomatic Corps veterans.

They gasped in horror collectively at the sight playing itself out before their eyes.

"Blast it, Jaxey, are you insane?" Korlon flipped the switch, putting the shield back up.

Jaxey was doubled over in hysterics. She had called his bluff, beat him at his own game.

He pretended to be angry. "You will pay for this when we get home."

"It will so be worth it," she declared, as soon as she caught her breath.

"Wench," he muttered under her breath.

"It's why you love me." She leaned in for a kiss.

He couldn't help but respond. She was exactly right. Her feistiness was exactly what he treasured most about her. Sure, the submissive sex was great and a vital part of their life together, but he needed a partner, too, someone who could keep him humble.

"You will be the death of me yet," he informed her.

She hugged him tightly, her nude body feeling so good and warm against his. "You're not going anywhere," she informed him. "Not without me."

"Don't worry, I'm sure death is as afraid of angering you as I am," he quipped.

She laughed, settling in beside him. They stayed like that all the way home. *It is perfect*, thought Korlon. *Except for one thing.*

He wanted this for Desela, too. And until she found her love mate, her very own Dominant, he would not rest.

Let it be this Trajan, he thought.

He dared not think what might happen to Desela if she were disappointed again in love. He hadn't meant to do it to her the first time, but he did feel responsible.

This was why he would go above and beyond the call of duty, returning her to Unicorn Three.

To meet her fate. Whatever it might be.

* * * * *

Desela had been tossing and turning for hours. Proper sleep was eluding her. In its place had come only the dreams, cruel and tantalizing, as painfully real as they were inescapable.

Of all nights, she did not need her sex dreams *tonight*. Tomorrow morning they would be leaving for Unicorn Three. She needed to be fresh and ready for the trip. She had to look her best and act her best. And she had to be sharp as a brain-droid.

The danger was real. Korlon could protect her only to a point. She would be smuggling herself onto a planet where women frequently ended up as sexual properties, enslaved in brothels.

What if someone grabbed her before Trajan? Worse still, what if Trajan got her and didn't want her?

Stars, he had already made it clear he didn't want her. She was too stubborn to accept it, that's all.

Too stubborn...and too tortured.

Tortured in her soul.

That's what the dreams were about. Trajan coming to her in the night—or rather, her desire for Trajan rearing its ugly head and doing direct battle with her worst fears.

Fears of abandonment, fears of dark captivity, fears of being alone, forgotten, or abused.

She had struggled so hard to be all right by herself. Such a brave struggle over the years to be fulfilled in her work, in direct contradiction to her obedient nature.

She had made her life about greater service and a larger sense of duty.

Then she'd met Trajan, at which point everything had fallen apart.

Sitting up, Desela wiped the sweat from her brow with the sheet. She had a handheld beam device which she could have used, but lately she liked using natural materials.

Blotting her damp skin with the cotton material reminded her of the towel Trajan had given her after they had made sex. Just before he had rejected her so totally.

If she closed her eyes, sometimes she could put herself back there. Irrationally, she told herself if she just thought hard enough, maybe she could change the course of events, somehow keeping him interested in her.

It was not just her forehead that was sweaty. Beads of perspiration had formed on her breasts and on her belly. She touched herself there, too, feeling wickedly erotic. If Trajan owned her she would not be allowed to do this, not without permission. She would touch or not touch at his will.

Even the right to use her hands would be a privilege. At his discretion, he could tie or chain her. Spread-eagle on her back or with her wrists bound behind her.

Thus would she be available to him all night long. There was no telling when a primale might want his female and they were notoriously short-tempered when it came to putting up with obstacles.

An obedient must be ready for her Master. Always pliant. Always wet.

Desela was wet now. Every time she thought of Trajan she got wet. His image in her mind made her pussy flood. His elusive smile, those complicated eyes. The way he used his hands. That immense cock of his and the rest of his fine body—a study in powerful masculinity.

Though not a Guardian, he was easily a match for Korlon or any of the other soldiers. She wouldn't personally wish to see them fight. There was no telling what might happen.

The one thing that was certain was her inferiority. Not as a human being, not as a valued soul in the cosmos, but as a sexual creature, by genetic design made to bow to the male energies.

Desela twisted her sheet, turning it into a thick rope. The material glowed luminescent pink in the dim rose-colored light of her holo monitor. She had left it on in blank screen mode to cut the darkness and soothe her spirit. What it was doing now, though, was turning her on.

The pink being a close cousin to red. That was the color of sex. The color of love and the color of her virgin blood which had trickled from between her legs when Trajan had first penetrated her.

Wrapping the makeshift rope in both fists, she stretched it across her mouth, inserting it and biting down. She gnawed the cotton. She imagined a bit put in her mouth, a gag to silence her.

Slaves were silenced. Trajan had seemed ready to silence her a time or two. Would he gag her as Master, putting her in her place as slave?

The next place for the rope to go was across her neck. Not to choke, but to bind it. Pressing down, like a collar. Masters collared their slaves. Jaxey wore collars at times. Korlon had told her they made Jaxey horny as hell. As soon as she was fitted with one

she would want to be taken, hard and rough, on the floor, on all fours. Korlon enjoyed teasing her, making her perform as a slave while tending to domestic matters as her pussy simmered to boiling.

He wouldn't make sex with her until she was crying for it. Begging him on her belly, her lips pressed to his feet. Even then she would have to take a whipping to warm her up—as if she needed it. If she dared to come before he gave her the word, she would be denied his cock for the entire night.

It was no mere game. Though quite enjoyable for them both, the stakes were high and very real. There was in their chambers a whole array of equipment for discipline, including a rack and a set of stocks. He could also use the artificial cock droid on her—which was able to keep her in a state of aroused agony for hours on end with no hope of satisfaction.

Some of the stories made Desela turn pale, but then, she was just a run-of-the-mill obedient, while Jaxey had the strength and fortitude of a primale.

The contrast was almost paradoxical, between the level of massive domination Korlon was able to exercise over his wife and the distinctly un-primale level of freedom she was allowed. It was an arrangement that worked perfectly for them and only them.

For the millionth time since leaving Unicorn Three, Desela caught herself wondering what kind of Master Trajan would be. He would enforce his will most certainly, exacting strict retribution for her failings. He would offer no apology for enslaving her. Should she ever stray, forgetting whose brand she wore, he would use his cock and anything else required to bring her quickly into line.

Desela would obey, and obey perfectly.

In exchange she would be treated to the most delicious of obedient orgasms, pleasure beyond imagining. She pressed the sheet down over her nipples, rubbing it back and forth. The friction made her moan softly. Some obedients had their breasts bound on a regular basis. It was considered very attractive and arousing.

She could picture Trajan using leather on her. Binding them tightly so that they throbbed with need. Moving the wet, rolled sheet lower, she pressed her belly button. Desela had always wanted a belly ring, something her Master could attach to a chain. She could be chained to his bed that way, or against a wall. Perhaps she would stand there for him, naked, breasts and palms against the cool surface, her little chain keeping her fixed while she awaited punishment to her naked ass.

Or, if he preferred, a deep hard anal fuck, to teach her more fully what it meant to be a subjugated female. A lovely amusement. A treasured, sacred possession.

Desela wrapped the sheet tightly about both her wrists, needing the bondage. Strict confinement to hold her fast, hot and ready. She squirmed against the tension, her fingers irresistibly drawn down to her pussy, to her clitoris, to her crack.

She jolted at the sensation, hot spikes of sharp desire in the lonely, hollow light—artificial pink, silent and empty.

Desela needed a man. Desela was tired of being alone. She had gone too long and now that she knew Trajan she could not imagine herself going on a minute further.

Closing her eyes, seeking the solace of inner darkness, she sought to bury her mind in sleep. She tossed from side to side, however, finding no rest. Her body was on fire and there was nothing to put it out.

As a last resort she employed the sleep machine. Reaching out with her bound hands, she pushed the button on her night table. A large, round green one. At once, soothing blue beams poured down from the ceiling. They were mind calmers, designed to put the brain into a place of ease.

Her skin was so sensitive that she thought she could feel the rays, like tiny whips, stinging and bruising her. It was her imagination, of course, tortured and overwrought.

She continued tossing, turning her pillow again and again, soaking it in sweat. At last she grew too exhausted to fight the beams.

She passed out, her arm over the side of the bed, her legs wide apart, her cheek down on the mattress. Almost immediately, as her conscious mind gave way, the unconscious stepped in.

Another dream was coming, bold and colorful and powerfully seductive...

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Desela found herself in a golden chamber, with a gold domed roof and golden floors. The room was circular and the walls were painted. The paintings depicted lovely females in various modes of capture. Some wore flowing white gowns and heavy steel chains. One was being dragged behind a chariot. Another woman was naked upon a block, being auctioned to the highest bidder. The woman was collared and leashed. Her nipples bore golden rings. The auctioneer held her leash and was pulling her close, forcing her to stand at attention. He was addressing the crowd, pointing to her firm, breasts with a small whip that he held in his other hand.

The woman's hands were at her sides, she was making no attempt to interfere with what was being done to her. Her hair was golden, wild and free like Desela's. Between her legs could be seen a lovely golden thatch, discreetly hiding pink labia – pink like her erect nipples, pink like the lips of her mouth.

Her eyes were green and glassy. Not frightened, but dreamy and aroused.

In another painting, a naked slave was at the feet of a man, imploring mercy as he held a whip over her head. This one was much longer, like a snake, thin and made of braided leather. There were marks on her white skin from where the leather had already struck.

The most dynamic painting showed a woman on all fours, her wrists and ankles in shackles, a heavy collar on her neck. She wore a torn rag of a dress, brown and very short. Two men were making use of her, one thrusting himself into her mouth, the other into her pussy from behind.

Her eyes were closed in an expression of pure ecstasy.

Desela shivered at the sight of it.

"That's what happens to slaves," said Korlon, who was standing next to her.

She was startled to find him there. "I thought I was alone," she said.

"Soon there will be many more men, Desela. You know why you are here."

Her heart was racing. "No, Korlon, I don't know..."

"You are here to be sold, Desela."

She took a step backward. "That isn't possible, Korlon."

"You've seen for yourself." He gestured around them. "This is an auction room. Women are bought and sold here, like the sex animals that they are."

"But you love me, Korlon," she said. "You're going to marry me."

"I can't, I'm already married."

Desela knew this, of course, in her conscious mind, but in the dream state, things were confused. "Who else would you marry, Korlon?"

"I married Nyssa," he said.

Nyssa emerged from the shadows that had suddenly filled the outer parts of the room. She wore a red gown, her hair combed loosely down her back. "Hello, Desela," she smiled.

"You," she gasped. "You married Korlon?"

"I love him, Desela. I always have."

The two embraced, kissing.

"But what about Theron?" asked Desela.

"He doesn't know anything about it. And you're not going to tell him," said Korlon. "We're not going to let you."

Desela put her head in her hands, crying.

Jaxey appeared at her right side, laughing. "This is why we have to sell you, because you get in the way, Desela. You don't understand anything."

"I'm trying to," Desela sobbed. "I am."

"Take off your clothes," said Nyssa. "It's time."

Desela looked down. She was wearing a very ancient wedding dress of white silk and lace. "I can't," she said, employing the kind of logic that only works in dreams. "It's rented."

"Jaxey," said Korlon. "Rip off Desela's dress."

"Jaxey, please, don't."

Jaxey was too strong too fight. In seconds she tore the beautiful gown away, rendering Desela completely naked. "Stop whining," Jaxey said, slapping her face.

Desela held her cheek. It burned hot.

"Did you like that?" asked Korlon.

Jaxey seized her hair, yanking her head back. "Don't lie."

"Yes," Desela exclaimed. "I liked it."

"Ask for another," said Korlon.

"Jaxey," sputtered Desela, "please slap me."

Jaxey slapped her breasts. Desela cried out.

"You should have specified where," said Jaxey.

Nyssa and Korlon laughed.

"Goodie, goodie," said Nyssa, jumping up and down. "I love it when Desela gets fooled."

"Jaxey," said Korlon. "Use your cock. Get Desela warmed up for her sale."

"Jaxey doesn't have a cock," pointed out Desela.

"She can have one here, Desela. This is a dream."

"But...it's my dream."

"I'm controlling your dream," said Korlon. "And if I want Jaxey to have a cock to fuck you with then that is what will happen."

"Yes, Korlon." She lowered her head.

"Nyssa, where are her chains?" asked Korlon.

"They are on her already."

Desela lifted her wrists. Sure enough, they were enclosed in shackles, connected by heavy links. Her ankles were similarly bound. She had a steel collar around her neck to which was attached a dangling chain leash. The leash descended between her breasts and between her legs, tickling her pussy lips.

"Korlon," Desela appealed to her former fiancé, holding out her imprisoned wrists, "how can you let them do this to me?"

Korlon looked at Jaxey. "Why is this slave standing in my presence without permission? And why is it addressing me?"

Jaxey took Desela by the neck and pushed her to her knees, amid the jangling of chains. "You may not stand in any man's presence without permission, girl. Silence," she ordered. "Mouth closed, legs open."

Desela spread herself. Her pussy throbbed with need.

"I can smell her," said Korlon. "This is turning her on."

"She's a natural slave," said Nyssa. "Wait until the room is packed full of strange men bidding on her body, vying for the chance to own her."

Desela's nipples popped to attention. She tried not to writhe in anticipation of so much shame and humiliation.

"She's more of a little sex animal than we thought," said Korlon. "Jaxey, I want you to take her in the ass instead. Let's keep her pussy nice and tight and hungry for the show."

Korlon had never seemed so strong to her or so masterful. Desela could not help but want to service him.

"Korlon," Desela moaned softly. "May I please take your cock between my lips? Please, will you use your slave's mouth?"

"You aren't my slave. That's a question better reserved for the man who buys you tonight, my dear."

Desela fell at his feet, administering a kiss to his foot. "Keep me," she said, licking at the top of his boot. "Let me be your caged pet. I'll take the littlest amount of your attention, just don't sell me."

"You have nothing to negotiate with, slave." He withdrew his foot. "You are property yourself."

"You will be sold," said Nyssa. "And if you dare hold back, not showing the buyers your true slave nature, you will receive terrible punishment."

"Desela won't hold back," said Korlon on her behalf. "Will you, slave?"

"No, Master." She looked up at him, still on all fours.

His eyes were terrible and fierce and left no room for refusal. "Are you ready to be taken in the ass?" he asked, quite rhetorically.

"Yes, Master," she replied humbly. "Thank you, Master."

Her hindquarters tingled in anticipation. Her entire body felt alive and sensitized. At the same time she felt uncertainty. "Master," she blurted, "why can't you do it yourself?"

"Insolent girl," snapped Nyssa.

"I'll take care of her." Korlon parted the halves of the robe he was wearing to reveal his enormous hard cock, the one she remembered sucking on so devotedly back when she was his betrothed. The tip of it was glistening with tiny drops of pre-cum and the vein on the underside was pulsing.

Without any further formalities he stepped forward and pushed himself into Desela's mouth. She took him down without question, her lips parting of their own volition. He slid himself deep and fast, aiming straight for the back of her throat.

"You failed the test," he told her. "You aren't worthy of Jaxey's cock."

"She didn't really have one, anyway," announced a newcomer.

She recognized him as Theron. He was standing naked, his magnificent body painted pure white.

"Theron, you're a statue," said Nyssa. "You can't talk."

Korlon was pushing himself in and out, fucking Desela's mouth. She could feel him swelling, getting ready to ejaculate. "Don't argue in front of the slave, you two," he said, breathing heavily. "It's bad for business."

"I do have a cock," said Jaxey, grasping hold of Desela's hips.

Desela felt the swelling inside her...it reminded her of Trajan, the only man whose cock had ever penetrated her in real life. She pushed her ass back against Jaxey encouraging her to fuck her hard, but Theron stopped her.

"Never mind that, we need to get the auction started," he said. "The men are here."

"Just give me a moment," Korlon grunted, releasing his semen, only it didn't taste like semen.

It was like milk. She drank it down, sweet and warm. He pumped himself dry into her mouth and then pulled out.

The milk dribbled down her chin.

"Sloppy girl." Nyssa slapped her.

Desela began to orgasm, her body quaking, her pussy contracting and releasing, clenching the open air as if a cock were inside her.

"She needs to be sold quickly," said Jaxey. "See what a whore she is? She will melt down totally from sexual frustration."

"I'm not a whore," Desela protested.

"Not another word out of you," Jaxey said. "Or I will gag you with my wet underwear."

Theron clapped his hands together. "The auction is beginning."

Lights came on all around the back walls of the room. They were just bright enough to reveal the faces of dozens of potential buyers, all dressed in long white robes. There were all sizes and shapes of men and all ages, too. Desela could see their hard cocks tenting the robes. Several men were openly masturbating.

Theron clapped his hands again and a spotlight came on, directly over Desela. The beam was hot and white. She felt it kiss her skin, like the touch of a whip.

Suddenly she was alone in the middle of the room. Korlon and the others had vanished. In their place was a well-dressed auctioneer with a mean-looking face.

"Welcome, gentleman, to a single sale," he said. "No refunds."

She recognized the voice. From when she had first arrived on Unicorn Three, in the saloon. She was in Trajan's arms, not fully consciousness, but she had sensed his presence.

His name was Gideos.

"Do I hear a hundred credits to start?" Gideos tugged on her leash. "For this titillating bit of slave flesh."

"A hundred," someone called.

"I hear a hundred, do I hear two?" asked Gideos.

"Two," said another.

"Two it is. How about three?" Gideos snapped a whip on Desela's ass. "Turn around, you stupid bitch, let the men see you."

She tried to protest, but the whip hurt too much. She strained to see in the bright lights. The faces of the men seemed so cold and cruel.

All of them strangers.

Then she saw Trajan standing in the midst of them, dressed in red. She tried to call to him, but Gideos made her keep turning.

There was Trajan again on the other side. She cried out his name, inducing Gideos to punish her behind hard. The bids were rising, to six hundred, seven hundred and higher.

"Good breasts." He grabbed hold of her cruelly. "See how firm?"

"Trajan," she cried. "Help me..."

He just stood there watching.

"Good teeth." Gideos put his fingers in her mouth, inspecting her as if she were a horse. "And a good pussy."

Desela came as he touched her. Trajan disappeared again only to reappear at the back of the room. Why was he not rescuing her? Or at least bidding on her?

"Trajan, buy me!" she cried.

"Trajan, buy me," mocked Gideos. He produced a dildo, which he put inside her.

Desela began to clutch at it, pushing her pelvis in and out instinctively. She was so horny, she couldn't help it.

"A thousand," said a man, not Trajan.

Gideos took out the dildo before she could come. He whipped her on the hip, inducing her to open her mouth to receive it. Humiliated, Desela sucked on the dildo, the very same one that had been inside her. She was breathing hard, her cheeks were flushed as he pushed the dildo in and out.

"Two thousand," called out a bidder.

"Five," countered another.

"Ten," said a third.

"Hold the dildo," ordered Gideos.

Desela obeyed, commencing to shove it in and out all on her own. Meanwhile, Gideos stepped behind her with the whip, to strike at her back. As the first blow fell she came again, sucking so hard on the artificial cock she thought she would crush it. Meanwhile the bids were coming thick and fast, the numbers rising higher and higher.

Desela was surrounded by passion, overflowing with sexual degradation and lust. Alone and naked in this strange room full of men. It could be perfect, if only Trajan would bid on her.

The room was starting to spin. Gideos was whipping her, making her turn in circles. The lights swirled in her eyes. The men's faces were blurring. Trajan kept on vanishing only to reappear. She called out, terrified that she would fall through the floor into some kind of black hole.

She was trying to scream herself awake, but dimly she was aware no sound was coming out of her lips. She tried shaking herself. Finally, she felt her body dislodge from its lethargy. She started rolling downhill, over the edge of a precipice. The men were coming after her, or rather swallowing her down.

It was the impact that saved her...

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Desela awoke on the floor in her quarters, next to the bed. The damp sheet was twisted about her body. The pink night lights were off. The daylight was shining through, fresh white light marking the beginning of a new day under the dome.

She had made it through the night. The last one before embarking on her return trip to Unicorn Three. If things went well, she might return no longer single. Or perhaps she would not return at all. As the mate of Trajan, her rightful place would be by his side, supporting and pleasing him. Sharing his companionship.

Desela cleansed herself under the beams, removing the layers of sweat from her skin. She chose something simple to wear from the clothes-making machine and headed out the door to the spaceport.

Korlon and Jaxey were waiting for her.

"You're going with us?" she asked Jaxey hopefully.

"You don't think I'd leave you with this big lug for protection, do you?" She winked.

Desela gave her a hug. "Thank you," she whispered.

Having female support was important to her, as much as having the firm and dominant presence of Korlon.

"Truly," she felt her eyes watering up, "I don't know what I would do without you two."

"You're our friend," said Korlon soberly, looking especially handsome in his disguise as a cargo ship crewman. "We intend to stand by you always."

Jaxey was dressed as a crew member, too. She could see from the ship behind them that they had spared no expense. The cruiser was marked as a routine galactic transport. She had seen plenty of others like it when she had arrived at Unicorn Three and again when she'd left.

Hopefully they would blend in, not attracting any special attention.

"I couldn't ask for more in life," said Desela, "than the two of you."

"A good lifemate wouldn't hurt, either, right?" Jaxey grinned.

"No, it wouldn't," she agreed, attempting to return the smile.

"Don't worry," said Korlon, sensing her anxiety. "Things are going to work out just fine. I can feel it."

"You're not a very good liar," said Desela.

"Primals can't lie," he reminded her.

"Primals aren't supposed to be able to do a lot of things, Korlon. But you seem to manage."

"Never mind that, Desela. You worry too much. Doesn't she, Jaxey?"

"Definitely," Jaxey agreed. "You're supposed to leave everything to us. You're the obedient, remember?"

"As if I didn't put you two up to this," she reminded.

Korlon took her hand. "Come on, let's get you aboard the ship. We have a long way to travel."

Desela let herself be led. They put her into one of the passenger seats behind the pilot and copilot's spot. The seconds passed like hours as she waited for the final checks to be made.

They would be in space for three days after takeoff, even at hyperspace speeds. The wormhole would take them to the proper planetary system, after which they would rocket into orbit around Unicorn Three.

She could hardly wait. And yet, at the same time, she was so terrified that she would not mind if they never got there at all.

They would get there, though, because Jaxey and Korlon were too good at what they did. She would arrive on Unicorn Three and she would see Trajan again.

From there, it was up to her—and to Trajan himself.

More than anything, her fate was in his hands.

The strongest hands she had ever known.

Hands capable of so much. Hands that could subdue enemies and drive a woman mad with passion. How would he touch if indeed he deigned to lay hands on her again? If she could have that privilege just once more, then she would be able to say her life had meaning.

At that point he could reject her forever, if that's what made him happy.

His happiness was what she cared about, not her own. Would he believe that, cynical as he was? He could test her, interrogate her, she didn't care.

There was nothing to lose...except her loneliness.

And, unless she missed her guess, his own to boot.

"Hold on," Jaxey called back from the copilot's seat as the rockets fired, launching the cargo ship off the floor of the spaceport.

"For dear life," Desela said, knowing the statement to be true in more ways than one.

Chapter Four

Desela's heart was pounding. She could see nothing from her tiny confinement. The cloying darkness only added to the anticipation. The seconds were dragging like hours.

Korlon had warned her that it would be difficult for her to remain in the cargo container even for the short amount of time required to land in the Unicorn Three spaceport and unload the ship.

She had assured him she could handle it.

"Are you absolutely sure about this?" he had asked, showing some last-minute signs of primale overprotectiveness. "It's not too late to back down or try a different approach."

She had asked him what other approach there could be at this stage of the game. He had suggested just asking to talk to Trajan after they landed. But she knew that would never work. He would never agree to see her. He wouldn't even allow her past the customs checkpoint.

Korlon had agreed with that assessment. "I just needed to make sure you were committed to this, that's all."

"I haven't any choice," she had told them. "I'm too scared to back down now."

"I think you are very brave for going forward." Jaxey had kissed her cheek, giving her a final hug.

"We will have your back the whole time," Korlon had said. "No one will be able to lay a finger on you, Trajan included."

That had made her smile, because the whole idea of this was to get Trajan *to* lay his fingers on her and a whole lot more besides.

The cargo container did not allow her to stand up. She was forced to sit, with her legs gathered against her chest. Being sealed inside such a little space, warm and dark, was more than a little sexually arousing. She thought about Trajan locking her up. Naked. Keeping her like that for as long as he wished.

He would take her out only when he wanted to play with her. When he desired to use her body, driving her mad with passion, quenching her lust in the roaring waves of his own overpowering male energies.

Desela concentrated on the myriad sounds of the ship as it descended through the atmosphere. Complicated clicks and beeps and whooshing noises until finally she heard the heaving of metal and the loud crunch of the landing pads as the cargo ship came to a rest on the surface of the spaceport.

For a few minutes after that everything was silent. Then she felt her tiny crate world begin to move. A robo transport lifted her, preparing to move her out of the belly of the ship. She heard the whirl of the machinery. Other boxes were being unloaded, too.

Soon, very soon, she would be unloaded from the ship, with Korlon overseeing things. And then it would be time to meet Trajan. She had a funny feeling it would not be long. Something in her gut told her he would be close by. A man like Trajan would have an instinct for things out of the ordinary.

Their landing would draw him like a magnet.

Or was that wishful thinking on her part?

One thing was for sure, the closer she got to this man, the more excited, aroused and tingly she felt. If he didn't show himself pretty soon, she was liable to melt right there in her little box.

* * * * *

Something was definitely wrong about the cargo ship. It wasn't anything Trajan could put his finger on, but he could feel it in his gut.

And his gut never lied.

He would suspect Gideos of being behind whatever it was, but the two of them had a carefully crafted agreement which Gideos would be more than a little foolish to break. According to their terms, Gideos could visit Unicorn Three and ply his legitimate trades, including legalized prostitution, but he couldn't use it as a smuggling port. In turn, Trajan avoided vigorously pursuing those crimes which the man committed on other planets.

It was a poor bargain in Trajan's opinion, but given the man's political connections, it was about the best he could manage. Besides, if Gideos were eliminated, someone worse would come along.

In the end, he kept the colony peaceful and its citizens, such as they were, out of harm's way. Did he turn a blind eye to small things in his jurisdiction? Yes, in the larger interest.

But this ship gave him a bad feeling in his gut. An obscure registry from halfway across the universe, a hastily prepared manifest, a strange assortment of cargo. All of it spelled trouble—a crew with something to hide.

Bit by bit, he watched it being unloaded. Heavy polysteel crates, each labeled appropriately for delivery, destined for various markets on the planet. It wasn't the sort of ship one saw often on a remote world like Unicorn Three. The servo droids were clean and new and the crew's coveralls were fresh. This alone was suspicious.

Trajan was keeping out of sight, waiting until the unloading work was done. Once the materials were officially transferred to the port authority, then they were subject to his inspection, and his authority. Rather and the other deputies were dispersed loosely and in secret about the ship.

A few more crates were driven out of the cargo bay and then they were done. Trajan counted a total of sixteen, piled in ones and twos, an assortment of shapes and sizes. The port authority droid gave them the once-over, walking around the perimeter of the pile of crates with a representative of the ship's crew.

The droid clanked as it moved, its spindly legs badly in need of repair. At each crate it bent over, bending its metal neck to aim a single camera eye at the requisition code.

Trajan could not help noticing the bearing of the man beside the droid, the stature of him, the way his eyes kept constantly on the move. He was large, too, and strong. A primale, probably military.

This whole thing was making less sense by the minute.

Trajan didn't like it one little bit.

The droid—which had been instructed by Trajan to offer no opposition—gave the okay and handed the crew member the keypad for signature. As soon as the man handed it back, Trajan gave the signal. The cargo was his now and so was this ship.

The crewman did not flinch as the deputies showed themselves. Standing warily, in a posture of self-defense, he waited. His complete lack of fear or guilt confirmed Trajan's suspicions that the man was other than a run-of-the-mill smuggler.

"Search the ship," said Trajan to Rather. "I'll have a look at these containers. After I talk to this gentleman for a moment."

Trajan looked the crewman square in the eye. Their depths showed strength and purity and his motives did not seem mixed.

Interesting.

"Do you have a name?" Trajan asked.

"Korlon," he said. "Civilian Crewman Korlon."

Civilian, indeed.

"Is there anything you would like to tell me before I start searching, *Crewman Korlon*?" asked Trajan.

Again, the man showed no hesitation or fear. "You'll find out soon enough."

"You've got that right," said Trajan. He broke the seal on the first crate. It was empty. He repeated the action on two others.

Nothing. Not a damn thing.

"You want to tell me what this is about?" said Trajan, who did not like playing games. "Or do we need to do this the hard way?"

The man held his tongue.

Trajan nodded. "The hard way it is."

This man might be primale, and a formidable one at that, but he was off his home turf. This was Trajan's territory and there wasn't a power in the universe that could stand against him when his back was up.

He was about to advance when his supersensitive primale hearing picked up an odd little noise. Rhythmic and soft from inside one of the containers. He put his ear to the nearest one, then to the one next to it.

After three more tries, he found it. A definite human heartbeat inside a small, square box, roughly four feet by four feet.

So they were slavers after all.

"What have we here?" he wondered aloud as he stooped over his find. "Dare I guess something female? For someone's brothel, perchance?"

The sealed container door gave way in his hand.

Nothing could have prepared Trajan for what was inside.

It was female, all right, but not the stranger he had expected. Not the purchased woman or kidnap victim who usually ended up in such unorthodox quarters.

"Hello, Trajan," said Desela, looking up at him.

Trajan fought back a wave of emotions. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"I came...to see you."

He frowned. "Well, you've seen me."

And he was seeing her, too, in the flesh. She had chosen her outfit well. A short skirt, white boots, and a tight silver top cut low between her full breasts. The outfit was designed to advertise her femininity and her desirability. Any man would want her looking that way.

Hell, any man would kill for that kind of beauty.

Of all the things that could have been in the container, she was the worst in the entire universe.

"I was hoping we could talk," she said, her voice husky. "About us."

Talking—now there was something he could not afford to do with this woman. That or anything else that involved personal contact.

"There is no us." He took her by the arm, hauling her out onto her feet. She was so small beside him. He had forgotten how it felt to be next to her. To want to protect her and touch her. And own her.

Every strand of that silky gold hair, every fleck of green in her bright, intelligent eyes.

"That's not true," she defied him. "Or else why wouldn't you take my holo? What are you so afraid of?"

Trajan was not interested in penetrating her feminine logic.

"I am not afraid of anything. I didn't talk to you for your own good. And now I want answers, Desela. What on earth are you doing all the way out here in a cargo container? Do you realize how dangerous this is? You—" He glared at the dark-haired crew member, deciding he was the leader. "You knew she was in there?"

"Yes," said the man, nonplussed.

"Well, now I have heard everything," Trajan snorted. "I don't know who you are," he said. "But I want you off my planet. And you will take this female with you."

"Nothing would please us more," the man said flatly. "Come along, Desela, you are obviously not wanted here."

"No, Korlon," she defied, "I am not leaving."

Trajan bristled at the name. The sound of it was so very similar to the one she had uttered that first day, when he'd kissed her. Was this her mysterious lover? If so, if they were together, then why had Desela come for Trajan?

"Desela, don't be ridiculous," Korlon said.

"I am not being ridiculous," she insisted.

"Yes," Trajan agreed with Korlon, "you are. You have no authorization to be here. You will leave at once."

"Or else what?"

Trajan frowned. "There is no 'or else'. You are leaving and that's final."

"Yes, there is," she said triumphantly. "If I don't leave you'll have to arrest me, won't you?"

"Desela," said Korlon sharply, "you will return to the ship now."

"You aren't my Master, Korlon."

Not her Master? So what is the relationship? Trajan wondered.

"That doesn't mean I won't turn you over my knee for a good spanking if you need it," Korlon warned.

Something welled up inside Trajan. He did not like this Korlon talking to Desela that way. Still less did he like the idea of another man's hand on her behind, impertinent as it was. "Any spankings on this planet will be done by me," said Trajan.

Desela grasped his arm. "You will punish me, then? You mean it?"

Damn! The woman is twisting everything around. "That's enough, Desela. I was not speaking to you."

"Yes, Sir," she whispered softly.

Trajan's cock swelled in his pants at her reply. The little minx knew what she was doing, he was sure of it.

"Korlon, take this woman," he ordered, "and go now."

"I will only find another way back," she blurted.

Trajan scowled. She probably would. "Desela," he sought to appeal to her reason, "why are you behaving this way?"

"Because," she thrust out her hands defiantly, "I'm a criminal and I need to be arrested. Didn't I land here against your orders? Aren't I banned from being here?"

His pulse raced at the thought of those feminine wrists encased in snug, magnetic cuffs. Not to mention her slender throat graced with a punishment collar of the sort used for transporting prisoners on Unicorn Three.

"Desela, you are trying my patience."

"I've only just begun, Trajan. I hereby defy your authority. And I demand to be arrested."

A crowd was gathering by now. This was just what Trajan had hoped to avoid. Desela was going to force his hand at this rate. No matter what his personal feelings, he could not allow justice to be openly flouted.

"Desela, this is your last warning."

Desela reached for his belt. He caught her wrist as she tried to grab his communicator. "Desela, for stars' sake!"

"Attempted theft," she cried triumphantly. "And assault on an officer."

She held up her hand to the assembled throng, a ragtag collection of miners, merchants and pleasure women.

A cheer went up.

That was it. She had officially gone too far.

He slapped the magnetic cuff on her wrist. Whirling her about, he secured her second wrist, locking her arms behind her back. He could smell her perfume. She was helpless now, in his custody.

One of the deputies handed him a collar. He secured it from behind.

Desela pressed against him, subtly applying her fingers over his erection. He cursed under his breath as he locked her neck in impregnable steel. "Any attempt to escape or interfere in administration of justice," he gave her the standard warning, "will result in punishment doses of electricity."

"I will be very obedient, Trajan." She turned her head and whispered, "You won't need to punish me...unless you want to."

What he wanted to do was to throw her to the ground and rip off her clothes. It was taking all his willpower to hold himself back from taking possession of her, partaking in all the wonders of this body he had missed so much.

"You are a prisoner of the colony," he recited the official mandate. "You have the right to be heard by the magistrate. In the meantime you will remain confined."

"Yes..." she breathed.

He grasped her upper arm, pulling her beside him. "That will be enough out of you, missy."

Her lips curled. "You called me missy."

"It means nothing, damn it. The past is...over."

That might be true, he thought, but right about now he would love to take this insolent, reckless young woman over his knee, whip up that little skirt and spank her mercilessly.

And then...

Well, the possibilities were obvious.

Desela. His prisoner. Subject to his exploitation. Collared, under his power. She would truly have no choice but to serve him with her hot, naked body, offering herself, her mouth, her ass, her pussy.

"Sir," called Rather, interrupting his reverie. "We searched the ship. We found two more. One man and one woman."

Grateful for the interruption, he turned to see the new prisoners. Both were dressed as crewmen, but like the other, they screamed out military.

What the hell was he dealing with here? More of Desela's secret political connections? Or was she involved in some strange conspiracy?

His gut told him there were more of these people hiding on the ship.

"Rather, take this beast apart, bulkhead by bulkhead."

"You got it, boss."

"Who's in charge?" Trajan scanned the three. "You," he decided, addressing the one called Korlon.

He said nothing.

"You're Guardians," he continued to follow his intuition. "You and you," he pointed to the males. This left the woman. Something about her was unusual. She could pass for fem, but something in her eyes was too bright, too fierce.

"The real question is what are you doing on my planet? You've come an awful long way just to bring her here." He inclined his head to the patiently waiting Desela.

The first man did the talking. His tone was careful, measured, proud but not disrespectful. "Marshal, may we be permitted a moment to consult with your prisoner?"

Trajan would be a fool to allow such a thing, but he had every intention of monitoring their conversation, so why not?

"You have two minutes. No more." He motioned Desela toward the group. "I'll be back here, out of range."

They took her past the range of his primale hearing, but not far enough for the hidden audio receptors he had had planted all over the port.

A couple of surreptitious adjustments to his utility belt and he could hear them over a frequency broadcast through a tiny earpiece.

"All I'm saying, Desela, is that this isn't going to work. You've already been found out. He put you in handcuffs like a criminal. Let's just get you home," the dark-haired man was saying.

"But it has to be Des' decision," the woman interjected.

"I can't let her take the risk of staying. I'm sorry," said the dark-haired man.

"We might not be allowed to leave peacefully," warned the second man, who'd identified himself as Ramos. "We might meet resistance."

"I'll worry about that, Guardian Ramos," said the dark-haired man. "Des, are you ready to go?"

"I can't." She held up the cuffs. "I am under arrest."

"We will clear that up when we get home."

"I'm not going," she insisted.

"I will make you," Korlon said.

"Korlon," said the woman from the ship. "You're being irrational. She's a grown adult."

"I don't care. She's not thinking straight. I'm in command of this mission and I will do what I see fit."

"So will I," Desela proclaimed. "I love Trajan. I know that more than ever. You can't change my mind. He is my destiny."

The surging emotion in Trajan congealed into a huge lump in his throat. How could Desela say such a thing? It couldn't be true.

Could it?

"Korlon, I am begging you," Desela implored. "As an obedient. Allow me to stay."

"I'm begging you, too, Korlon" said the woman from the ship, her voice suddenly pliant. "As your woman...your submissive."

Korlon ran his hand through his hair. "How am I supposed to fight two of you at once?"

"You don't," said the woman from the ship. "You yield to us graciously, from your position as man...and Master."

Trajan could not believe what he was hearing. This woman was Korlon's mate, obviously quite happily bonded. Was Desela alone in the universe, then, just as he was?

He had hoped for her happiness with another.

Not that there was anything he could do. Trajan would not, could not, take a mate. No matter who it was.

"I'll agree to this," said Korlon. "But I will not abandon you, Desela. We will remain in orbit, out of sight. And the transponder stays on. You get in any trouble, you call for help. We will be there in less than five minutes, no matter where you are on the planet."

"Oh, Korlon." She stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. "Thank you."

Trajan clenched his fists. Desela's lips on the skin of another man was not something he could abide, no matter how innocent it might be.

"I thank you, too," said the woman from the ship, kissing his other cheek.

"I am not happy about this," said Korlon. "Five minutes' response time is an eternity."

"I won't need it," said Desela. "Trajan will keep me safe."

Trajan's heart swelled. He did not mind being thought of by Desela this way, not at all. A strong part of him wanted to be her protector, replacing this Korlon, whatever role he played in her life.

"Excuse me," said Ramos, the worrier. "But nobody's addressed the main problem here. Des is staying, happily under arrest, but I don't feel much like hanging out in the local jail myself."

Korlon nodded. "Either the Marshal lets us go, or we are going to escape."

"You can't hurt anyone," said Desela.

"I know my business," Korlon said. "No one will get hurt."

"This Marshal knows his business, too, honey," said the woman. "And I am not sure he can let us go without a fight."

Trajan was inclined to agree. Obviously it was time to step in.

At this point, it appeared he was going to be stuck with Desela. He had arrested her and he couldn't back down. Even if he did, he was sure she would come back. His only hope was to somehow convince her, gently enough, that he was not the man for her. That he could attend to at his leisure, when he had her safely in jail.

First, though, he had to get the ship and its mysterious crew out of here.

Whoever they were, they had apparently come for the sole purpose of delivering Desela and now they wanted out.

This was not a problem, so long as it did not appear to the growing number of onlookers that Trajan was letting smugglers get away.

The solution was tricky, but possible.

Moving back toward the little group of conspirators, he announced the end of their two minutes. "I want to have a word with you," he addressed Korlon. "In private."

Korlon accompanied Trajan to the other side of the ship.

"I know why you're here," said Trajan.

"Oh? And why is that?"

"You have a personal relationship with Desela."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure, you do." Trajan smiled. "It's written all over your face. You're a terrible liar. Just like the rest of us primales."

Korlon managed a thin smile. "We are a peculiar breed, aren't we?"

"Probably that's because we get all the peculiar jobs."

"Like arresting harmless obedients?" he said, slightly tongue in cheek.

"Let's not forget transporting them illegally across open space lanes," Trajan retorted.

"Yeah..." Korlon ran his hand over the back of his neck. "Look...this situation is awkward as hell for both of us. I agreed to bring Desela here because she is the kind of woman who would do it one way or the other and I couldn't let her go unprotected."

"You are close to her," said Trajan.

"We were engaged." He nodded, offering no further explanation.

"And now you feel an obligation."

Korlon looked him in the eye. "I would defend her as though she were my own," he acknowledged.

Trajan chose his words carefully. "I mean her no harm."

"I know that," Korlon replied, selecting his own with equal precision. "Otherwise, we would not be having this conversation."

Trajan could not miss the implications. Unwilling to be bested, he replied, "And I too trust you, or I would not have been prepared to release her back into your custody."

Korlon considered. "We're at an impasse."

"I have to keep her," said Trajan.

"She violated colony law," Korlon agreed.

"She left me no choice but to arrest her."

"Desela wants time with you."

"I have to use that time wisely, don't I?" said Trajan.

"Use it for what?"

"To convince her not to love me."

Korlon smiled. "Good luck convincing her of that, or any woman for that matter."

"I must show her that she is better off without me."

"If you say so."

"You doubt that?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "What do men know of love? Least of all primales. Mates are given to us by fate, not chosen by our own will, isn't that the saying?"

"I don't believe in fate."

Korlon shrugged. "That is your concern. Mine is her happiness."

"I would die," said Trajan, "before allowing her to ever be unhappy. And I would kill to protect her."

"I'm no expert," Korlon said thoughtfully, "but that sounds like love to me."

"With all due respect," said Trajan, "you do not know me."

"No," Korlon acknowledged, "I don't. Other than the public record."

"Which indicates I am a rogue."

"You have never behaved without honor."

"I act for survival."

"As do we all, Trajan. Speaking of which, how exactly do you propose we part company? Will you oblige us to shoot our way out?"

"I don't want to kill you all," said Trajan. "That would make Desela unhappy."

"And I wouldn't want to kill you and your men," Korlon countered. "Because that would break her heart."

"Either way, we had best part friends," said Trajan. "Don't you agree?"

"That would be advantageous. But are you not obliged to arrest us?"

"I would be," said Trajan. "Unless, for some reason, you were able to reveal that you were here on some sort of official business."

"Official business?"

"You are a Guardian, and you are well-connected. That much I can figure out. Simply present credentials to me. Override planetary customs regulations in the name of galactic security."

"But this is not a security matter."

"It would become one if I arrested you."

"That is true. Although you would never accomplish such a feat."

Trajan shrugged. "Supposing you are right and you escape? Wouldn't that be a security matter? You would have bodies to explain."

Korlon was silent. "If I did provide credentials, what assurances would I get about Desela?"

"All charges will be dropped. As soon as she appears before the magistrate."

"How soon is that?"

"Two days until his return from the next planet in the system. I would drop them now, but regulations prohibit."

"In the meantime, we get to stay in orbit," Korlon negotiated. "We keep tabs on Desela with the transponder we've inserted under her skin."

"A lesser man might take offense at your lack of trust. In this case however, I would expect no less of you." Trajan put out his hand.

Korlon accepted the handshake, squeezing his fingers hard, primale style.

"Desela will be returned to you in two days," Trajan concluded. "You will take her home for good."

"If that is what you both wish."

"It is," Trajan said firmly.

At least it had better be. He did not think he could manage seeing her again. As it was, it would take everything he had to survive this visit.

"Fate be with you," said Korlon.

"I prefer to rely on my own strength."

"As do I," Korlon said. "Though the love of a good woman doesn't hurt."

Trajan frowned slightly at the man's wink. "Good day, Korlon. It was an honor to meet you."

"Likewise," said Korlon.

Trajan watched him walk away, toward Desela.

He would have a few words with her and then... Soon, she would be all his.

For two days.

Or, if he wished, forever.

The word burned in his belly. Like the treachery of Lysia, like the fire of Trillion whisky, like the rage he felt whenever he took down a criminal. It was like all those things and more. Like an unquenchable thirst.

Whose name was Desela and whose object was a union, a mating he could no sooner contemplate than he could leave this job, this world, his own skin.

And yet, times did change. People moved on, they grew and faced their new realities or else they died.

"Boss." Rather came up to him. "You want me to take the prisoner?"

"No," he heard himself say. "No one touches her but me. No one at all."

* * * * *

Desela was collared and cuffed. Under arrest. In the custody of Trajan. The reality was taking a little time sinking in. Trajan had put her in the flyer, in the passenger seat next to him, but he wasn't talking to her, not as he had when they'd traveled together before.

Everything was different.

Her thumping heart told her that. And the look on Korlon's and Jaxey's faces when they had parted ways in the spaceport a few moments ago.

"The magistrate will be here in two days," Korlon had said. "We will be in orbit, watching over you."

In orbit, yes, but that was not the same as having immediate access. She was a prisoner and she would be under guard.

Had she made a mistake?

She wanted to speak with Trajan, to have a second chance.

Was he prepared to give her one? She could spend her time waiting for the magistrate totally alone. Some deal Korlon had worked out. The ship went free and she was stuck here.

"Don't sit like that," Trajan snapped at her as soon as he had lifted the flyer off the ground.

"Sit like what?" she asked.

"With your body like that. You think I don't notice?"

Desela attempted to shrink into the seat. "I'm just sitting."

"You are displaying is what you're doing. You're trying to tempt me."

Desela took heart. So he had some interest in her after all. "You're the one who chained me up like this."

"It's standard operating procedure. You're not special."

She blatantly pushed out her breasts. With her hands behind her back they made tempting targets, indeed. "In that case, you shouldn't have such a difficult time looking at me."

"I'm warning you," he said.

"Are you going to punish me?"

"You'd love me to, wouldn't you?"

"If that's what it takes not to be ignored." Her nipples were hard little bullets pressing visibly against the material of her shirt. Let him overlook her now.

"I can't wait to get you to the jail," he said. "I'm going to put you in the most shapeless coveralls you've ever seen."

"We're not there yet, though, are we." Desela stretched a boot across the seat and touched his leg.

"Desela, damn you!" he growled, pushing her leg back over.

"I'm not wearing any panties," she informed him huskily. "I wanted to be available for you. See?"

Desela managed to prop up her other leg, causing her short skirt to fall back. He glanced across, getting a decent view of her naked pussy.

"That's it, Desela. I've had enough."

Desela cried out, a hot moan as the charge coursed through her body, mild and highly suggestive, like an invisible whip coiling down her spine. "Oh...Trajan."

Just as she'd hoped, the electro-stimulation from the punishment collar was turning her on. He was using a low dose, as she knew he would, which meant she would not feel the true torture the device was capable of delivering.

"Yes." She thrashed her head. "It's what I need...yes."

"Desela." He cut the juice off. "Pull yourself together."

"Yes...Master." She lowered her head onto his lap. "Please...let me...please you."

He took hold of her by the hair. "Desela. Enough!"

Desela sat back quietly. Docile. Controlled. And aroused out of her mind.

"You shouldn't have come here," he rebuked.

"I couldn't help myself, Master."

"I'm not a Master, damn it. Yours or anyone else's."

"I'm sorry, Sir."

"Don't call me Sir, either."

"I can't call you by your name, not anymore."

Trajan sighed. "There's a universe full of men. You have your pick, woman. Why torment me?"

Desela smiled, taking her victories where she could. "It's fate, Sir."

"There isn't any such thing."

Desela leaned across, boldly stealing a kiss. "Are you sure about that, Sir?"

Trajan nearly lost control of the craft. He was breathing hard and she had seen that look in his eyes when he was preparing to penetrate her.

"Yes," she encouraged. "Do it to me, Sir...whatever you want. I will take it."

Trajan appeared to war with himself for a brief moment. Indecision clouded his eyes.

Then came something else. A coolness, a resolution she had not seen in the man. "Very well, Desela," he said, his voice eerily calm, his eyes crystalline blue. "You shall have your wish."

With that he reclined her seat, leaving her on her back, quite helpless.

"What's going to happen to me?" she dared to ask at last, in a small voice.

"You are going to take it," he told her. "You are going to submit to my lust. Completely and without question."

A shiver passed through her. A combination of gurgling excitement and a deep thrill born of the unknown. "I will hold nothing back," she promised.

He put his hand between her legs, parting her thighs. "No," he agreed. "You will not."

She was wet to the touch and red hot.

Desela shuddered at the sudden invasion. "Oh, stars," she screamed, her body releasing its pent-up reserves. "Oh, yes."

He kept his fingers in place, allowing her to buck and writhe against him, the orgasms pouring out of her one after the other, like roiling explosions, deep and fragrant and feminine.

Only once her body had calmed itself to some semblance of normalcy did he notify her of her infraction. "You came without permission. I will punish you for that. Among other things."

"Yes," she breathed. "Sir."

Trajan put his cum-soaked fingers to her lips. "For the next two days," he informed her, "you are mine."

Desela considered the prospect. Terrible and wonderful and electrifying. "Yours," she said, opening her mouth to lick away her own liquids.

The taste was bittersweet. A thrilling foretaste of slavery.

Servitude to the man she loved. The one she wanted to give herself to forever. Somehow, she vowed, she would be good enough so that he would want to keep her.

Apparently, Trajan had something different in mind, though.

"You'll understand," he told her, "when your time here is done. Why you need to leave. And why I am not meant to take a mate. I won't hurt you, Desela. I would tear my own heart out first. But I will treat you the only way I know how—as a sex slave, pure and simple. Not as a mate, Desela, but as a pleasure object."

"I want that, I want it," she vowed.

"You'll change your mind," he predicted.

"No." She sucked greedily on his fingers. "I won't."

The flyer landed with a jolt, right next to the jail. "We're here," he said.

"I'm ready," she replied.

"No." He shook his head. "You're not."

"I can face anything," she said. "With you."

Trajan blinked. His face was twitching. Almost like there was something behind his usual harsh expression, trying to break through. In the end, the sternness won out. "Let's get going. The sooner we start, the sooner we get this over with."

She smiled. He didn't mean it. He loved her and she was going to prove it. By being the best slave to him that anyone could imagine.

* * * * *

Jaxey did not understand Korlon's good humor. He had been smiling since they had boarded the ship. He would not tell her a word of what had transpired between he and Trajan, which left her totally in the dark as to what arrangements had been made.

All he would say was that they were remaining in orbit a couple of days.

"And after that?" Jaxey demanded, following him into their quarters on the cargo ship.

"After that, we will see," he said cryptically.

She watched in disbelief as he turned on the hologrid, looking for a show to watch. "You can't be serious," she said.

"Serious about what?" He sat down in front of the grid in a large, comfortable chair.

"About just hanging out here in space."

"We're not hanging out," he said. "We are in a geo-stationary orbit."

"You know what I mean." She moved between him and the hologrid, blocking his view. "We're up here and Desela's down there. We're supposed to be on alert, watching her back. At least I thought we were until you and that Trajan character got all chummy."

"Desela is fine," he said. "She is attending to her business. As a female."

Jaxey's brow shot up. She knew a jab when she heard one. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? You're not going to try and go all dominant on me now, are you, because I'm not in the mood. Des is my friend, too, and my responsibility and if you think I'll be pushed aside, you have another think coming."

"You're in my way, woman," he replied. "This is my favorite show."

She spun about to look at the screen. "*The Martian Juggling Hour*? Give me a break, Korlon."

"I love juggling. Always have. Now are you moving aside or not?"

"Not," she decided.

Korlon's expression changed ever so slightly. His voice lowered, too, just the tiniest increment. "Are you disobeying me, Jaxey?"

Jaxey swallowed. The bastard was playing the biology card. Look at him, sitting there like that, all smug and male, his cock hardening in his lap, his big hands gripping the armrests. The very hands he used to bind and caress and spank.

Damn it, how many million times was she going to fall for this in her married life? "Korlon, please don't make this sexual." She stood her ground. "You know we have to talk about this, and since we're on a mission, even an unofficial one, I think I have grounds to ask for a briefing."

He smiled thinly. She knew immediately the mistake she had made. She had forced his hand and now he would apply a loophole.

"Yes, that's true. Tell me, though, Jax," he said, his voice a slow and sexy rasp. "Where exactly are we, at this moment in time?"

"On a cargo ship." She folded her arms, stubbornly avoiding the inevitable conclusion. "On a mission."

"Correct," he acknowledged. "And on that ship, the space we now occupy, what does it represent?"

"Our sleep chambers," she mumbled.

"I didn't quite catch that."

"These are our sleep chambers," she said, with utmost reluctance.

"Yes." He nodded like a good examining lawyer. "And tell me...are we now occupying those chambers?"

"Yes," she said, her belly and nipples tightening in anticipation, "we are."

"And when we are in our bedchambers," he continued, moving to conclude his argument, "wherever they might be, what are the rules that apply between us?"

"You are in charge."

"And what is your place?"

"I obey," she whispered.

"And if you do not obey?"

"Then I am punished." Jaxey's heart was racing, her pussy was already dripping, the way it always did when her mate took control.

It was at times like these that her mind went to a different place. The arguments she might make no longer mattered—about how she had a right to finish a discussion with him first before they entered into their sex roles or how she deserved a little warning time first.

All that mattered now was his authority. Which was superior to hers, by her own consent and desire.

It was not a matter of turning into a zombie. Her submission was based on the deepest love and trust. And as much as she hated to admit it, if Korlon was relaxed about the situation, then it must truly be all right.

That he would never, ever, act against Des' or her own interests was a foregone conclusion.

"You disobeyed me just now, did you not?"

"I did," she heard herself say.

"And what should happen now?"

"I should be punished," said Jaxey.

Korlon opened the upper part of his coveralls. Her mouth watered as he bared his chest, his brown nipples, his full pectorals, and the washboard stomach. "What symbol is this?" he inquired, pointing to the silver necklace he wore with the tiny medallion inlaid with a three-spoked emblem.

"That is the symbol of your dominance over me," Jaxey replied, her knees weak.

"You may consider that mastery hereby invoked," he told her.

"Yes," she replied. "Master."

"Remove your clothing," he ordered.

Jaxey stripped off her coveralls without question. Her nipples were tight, her pussy was glistening wet. He did not say a word until she was completely nude, down to bare feet.

"What is that symbol on your neck?" Korlon referred to her own necklace and medallion, a smaller version of his.

"It is a symbol of my submission to you, Master."

"You may consider that slavery hereby invoked," he said.

Jaxey fell instantly to her knees, putting her head to the floor. It was a rote action, part of her training. She could not ignore this command if she wanted to.

His power over her thrilled Jaxey, though it also left her helplessly exasperated at times. On this occasion, he had chosen to lead her gently, with amusement to this conclusion—her, naked, prostrated.

Had he wished, he could have put her there instantly, with a word or a gesture. Sometimes he did that, just to show he could.

"I am going to punish you, slave," he pronounced.

"Your slave thanks her Master," she said.

"You will be punished with the lightwhip."

Jaxey's body began to quake involuntarily. The lightwhip was a devilishly creative, agonizing device indeed. Its reputation was legendary. Even freewheeling fems, it was said, were reduced to begging obedients after a taste of its heat on their flesh.

"Yes, Master," she managed. "Thank you, Master."

"I will do so as soon as I finish watching my favorite program. What is it again, slave?"

"The Martian Juggling Hour, Master."

"Yes, that's it. You may crawl to the wall to my left and wait until it's over. You will stand there, facing it."

"Yes, Master." Jaxey padded on hands and knees, the friction of the carpeted floor sending little tingles up and down her exposed body.

"I don't see any wiggle," he observed.

Jaxey was forced to shake her ass for him as she moved. The liquid was dripping blatantly from her pussy. She could smell her own heat, wafting through the conditioned air.

"Better," he approved. "Slave girls should always wiggle their asses when they crawl."

Her ass burned, knowing he was watching, evaluating her as an object of pure lust. To the world she was a Guardian, a warrior, a responsible member of society, but in here, in the privacy of their sleep space, she was a sex slave, answerable to her mate for the submissiveness of her actions.

Sometimes his desire overwhelmed her. Being a slave, she was subject to its full power. Bondage and discipline were only aspects, means of conveying how much he lusted to have and own her.

The heart of things was control. The right to make her act and behave in the ways that made him horny, to reduce her in totality to a naked creature of sexual heat.

She was panting by the time she reached the wall. Much as she dreaded what the whip would do to her, the ways it would reduce and unravel her, she found it far worse to have to wait.

Korlon knew this and that's why he was frittering time on the juggling.

Jaxey stood, facing the wall.

Blank, boring, sterile whiteness.

Her pussy was on fire. Her lips were dry. She danced a little on her feet, moving the bare soles up and down on the sensuous rug. She wiped her palms on her hips. This was killing her.

She could almost hear the time, seconds ticking, way, way too slowly.

Had a minute gone by or was it more?

She could hear him breathing. He cleared his throat, shifting a little in his seat. He looked so fucking sexy in those coveralls, insolently open to the waist. She wanted to devour his crotch, ripping the material with her teeth to get at his cock. She would lick and worship him, showing what a good and eager girl she could be.

He would forget about the whip. He would forget about punishment. He'd want to fuck, two days straight.

Another throat clearing, a shifting in the seat. She wanted to look at him so badly it hurt. Was he erect? What if he was playing with himself? Sometimes he did that, just to taunt her. In situations like these.

She had to see.

But peeking was an offense.

Bad girls peeked, good girls stared at the wall. Naked, cheerfully smiling in anticipation of a thorough going-over with the whip.

Coils of pure energy, able to go anywhere on a woman's body...and inside it, too. Not just whipping, but Master-sanctioned violation of the sort that left a woman hating herself for loving it, confused and angry and coming like crazy as she begged for more.

Jaxey couldn't stand this. She was too far separated from him. What was he doing exactly? What was he thinking? Was he upset?

Eyes glued to the holoscreen...or was he watching his cock, stroking it, long and lazy, making it thicker and harder, coaxing the veins into prominence, teasing a little crop of pre-cum out of the head.

Stars, she had to look, just one quick glance, a half a second, he would never even know, she would be so fast...

Jaxey's head whipped around, stealing her glance. She breathed a sigh of relief. He was looking at the screen. She turned back to the wall, ready to make the freshly burned image in her mind last her the rest of the hour.

The sudden sound of his voice made her jolt. "Nice try, my curious little kitten."

Her heart slammed in her chest. She had been caught. She had broken a rule and now she would pay the penalty. It might seem a small thing, but it was guaranteed to make her hour infinitely more tormenting and frustrating.

"Belly to the wall," Korlon ordered.

Jaxey bit her bottom lip in anticipation. Female anatomy being what it was it wasn't just her stomach that was going to be making intimate contact with the flat surface.

There were her breasts and thighs and her cheek, too.

She moaned at first contact, wanting to come so badly it hurt.

How could Korlon do this to her? How could he reduce her so quickly into a starving sex animal, a writhing pet willing to perform any act?

Was there any doubt he was the Master and she the slave? A few words, a single look from out of those deep eyes of his and there she was, standing in naked submission, waiting docilely for wretched, cruel punishment, her greatest hope to be filled and exploited by his cock, to be allowed to crawl into the bed she was supposed to possess equally so that she could service him in abject surrender, hoping to perform well enough to be allowed to beg for the right to speak, which in turn would allow her to beg to come...pinned and owned in eternal servitude.

Jaxey's nipples throbbed. Her breasts were squashed. With every intake of breath she wanted to shove herself against the wall, fucking it, rubbing like an alley cat.

If she knew it wouldn't get her in more trouble, she would ask to come this way. It wouldn't take long. A few good rubs and she would be over the top. Moaning and climaxing, naked, her liquids slick on the wall.

Korlon knew this, too. He was doing all of this deliberately, manipulating her step by step.

The slope was long and steep and it seemed to get steeper all the time.

Would she change their arrangement, though?

By all that was sacred in the Guardian Code, the answer was no. Not a thing would she change.

Her ears perked as she heard the music. The show was ending. She could hear him getting up, turning off the hologrid.

It would not be long now.

He would fetch the lightwhip.

And then the fun would begin.

Chapter Five

Trajan escorted his lovely prisoner to the front desk in the jail. She was still cuffed and collared, which was a requirement of regulations. Clearly they were not needed, given her size and weakness as a female.

Although they did make her look damn desirable as an obedient.

"Trajan Marcus Aurelius," he announced his full name to the android on duty. "Posting bail on a prisoner."

"What are you doing?" asked Desela. "Aren't you putting me in a cell?"

He gave her a harsh look. "Were you given permission to speak, slave?"

She hung her pretty head. "No, Master," she whispered with full pouting lips.

"Present prisoner," droned the android, "for bail valuation."

Trajan moved her forward, pressing her belly against the desk. "Open your eyes. Look right into the scanner, don't blink."

She did anyway, as soon as the red beam shone into her eyes.

"I said don't blink." He smacked her scantily clad ass.

Desela gasped.

"No prior record, low risk for flight." The android evaluated her record from the retina scan. "Bail posted at one thousand standard credits."

Trajan pulled his card, inserting it into the slot on the shiny white desktop. "That's a lot of money, girl, I'll expect you to be extremely grateful."

Her cheeks pinkened, the gesture of modesty inflaming his blood. "Yes, Master," she said.

"Credit accepted, Trajan Marcus Aurelius," the round-headed silver android completed the transaction. "The prisoner is hereby released. Court appearance date in three solar days. Failure to appear will result in forfeiture of credits."

"Don't worry," said Trajan, still operating in his capacity as private citizen. "She'll be there."

He said this right to Desela. She shivered in response knowing that his comment was a not so subtle statement of his intent to keep her in a state of close and exacting bondage.

"Turn around," he said.

Trajan removed the official cuffs, freeing her wrists. He spun her around again, so she was facing him. "Lean your head back," he commanded her.

He took off the collar next, leaving her temporarily free.

"Those were colony property," he said. "You're not a colony prisoner any longer – you're mine."

"Where will you take me, Master?" she asked softly.

Trajan took her upper arm, lifting her onto tiptoes. Whipping his arm around behind her he delivered a single punitive spank, hard enough to make her wince.

"Were you given permission to speak?" he inquired.

"No, Master," she breathed, a chided slave girl.

"The next time will go harder." He pointed to the long white corridor at the end of which lay the door to his private quarters. It was there, both in his bed and out of it that she would learn what it meant to be given no choice but to obey.

A writhing sex object, desperate to please, her will shattered, her entire being reduced to squirming, sweat-covered in quest of the ever elusive orgasm being held back by her cruel bastard of a Master.

"March," he said. "Now."

His footsteps seemed to drag out into forever. His cock was aching like mad, his pulse was racing. All he could think of was getting Desela behind closed doors, so he could deal with her properly, the way his primale libido was screaming out to do.

Just a few more steps and she would be his. Two whole days to do with as he pleased. The perfect vessel for his pleasure – so long as he did not allow himself to get emotionally connected enough to have bonding sex.

Which in turn would mean they would be stuck for life.

That was not going to happen.

He would simply make use of her body, liberally, wantonly, callously.

All in the interest of keeping her free by convincing her to reject him, of course.

The door opened in front of them with an almost angelic whir. So much bliss lay ahead.

Desela hesitated. "Master?"

Her head turned in his direction.

"Eyes forward," he ordered. "Don't move."

She stood perfectly still as he lifted her skirt. She wasn't wearing panties. All the better.

A loud crack resounded in the air as he punished her with a single blow across her perfect cheeks. She released a grunt, low but very female.

"Inside," he told her.

Desela crossed the threshold, the picture of obedience.

"To the center," he dictated. "Face me, hands at your sides."

Trajan made her wait like that. He put his hands on his hips, enjoying the sight of her, trying to be good, trying not to move or shake in any way.

"These are my quarters," he said, indicating the simply furnished room with a large bed, a mirror, a dresser and a wall-mounted objectifier to make anything else he might need. "Everything in it is my property. As long as you are here, you're my property, too. If I had a pet I would treat you similarly, although I would probably allow the pet more freedom." Her lips twitched very slightly. "Is there a problem, Desela?"

Her voice was thick. "No, Master."

Trajan frowned. "If I find out you're lying to me..."

"I'm not lying, Master," she insisted.

"We will see," he said. "You will remove your top, Desela. Show your Master your naked breasts."

Her hands moved over her skimpy shirt, opening it dutifully. Daintily, she parted the halves, revealing her full, round globes.

"Slowly," he cautioned, not wishing to end her striptease too quickly.

Desela eased the shirt over her shoulders, inch by inch.

"When you are completely nude," he told her, his voice a deep rasp, "I'm going to dominate you. I'm going to fuck you and exploit you."

Her eyes lit up, scandalized. "Yes, Master, oh, yes..."

"You will come for me," he predicted. "You will scream and beg and crawl."

The top fell to the floor. "I am yours, Master."

Trajan watched her breathing, her breasts slowly rising and falling. They looked full and ripe indeed next to her rib cage and slender belly.

"Your nipples should be pierced," he observed. "You should have a chain running between them, a leash to be held in a man's hand."

"Will you do that to me, Master?"

A jolt passed through him. The request had been so tenderly delivered, so very sweet and sensual. "Only a permanent Master would do that. And that is something you will never have."

Strange that he should feel so adamant about the subject. Assuming he did not want her himself, why should he care if she found happiness in the collar of another Dominant? Clearly she was the sort of woman who needed a Master so why begrudge her?

Unless he was jealous.

Impossible.

Pushing the idea from his mind, he gave her the next order. "Take off your skirt, Desela, it's time we uncovered that delicious pussy of yours."

Desela promptly unfastened the garment, wiggling it over her bare hips. With tantalizing ease, it joined the top on the floor in a puddle at her booted feet.

"Hands over your head," he commanded. "Turn about for me."

She did so, displaying her body to full advantage.

"Ass out," he said brusquely. "Suck in your stomach."

Desela obeyed, casting aside any pretense at modesty.

"Now take off your boots. Slowly. Very slowly," he reiterated.

Desela flexed her legs, making an unwitting show of it as she bared her feet, one after the other.

"Legs apart," he said as she presented her naked self. "Cup your breasts."

Instantly, she spread her thighs, exposing her pink sex lips. A moment later she held up her breasts, unabashedly, with total trust and docility.

Her easy, wanton compliance only made him want to push her harder.

"One hand in your pussy, one on your left nipple. Stimulate yourself."

She sucked in a little breath and began to attend to her own body, her fingers moving according to his will, bringing pleasure by his design.

She had best enjoy it, he thought, before it turns to the sting of pain.

That, too, was in his design.

Trajan noted her increased reactions. The way she licked her lips, the way her nipple responded to her caress, the way her crack glistened from the slowly leaking fluids. "You seem excited, slave girl."

"Yes, Master," she sighed.

"Are you close to coming?"

"Yes, Master."

"Would you like to come?"

"Yes, thank you, Master."

"I did not say you could," he said, bursting her bubble. "I merely asked if you wanted to."

A shiver passed down her spine. She had been tricked, manipulated.

"On your hands and knees, girl."

Desela took her hands from her body, lowering herself to the floor.

It was a hard surface, smooth blue tile.

He went to the wall, to the objectifier and ordered a slim leather riding crop. Slicing the air, he tested it, well in range of her hearing.

Moving to the communicator on the wall, he said, "I'll be off duty the rest of the day. Emergencies only."

"Emergencies only, boss," Rather repeated.

Rather knew the score. He would see to it they weren't disturbed.

"Thanks," said Trajan.

He returned to his prisoner, whip in hand. "Now you'll have my full attention." Trajan touched the whip to her back, making her jolt. "That's what you wanted, isn't it, girl?"

"Yes, Master," she said in a small voice.

"You don't sound so confident." He ran the leather up her spine, to her neck and across to her cheek.

"I-I'm a little anxious, Master."

He laughed. "Only a little?"

"A lot," she confessed.

He tapped her ass with the leather. "You would like reassurance?"

She hesitated, sensing perhaps that she was in no position to ask for such a thing.

"I asked you a question." He let the whip sail through the air, landing high on her buttocks.

Desela gave a small, contained yelp. "I want to please you, Master, that's all."

"You want to be a good girl?" He rubbed the red spot, touching the small welt he had raised with the whip.

"Yes," she whimpered. "I want to be a good girl."

He struck her again. "On your belly. Prostrate yourself."

Desela pressed her beautiful breasts and pussy to the floor. His floor. She was at his mercy, as much as a woman could be to a man. Kneeling beside her on one knee, he put his hand on her buttocks. Hot to the touch. "What's wrong, darling, you're shivering."

She was unable to speak. He spanked her. Three times, reddening the rest of her bottom.

"I feel strange, Master," she said, her voice sultry and weak.

"Define strange." He inserted a finger into her pussy. She was wet and eager, as open as any woman he had ever known.

"I want...to be used," she panted.

"You would like to be fucked?"

"Anything, Master, whatever you want to do to me...for your pleasure."

"I had considered taking you in the ass," he mused.

She lifted herself. "Yes, Master, do that...use my ass, come inside me."

"I had also considered chaining you up and teasing you until you weep for an orgasm."

Desela moaned, as though it were already happening. "Master, I'm so helpless...please, do what you want."

He found her clitoris. "Suppose I want to sell you to one of Gideos' brothels?"

"Master..." She sounded piteous. "Keep me. Let me serve you."

He smiled. She was no longer thinking clearly. He couldn't sell her because she needed to go to court. But at the moment, this room and what he was doing to her comprised the whole of her reality.

She was slipping into her slavery, falling under the spell of the submissive. He played with her pussy a little longer, bringing her once again to the brink of orgasm before stopping.

"On your back," he said, slapping her hip.

Desela rolled over, her hands moving instinctively over her head.

Trajan waited a moment and then delivered a light blow with the whip to her belly. "Is that how you display yourself, slave girl?"

Her cheeks reddened. She widened her thighs, exposing her sex.

Trajan touched the whip to her nipples, one after the other. "You need training, don't you?"

"Yes, Master," she rasped.

"You're an undisciplined creature. You need the whip. You need chains. You need my cock."

Her mouth opened into a moan at the mention of his cock.

"You would like me between your legs?"

"Yes, Master." She lifted her hips. "Please..."

Trajan stood without comment. Towering over her, placing himself directly between her legs, he began to undress. She looked up at him, as if regarding a god.

"You will please me," he ordered. "However I choose to use you."

She wet her lips. "I will, Master."

The confidence in her voice, respectful, intensely passionate, affected him to the core. Though he did not show it, he began to wonder, for the first time, if she might not be more up to the challenge than he realized.

Impossible though it might seem she was not yet crumbling, not yet begging release.

A new danger surfaced in his mind now.

For while he had more than prepared himself to be disappointed by Desela, he had no clue what to do if she truly met his needs.

Pushing the idea aside, he removed the rest of his clothes.

It was time to stop thinking. Time to fuck his slave girl, until she could no longer remember her own name or what planet they were on.

Desela was about to be fucked. By her Master. Naked on the floor, on her back, her legs obscenely spread, her ass smarting from the blows of his whip, the hard smacks of his hand.

Waiting, as he stood between her legs, biding his time, choosing his moment of conquest.

He had her right where he wanted.

She was so very wet, aching and swollen with need. Her fingers were covered with her own cum. Her pussy was dripping it, trickling it down to the floor. Cool tile under her ass and back, warmed very slightly by her breasts and belly a few moments ago, before he had ordered her to roll over.

Her Master was putting her through paces.

Training her. Teaching her the lot of a sex slave.

The words, the idea was overwhelming, but what else could she be to this man, beholding him now, in all his splendid nudity, lording over her?

The broad shoulders tapered to a narrow waist, not an ounce of fat on his perfectly muscled body. The triceps and biceps proportioned to the pectorals and the abs and the thigh muscles.

And his hands, so large and capable of dealing both pleasure and pain to a woman. A female could not help but love such hands, even as she trembled before them, begging favor.

Much as the idea rankled her adopted fem sensibilities, she relished the idea of being Trajan's pet. His naked pleasure animal, a human female devoted to his lust and satisfaction.

Was there any better way to be wanted?

No other man could do this to her. None ever had. Not even Korlon had awakened the slave in her...the obedient woman in her to this degree.

It was said that an obedient was like a rare flower, and that for each submissive woman there was one man to bring out her bloom.

Trajan was that man. That Master.

She held her breath now as he took his cock, wrapping it in his hand. That capable hand...that glorious cock. Slowly, agonizingly, he began to stroke himself. Up and down the length, pressing the thick vein down at the underside, pushing his fingers all the way to the back of the shaft, to his balls, which hung heavy and thick with semen.

Desela whimpered...not daring to speak any more what was on her mind.

How much more obvious could it be? A flushed and naked woman, writhing at his feet. She had already begged to be taken. Using every available opportunity to speak her slave's mind.

Stars, she needed to touch herself badly. It was so unfair, the way he took his own pleasure, enjoying his body as he saw fit. She could not do so. Her hands were his to command. Her pussy was his to look at, to torture, to penetrate.

Desela's breath caught in her chest as he placed his hand beneath his testicles, gently weighing them, one by one. Was there no end to his ability to torment?

"You will satisfy me with your mouth first," he informed her. "Then we will see about using the rest of you."

"Thank you, Master," she exclaimed, her lips already tingling in anticipation of receiving his cock. "I will devote myself. I will be yours."

Trajan positioned himself, climbing astride her chest. She was overwhelmed with his strength and power. If he wished, he could crush her completely.

Obediently, in absolute subjugation, she opened her mouth. He did not immediately feed his cock to her, however, but opted to rub it first over her cheeks.

"You are here for my pleasure," he informed her. "Every part of you is mine to use as I please."

"Master...oh, Master...yes."

The scent of him was rich and powerful, pure male. Her cheeks burned from the heat of his primale cock. When his balls tickled her chin, she moaned aloud.

She wanted to be invaded. She wanted her mouth to be stuffed and taken over. She wanted to taste cock, eat cock, and breathe cock.

She wanted to lick and suck at him greedily, until he deigned to reward her with his semen, full thick spurts to fill her cheeks.

"You're a pretty girl," he praised, smoothing her hair. "I will enjoy exploiting you."

Desela was breathing hotly, trying to touch her lips to his cock, desperate. "I will do anything, Master. Anything at all."

"Yes," he said, his tone inducing pulsing quivers in her neglected pussy. "You will."

Grasping his cock, he placed the tip of it before her lips.

Closing her eyes, she kissed it delicately, reverently.

Trajan gave an approving groan, soft and in control. Encouraged, she slid the tip of him inside her mouth. Tentatively, she pressed the glorious cock between her lips.

Trajan promptly offered her more, which she took eagerly.

"You will serve me abjectly," he looked down on her, "for the duration of our time together."

She signaled compliance as best she could with her eyes.

Trajan pushed his cock in farther, seeking the back of her throat. "I will use you to the fullest extent of my physiology."

Her pulse raced. A healthy primale like Trajan was capable of six maybe seven orgasms a day. She would be on her back constantly at that rate, or in whatever other position he chose to put her into.

She focused on the feel of him, the heat of his erection. She knew he was not expanding himself as much as he could. Was it mercy on his part or just another form of teasing?

"Prepare yourself," he said, sliding in and out with practiced ease. "I will be coming hard."

Desela sought to relax her jaws. She would drink it all down, his essence, his salty-sweet semen.

"Yes, that's it," he encouraged, spreading his fingers over the sides of her head.

She was helpless now, held in his viselike grip. Even if she wanted to break free, she had no hope.

This reality did not scare or anger her—on the contrary, it thrilled her. Finally, a man strong enough to take her love.

Or at least to seize upon her body.

“Desela...mmm...”

He was saying her name, so delicious on his lips. She could live there, in his kisses, in his approval, or even in his condescension.

Such was the obedient way—falling for her man hard and deep, straight to the bottom of the blackest hole. The only way out was for her Master himself to hold her up.

Did Trajan have it in him to do that?

These next days, these next hours would tell. All too soon she would be over the edge, too far gone to keep herself together. She would be drunk on his power, intoxicated to a near stupor on his domination.

If he wished, he would be able to erase her will, to remake her into some alien image. A zombie. A drugged-up pleasure woman for sale in one of Gideos’ brothels. Or maybe something even more abject...

Something befitting a world this primitive and dark.

“Now,” Trajan commanded triumphantly. “Take it...now.”

Trajan’s semen blasted against the back of her throat. She swallowed the first of it, earthy and rich on her tongue. More followed, much more. Her swallows turned to gulps. He continued to hold her head, though his grip loosened.

His words became more soothing. His face was more relaxed, the tense lines loosened just a little.

She had appeased him. At least for the moment.

Trajan stayed inside her mouth a little longer. She kept on sucking him, because he had not told her to stop.

He was looking down on her, studying. She did not want to fail her test, whatever it was.

At last, he withdrew his glistening wet cock.

It was still hard, as though he hadn’t ejaculated at all.

“Lick it clean,” he said.

She did her best, trying to remove any possible evidence of their sexual encounter. It was futile because her lips only made his cock wetter with saliva.

The symbolism, of course, was clear. He had fucked her mouth, using it at will and now she must pamper him, using the only tool at her disposal, her lowly tongue.

The same one she used to speak and sigh and moan.

"That is enough," said Trajan. With that, he moved between her legs, bracing his powerful arms on either side of her body. From that position, with his cock poised at the apex of her thighs, he was able to impale her with a single smooth thrust, laying claim to her pussy.

"Your slavery is about to be made official," he informed her. "The moment I come inside you, you will be owned."

Desela's mind leaped to a whole host of possibilities, none of which could ever be rooted in reality.

If he were in his mating heat, getting ready to ejaculate and mark his designated female...

Then they would have to be united, for he would never be able to make sex with another woman and she would be unable to make sex with another man.

She would have to be his forever. He would have to make her live with him, here on Unicorn Three, or else they could get a place back on Earth, under one of the domes. A small apartment in a high cylinder. He could do security work, or serve in judicial administration for the Council.

And she could keep his home, please his cock and otherwise serve in whatever capacity he allowed her to.

"You will hold perfectly still," he commanded, "while you are being had."

This was harder than it sounded. Dominated as she was, there were always ways for a woman to move her body, urging on her partner, enticing him to her thorough exploitation.

There was squirming and wriggling and writhing...and a whole host of motions in between.

Even now, she found herself caught in the midst of her body's inevitable responses to his presence, his sexual energy.

Just one little kiss, a subtle nibble and she would stop.

"I said hold still." He pinched her breast.

"Yes, Master," she whimpered, unable so far to comply.

He punished her further, withdrawing his cock to the very tip, forcing her to endure the agony of emptiness. He waited stoically, with pure primale discipline.

"Are you ready, girl?"

She nodded her head, choking back tears. She wanted it so badly — all she had to do was reach up with her body to impale herself. But that would only land her in more trouble.

"You must release every muscle," he advised.

"I'm trying, Master."

"Not hard enough."

"But I don't know what else to do."

"Stop thinking of yourself in control. Surrender the idea of 'I' and 'me'. A slave takes no actions—things happen to her. Even an orgasm is something her Master does to her. It overcomes her—it has her, not the other way around."

"I want to be that way, Master."

"You will," he said, his voice deep and intent. "Have patience."

She was overwhelmed by his conviction, by the totality of his devotion to her slave's education.

"I'll be patient for you, Master. I would wait forever for you," she promised.

Trajan took the opportunity to claim her, his pulsing, rock-hard shaft plunging to the depths of her moist and needy sex. "No more talking, Desela. I only want to hear you sighing and moaning from here on in."

"Yes, Master."

He didn't sound angry with her. If anything, he seemed amused. She would make him pleased with his decision to go easy on her.

She tried to concentrate on letting go...on letting the orgasm come and take her. But she was too hungry for it, too greedy to reach out and snatch it.

The more he moved up and down, the more she tried to follow—rippling muscles and tensed nerve endings seeking to draw herself up along the path of his rhythm, matching him beat for beat.

In the end, he left her panting, frustrated.

"You need much more training," he declared.

"Yes, Master." She was on the verge of tears.

"You are not permitted to come with me," he pronounced.

"Master, I am sorry," she cried in her unsatisfied arousal, more upset about disappointing him than about losing her right to climax. "Let me try again."

"No more. Not now."

"Yes, Master."

"Brace yourself," he dictated, "the time has come."

Desela clenched her toes and gritted her teeth. How would she avoid climaxing with him? She was barely hanging on the precipice as it was, her nails dug into the cliffs that held her above the abyss. That darkest and most ecstatic of places where submissive women went when fucked and controlled by their Masters.

Trajan reared back his head. The sound from his mouth was half lion, half man. Testosterone surged from his pores, lightning jumped from his flesh along a million points of contact between his body and hers.

Hold herself back? She would be lucky to keep herself from total dissolution.

His orgasm was like a rushing storm, wind blowing sheets of rain, roaring, thundering cascades. A sound to penetrate the core. A sound both ear-piercing and oddly quiet at the same time.

Like an ancient tuning fork, piercing the universe, splitting it wide.

He had twice as much semen to release as the first time. Or so it felt. Spurt after spurt filled her starving sex.

"M-Master," she shook, her body caught up in the roaring, the shaking. "I can't—" Can't help myself, she was trying to say. But the point was already made. Her movements were all too obvious, her facial expressions telltale.

"You'll be punished," he grimaced, breathing through clenched teeth. "You are a disobedient...naughty...willful little slave."

With every word he pounded at her, driving her down. Trajan's pronouncement managed to trip a whole new set of triggers. "Yes," she screamed out, her body exploding into higher and higher orbit. "I am...disobedient...and...and willful."

Trajan was breathing hard, still coming. He was somewhere else, too, in that place for Masters who were taking their high off their subjugated slaves.

"You'll pay, girl...you'll pay dearly," he continued, his words matching the beat of his heart. "I'm going to put you in a fucking collar. You'll crawl for me...you'll kiss my feet...you'll sleep on this floor. You'll beg to take food from my hands, on all fours. You'll take my cock up your ass, and the robotic dildo, too."

"Yes...fuck, yes, Master."

"You'll be...my little...fuck slave..." He reached a crescendo, slamming himself on top of her.

Trajan was climaxing a second time, without any respite from the first. Desela closed her eyes, lifting her face to the ceiling. Another orgasm was washing over her. This one was even larger and more out of her control.

She felt like a cork, being bounced along on a tidal wave.

"Again," he chided. "You disobey me."

Ashamed of herself for letting him down once more, Desela sought to hide her face.

He turned her head back dead center, so she could face him. "You don't get away that easy."

Her lip quivered. "Mercy, Master?"

To her great surprise, he offered her a wink. "Don't be so quick to try and soften me up. Punishment can be quite fun. And interesting, too."

Desela's body continued to tingle, the aftershocks shooting up and down her spine. "Yes, Master."

"You don't seem convinced," he mused.

"Forgive me, Master."

He stroked her cheek. "Such a pretty little thing."

She shuddered at his touch. The words were at her lips. They very nearly spilled out. "Master, I..."

He cocked his head. Did he have any clue what was on her mind?

Did she?

Was she on the verge of confessing love to this man she hardly knew? It was one thing to bravely travel halfway across the galaxy to follow a mating instinct, but quite another to lay her heart out so blatantly.

And yet it was all true. She felt so very warm and cherished and at home with Trajan. It was as though he knew her better than she knew herself. It was as if they had been together forever.

When he was being passionate, when he was lecturing her, when they had simply been riding together in the flyer, she had felt alive. Validated in his presence, made strong and whole.

It was palpable now.

Close enough to touch and feel and breathe in.

"A credit for your thoughts," he quipped. "Never mind," he kissed her, ensuring silence. "Slaves don't get asked that question."

She lifted her lips, wanting more.

"No." He denied her.

Just like that, Desela was deprived of the chance to kiss the man she loved. Blinking, she tried not to show the pain.

"Obedience," he told her, studying her eyes. "That's what matters. And the only true test of that is to make you do what you do not wish to do, while thwarting you in the things you would prefer to do."

Trajan's cock was still inside her, still hard. He had her pinned and skewered, controlled in every sense of the word. She wondered how she had any possibility of exercising any preference of her own.

Still, he was the Master and she the slave. Hers was not to question, but to suffer, squeal and come.

Without permission.

"Pucker your lips," he ordered.

She did so, expectantly.

"Kiss the air."

The motions embarrassed her, not to mention the sound of her own lips pressed uselessly against nothing. Trajan laughed lightly. "That's my girl. Now keep your mouth frozen, as though you were about to be kissed. Don't quit on me, you're doing so well."

He was teasing her, acting as though she were doing this of her own accord.

In a sense she was, but given her state of enthrallment to Trajan and to her own need to be directed by him, she could no more deny him than she could keep from inhaling the air required to breathe.

"You have a slave's lips. Natural, full, perfect." He barely brushed them with his own.

Desela moaned a wordless plea for more.

"Arch your back, offer me your nipples."

She did so, pushing her breasts out.

He bent his head, dabbing each with his tongue. After that, he licked them, massaging the hot nubs.

"I've only just begun with you," he told her. "I have not even come close to being tired." Trajan watched for a response. Receiving none, he continued. "I will come inside you two or three times more. Then I will secure you. Leave you here in my quarters for a little while. Would you like that, Desela?"

For the first time, she felt genuine fear. "Master, please don't leave me alone. I'll do anything..."

"You will do anything as it is," he reminded.

"I don't want to be alone," she repeated, her voice cracking.

Trajan moved his cock in and out, up and down. After just a few efficient thrusts, he had her out of her skin again, caught on the razor's edge.

"What's it to you if I leave you alone?"

"Do what you want to me," she moaned, speaking once more from her deep place of primal slavery. "I'm yours...to be punished and abused."

"I will blindfold you, Desela and chain you up. Then I will leave you alone."

"Yes, Master. Yes," she cried, spasming.

"I'll teach you to truly appreciate my presence, won't I, slave girl?"

"You will, Master."

"Come for me," he ordered. "Release your body to me."

Desela exploded, instantly and silently, too racked with sexual energy to let out more than a hoarse, voiceless scream. He took hold of her hands, interlacing their fingers. She did not think she would survive this complete dissolution of her soul, a cataclysm of pleasure tearing her to shreds.

"Mine," he said, his voice commanding and soothing and domineering all at once. "Mine and only mine...absolutely mine."

He spoke the words into her ear, which was wet and hot, another opening to her body, open for the penetration of his voice, of his ideas.

She became a vessel to be filled.

In the midst of this transfer, a strange feeling came over her. In as much as he was lording over her, making her need him and feed off him, he was feeding off her.

It stood to reason, didn't it? That a Master's being, his identity depended on that of the slave just like hers depended on him?

Not that she had any way to prove this. Trajan would have to open up to her, share his feelings on the matter, and this did not seem a likely possibility. At least not in the near future.

What she did know was that for this precious moment at least, they were linked inextricably. Him inside her, above her, over her, and her beneath him, receiving the majesty of his power.

Orgasm after orgasm, release after release, until she could remember little more than her own name.

Talk about sex-making to drain the mind.

It was like stepping outside her normal consciousness, walking to the brink of oblivion.

Just as she thought she would pass out from the pleasure, Trajan called an end to their passion. She felt the emptiness as he withdrew. She lacked the strength even to whimper.

He lifted her into his arms, scooping her off the floor, limp as a rag doll. She nuzzled against his chest, feeling safer and more whole than she ever had in her entire life.

Trajan's heart beat strongly, his skin was warm and damp, the smooth softness covering rock-hard muscle. Every fiber of her being reached out to him, in gratefulness, in arousal.

She was protected, cared for...and maybe even loved.

He laid her down on the bed. His gentleness astounded her, coming from a man of such rugged strength. She tried to cling to him, not wanting the connection to end.

Trajan easily separated himself and went to the objectifier on the wall. She heard the machine humming, knew he was making things – devices – probably for her.

Sure enough, he returned, chains in his hands, gleaming and rattling. He had leather cuffs, too, and a collar. He laid the chains over her thigh. The cool metal sent delicious chills down her spine. Her pussy reacted, releasing fresh liquids.

She wanted to be fucked...again.

She was becoming insatiable.

Trajan took her wrist, wrapping it in the leather cuff. There was a locking mechanism, which meant she could not remove it against his will.

He did the same to her other wrist.

He did this because he was her Master and he owned her.

The thought turned the whole of her to liquid...melting, boiling and bubbling. "Trajan," she moaned. "Please...take me again. I can't...I can't think straight. I can't live...without you inside me."

His face was stern. "Discipline, girl. You will not move or respond unless I tell you to."

Desela whimpered. "Yes, Master."

Trajan attached lines of chain, one each to eyebolts stitched into the cuffs. He connected the opposite ends to bolts on the wall behind the bed.

She was bound now, her arms held above her head.

"Legs apart," he ordered.

Desela could barely breathe, barely move. She managed to spread herself, baring her pussy to his full gaze.

Electric charges flashed through her as he laid eyes on her sex, that portal he had already conquered so thoroughly.

And yet, for all his use of her, she craved more, as though her sex had been empty and alone for a century.

I'm addicted, she thought, I am dependent on this man and on his ability to pleasure and possess me.

He touched her ankle, sending tiny quakes down her spine. Every impulse in her told her to scream out to be fucked, to lift her pussy to him, to demand and shout to be had. "I'm trying...to be good, Master," she gasped, hoping he would recognize how hard this was for her.

Trajan wrapped a cuff around her ankle, unimpressed. "Do you expect a reward for obeying me?"

"No, Master." She was on the verge of tears.

Trajan locked the cuff and moved to her other ankle. The cuff fit snugly, binding and holding her.

"Obedience is what you owe me, I will take no less." Producing two chains, he attached the cuffs to bolts at the foot of the bed, thus securing her ankles.

Desela was spread-eagle now, completely helpless.

"Attempt to free yourself," he ordered.

Desela obeyed, pulling against the leather and steel.

"Harder."

She increased her squirming, her small, female body straining in utter futility.

"Harder," he repeated. "Free yourself."

Desela grimaced. "I can't, Master!"

He made her continue until she broke a sweat.

"Stop," he said, controlling her as easily as he would a puppet.

"What have you learned?" he inquired, his calm in direct contrast to her frantic demeanor.

"I'm not in control," she breathed heavily.

As if she didn't know that already.

"Why are you bound like this?" he wanted to know.

"Because...it's your will."

He reached out to tickle her foot. The ensuing laughter was anything but funny.

"Because it's your will...Master," he corrected.

"Yes, Master!" she exclaimed.

He removed his fingers. "How long will you remain like this?"

"Until you free me, Master."

"And in the meantime, what may I do to you?"

"Anything." She sighed, lost in his eyes. "Anything at all."

"I can fuck you..."

"Yes, Master."

"I can whip you – your belly and breasts and thighs."

"Yes, Master."

"Beg to be whipped," he commanded.

The words caught only briefly in her throat. She had no choice but to give him what he wanted.

"I beg you, Master. Whip me."

"My belly," he coached, "and my breasts." He was casting a spell over her, touching her, manipulating her even now.

"Whip my belly," she moaned. "Whip my breasts, Master. Whip them..."

He crossed his hands over his mammoth chest. "Now beg to be fucked."

"Master," she ground her teeth, "fuck your slave...fuck her hard..."

His smile was slanted, utterly male and superior. "You were to be punished," he reminded. "Were you not?"

"Yes, Master." The frustration bled into her voice. She had nearly forgotten her crimes and the promise of retribution.

"You will receive a slave's punishment," he said. "The punishment of a conquered woman."

"Yes, Master."

"Your nipples will be clamped. Your pussy will be filled with a device, a robotic dildo. You will not be allowed to come. You'll be kept on the edge. A gag will absorb your screams."

She felt the blood drain from her face. "Master, if there is any other way..."

His features darkened. "You have just lengthened your sentence by an hour. Care to keep talking?"

"No, Master," she whispered.

"You may thank me in advance for punishing you."

"Thank you, Master, for punishing me," she rasped.

Trajan produced the clamps from the objectifier. Small, gleaming silver—nasty-looking, with narrow pincer edges. He held them up so she could see. Stroking her forehead, pushing back stray, damp hair, he asked, “Are you ready, my girl?”

She looked at him longingly. His handsome face, so strong and so close. His eyes, so very deep and commanding. He had called her his girl, melting her heart. “Yes, Master,” she promised softly.

He laughed, running a hand down her rib cage to her hip. “You’re lying. You couldn’t possibly be ready.”

“Master, I want to be ready. I want to submit,” she insisted.

Trajan slapped her breast very lightly.

Desela cried out in shock.

“That is pain,” he said. “Sexual pain. There’s a lot more in store. Still think you are ready?”

Tears clouded her vision. “Master, I beg you...”

Desela did not even know what to beg for. She only knew that she had been defeated, thoroughly and totally. He had run circles around her, making a mockery of her every desire.

“Beg me for what?” He ran his hand over her pussy.

“I beg you for...” Her voice cracked. “For punishment.” She gave the only possible answer. “I beg you to punish me...hard.”

“Lift your buttocks,” he ordered, “from the bed.”

She did, straining her every muscle to do so.

Trajan responded, promptly slapping her pussy. Again his touch was light and precise, and again her body was racked with dark, stinging sensations. She collapsed back to the bed.

“Lift,” he said.

Desela raised her pussy, throbbing and hurt.

Trajan slapped her a second time. Again, she collapsed. Trajan held out his hand as if to strike. “Up,” he commanded. “And stay up.”

She was crying, though her pussy was spasming, on the verge of fresh release. Her body trembled all over. Exhaustion overcame her. Instead of slapping her again, he merely watched, observing her quivering limbs, the struggle on her face.

At last, inevitably, she collapsed.

“Congratulations,” he said dryly. “You’ve earned something extra in addition to your other punishments.”

Without further explanation, he went back to the objectifier.

“Know what this is?” He held up the piece of tapered black plastic, roughly like a dildo but smaller.

She shook her head, wary.

"It goes up the asses of bad slave girls like you. Most slaves find it reasonably enjoyable, once they get past the humiliation of having to take something inside their anus. Although in your case, humiliation is a turn-on, isn't it?"

She averted her eyes.

"Isn't it, slave girl?"

She did not dare ignore him again. "Yes, Master. It turns me on to be humiliated."

It occurred to her that her response to his sudden change in tone—the way she had almost snapped to attention lying down, telling him exactly what he wanted, had been almost subconscious.

Was she already responding to his efforts to train her?

And if so, what kind of creature was she going to become?

"Of course it does," he declared. "You're a natural slave. Now let's get you situated, shall we?" This time Trajan lifted her bottom himself. He lubricated his fingers first, pushing the cool, greasy cream deep up her anal canal. "You should relax," he counseled. "It will go in easier."

"Yes, Master." She tried her hardest, though she was anything but relaxed.

Trajan had difficulty inserting the thing. He opted for the softer approach. Lowering his head between her legs, he grazed her clitoris with the tip of his tongue. "It's useless to fight me, Desela," he crooned between tantalizing, precise licks of the tiny, swollen bit of flesh. "You're a sex slave. Sex slaves surrender to everything...eventually."

"Oh, Master," she cried out.

What he was doing to her! The sensation was wonderfully familiar, but different, too. She felt a fullness, as when his cock was inside her, but different nerve endings were being pressed. It was like having his cock obscenely pressing not only between her legs, but on a million other points of her body at the same time.

Cocks, his cock, everywhere at once.

An orgasm was welling up, something indescribable, like a liquid sunset, an edible sun, large and orange and lickably delicious.

"Master, I'm going to come!" she cried.

"Hold that thought," said Trajan, denying her his tongue.

She clenched her fists in anguish, bucking against her bonds. Trajan made his move, sweeping his hand back under her ass and inserting the plug into her much-loosened hole.

"There," he pronounced. "Much better, don't you think?"

Desela's buttocks clenched around the invading artificial cock. Try as she might, she could not parlay this sensation into an orgasm.

"Repeat after me," said Trajan, sounding rather amused. "I am a naughty little slave girl. I am getting what I deserve. Something to plug each of my holes and teach me my place."

"I'm a naughty little slave girl," she spat, her frustration turning to anger. "I am getting what I deserve. Something to...to..."

"To plug each of my holes," he prompted.

"To plug each of my holes...and teach me my place."

"Very good. And which hole should we fill next, do you suppose?"

"My...my pussy," she said, unable to bear even a second more of that burning between her legs.

"Actually I think we'll clamp you," Trajan said, retrieving the tiny pincers.

"Yes, Master." She sought to please him with eagerness. "Thank you."

Trajan took hold of her nipple. His brow furrowed, his voice took on a soothing tone. Instantly, she grew wetter. "This will hurt in a way you've never known, take a deep breath, don't fight against it, just let it settle in."

She couldn't believe the sudden change. It encouraged her in ways she knew were dangerous. If she got her hopes up, she could get hurt all over again. Like with Korlon.

Why had she come here, anyway?

Desela sought to focus on Trajan's lips, the smooth lines and the sexy firmness. He squeezed her nipple a little harder with his fingers and then he introduced the clamp.

Biting metal. Deep and gnawing pressure.

"M-Master..."

"Submit to it, baby," he urged. "You can take it."

She responded instantly to the mix of compassion and authority. As welcome as it was unexpected.

Take it, she did. For him.

"Yes," he said. "That's it."

The need to please this man was more than she could stand. Try as she might, she could not hold her tongue. It was not her pride she feared for—that had been wonderfully surrendered the moment he proclaimed her slave.

What concerned her was disappointing him any more with her foolish prattle.

"Am I being...a good girl?" she breathed, her eyes lost in his.

Something crossed his face, an expression she had never seen on him. It began as a flash of pain, from somewhere deep, but quickly metamorphosed into a look of lustful adoration. "Yes..." he told her, his head bending to hers as if by magnetic power. "But I must still punish you from before."

"You will be strong with me." She smiled.

"I must be strong," he agreed.

His lips found hers, even as he spoke the words. Desela moaned softly in sheer joy as he kissed her. She could die at this moment, a happy woman.

But there was so much more on the horizon—the throbbing in her nipple spreading across her body, the desperate heat between her legs, the constriction of the bondage.

“It’s time for the second one,” he said between light, hot kisses.

“Yes, Master,” she sighed, so proud and thrilled to be at the center of his attention.

He kissed the unclamped nipple. “Embrace your punishment. Be Master’s good girl.”

“Oh, Master...” She could not put into words what it felt like to be given that opportunity, that vote of trust. That was all she wanted, a chance to show him she could be a good slave to him, a good obedient.

He took the nub gently, pressing it into shape. “I want to see it on your face,” he said. “The beauty of the pain.”

She was not sure exactly what he meant, but as he replaced his finger and thumb with the cold, unrelenting clamp, she tried to focus on flying. Her eyes closed, she became a butterfly, infinitely delicate, with colorful, gossamer wings.

The air around her was strong, the wind was blowing her to and fro. She opened herself, opened to the full span of her butterfly winds.

And so she was taken and drawn into a vortex.

The new clamp made her forget the old. At least for the moment. Soon enough they blended together, creating a layer of fire that covered the whole of her chest.

Desela was writhing, trying to get them off.

“Be still,” he ordered.

She could not hear his words clearly, much less obey them.

There was just nowhere to go. To lessen the pain on her nipples, she had to clench her buttocks, but that only reminded her of the plug inserted up inside her. She could relieve that pain only by arching her back at the expense of her breasts.

Trajan chose to calm her with his lips—this time his kiss was demanding, possessive and mouth-taking. She yielded up the inside of her mouth gratefully, allowing him to center her world with his plundering tongue.

He did not merely take, however, but gave of his own presence.

She felt her pulse being measured, her pleasure and pain invisibly gauged. And not just now, but all the way back to the beginnings of her life. Trajan was learning her and understanding her.

The pain was the medium somehow, with her the recipient and him the guide. She felt her lips melting into his and a release came over her, not exactly like an orgasm, but hardly an ordinary sensation, either. It centered in her nipples, which felt large as balloons, and radiated downward to include her hot, wet pussy...which she could not close or protect from anything he might wish to do to her.

"Good," he said, sitting up beside her.

She tried to touch him, stretching her fingers. Pushing out her hip against him. She would crawl out of her own skin if that's what it took to get to him.

She held her tongue, refraining from begging anything. It wouldn't matter and besides he was right, it was more fun to let him be as devilish as possible.

"I've ordered an extra large from the objectifier," he told her. "You will take it all."

He went to retrieve it. He was gone only a moment.

Desela beheld the dildo, feeling suddenly confident and ready to serve. "Thank you, Master..."

He inserted the device, pushing in just inside the opening to her sex. She gasped at the contact. This was no ordinary dildo breaching her, but one of the new, artificially intelligent ones. Immediately it began to tickle her all the way up to her clitoris, a thousand tiny, soft bristles absorbing the needed biochemical information. Whatever it took to ensure it would drive her to distraction.

The readout light flashed green, indicating it was ready.

Trajan activated it, causing the tip to vibrate. Shock waves, small but powerful, passed through her body. The dildo knew her now, the flow of her blood, the reactivity of her nerve endings. It would do to her whatever the programmer wished.

Unfortunately, that programmer was not her.

"Tease only. No climax," Trajan said as he slid the dildo in, allowing her to accommodate it.

Desela held her breath. The whirring cock became her world. The cock and the clamps. And the bonds on her limbs.

And Trajan's eyes.

"T-taking..." She tried to say, unable to form whole sentences amidst the mind-numbing throbbing.

"You're taking it," Trajan finished her thought. "You're taking the pain like a good girl."

Yes! That was it exactly. Time to try something else...

"L—"

Trajan put his fingers over her lips. "Don't say anything more."

Did he know what it was she was trying to express? It was a four-letter word, the biggest, most frightening one in the universe. It would keep. It would have to.

"There is only one thing left," he said.

A blindfold. Her Master was holding up a blindfold.

Trajan put the black over her eyes with almost infinite reverence. She might as well have been a piece of veridium crystal. Sighing, she let herself surrender into his power, into the darkness he was imposing. She must trust, she must let him direct in all things.

She was on the ocean now, on a tiny piece of driftwood, catching the currents, bobbing up and down. Darkness surrounding her, nothing but the sound of Trajan's breath.

And behind that the echoes of an impending storm. One that would never come as long as he kept the dildo on tease only.

All that stimulation to her body, distributed along every nerve ending, dissipating through toes and fingertips and a million other nerve endings.

Talk about being splayed out...

Sexual dissection.

That's what it felt like.

She tensed suddenly, as the sound of his breathing changed. She felt the displacement of weight on the bed.

He was getting up!

He was going to leave her.

The scream welled up from deep within her. It was like one of those nightmares where you are trying to cry out but you can't make your real-life voice work. You want to wake yourself up, you want to get out, but each time you try you find you are still caught up in it.

"Desela..." Trajan put his hands on her shoulders, "what's wrong?"

"Don't..." she managed to blurt, drawing strength from his touch. "Don't leave me."

"I won't," he told her. "I won't leave you."

"Hold me," she said hoarsely. "Master."

Trajan moved onto the bed, and lay down alongside her. He pulled out the vibrator and anal plug. "It's okay, Desela, honey, I'm here."

"I'm cold," she said.

"It's my fault. This was too much," she heard him say.

"No, Master, don't blame yourself."

"Listen to me, Desela. I'm going to take the clamps off. There will be a brief moment of pain, worse than you have now, as the blood flows back in. I want you to concentrate on the sound of my voice..."

"I will, Master."

"You did well, Desela. You did very well. I'm proud of you."

She stifled a scream as he took off the first clamp.

"One is off already," he encouraged. "Just one more to go."

He took off the second one. She cried out from the release. "Oh, Master, thank you."

Trajan pulled off the blindfold. She had never been so happy to see another human face. "I love you," she said boldly.

Trajan's lips were pale and thin. He moved to unfasten her wrist cuffs and then her ankle cuffs. "You should get some rest," he said, rising to his feet.

"I don't want to rest. I want you to make love to me."

"Slaves don't tell Masters what to do."

"This one does."

He tried to remain stern, to little avail. "You're begging for a spanking."

"Ooh, can I have one for real?"

"This is not how I intended for things to work out." He put his hands on his hips.

She held up her arms. "But you can't resist me."

"Sure, I can."

"Your lips say no, but your cock says something else."

He frowned, looking down at his erection. "I'm not sure what to say to that."

"Don't say anything. Just fuck me with it."

Trajan considered for just a moment before pouncing.

Desela replied with half a laugh and half a squeal.

Now the fun would really start.

Chapter Six

Korlon could barely concentrate on the holoscreen.

What a dreadful program.

Juggling from Mars? Granted, the jugglers were all Rigelians with six arms apiece, but still, how long could you watch spinning plates and knives—especially with one's naked mate quivering against the wall, her body pressed hard, her breath coming in short pants.

Every two seconds he stole a glance at Jaxey. Her fine ass jiggled ever so slightly with every breath. She couldn't stay still. She was horny—he could tell by the way she twitched. He could smell it, too, with his primale olfactory senses.

The delicious heat of his woman.

He would never tire of that scent. He would never tire of her.

How he loved to torment her and play with her head. It was all in good fun and it always led to the most incredible sex-making between them.

Having Jaxey submit to him was so much better than with any obedient. Each time he got to break her all over again, forcing her body to succumb in spite of her mind.

And punishment was the spice, along with the keen humiliation scenes they both craved. Of course he made sure never to use his sexual supremacy as a way of tampering with the rest of the relationship. In lots of ways, she was in charge, which was as it should be.

When it came to the situation with Desela, he was counting on Jaxey to trust his judgment. He couldn't really explain to her why he trusted Trajan. It was a male thing, a primale thing. He had looked in Trajan's eyes, they had sized each other up and found their motives to be in harmony.

Each of them wanted the best for Desela. Each of them would do whatever it took to bring her happiness.

Korlon could see why Desela felt for Trajan as she did. He had a strong, vibrant personality. He was a man among men. Not afraid to stand apart from the crowd.

He had suffered pain—that was clear, too.

He reminded Korlon of some of the veterans he knew, the ones who had suffered most greatly and seen the most terrors in the Narthian wars. Trajan's wounds were scarred over by now and he used those scars to make him stronger.

Desela evidently saw even more deeply inside him. Perhaps she was the one meant to heal him. Every primale, it was said, had a perfect lover, an obedient who would flourish at his feet and who would be his nourishment, the source of his life's energy.

Desela was safe with Trajan. Korlon would bet his life on it.

Certainly, the situation would have to be monitored, and he did have an alarm rigged, connected to the transponder she wore. Should she end up away from the jail complex, he would find out about it.

And he would act.

Otherwise, he was free to enjoy himself.

With Jaxey.

And the lightwhip.

His cock had swollen painfully while watching her react to the very mention of the whip. Her small body had shivered involuntarily.

Oh, the things he had done to her with that whip.

Oh, the things he was going to do to her with it.

As soon as this ridiculous show was over.

He would start on her now, but there was a principle at stake. Besides, absence made the heart grow fonder, or something like that.

Korlon couldn't wait to touch himself, though.

Lifting discreetly off the seat, he pulled down his overalls. His cock sprang out, swollen to maximum dimensions.

He began to stroke it slowly. Pressing in all the right places. The veins were throbbing.

Damn, he needed Jaxey badly.

Screw the juggling.

He rose to his feet and ripped off the overalls. "Know what that was, slave girl?"

"I don't know, Master."

She was still against the wall, where she belonged. Korlon smiled. "That was your Master, getting naked. Know what happens now, slave girl?"

"No, Master."

"You get fucked."

"Yes, Master."

"Are you ready for me?"

"Yes, Master."

"I hope so, because I'm taking you as you are."

"I am ready, Master."

"Spread your legs," he ordered, "and brace yourself."

She did so, widening her stance and putting her palms flat on the wall.

He approached her. With the palm of his hand he delivered a whack to her ass. "Why the fuck aren't you begging?"

"Please, Master," she said rapidly. "I beg you to use me. Please, fuck me with your hard cock."

He watched her ass turn red. A nice handprint.

"I'm going to have fun with you, slave. Me and the lightwhip."

"Yes, Master."

He smacked her again. Now there were two handprints.

"I'm going to fuck you," he announced.

"Thank you, Master."

"The gods help you if you aren't a good enough lay."

As if she wasn't the best and most exciting sex partner each and every time.

"I will try, Master," she answered meekly.

It was all part of their game, part of the erotic tension and buildup.

Korlon slapped her ass again, this time leaving his hand. "I own this," he said. "I own you."

"I'm yours," she gasped as he pressed his cock between her ass cheeks. "Oh gods, I'm yours, Master."

Korlon nibbled at her earlobe. "I'm going to fuck you so hard."

"Yes..." she groaned. "Please, yes."

Korlon grabbed her by the hips. Backing up, he turned her about. He pushed her against the wall again, this time ass first.

Lifting her up, he impaled her. In one smooth motion, all the way.

She cried out as he sank his cock to the hilt.

"My pussy. My body, my breasts," he declared.

"Yes." She grabbed at him, wrapping her arms and legs around him. "Fuck your pussy. Fuck your little slave girl."

Korlon reared back and rammed himself home. He was going to have her hard and strong—a primale fuck, between two genetically superior human beings.

One possessing. One possessed.

He bit her breast, hands clamping at her ass cheeks. She bore down on his cock with her vaginal muscles, encouraging him to thrust even faster. Korlon accepted the challenge. She swore at him, chomping down on his shoulder. They slammed into each other, bellies slapping like animals.

"So...fucking...good," he growled.

"So deep," she answered. "You're going so deep."

"Damn straight I am."

Deep and true.

"I'm there," he told her. "I'm fucking *there*."

"Me, too," said Jaxey. "Me, too."

They exploded together, their bodies enmeshed, her luscious curves against his hard muscles, her swollen breasts flattened by his pecs, their pelvises fused.

His semen erupted into her, finding its natural home between Jaxey's legs, inside her warm and wet canal, so deep and inviting. She screamed out her own release, feminine fluids mixing with his.

"Fuck..." he exclaimed, feeling the climax to the tips of his toes. He pushed the semen out of him, giving her as much as he could manage. He would save some, of course, for later on, after the lightwhipping.

As her own spasms slowed, Jaxey put her head on his shoulder. "Fuck...yeah," she echoed.

He caressed her ass, his mind already turning to the next phase of their play. He hoped she was enjoying her momentary respite.

Because it wouldn't last.

"It's time," he said.

"No," she whined. "Not that."

He lowered her to the floor. She landed softly on her ass. "Go," he pointed. "Fetch it."

She looked at him, pouting.

"Now, Jaxey."

She tried to stand.

His hands went to her shoulders. "You'll crawl, girl, like the slave you are."

Jaxey went to her hands and knees.

Korlon's cock rejuvenated at once at the sight of her crawling prettily. The fact that she was madder than a hornet only added to his excitement.

This was definitely going to be a three-orgasm session, he decided, maybe even four. If he timed it right.

Korlon was making her get the whip herself. On her hands and knees, naked. No obedient in the universe could possibly suffer worse than she, or be more thoroughly dominated.

It made her furious. It made her indignant. It made her wet.

So fucking horny.

Her man was making her crawl. Just because he wanted to. Because it turned him on. Because he liked to see her like this. It made him horny, too. He fucked her that much harder.

Like a beast. A lion. A tiger.

Jaxey found their toy box in the corner of the sleep room. It was only a foot high, designed so she could remove the various items with her teeth. There was a button on the side to open the box, which she could push. With her nose.

As the panel slid aside, she felt the instant familiar knots in her stomach. Hot knots of nervous anticipation. The box was full of Korlon's special devices, the ones he treasured and didn't trust any objectifier to make. There were whips, some of them quite ancient, and a series of leather collars that had been worn by slaves for generations.

There were also intricate carved chains. And, in a pocket on the side, the innocent-looking little rod, barely six inches long and one inch thick. Gray calamite metal, polished smooth, with a wrapped hand grip of Pazantian red leather.

At one end was a strap, which could be wrapped around the hand for even better control. In her case, it would serve as the means of conveying the device to her master.

Delicately, she pressed her teeth down, clamping the strap. She pulled at it, lifting the rod free of the pocket.

Her pussy felt a little unwitting jolt as the rod came free.

It dangled in the air, the business end hanging down.

That part was flat, cut with grooves and a series of very tiny openings. When activated by the buttons on the handle, the energy of the whip would come through them.

The effect was spectacular and overwhelming.

Jaxey padded back, the whip in her mouth.

Her limbs trembled, she could barely move. Nothing—nothing at all—made her feel more like a slave than this.

Korlon was waiting for her. She lifted her head so he could take possession of the weapon.

He gave her head a stroke, as one would a beloved pet.

A moan escaped her lips. Unbidden, she lowered her lips to his feet, kissing them.

She was Korlon's mate...his slave about to be whipped. He loved her, as a primale—with all the power that entailed.

"Stand," he ordered.

Jaxey rose to her feet, weak and unsteady.

Korlon was inches away. Her breath released, her lips nearly touching his chest.

"You will not hold back," he said.

"No, Master." As if she could.

His hand moved between her legs, taking control of the pussy he owned. She could feel his cock brushing her thigh. It was hot and hard.

"You will perform for the whip."

"Yes, Master."

"You will be exquisite."

"Yes, Master."

"You have no choice."

"None, Master."

Between his will and the whip, what chance would any woman stand? She moaned as he insolently flicked his finger over her clitoris. "Kiss my nipple, slave."

She pressed her lips helplessly, desperate to please. Nibbling, sucking.

"Hands behind your head," he ordered.

The posture accentuated her breasts. Not to mention what it did to her belly.

Korlon held her at the brink of orgasm. "Would you like to come?"

"Only if Master wills," she sighed.

"You may ask permission."

"May your slave come, Master?"

"No. My slave may beg for the whip."

"Whip me," she moaned.

"Where would you like to be whipped?" His fingers moved deeper, forcing her to spread her legs wider.

"E-everywhere," she replied, lost in what he was doing to her. "My...my whole body."

He angled his hand, forcing her on tiptoes. "Be specific, girl."

"I beg you to whip my ass," she said, knowing how much Korlon loved this kind of buildup. "I beg you to whip my breasts. And my thighs...and...and..."

"And what?"

"And my pussy." She whispered the words.

"You like the lightwhip on your pussy?"

"Yes...Master." Her insides were dissolving at just the thought of it. The whip didn't merely go over her pussy...it went in it.

"You're going to come for the whip, aren't you, slave girl?"

"Yes, Master." She breathed rapidly, shallowly, indicating the height of her passion. She could come now if he would let her.

"The whip is going to own you."

"I will...submit..."

He grasped her hair, bowing her neck. "Kiss me," he ordered.

This time he meant his lips.

Trembling, she obeyed, daring to touch her mouth to his. It was like walking on the edge of a volcano, like tickling the sleeping tiger.

To arouse him now, in any way, would only add to her suffering. But arouse him she must.

Korlon sucked in her tongue immediately. He was a firestorm, consuming her. "Stand back," he ordered, releasing her.

She walked backward a few steps, keeping her hands behind her head.

Slaves did not break position without orders.

Korlon's face was a study of primale intensity. His cock was rock-hard. "Keep going," he told her until she was several feet away.

His body was poised, beautiful and tense, like a jungle cat. By the gods, she loved him so much at times like this. It made her ache inside. It made her want to weep and touch and...and everything.

Korlon turned the whip on without looking at the controls. His fingers moved expertly over the switches.

As much as she loved looking at him, she could not help but move her gaze to the whip, with its gleaming energy strand, long and yellow and glowing.

Flicking his wrist, he cracked the lightwhip in the air.

He had it on a low setting, yellow being the least intense color. The beam was thin too, though this did not necessarily bode well for her as recipient of its charms.

He cracked at the air a second time, making her shiver.

"Frightened?" he asked.

"I submit myself, Master," she said hastily. "I beg your attentive discipline to my naked body."

He smiled slantedly. "You didn't answer the question."

"I am ready," she whispered. "To take what comes."

He nodded. "Spoken like a mature slave."

The next flick of the wrist brought direct contact. The tip of the glowing cord just nipping at her thigh. A jolt passed through her, a rapid-fire sting.

"Does that turn you on?"

"It makes me wet," she said honestly. "And...weak."

Korlon whipped her again, a tiny blow, to the other thigh. She held herself rigid, absorbing the impact.

"It's been a while," he noted her lack of welts, "since we've played."

"Yes, Master."

He swatted her belly, leaving a clean, red mark. Jaxey gasped, gripping her fingers tightly. She had to fight every instinct in order to hold her position.

This, too, was training. Slaves were taught in many ways to subjugate themselves, to override their natural impulses for the pleasure of Masters.

"You look good marked. You look like property."

"I want your marks, Master. I want you to love me and own me, always."

He whipped her belly again. She gritted her teeth. "I love you more than my own life, Jaxey."

A tear fell from her eye.

Korlon made a minor adjustment. The cord lengthened, curling in the air above his head, a floating, gravity-defying dance. She watched it, mesmerized, half aroused, half terrified.

He lifted his arm over his head, whirling the handle. The beam turned orange. He flicked his wrist again and this time the whip sailed over her head, curling behind her.

She yelped as the tip flicked her ass.

Korlon laughed. "That's a new dance."

She didn't react well. He had managed to tap into a tiny hitherto hidden pocket of resistance—a deep, deep one.

He was always doing that to her.

"I'm not dancing," she snapped, harsh as the whip.

He grinned. "Is my girl being sassy?"

She turned red, hating him, hating herself, hating the fact that she liked this and needed it. "I'm a woman," she went for broke, "and I have rights. Just because I let you play..."

The cord turned red. Korlon whirled his wrist, causing the whip to encircle her waist. Despite the hot color, she felt nothing. At least not yet.

"I'm sorry," she blurted. "I didn't mean it."

"Of course you did. That's the beauty of our relationship. Your body and mind are at odds and I get to take advantage. In the most loving way."

The whip was a snake, looping around her stomach, encircling her breasts. A coil was directly over her nipples. One went around her neck.

Not many people could do all the things with a lightwhip that Korlon could. He could make it twenty feet long, fifty feet if he wanted. And he could finesse it, too.

The tip of the whip passed back down her stomach. Before she could draw another breath, her arms were tied to her side. Her whole upper body was crisscrossed in glowing red.

He thickened the width of the energy rope and went to work on her legs—tying her feet together and crisscrossing the cord up her legs. He was continuously lengthening it, feeding it out from the generator in the handle. She was beginning to feel like a mummy at the rate he was going. Her heart pounded as he let the tip come to rest just shy of her pussy.

Here goes, she thought.

Why would she never learn? She brought this stuff on herself.

Of course she loved every minute of it.

"Try and free yourself," he said.

Jaxey stiffened. She knew what would happen. Her own kinetic energy would interact with the cord of the lightwhip. She would end up giving herself an erotic shock over the whole of her body. "Master, no..."

"Did you say no?" Korlon managed to work the tip of the cord across her pussy.

Incredible. Talk about an artist.

She moaned as he gave her the tiniest zap directly to the most sensitive place on her body. "Master..."

He was invading her, intimately, wickedly.

"All right," she cried. "I'll do it."

He eased off, giving her a chance to obey. Jaxey grimaced, straining against the cord, just as he had told her to.

At once the lightwhip fought back, the coils biting at her skin.

She cried out, to no avail.

"Harder, fight harder."

Jaxey shivered as the coils rubbed her nipples and wound between her breasts. They were claiming her by Korlon's hand.

"I surrender," she cried out as the whip cinched between her legs, running down the crack of her ass. "I submit."

But Korlon wouldn't let her submit. He wanted her writhing and wriggling, struggling in utter futility.

At last he let her fall to her knees. "You may beg penetration."

She tried to catch her breath. "Master...I beg...to take the whip...inside me. I beg to be...used."

She was hot with need, dripping with sweat and sex fluids. The whip was pulsing everywhere on her body, making her feel dirty and gloriously high all at once.

He smiled, clicking one of the buttons. Instantly, the coils disappeared, as if they had never been. He raised the handle in the air, making a fresh adjustment.

"I won't go easy on you," he warned.

Jaxey swallowed hard. It was time for the fuck beam. "Yes, Master," she said meekly as the thick rope of energy appeared at the end of the handle.

The fuck beam was made of three intertwined colors—green, blue and red. It was approximately three feet long and blunt at the end.

"Position," he ordered.

Jaxey went down on all fours, facing away from Korlon and the lightwhip. Spreading her legs, she lowered her cheek to the floor, bracing herself with her forearms. She did not need to be told to thrust her ass in the air.

The motions were rote. As was the response of her throbbing, aching pussy. It was the same as always. She was turned on and eager to be fucked by a lightwhip.

Hot shame washed over her, delicious and sweet.

Only a slave could react like this, a woman whose body had been reduced by a Master to the level of a sex-starved animal.

Korlon began by slapping her ass with the beam. A wide, lazy hit that nonetheless packed a punch.

Jaxey gritted her teeth.

He spanked her again, leaving a trail of invisible, burning sparks across her ass.

Jaxey moaned.

"You'll take it in the ass," he decided.

"Yes, Master, thank you, Master." She sought to appease him. "I gratefully surrender my ass..."

Korlon touched the end of the beam to her anal opening. The energy beam went to work, twisting and winding its way in.

"Th-thank you," she grimaced. "Master, thank you for conquering my ass."

"Squirm," he ordered. "Squirm for the whip."

Jaxey moved her behind, obscenely wriggling, pushing herself into the beam. Her moans continued, unabated, punctuated with more attempts to ingratiate herself. "Thank you, thank you for using me. My ass...isn't worthy."

"You're holding back," he said. "You're not surrendering enough. I think you need a more serious whipping. Your back, or the soles of your feet."

"No, Master. I'll do better," she cried. "I can take it deeper."

She would do anything to avoid the kind of real pain he was talking about.

"I'm waiting."

The energy cord thickened. It was hotter, too. Whimpering, Jaxey thrust back against it, impaling herself. He had it set to high pulse, low heat, which only added to the feeling of overwhelming fullness and invasion.

Still, she must give him more, yield more if she hoped to avoid the full wrath of the cunning lightwhip.

It was her training that allowed her to keep going, relaxing her muscles, giving him the access he desired. Breasts and belly squashed against the carpeted floor, her hair in a corona about her, the taste of the rug in her mouth, she endured, opening her body to the pervasive, pulsating reality.

Korlon manipulated the whip now, sliding the beam in and out. It felt as solid as any cock and yet there was a strange almost liquid sensation, too. All she could think about was how this thing was going to be in her pussy any minute, driving her out of her mind.

Sensing her body's reactions, Korlon voiced her thoughts. "Are you ready to have your pussy fucked?"

"Yes, Master. I beg you...take me...with the whip."

Korlon removed the beam from her behind. Lightly he let it slide across her back and her stinging buttocks. When he touched the soles of her feet, she cried out.

Clenching her fists and toes, she whispered for mercy.

Korlon showed none. "You will come on command." He applied the tip to her labia, just barely parting them. "Is that understood, slave girl?"

"Yes, Master. My orgasms are yours, they happen for you."

Korlon increased the charge. Instantly her sex was filled, wall to wall, by the pulsing, twisted beam—three beams in one. She gasped, holding her breath. Her nipples felt like they were going to explode. Her belly was tight, the anticipation a silent scream everywhere in her body.

Time stood still. She was reduced to the waiting—for his motions, his commands.

He owned her, the whip owned her.

Korlon held her in stasis, the energy pulsing, titillating, taunting her with her own lack of power. Seconds dragged into centuries until at last he spoke the word.

"Climax," he ordered.

Jaxey's body went into a single convulsion, the entire length of her spine energized, just like the whip. It was a compressed orgasm, the feelings and sensations squashed into a few agonizing seconds.

This was Korlon's doing. The power of the whip, controlling regulating.

He pulled the lightwhip out.

She was left empty, cold...alone.

Her breath was quick and halting. She couldn't feel anything.

"M-Master," she whimpered in the tiniest voice.

He stood behind her, the whip still humming in his hand. He did not speak to her, he did not touch her.

Not until he was good and ready.

"Climax," he ordered, reinserting the whip.

Jaxey wept openly...the orgasm was both a blessing and a curse. So much pleasure, an overload of it—pleasure edged with pain, or was it pain edged with pleasure.

Dark waves of black, liquid ice, or was it cooling lava...

Nothing made sense. Up was down, down was up. She was naked, her Master's toy, being played with—that was all she knew. That was all that mattered.

The whip was gone again. Again she was frozen alone, whining for it to be back, whining to be impaled, to be stung and had and screwed—literally.

The next time he pushed the beam inside her he did not tell her to come, which meant that she could not come.

This time she screamed in anguish, a new kind of pain borne in frustration. "Let me, let me, goddamn you!"

Korlon withdrew the beam, altering the setting.

"I didn't mean it, I am sorry, Master, I am sorry..."

Her wailing did nothing to change her subsequent punishments. Twenty lashes, with a tight, cool orange beam. She knew the color by its feel, by the experience of watching it on herself in times past. The orange beam left welts. The orange beam was the closest of all the colors to the composition and feel of leather.

The orange beam made her feel like a bad girl, a naughty pet. The orange beam made her do things like crawl on her belly and lick her Master's feet and beg to suck his cock.

The orange beam was humiliating and exciting. It charged her. And hurt her and filled her brain with electric zaps of need.

She lost track of the count. It was too high. More than one was too high. Numbers didn't matter. Time didn't matter, just the continued pouring of liquid fire over her ass, which was still sticking up in the air, the biggest frigging target in the known universe, it seemed.

How much more and what was next? When would he just get on with the fucking—old-fashioned sex-making—cock and pussy?

The beam was gone. Korlon had shut off the lightwhip. "To the bed," he said. "Crawl."

Yes...thank the gods...finally.

Despite her position on all fours, she felt like she was floating. The sexual desire mixed with the aftereffects of the punishment left her brain more than a little dazzled.

Jaxey reached the foot of the bed and lifted herself. She crawled on top of the sheets like a cat, graceful, hungry, curious...

Every time with Korlon was different. Each occasion was like brand new. What would it be like this time?

Korlon climbed onto the bed with her. She nearly jumped from her skin as he touched her hip. It wasn't pain, just pure erotic charge.

"Hold still," he chided.

He had healing cream. Apparently he didn't want her scarring up this time. The cream was warm and instantly took away the pain. In a second her skin was dry and whole and normal again.

Incredible technology delivered by an incredible lifemate.

"On your back," he said his voice rich and gentle. "It won't hurt at all now."

He was right. She felt nothing but the anticipation between her legs. "Master." She held out her arms, eyes glazed. Her pelvis was lifted. She was strong and eager, restored completely.

Korlon's smile lit her world, making all of it so very worthwhile. As he descended, taking his inevitable, rightful place between her legs, she could only think how lucky she was, the luckiest woman in the universe, in her own biased opinion.

"Master," she whispered as he took her, sheathing himself in one thrust, a perfect fit, the friction delicious and heavenly.

"My angel," he replied.

"Yours," she sighed, wrapping her arms around his neck, her legs around his ass. "Forever."

"Forever," he agreed. And then he began to move very slowly, pushing himself in and out just enough so they could stay tight and close, mouth to mouth, chest to chest, breathing each other's air, nipples squashed, their sexual organs in symbiotic harmony, blood pounding, hearts beating, building, exquisitely, excruciatingly toward the final blowout.

Climax in slow motion, melted and liquefied to the energy of a star, lighting the night sky on a million worlds. A star of shooting semen, shooting light and shooting love.

"Korlon," she cried his name.

"Jaxey," he replied, acknowledging that here, in the sacred universal cathedral of their love, they were one, equal and united.

As the passion finally ebbed and they fell back down together into reality, landing on a perfect blanket of post-coital bliss, Jaxey had only one thing on her mind, one concern.

And that was Desela.

Their friend simply had to have what they did. Any other option was not acceptable.

Saying a prayer to the queen of love on high, Jaxey sent her well wishes.

May Desela find her Master. May she be in his arms right now, on Unicorn Three.

Chapter Seven

Trajan had miscalculated. Badly. He had taken Desela as his lover in order to cure her of her desire to be a slave. His intention had been to give her too much of a good thing.

It was a good theory.

Unfortunately the hands-on reality had involved direct sexual contact. With all the potential that brings for emotional complication.

Complication was a good word for what he had going now.

A sleeping woman in his arms, clutching happily at him, smiling as she snoozed, her lovely lids fluttering in time to her dreams.

Dreams of slavery. Dreams of happily ever after with him.

How long had they been sleeping?

He looked at the wall monitor. Blast it—they had slept through the night, falling asleep together after that final round of sex-making.

He tried to review the events in his mind, to see where it had all gone wrong.

Things had seemed under control. He'd had her chained down, unable to move a muscle. How could he have lost the upper hand?

One little cry, that was all it had taken. A single sound of genuine distress.

Immediately he'd known he had overshot the rim. Too much bondage and domination, leaving her too shaken up. He had been forced to backpedal, taking off the cuffs and the clamps.

Don't leave me, she had said.

He hadn't even left the bed.

He wouldn't have been gone long. A few minutes, no more.

A mistake, of course.

You never left a woman alone in bondage. Ever.

A mistake made...for what reason?

Certainly not lack of experience. Or lack of compassion, either.

Maybe it was desperation. A confused attempt to get away or to push her away—too hard.

And now they were in each other's arms again, tighter than ever.

She wanted to be a good girl. She wanted to be *his* good girl.

How the hell could a man resist that?

From a woman this beautiful and smart and kind and everything else.

He was lucky. Any man would be lucky beyond his wildest dreams to have a woman like Desela pursue him. Across the galaxy, for stars' sake.

Bringing half the Guardians for backup. He was going to have to put an end to this. It would be harder now. He would have to rip himself away. Two days until the magistrate came. He would have to resist her charms that long and then send her back with her friends.

That was easier said than done, though, especially with her stuck here in his quarters. Could he sleep in his office for two days?

Hell, at this point he wasn't even sure he could leave this bed.

From the moment he had unchained her after hearing that cry of hers, something had snapped. A straw, breaking the back of some ancient camel. At that exact moment, it had all changed. The sex, all of it. They had entered into a flurry of entwined arms and legs and wordless, hot sex-sharing—two beings pulled together in the void of the cosmos. Acting out all their tensions—their hot breath and the thrusting of their bodies spelling it out.

There was really something here, something between them. An affinity.

Trajan swallowed hard. The lump remained.

He stretched his arm, reaching for the com link on the nightstand.

Desela reacted immediately. Without opening her eyes, she released small whimpering sounds, clutching. Frown lines crossed her face. The pretty lips went into a pout.

It didn't stop until he grabbed the link and settled back down.

"Mmm," his prisoner sighed happily, clinging.

He ought to have been aggravated by this, but he wasn't. It touched him in a way too deep to describe.

For a primale to have a woman need him that much—the right woman—was the most important thing in life.

Except not every man had the *right woman*.

His was supposed to have been Lysia. And that had ended in the near destruction of his soul.

Who was Desela's right man? Was it supposed to have been Korlon? She loved him enough to say his name in her sleep. That must mean something.

He activated the link to Rather, hoping the call wouldn't awaken the obviously exhausted Desela.

"What ya got, boss?" Rather chimed.

"I got trouble," he quipped. "Same as always."

Though it wasn't really the same this time, not by a long shot.

"You and me both," said his right-hand man, the closest thing to a friend he had in the world.

"I'm gonna need you to get a jail cell ready. For a special prisoner."

There was a momentary silence on the other end of the line. "Looking to get your bail money back, are you?"

"Something like that."

Desela was stirring, but not showing any signs of waking. With his free hand he stroked her hair. The gesture was instinctive and a little bit frightening for its implied intimacy.

"Boss," said Rather. "Mind if I ask you something?"

"Yes," said Trajan. "I do."

"I'll take that as a no," he said. "Tell me, where do you see yourself, ten years from now?"

"Still busting your chops," said Trajan. "And don't you get any ideas about my quitting, because there's no way I will ever leave and give you the satisfaction."

"Better not. I'd be liable to fix this mess of a colony up and make you look bad."

"Just clean up that jail cell," he said emphatically. "Make it fit for a woman."

"A woman you don't care about, right?" he said sardonically.

"I would do the same for any female prisoner."

"Sure, you would."

What a smartass Rather was. Trajan had made it clear to him, plenty of times since Desela left the first time, that he had no interest in her. Why wouldn't the man believe him?

Speaking of Desela, she was stirring. This time she was definitely awake, delivering little kisses over his chest. He tried to brush her away, unsuccessfully.

"You know sometimes you come pretty close to insubordination," said Trajan to Rather.

"Sorry that's too big a word for my pay grade."

"How about pain in the ass? Does that compute?"

Desela had abandoned his chest, opting to move lower. He didn't really have the energy to stop her, naughty as she was. Anyway, it was pretty obvious what she had in mind.

"Computes just fine. Matter of fact, boss, that's what you've been ever since that woman left here. We were all hoping you'd get back to normal now that she was back."

"What are you talking about?"

Desela looked at him mischievously, her tongue poised an inch from his shaft.

"No," he told her sternly.

Desela ignored him, delivering a long lick up the underside, right along the swollen purple vein.

His breath caught in his throat. He could swear she had been practicing in her sleep.

"No, what?" said Rather.

"Not you."

"Who then?"

"Forget it, Rather. Blast it, why are we having this conversation, anyway?"

Desela scrambled between his legs. Her gaze glued to his, watching for a reaction. He gave her a warning glare—for all the good it did him.

She proceeded to work him over with kisses and licks, until finally she put his cock head directly in her mouth. He fumbled for her head. Her hair was silky and soft, he could play with it for hours.

"I won't speak for you, boss. Me? I'm on the clock and this beats the hell out of arresting drunks and breaking up bar fights."

"Whatever I'm paying you, Rather, it's got to be too much."

"Who says you're paying me at all?"

Desela lowered her mouth over his cock, teasing. Down she went, then up again. Now she was blowing on him, drying off the layer of glistening saliva.

"Okay, the robot bank, then." Trajan took a ragged breath. Desela was driving him crazy. He was going to need to do something about this.

"Might as well be human as cheap as they are."

"Uh...yeah..." Trajan couldn't get a full sentence out this time. Desela had moved to his balls, delivering more of her little kisses. Shifting once again, she sat up and straddled one of his thighs.

Stars, now what was she up to?

His cock throbbed, trying to reach her. She was just out of range, her belly almost but not quite grazing the side of it. Her eyes were lit with passion and mischief. Sucking on her lower lip, looking like the naughty slave she was being she touched her breasts. Cupping them, massaging, offering...

Slowly, she began to grind herself on his thigh. Her liquids dripping down. Very faintly, she began to moan.

"What was that?" Rather said, amused. "I didn't quite catch that."

Trajan cleared his throat. "Listen, Rath...I gotta run."

"You gotta come?"

"Run. I gotta run."

"Oh, yeah, right."

"Go to hell, Rath."

"Been there, done that."

"You and me both." Trajan cut the link and tossed the com device. "You mind explaining what you're doing?" he asked Desela.

"I'm just making my Master happy," she said innocently.

"Hmm..." he feigned displeasure. "We'll see about that."

"I'm being bad, aren't I?" She grinned.

"Very."

"Will you punish me?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you will, Master."

"You're going to finish what you started first."

"Yes, Master." She moved eagerly to mount him.

"No. Not that way."

She sat back on his thigh. "Master?"

"Take my cock in your hands. Lean over."

She did so, lining up her face with the tip of his turgid cock.

"You'll take it like that, slave girl. Let me hear you beg for it."

"Oh, Master," she sighed, enraptured. "Please come...on my face."

He put his hands behind his head, enjoying his absolute power over this gorgeous female. His Desela...if he wanted her. "Beg for it on your breasts, too," he commanded.

"Yes, my Master, come on them, cover my breasts, my face...come in my hair," she moaned, rubbing her hands up and down his cock, squeezing with her palms, tickling with her fingertips. "Cover me with semen."

"After I come on you, I will spank you," he said incidentally. "For distracting me while I was on the phone."

"Your slave thanks you," she said huskily. "For her discipline."

Trajan marveled at the incredibly beautiful woman before him. How bright and alert she was after her sleep. She was positively glowing in his presence. A stab of guilt hit him. Did she think something had changed? Did she mistake his unexpected passion for a weakening of resolve?

No time to fret about nuances now.

His cock was at threshold. No more holding back. "I'm going to come." He ground his teeth. "All over your beautiful face, your gorgeous breasts. Desela, oh god, you are so beautiful."

"Oh, Master, thank you," she exclaimed. "From the bottom of my heart. How I treasure you and the gift of your semen."

Trajan grabbed his cock away from her. A deep growl passed from his lips. The veins on his neck were standing out. "Going to come..." he hissed.

"Yes, yes, Master," she encouraged.

The first blast hit her on the cheek. He released it with indescribable satisfaction. A second followed, rapid-fire, impacting on her forehead and then a third on her chest. A fourth landed on her chin and then a fifth on her right nipple.

She was being bathed in the stuff. White, sticky gobs adhering to her smooth, creamy skin. She had the biggest smile on her face. She was laughing and she had her tongue out, catching his semen. He kept going, giving as much as he could – an offering to her seemingly insatiable desire to be the object of his lust.

His exploitation.

Something welled up from deep within him. Something that made no sense and which, furthermore, was dangerous.

A long time ago, in another world, he would have called it love, allowed it to worm its way to the surface, taking him over, dissolving his defenses so it could turn around later and eat away his life force.

He was smarter now.

He chalked it up to lust, to overexcitement, to indigestion, to anything at all other than the “L” word.

Anyway, even if he did believe in love, how could you fall for someone you hardly knew? The whole idea was absurd.

Trajan was finished ejaculating. He was holding his cock in his hand, brooding. Beautiful Desela crawled up to him, covered in semen, proudly soaked in the stuff. “Do I get my spanking now, Master?”

“No,” he complained. “Not if you want it that badly. Where’s the punishment in that?”

“Oh.” Her lips pouted charmingly. “In that case, I don’t want it at all.” She shook her head. “No way, Master.”

He laughed in spite of himself. “Come here, you little imp.”

She squealed as he pulled her up, positioning himself so he had a lap to haul her over. “Master,” she giggled.

He laid his hand on her ass, patting noisily. “This isn’t funny, not at all.”

“Not at all.” She burst into giggles.

He smacked her hard.

“Ouch,” she cried, chuckling and wincing at the same time.

He smacked her again, sending her into near hysterical laughter.

“Oh for heaven’s sake, woman,” he complained. “You are the worst slave in the world.”

“I-I’m sorry...” She turned her head. “Master...I’ll try to do better.”

With a sigh, he let her up. He wasn’t upset. How could he be? She was sincere and fun and she made him feel alive for the first time since...ever.

“Never mind, just go get yourself cleaned up in the sanitizing chamber.”

"You're not coming with me?"

"Nah. I'm going to just do a little thinking."

"Okay, Master." She pouted. "I'll miss you."

"You'll be back in five minutes!" he exclaimed.

"That's a long time, Master."

He spun her about, giving her a good smack on the ass. "Go."

She did so, giggling again.

As soon as she was gone, he put his hands behind his head and started considering.

Was it really that horrible having her around?

Maybe she wouldn't need to go in exactly two days. What if she stayed a week? That wouldn't complicate things too much. At least not any more than they already were.

Stars, listen to him. He was actually rationalizing dragging this thing out. He ought to have his head examined. She had to go after two days, and that was that.

Trajan just about had himself back in line when Desela came out of the bathroom. She was wearing a little red nightie, composed of sheer silk with spaghetti straps and a plunging neckline. She was barefoot, with a gold anklet around one slim ankle.

She wore a gold necklace with a dangling ruby. Her hair was freshly cleaned and swept back into a ponytail.

He surveyed the whole of her, top to bottom and back again. Obviously she had been making use of the clothes-making machine.

In vain, he tried to pick up his jaw off his chest.

"You hate it," said Desela. "I can tell."

"How can I hate it? Are you crazy, woman? You look beyond stunning. You look like perfection," he said, unable to find a better word.

"Hardly." She blushed. "But thank you for the sentiment."

Trajan had an idea. "How would you like to take a ride with me – the old-fashioned way – on horseback?"

Desela blinked. "Now, Master?"

He cleared his throat. It was pretty clear from her outfit what she had in mind, and it did not involve four-legged animals. "Not immediately, no."

"Oh, good," she sighed. "I was hoping for...well...you know."

"You want to make sex," he said, amazed at how easy it was to talk with Desela about things. "I do, too. I really do."

He was so comfortable with her. It was amazing. For all the passion between him and Lysia, he had never felt truly relaxed with her, that he could be himself. And he was damn sure she had never been herself.

"I want to make you happy, Master," she said.

"You have," he answered quite honestly. "Every minute I have been with you...even when you're driving me crazy, you make me happy." Trajan shook his head, astounded by his own words. "I can't even believe I'm saying this, but it's true."

She came to him on the bed. "If you let me," she said with a depth of emotion that melted his heart, "I will make you happy forever."

Trajan couldn't squash her hopes, any more than he could agree. So he chose the moment to haul her over for a kiss instead. The first locking of lips led to a passionate barbing of tongues, which led to other things—his hands on the red silk, feeling her breasts, her thighs, her skin doubly smooth with its covering layer of artificial material. Material light as a butterfly's wing and so very easy to lift away.

Desela...naked once more, golden and healthy, lying with him, kissing him, sighing for him, touching him, worshipping him.

Was this the best time he had ever had with a woman?

Hands down.

Was it confusing the hell out of him?

Absolutely.

Did he know what he was doing, wanting to ride horses with her?

Probably not.

Would he do it anyway?

Yes.

Was he about to enter her another time and come inside her another time?

That went without saying.

So did any further dialogue he might have with her, or in his head.

Clutching her tightly, he gave in to the secret, unspeakable connection that he refused to call love—at any cost.

* * * * *

Desela hadn't really tried to ride the horse on her own.

She was pretty sure she could have managed it, but the fact was she preferred riding with Trajan on his horse.

It was a pretty shameless thing to do, she had to admit, but look at the possibility it created.

Her, sitting behind him, her front snuggled against his back, her hands wrapped around his waist—at least as far as they would reach.

And if that wasn't sexy enough, there was the thrill of being astride the mammoth, saddled animal, with all that huffing, puffing power.

The horse's name was Trigger.

Apparently he was named after some horse owned by a cowboy on ancient Earth. This particular Trigger was a lovely pale brown with a wheat-colored mane and big almond eyes. It had heavy hooves which it could tap on command.

Trajan had showed her all those things back in the barn. As a Marshal, he took very seriously the history of his profession, including these ancient animals used for transportation. He raised them and cared for them in his spare time. He was very enthusiastic about it and Desela loved that because she loved him.

Things were very simple when you loved a man, at least when you were an obedient.

Was she worried about rejection at this point?

Yes and no. A part of her was so happily absorbed in the moment that she couldn't imagine any other reality. As for the part of her that knew there was still a deadline looming, she held out hope that he would change his mind.

It was a possibility, at least. Look what had happened so far in such a short span of time.

And they still had more than a day left to make more magic.

At the moment they were heading for the top of a ridge, to the east of the spaceport. It was a terraformed area, covered by a small protective dome, invisible to the eye, but impenetrable by any harmful environmental effects. Inside it was kept in a condition reminiscent of the North American desert west, with painted rocks and tumbleweeds and tall green, prickly cacti in the shapes of funny waving people and small round stools.

Trajan had packed a lunch for them and a blanket to sit on. He had a special spot in mind, one with the best view on Unicorn Three.

"Here we are." At the end of the dusty trail he dismounted and helped her down.

Her insides melted as he took her so effortlessly by the waist and hoisted her into the air. He was so strong, and yet the way he held her told her he would never, ever, hurt her.

"Thank you," she said softly, licking her lips.

He frowned, looking down for a moment at the gravel on which he had set her. "Watch your step," he said. "The rocks are sharp."

"Take my hand?" She held it out for him.

His little attempt to avoid kissing her had backfired. Now he would have to take her hand. It had gone this way since they had gotten out of bed, with him constantly trying to keep things platonic and her working steadily to make them as steamy as possible.

"If I didn't know better..." He grasped her hand, leading her across the gravel to the small grassy area designated by a wooden sign as being the "Official Picnic Zone".

"What?" she teased.

"Never mind," he grumbled.

She tried to keep a straight face as she helped him set up. After spreading the blanket they unloaded the food items from the saddlebag. A bottle of wine, some bread and cheese and a small hunk of honey cake.

It was simple and plain but downright delicious.

"It's amazing out here," she remarked, taking a breath of the filtered air, converted into a near perfect copy of that on Earth.

"I come here when I want to unwind," he said.

She touched his hand. He was leaning back, resting his body on both palms. "And do you need to unwind often?"

"Often enough." He shrugged.

He didn't remove her hand, which she took to be a good sign.

"Trajan, may I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

It felt odd not calling him Master after all they had been through, but he had insisted. The moment they were out of bed, cleaned and dressed in their leather boots and shirts and vests and rugged riding pants.

"I hope you won't consider this prying, but exactly what happened between you and...that other woman?"

"You know about that?" He didn't seem upset. Maybe the wine had mellowed him, or maybe he was learning to trust her. At last. "I won't ask how," he smiled. "Your Guardian friends probably told you all the sordid details of my life. As for Lysia, there's not much to tell. She conned me, she lied, and she pretended to be one thing and turned out to be another. It all had to do with my credits, and I stood to gain a lot from a cluster brother of mine who had just died."

Desela pursed her lips. Being genetically engineered, citizens no longer had biological families, but they could form close attachments with "brothers" and "sisters" in their clusters, the small units in which they were raised. "I'm sorry for your loss," she said.

He leaned over and touched her cheek. "Thank you, that's sweet. But that was a long time ago."

"I know it hurts you still. I can feel it."

Trajan looked away. He was silent for a while. "You know, I think what hurt the worst wasn't having her cheat me, or run off, it was the idea of having her rob my time. My ability to trust, too."

"I think I would feel that way, too."

"For years I didn't want to talk to a woman or so much as kiss one unless there was a financial transaction first. Made it all safe, you know? Nice, firm boundaries."

"That's understandable."

He snorted. "Not according to most people. They said I was a degenerate. Only interested in pleasure women. And drinking. And scrounging money in questionable trading deals."

"You did what you had to," she said firmly. "To survive. Your spirit was deeply wounded. You couldn't be the lion you are now. You had to heal."

He shook his head. "You can't just excuse everything."

"Yes, I can. I'm your slave. Your woman."

"No. You are not." He turned toward her again, his eyes considerably more agitated. "And I think we better deal with this once and for all. I know I fucked up where you're concerned. I made love to you...hell, you are too much woman to resist. But I can't be your man or whatever you're looking for."

"I am looking for my lifemate."

"Good luck with that." He rolled his eyes.

She couldn't help but feel a little bit upset watching him swallow down his wine. "Here you go again. Mr. Cynical."

"We've been down this road, love, remember?" He offered her a wink.

"I don't like you when you drink, Trajan."

"And I don't like you when you're sober. Or drunk."

"You're just trying to push me away. You don't mean those things."

"The fuck I don't. How many times do I have to toss you off this miserable rock to convince you? You're not wanted. You don't belong, you never did. You need to go back to your buddy Korlon. You and his mate can carry on with whatever little three-way it is you have going."

"So that's it," she exclaimed, graced with sudden insight. "You're jealous."

"Jealous?" He laughed callously. "There's a good one. Stars, girl, you really do live in a fantasy world, don't you?"

"You're the one who won't face up to reality," she charged. "Sitting out here on this rock, as you call it, wasting your talent when you could be doing anything you wanted to in the universe."

His features hardened. His jaw twitched slightly. A less disciplined man would have yelled or stormed off. But Trajan wasn't like that. "That's enough. This conversation is over."

Emotions swirled in her head. She was breathing hard, wanting to say so much. But all that changed with his single command. Obeying him was imprinted on her heart, deeper than any instinct.

"Yes, Master." She lowered her head.

"I told you not to call me that."

"Sorry, Ma—" she caught herself. She had almost done it again. Tears dotted her eyes.

"Why are you crying, Desela?"

"I don't know," she replied honestly. "I told myself...I was going to be okay, no matter what."

"You are okay, you're more than okay. You're together, you're strong. You don't need slavery."

"But I want it," she insisted. "I want to be your slave, because I know how you'll treat me and I know you will make my sexual dreams come true. I know you will focus me and bring out the best in me. I know you will complement me. I know we will both be so good for each other."

"You can't know that. I'm sorry, Desela, but no one can make those kinds of guarantees."

"I don't want guarantees. I want you—your heart. Just as it is, warts and all. Why can't you see that? I love you, you stubborn primale."

"I'm warning you, Desela, cut it out. And don't think I won't pull down your pants and pepper that pretty behind of yours right here and now because I will."

Desela stood right up, unfastening her belt. "Go ahead." She dropped her drawers. "What are you waiting for?" She was standing there, naked from the waist down, holding out her doubled-over belt for him to take.

"Put your clothes back on. That's an order," he snapped.

She knew she had him on the ropes. She had called his bluff and now it was time to strike her blow, pure and true. "Tell me you don't love me and I will." She backed away, out of his reach.

"Desela, pull up your pants, now!"

Her heart thundered in her chest. His eyes were fierce and he was commanding her with the full power of a sexual Master...her Master. Just a few moments ago, she'd succumbed to him, but now she must fight back. For his sake—for both their sakes.

Ironically, she must defy him now in order to be his slave later.

"I will...if you just say it. Is it that hard? 'Desela, I don't love you.' Why can't you say that?"

"Woman, you know damn well why I can't say it, now pull up your pants. I won't ask again."

"I don't know why," she said stubbornly. "You have to tell me."

She tried to keep a step out of range, but he was too fast. He grabbed her arm, holding it in a grip of steel. His voice was calm. Ironclad. "Pull up your pants."

He let go of her long enough to let her do as she was told.

As soon as her pants were up and buckled, he took her by the wrist, back to the horse.

"Where are we going?" she asked as he lifted her up into the saddle.

"I'm taking you to jail. Where I should have left you in the first place."

Leaving the picnic behind, he swung up on the horse behind her, wrapping his arms around her and grasping the reins. She held on tight as he turned the horse toward home, fast.

How different the return trip felt. A dark, bleak blur. The senseless gallop of angry hooves, a sky and sun that seemed to mock her in her present mood. There was nothing to be happy about, and there would never be anything in the future.

She had let him in too far. She had put herself in that vulnerable position. She wasn't aloof, she wasn't evaluating this — she was suffering it.

All her reasoning about how she could win him over meant nothing anymore. She had ruined any chance she had with her outburst. She had pushed too far and now it was all over.

Her tears stained her cheeks. If he heard her crying, he didn't indicate it.

They made it back to the jail in half the time.

"Rather's had a cell prepared for you," he told her, walking her into the lobby of the building.

"So you've been planning to do this?"

"I had the plan, yes," he admitted. "Then we went riding...and I thought..."

"You thought what?"

"Nothing. I thought nothing." He ushered her down the hall and into the waiting cell.

It was well appointed, with a throw rug, a table and chairs and a thick fur covering over the bed. She scarcely noticed. She was too busy guessing what it was he'd been thinking that almost made him keep her out of this cell.

"You'll be fine in here. A deputy will pick you up for your court appearance. You'll be let off with a warning not to return, and then you can go home with your friends."

"I won't see you again..."

"Don't make this harder than it already is, Desela."

She laughed without humor. "Oh, I don't think it could be any harder than this."

"Sure, it could," he insisted. "It could be lots harder."

"How exactly?"

"I could have agreed to mate with you," he said.

Fortunately he left quickly after that, too quickly to hear her sobbing.

She did so alone, behind closed steel doors, a million miles from home.

That distance paled, however, in comparison to the gap she felt right now with Trajan.

How would she get through to him now? In locking her away he had really succeeded only in locking himself away.

Suddenly her perspective changed. She got down on her knees to pray to whichever god might listen.

Let Trajan find peace, with whoever can make him happy. Don't let him be alone...a prisoner in his own jail. When I am gone from here, find a way, and set him free, too.

Saying the words was like having a boulder lifted off her shoulders. Weak as a kitten, but deeply satisfied, she lifted herself into the bed and crawled under the fur.

She was asleep in seconds, enjoying the sweetest peace she had had in a long time.

* * * * *

Trajan went immediately from Desela's cell to his office. The more he thought about it, the more he realized his plan of keeping Desela here in the jail, even for a day more, would not work.

Punching up the com link on his desk he made a link to Korlon's ship.

"Korlon here," replied the man himself.

"Marshal Trajan here. I need to speak with you."

"Certainly, Marshal. Are you clear for a holo link?"

"Yes. Frequency one-one-nine."

"One-one-nine, check. Would it be all right if my mate appears with me?"

"Suit yourself."

Personally, he could do without the distraction, but he wasn't in a position to be choosy.

Sitting behind his desk, he waited for the two to materialize in the middle of his office. To his shock, Korlon was seated, wearing a robe, the two halves parted. The female was on her knees before him, naked, a collar on her neck, attached to a chain. He was holding the chain along with a crop, which he was rubbing up and down her back.

"As you might have guessed," Korlon introduced the female. "Jaxey is my submissive mate."

"That's an understatement," said Trajan dryly.

"Jaxey," said Korlon. "Trajan is a Master. Greet him appropriately."

The lovely woman put her head to the floor, or at least the pristine image of her. "Greetings, Master Trajan."

"That isn't necessary," said Trajan.

"Yes, it is," said Korlon. "Were we in the same room for real, in fact, she would be required to crawl to your feet and kiss them. She would also suck your cock on command. Isn't that right, girl?" He pulled the chain, straightening her back.

"Yes, Master. I serve as I am told."

"Jaxey is an excellent cock-sucker, aren't you, lover?"

"If I do not perform well, I am beaten," she said.

Korlon tousled her hair. "Isn't she wonderful? No one fucks her, though. That is for me alone to enjoy."

"Yes, she's quite...interesting. I didn't have the impression she was a slave when we met, though."

"She is primale by genetics and she leads a free life. Except when it comes to our intimate life."

"Which you choose to share with me...a total stranger?" he asked skeptically.

"You're hardly a stranger. You are involved with our dearest friend."

"Not for long. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I would like you to pick her up sooner than scheduled."

"What about the trial?"

"You can bring her. I will release her under your authority. The bond is already paid."

"Is this her idea?" Korlon wanted to know.

"Obedients don't have ideas," he said curtly. "They have orders to take."

"True," said Korlon. He tugged Jaxey's leash, pulling her over his erect cock. She began sucking at once. "So I take it things aren't going well with you two."

"No."

"Oh." Korlon looked down at the bobbing head. "Slow down," he chided. "Make me come too fast and you'll feel the cane before supper."

Trajan's cock leaped in his pants. He wished Desela were doing that right now to him. "We're just not suited for each other," he told Korlon.

"I see. Trajan, if I may say so, you do know that Desela adores you?"

He felt a lump in his throat. Was the entire world going to back him into a corner about this?

"She has feelings, yes." He tried to brush it off. "But it takes more than that."

"It does? Really? Well, how do you feel? About her, I mean?"

"I feel like people need to get off my back," he snapped.

Korlon was silent.

Trajan regretted his rudeness instantly. "I apologize. I've been...under stress."

Korlon winked. "Des will do that to you. Having a woman like that love you is a fulltime job."

"So she did love you," Trajan decided to clear the air.

"With all her heart," he said without hesitation. "Until I broke our engagement."

Trajan felt instant sympathy for her. No wonder he was able to connect to her. They were kindred sufferers, survivors. "That sort of thing can destroy a person," he said.

"I know. I tried to avoid it. I wish it could have been another way. But this woman here is my mate. That's why I'm showing her off to you, so you can see."

"It must hurt Desela to see you with her."

"I don't feel good about it," Korlon replied bluntly. "Which is part of why I'm trying so damn hard to find her a lifemate."

"The wrong lifemate is worse than none at all."

"You're right. When we leave, we'll give her some time. She'll be heartbroken, of course. Again. Maybe someday she'll trust enough to find another."

Trajan did not like this conversation. He didn't like having things rubbed in his face, and he didn't like the idea of Desela finding another man, either.

Most of all, though, he couldn't bear her having a broken heart.

"I'm not sure it will be all that bad," Trajan said.

"It will be," said Korlon, getting his blowjob. "That's a fact, I'm sorry to say."

"I'm not responsible for her," said Trajan, on the verge of losing his temper. "Why are you making it out like I am?"

"I'm not making out anything. You're the one who needs to make up your mind. You keep the woman, and then you let her go. You take her back and then let her go again. That's not very responsible is it?"

"Sir," said Trajan, seething, "I suggest you desist from this line of argument."

"And I suggest you answer the original question. Like a man. What are your feelings for Desela?"

"I love her, damn it, is that what you want to hear?"

"No," said Korlon, smiling thinly. "But I think it's what Des wants to hear. And what she needs to hear."

Korlon's words slammed him like a lead pipe to the solar plexus.

Nothing in the universe was worse than a primale who did not meet his love obligations. Had he led Desela on, giving her mixed signals, heating her up only to leave her ice cold?

What about right now – with her sitting alone in a jail cell to appease his own ego or fear or whatever the hell else was messing him up.

"This conversation is at an end. You will stand by," said Trajan, "for further communication."

He cut off the holo, causing the three-dimensional image of Master and slave to vanish in the air. This was more rudeness on his part but it was very much preferable to what he might say if he stayed in communication with Korlon.

Trajan knew something must be very wrong with his state of mind. He never lost control with people, least of all Guardians on the right side of the law. Nor would he ever play with a woman's affections.

Damn...had he steered that far off course?

Using Desela and conning himself into thinking it was for her own good. It was a terrible twisting of his character. He wasn't fit, under these circumstances, to have a mate, a lover, or his job as Marshal, either.

Trajan needed time to think.

He needed to go airborne. He needed to take his flyer as far as it would go, to the halfway point in fuel and then farther on, to the three-quarters and finally to the empty mark so he could crash-land in the desert.

What better way to be forgotten, blown away by the sands of time into oblivion.

To that place where he had never been born. A universe where he had never met Desela. Never ruined her life with his love. A universe of sheer and unadulterated...nothingness.

"Buy you a drink, boss?"

Trajan answered the drawling man without looking over his shoulder. "Not now, Rather."

"If you ask me," Rather called out, "you're a damn fool."

Trajan spun on his heel. "You're pushing it, Deputy." He jabbed a finger in the air.

"So get me drunk and kick my ass. We both know you'll never manage it sober."

Trajan rubbed his hand over his lips. Damn it, if Rather didn't know how to break the tension every time. "Fine, but if there's ass kicking to be done, I'll be on the giving end."

Rather sprung for whisky, the real stuff, old Earth.

"You're being mighty generous," said Trajan, swallowing his shot.

"Nah." Rather downed the contents of his own shot glass. "I'm putting it on your tab."

Trajan stifled a grin. "Son of a bitch."

Rather ordered two more from the robo bartender. "So when are you gonna tell me about the lady?"

"There's nothing to tell."

"And that's how I know there is."

"You don't know shit."

"I know you're tearing yourself apart. I know this woman means something to you."

Trajan sighed heavily, leaning on the bar. "If you're gonna ask me if I love her, trust me, the next person who does is not gonna see straight for a week."

"Oh, I already know you love her. The question is do you have the balls to do something about it?"

"Balls?" He snorted. "I'm letting her go for her own good. *That* takes balls."

"Maybe."

"What do you mean maybe?" Trajan demanded.

Rather downed his second shot. "I'm just saying, maybe what really takes balls is not sending her away."

"Impossible." He shook his head.

"Could be. What have you got to lose, though?"

Trajan extended his arms. "All this. Perpetual loneliness, shitty pay, crappy companionship."

"You can keep all that. Desela will fit in. She seems tough enough."

"Yeah, she's tough all right. She drives me crazy."

"That's what women are supposed to do."

Trajan shook his head. "I can't talk to you."

"Any chance that could last?" Rather asked hopefully.

"No. And why aren't you calling me boss?"

Rather tipped his short-brimmed cap. "Start acting like one and I will."

Trajan swore at him as he walked away. "Thanks for the pep talk."

"Any time...boss."

Trajan put his credit disc into the slot, covering the bill.

It was flying time.

Minutes later he was up in the machine, leaving the troubles of the ground far behind. Escape was what he needed. A clean break.

No more babbling nonsense. From Korlon. Or Desela. Or Rather.

To think, his own deputy telling him he was a coward for not facing up to his love for Desela. The man didn't understand. No one did.

He had no choice. He had his destiny.

Desela would face the judge. And then go home.

Opening the retractable roof, he let the air whip across his face, cleansing and awakening. He often wondered what it would be like to be a bird, to be able to sustain himself up here under his own power.

How many times had he been up here? How many more times did he have left? There was a sobering thought. One day his life would end. And it would be sooner rather than later with the job he held.

When all was said and done, what would be left of him to show for the effort?

What hope did he have? Was there any point in going on?

This was new – this despair. Desperately he looked for the way out.

It was staring him in the face, just as it had been all along. A different choice, a real and qualitative change he could make.

The tools were right there at hand.

Judges, after all, served more than one function, didn't they?

Passing sentence on the guilty was one of them, but there was another.

It involved a different sort of binding over—not a criminal into prison but two lovers, together forever.

Time seemed to recede out here. It felt like months, years since Desela had first ridden with him. When she was there, he felt challenged, alive, and when she wasn't, it was like a vacuum had opened up, a gulf that nothing could fill.

Making a marriage bond was a crazy notion, but it might just be the only way to get any peace.

Desela seemed determined to keep showing up in his life, anyway. If he married her, at least he could keep better tabs on her.

He couldn't believe he was even considering such a possibility.

Maybe she was bluffing and she would run like the wind the minute she saw he was going to follow through.

Maybe not.

It could be he would run.

No matter what...it felt like the next step in his life.

Trajan Marcus Aurelius was tired of running.

He was going to make his stand.

Once and for all.

Trajan checked the fuel gauge. He was at halfway.

He smiled, pulling up on the control stick.

Time to go back...time to find the judge.

So he could start shocking the hell out of everyone.

Himself most of all.

* * * * *

Jaxey was sitting in the easy chair, indignantly punching channels on the holo remote. Program after program flipped by. She wasn't even watching the screen so much as glaring at the passing colors.

She was looking for reds and blacks. Which matched her mood.

Korlon had gone too far this time. Forcing her to perform as a slave for Trajan, a man she hardly knew. Yes, he was a primale and Korlon did have the right to do with her body as he wished and yes, she did service other men orally at times.

It turned her on, that was true, too, but this situation was different. She did not want to play the role of naked obedient. She wanted to be able to stand as Korlon's equal when dealing with Trajan.

After all, Desela's future was at stake.

"My lady is not pleased." Now it was Korlon's turn to stand in front of the holo, blocking her view.

"I'm not talking to you right now, Korlon. And don't you dare go all macho on me. I'm not in the mood. I swear to god, I will kick you in the nuts so hard."

His nuts happened to be exposed, luscious and full, as always. He was naked, hands on hips, insolently posing, his cock half hard. Honestly, how was she supposed to resist this man? When all she wanted to do was crawl to him and kiss him all over and get fucked by him hour after hour?

"Just let me explain," he said. "I was trying to make a point."

"What point is that?" she snapped. "That you can boss your female around whenever you like it? You and Trajan are having a pissing contest, just admit it."

"That isn't it. I just wanted to let him see the benefits of having a mate. I did that for Desela's sake. Besides, it isn't like we haven't played games. Remember the time on Remulon Eight?"

"Don't you go there. That's not fair. Remulon Eight was different," she exclaimed.

"You danced naked for a roomful of Sarnian traders and then you —"

"I know what the fuck I did, Korlon."

She hated when he brought that incident up. They had both gotten drunk and decided to pass her off as his chattel pleasure woman. She had licked and sucked off the lot of them. The sex between her and Korlon afterwards was so explosive they hadn't left their quarters for two days.

"I'm just saying —"

"Look," she sighed. "Will you just admit you don't know what you're doing where Trajan is concerned?"

"I don't know what I'm doing." He shocked the hell out of her with his bald-faced admission. "Are you satisfied?"

She pursed her lips. "I would feel better if I could use the lightwhip on you."

"Don't push it." He pulled her up out of the seat, putting his hands at her waist. "Jaxey, I know this makes no sense to you. But I'm with Desela on this. I feel like Trajan's the one. I felt like if I just pushed him a little, maybe he'd see that for himself."

She gave him a hug. "I love you, Korlon, my great big stubborn Master. You have a heart of gold."

"I just wish I could make things work out better sometimes," he fretted.

"You never know," she pointed out. "They still might."

He gave her a kiss, wet and soulful. "Here's hoping."

"We'll find out, won't we, soon enough."

"After court," he agreed. "This suspense is killing me."

Her hand wrapped around his cock. "We could pass the time a little more pleasantly."

He gave a slanted smile. "What did you have in mind?"

Jaxey raised her eyebrows. "Want me to show you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact."

Jaxey slipped immediately to her knees, delivering a kiss to the tip of his turgid cock. She delivered a long lick up and down the length of him. Korlon moaned, putting his hands on her shoulders.

"I love you, baby," he sighed.

"I love you, too," she said, sliding him into her mouth.

He groaned. It was the sweetest sound in the universe to her ears. It signaled his pleasure, and the beginning of another session between them.

She wanted him to come down her throat, but he had other ideas. Sweeping her into his arms, he took her to bed, laying her out flat on her back.

Lifting her legs, he pushed them back, bending her knees.

"It's my turn to please you," he said.

"Yes...Master." She smiled.

Korlon's tongue dabbed at her pussy, inducing the telltale liquids to ooze free from her crack. Jaxey gripped the sheet with her fists, tossing her head back and forth.

"Yes," she cried. "Yes...yes."

He took his time, showing that a Master's control can take many forms. There was nothing submissive about the way he teased her clitoris, compelling her to feel the pulsing desires within. His head dove deep, over and over, alternating plunges of his tongue with light vibrations of his lips. He drank down her nectar, inducing more in a constant flow, a living fountain of sweet sex that built and built and built until she was bucking and moaning and clutching.

The orgasm came like an explosion of colors, a rainbow from deep between her thighs, erupting across the cosmos. She grasped her own breasts, molding and cupping her flesh. Her belly undulated as she let the shock waves pass through her. She felt so free, free to fly, knowing Korlon was there to hold her in place. To anchor and chain her.

All was good. All was right.

She and Korlon were happy.

And Desela would be happy, too.

She knew this now, as surely as she knew anything.

Chapter Eight

"Ma'am, it's time."

Desela raised her eyes, looking toward the door of her cell. The deputy, the one called Rather was standing there.

"Already?" She managed a weak smile.

"Yes ma'am," he said, his voice gentle and solicitous. "Is there anything I can do for you first? A glass of water? A nutrition pill?"

"No, thank you, you've been so kind already." She rose to her feet, ready to meet the judge.

"I haven't done much." He shrugged. "You deserved a lot more."

Actually, Rather had done a lot. Checking in on her constantly, making sure she didn't feel too alone or scared. She would never forget the man for that.

"You deserve better, too," she replied, giving him a small kiss on the cheek.

Rather flushed red. "Ma'am," he cleared his throat. "For what it's worth...about the Marshal..."

"You don't have to defend him, Rather, it's all right," she said softly.

"I ain't defending the rascal, ma'am...just letting you know the stubborn cuss doesn't know what's good for him. Never has. He's letting you go, but he'll hate himself for it the rest of his life. He figures he'd only bring you down. Damn fool."

"We are all fools in this universe, Deputy Rather," she pointed out. "The best we can hope for is to stumble our way through."

"You're a lady," he said. "I can tell that."

She laughed. "Let's just go...please?"

"Certainly, after you?"

Desela walked out of the cell into the corridor. Her heart was beating steadily. She felt strangely calm. To think in a matter of an hour, maybe less, she would be back on board the cargo ship with Jaxey and Korlon, leaving Unicorn Three forever.

Never to see Trajan again.

The courtroom was across the street, on the second floor of the colony administration building. A female deputy was standing guard outside the double hydraulic doors of the courtroom.

The doors were marked with the emblem of the colony, a half sun rising above a small spaceport.

Desela thought it odd that the deputy was smiling so broadly. Practically grinning.

She must really love her work, thought Des.

"I'll be waiting out here," said Rather.

"Thank you," she replied.

The doors slid open.

The first thing Desela saw was the gray-haired man in the red robes, trimmed in gold. His medallion indicated his station as a judge for this portion of the civilized universe.

He held his hands folded together before him. "Come in, young lady, we have been waiting."

Desela looked around the room. "We" apparently referred to a pair of recording robots and a bald bailiff in a green uniform, all of whom sat behind a nondescript black table to the left of the judge.

The room itself was plain gray, a windowless square, unadorned. There were three flags at the very front, along the wall, one for the colony, one for the quadrant and one representing the High Council of Earth.

The judge was standing in front of the flags, and he too was smiling rather broadly.

Apparently he loved his work, too.

"Miss Desela." He reached out to shake her hand. "I have heard a good deal about you...from the Marshal."

Desela braced herself. "Wonderful," she muttered. "Now I'll get the death penalty."

"What's that?" said the old man, who was a little hard of hearing.

"Nothing, sir. I was just —"

"You were speaking out of turn is what you were doing," interrupted a stern voice she knew all too well.

Desela stiffened. It was Trajan, walking up beside her to face the judge.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. "You said you wouldn't come."

"I changed my mind. The case is altered."

"Altered? How?"

"New evidence," said the judge, beaming.

Desela crinkled her brow. Had everyone gone crazy? "I don't know what is happening...but I think maybe it's time I asked for a lawyer."

"Request denied," said Trajan.

"You can't deny me a lawyer," she said crossly.

"You're a security risk. As a matter of fact..." He reached for his magnetic cuffs. "Put out your wrists."

Desela did so, stunned. Wide-eyed she beheld him as he locked the cuffs on her wrists, imprisoning her hands in front of her body.

"Judge, look what he's done," exclaimed Desela.

"Oh, dear." He sounded positively giddy. "That looks serious."

"I demand to see Korlon," she said.

"Request denied." Trajan's face was cold, almost brutal. In spite of herself, Desela felt wet between her legs.

"You can't do that," she insisted.

"I can. Regulation six-three-one. General Authority Order. Security threats may be detained at will."

"But I'm not a threat and you know it."

"That's for me to decide. And I can take as long as I want to make that determination."

"Judge," she pleaded, "this can't be legal. You can't tolerate this."

"Desela, you will cease pestering the judge or I will put you under discipline."

"Go to hell, Trajan! You don't own me."

Trajan reached about, stretching his arm.

Desela yelped. She had just been spanked!

"Judge, did you see that?"

"Oh, my," he chortled. "I did."

Desela turned to run away. Trajan held her fast. "Attempted escape," he said.

"Hmm," said the judge. "That's a very serious offense."

"Ten years at least, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes," the judge sighed. "I'm afraid it will be at least that."

Desela felt like she had gone to sleep in her cell and woken up in a nightmare. She wanted to scream out for Korlon, for Jaxey, for anybody.

The moment she opened her mouth, however, Trajan kissed her.

Stealing her breath, her very soul. "What the —"

"You are going to prison for a long time," he explained. "I thought you might want a goodbye kiss."

"You can't, Judge, you can't," she pleaded.

"Well..." He ran his fingers over his cheek thoughtfully. "There might be a way."

"What way?" said Desela.

"If you were claimed," said the judge. "Under Colony Law, you would no longer be subject to civil laws."

"Claimed?"

"By a male, yes. It's an old statute, similar to lifemating. You would then, being an obedient, be subject to your Master's rule and he would be responsible for you."

"But...but I don't have..." Desela was still in shock, the words coming out of her mouth not seeming to compute.

"You don't have a man to claim you?" The judge looked distressed. "Oh, I see."

"That isn't true," said Trajan.

The judge and Desela both looked at him.

"What are you saying?" said the judge, echoing her thoughts.

"I will claim the female," he said matter-of-factly.

Desela's heart leapt to her throat. Was she hearing correctly?

"You realize what this entails?" queried the judge.

"The female will be my responsibility, my lifemate, my one and only woman, until my death or hers."

"T-Trajan?" she whispered. "Do you mean that?"

"Silence," said Trajan. "Prisoners speak when spoken to."

She lowered her head, though her spirit was bounding.

"You will have to demonstrate your commitment," the judge pointed out.

"I will swear the oath of lifemating. I will promise my heart and being, to keep her and love her...to discipline her."

A chill went down Desela's spine. He was talking about primale union, the love of Master and slave.

"And you, young lady," said the judge. "Are you prepared to accept this offer? Will you submit yourself to the love and discipline of this man?"

"With all my heart and soul."

"In that case," said the judge, "we may proceed with the binding ceremony."

It was at this point that Desela realized things might not be as spontaneous as they appeared.

"Trajan, did you...plan this?"

Trajan pursed his lips. "Give me your hands," he told her.

Desela obeyed eagerly, excitedly.

"Trajan Marcus Aurelius," began the judge, having been handed the officiating book by the bailiff, "repeat these words after me. 'I do hereby pledge, with all my soul, Desela Tenaria, to love and cherish, honor, protect and keep you, with all my dominant power.'"

"I, Trajan Marcus Aurelius, do hereby pledge with all my soul, Desela Tenaria, to love and cherish, honor, protect and keep you, with all my dominant power," Trajan repeated the words, squeezing her fingers, pervading her with warmth. Desela looked up at him, melting.

"And you," the judge continued, turning to Desela. "Repeat these words — 'I, Desela Tenaria, do hereby pledge to love and cherish you, Trajan Marcus Aurelius, to honor and obey you, to submit to you in all things as your devoted obedient.'"

"I, Desela Tenaria," she said, her voice quaking, "do hereby pledge to love and cherish you, Trajan Marcus Aurelius, to honor and obey you, to submit to you in all things as your devoted obedient."

The judge took a deep, commanding breath. "So be it. Having heard your pledges, by the power vested in me by the High Council, I do hereby proclaim you lifemates, until death do you part."

"Trajan," she rasped, holding up her hands. "Master?"

He undid the cuffs, allowing her to embrace him. She held him so tightly, not wanting to let go. She was so afraid she would find this wasn't real.

Wouldn't that be just like reality to play such a cruel joke?

"Master, I must ask you," she said, after he had finished smothering her face with kisses. "How...how did you get to this point?"

"You mean how did I come to my senses?" He smiled wryly.

She flushed. "A good obedient doesn't criticize her Master...at least not in public, but yes, that's the gist of it."

"I'm not sure. I guess enough people kicked my ass." He furrowed his brow. "Or maybe I just got tired of playing it safe. I lived under a rock a long time, hiding from Lysia's ghost. Long enough, don't you think?"

"You said it," she grinned, "I didn't."

"Don't think this means I have all the answers," he warned. "The fact is I don't know the first thing about relationships."

"We'll be together." She pressed her cheek to his chest. "That's what matters."

"I saw it that way, too," he agreed. "That's what sealed it for me, I suppose. Much as I couldn't picture being able to give you what you needed, there was just no way I could imagine anyone else trying to do it instead."

"In other words," said Korlon, stepping up behind them, "he's a jealous bastard."

"Korlon," she exclaimed.

Trajan stepped back. "Korlon, I would be honored if you would hug my bride."

"The honor is mine." Korlon opened his arms.

"I'm so glad you are here," she sighed. "I'm just sorry you missed the ceremony."

"That's okay, Desela, that part needed to be private. Just take me and Jaxey to dinner tonight and we'll call it even."

Jaxey was right beside him. Desela hugged her too, feeling such an overwhelming tide of joy she could barely contain herself.

"I'm the happiest woman in the universe," she cried. "I have the best mate and the best friends."

Trajan took Korlon's hand. "Please accept my apology. I was rude with you, disconnecting like I did."

"That isn't necessary. I was prodding you, trying to provoke you."

"Well, it worked."

"I'm glad something did," drawled Rather.

Desela took another kiss from Trajan, the first of countless millions. "I love you so much, Master. You won't be sorry for claiming me, I promise, I will work so hard to please you."

"You don't have to do anything." He brushed the hair from her face. "Just be who you are."

"I can do that." She beamed.

The judge reached out and took her hand. "Congratulations, young lady. You have probably figured out Marshal Trajan was having a little fun with you."

"Yes, he scared me to death, is what he did." She raised an eyebrow. "I'd nearly forgotten that."

Trajan winked. "I think I might be in trouble, Judge."

"Don't look at me, you're the Dominant."

He rolled his eyes. "In theory."

"You can dominate any time I tell you to," Desela teased.

Trajan gathered her tight, tickling her. She laughed until she cried. And then she laughed again.

They all laughed, for a long, long time.

About the Author

Reese Gabriel is a born romantic with a taste for the edgier side of love. Having traveled the world and sampled many of the finer things, Reese now enjoys the greater simplicities; barefoot walks by the ocean, kisses under moonlight and whispers of passion in the darkness with that one special person.

Preferring to remain behind the scenes, cherished by a precious few, Reese hopes to awaken in the lives of many the possibilities of true love through stories of far off places and enchanted lives.

For the sake of love and hope and imagination, these stories are told. May they be enjoyed as much in the reading of them as in the writing.

Reese welcomes comments from readers. You can find Reese's website and email address on the author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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