

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Man's
PRIZE
MORE THAN MALE
REESE GABRIEL

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Azar's Prize

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MORE THAN MALE:

AZAR'S PRIZE

Reese Gabriel

Chapter One

Look in the galactic dictionary under death wishes, and you would find the name of Theryssa, first female officer of the Star Guardians...

At this very moment Theryssa was floating weightless off the starboard bow of her class one solo cruiser, two parsecs from nowhere, deep into pirate space, happily ripping out the nav-com beacons and hyper-drive relays, without which she had no chance of ever getting home.

Why was she doing such a damn-fool, idiotic, black-hole-for-brains thing? Incredibly enough, it was a top secret mission—one she had devised for herself and sold her superiors on. Certainly, it had seemed a good idea at the time...sort of.

A lot of people said Theryssa was only doing this to prove that she was fit to be in the Guardian Corps, and not there merely because of the special entrée given her by her parents, who happened to be the two most important people in the galaxy. Others thought she was just plain reckless and unstable.

What kind of normal person, after all, would be willing to set herself up as bait to be captured by a sex-crazed pirate king so they could spy on him and see if he was in bed with the Narthians?

Bed being a highly charged word in this context, given how much time this particular pirate king was said to enjoy spending in them with his captured females. Azar Xenelion was his name, and supposedly he was irresistible to the female sex. According to space lore, a woman need be brought to him chained or tied only one time—that being the first. After that, she would return to him willingly, begging his touch.

Theryssa knew that was ridiculous, not to mention an insult to female dignity. She would just as soon believe that little yarn as she would some of the other tales about the man, such as the time he purportedly eluded an entire Guardian escort flotilla, capturing an armored freighter loaded with fifteen cosmic tons of priceless velocite gems.

What was not an exaggeration, unfortunately, were the many accounts of how incredibly ravishing he was. His holoimages made her wet each and every time. Her favorite one showed the man bare chested, with his razor-sharp energy sword and scabbard, the leather belt swung over his muscular shoulder. He was beautiful and sexy and manly in a raw and primal way. Not like the genetic perfection of the primales, among whom Theryssa's father was one of the finest.

It was hard to pinpoint the appeal. Perhaps it was just the idea that this Azar was so alien to her own carefully planned world. That his body had grown strong purely through labor and war, that his skin was bronzed by the sun, his biceps and triceps and

rock-hard abdomen forged in the wilds. Not to mention the scandalously earthy method of his birth—out of the womb of a mother, from the planted seed of a father. No genetic planning, no seeding laboratory. No test tubes, no endless statistics.

Even his age was hard to pinpoint. In some of the holoids, he looked to be in his early thirties, while in others he seemed closer to her father's age. If that was the case, he was certainly maintaining his raw vitality.

Or was savage the better word, what with that long, tawny hair hanging down his back, the fierce blue eyes, quick as a jaguar's? And that mind—cunning as anything the geneticists could devise and yet free of all the restraints that could possibly be put upon it by society.

Azar Xenelion. Free in thought. Dangerously so, choosing an outlaw's life, living off the wealth of the liners and freighters unfortunate enough to cross his path. His prey, he called them, and their contents, booty.

The women were booty, too. Fems, obedients, aliens, no distinction was made. He took as he wished, making the women want him in every way possible before casting them aside for new ones. An abhorrent philosophy, yes, but still there was a magnetism to the man that even Theryssa, a female with three quarters primale blood, raised by the most powerful two members of the government, could not deny it.

Some said it was even worse than that, that the reason he attacked Guardian ships had to do with his desire to destroy the genetic system itself, creating a world of natural birth. The very thought made the skin crawl.

Living with Azar's images burned into her brain was not proving easy. So far it had been touch and go. She could have sworn the bastard was grinning at her from the other side of those holoids when she'd sat in her quarters on the edge of her seat, her coveralls hastily pulled open, her hand shoved down between her legs, absorbing the wet heat, her fingers simulating the action of a cock. His cock. Thrusting. Thrusting. Thrusting.

She had come harder than she had in months, maybe ever, soaking the plastiseal seat and leaving herself open and vulnerable in a way that defied description. It was crazy. All she had done was masturbate to his image and yet she'd felt like she had been physically and mentally had by the man. Possessed in the fullest sense of the word.

Twice that night she had buried the holoids as deep as she could in her backup system. If she could have destroyed them outright, she would have. As it was, she had pulled them back up on her personal monitor both times, again achieving mind-blowing orgasms.

She even went so far as to fabricate a dildo from the objectifier, one that she thought would appropriately simulate the shaft of a man that size—six foot five, two hundred plus pounds of sheer muscle, broad shoulders, tapered waist, rock-hard thighs.

Oh my fucking stars. She was sure her screams were audible all the way to the next galaxy. She shoved that thing so far inside herself, so deep that she was actually

shivering and panting and grunting, hot and cold, filled to the point of explosion and totally fucking needy and empty all at the same time.

She shouted fuck a million times, and every other swear word on top of it. Colors poured into her brain that she had never seen, and sensations in her breasts and belly that she had only ever associated with the intoxication of bubble juice. In short, she went supernova, suns imploding inside suns, collapsing down to the tiniest little pleasure points, and then expanding all over again, rushing to fill the void at hyper-light speed.

Her pussy had a life all its own, contracting and bearing down on the dildo like they shared some secret language. The liquid just kept flowing and her clit, so very full and swollen just hung there, like a laser trigger, locked on constant feed.

Nonstop firing. Blast. Blast. Blast. Eye-dousing pinks and purples and reds.

Then she got really wacky and ordered her auto-grid host to sim the holos up a bit, showing the pirate in various fun poses. Sans clothing of course. She had to stop herself from putting her own holos in the mix, simulating sex acts. What was next—scribbling their initials in her notepad like a first term adolescent?

She put up a sex blocker against him—part of her Guardian training—and tried to figure what was wrong with her. Was it all that silly talk about his being so sexually invincible? Was she just more nervous about the mission than she was willing to admit to herself?

She knew better, of course, than to complain to her parents. As far as her mother was concerned, she was getting everything she deserved after pushing so hard to be the first female cadet in the all-male Guardian service.

She would never forget her response when she'd first told Mom she wanted to join up.

"You ought to be taking this time to explore," Nyssa, the current Head of the High Council, had counseled. "You're only twenty-three. You should be sowing your oats, making sex and music like I did at your age. You'll have responsibilities soon enough."

Pointing out that she was not her mother's clone and that she might wish to lead her life differently would have been pointless. It was times like this that Theryssa found it hardest to be one of the precious few persons in the world whose genes had come from two specific people rather than an abstract, engineered mix.

The program was experimental and highly secret. Her own parents were two of the first. While her real origins could not be made known to the general public, she did manage to grow up with both of her progenitors as opposed to being raised in a cluster with many other children. Having a biological mother and father to live with, and who saw one as reflections of themselves, Theryssa learned, could be a real drag.

Her father was initially a lot more helpful. As Commander of the Guardians, General Theron had smoothed the way for her groundbreaking entry into the Service, not only with its primale members, but with Mom, who in Dad's opinion was a far more fearsome adversary.

Once she had joined up, however, he'd become like a second drill sergeant. Worse really, because he could interrupt her any time day or night, even if she was on leave. As far as he was concerned, the tougher the assignment she took on, the better.

His daughter was, after all, the best of the best, destined for great things.

Shooting comets, how many times had she heard that lecture? Since she was a little child, four or five solars old they had been telling her the story of how they had been engineered themselves, just so they could come together and support each other and so their DNA could be used to make a new, stronger kind of human being...of which Theryssa was the first.

That story became the template for everything. The time she'd played tag with her robo-dog in the house when she was six and broke one of her mother's prize holo-acting trophies, she was betraying her destiny. The time she only got a ninety-nine instead of a hundred on her interdimensional geometry final when she was fifteen because she had stayed out too late kissing a boy the night before—that had been betraying her legacy, too.

Did they have any idea how hard it was to live with that kind of pressure? Didn't they see that Theryssa was just a person, trying to live out her life like anybody else? Besides, from everything she had grown up seeing of her parents exploits, battling the Narthians and fighting back the anti-geneticists led by Malthusalus, they were the real heroes, not her.

Theryssa did have an aunt, her mother's younger half sister Seria, and her husband Raylar. Raylar was second in command of the Guardians and would take her father's place once he retired. He was a good man, though a bit stiff at times. Aunt Seria was a lot easier to talk to and pretty sympathetic when it came to sharing her frustrations with her parents.

Seria had a legacy of her own thrust upon her, as the chosen mate of Raylar. Since she hadn't been engineered to serve in a leadership position, she tended to be a little more laid-back about things. Seria shared the same father as Nyssa, the dynamic Marax. Her mother, however, was a very beautiful obedient who had died a long time ago.

Theryssa had been a little girl when Seria's identity was revealed to her. Theryssa had bonded with her right away. In some ways she was like a big sister. Although half obedient by blood, she was pretty bold and independent in her own right. She still worked part-time in the Diplomatic Corps.

The bulk of her time was spent with their son, her cousin Saymar. Saymar was barely ten, though he already fancied himself a great warrior. Theryssa wondered how in the world he was going to have the patience to wait for his own turn at leading the Guardians after the eventual retirement of his father Raylar, who had yet to assume command himself.

Theryssa would have been perfectly happy with a normal, unremarkable military career, albeit as the first of her gender to serve in the Corp of Star Guardians, responsible for defending the humanoid planets against all barbarian or Narthian bug

invasions. But destiny has a funny way of catching up to a person. Case in point, Theryssa's current mission. It didn't take a robo-surgeon to figure out this was no ordinary assignment. She was about to go seriously undercover, unarmed into pirate hands, with no hope of backup.

In the back of her mind, Theryssa had to know that she might never get home again—most especially if she succeeded in passing along the information about the Narthians, thereby engendering the pirate's eternal wrath. Still, it was too good an opportunity to pass up. For a decade Guardian Command had been after Xenelion and now, through Theryssa, fresh from the Academy, they had a chance to infiltrate his operation and link him to the Narthian Bug Hordes in one fell swoop.

All because Theryssa was a woman. Talk about ironies.

She was a little surprised they had let her do it, to be honest. Her superiors had balked at first. And while no one ever said so, Theryssa's father, and therefore her mother, must surely have had to sign off on the idea.

Theryssa wasn't sure whether to feel good or bad about them letting her do this. At one level it meant they really did trust her as much as they were always saying they did, which was cool. But they had been so damn calm when they said goodbye. What was up with that? Were they just being callous, all disciplined and command-like, or did they have some kind of ace up their sleeves that was going to keep her safe? Some secret bit of knowledge that changed the equation she thought she was dealing with?

Would the possibility surprise her? Not really. After all, that was how her grandparents, Nyssa's mother and father, the former Head of the Council and Commander of the Guardians had always worked things. With bigger purposes, as they put it.

Or as Theryssa preferred to think of it, playing things the sneaky way.

Speaking of being sneaky, she had to work fast to finish sabotaging her ship and get back inside. She had to be careful, of course, to make it look natural, like meteor damage, or space shrapnel. Never mind that any halfway competent star pilot would never allow himself to be hit by a flying rock in the middle of a million mile wide void—Theryssa was just going to have to play dumb on that one.

Tee, hee. Look at me, the bimbo woman astronaut.

They'd probably buy it, too, the way all chauvinists do when offered a chance to reinforce their stupid ideas about male supremacy. What these pirates would never know, assuming Theryssa played her role as helpless captive right, was that she was not just another reasonably pretty face. She was a trained expert in self-defense, with lethally registered skills. She also had those primale genes, a hundred percent on her father's side and half on her mother's. That meant she had a fair share of her Dad's augmented powers, including super hearing, ultra-range sight and a strength factor that ought to make her able to knock any dozen or so of these pirate morons back to whatever Dark Age they'd skulked out of.

She would need the super senses pretty quickly to tell when they were coming up on her ship, too. Without her nav-com beacons, she was blind as a Corian bat fish out here.

They couldn't come a moment too soon at this point. As much as Theryssa didn't look forward to being plucked up as "booty", she was far more afraid of *not* being found. Sure, Guardian Command would institute a search if she failed to turn up in some shape or form within the next Solar, but they would have only an approximate idea of where to look for her. She had gone off the holo-trackers some time ago, so as not to scare the pirates away. This meant no visual tracking or any spacecraft to come to her rescue.

If anyone else found her, they would never believe she was a Guardian. Not flying as she was, incognito, wearing an interstellar delivery uniform, her craft marked with the logo of an outfit which transported one of a kind items for people rich enough not to have to create simulations using their objectifiers.

Theryssa would tell them she was lost, drifted off course. She sighed thinking of how she would be making a moron of herself, complete with batting eyelashes and looks of awe. What an acting job, complete with painful, bimbo-like slowness as she pretended to realize that her rescuers were not knights in shining space armor, but interstellar ne'er-do-wells. *Please don't hurt me with your mean old swords, Mr. Pirates, sirs.* Back inside the ship at last, Theryssa occupied herself playing a game of groak against the ship's computer. She noted the time. A minute since she checked last.

This waiting was killing her. Whatever destiny she faced on that pirate ship, whoever this Azar Xenelion turned out to be in real life, it was going to be a hell of a lot better than dealing with her own imagination out here in space. Any Guardian would tell you, battle came as a relief after a long flight in the deep black reaches. Out there the ghosts got real. Especially when you fly solo.

Voices, not necessarily good ones, can drown out a person's rational thoughts. Questions floating past your front grill, again and again, the answers never satisfying. Would she really be able to finesse this just right? A Guardian, a trained warrior pretending to be a damsel in distress? Being that she was the first female in the Service, it wasn't as though Theryssa's colleagues or even her superiors could offer much practical assistance.

Her father had given her a long speech, recounting his role in the defeat of the Narthian Bug Nest on Tubos Minor and told her to remember the Guardian Code. That was all well and good, except her father did not have female hormones. He had no clue what it was like to fight that kind of primal urge. It was different being a woman, when you had the kind of biology that made you want to have the enemy inside you, making love to you, showing you what your body could do under the influence of a finely wielded cock. Part of her wanted to attack, but another part just wanted to get close enough to surrender, so she could feel what it was like to be the pirate's prisoner. Or even worse, his toy.

Oh, to be played with by the likes of Azar Xenelion.

Theryssa wasn't the only woman to feel it. Her mother had taken one look at the holo of Azar and turned stonily silent.

"What now, woman?" Theron had demanded of his wife. She had sighed at her husband's naïveté and left the room. Nyssa knew full well what her daughter was dealing with, and Theryssa was sure she didn't envy her. But she had asked for this, hadn't she? And she was about to get it in spades.

As if it hadn't been bad enough so far. Five days in deep space, resisting every urge to masturbate, trying to stay cold and hard and professional. All the while rehearsing her role as the proverbial fluffy female, easy pickings for sexual predation.

She checked the clock again. Another minute had ticked off. Wonderful.

Hurry up, damn you, Azar. Get here and enslave me, already.

* * * * *

Azar studied the small cruiser through the starscope of his pirate ship, his eye pressed to the lens. The cruiser at the other end continued its slow, aimless drift in space. Thus had it been for the last half hour, seemingly alone, and crippled. The damage to the engines was evident and quite severe. It looked to have taken a random meteor hit. A one in a million chance, but not entirely impossible out here in the space lanes between Earth and Beta Prime. The Navigation and communication lines looked torn up, too. Presumably, the courier ship was unable to call for help.

A sitting duck. Likely laden with some sort of treasure. Ancient gold artifacts, perhaps, or antique artwork. Maybe even a first edition of a real book, with paper and ink.

What a lucky day to be a pirate. How entirely fortunate.

A little too fortunate, as far as Azar was concerned. Opting for caution, he held their observational position at a safe distance, the pirate ship's invisibility shields still engaged.

"Captain, what are we waiting for?" demanded Oleron, his bearded, increasingly insubordinate second-in-command. "There is prey right in front of us. Why do we not seize it?"

This was Oleron's problem—he had allowed his own short-sighted egoism to blind him to all other considerations. In order to score quick points by appearing bolder than his superior, he was surrendering the true judgment needed to lead. "If it is prey, Oleron, then it will wait...while we ascertain fully the nature of the situation."

"What is to understand? I see booty—all the men do. Too long have we waited, and too often turned away when we could have fattened ourselves and lined our coffers."

There were others on the bridge, listening, watching.

"A fat predator does not make for an effective predator, Oleron. You must think of the long term."

"A pirate has no fear, *Captain*."

Azar turned from the scope to confront his accuser. "Nor does a fool, Oleron. Are you sure you can gauge the difference? Besides, we are not blind killers. We have objectives. We are at war, or have you forgotten?"

Oleron scowled, his eyes darting back and forth. The others were grinning, chuckling. Knowing himself beaten, for the moment, he backed down. "I know nothing, sir but what I am ordered to do."

There was no missing the sarcasm, the intended challenge to his rule...and the cause, which was to defeat the Galactic Council and its cruel program of genetic mating. A program which had cost the life of the only woman he'd ever loved.

"In that case, you will de-cloak the ship and apply the magnobeam," he commanded, dropping the matter for the present. "Bring the cruiser into the lower bay. I will await its arrival there."

"Sir," Oleron saluted, the tiniest bit of grudge showing through.

Azar gave him a month, maybe less until he tried a mutiny. He had seen any number of men like this over the years, spineless and greedy. It ought to be child's play to defeat him, and yet as Azar rode down in the elevator he felt, for the first time in his life, an overwhelming fatigue, bordering on exhaustion.

He'd been at this so many years now, having single-handedly organized the galaxy's worst outcasts into a fighting force capable of matching even the Guardians and using it with ruthless efficiency time and again.

In exchange for their loyalty he gave the men plunder, and a cause. They were standing for free and natural humanity, for the right to mate with the person of one's choice, and to have babies in the natural way. Imperfect, unpredictable babies who could marry as they wished.

Not genetic slaves whose lives were fixed from before they were old enough to speak.

Few of his pirate crew cared for politics, it was true, but they were better men for believing in something larger than themselves.

As for the secret he was forced to keep about his own nature—that he was not in reality a natural-born rogue like them, but a product of the Council's elite technology—this had caused him to lose many a night's sleep and had aged him prematurely.

But he had no choice. If the men knew they would run from him in terror.

Or was he only justifying himself, manipulating those around him to maintain his own private vendetta against the Council?

Could it be time to come clean?

He had been wondering about this almost nonstop since receiving a secret communiqué from the Guardian High Command two days ago. It was an urgent request for a meeting, to discuss peace.

This alone would have brought only his contempt, but there was with it a personal transmission, from General Theron himself.

A handwritten letter of apology.

This would have meaning to no other living person except himself. It concerned an event of long ago...*the event*. And he was not as yet decided as to how to respond.

In the meantime, there was the cruiser.

Why exactly had Azar agreed to take it onboard, anyway? Something was wrong with the situation, his gut told him that. Anything that came too easily always was. There were no Guardian ships in range, so he had decided to take the chance. Still, he sensed no good would come of this.

As a precaution, he ordered extra men with heavy lasers, to the bay. If anything untoward was in that cruiser, it would be vaporized to the next universe. He took up position at the front of the storming party.

Azar waited until the crippled ship was fully inside and resting on the deck, the bay door closed behind it. Raising his hand, he gave the count. On three they moved in fast and hard, surrounding the ship and blasting the outer hatch. They had the pilot down on the ground before he or they could draw another breath.

"Don't shoot, oh, please," came the high-pitched voice belonging to the small body—far too curvaceous to belong to a man. "I beg you, please don't kill me!"

Azar felt the blood drain from his face. Correction. They had the pilot down before *she* could draw another breath.

By the Holy Raiders of the Arc Nebula, the pilot was female. No wonder his gut had been ringing the alarm bells. The last thing he needed with a possible mutiny on his hands was a woman for the men to fight over.

"Captain," cried Koros, a toothless, crusty veteran of a hundred campaigns. "We got ourselves a wench."

"Let's strip her down," said the stalwart Robo-Leg Jim, his cock suddenly as stiff under his breeches as his artificial limb. "And give it to her good."

By the gods, his crew was degenerating badly. His leadership must surely be lacking of late.

"No," Azar boomed. "We'll have none of that. Have you men forgotten what we stand for? This is no willing space prostitute here. Since when do we abuse females?"

"Perhaps, Captain," said Oleron. "If you allowed them to enjoy female companionship as you do, they would not be so...impatient."

Azar turned on him. "Do you presume to question me?"

"No, sir." He bowed, avoiding a fight.

Azar regarded him, even as his mind tried to recollect recent history. Oleron had a point, mean-spirited as he was. Azar had been neglecting his men's needs in favor of his own. He'd been trying to keep them focused on work, even as he sought women for himself to maintain his flagging spirits. He would have to address this.

"Are you the Captain, sir?" The young woman addressed Azar. She had risen to her knees. She wore a tight uniform, with a zipper down the front, the emblem of her

company incised just above her left breast. She was about five foot five, with long black hair and piercing eyes.

For a moment, Azar could not speak. She was that beautiful, that breathtaking.

Hands down, in fact, she was the loveliest creature he had ever laid his weary, jaded eyes upon. "I am Azar Xenelion," he confirmed. "Captain of this ship. By the laws of interstellar piracy, I declare your vehicle and all its contents to be forfeit."

The lovely, raven-haired angel shook her hair over her left shoulder and crossed her arms over her breasts, the very picture of feminine helplessness, and yet at the same time possessing of a playful, even bold nature. Such a strange contradiction.

She made him feel energized.

"Sir, I appeal to you...do not let these men take my clothes...or my...my honor. If I must be used, let it be by you alone."

The blood surged to his cock, as if on cue. What man in his right mind could refuse such an offer? A captured angel, offering herself for the price of protection. Conveniently on her knees, eyes seductively moist. How simple to ball that luxurious mane of hair in his fist, to put her immediately to his pleasure, making her swallow his throbbing, erect cock inch by inch while his men watched, licking their own lips, hoping against hope for their own turn with the beauty.

Oh, to be an ordinary pirate, with no code or ethics.

What fun he would have.

On second thought, such a woman could not be shared, even visually. It would dishonor her high nature. Besides, she would probably find a way to fight back, making him sorry he'd ever tried to shame her.

He suppressed a smile. Again, she was making him feel light on his feet. How long had it been since he'd stood in one place and breathed deeply, happy to be alive?

How many starry nights had he gazed upon, how many fallen comrades, how many bottles of rum in a hundred space variations, how many soft lips, whispering his name in awe, master and captain in more languages than he could count.

But none of those planets were Earth, and none of those women were truly his.

Not like Solania.

Azar pursed his lips as that feeling came rushing back. The one he'd had watching the ship out there a little while ago, drifting, and dangling. Like shark bait.

This was all too perfect...too easy.

"Search the cruiser," he ordered Robo-Leg Jim, circumventing Oleron for the moment. "And have the wench brought to my quarters."

"Yes, sir," said the obviously disappointed Jim.

It was on his way out that Azar heard the whispering. He had his needle sword to the man's throat in the span of a heartbeat. "Would you care to repeat that in a volume more suitable for a man than an old woman?"

Oleron's forehead beaded with sweat. "It was nothing, sir."

Azar knocked the man swiftly off his feet.

The stunned Oleron clutched at his stomach. "What was that for, Captain?"

"That," said Azar. "Was my own version of *nothing*. Next time it will be far worse."

Azar's heart thudded in his chest as he left the bay. He had made a mistake allowing Oleron to live. Mercy, given to the wrong people, inevitably came back to haunt one. Sometimes fatally. For some reason, though, he could not kill the man in the woman's presence. It wasn't that he thought she couldn't handle it—he was sure she could. Under her damsel exterior, she was feisty as his beloved, lost Solania had been. Maybe more so.

More than ever he felt an overwhelming drive to be with the dark-haired woman captive, to speak with her, to learn her name. She represented danger of a very different kind, one that at the moment he far preferred. To die at the hands of an Oleron, or in the face of nameless Guardian laser guns was tragic at best, but to die in the arms of a green-eyed angel, with an oval face like a goddess, a noble brow and the body of a virgin sea nymph, that would render an existence like his meaningful, as miserable as it might have been heretofore.

Besides, there was a mystery to be solved. And Azar loved puzzles. The beautiful young woman had a story, an identity, and depending on what his men found on that ship, it was quite possible that her true identity would end up having as little to do with interstellar package delivery as Oleron had to do with being a real man.

The trick now was to make them sweat a little. The woman, Oleron, all of them. Let him be the one with the answers, keeping them all off balance. To that end, he made himself briefly incognito, taking a detour into the ship's kitchen.

"Rum," he told the robo-chef on duty. "Natural, not synth."

The machine floated by anti-grav to a metal cupboard to fetch the bottle.

"Skip the glass." Azar put out his hand. Experts had studies from here to the next system that it was impossible to taste the difference. But experts couldn't quantify the really important things in life. Like loyalty and trust. And desire for a woman.

"To life," he toasted the machine.

The rum went down like fire and molasses, like sweet memories, mixed with an unknown future. He took another drink. Images conjured, waking dreams, from the tips of his toes upward, through the heart, to the head where they could be interpreted. He was seeing the woman in the bright yellow flight suit with the green trim and the logo over her breast, the slick, glossy material hugging her every curve, the shiny metal of the zipper inviting a downward tug, inevitable and complete.

Did female space pilots wear underwear? Something practical, made of clingy, see through absorbex, or would she be more daring, perhaps even donning some wispy, silky things, wickedly old-fashioned, a bra and pair of panties, black or red, barely covering her full breasts and sweet ass?

As captain he had the right to see her underwear and any other part of her. Including her naked body. And it hardly ended there. He could see that body writhing underneath him, her legs splayed open as he pumped her warm, slippery pussy full with rock-hard cock. He could also see how she looked with stripes, the red marks of the crop or cane lining her soft flesh, inviting his touch, his conquest. Or perchance in bondage, hands behind her back, drawing emphasis to her outthrust breasts. Ankles, chained apart, too wide to cover her desire, the dripping moistness, the swell of labia, the glimpses of still pinker flesh, begging further examination. That look in her eyes as she realized what he already knew, that everything would be done to her according to his will, male to female. Just as every man desires, looking at every beautiful woman, to take and chain and own her.

Galaxy Shipping Pilot W45-76, according to her uniform. How much more he would learn reading her nude. Absorbing and studying, playing and teasing, holding him hostage to sex, hour after hour, taking such unfair advantage of her gender, reducing her to naught but a silent whimper, to yearning, reaching flesh, which will do anything, take anything, if only to be granted the smallest of male attentions.

Such a lovely little jewel this one would be to dangle from his chain. It was not about the number of women, or even the act of conquest itself, so much as it was the thrill of unfolding the nature of each new flower. At the moment he was loving a female, there could be none before or after her. She was center of the universe. And he was its challenger, its explorer.

The ultimate pirate.

Azar knew of the stories of his prowess that circulated. His exploits with the fair gender. They had become a bit exaggerated, as were the other tales—those of his exploits against his enemies.

If it was a matter of mere flattery, Azar wouldn't be concerned. Unfortunately, his image had been converted by Earth media into that of a mere self-serving plunderer and not a freedom fighter.

More than anything lately, he felt like a dinosaur, fighting for a forgotten cause, feeling a thousand years old and completely misunderstood.

Would this young, voluptuous new female be the one to give him back his youth? Not if he played her game. The easy surrender she offered in the bay was false. A trap more than likely. But set to what end? This was no mere damsel throwing over her virtue. She had spoken her lines a little too boldly, moved with a little too much assurance. Not quite, but almost to the point of mocking.

The one thing he did not smell on her fine, exciting little person was fear. A star courier, especially female, ought to have been terrified half to death. This one had a kind of deadly calm. An anticipation almost to the point of eagerness.

There was only one sort of human being who reacted in such a way, and they were neither star couriers nor female.

He pushed this possibility aside for the moment, for it made no sense. Another drink, and then he would see what he would see.

"Captain," Robo-Leg Jim stood in the servo doorway of the old gray metal ship, the Sabre, Azar's only real love, his only real home for ten years.

"What is it, Jim?"

"We have taken the cruiser apart, down to the rivets."

"That was fast work," he approved. "What did you find?"

The pirate signaled two of the others to bring in the items. Azar identified them one by one. An antique suit of clothes, called a tuxedo, a genuine box of cigars from New Cuba with a personal note from his Highness, King Fidel the Eighth, and the piece de resistance, an ancient Egyptian figurine, probably from the days of the pharaohs.

The cruiser's manifest confirmed the diminutive but priceless cargo. Nothing else had been found, not one shred of suspicious evidence linking it to the Guardians or the Council.

Too perfect. Too easy.

"The female is in my quarters?" he confirmed.

"Aye, Captain."

"She is secured?"

"Chained tight, sir. Not going anywhere in a hurry."

Azar's balls tightened and his cock thickened as he pictured the beautiful female, helpless in bondage. It was so very difficult to think of her in terms other than purely sexual. "I must attend to her interrogation. I am not to be disturbed, except for emergencies."

"Aye, aye, Captain."

The pirates stepped aside as their leader strode past, his leather boots tromping down the corridor, his long mane of bound hair hanging down his back. He was a man on a mission now, and the gods help any who stood in his way. He would not rest, nor would he divert his attention one iota from his stated goal. The woman would speak the truth.

And she would speak it quickly, no matter what means he must apply. Unless he missed his guess, there was something afoot here that threatened not only his own peace but that of the entire brotherhood of pirates.

He could not put his finger on it, but something about the courier was very, very wrong. Her overwhelming beauty and sexual magnetism was a clue. He would find other ones, he suspected, in short order.

Then again, there was virtue in taking his time.

Especially as the means he intended to use were highly erotic in nature. Methods that would, as a pleasant happenstance, result in him enjoying the woman not only as a mental conquest but a sexual one as well.

Chapter Two

Theryssa's hands were shackled behind her back. The pirates had put her on her knees, on the captain's bed, an ancient four-poster carved out of a very rare living gem material found on Zanhus Two.

A collar of old-fashioned steel circled Theryssa's neck. It was attached to a metal chain, which they had secured into one of the four identical metal rings attached to the posts.

They were enjoying themselves immensely, though her pirate captors had no clue, of course, that she could break this steel with her bare hands. So, too, could she have disposed of all three of them on the way down here from the cargo bay without even breaking a sweat.

What a bunch of arrogant fools they were, thinking her just a poor defenseless woman. Especially the baldheaded one, whose name she had learned was Oleron. He was as dumb as he was crass. His hints about his rising power among the crew were hardly subtle.

Nor was his promise to one day become far more intimately acquainted with Theryssa's charms.

"What goes around comes around," he told her, though she had no clue what the man was talking about. Frankly, he was damn lucky he hadn't actually laid a hand on her, or she would not have been responsible for her actions.

The thing she had to bear in mind was that this Oleron was of no more importance than an ant crawling across the blanket of an old-time picnic. He was annoying, but in the end, he didn't matter in the least.

Her job was to figure out what Azar was up to. And that meant letting herself be chained to the bed like a common wench, a lot of horny grinning males drooling over the sight of her.

"Please," she begged, laying it on thick, "don't hurt me."

They left her alone in the captain's cabin, happily snickering. Never realizing that she was already well on her way to getting what she needed. So far, in fact, she was collecting intelligence faster than a spy droid operating full throttle in a nest of Calossian gun runners. Less than an hour in pirate custody and she had already gained a working knowledge of their engine and weapon's systems as well as a good sense of their fighting capability.

Scanning ship computer schematics with her hypersensitive brain waves and monitoring internal communication systems was the easy part, though. The hard part

remained. Namely the collection of intelligence for the Council. Information about Azar's connections to the Narthians and to other pirate groups.

One thing she had picked up on so far was some surprising hostility among the crew. Not all the men supported Azar. Their body language, the motions of the eyes of certain members in the captain's presence spoke volumes.

And that did not begin to approach the blatant dissension she had witnessed in the little incident between Azar and one of his lieutenant's in the hallway, the one called Oleron.

The underling Oleron had been seething under his breath, and Azar had called him to task. Azar had made a fool of the man, dominating him thoroughly. Theryssa had to confess to feeling a slight tightening in her belly when she'd watched him draw his sword and upend the baldheaded man.

Were Theryssa a man, she would mark the incident well as a warning of Azar's power. As a woman it signified something else.

Azar was a pirate's pirate. He took what he wanted, including women, and he was first because none dared oppose him.

In this environment, Azar was like her father. The undisputed boss, and so far he looked more than up for the job. Plenty of times Theryssa had rolled her eyes seeing how her mother bragged on Theron and doted on him. But now she could see how a woman would get caught up in a man's aura and she began to wonder if she wasn't a little jealous of the fact that her mother had a husband—a hero and protector. Just like Aunt Seria had Uncle Raylar, another man whom Theryssa followed as a child, seeking his constant approval as she had with her father.

She had to admit, seeing Azar's holoïd and living with his stunning male beauty for so long had done little to prepare her for the real thing. Unlike with most holoïds, he was actually more vivid in person. More charismatic, too. She could see the attraction women must feel in his presence, hell, she could feel it herself.

Try as she might, she was like a moon being drawn into orbit. Those eyes, so deep and compelling, that rock solid form. And that cock, outlined beneath his skintight britches. Wild, half hard, promising a woman pure bliss at hyper-light speeds.

It was said that women loved by him were ruined for others. The Princess Galina of Menos One, having been held hostage by Azar for a fortnight, had begged to remain behind as the man's slave rather than resume her ransomed place on the throne of her home planet.

Had Azar lain with her on this very bed? Certainly it was equipped to keep a woman subdued, what with the iron rings in the posts. A female could be chained any number of ways, including spread-eagle on her back.

Theryssa felt a tingle down her spine as she looked at the rack of floggers on the wall. They were made of quaint leather, of varying lengths and styles. Beside them were hooks on which hung chains and shackles. Was it all for show or was she getting some insight into the man's sexual tastes?

She could only imagine if she were an ordinary woman, really trapped here, looking at all these things, and awaiting their owner to come back to his cabin. Were she not imbued with primale blood, were she not a Guardian, she would be at this moment, little more than a possession at the sexual mercy of a potential sadist.

What a relief that wasn't the case.

Strange, though, how a part of her felt a little twinge of regret...at not being able to experience such emotions, or face such erotic dangers. Given her genetics, three quarters primale and one quarter fem, she shouldn't be feeling things like that.

According to her Aunt Seria, however, there was more to life than genetics.

"You might be seventy-five percent primale by blood, Theryssa, but you are also a hundred percent female. And sooner or later, hormones are going to trump DNA."

"When will that be?" she had asked her Aunt.

"When you find your lifemate." The beautiful Seria had smiled.

Sometimes she envied her aunt and her mother for the love they had in their lives, though Theryssa did not want a lifemate of her own. Relationships were too complex. She wasn't all that interested in sex-making partners, either. Most men bored her. And those who weren't boring tended to be too self-absorbed and shallow. The really good ones were off limits, having devoted themselves fully to careers, especially in the Guardian Corps.

She had to laugh when her father gave her lectures. He thought she was still a virgin and she didn't do anything to correct him on that score.

Damn it, why did the man keep floggers in here? The place was intimidating enough with the animal skin rugs on the floor and the snarling animal heads on the walls. The latter being interspersed with an assortment of spears and other deadly sharp weapons. What really got her, though, was the painting on the wall opposite the rack of floggers.

It depicted a woman, incredibly graceful and beautiful. She was on her knees, naked, save for a tight, jeweled necklace, almost a collar. Her back was arched and her thighs were wide apart. She had her head back, mouth open, tipped up, her tongue stretched just far enough to catch one of the drops of rain falling in the forest around her.

Her pussy was totally exposed, the lips glistening wet. She had placed her hands behind her head, fingers interlaced. Thus was she rendered completely helpless.

Theryssa had never seen an image so scandalous and at the same time, so erotic. The tension in her body, the expression on her face made it clear she was in subjugation. A slave. And yet she seemed so completely at one with nature. So very free.

She felt her mind drifting as she sought to fill in the details. Who was the man who had put her in that position? To whom was she kneeling, so much in another's power that she dared not break position to seek shelter from the rain?

Who was the man she called Master? Was this a painting of a real woman? Someone Azar knew? Galina, even? What if it were she in that position? What if she were forced to abase herself, exposing her sexual heat to a male...to Azar.

What a sight she would make. The rain dripping from her hair, beading on her breasts, plinking off her swollen nipples, running in tiny streams down her belly and between her legs. Her own fragrant scent mixed in the air with the smells of the forest, wet earth under her knees, wet moss and leaves...and a wet, throbbing pussy.

Open for Master. Hot and ready to be stuffed full of hard cock. Or maybe he would take her mouth, conveniently opened, lips already parted.

Would he ask her what she wanted, what she needed? Would he make her say the words she feared most?

Fuck me, Master. Throw me down on the forest floor. Fuck me in the dirt and the leaves. Fuck me in the rain. Take me like an animal. Hard and nasty. Make me come, again and again, make me scream out so the whole forest can hear me and every creature in it...

Azar, pinning her down, underneath his rippling muscles, letting her feel everything a woman should. The delicious surrender that even a fem could enjoy at the hands of any ordinary mem.

Or, what if he could take her further? Let her experience what an obedient feels when she becomes the absolute sexual possession of her primale? Indeed, what if she could feel the orgasm of an obedient—that release which was said to be the most profound of sexual pleasures in the world?

A pleasure that began with the meeting of eyes...the matching of wills. That eternal male-female exchange which in this case ended up with one of them wearing a collar of brilliant jewels, obeying, like a pretty, beloved pet.

Yes, my Master, come to me...and tell me what to do...

"I see you are enjoying my artwork."

Theryssa started at the sound of Azar's voice. The blood rushed to her face as she realized she had been rubbing her thighs together staring at the picture...daydreaming as she knelt, shackled on the pirate's bed.

Quickly she hopped off onto the floor, stretching the chain on her neck as far as it would go. "I demand you unchain me immediately."

Azar smiled at her, turning her insides a few hundred degrees hotter. He was regarding her with the amusement of a predator, a big cat, in the company of a small, fluffy rabbit. "I see you've lost some of your initial fear."

Theryssa frowned. He was referring to her sudden show of spunk. It was in sharp contrast to her earlier performance as the ultimate helpless, ditzy damsel.

Stars, this was going to be a hard line to walk. Not being too tough or too weak, all the while holding her temper in check so as not to bust out of her chains and give the pirate a sound thrashing.

Something felt very wrong about that last idea, that of beating up her handsome, alpha male captive. Would he really be that easily overcome? She didn't see why he wouldn't be, being that he was an ordinary man and she was imbued with primale power.

It was a pity, in a way. If ever someone looked like a primale, it was him. In fact, she had never felt this attraction to any primale, not even the strongest among the Guardians.

Theryssa ground her teeth.

There she went again...playing with mental fire. It was suicide to wish for this man to be stronger than her. Not to mention a complete betrayal of her mission. She was to collect her information and escape scot-free.

Strange how she hadn't considered taking *him* prisoner and forcing him to reveal the information. Her superiors hadn't suggested that either. She wondered why.

"I just want to go home," she said, making what she hoped was a reasonable statement coming from the mouth of a captured female courier held by deadly pirates. "Please...won't you just let me go?"

Azar moved to the wall with the rack of floggers on it. Her stomach tightened. Was he going to pull one down? What would she do if he sought to apply the leather to her skin? She couldn't allow herself to be flogged like a common slave.

No, it wasn't a flogger he wanted, but one of the knives. It was a long, jagged one, with a two-sided blade. For a moment she thought he might attack her. Her muscles flexed in readiness to break the shackles.

She would have snapped them like twigs, had he threatened her even one iota.

"You see this instrument?" He held the knife up in front of her, maintaining a safe distance of several feet.

Theryssa relaxed her guard, but only a little. "It would be pretty hard not to see it."

Damn it, she'd used sarcasm. Definitely not in character for a damsel in distress.

The remark earned her a second smile from her handsome captor. He was definitely analyzing her, testing and probing. She would have to be more careful. This was not a stupid man. Far from it.

"You're right, the question was rhetorical," he acknowledged. "As for the knife, this is the blade which I once used to defeat an entire squad of Zanamian Assassins, eight in all, armed to the teeth. Their commander tossed it to me as a joke, prior to what was supposed to be my execution."

"Oh, my," she said. Was he trying to scare her? How was she supposed to answer? He was expecting her to say something. Revealing that she was turned on by the thought of him fighting so valiantly and that she wanted him to throw her down on the bed and ravish her would probably not be in order. "It's such a...big knife," she observed.

"Yes, it is," he agreed. "Does it frighten you?"

She suppressed a smile of her own. The poor man was so clueless, really. She could disarm him and shatter that precious weapon of his in seconds if she wished.

Still, this didn't stop her from fantasizing about him battling Zanamians to the death. Was he bare chested at the time, she wondered?

"I-I can't lie...yes, it terrifies me," she replied.

Blast it, why hadn't she thought to say that in the first place? It would have fit in perfectly with her role.

The pirate pursed his lips. "Funny, you don't seem frightened," he noted, innocently enough.

"I'm hiding it deep inside."

Oh, fuck, this must be sounding so corny.

"Really? That's a new one on me," said Azar. "Generally women are pretty vocal, at least in my experience. Being chained up, no escape, my knife so close to them, tends to make them pretty expressive, hysterical even."

"I don't want to make you angry by saying the wrong thing," she offered.

"It's not a matter of saying the right or wrong thing." He shrugged. "I suppose it's just a matter of my expectations."

"Your...expectations?"

"Yes, I will admit I have never thought of it in those terms, but I suppose I have some expectation as to how a woman will act when confronted with a knife, by a murderous pirate such as myself."

Damn it, was he playing with her?

"Well it is my first time," she pointed out. "Having a knife pointed at me and all..."

"Granted," he nodded. "I can see where that might leave you at a loss. Might I ask you a question, though?"

Theryssa frowned. He was being way too polite and charming for her liking. "Yes?"

"Are you expecting to be ravished?"

Theryssa felt instant heat between her legs. Was he reading her mind?

If only she wasn't on a spy mission. If only this man wasn't a sworn enemy, she would be able to strip the clothes from his body, bare those fine muscles, and kiss and lick every inch of that bronzed skin of his.

A natural man. Born of a woman. Not a test tube. He was like an animal in the forest. Raw and completely...sexual.

"I am at your mercy. I know that."

Actually, it might be great fun to have him at her mercy, too. She would chain him down, mount his magnificent cock and ride him until he came, spurting helplessly into her hot, tight sex.

The pirate ravished by the woman with super genetics. Now there was a twist on the old kidnapping plot. How would he react? Something about him was so different

than she'd expected. He was dressed like a pirate, doing a damn good job as one...but there was more to him.

Why did she feel like he was play acting as much as she? She'd love to ask. She'd love to drag the truth out of him.

Except she couldn't reveal herself. She had to keep her powers under wraps. For as long as necessary to get the information she needed. And if that meant playing along with the man's sex games, then that's what she would have to do.

Up to and including pretending to be overpowered.

And pretending to like it, as well.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, though, she could see Seria smiling indulgently, reminding her of the damn twenty-five percent fem that might make her enjoy it for real.

"You seem quite agreeable." Azar moved toward her, seemingly oblivious to her internal chaos as he touched a finger to her cheek. He was so much larger than she, seemingly so much stronger. "Are you telling me you will not fight me...no matter what I choose to do to you?"

His finger sent waves of raw energy, like hyper-drive fuel, coursing through her veins. She opened her mouth, which was suddenly quite dry. "How...could I?" she said, her voice a hot whisper. "As strong as you are?"

"Fighting is an instinct. You are offering me reason." Azar brushed her hair behind her shoulders, arranging it as if she were already his woman, to do with as he chose.

The tenderness, the heat of his eyes on her made her melt. If he were to ravish her now, she would not need to fake surrender.

"I will release you from the chains." Azar slipped the knife into his belt and reached for a key in a small pouch beside it. "If you promise to be good."

She suppressed a sudden urge to tell him to shove it.

Her eyes darted to the jeweled handle. She could, if she wished, take it from him and hold him hostage, even dispatch him. That is, if she could stop her body from trembling.

"You hesitate. Is it that you're afraid you can't be good or do you like being chained?"

"Neither," she snapped, unable to stay in character.

He smiled, looking much more the pirate. "What are you? Obedient or fem? Surely you're not obedient."

Try primale, asshole, as you're about to find out. "I'm fem."

His hand moved to caress her arm. It was an itch and a scratch all in one. "That's too bad."

"Why's that?" she whispered.

"The things I'm going to do," he rasped, "are better suited to an obedient."

Her mind surged with the implications.

He's going to take me...use me.

"Do you know yet who I am?" he asked casually.

Her heart pounded. "No," she lied.

"I am Azar."

"Oh."

"You know me?"

"Everyone knows you."

"What about me," he queried, "do people say?"

She swallowed. How much of her real knowledge should she give? "They say you enslave women. Steal ships."

"So they do."

She recoiled slightly – very out of character – as he reached for the steel collar at her neck.

"Don't be afraid little one," he rasped.

I'm not your fucking "little one", she wanted to shout. I'm a trained warrior, and I'll see you rot on a prison planet for the rest of your life before I'm done with you.

On the other hand, there was something almost endearing in it...

She couldn't succumb, though. He would have her eating out of his hand, like Galina, begging to be used and abused.

"There, much better," he approved, removing the collar. "Now I can see your lovely neck."

Theryssa felt her cheeks pinkening. Suddenly her neck felt quite naked.

"Let's see about those wrist shackles, too, shall we? Turn about, little one."

He had said it again. Like he had the fucking right to give her pet names. Quickly, she turned her back before he could see the expression on her face.

"You do realize," he undid her cuffs, "there is no hope of escape from this ship. Even if you managed to get out of my quarters."

So you say, buckaroo.

"I understand."

"You should call me Sir," he suggested. "From here on out."

"I understand," she let the charged word off the end of her tongue. "Sir."

Azar whirled her about, catching her completely off guard with a kiss. His lips were red-hot, searing against hers. Her initial resistance gave way to openness, complete and total.

He had her. The fucker had her.

His tongue was in her mouth. Probing, playing with her, like she was any captured maiden he was about to possess. Desperately, she fought to keep her wits about her, even as her nipples pushed against him, hard as pebbles.

His body was so firm. She could feel every muscle. His cock was rising, too, against her delta, pressing between her damp, needy thighs. She could feel her arms lifting, her own hands, wanting to hold him.

How she had dreamed of this moment, masturbating over his image, picturing his cock, hard and exposed, sliding inside her, conquering her sex, making her his lover, his object of plunder.

Stars, she wanted him to be a primale, strong enough to just take her.

But that would destroy everything.

At last he broke the kiss. He seemed perfectly calm and in control, unlike her — she was on the verge of panting.

"Tell me your name," he said.

"Theryssa," she breathed. "I'm Theryssa."

"Theryssa." He weighed the sound on his tongue. "That is a beautiful name. It suits you. Such a pity it was chosen at random. By computer."

But it wasn't, she thought. My name is a combination of my parents', as I am a combination of their love.

"Your name," she said, "it's natural, like you."

His eyes showed pain. She didn't understand why. The fact that he was born of a woman's womb was one of the main things that made him so fearsome, strange and formidable.

"This isn't about me," he dismissed. "You're the prisoner, Theryssa. You're the one who will answer...or face punishment."

Her pussy sizzled. "Yes, Sir. And I thank you, for the compliment. No one...no one's made my name sound so good."

"You are unique," he told her.

Theryssa was lost in his eyes. So very deep and complicated. Was this man good or evil?

"Indeed," he continued, "I do not recall ever running across a courier with such a beautiful name. Or face."

She gasped inwardly as he caressed her cheeks with the tips of his fingers. She was completely helpless as he moved to her mouth, running them across her lips. Light and wet and teasing.

Electric surges shot down her belly. Spasms gripped her pussy.

He was staring at her intently. But what was he thinking? She could imagine all kinds of things. Not least of which was taking his fingers inside her mouth and licking and sucking them.

"You should know, Theryssa, I will interrogate you. Thoroughly and without mercy."

Theryssa arched her back. She wanted him to touch her breasts. To rip off her uniform and bare her swollen globes, not to mention the rest of her. She wanted to be naked. She wanted...everything.

"I'll tell you whatever you want to know," she assured him.

"Yes, little one, you will."

The way he said it, it was like he was inside her already, enjoying her body, making it sing.

Slowly, agonizingly, he moved his damp fingertips down to her chin. He tipped it back ever-so slightly, so he could touch her neck. With thumb and forefinger, he took her pulse. "Your heart is racing. Are you nervous about something...or just scared and aroused?"

"I'm...scared."

He angled her head backward a little more, so she could no longer see what he was doing.

"And aroused," he repeated, brushing his finger over a single nipple, all too evident against her tight uniform.

"Yes..."

"But not nervous..."

"Why would I be nervous?"

He touched her other nipple, making her moan softly. "Perhaps you are concealing something."

"You only have to ask me..."

"I want you out of your uniform, Theryssa. Release yourself from it."

"Yes...Sir." She gave the voice command, initiating the opening sequence in the tiny computer brain concealed in the emblem on her breast. At once the courier's uniform divided into two halves, right down the middle of her chest. Simultaneously, seams opened on her sleeves and down each leg. The built-in boots did their own separating routine.

Theryssa had only to lift each foot and take a step forward. She was naked now, entirely exposed to the pirate's viewing pleasure.

"Stand for me," he said. "Over there."

Azar indicated a place in the center of the cabin. She walked on tingling bare feet. The thick, white fur was luxurious against her skin. Theryssa fought an overwhelming desire to lie down upon it, feel the surface of it against the rest of her body.

Hands at her sides, goose bumps on her skin, Theryssa put herself in position, under inspection by the sexiest, most devilish man she had ever encountered.

"You stand like a soldier," he said, his tone neutral.

Theryssa considered her posture. Damn it, he was right. Instinctively, she had stood straight and tall, almost at attention. A captured damsel would display a good deal more modesty.

Quickly, she cupped her hands over her pussy, her lips puffy and moist against her equally damp palms. She hunched her shoulders, too, trying to look a little more overwhelmed.

Azar stood there watching.

Damn it, could he make her feel any more self-conscious? She clenched her toes, digging them into the fur. By the second he was gaining more control over the situation...and over her.

"You covered your sex," he observed. "But I can still see your breasts."

She moved to rectify the situation, quickly realizing that left her dripping wet pussy exposed. She moved to cover her mound, only to leave her breasts vulnerable. "I can't do both!" she protested.

"No," he agreed, "you can't. Reason tells a woman that. But instinct...that makes her want to try nonetheless."

Theryssa was losing her patience. Cat and mouse had never been her game and she was not about to start now. If indeed he saw through her disguise, better to find out so she could devise some new strategy. "I'm sorry I'm not meeting your expectations for a hysterical kidnap victim. I'm doing the best I can."

The pirate was nonplussed. "Tell me, Theryssa, are you a virgin?"

"No," she stiffened. "I am not."

"You have made sex with many men, or only a few?"

"Enough," she replied curtly.

"You would consider yourself a good lover, then? You know how to please a man?"

"I haven't heard any complaints, if that's what you mean."

He nodded. "I didn't think so. And tell me, do you like being a fem?"

"It's all right." She shrugged. "It's all I know."

"Indeed. You've never had the chance to explore any other part of yourself."

"I know who I am." She was tiring of the game. She wished he'd step up the pace.

"You won't ever submit to a single man as husband," he mused. "No fem ever will."

"We all serve our function."

"For who? The corrupt Council? The power elite?"

Theryssa had to hold her temper. This was her family he was talking about. "The Council serves humanity."

"How, exactly?" He snorted.

"For one thing, they keep us all from being NARTHIAN bug food."

"Maybe death is preferable to some, than living a life dictated by another."

"That's easy to say when you live out here all on your own, doing whatever the hell you want. Some of us humans take responsibility for the race."

She watched him pull the knife from his belt. Here it comes, she thought. Badass pirate show time.

"Theryssa, if there is something you want to tell me, about your real identity, this would be the time to do it."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm a courier."

"Really? So there's nothing special about you?"

"Nope."

"In that case, I think I'll let the crew use you for a while. Fems like superficial sex, right?"

"You know it," she gave it right back.

"You will be taken, Theryssa, by a hundred horny men. They will come in every orifice, unless you seek my protection."

"I think you're bluffing. I don't think you like to share."

He weighed the knife in his hand. "You may beg me nonetheless," he said, not bothering to look up at her, "to not share you with my crew. You may beg me. On your knees."

"Go to hell."

The invective slipped out before Theryssa could catch herself. Meanwhile, Azar was making his move...

The events of the next few seconds took place so quickly she was not able to sort them out until afterward, when she was holding the dagger, having snatched it out of midair at lightning speed.

"You son of a bitch," she screamed. "You were going to kill me."

Azar's arms were folded across his massive chest. "It is as I thought," he said, revealing that he had thrown the knife directly at her head as a test. "You have primale genetics."

Theryssa's heart slammed in her chest. What a fool she was. She could have dodged the blade or thrown herself to the floor, maybe allowing it to graze her. But, what could she say at this point?

Damn it, what had given her away in the first place? He must have been pretty sure of himself to risk her life like that, or did he care so little for her existence?

"Never mind that — what if you'd been wrong?" she demanded.

Azar stood his ground. "But I wasn't."

"You could have been...and I'd be dead. Not that you give a damn." A part of her was angry at this. Another part was a little sad. She had hoped for something more from him. But why? He was a ruthless pirate.

"That's a moot point, Theryssa. What you need to focus on right now is telling me the truth."

"Why should I? The cat's out of the bag. We both know there's nothing you can do to control me. As a matter of fact," she glared, "I think you're the one who'd better start taking the orders."

Azar continued to be unfazed. A fact that was more than a little unnerving. She could tear him limb from limb. Didn't that bother him just a little? Or was there more here than met the eye on his part as well as hers?

"You gave yourself away the minute I walked in," he said, as if she'd asked him for an explanation. "The way you held yourself in those chains made it obvious. You could break free any time you wanted."

"Bully for you. Remind me to send you a galactic detective's license when I get home."

Actually, his accomplishment in guessing her identity seemed to rank more in the category of super-sleuth-works-small-miracle than rudimentary observation. He was hiding something here, too, but what?

Theryssa ordered her uniform back on her body. The material slid back up her skin, like a banana being peeled in reverse. Instantly, she felt her confidence rise.

"Speaking of which," she informed him. "Since we both know what I'm capable of now, I would like you to take *your* clothes off and put your hands on your head. It's time I did a little interrogating of my own."

Azar shook his head. "I'm sorry, that's not going to happen. Guidance computer," he addressed the empty space above his head. "Initiate self-destruct sequence alpha. Ten second countdown."

"Acknowledging captain's voice print," chimed the melodic voice of the machine. "Sequence initiated. Ten, nine..."

"What the fuck are you doing?" Theryssa demanded.

"I am destroying this ship, Theryssa, and everyone onboard."

Great Supernova – is the man completely insane?

"You wouldn't dare go through with that." She attempted to maintain her calm. "You'd die, too. And your whole crew."

"We all die sooner or later." He shrugged. "A pirate lives every day as his last."

"Seven," said the computer, as if to rub it in how nightmarishly real this was. "Six..."

"You would really die before surrendering to me?" Theryssa asked, feeling a whole new layer of awe for this man. Not to mention blind terror.

"Yes, Theryssa, I would."

"Four," the computer confirmed, ticking off yet another second of existence.

"What do you want?" Theryssa blurted, unable to resist the call of her survival instincts.

"Your submission," he said simply. "In no uncertain terms. You will yield to me from now on as any ordinary woman."

"Never," she hissed, desperate to call his bluff.

"Three, two..."

Azar folded his arms. "Well?"

He isn't bluffing...

"Done!" She exclaimed.

"One..."

"Swear it upon your honor."

"I swear!" she cried. "Now stop it, damn you!"

"Abort destruct sequence."

"Zero..."

Theryssa shut her eyes. Fuck. There went her mission.

"Destruct aborted."

She opened her eyes again. The ship was still here. As was she. And Azar, too.

Her momentary thrill at being alive evaporated as she considered the implications of what she had agreed to.

Yielding to a pirate captain...as an ordinary woman.

Azar's hands moved imperiously to his hips. There was no mistaking his readiness to enjoy his prize. "Get on your knees," he dictated. "You will present yourself to me. Naked."

Theryssa's belly clenched. She had never felt so hot and weak in her life. As the clothes fell away, so did her lifelong protection.

Thanks to her promise—which she could no more break than she could turn against her people and work for the Narthians.

For all intents and purposes, she was a normal female...not to the world but to this one man. The worst possible one to be helpless before, too. Because, unlike any other in the world, this man seemed to understand her weaknesses.

Weaknesses that had to do with lust...and maybe more.

Her heart thumped in her chest as her clothes fell away. She was nude again, but it was different than before. More real and profound. More excitingly dangerous.

This time she felt genuinely stripped. Exposed.

More naked than she had ever been in her life...

She took a deep breath, her head swirling as she tried to sort things out.

So much for the supposedly foolproof plan they had sent her in here with. All hope was not lost, however. She was pledged to obey, but not necessarily to tell the truth.

Her mission would go on. She would remain undercover, continuing to collect data on Azar. She would, however, need a new cover story. Her guise as Theryssa, innocent female courier caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, had been unmasked, but she could come up with something else.

The problem was she wasn't sure what more he might know already. She was the first of her kind—how had he even known to look for such a possibility as a woman with three quarters primale genetics, in effect the very first primefemale?

What if he had spies working close to the Council?

A chill went down her spine as she considered that he might have known all along that she was a Guardian and who her parents were. In effect, he might have lured her into a trap.

In that case, she was going to have to fight her way out of here or else end up being a hostage. She couldn't imagine her father or mother caving in to any demands for her release, but she could never take that chance.

She would do anything to avoid that. Anything at all.

"I'm waiting, Theryssa."

The sound of his voice jarred her back to reality. She was naked, in front of her gorgeous and dangerous captor, whose breeches were currently being stretched by a mammoth erection. He had given her orders, the first she was to follow as the man's submissive.

She went down in slow motion, her body trembling. At last, her knees touched the thick fur. It tickled her skin, making her senses come alive. She could smell tobacco in Azar's cabin, and rum on the shelf. She could smell the leather of his boots, as well—so very close to where she knelt for him in subjugation.

He took several steps forward, and now she could detect the musk on Azar's skin. Mixed with raw testosterone. His boots pressed the fur as he moved. Closer and closer. She could almost hear his breathing, the raw desire, and behind that the hum of the ship's engine.

The raw power vibrated through the metal floor beneath the furs, and reverberated through her unclothed body.

His approach seemed to take forever. Each step stretching to interminable lengths. No doubt this was part of his strategy—to make her needy, jittery. Horny.

He stopped a foot away. She licked her dry lips at the sight of his leather-covered shaft. Larger than life. Almost close enough to taste.

"Knees apart," he directed.

Theryssa hesitated. Nothing was holding her down here. Except her damn honor. Sometimes she really hated being her father's daughter.

Maybe she could break her oath. After all, the man was a pirate. A real cutthroat. A man who could not begin to understand the meaning of integrity.

Azar did not take kindly to her delay. Reaching down, he seized the back of her hair in his fist, balling it painfully. "I gave you an order, young lady."

Theryssa cried out, her eyes watering. It was the shock more than anything else. The man was daring to treat her as if she really *was* some ordinary wench – an obedient, even.

Funny, he was so sure she wouldn't rebel. Didn't he realize her power? He seemed pretty familiar with it, so why put himself at risk like this?

"You're hurting me."

"That is the price of disobedience. Keep it up and I will take the flogger to you."

Theryssa slid her knees apart on the fur, complying with his earlier order.

"Wider," he said, not letting go.

Theryssa opened her thighs as wide as they would go. Her pussy was going wild. She would take any kind of attention now, the rougher the better.

He released her hair. "That's better."

"No it's not," she shot back. "It's inhumane. Don't you ever do that again. And don't call me young lady anymore, either. It's insulting."

"You are younger than me. And you're a lady..."

"I'm a woman, damn you."

"You're a female," he compromised. "In the keeping of a male." Azar ran his hand over the top of her head, lightly caressing her earlobe for emphasis. She tried to jerk away, but he snapped the fingers of his other hand, keeping her in place.

"Never seek to deny me your body, little one. You are mine to touch as I please."

Theryssa shivered. What he was doing to the tender flesh of her ear was having direct consequences in other parts of her body. Consequences which were distinctly detectable in the sweet scent emanating from her forcibly displayed sex.

"This isn't fair, Azar."

Azar laughed. She loved the deep, rich sound of it, like coffee from the far reaches of the rim forests of Fralos Ten. "It isn't designed to be a fair arrangement, angel. It's designed to maximize my enjoyment of you, as a captured commodity."

Theryssa did her best to fight back the gyrations, her pelvis pushing forward against the air, only to retract in favor of thrusting breasts. It was bad enough he had to tease her body, did he have to call her sweet little names, too?

"I'm not your commodity," she insisted.

"And yet your body is responding exactly as I wish it to."

"I'm going along with this because I have to. That's the only reason."

"Is that so?" His amusement was obvious. "In that case, I'm sure you'll want to resist me as much as I'll let you. Every step of the way."

"Damn straight." She gritted her teeth as he touched the back of her neck, sending icy hot spikes up and down her spine. "I'll obey you, but I will let you know how much I hate it. And if you leave a loophole, I promise I will take it."

"I consider myself warned." Azar took her hands, lifting her back to her feet. "Undress me," he ordered.

Theryssa could barely stand. As he let go of her fingers, she nearly fell to his feet. He was like a magnet of maleness, a singular powerful mass, drawing every ounce of strength from her.

She dared not take a single breath, lest he see even more clearly the state of her body. Swollen nipples, puffy red lips—above *and* below. Tight, contracted belly, quick little half-breaths, each of which only served to make her breasts feel a little more swollen, a little more achy and needful of his squeezing hands, his biting teeth and warm mouth.

Theryssa sucked in her lower lip, feeling the blood inside coursing against her teeth. She would never be able to do this. Not without losing her mind. There was no telling what she might say. What she might do.

Agonizing seconds passed between them.

Azar measured her defiance. "Are you planning on being a bad girl, Theryssa, or a good girl?"

Hearing him call her a girl did things to her. It was a scandalous thing to say, more demeaning than "young lady", and she knew from the light in his eyes that he was playing with her, waiting for a reaction.

Frankly, Theryssa felt a bit of both. A bad girl and a good girl. Mostly she wanted to be on the floor, where he could pound her into submission with his cock. She reached for the front of his vest. It was made of an animal hide, the front of it held together with rawhide lacing. Feeling just a little galvanized by his latest prod at her feminine independence, she opted to tease him.

"What if I am a bad girl?" she wanted to know, determined to beat him at his own game. "Will I go over your knee?"

"Is that what you want, Theryssa?"

"What do you care what I want? I'm your slave, right?"

"A Master can be generous with his slave. I've possessed hundreds of women and I have bestowed kindness on them all."

Theryssa didn't like the idea of other women for some reason. Was he trying to rub it in her face? As if she cared. "I'm not going to compete to be the highest notch in your belt, I hope you know."

"You already are," he floored her.

Stunned, Theryssa tugged the lace in the key spot. Like a snake, it slithered free from the holes, causing the two halves of the shirt to part ways. She had to catch her breath as his chest came into view. The awesome abs, the incredible pecs. And such a

tight waist. You could not design a better male in any laboratory. Primale genetics were a joke compared to this.

At least on the outside.

What a bizarre thought, that with her small female body, she could bring this man to his knees. For real.

And yet he wanted to be kind to her...

"No. I just figured it was part of your whole macho trip."

Azar claimed her ass, grasping it easily, possessively, with a single hand. "Have you ever been spanked, Theryssa?"

"No." She attempted an expression of disgust, though what she felt was far different. "You know corporal punishment isn't allowed on Earth."

"Obedients are spanked."

"That's their business."

"Actually, it's their mates' business. Tell me...primefemale. Are you mated? We heard a few of you were being made. It was a matter of time until one came this way."

"I'm single," she said, attempting to end the conversation.

"Indeed. You aren't alone, though. You have some purpose in being here. And we will find it out, won't we?"

All too painfully she was aware that he could draw her against him now, her bare pussy against his leather breeches, her breasts against his smooth, hairless chest.

And that did not begin to cover the emotions roused by his sudden play for dominance. Taking a physical hit from a male in a wrestling ring or martial arts contest was one thing, but humbly accepting smacks to one's naked behind as a prelude to sex-making was quite another.

Theryssa had to draw a line here. Without breaking her promise, she had to let him know there were limits. The question was how to get that message across.

"Being spanked is an experience," he shifted his grip. Azar was drawing her closer, his index finger creeping lower, within dangerous proximity of her labia. "Some women find it quite arousing. Obedients can't live without it."

"I can't imagine why." She stiffened, trying hard not to breathe. Oh, stars...he was grabbing her ass. She tried to squirm free, keeping the conversation casual.

"It's the loss of power, I suppose. The feeling of sexual surrender."

She moved to brush his hand off her ass, an attempt to get her way without exercising primale force.

Azar's grip was steel. For a minute she wondered if she *could* get loose.

His gaze narrowed. "What are you doing, Theryssa?"

"I'm..." Oh, fuck, she was cheating, that's what she was doing.

"You weren't trying to take my hand away?"

She swallowed, unable to lie. "Yes..."

He clenched her behind. Hard. "Whose ass is this, girl?"

There was only one answer. "Yours."

His hand lifted and fell, smacking her efficiently, masterfully. "I touch this ass when I want, how I want."

"Yes, Sir," she breathed.

He pulled her closer. She didn't resist.

"Whose pussy?"

She gritted her teeth, knowing what was coming next. "Y-yours."

"And if I want to touch it?"

"You may."

"Any time? In any way?"

"Yes..."

"Beg for it, Theryssa."

"Please," she tremored, feeling the mounting heat of anticipation. "Touch my pussy."

He gave her another spank, hot and degrading. "Whose pussy?"

"Yours, Sir," she responded quickly. "Please touch your pussy."

"You're quite wet," he observed.

She couldn't help moving against him. "Yes, Sir."

"Stand still," he chided.

Theryssa whimpered, all her dominance and power lost. She couldn't strong-arm him if her life depended on it now. He'd played the gender card. Appealing to the obedient in her, not to mention the one hundred percent that was female.

Theryssa tried her best not to move as he slid his fingers to the second knuckle.

"You're not only wet, you're close to orgasm," he said.

Theryssa tried one last attempt to regain her dignity. He wanted her helpless and begging and she was determined to deny him the satisfaction. "What do you expect?" She smiled bravely. "It's a mechanical reaction."

Azar caressed her clit with his knuckle. "I think you're splitting hairs. A reaction is a reaction. Your body is telling its own story."

Fuck, he was right – damn her female hormones.

"But...it's not real." She stifled a moan.

"It seems real enough to me."

"You're not really in control," she protested, trying not to sound too terribly shrill or desperate. "I'm letting you. Because...of my promise."

"Ah, yes. I'd nearly forgotten. Your super powers." The fucker sounded like he was mocking her. "The ones that would let you resist me to the bitter end."

"The ones that would let me lay you out flat on your arrogant, ignorant ass, more like," she hissed.

Azar lifted his hand and spanked her again. Nothing erotic this time, just pain. Theryssa squealed. Hardly a proper reaction from a Guardian under torture.

"Are you out of your mind?" she cried.

Azar punished her again. "Hold still," he ordered, precluding her attempted escape.

Theryssa put her hand on her buttocks. Hot and throbbing. He had really done it. The son of a bitch was treating her like an obedient. "That hurt you sadistic fuck."

Azar took possession of her nipple. "You will not swear at me."

Theryssa sought to hang tough, but he pinched her harder and harder. "All right," she whimpered, "I won't."

He didn't let go. "Was that kind of language allowed growing up in your common house?"

"Yes...no."

"Which is it? Did you even have a common house? Bet they kept you in the test tube until you were full grown."

"I have parents," she spat. "They loved and cared for me."

"How sweet." He let go of her nipple. "Take off my pants, spoiled primale girl, raised by her parents."

"I wasn't spoiled."

He pushed her to her knees, making her feel really overpowered. Impossible.

"Did you have little test tube brothers and sisters?"

"Only me." She opened his breeches.

"Bet you were daddy's little girl."

If you only knew who he is, she wanted so badly to say.

"Daddy's little girl," he repeated. "A pirate's slave."

He wore no undergarments. His cock sprung out fully erect, long and thick, uncircumcised. A prominent vein was pulsing underneath. His balls were full and tight.

"How about mommy? She an obedient?"

"She's a mix, like me."

"A freak, you mean."

"Don't say that." She covered her ears.

"Freak!" he roared. "Freak."

Theryssa didn't mean to cry. The stress of the mission, the captivity, dealing with this strange, paradoxical man. "I...I thought you might be human, but you're a monster."

He lifted her by the hair. "You will not cry."

His face was in anguish, twisted. As if realizing what he'd done, he grabbed her and held her tightly. Tighter than she had ever been held in her life.

At once she felt protected and secure, but she was also overcome with need.

"Theryssa," he said softly, "I'm sorry."

She began to rub her nipples against his chest and press her crotch to his, begging penetration. The only thing on her mind, in her world was quenching the submissive fire he'd ignited. "Use me, Azar...Sir."

"Not like this," he kissed her neck, inhaling her scent. Bend down," he commanded. "And take hold of your ankles."

She was momentarily confused. He helped her, turning her about and putting her into position. Facing away from him. Her hindquarters exposed. To the air. To punishment. To him.

Theryssa gasped as she felt him pressing her crack—the tip of his rock-hard cock poised to enter her desperate lips. He was going to fuck her...at last.

Oh, god, Azar...yes...take me.

She did not dare speak the words aloud, on account of how much power it would give him. He was insufferable enough as it was.

"I want you, Theryssa," he croaked. "You can't imagine."

His fingers splayed on her back, sending shivers up and down her spine. She clenched and released her toes, every breath like a knife stab of waiting. "Azar, oh, stars, don't make me wait."

His cock was right there, aligning itself. Any second now...

Azar thrust his cock deep and hard, a slide down her canal, filling her totally and beyond redemption. The heat threatened to melt her insides, but still she wanted more. She squeezed him with her super muscles. He matched her. His hands clamped at Theryssa's slender waist, assuring her complete impalement. She groaned as his massive shaft retreated momentarily and then pushed back, deep into her. She was so open and wet and ready, accepting every last inch of him.

Her body exploded on the third thrust.

It was like she had never been fucked before, like this man was the first, his cock blazing a trail for all the rest to follow.

The first of the orgasms came from down deep in her toes. It had been building from the moment she had laid eyes on his image, reaching its crescendo here, with all their charged dialogue and his arrogant claiming of her body.

No man could do this to her, and yet this one was.

And she was taking it...coming and coming and coming. Even as he smacked his balls against her tender, spanked ass cheeks, pushing her to greater and greater limits.

"Mine," he growled. "My pussy...to fuck...and own."

"Yes...own it, own me," she said, lost in the heat of the moment, unable to see beyond to the very real impossibilities of the High Councilor's daughter submitting to a pirate on a permanent basis.

"My good little girl, my good little slave."

Theryssa screamed out, a fresh orgasm overtaking her, this one coming through every nerve ending, opening her thoroughly to the man's predations. Deliciously wicked and scandalous, demeaning and enrapturing all at once. Like a flame igniting her entire being, burning her right down to the ground.

"Yes, my Theryssa," Azar rasped as he reached around to grasp hold of her breasts. "My reborn angel."

What did he mean? Theryssa wondered, her fleshy globes pulsing and aching in his viselike grip. What exactly did he want from her and who did he want her to be? How far was this game going to go?

If indeed it was a game at all.

Theryssa felt a fresh spasm as Azar readied himself to come. By the goddess, he was swelling up, and getting hotter, too. If she didn't know better, she'd almost think he was more than a normal male...

But no, that was impossible. This man was a pirate, raised on an outlaw planet. There was no way he could have any artificial genetics at all, let alone the DNA of a primale.

She was imagining things, she had to be.

Azar leaned back, releasing a mighty roar. His semen came in hot bursts, thick shooting streams filling her canal. On and on, until she felt like she might explode. So hot...not like the mems.

Once again she thought of the times, brief though they were when she had lain with primales. Fellow students at the Guardian Academy. Her father would have had her hide if he'd ever found out. Aunt Seria had smirked, warning her to never tell a soul.

She hadn't told anyone, nor had she ever thought about it again until now. It was just that this experience was feeling so familiar.

What if it was true? What if...

No. She couldn't let her mind play tricks on her like that. She had been in space a long time, that was all. She was still a little susceptible to space madness.

In fact, she might be dreaming this whole thing. Yes, that was it. She was only imagining Azar fucking her from behind. In a few moments, she would come to, safely in her little space ship, still on her way to meet him.

She would have a good laugh over the whole thing. And then she would turn around and head straight back home.

Unfortunately, this particular Azar refused to vanish into the mist of fantasy. Withdrawing his cock from her twitching, burning sex, Azar ordered her to attend to him.

"Lick me clean," he said.

Theryssa's jaw dropped at the sight of him. Dripping as it was with his come and hers, the man's erection had not flagged in the least. If anything, he was harder than before.

There were only two ways that was possible. One, the man was some kind of android, which seemed highly unlikely, or two...he really was a primale.

And if that was true, she would have an entirely different possibility on her hands. Namely that she was not a prisoner in name only, but in reality.

There was only one way to find out. Theryssa was going to have to test him, just as he had tested her.

Chapter Three

One look at Theryssa's eyes told Azar of the woman's suspicions. He had been careless, giving her far too many reasons to suspect he was more than he appeared to be on the surface. At more than one point, he had nearly shown his primale powers, kissing the very breath from her body in their initial embrace. He had been unable to sufficiently control his cock, either. He had wanted her so badly there was no way he could have kept himself from swelling beyond normal proportions.

Too, he had filled her with far too much semen, and at a much higher temperature than any normal man should be capable of.

And now he was standing there, after such a titanic ejaculation, still as hard as ever. As though he had not come at all. How could she not suspect something was going on?

Quickly, he willed his erection down.

Theryssa watched it decline to half mast, though her body was still on high alert. Given the tension in her limbs, he was fairly certain she was going to try something foolish.

Would she openly break her promise to obey him? He doubted that highly. But she had already warned that she would take advantage of loopholes.

In short, Azar expected an escape attempt in the near future.

He would have to handle the situation with extreme care. He must let Theryssa think she still had the advantage as the only primale in the room, and yet he must also make sure she did not actually leave the cabin. For her safety as much as anything. Strong as she appeared to be, he could not take the chance on Oleron and the others overcoming her.

He simply would not allow harm to come to her. Whether she realized it or not, he was actually guarding her with fierce intensity. Nothing he was doing would bring harm to her. Even the little test with the knife had posed no threat, for had she been unable to deflect it, he would have used his own augmented reflexes to save her from the blow, either deflecting the blade or moving her at lightning speed out of the way.

Whether she knew it or not, he would die before he let harm come to her. No woman had been able to do this to him. Not since Solania. He'd suppressed the primale protection desire with every female after her. He'd forced himself to be as a mem, sleeping with anyone he wished.

It wasn't easy, but it was possible.

He wasn't a slave of Council genetics. He could be as he chose. Just as he had fallen in love with Solania in the first place—a fem, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

The first time he's seen her dancing, she had taken his breath away. By law he should never have pursued her, never talked to her. Instead he had made sex with her that night and within two weeks had made plans to marry.

The Council had other ideas. They had sent Theron, a junior Guardian then, to warn her away. She had become despondent and gone for an air-car ride to clear her head. She had taken it off autopilot. No one could ever be sure how the accident had happened. She had hit the dome full speed.

His fallen angel.

By the gods of vengeance, he had called Theryssa his reborn angel...in the middle of sex-making with her.

What was happening to his life? First the call for peace from the Council and the letter from Theron, attempting to explain about Solania and now this...the dark haired beauty come to him like a ghost.

He needed to get control of himself. Her life was not important, only the information she could provide as to who had sent her and why.

Because where information lay, there was always power, in one form or another. That's what women were for. They were power. Directly and indirectly.

The fact that he had never made better sex with a woman in his life, not even with Solania herself, did not matter. Nor did it make the least bit of difference how his heart raced in her presence and how her eyes and smile and indeed her every feature, intrigued and captured him beyond measure.

Never before had he been this intoxicated by a woman. Making sex with her, far from sating his curiosity, had merely whetted his appetite for more. What would she be like the second time and the third and beyond?

What if he were to become completely entangled in her dark-haired beauty, in the magic of those green eyes, and the grace of those lithe limbs? He was thirsty for her and hungry. And not just for her fair form. He wanted to know the inner woman, too. What made her tick and what her hopes were, and her dreams.

Dangerous indeed was this unexpected package snatched from the depths of space. His instincts had been right. But it was too late to cast her back out. She was his to deal with. For the long haul. Until he could determine her identity and find some way to get her home safely. Wherever home was.

In the meantime, he must continue on in the role he knew best, that of plundering pirate. It was one he had played for well on two decades. Ever since Solania's death. That terrible point of delineation marking his self-exile from everything he had ever known.

"You were given an order," he reminded Theryssa.

She looked at him, conflict evident in her eyes. "You don't really expect me to..."

"You will lick my cock clean," he confirmed. "And you will do so to my satisfaction or I will display you naked for the pleasure of my crew."

Theryssa tossed her dark curls. "No one else can look at me naked. That's not the deal."

He couldn't help but smile. For all her obvious courage and strength, she was so very female. "Want me to keep you for myself, do you?"

"Don't flatter yourself. I'm just sticking to the deal."

"The deal is obedience, young lady. If you choose not to honor your responsibility, I can and will punish you as I see fit."

Theryssa frowned. "Real men don't need to humiliate women to get off."

He watched her approach, in spite of her protests. "Does it humiliate you to give a man pleasure?"

She stood face to face with him, defiant. "Make no mistake, Azar," she squared her jaw, "there isn't a thing you could ever do to me in this lifetime to take away my pride."

Her eyes were shining like emerald fire. What a marvelous creature she was. Any man would be honored to have her at his side, in battle, or in peacetime for that matter. Did she have any love interests, he wondered. It would be difficult for her. She wasn't a fem, which meant no mem would dare touch her. She wasn't an obedient, either, which meant most primales would avoid her like the plague.

Were there any more like her? What game was the Council playing at this time? When he had served as a Guardian, back in the days of Marax's command, he had been aware of certain experiments. Plans to create hybrids on a mass scale.

Not all of the Council members had approved. Chief among the opposition was Malthusalus. The debate had reached a point of open conflict and Malthusalus had fled, fearing arrest. He and others had begun a campaign of subversion, designed to return society to its old ways. Azar, known then as Azariel, was sympathetic to Malthusalus' ends, though he could not condone acts of terrorism.

Even after the death of Solania, he could not join up with the infamous rebel. Instead, Azar had tendered his resignation from the Guardians and headed for the Outer Starfields, well beyond the influence of either the Council or Malthusalus' agents. Concealing his primale powers, he had signed on with a crew of space pirates, and over time, came to be king among them.

He used his forces to attack the Guardian ships, which he considered fair targets, but he was no friend to Malthusalus, and certainly not to the Narthians.

"I have no wish to take your pride," he told her. "Or anything else that you do not give freely."

"I shall give nothing," she said.

He smiled, enjoying her thoroughly. "Then I shall have nothing. Except a bath, my sweet, with your tongue."

Daggers shot from her eyes. His cock swelled with thick, hot need. This proud beauty was all his...and in a matter of seconds, she would be servicing him.

And why not indulge himself a little? He was still in control here and he could stop things whenever he wanted.

His pulse raced as she lowered herself to her knees, her lips even with the tip of his shaft. "Take your time, love. We're in no rush."

"If I were you," she advised, her hot breath on his balls, "I would give me specific orders not to bite your cock off, otherwise I won't be held responsible for my actions."

Azar laughed—a deep roll from his belly. "Have you any idea," he queried, "just how charming you are?"

"No. Do you have any idea what a pig you are?"

Azar caressed the top of her head, doing the one thing he knew would infuriate her most. "That's enough, little one. Time to tend to your work."

Theryssa made a noise, indicating her anger. Any further protests, however, she kept to herself. Instead, she extended her tongue and tentatively touched the tip of his cock.

Azar ran his fingers through her thick hair. "Yes, baby, that's it."

"Don't call me that." Theryssa slid her tongue underneath, running the top of it along the thickly protruding vein. Azar released a low groan. He could see this cleaning exercise was quickly going to turn into something else entirely.

"I mean it in the best way, I assure you. Put your hands behind your back, Theryssa. Clasp them."

The new position accentuated her breasts as well as emphasizing the helpless servitude of her position. She was shackled now by something better than steel—his will.

Her eyes were closed. She was working tenderly up his shaft. What was she feeling? Was she as immersed in their connection as he was? He made a mental note to return the favor. Later it would be her facing the pleasures and tortures his tongue on her sex.

"Oh, Theryssa," he rasped, "you sweet, mysterious thing. I want to shove my cock in you so far. I want to make sex with you...for a hundred years without stopping."

Theryssa's pace quickened, as did her ardor. She had managed to reach the base of him and now she was working back to the tip, along the side. As she reached the tip again, she took care of the small drop of pre-come, dabbing it with the end of her tongue.

Was that a trace of a smile he saw on her face?

She did his cock head next, her tongue making luxurious swabbing motions. When she had managed to cover every inch, Azar took hold of the sides of her head and guided her underneath. One by one, she took his fully loaded balls into her mouth. Her sucking motion was sweet and gentle, natural and perfect. No captured female had ever done it better.

Had she received some kind of training? What was the Council trying to do, develop a race of super-powered pleasure women?

"That's enough." He tugged her head back very gently, almost like a dream, his fingers interwoven in her hair. He hardly needed to guide her as she sought his cock again, this time with her mouth opened into a sweet, accepting oval.

The opening was cock-shaped, and he went between her lips, as if in a dream, when you feel like you've come home to the very source of pleasure in the universe.

Theryssa's jaws were slack. She was surprisingly relaxed. He sighed his affirmation, as he slipped into the pocket of her cheeks, sheathing himself. He wanted to be completely immersed, but he knew her mouth could not take all of him. Finding the back of her throat, he pulled quickly forward again, so as not to overwhelm her.

She showed no signs of gagging. In fact, she was trying to suction him back in again—harder, faster.

With both hands, she covered the exposed part of him, forming an extension of the tunnel made by her mouth. He reminded her that she was supposed to have her hands behind her back, but he wasn't much disturbed by her willfulness, especially as it was designed to increase his pleasure.

Theryssa made a slurping noise. She was a hungry, eager little thing. By the gods, if the male members of the Council had known the possibilities of feminine primale power in the area of fellatio, they would have made millions of women like this.

Azar gripped her shoulders, steadying himself. It was very tempting to ejaculate this way—into her sweet mouth. He wasn't going to, though, not until he was sure just how much experience she had actually had with primales.

Obviously she wasn't a virgin and she didn't seem totally freaked-out by his super-powered cock, but Azar was considered to be extra potent, even by primale standards.

In his younger days, it had often taken two, even three pleasure women to satisfy him over the period of a single night. He had not wanted Solania to mate with him for that reason. He had feared what might be unleashed should he become fully bonded with a woman. Such a level of possessiveness and sexual demand might be more than a woman could handle.

Solania had been a brave woman, however, and very stubborn, too. She had refused to take no for an answer. She had pleaded and begged, tirelessly working to make Azar see that she was the one female made for him.

I cannot live without you, she'd said, so why should I ever fear what might happen with you?

There was no way to argue with such logic.

Ten times he had ejaculated inside her, all the while bringing her to countless orgasms, both clitoral and vaginal.

They enjoyed one another in every conceivable position, their bodies covered in sweat, limbs intertwined, hearts slamming in unison, blood pulsing – two systems made one. He scarcely knew where she ended and he began. Time and space disappeared. There was only his sweet, curly-haired redhead, with her small, perky breasts, pale white skin and rounded, eminently spankable ass cheeks.

When the loving was done, she came to him on all fours, a collar and leash in her teeth. Laying it beside him where he reclined on the bed, she begged him to collar her, put her under his discipline.

"Do you know what this means?" He brushed the hair back from her forehead to gaze into her pretty brown eyes.

"It means you will be my Master," she said.

Tears in his eyes, he affixed the leather around her slender throat, the chain leash hanging between her breasts.

"Beat me," she whispered when he was done, her finger touching the collar in awe and astonishment.

His cock popped to full erection. Half crawling, half scrambling, she made it onto his lap. He had her mount him sideways, so he could spank her while he was inside her.

Solania screamed, orgasming with each spank. Her pussy clenched him tightly, the helpless spasms driving him onward to more and more punishment. Twice he came inside her that way, until her ass was red and twitching between blows.

"Clean me," he ordered her.

Eagerly, Solania fell to the task, the words "Yes, Master" pouring hotly and submissively from her lips.

Azar steeled himself against the power of the memories. Something about Theryssa was making him feel it all again, like it had just happened. What was going on here? If he was supposed to be in charge, why did he feel like he was losing control by the minute?

And this was with Theryssa on her knees in front of him, his erection deep in her mouth, silencing her willful tongue. How much worse would it be in a more equal position?

Time to find out.

Consider it another round of testing. The seasoned pirate primale and former Guardian against the up-and-coming superwoman. No holds barred.

And may the better person win.

* * * * *

Theryssa was only sucking Azar's cock under duress. She wasn't really enjoying it. And she was going to tell him that, at the first available opportunity. The fact that he tasted so wickedly pungent, so totally male and salty sweet meant nothing. As did the

fact that she was stuffing him down her throat, trying to inhale him like a greedy little eager-to-please obedient, her pussy on fire and demanding a fresh injection.

If anything, she was being ironic, sarcastic even, showing him how totally opposite such behavior was to her true nature.

In truth, she hated his pulsing heat, the way he was playing her, sliding in and out, controlling how much she got of him at any given moment. If he thought to break her, he had another think coming. She was a free woman, a Guardian, with a fine lineage, and she would never beg a man for anything sexual, least of all a pirate.

Hate was a bad emotion, though. It was the flipside of another—the totally wrong one to have here. She decided to refocus on feeling neutral. This was a mechanical act and she was going through the motions. Just like they practiced going through Narthian bug torture.

Granted, Azar was no bug. He was more like a god dropped from the depths of space into her lap.

His hands were at the side of her head. He had her hair insolently twisted in his fingers. No man had ever dared to treat her this way, using her precisely as he wished, for his own pleasure. Even the primales she had known treated her with kid gloves. For while it was not generally known who her parents were, it was clear she was someone special.

The first female in the Corps. That distinction came with a certain aura. To top it off, she was primale herself, which meant she fought for control in every encounter. Her primale lovers, though few in number, tended to direct her to the weaker brand of males, the mems. These were more than happy to bed the beautiful Theryssa, though they promptly found themselves in over their heads.

Most ran like hell, though a few enjoyed it. Theryssa, however, was profoundly frustrated to find herself taking on the dominant role. Having a man on his knees in her presence was not a particularly great turn-on. Although her rage at the moment made her more than a little anxious to turn the tables on Azar.

The question was, could she actually manage the feat? When the time came to make her move, would he fold to her primale strength, or would he reveal himself as what she suspected him to be—some kind of rogue primale himself.

She was pretty much convinced of the fact. No natural-born male should be able to keep up an erection like this. Nor should he have been able to shoot her full of what felt like a gallon of sticky, hot cum inside her. The way he was keeping hold of her head, too, gave her this uncanny feeling of a whole lot of latent power.

Plus there were the intangibles. The way he stood here, expecting her to pleasure him, as though it was his right, as though she had no hope of real resistance.

Theryssa was fighting strong emotions in the process. The idea that she might be a real prisoner right now...a slave, even...was making her pussy drip. He had told her he wanted her again. And he sounded like he wasn't going to let anything stand in the way.

She remembered the time when she was eighteen and she had inadvertently discovered her friend Urella pleasuring a mem in the back of a dimly lit orbiting dance club. Urella was a fem and not an obedient, but it was clear enough she was able to give in to some pretty deep female surrender urges as she had taken her lover's cock all the way to the back of her throat. The mem had been pumping her like mad, his fingers wound around her long blue hair, manipulating her mouth like a pussy.

Urella's face had been lit with pure bliss. Her jaw had been slack and her hand had been between her legs, underneath her short skirt. She'd been making herself come, even as the mem had worked her.

His eyes had been closed and his teeth gritted, and Theryssa remembered being so jealous because at that moment he had been so completely into Urella and she into him.

A few moments after the tall blond mem had ejaculated inside Urella's mouth, they'd switched positions, so he could eat out her pussy. It was at this point that Urella had looked out and seen Theryssa.

Theryssa had run off, all the way home. She'd never spoken of the incident again, and when Urella had pressed her to talk, she'd stopped seeing her.

Theryssa had always been that way. Stubborn like her father. Her mother knew this, and had given up dealing with both of them years ago.

Azar stopped Theryssa's rhythmic motions, breaking her reverie. Removing himself from her mouth, he helped her back to her feet. "Tell me," he said. "What you want now."

"From you? Nothing," she lied, squeezing together her throbbing, engorged pussy lips.

"Your nipples are hard," Azar noted. "I assume that's just another mechanical reaction?"

"Yep. I'm cold," she replied, tightlipped.

"But you're sweating."

"Must be space flu."

His lips angled into a rakish smile, one part gorgeous, two parts infuriating. "Got that flu in your pussy, too?"

"Fuck you."

"Pinch your nipple, Theryssa."

The order took her aback. "What for?"

"I don't have to explain my orders, young lady. But if you must know, it's punishment. For being disrespectful."

Theryssa wanted so badly to say something even worse. Instead, she said, "No."

"If you don't, Theryssa, I will."

Theryssa took hold of one of her aching little buds, figuring she would get off easier that way. "There? Are you satisfied?"

"No, I'm not. Do it harder."

Theryssa applied a little more pressure.

"More."

"That's enough," she said, wincing.

"Pinch it for real, Theryssa, or I will put you in chains for the night."

The blood left her nipple. She brought a whimper to her own lips. "Azar, please."

"You may apologize."

"I'm sorry." Theryssa's pussy flooded afresh. The man was being so strong with her, so firm and...masculine. He was tolerating nothing, just as if she were his obedient, mated and fully submitted.

"You may let go," said Azar.

The release of her nipple brought a fresh wave of pain, hot and pulsing and sexual.

"You may thank me for disciplining you."

"Thank you," Theryssa whispered, her eyes fixed intently on his feet.

"Is your pussy wet?" he wanted to know.

"Yes."

"Show me."

Theryssa moaned softly. Under his command, her fingers moved to her own opening. She tremored, collecting the required evidence.

"Taste it."

Hot and helpless, weak as a kitten, Theryssa sucked her fingertips.

"What do you taste?"

"M-myself," she said, stuttering for the first time in her life.

"Speak up."

"I taste myself," she declared, his stern tone making her startle.

"You taste your come?"

"Yes...I taste my come." The word made her feel invaded, taken by the man. Far from wanting to fight, however, her body was craving more. Like the moth that hovered dangerously close to the burning power of the fire.

"What do you want?" Azar repeated his earlier question.

The lesson was not lost—of Azar's power in the situation. And her lack of it. "I want to make sex," she said, giving him a better answer this time around.

Or at least what she thought was a better answer.

"You speak in Council euphemisms, Theryssa. I want to hear you spell it out, in plain English."

"I want to fuck," she corrected.

Azar remained unsatisfied. "Do you wish to fuck, or be fucked? There is a difference."

Theryssa swallowed hard. Damn straight there was a difference. Fucking meant equality, *being* fucked was something else altogether. "I guess you're looking for me to tell you how I want you to fuck me..."

"Do you?" He was standing half a breath away, his eyes intense upon her—cool and clear, like a predatory cat. He was acting as though he had all the time in the world and not a bit of desperation to contend with.

She, on the other hand, was a mass of need, her confidence evaporating, her will melting in the heat of her passion. "Azar," she pleaded, "don't make me..."

"I'm not making you do anything, little one. If you have no desire to continue our time together, I can put you in irons, or remove you to a cell. The choice is yours."

"Azar, you know I'm aroused..." She put her palm against his chest, barely grazing his smooth skin—a velvet covering to rock-hard muscle.

He grasped her wrist. His grip was like steel. Could she break it? Her head was swimming. Of course she could. She was just getting a little delirious.

Azar held her arm over her head. "It doesn't matter what I know or don't know. I asked you a question, and I want the answer."

Theryssa felt as if she might faint. If he were to let go, she would slip to the floor, weak as anything. What was going on here?

"Yes," she whispered, her chest rising and falling under the man's imperious gaze.

"Yes, what, Theryssa? I do not want to play games with you."

"Yes, I want to be fucked. By you."

Azar released her. "Describe it. Tell me, exactly."

Her mouth was dry as a desert planet. Why was he doing this? "I-I just want you to fuck me with your cock."

"More," he demanded.

"I want your cock in my pussy," she supplied. "I want...I need it inside me."

"Touch yourself. Tell me how badly you need it."

"Yes, Azar..." She moaned softly as her finger tips traveled down her tingling flesh, over her undulating belly to the delta of her thighs. "Oh, god, yes." She flicked the tip of her swollen clitoris. "I need it very badly. I need it fast and hard."

Azar reached for her nipple and gave it a punitive tweak. "You're not talking about my cock. Tell me how you want my cock."

Her moan turned to a half-groan, peppered with pain. "I want...your cock." She arched her back, thrusting her breasts out masochistically. "I want it...pummeling me. So hard and fast. Filling me...driving me into the ground. I want it to own me and brand me and mark me..."

Azar showed no mercy. Grabbing the other nipple with his free hand he pressed her even farther. "Make yourself come, Theryssa, and tell me how badly you want it."

"I'll do anything," she cried, her fingers racing up and down her slit. "I'll crawl for you, Azar...I'll beg."

In the back of her mind somewhere, she thought of Galina. The princess who had turned slave. Was this the same road that other women had traveled with Azar?

"That's it, little one," he encouraged, manipulating her pinched nipples. "Give it to me. Give it all to me."

The things you will never take, but which I will freely give...like my pride. Isn't that what you mean?

Theryssa shook her head, attempting to resist. Azar broke her with a kiss. Hot and hard and punishing. As she yielded her mouth to his plundering tongue, she found herself giving way below. Whimpering, sweat pouring down her forehead, she took the only option left, riding the overwhelming outpouring of sex, fingers stuffed obediently in her pussy.

Never before had she experienced a climax as a complete and utter act of subjugation to another's will. It was his command, and therefore his fingers inside her. The fact that he was not orgasming, but merely manipulating her at his leisure, only reinforced the feeling of being controlled.

And then there were his fingers playing with her nipples, squeezing and releasing, tantalizing, raising her high and bringing her low, mixing the pain and pleasure into an indescribable soaring.

There was no mistaking it as his own recipe, a unique blend against which Theryssa stood not a chance of keeping her freedom. Up, over the mountaintops, through the atmosphere and into space. Out to the nearest star for an explosion, a supernova blast—enough searing heat to melt matter.

Never had she masturbated like this. Never had she breathed like this.

When it was done, she could not bear to be released. Sucking on her lip, nearly to the point of drawing blood, she fell against him, shivering. It was not a matter of craving release now, but one of holding herself in one piece. Body and soul, she felt like she was falling apart. Drifting away on a cloud.

She needed his touch to be reminded she was real. And she needed his cock to be sure she was still capable of feeling anything.

"Touch it," he whispered, his breath hot in her ear, his teeth lightly nibbling at the lobe.

Theryssa did not need to be told what it was he was requiring her to touch. She drew a sharp breath, holding it. Her fingers moved in slow motion, down to Azar's cock.

Oh, god, he was throbbing. And so big and hard. Much bigger than before. She retracted her fingers, as though electrocuted.

"Touch it," he repeated.

Theryssa returned her fingertips to where they belonged. Tentatively, luxuriating in the feel of him, she ran them up the length, all the way to the base.

"Wrap your fingers tight."

She did so, marveling at his thickness. The vein underneath pulsed, responding to the pressure. Azar remained impassive, a study in utter self-discipline.

"Tell me what you want," he said, his voice bearing only the slightest edge, husky and sexy as hell.

It was their third go-round with this particular question and this time she was more than ready to give him a down and dirty answer. "I want to be fucked, Azar. I need you to fuck me like an animal. I need you to make me scream, and fuck me into submission."

Azar ran his fingers through her hair, tilting back her head. "I am going to take you harder than I have ever taken a woman, Theryssa."

"Yes...I want that," she croaked. "I need it."

"On the rug," he said. "I am going to have you on the rug."

"Yes..." It was perfect. He would subdue her and fill her and possess her. Exactly as he pleased. Not on any civilized bed, but on the surface of an animal fur, as soft as it was barbaric. "On the rug..."

His eyes never left hers as he made his move. One hand behind her back, supporting her as he lowered her to the floor. With the other, he was already staking his claim, running his capable, strong fingers up and down her torso, sending rivulets of pleasure up and down her spine.

Theryssa was on the verge of another orgasm.

She cried out softly as her buttocks touched the thick, absorbing surface of the white animal fur. Azar had set her down perfectly, with the grace of a dream. But there was no mistaking the ferocity of his intent.

"Mine," he loomed above her, his hand moving between her thighs.

Theryssa felt the spasms deep inside. Foreshadows of climaxes to come. "Yours," she replied, opening her legs. The statement was acknowledgement and surrender and foreplay all at once. As admissions went, it did more to turn her insides to jelly, head to toe, than all the touches of all the men before her in her life.

She had but one purpose now, one goal.

Azar's cock.

"Please..."

He possessed her in a single motion, using his hand to guide himself home. Either his erection had shrunk back down or she was much more open and ready this time, because it was an instant, easy fit. She had expected a much tighter fit, given how large he had appeared earlier.

Once again she was reminded of the power of primales to change the size of their erections at will, in the same way mems could direct their chests to puff out or recess into concavity.

Was that what was really going on with Azar? Could he really be a superman in disguise? The evidence seemed to be mounting.

That was as far as her thought processes were allowed to go. Azar had her occupied with other things.

Gathering both her hands into one of his, he pinned her wrists over her head. "You will not come without permission," he dictated.

Theryssa arched her spine, attempting to free herself. He pushed her back down. Was she trying her hardest? Was he? It was all so hazy. Which one of them held the real superiority?

For the moment, Azar did, at least as far as the sex went. Her body had its needs, its cravings, and those were leading her directly into submission. The fact was, having her wrists held down was exciting, all the more so for how it would have made her furious any other time.

So was having her body so intimately controlled. This man had dared to take away her most fundamental right – that of orgasming as she saw fit.

She would have to get permission...

The idea scandalized and thrilled her.

"I want to come now," she declared, deciding to test his power.

"Permission denied."

Bastard. Would he really try to stop her? Assuming such a thing was really possible if she wanted to badly enough. And what would he do if she disobeyed?

"What must I do to get permission?" she asked.

Azar shifted position, managing to sink his cock even deeper inside her pulsing sex. "You must tell me who sent you. And what you are here for."

She shook her head bravely, hiding her uncertainty. "I'll never do that. It's not in me to betray those I love."

"Then I will climax alone."

"You wouldn't be that mean."

Azar shifted again, this time withdrawing almost to the halfway point. "I'm a pirate," he reminded, clearly toying with her. "It's in my blood."

Theryssa felt the immediate emptiness. Damn it, she needed that cock in her and he knew it. "There's more to you than being a pirate," she attempted to distract herself from her desperation. "I can feel it."

"You're a woman," he dismissed. "You feel too much."

"I'm my father's daughter, too," she said. "Remember, you told me that?"

"Daddy teach you to disrespect your elders?"

"No. Just outlaws."

"Some people are driven to do what they do."

"Funny, I never heard a pirate apologize for plundering."

"And I never knew of a Guardian who squealed while getting a simple spanking."

"Screw you," she reddened.

Azar bent his head, taking a single ripe nipple between his teeth. He bit it. Just hard enough. Theryssa cried out, though she dared not writhe in her current state. Holding herself absolutely still, she took what he had to give.

Pleasuring and tormenting.

"Azar," she sighed his name, totally breathless as he let the nipple go.

"You will surrender to me. Completely. You will not hold back."

"Yes, Azar."

Stars, did he intend to interrogate her during sex?

"Do not move," he commanded. "Relax your body, completely."

He was compelling another level of subjugation, depriving her of even the pretense of resistance. Never had it been clearer to her in her life what it meant—the difference between fucking and being fucked.

Slowly, almost painfully, Azar lowered himself, filling her once again. "Look into my eyes," he said. "Do not look away."

She had to watch him dominating her.

"You haven't a clue, Theryssa, what I've been through in my life. I lost everything that mattered to me. All I have is my fight...and it's your fight, too, and the fight of everyone who wants to be free."

Her eyes watered. "But we are free. Why can't you see that. My par—the government is good," she corrected the near slip.

"It's not real life. You love who you're programmed to love." He settled himself to the hilt. Angling his body slightly, he left room for his hand. For the tips of his fingers to press her clit.

Theryssa leapt under his calculated touch. "But people have choices..."

"Wrong, Theryssa. Love the wrong person, the wrong classification and see what happens."

"Things are changing. There are new mixtures, not everybody is the same old type. Look at me."

Turning them both sideways, he exposed her ass. "I said, lie still."

She yelped as he smacked her exposed cheeks, three times in succession.

"You may thank me," he said.

"For what?"

"For disciplining you."

"Thank you," she muttered, her ass hot and stinging, her pride smarting.

"Are you ready to be a good girl, my horny little Council spy?" He wanted to know.

"I'm not—" She cut off the words. He knew full well how she felt about him calling her a girl. And she certainly wasn't a horny little spy. But that was the point, wasn't it—making something sexual out of pushing her buttons. It was all part of the power game between them.

If you could properly call something so deep a game.

"I'm waiting, Theryssa." He had her twisted on her side, fully impaled, front to front, her wrists still held, his left hand poised to strike her ass again. "Tell me you want to be a good girl, a good lay, a good agent for your masters back home."

She twitched in anticipation. She wanted it. And she didn't. She was anxious to avoid pain...but she needed his strong touch.

"Azar..." It was all so confusing. If only they were just making plain, normal sex. "No."

Azar leaned in closer. His breath burned her earlobe with a tiny, devastating whisper. "Tell me you don't want this."

He was giving her an out. A chance to reject the whole thing. Would he really let her go? She ought to call his bluff. But the thought of being left alone right now, of having him leave her without finishing was worse than anything else she could imagine.

Seconds ticked by, her hollow breathing comprising her only answer. What was she supposed to say with his cock in her willing pussy, her body thrilling to his raw, commanding power?

Azar nibbled at her neck, his hand caressing her sore ass at will. "I'll take that as a sign you want to go on."

Theryssa closed her eyes. She was moving for him, responding under him. Cooperatively. Erotically.

The question came again, penetrating, pouring over her needy flesh. "Are you ready to be a good girl, Theryssa? A good, horny little spy?"

"Yes, damn you," she said, a hissed confession in broken stabs of breath. "I am ready...to be a good girl...a horny spy."

He delivered a smack to her undefended behind. "I hope so."

Theryssa pushed against him, craving.

Azar rolled her flat onto her back once more, compelling eye contact. "I will not allow you to hold back from me, Theryssa." Azar's cock swelled on cue. She also felt the added heat burning deep in her pussy. Like a fire, consuming her, which only he could put out. "I will accept nothing less than your full submission." He clasped her buttock.

"Would you know it if you saw it?" she wondered.

"We will find out, won't we?"

"What do you mean?" She asked warily.

Azar pulled out completely, leaving her bereft of his formidable, glistening shaft. "I mean that it is time to see what you are made of."

She didn't like the sound of that very much. Warily, she watched as he lay down beside her, his miracle cock pointing straight into the air, strong as ever. He put his hands behind his neck, looking quite relaxed.

"You may mount me," he said.

Theryssa's stomach turned somersaults as she looked at his erection, thick and ready. How was she supposed to get on top of it without a stepladder?

Okay, maybe it wasn't that bad. But it was bad enough.

"You have until the count of ten, Theryssa, to take my cock inside you."

Ten...as in the self-destruct sequence, she thought glumly.

Gingerly, she straddled him. Such a fine and perfect body. She could spend the better part of a solar year just worshipping every inch of him, kissing, nibbling, licking and pleasuring his fine body.

Her pussy was dripping wet. Parting pink, swollen lips, she put herself into position. The right angle, the right placement.

"Stop."

Theryssa was squatting over him, the tip of his shaft just separating her labia. Only by her extraordinary physical training was she able to hold the position.

"You will make me come," he said, "without coming yourself."

Fuck. What a bastard.

"Is there a problem, Theryssa?"

Waiting like this was sheer hell. She wanted to stuff him inside her, she wanted to scream and tear at her hair until she exploded into a million pieces. "No...Sir," she denied him the satisfaction of knowing he was getting to her.

"Good," he nodded, "because as you probably guessed, I have a large crew. And I would insist on each man using you at least twice."

"Good, I'd enjoy it, they probably don't talk the whole time like you do," she snapped. He smirked with pleasure. She would really like to have him tied up right now, to give him a dose of his own medicine.

"You may resume, Theryssa. And if I may point out, you were the one talking just now, not me."

Theryssa gritted her teeth. In vain, she tried to will her pussy to be numb. Unfortunately, her primale genetics did not give her the same sexual control as the males. If anything, it made her more sensitive.

Inch by inch she descended, whimpering in sexual agony. "I...need...to...come," she said haltingly.

Azar ignored her. "You have the most perfect body," he noted, taking hold of her breasts. "Your designers knew what they were doing."

She was barely half impaled, but out of her mind already. "Azar, please..."

"Are there any more like you?" He manipulated the soft flesh. "Or are you one of a kind?"

Theryssa was shivering, tears in her eyes. "Azar...I'm pleading with you..."

He remained unmoved. Just as he'd said, her begging would come in his time, in his way. Such would be his complete and utter victory over her.

"You may pleasure me," he said, "with your pussy."

Theryssa sobbed. She lifted herself, only to collapse back down.

"Move," he ordered, slapping her hip.

She attempted to rise, her hands braced on his chest. Each millimeter was molten agony as she sought against all odds to hold herself back from climax. "Come, damn you," she screamed. "Don't make me wait!"

Azar was a rock. "I seem to be having trouble," he teased. "You'll have to go faster."

"Please, I'll do anything, Azar...I'll...I'll be your slave."

By the gods, what was she saying? She sounded like Galina. There was no way he could hold her to a promise like this. It was entirely under duress, in the heat of sexual torment.

His answer pushed her over the edge.

"You already are, Theryssa."

"Fucckkkkk," she screamed, convulsing. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

Azar grabbed her hips, lifting her bodily. As though she was little more than a rag doll, he swung her up to his face and deposited her pussy on his lips.

By the very genes of creation, he was going to use his tongue on her.

I've died, she thought. I've been sucked out of my ship into deep space and gone to horny woman heaven.

Or is it hell...

Chapter Four

Cunnilingus as torture?

Few would think of it as such, but actually, Azar had chosen a particularly cruel form of punishment for his prisoner. If she was going to insist on orgasming without his permission, than she would find herself inundated with them.

Her pussy was sweet like nectar. Her lips opened to him, as if they had been made for his probing tongue. Moving the rough surface across her clitoris, he pushed her immediately into a fresh orgasm.

It was only the beginning of the treatment he intended to impose. Pleasant at first, she would soon find the tables turning.

Before it was over she would be begging him again – this time to stop.

“Oh, god!” She thrashed. “Oh, Azar...god!”

His hands held her hips. She was not going anywhere. Tickling her with long strokes, he wore her last defenses. The last bastions of her pride.

“Fuckkkkk...” She was crying out again, shouting out to whoever might listen.

No one would, of course.

“It’s so...” The words escaped her. Reduced to grunts, she ground her pelvis into his face, bathing him in fresh liquid – pungent and totally female.

He allowed her satisfaction, rolling his tongue into a miniature cock. Over and over she hissed her affirmations. Her body was beyond tense, like a coil, winding and unwinding itself.

“Fuck...fuck me...Azar.”

Azar doubled the speed of his tongue and then doubled it again. Theryssa went stiff – the shooting waves of pleasure going like quicksilver straight to the core of her being.

The next two orgasms were more properly endured than experienced. It was like trying to hold onto a bronco. Each time he took her aloft, shooting her high into the stratosphere. He could feel the raw sex surging through her body, straining her every nerve, exploding every sensitive ending.

She was being battered with pleasure.

The trap was nearly set...

Theryssa was unable to keep from grinding and writhing, desperate to draw him deeper inside her pussy. For a brief few minutes he slowed the pace, letting her catch up, until he had allowed her to think she was regaining control, her fingers clutching his head, her voice urging him on, as if he was there only to do her bidding.

Instead of the other way around.

"More...more...more," she urged, sliding her pelvis up and down. "I...I...need more."

Such sweet motion. Such a beautifully sexual creature. The most amazing he had ever known.

It would be interesting to break her.

His tongue moved in for the kill. Speeds so fast, her clitoris had no time whatsoever to recover. Her liquid dripped over his face. One, two, three orgasms in under a minute.

And still he went on.

Theryssa cried out. She was not really in danger. She would not really be hurt. But she would learn her place in the scheme of things.

"Azar..." She clutched his head. "No...please...I can't..."

He paused for only a second, just long enough to utter a single word. "Beg."

"P-please...no more..."

Abruptly, Azar stopped, lifting her pussy just out of range of his dastardly tongue.

Theryssa's relief was short-lived, as he knew it would be.

Unfortunately for her, she had been left midway to climax number whatever-it-was.

Just like that, her world fell apart. Like an addict, cut off from her supply. "Don't stop, not like this. Azar, oh fuck...don't..." Theryssa was shuddering, shattering. Trying to come with all her might.

He let her thrash a while, like a fish thrown onto dry land. Each time she seemed to be receding from the brink, he ran his tongue quickly over the rim of her sex lips, sending her into a fresh frenzy.

At no time, however, would he put her out of her misery. Eventually, he seated her on his thighs, just behind his cock. She could see it, but not touch it.

"Play with your nipples," he ordered, doubling her agony.

Her face was a study of womanly passion, pink-faced agony brought on by thorough and sadistic male control.

"What do you want, Theryssa?"

And so it was coming full circle, back to the original question he'd posed. The first time she'd been snide, the second she'd admitted her sexual needs. This time, he hoped she would see the deeper lesson.

"I want...I want to be a good girl."

Azar smiled in deep satisfaction. "On all fours," he commanded. "Head down."

She moved into position, her breasts hanging sweetly, her ass sticking out invitingly. He was so very ready to fuck her. But first...the collar.

* * * * *

Theryssa dug into the fur with her fingernails and her toenails, too. A battle was going on inside her, between her reason and her lust. Her reason, which had been asleep up to now was awakening and asking some hard questions.

What had she done? Why had she told Azar she wanted to be a good girl? She wasn't his girl, his slave or anything at all to him. She was a Guardian, an officer working for the Council.

To the extent that she was acting like a horny little damsel in distress, it was supposed to be just that. Acting. Playing the part of the seduced wench—breathless and in heat so as to lull Azar into a false sense of security.

She was supposed to make him lose his cool, so she could take advantage of him.

The trouble was, she really did want to be fucked. Hot and hard and dirty, in all the wicked ways she could think of. On her hands and knees. Pounded with Azar's cock until he had taken every bit of pleasure from her that he wished. Yes, she wanted to be a wench for him. She wanted to satisfy him so much with her body that he never turned to another woman again.

God, did she even know what she was saying? This was worse than letting her lust rule her. This was giving in to the false delusions of her heart. She hardly knew this man and what she did know should tell her to avoid an emotional entanglement like the plague. So why was she thinking in terms of not only fucking him, but keeping him?

He was a cutthroat, for heaven's sake.

She couldn't get over the idea that there was more to him, though. He wasn't just an interstellar brigand with no care for anything but his own purse. There was something he was trying to hide. Almost as though he had a different identity altogether. And there was more to this mission, too. Her folks were up to something, she was becoming more sure of this as the hours passed.

Call it instinct, or just experience from watching Theron and Nyssa at work.

But what *was* really going on? This was some kind of dangerous game here, just on the surface, let alone any secret elements. A pirate was sexually dominating her, after all, and she enjoyed it.

Azar was dominating her...the blue-eyed rogue she had dreamt of and fantasized over all this time. A dream come to life, with his sexy ways and strong loving.

Azar. The only man who had ever rocked her world, launched her to the stars, and set free her soul, all the while commanding her onto hands and knees.

Too bad this dream had so much potential for nightmare.

Her heart pounded as she waited for him. On all fours. As he had ordered. What was coming next? Chains? Other pirates to satisfy sexually? He had her, didn't he? Trembling and naked, spasming inside, like his cock was in there, having its way with her.

He was walking over to the wall. Fiddling with something on the rack. Her body tensed in all its aching vulnerability. Was he getting a flogger to use on her?

Hadn't she been a good enough girl? Wasn't she pleasing him?

Theryssa clamped her thighs tightly, trying to hide her arousal. She was dripping, desperately in need. It was getting too hard to fight. The feelings of being Azar's girl. His nude booty. And everyone knew it, too. The crew had chained her in here, totally aware that this would happen, confident that she would end up a slave, like all the others.

They probably knew, too, that Azar would eventually spurn her, just like those others. That had to be the case, or else there would have been someone in this cabin already, before she got here.

Lifting her head, she stole a peek to see what he was doing.

"Head down," he growled.

Theryssa lowered her eyes instantly. Would she be punished for that? Her nipples throbbed as she thought about the pinching. Or would it be her ass again?

Perhaps if she were able to appease him...with her soft body, her proffered breasts, her pussy. Images filled her mind, of slave girls crawling on their bellies to the feet of their Masters.

"Sit up," Azar commanded.

Theryssa started at his sudden presence. Back on her heels she went. The first thing she saw was the collar. Thin leather, studded with jewels. Like the kind used on pets in ancient times. There was a leash with it, made of metal chain.

"I am going to put this on you," he stated the obvious. "And then I am going to fuck you. Like a tamed animal. I want you to give me your permission to do this."

"Why do you need my permission?" she asked. "When I am already bound to obey?"

"I do not need your permission, I want it. They are not the same thing."

Theryssa shook her hair back over her shoulders. She was not sure why he suddenly wanted her approval, but refusing him was unthinkable. "I give you permission, Azar. To collar me. And fuck me."

"Do you know why I punished you before?"

"Because I came, instead of making you come."

"Yes. As a result, I delayed my own pleasure to tend to your discipline."

"How sporting of you."

"You really are insufferable, aren't you?"

"I've been told that, yes."

"That is what makes you so special?"

"Well that makes you the first guy to say that."

"Oh?"

"The rest think I'm a pain in the ass."

"They were boys. Or idiots."

"They were Guardians."

"There is not always a difference."

"You talk like you know."

"Tell me I'm wrong."

"Only if you promise immunity from punishment."

"How about I use you instead," he suggested, "like the owned wench you are?"

"So long as you know it's only for play. A person cannot really be owned." Her heart was beating like a rabbit's. Was she trying to defy him? Egg him on? Or just confirm what she already feared...that this little undercover assignment was headed somewhere she could not possibly imagine.

"If the collar fits..." Azar wrapped the leather about her throat. His fingers were masterful, but not harsh. How many females had he done this to? Had they all been so willing?

She held her breath as he fastened the tiny clasp and padlock. As far as security went, it was laughable. She could break it between two fingers. But the symbolism was quite real. Locked collars were for slaves. And for all intents and purposes, given her promise to obey the man, that's what she was.

Azar paused to admire her. "You look right this way."

Theryssa flushed hotly at the remark, the redness passing from her cheeks all the way to her breasts. Azar took the leash in his fingers. "Open."

Theryssa parted her jaws, then bit down on the cold, smooth metal chain.

"Even better," he approved.

Her eyes flashed, communicating indignation.

Azar laughed, patting her head. "Fury makes you even more gorgeous. I could only imagine you in a little cage, with your own water dish."

Theryssa's mind turned instantly to rebellion. "Fuck you, asshole," she spat out the metal.

She was already on her feet when he stopped her, using his favorite technique.

"Down," he commanded, controlling her with the twist of a single nipple.

Anguish surging through her veins, her poor nub screaming for mercy, Theryssa submitted on bended knees. "Swear to god, I'm gonna figure out why you're so strong."

"Enough fooling around," he said. "It's time to give us both what we need. Get on your hands and knees, Theryssa. Before I explode."

What a complicated man. Trying to degrade her one minute, treating her like some kind of partner the next.

Of course she was pretty complicated, too. Actually being caged was something that would happen over her dead body. But talking about it...and having Azar threaten it, that was arousing to no end.

"So you like putting women in cages, do you?" She tried to keep the dirty talk going.

"Only if they ask me," he teased.

"What about love?" she asked impulsively. "Have you ever been in love?"

He plunged a finger deep inside her, instantly reconfiguring her priorities. "None of your business...spy."

"Please, Azar, I really want to know."

He played with her, making her pant. She pushed her ass up against his hand, seeking pleasure even as she listened to his answer.

"There was a young lady, once."

"Was she...like me?"

He inserted one finger into her anus, using the others to work her pussy. "There were similarities."

Theryssa moaned, broken. "What...happened?"

"She's gone, that's the end of it."

So were his fingers. She cried out. "Azar, Sir, please, don't...leave me like this."

"I said no questions."

"I'm sorry. I'll take punishment. Please, spank my ass, then use me for your pleasure."

"You'll be punished all right, girl." He got a dildo and a butt plug. The dildo was a slick, cool material, smooth against her pussy walls, titillating but offering no relief. He pushed it far inside her, then told her not to move.

The butt plug was a hard little bastard of a thing. It made her feel dirty, invaded and horny as hell.

"Not one word," he said.

She stayed as quiet as she could. Like a statue. Except she was sweating and fighting off spasms every other second.

Her worst fear was that he would leave her.

Twice he came over from whatever he was doing on the other side of the room to swat her with something leather. His belt, probably.

She whimpered appropriately.

Did it go five minutes or was it an hour until he came by to check on her? She thought he was going to take out the anal plug, but it was the dildo he grasped.

"You'll take me with your ass filled," he said, refusing to take out the plug.

Her buttocks clenched on the anal invader. Her pussy screamed as he removed the dildo, so slowly, shredding her nerve endings, make her feel empty and hot and cold and confused all at once.

"No," she cried, "don't...take it."

"Would you like my dick instead?"

"Yesss..." He had her moaning, her sex spasming in anticipation.

She cried aloud as he touched her, grazing her clit.

"Ready?" he teased.

She shook her head frantically.

"Hold still," he commanded, slapping her ass.

Theryssa shivered as he pushed his cock into place, parting her sex lips. "You'll take it on my terms, girl, or not at all."

"Your...terms," she panted.

He pushed his thickly veined cock an inch or so between her puffy, waiting lips. He was hard and molten hot. She burned at the feel of him, lost to the sensations. She wanted more. She couldn't live without it.

His hands went to her hips, steadying her. She was the perfect target, a vessel for his plundering. He sheathed himself, pushing all the way to the hilt. She felt his pelvic bone and his heavy, full balls.

He enjoyed the position for a moment, readying himself. Then he began his motions, expert, more familiar than before. She sensed he was learning her body, how to please and torment it.

Azar kept her on the razor's edge until she could stand it no more. Her body was quaking. She was dissolving.

One or two more thrusts, to cement his dominance and then he gave the word, the command. "*Now.*"

She came instantly, swallowing his cock whole. Azar kept ahead of her, moving faster and faster.

She couldn't keep track of the orgasms as he masterfully pistoned into her. His fist was in her hair, the pressure just right as he tugged, letting her know he was there, turned on out of his mind, fucking crazy for her, needing this more than air itself.

She was so full, so thoroughly possessed.

"Come," she cried. "Come in my pussy...your pussy."

Azar's breathing quickened. She relished the sound of it, knowing he was taking his ultimate pleasure in her. She could feel his cock hardening, getting ready to shoot itself deep up into her. He was beyond talking, he was all beast, a beautiful male animal using his female.

His growl was like a star lion, from the distant nebula of Tresos. His orgasm was so magnificent, a work of art, liquid wonder to fill her belly...and her soul.

"Yes," she cried a dozen times over. "Oh, fuck, yes."

Azar expelled the last of his come, but he wasn't done. Manipulating the butt plug to keep her at a fever pitch, he continued pumping—as though he had yet to come at all. His thrusts were at near hyper-speed. She had to use primale strength to keep from collapsing forward onto her belly. This was one worked up pirate.

Azar's second orgasm came like a blast of energy, instant, irradiating fluid heat, obliterating everything in its path. Theryssa couldn't help but climax with him. He was a force too powerful to resist. A sunstorm, a moonstorm and windstorm all wrapped into one.

I don't want to leave, she thought, I want to live here in this union, forever. The two of us in a perfect rhythm. Until all the troubles of the world disappear forever.

For the briefest few seconds, it all felt true. But then reality returned. With a vengeance.

She was on a mission, she reminded herself, and this man who was loving her so wonderfully was her enemy. It was her job to collect information and maybe even do battle with him. One day she might even have to kill him, should he indeed prove to be a Narthian ally.

Azar pulled out his cock. It was still hard, still filling her to capacity. The man was still unsated. Was there no end to his desire?

She awaited his next move as he rose to his feet, bidding her to do the same. What was on that devious mind of his this time? It didn't take him long to reveal his plans. In one motion, he lifted Theryssa into his arms. Her heart commenced racing again as he carried her to the bed. His body was so hard and smooth against her, so warm to the touch. How was she supposed to stay strong, a Guardian and warrior, when he kept putting her in the mood for sex-making?

"You will remain here," he laid her down on the fur covered surface. "Until you have permission to get up."

Theryssa sucked in her dry lower lip, thirsty. She was a prisoner in his bed. Naked. The implications did not escape her. Nor did the dark intensity of his gaze on her body. Instinctively, her hands went over her head, palm up on the pillow.

"Take me, again, Azar," she murmured. "I'm ready...I'm a...good...girl."

Azar unclipped the leash from her collar. She held her breath as his fingers worked, so close to her breasts. She could smell him, deep and pungent. His hard cock was so very close, and the rest of him, too—his body dotted with sweat, his muscles corded tightly with fresh lust. She was amazed at how familiar he was beginning to seem.

Her heart skipped a beat as she anticipated penetration. Instead, he straightened, his spine as fixed as that of any Guardian.

"Go to sleep," he said. "That's enough for now."

Theryssa's mouth hung open. She couldn't believe it. He was rejecting *her*? But what about that monster erection of his? "You can't be serious," she said.

"I am not in the habit of making jokes, Theryssa. Especially where it concerns issuing orders to one of my slaves."

Theryssa's pussy twinged in reply to her being called a slave. "I'm your prisoner," she corrected.

"I am making use of your body for my pleasure," he explained. "That makes you a slave."

"So why don't you do that now?"

"I don't want to."

"Bullshit. You're hard as a rock."

"I'm sorry," he shook his head. "I know you are in heat and you need to be ridden hard and long, but that's part of slavery. Your purpose is my pleasure, not your own. If it's any consolation, I will use you first thing in the morning."

Theryssa pulled her knees up to her chest and folded her arms over her breasts. *The nerve of the man.* "Screw you. I don't need a damn thing. I just felt sorry for you, that's all."

Azar moved quickly and efficiently, descending on her and rolling her to her stomach. His hand rained down like fire, peppering her behind with punitive blows.

Tears stinging her cheeks, she cried out her apology.

Azar poked a finger into her crack. Moisture oozed readily. "You are a hot and horny slave girl. Say it."

The sudden pressure to her clitoris mixed with the throbbing from her spanking. "I'm a hot...and horny slave girl," she exclaimed.

Azar rolled her to her back. "Can I trust you to keep your hands out of your pussy until morning or do I need to chain you up?"

Theryssa's cheeks brightened. Beneath her veneer of anger was shame and below that, a sea of lust, like magma bubbling from her core, unknown and threatening to engulf the whole of her. "You have no right," she blurted. "To stop me."

Azar seized her pussy, making clear with the movement of his fingers just how much he considered her to be his property. "Nothing enters here against my will. Not even your hand. Is that clear?"

Theryssa stiffened, a shock of pleasure passing through her. "Y-yes." Her teeth chattered.

He left her unsatisfied. "Go to sleep, Theryssa."

Trembling, she turned to her side. She dared not ask for a blanket. Presently, he shut the lights off and climbed in beside her.

She felt overwhelming relief at his presence. Enemy though he might be, and source of her unbelievable torment, she felt this strange need for him. Somehow, deep down, she knew she was safe here. And that he would never allow real harm to occur to her.

Too, she was afraid to be alone. All that time in space, indeed, for a lifetime before, she had never worried about anything. Did it have something to do with how full he had made her feel before, and how alive? It was almost as if by awakening in her that sense of belonging and connectivity, he had also made it possible for her to feel loneliness.

Hugging herself tightly, Theryssa willed her body into a state of lower consciousness. Her mind was racing and twisting and she needed to get a hold of it. There was only one way to focus at this point, and that was on devising an escape plan.

It was not her intent to actually get away. She merely needed to know if she could. That would tell her for sure if he was primale or not. It didn't have to be anything sophisticated. A simple act of trying to sneak out the door or trying to grab one of his weapons to immobilize him.

She would wait until he seemed more or less asleep and then she would make her move. With any luck, she would buy herself a little time to snoop around his cabin first to see what she could learn about his Narthian connection.

In the meantime, she would bide her time. Turning up her auditory powers, she tried to hear the sounds of any crew members nearby. There were two heartbeats in the corridor, and three more directly above them. The ones in the corridor were awake. Walking.

Idly, she set about matching each heartbeat to the other data she had collected, including voice prints. Before too long, she had a working map in her head, of who was where. The really obnoxious one, Oleron, was on the bridge.

No doubt pretending to be captain.

Theryssa turned to hear Azar's heartbeat. It was very strong. Lulling in a way. Damn, but she was exhausted. She watched him roll to his back. His chest looked so inviting.

Theryssa licked her lips. She wanted so badly to lay her head down. To pretend, just for a little while that they were a normal couple. Her, on leave, and him, fresh from wowing her folks, taking her on an interstellar cruise.

What a foolish little romantic she was. Since when did she like cruises?

Nevertheless, Theryssa did lay her head down, very gently. Just for a second, she thought. But the second dragged out to a minute and a minute into ten. She put her palm down, absorbing his strength. His warmth on her cheek, his chest rising and falling like clockwork to put some order back into her world.

For the first time since Theryssa was a little girl, her eyes grew truly heavy. It was that twenty-five percent of her that was mere fem. She had inherited this from her mother, who was no slouch herself.

Theryssa had always hated this weaker part of her nature, but her mother and Seria both had predicted one day she would come to cherish it. Rely on it even. Was this what she meant? Was it something she needed to have a relationship?

If so, it wasn't going to be now. Not with this man. Pirates didn't have relationships. They kept slaves. At least until they got tired of them.

Funny, though, at points she thought she could sense a bit of vulnerability in Azar. A look in his eyes from time to time. Even in his breathing, there was this undercurrent. Almost a tenderness.

She had to be imagining it.

Stars. Now she was yawning. What was the world coming to?

The next thing you know, she would be having actual sleep. With dreams. Real ones—the kind you couldn't control.

And it didn't take a robo-psychic to figure out who would be in those dreams, doing what to Theryssa's poor, innocent person.

Chapter Five

Azar was surprised but pleased to see Theryssa settle so deeply into unconsciousness. Sleep was considered unnecessary for primales, but personally he had always felt it was an important part of the body's restoration process.

Having her lay her head on his chest had filled him with feelings of protectiveness. Superwoman though she might be, she had chosen him to watch over her. At least for this one night.

How good she felt against him. So natural. His hand on her back, fingers fanned, was a perfect fit. So were her breasts, squashed against him. Her little nipples were tight and hard.

And so was his cock. He wanted to do things to her, to touch and squeeze and have his way with her incredible body. Again. And then again after that.

Never had he dreamed of finding a woman who could keep up with him, who could take the sting of his hand and the force of his cock and come back wanting more with barely a breath in between.

Refusing her offer of sex—correction, her self-surrender for sexual possession—had been maddeningly difficult. He could easily have jumped on her and ridden her for hours.

But there was more to sexual play than the act itself. Especially when you were a primale like Azar. Half the thrill was in the conquest, and with a female like Theryssa, primale herself, you could hardly expect to achieve that conquest in one session.

He would be lying if he didn't admit to some amusement, even a little sadistic delight in seeing her so angry with him. Her frustration turned him on, too. It was going to be worth it, though. She would be red-hot when he finally had her again—eager and desperate. And he would be feeling strong, like he was truly making her his own.

Azar told himself this would lead to nothing new or different for him. Once the objective was reached and he was bored with her, he would move on to someone new, just as he always did. Naturally, he would make sure to glean what intelligence he could first.

The whole process should last a few days at most. Then she would be gone, and he would forget soon enough. He always did. And she would be fine, too, going back to her life on Earth.

A life, by her own admission, without much male appreciation.

Azar's stomach tightened into a thick knot. He couldn't picture her alone. She needed to shine for a man. A man strong enough and compassionate enough to handle her complicated nature. A man who would be her partner.

And what about him? What did he deserve? A woman he could really sleep beside at night, like this one, and not just a fresh sex partner?

After sex-making, Solania had tried to stay awake like a primale, but she had always fallen asleep, much to her chagrin. Azar greedily enjoyed the times of total possession over her physical form, deep in the dead of night.

Azar stilled his breath for a moment. Theryssa was stirring. Keeping his eyes closed, maintaining himself in a primale trance, he observed her with his inner vision.

It was an ancient technique among primales, one which involved utilizing the subconscious mind, tapping it into the deeper recesses of sensation. The entire area around him was clear to him. He could even perceive through walls.

After a while he detected her eyes popping open—lovely, green and curious. She blinked several times, her eyebrows shifting rapidly. He knew that mind of hers was working overtime, he could almost guess her thoughts, reliving events up to now and calculating her current situation and future possibilities.

Good girl, he thought, admiring her ability to stay perfectly still, not panicking despite being caught up in such a potentially unnerving situation. She had been through quite a lot and yet she was cool, calm and collected.

He swelled with a strange pride.

Few people he had known, male and female alike possessed such qualities. The fine tension in her limbs indicated she intended to make a move. It was an interesting situation. She had promised to stay in bed. Would she openly defy him? Her other instances of disobedience had been rather unavoidable, having come in the heat of the moment. In truth, he had set her up to fail, just to see how she would handle punishment.

But now she would have to choose between keeping her word and taking her chance at freedom. Assuming freedom was what she really wanted.

The freedom to spy on him and learn what she needed to know.

Theryssa was already putting her plan into action, delicately lifting his arm off of her body. He remained motionless, giving no indication that he was fully aware of what was transpiring. She had no trouble wriggling free and in seconds flat she was padding around his cabin. A naked, prying little minx.

She went to his communication logs first. She would not find anything, at least not anything she was looking for. For a while she stooped over the log machine, reading the entries, her pert breasts hanging down, her tight ass wiggling very slightly as she shifted her eyes.

He fought back a smile as he noted the little habit she had of moving her lips as she read. Before too long he would have those lips back where they belonged. Caressing his burning shaft.

Theryssa frowned, indicating her frustration. Abandoning the log machine, she took out her displeasure on her collar. Quite impressively, she ripped it off with a single tug. No doubt she thought herself above being fettered, but as it just so happened, he had some special chains, made of a material so dense, even a full-grown, fully male, primale could not break them.

"You don't like your collar, Theryssa?"

Theryssa turned to face him. "It's not my style."

Azar was sitting up in bed, his cock poking straight out at her. "Maybe not, but you weren't given permission to remove it. Nor were you told you could get out of bed."

"Remind me to give myself a good spanking later," she quipped.

Azar inclined his head toward the door. "I assume you intend to escape?"

"It depends. You plan on trying to stop me?"

"I'll admit, I'd rather not see our time together end so quickly," he conceded.

"Of course not," she noted sardonically. "You were having a blast. Beating me, abusing me."

"Did I do anything you didn't ask for, Theryssa? Beg for, even?"

"That's not the point and you know it. You had me under duress."

"In that case, you know where the door is."

"And how far do you think a naked woman would get on a ship full of pirates?"

"You're not just any naked woman. You're a superwoman."

"Right now I'm just super pissed." She reached behind her for the Zeerian lance on the wall, part of his display of captured primitive weapons.

"Good choice," he approved as she leveled the long silver weapon—saw-toothed and tipped with long hooked bear claws.

"Thank you." She smiled grimly. "Now unless you would like to become intimately acquainted with it, I suggest you start marching to my tune for a change."

"You make a persuasive case."

"Get off the bed." she waved the lance.

Azar stood, quite interested to see what she would do with her presumed power.

"I will admit," she said, "you have me wondering how you knew about my primale blood. I have been racking my brain, and the more I think about it, the more I think maybe you're primale yourself."

"But of course that's impossible."

"It is," she agreed. "Then again it isn't. The only real way to know is to test you."

"Like I tested you? With a thrown knife, you mean?"

She licked her lips. She was looking right at his cock. "Actually, you've given me the idea to do something a little more interesting."

"Such as?"

"Such as me giving you some commands. Some submissive commands. If you really are primale, you'll break down at some point and show yourself."

He arched a brow. "That doesn't sound overly wise." He arched a brow. "You might provoke me too much."

"I can handle myself." She waved the lance. "Enough talking. I want you to put your hand on your cock. Start masturbating."

Azar wrapped his fingers around his thick erection. He was more than happy to show Theryssa his arousal. "Like this?"

His fingers pressed casually, but authoritatively. He moved them up and down, with purpose and command. There was no mistaking his intentions. This was his dick to play with, the way he wanted. Nothing submissive here.

Her breathing was a little shallow. Her eyes looked a little glazed. "Yeah...like that."

Azar allowed himself a small smirk. She would never hold up against him. Not in a head-to-head battle for sexual primacy.

It pleased him to look at her like a predatory cat, and use her image in front of his eyes for his pleasure. He was in control not her.

He made sure to shift his fingers a little as he moved them over the vein underneath. When the first drop of pre-come appeared at the tip, he gave her a wink.

"Pinch your nipple," she ordered, sounding peeved over her backfiring experiment. "Give yourself some pain."

Azar complied, sending surges of white-hot energy through the tip of his cock as he did so. "Is this what you had in mind?" he queried, his voice a raspy whisper, full of seeming innocence.

He let her see as he twisted the nipple, how it tightened, how inviting it looked.

"Harder. Make it hurt."

"Already does." He grinned. Azar sucked in his belly just a little, emphasizing the muscles all along his hairless torso, a direct contrast to the succulent nipples.

"Harder, then." She thrust out the spear, menacingly.

Azar did so, absorbing the sensation, and building on it. "You're going to be punished after this, Theryssa," he turned the tables. "You've been a very bad girl."

"Fuck you," she snarled. "And get down on your fucking knees."

Azar knelt, though the stance in no way diminished his power. "I'm going to use the flogger, Theryssa. I will chain your hands over your head and flog every part of your disobedient flesh."

She was doing her best to ignore him, though he could sense the confusion and torment in her body. "Shut up and keep jerking off, you bastard. I want you to come in your hand and show it to me."

"If I do, Theryssa, I am going to feed it to you."

Her mouth dropped open. "Like hell you will."

"Don't fight it," he pumped his cock in long, languid strokes, from the base all the way to the tip, the motions designed to drive her wild. "You went to bed as my slave, Theryssa. Do you think you woke up something different?"

She thrust the lance forward and down, to within an inch of his chest. "Does this look like the act of a slave?"

"One whose Master has been toying with her—yes."

"You're not toying with me, you pirate scum. I am in charge of myself."

"Put the lance down, Theryssa. And go back to bed."

She smiled, half devil, half angel. "Make me," her eyes burned hot.

Azar did not flinch, despite the repositioning of the weapon directly at the level of his crotch. "I won't ask you again. This is your last chance to obey."

"And this is your last chance to beg for mercy before I cut your balls off."

Azar did not give her a chance to carry through with her threat. Before she could draw her next breath he was on the offensive. Pivoting himself on one hip, he swept out with his left leg, upending Theryssa. She was tossed into the air along with the lance. By the time gravity kicked in, he was standing over her, pointing the blade at her throat.

She was breathing heavily, but she was mad, not beaten. Anticipating some super move of her own, Azar snapped the blade over his knee and collapsed on top of her, pinning her.

"Get the fuck off me." There was no acquiescence this time. Theryssa was bucking underneath him, using her full strength. She could probably have dislodged a full-grown bull or a work droid, but Azar held fast.

He let her exhaust herself without saying a word.

She glared at him at last. "You're a fucking primale. I knew it!"

"Guilty as charged."

Theryssa's eyes were speaking volumes. He could only imagine what was going through her mind.

"I'm your prisoner for real," she acknowledged. "I demand the rights of universal capture."

Azar had expected as much. Fortunately, he was a step ahead. "You have no rights, Theryssa. I have already claimed you as a slave."

"No fucking way," she squirmed.

"When and where I want," he reminded.

She was powerless to prevent him exploring, reclaiming. At last, Azar pushed her legs apart with his knee and entered her, his cock pushing to the hilt in her silky softness. "You exist for my pleasure," he said. "As evidenced by your constant wetness in my presence."

"You arrogant prick," she tried to push him off. "You don't have a clue."

Azar let her struggle, enjoying the feel of her breasts and belly rubbing against him. He decided to ejaculate, just as he was.

Theryssa exclaimed in total frustration, realizing that her rebellion was turning him on. Too late, she tried to keep still, denying him.

Azar sighed with satisfaction, releasing himself. Pure jets of come, nicely released, no sweat, no grunting. "Good girl," he approved. "That is how you please your Master."

Theryssa had hoped to push him off now, but Azar was staying put, at least for the immediate future. His hard-on undiminished, he laid down the law.

"I was quite serious about the flogger, Theryssa. You will be hung upright and marked. I have special chains, ones you will not be able to escape. That will be your punishment. And also your interrogation. You will tell me who you are and what you are doing on my ship."

"You can't violate intergalactic law," she warned. "If you insist on enslaving me, there will be a price to pay."

"The laws allow sentient beings to give themselves over in bondage," he reminded.

"But I haven't given over squat."

"Really? Would you care to testify to that in court?"

He waited for her to remember. The words she had uttered, about how she would do anything for release—even become his slave.

"There's no way you can count that," she snorted.

"Kiss me." He decided to end the debate for now.

Theryssa shut her mouth tightly. Vigorously, she shook her head no.

Azar lowered his face to her, taking her lower lip between his teeth. He bit down, just the tiniest taste of pain. Theryssa moaned in immediate surrender. It was amazing how her primale genetics seemed to work against her. The more pressure was put on her sexually, the hornier and more yielding she became.

Her eyes filled with desire and trepidation, she lifted her head, touching her lips to his. He made her do the work, molding her mouth and moving it in time to her rapid breathing. He kept his own lips perfectly still, measuring, biding his time.

Second by second, she grew hotter and needier. He denied her as she sought access to his mouth with her tongue. It wasn't enough for her now. It was too gentle, too pretty.

She tried to seduce him, wrapping her arms around his neck. Nothing worked for her, not even when she ground her full, perfect breasts against his chest.

He waited until she was completely overwrought, writhing like a snake. Pulling her by the back of the hair, he disengaged her. Cutting her off cold turkey.

"Move your pussy muscles," he ordered.

Theryssa clenched and unclenched. She was showing her primale genetics, exhibiting a control impossible in a normal female.

"Work it to climax."

Theryssa licked her lips. She was a study in concentration. Azar stifled a groan as she squeezed his cock. Such an incredible, pulsing tunnel—a perfect fit. It was so very tempting to come again, but he wanted her to climax alone, so he could fully appreciate the look on her face, the reactions of her body.

It was part of the ownership process. Just as being forced to reveal one's most intimate sexual responses on command was part of slavery. The control would be his. She would be the one to reveal herself, the one to dissolve into a puddle.

"Azar," she sighed. "Oh, god."

"That's it. Move that little pussy," he coached. "It's punishment after this—no orgasms for a long time."

She started to spasm as soon as he spoke the words. Being dominated appeared to suit her, even more so talking about it.

"You may thank me for the privilege of being able to come, slave girl."

"Thank you...thank you," she cried. "Oh, stars, Azar. It's so..."

She clutched at his upper arms, digging into his flesh with her fingers. She was looking into his eyes, trying to convey what it felt like. To let go and give up everything. To be completely under the spell of another person. A strong, uncompromising lover.

So strong, in fact, as to be able to hold himself back in the midst of a hurricane of desire.

Azar enjoyed the crashing waves vicariously. Theryssa was transparent, a living radiator of the bucking, writhing pleasure she was experiencing. It was like being inside her, with her. His eyes began to burn. She wasn't the only one who was grateful. It was a gift she shared, the most precious in the entire universe. A gift of trust...of truest passion.

Not only was she giving over her body, but her eyes, and the expressions on her face. Azar was mightily humbled. He felt as though he had never truly seen a woman in the bloom of lust before.

"Azar," she called to him, as a fresh wave overtook her. "Come inside me. Come with me...together."

Only the cruelest and most stone-hearted of men could refuse such a plaintive request. So sweet and eager, and eminently female. He knew enough about the female

body and heart to know she was reaching deep, risking much by showing so much vulnerability.

If he were to reject her...

Damn it, why did Theryssa have to be so sincere, so goddamn open, and so goddamn courageous?

Compared to her, he was a coward. His prowess in battle meant nothing. Because he was incapable of reaching out to others.

"Theryssa," he said huskily. "We mustn't..."

She silenced him with a kiss, branding his lips with a bit of domination all her own. She was adept, he gave her that. Not to mention the most incredibly sexy creature in the universe.

Wrapping her in his arms, he gave her what she wanted. What they both needed, though he was not ready to admit it.

His thrusts were decisive, but also smooth and deep and gentle. His every fiber strained to listen to her body. He did not want to let her down. With everything that had gone on before, and regardless of what might follow, he was determined that this at least would fulfill her.

She was moaning lightly into his mouth, clinging to him with damp fingers, clutching greedily, wanting him everywhere at once. At one point, she rolled him onto his back and then over again. Back and forth they went, shifting positions, but always maintaining the essential contact.

His cock, cemented inside her, hand in glove, sealed with liquid passion. Theryssa sucked at his tongue and lips, rubbing her nipples against him. She pushed her pelvis, too, maximizing the contact between them.

As his climax approached, Azar grabbed hold of her ankles, lifting them in the air and wide apart. Spreading her open as far as he could, he managed another half inch of depth. Theryssa's body was racked with pleasure. Her eyes were half-closed, focused on some distant point. She had her teeth clenched and she was holding the backs of her thighs, trying to retract her legs even farther.

Azar controlled the pace. He wanted her positioned perfectly.

Once, twice more...

There. He had it. The supreme moment of release. Timed exactly to Theryssa's latest roiling crescendo. Shutting his eyes tightly, he let loose, expending his full stock of semen, holding back nothing. Every bit of him was unleashed, every nerve ending, every living cell. The drain, the opening and spilling was total and complete. Primale though he was, he would be tired after this and it would take some time to restore his energies.

But it was worth it. Feeling Theryssa's symbiotic spasms, absorbing her willing female heat. Unlocking with her the secrets of her sexual being.

"Hold me," she whispered.

He did so, falling into her, wanting nothing more than to lose himself in her heartbeat. There were answers here. Answers to questions he never knew existed.

Truth is painful, though, and so is pleasure when one is aware how short-lived it is destined to be. The fact was, he did not deserve this woman's affection. Whether love, or merely lust.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

It was a dangerous sign. Women who wanted to know what was on a man's mind were way too involved for their own good.

"I'm thinking about your punishment." He sought to put her off.

"My flogging," she supplied, as though it truly were her own.

"Yes, and I am not backing down in administering it."

"Why should you? I have it coming."

Her attitude surprised him more than a little. "You accept my sentence?"

"I tried to escape. I disobeyed you. I invaded your privacy. I broke my word," she read the list of her own crimes.

"You owe me nothing. I am a pirate."

"All the more reason for me to have been more careful."

"Not to have been caught, you mean."

"Something like that."

Azar stroked her hair. "You could just tell me who you are right now, you know, and save a lot of trouble down the line."

"I can't do that." She shook her head. "I'm sorry."

"I expected as much." Azar disengaged, rising off the bed to his full height. "I must attend to some business. Can I trust you to stay in the bed until I return?"

"Probably not."

Azar nodded. "Your honesty is appreciated. In that case, I will shackle you."

He gave her a chance to use the sanitizing chamber first. Once she was back on the bed, her body squeaky clean and pink, her hair fluffy and silky once again, he brought a pair of handcuffs, made of the special, unbreakable metal. "Put out your hands," he instructed.

Theryssa did so, palms down. He clicked the cuffs shut. There was a chain attached, which he secured to one of the metal rings on the headboard.

"That should do it," he announced, covering her nakedness with a thin fur. "I'll be back in a while. Get some rest. You'll need it."

She called to him just as he reached the doorway. "Azar?"

"Yes?"

"After you flog me...what will happen?"

"We finish the interrogation and I'll see to it you get to a Guardian vessel or station."

"Oh."

Azar tried to read something into her tone, but it was exasperatingly neutral. How this woman managed to inflame his blood. He wanted to kiss her fiercely, all over her body. He wanted to read her mind. He wanted to know what no one else did. Her secrets, the things she did not even tell her closest friends.

"I would think you'd be happy to leave here," he said.

"I am," she said, though she didn't sound it.

Women, he thought.

He must have been smiling as he left his cabin, because Oleron, who was standing in the corridor, remarked upon it immediately.

"Been enjoying yourself, Captain?"

"That's not your affair," he told the man. "Have the sensors picked up any more traffic out there?"

Oleron licked his lips. Like a jackal, ready to tear at a wound. Azar cursed himself for revealing his obvious interest in Theryssa. Now she would be a target for Oleron.

"A couple of freighters. We didn't want to disturb you, so we let them go."

Azar stiffened. "I'll decide what's a disturbance next time. Is that clear?"

Oleron barely concealed his venom. "Certainly, *sir*."

"To the bridge," said Azar, pointing the way. "We have work to do."

And quickly, too, so he could get back to Theryssa. He told himself he was anxious merely to get on with punishment and interrogation. But the truth was, he was already feeling, in her absence, an odd hole in his chest. Invisible, but real nonetheless.

Things felt off-kilter. Confused.

Not a good sign, not a good sign at all for a pirate, a sworn rebel destined to die an unpleasant death. Theryssa was alone, too, he thought. In his quarters. Chained up. That image made him want to comfort her. And dominate her. And everything in between.

His stomach did a flip. Half hot, half cold.

I should never have picked up that ship. Not in a million years. It was too easy, way too fucking easy...

He was paying the price now, wasn't he? And this was just the beginning. Who knew where it would all end. For him, for her...for everyone aboard this ship and maybe far beyond.

Chapter Six

Theryssa resisted as long as she could. She was nude under the black and white fur, her wrists encircled in gleaming metal. Her sex beckoning. Suddenly insatiable. Where had he gone? Her body wanted to know. Where was the man with the magic, conquering hands who made everything else disappear?

Azar had not specifically mentioned the subject of masturbation before he left, but he had certainly made his wishes – correction – his demands known on the subject.

No one touched her but him. And that included her.

The trouble was, it made her burn and twitch to think of a man owning her like that. Forbidding her to pleasure herself. Damn it, this was her pussy, not his.

And what was with these chains? They really were unbreakable. This wasn't Earth technology. Fuck it – was it NARTHIAN? She couldn't bear to think of that now. If Azar really was a traitor to his people, to humanity...well, she didn't know what she would do.

Obviously she would have to try to kill him. But it would hurt. In her heart. She didn't love the man, certainly not. It was just that they had shared some pretty close, intense experiences.

He had taken her somewhere. A place in her own soul she had not known existed. All her life she had been hiding feelings – trying to be tough, trying to keep ahead of her overambitious parents. So many expectations.

With Azar she didn't feel like she had to be anything. Except herself. Theryssa. Whoever that was.

Stars, she had to pull herself together.

Wanting to surrender to a man sexually was dangerous. Feeling conflicted about escape, about her mission was suicidal. Too many emotions swirling in her head. She was worried about Azar. She didn't like how tired he seemed. Not in bed – god knows he was a tiger – but outside of it, the way he had looked when he was on his way back to deal with his crew.

She had seen that kind of fatigue in soldiers who had seen too much.

Unbidden, Theryssa's fingers touched her belly. She was on her side. *Why not play with yourself?* said the voice in her head. *It's not like you can get up and go anywhere.*

Perhaps if she tried not to think of Azar. Could she get him out of her mind? It wasn't like he was the only attractive man in the universe. She sighed inwardly as her fingertips reached her clitoris. Yes, this is what she needed. Some private time with her own body. A chance to wipe the slate clean.

There were plenty of other men to think about. With hard, smooth bodies and gorgeous cocks. Men she had seen naked, men she had made sex with. It was no big deal. Sex could be made with lots of people. Azar had come into her life and he would go away soon enough.

She would deal with him. As soon as she cleared her head. Plunging her fingers inside her slit, she sought to banish him.

The chain slid across her breasts as her hands shifted position. Cold metal on her nipples. Azar's metal. One more fucking reminder...

Theryssa rolled onto her back. She could still smell him on the furs. Fiercely confident and masculine. She could picture him, looming over her, that look in his eyes. The one that let her know he was a man who took whatever he wanted.

He was not a ruffian, though. As sure as he was of his power, he was even more certain of his prowess. Calmly, quietly, he knew how to take care of business, making a woman feel like she was the only female in the universe.

Theryssa played with her swollen clit. Unsuccessfully, she tried to duplicate his technique. The way he teased so gently one second, manipulating so masterfully the next. He really could make a woman beg for anything. She hated the idea of any other receiving that treatment. She would want to kill with her bare hands any other wench he tried to chain up.

How crazy was that? What sort of privilege and thrill was it to be held prisoner? Azar had left her here, nothing to think of but his return. And what was happening then?

A flogging, that's what.

The man actually intended to hang her by her wrists and apply leather to her skin. It wasn't a matter of the pain. Guardian training had equipped her for much worse in the way of torture.

It was the sexual side of it. She wasn't a slave, she was a prisoner.

And yet Azar awoke things in her. Not a desire to submit to all men—just to him. When he had collared her, it had been like making sex, like being penetrated in some wicked, secret way. The same thing happened each time he held her fast, pinning her down.

And when he had given her commands. Stars, that had made her skin tingle, head to toe. How was it Azar could make her want to be owned by him? Why did she want him for a Master...at least in bed?

Theryssa's breasts ached to be touched. But she could not reach them while her chained hands were between her legs. Her motion had been limited. By the very man she could not get out of her mind.

The harder she tried, the more her current circumstances reminded her.

She wasn't free.

Far from being enraged, she was thrilled. Excited beyond all imagination. She belonged...to a man.

Fuck...she was coming again. How many orgasms did that make in this bed? Sucking in her breath, clenching her pussy muscles, she held it tightly as long as she could, relishing every second as the climax ran through her body, like a series of cords snapping, energizing and enervating.

Eyes closed, her world dark as space, she tried to sink to a place below dreams. A place of peace. Where maybe there would be some answers to all her questions.

When the shock waves had passed, Theryssa put her fingers to her mouth, licking them clean. It was the one thing she could think that she would not do on her own, but which Azar might order her to do.

She tasted scandalous to herself. Her limbs felt transcendently weak.

I'm doing this, she told herself, for Azar.

My captor. My Master.

Shivers claimed her.

Lying there, wrapped in fur, she had never felt more at home in her life.

Or more terrified.

* * * * *

Azar's gaze through the viewfinder was unwavering. For the second time in as many days, he was studying the movements of a ship that was not what it appeared to be. Yesterday, he had hauled in a courier express, netting himself one small cache of treasure and one big, complicated headache of a female.

Today he was looking at a civilian transport cruiser. A basic two-seater tourist model used for interplanetary weekend jaunts.

"Looks like this is our lucky week," said Trelorne, the navigator. "Probably a couple of rich fools who missed their turnoff on the hyper-way."

"This far out? Not likely," said Azar. "No, they're pros. See how they've been compensating for stellar drift?"

"What the Captain means," piped in Oleron sarcastically, "is they might be dangerous. We had best evacuate the area before they attack."

Azar's hand moved to his dagger. Oleron's eyes darkened. Two of his henchmen moved in beside him on the crowded bridge.

"Have I offended you, Captain?" Oleron asked, clearly spoiling for a fight.

Azar could easily have cut down all three men where they stood. It wouldn't have been the first time he had put down a mutiny. He opted for a verbal retort instead. "That isn't possible, Oleron. You are far too insignificant to ever cause offense."

Oleron smiled sideways, relaxing. For the moment, the crisis was averted. Soon he would make his move, though, and Azar would have to respond.

Damn it, why was Azar waiting? He needed to stop thinking about the past, about that note from Theron. About Theryssa.

Oleron licked his lips. "What are we going to do," he pressed, "about the ship?"

"We will take the ship onboard," Azar decided. "You will recover it in the cargo bay. The rest of the ship will be sealed off. In case of a trap."

Oleron's already cruel features pinched in obvious displeasure. Azar had gotten the best of him once again. Instead of showing up his captain, he had only endangered himself with his insistence on dealing with the mystery ship. "Yes, Captain. Where will you be? Back in your cabin?"

It was an obvious aspersion cast against his decision to remain exclusively with Theryssa since her arrival.

"That is not your concern, Oleron. Securing the passenger ship is."

Oleron nodded brusquely and left the bridge.

Azar found his thoughts drifting as he looked at the ship again on the viewer. With the mention of her name, he couldn't help but think of Theryssa. Was she resting properly in his absence? More than likely she was trying to escape. Perhaps he should have put a guard on the cabin. Not that any normal man would be able to stop her if she broke free.

His mind turned to what he would do when he was with her again. She would be flogged, of course, her golden skin deliciously pinkened by the many-stranded leather flogger he had especially in mind for the occasion.

Not much of a punishment, really. He wouldn't cause her much discomfort. But he would play with her mind, tease her just a little. At every available opportunity, he would make it clear that he saw her as a woman ripe for his exploitation.

He loved the look in her eyes when he talked to her about slavery. He loved how her body sang for him, how she purred in captivity. Such a proud and noble creature. He could never break her—just let her play with her inner demons.

Those that longed to know what it was like to crawl and beg. To be used for a man's total pleasure. To be desired beyond all reason, to be so much an object of lust as to be taken as a possession. A piece of property, never to be sold or traded.

The trouble was, Azar had never managed to hold onto anything in his life. Especially not a woman.

"Employ beams." He gave the order to bring the tiny ship onboard. "Maximum power."

Azar had a feeling deep in his gut. Something about that ship felt familiar. It had something to do with Theryssa. But what?

He shook his head, trying to clear it.

He was letting himself be consumed. Theryssa was in his quarters, and whoever was out there could not possibly have anything to do with her.

Not in a million light years.

* * * * *

"They've activated the beams," said Nyssa to her husband. "Shouldn't we shut down the main drive systems?"

"Not yet." Theron shook his head, sitting beside her in the cockpit of the small civilian cruiser. "Let's not alert them to how much we want to get caught."

"But we could overshoot their landing bay and end up halfway into the hull," she pointed out reasonably.

"We have time to compensate. Blast it, woman, must you keep arguing with me? I'm a trained star pilot."

"Who's been in dry dock for a decade," she shot him down.

"You're just itching to go over my knee, aren't you?" Theron grumbled.

Nyssa stole a quick glance at Theron's lap. His cock was deliciously outlined under his flight suit, as were his muscular, sculpted thighs, his powerful legs and trim waist.

And those hands...which still rocked her world and made her body dance after all these years of marriage. "No," she lied, trying to keep his mind on the track of their mission and off of anything sexual. "It's the farthest thing from my mind."

Theron raised an eyebrow. "You're a terrible liar," he crooned.

Nyssa tried to keep her eyes glued to the console. She knew that tone in his voice. She also knew how outrageous he could be when he wanted her. The fact that they were about to be brought onboard a ship full of potential pirates meant nothing to him. Admittedly, there were worse things than having a husband that much in lust after twenty plus years of marriage. But still...

"I can see you're aroused. Your nipples are rock hard," he persisted.

Damn it, why did the man have to be so fucking sexy. He was still a perfect specimen, all the more so for the slight gray in his hair and the tiny character lines around his eyes. He was aging splendidly.

And she wasn't doing so bad herself, at least if you went by how much trouble Theron still had keeping his hands off her.

"Has it occurred to you I might be cold?"

"You're wet, too."

"Fucking primale sense of smell," she muttered.

Theron grinned. "Busted."

"We're both going to be busted if those pirates catch us with our pants down," she declared, pointing to the looming cargo bay, its main doors open like the jaws of some kind of space shark.

"Pirates understand about a man needing a wench. They capture them all the time." He ran his hand over her cheek.

Nyssa pulled her head out of the way, trying to keep her sanity. "I'm not a wench, mister. I am the Head of the Council."

He moved his fingers to her breast. "You're my wench."

She tried to brush his hand away.

"Leave it."

Fuck. He was pulling rank. She might well be in charge of the Galactic Council, but when it came to sex-making, he called the shots. And why not? As a primale he knew instinctively what she needed. Especially when it came to submission.

"Theron, we can't..." Gone was her surety and authority. She was just a woman now, trying to bargain with a man notorious for doing precisely what he wanted.

In fact, her little shows of resistance tended to turn him on.

"Of course we can. You are my beautiful wife, and I will have you where and when...and how I want."

Nyssa sighed, so very full of love for this man. "Oh, Theron..."

"Clothes open," he gave the command for the seams on her suit to part.

Nyssa never failed to get a charge from that, the fact that every one of her outfits was coded to his verbal pattern such that his was the final word.

At any point in time, in other words, he could render her naked as he was doing now.

"Let's get these off," he patted her thigh, indicating she should lift her ass.

"Yes, Sir," she smiled, her anxieties melted away in the moment.

Theron helped her to strip the suit down over her legs. When she was bootless and completely naked he had her climb over the console between them and onto his lap.

His own suit was already open all the way down the sides, freeing up his cock. Inserting it inside her hot and open sex, she settled down on his lap, chest to chest.

"Fuck," she hissed. "I needed this..."

"You always need it," he teased. "You're insatiable."

"Me?" She pushed her palm against his massive pectoral. "You're the one who can't ever get enough."

"Stop being so goddamn sexy, then." He grasped her breasts, crushing them in just the right way.

"Oh, baby," she moaned. "I love you so much. I love being your woman...belonging to you."

"That's why I have to take you when you don't expect it. Keep you on edge. At any second, you need to be prepared."

She rocked her pelvis, pushing his massive erection against the walls of her throbbing pussy. "Have I ever been unprepared?" she retorted, alluding to the constant state of wetness she maintained in his presence.

It was true. Never once had he reached for her and found her dry. Not even on those occasions of total surprise. But that was part of the thrill, wasn't it? Knowing that her man might make use of her at any moment, day or night, that he might lay his hand

on her, drawing her close to inspect her readiness, to whisper in her ear, perhaps. Telling her to go to bed and wait for him, or lift her skirt at once, so he could take her. On the floor, or against the wall.

"You damn well better be wet," he growled playfully.

Nyssa wrapped her arms about his neck, relishing his masculinity. He would never, ever hurt a hair on her head, but she knew damn well from experience what it was to be punished by his hand – and the flogger, too.

It aroused them both, the rules between them, and the undercurrent of power. If she were found unprepared for sex she could be spanked. If she failed to please him, she could be spanked. Being too sassy, too, was grounds for a healthy peppering to her behind.

He gave her lots of leeway, of course. She was a fem and he had to treat her as such. She would never find her fulfillment through absolute conformity to a man's will. For any other primale, that would be a deal breaker. But Theron was not any other primale. He had been made for her – literally, genetically – and she for him.

She couldn't explain the science of how it worked, any more than she could define the emotion of love they shared. It was real and profound, that's what mattered. Sure, they had their disagreements sometimes, like any couple, but the bond they shared was unbreakable.

"You really are incorrigible," she lifted herself, partially exposing his glistening cock once more. "You know that, husband?"

"It's a characteristic I pride myself on." He took hold of her hips.

Nyssa gasped as he planted her back down, firmly.

"Were you given permission to move?" he chided.

"You didn't tell me not to."

"Keep it up, wife, and you will be spending the return trip in irons."

Nyssa's pussy spasmed. Just the mention of bondage was all it took. "You would never chain me that long," she teased. "You would miss the fucking too much."

"Who says I can't do both?"

Nyssa pictured herself spread-eagled on the bed, left shackled, to be used at his leisure. No doubt he would torment her, leaving her unsatisfied for hours at a time.

"You're in a mean frame of mind," she pouted.

"That I am. I might even give you to the pirates."

She nibbled at his earlobe. "Like that would ever happen. You can't even stand when other men look at me. Remember what happened with the Gibnian ambassador?"

Theron swelled his cock. Deliberately. "Damn straight I do. The bastard was drooling over you all through dinner."

"He has three mouths. He can't help but drool. As for looking at me, he has six sets of eyes. They can't all be staring at the wall."

"Never mind. You know what I'm saying."

"No, I don't, Theron. But it doesn't matter. We're going to be on that ship any minute. If we're going to come, you better make it quick."

"Who says I'm going to let you come?"

Nyssa's pulse raced. Nothing went deeper to her sexual core than when he took control of her orgasms. "Theron, you wouldn't leave me hanging?"

He certainly was capable of it. Possessing a will of iron, he could shut down his own sex drive and close up shop any time he wanted. He was also not above orgasming on his own and making her wait under threat of the paddle to her ass.

"I think I might do just that," he mused. "You'll be hornier for the return trip. More cooperative."

"Theron...please."

"My mind is made up."

Fuck. *Double* fuck.

"Just one orgasm, baby..." Nyssa wheedled, nuzzling his neck. "I swear, I'll be extra good on the way home. I could wear that little slave girl costume you like, with the bells? And I'll push all the buttons and cook for you. Whatever you tell me, I'll obey the first time."

"You're supposed to do that anyway, not that you ever do. Now get dressed, woman, before the pirates see you like this."

Nyssa whimpered as he removed her from his cock and set her back down in her own seat. She made one last desperate attempt to seduce him by putting her head in his lap, but he held her fast, his fist curled in her long, light auburn hair.

"You'll have lots of time to worship my erection later," he promised. "First we need to attend to some cosmic business."

"You really are impossible, you know that?"

"And you love every minute of it." He flashed a rakish grin.

She hid her pleasure at the sight of his smile. Why did the bastard have to be so gorgeous? Hustling back into her suit, she gave her prognostication for the much vaunted return trip. "You won't get a thing from me all the way back to Earth, you hear me?"

"That's fine. I'm sure the pirates can supply me with a slave girl or two."

"Yeah, well maybe they can supply you with a new cock, too, after I cut yours off." Her fingers flew over the panel in front of her. "And I'm shutting off the fucking drive system, too."

Theron put his thumb and forefinger, under her chin.

"What?" she demanded as he turned her head to face him.

"On the way back," he said, his voice smooth and cool and sexily matter-of-fact. "You'll be wearing nothing but your collar."

Her heart skipped a beat. "We don't even know if our mission will succeed. What if Theryssa ends up coming back with us once she finds out the truth?"

"She won't, Nyssa. Things are already settled, I guarantee it. It will be just us on the way back. You, me...and the collar."

Nyssa thought of the circle of steel—a delicate ring encrusted with pale-colored stones. She did not wear it often, but when she did its implications were as powerful as they were unmistakable.

The collar symbolized that place between them where they were anything but equal. When she donned it, she became a very different creature, one for whom everything, even clothing was at the whim of another.

It had reached the point over the years where simply touching the metal could make her orgasm. She could scarcely imagine what it would mean to wear it out here, in deepest space, where she would be in Theron's clutches, alone with no hope of distraction.

"Do we have an understanding, Nyssa?"

Her pussy was shamelessly liquefying. He could not have said anything more tantalizing and agonizing in her current state.

The collar. The fucking collar.

And all that came with it. The constant sexual charge, perpetual arousal. The groveling, the begging for her every little need. The delicious feeling of being a pet, stroked and petted...and owned.

And the sex...wall-to-wall fucking horny, wild, endless sex as she dealt with the out of control hormones of a man whose very blood was programmed to respond to a subjugated, totally defenseless woman.

"Yes," Nyssa replied, her voice reduced to a croak.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes...Master." The word exploded off her lips, sealing the bargain. It would happen all right, just as he said. She would take off her clothes and put the steel on her throat. Sealing the bond with a kiss. Deep and expressive. Changing everything, for as long as he wished to keep it on her body.

In the meantime there was reality...

"That's my Nyssa." Theron leaned forward, rendering a kiss to clear her head a little. "You gonna be okay?"

She nodded. The sex stuff had to go to the back of her brain.

It was time to carry out their mission.

To meet with a pirate captain, a self-styled king who had once been one of them. The very same Azar whom they must now convince to help the Council against the NARTHians.

The stakes could not be underestimated.

It was a matter of survival for every man, woman and child. Beginning with their own child, their beloved Theryssa, whom they had sent out here with a mission of her own.

Not the one she'd been told about, but a quite different one. One she would have balked at mightily if they'd told her up front.

For as it turned out, they did not really need her to spy on Azar at all, but rather to seduce him. To become his lover, and hopefully his mate. This in turn would assure her happiness, and also secure his help for the Council.

It was a wild risk to take, especially where Theryssa was concerned. Their daughter might well never forgive them for tricking her like this. But Nyssa and Theron had seen no other way.

The odds were against them. But if anyone could believe in the possibilities of love to change the fate of worlds, it was her and Theron. They had witnessed firsthand how passion could overcome suspicion and doubt in the romance of Nyssa's sister Seria and her husband Raylar.

Seria's life had been on a one-way track to loneliness, and Raylar had been threatening to self-destruct. And now, together, they were an unstoppable force. The Council's best diplomat, working hand in hand with its best soldier.

They could point to their own story, as well. From initial sparks to open hatred, two unlikely lovers had formed a symbiotic union which allowed each to shine, giving of their best gifts—her as Council leader, and him as Commander in Chief of the Guardians.

Granted, in her and Nyssa's case, there was some genetic help along the way, but they had a feeling about Theryssa and the man once known as Azariel. Even before the crisis, when Theryssa was coming of age and they saw how the other males were threatened by her prowess, Theron had told her that his friend could understand their daughter best.

Nyssa trusted Theron's instinct, after all the two men had fought alongside each other in some of the worst battles of the last NARTHIAN war, prior to Azariel's self-exile.

On one occasion, Azariel had saved Theron's life. A favor her husband had returned a few months later.

You didn't forget a bond like that. Not even if you ended up on opposite sides with someone years later. Or so Theron had laid it out for her. Nyssa trusted Theron implicitly, of course, and if he thought Azar was a good man and that he might click with Theryssa, that was good enough for her.

Besides, she had seen how Theryssa had reacted to Azar's holoimages. It had been love at first sight. Just as with Seria and Raylar.

Those were a mother's hopes, though. Nyssa also had her fears to contend with. Not least of which was that her daughter's heart would be broken, or that she might even be faced with mortal danger.

To say that letting Theryssa go had been the most difficult decision of her life was an understatement. Nor had Nyssa's anguish lessened over the course of Theryssa's journey. Being able to monitor her condition via the retina transponder they had secretly placed in her retina had certainly helped, but Nyssa was not about to draw an easy breath again until she had her daughter safely back in her arms.

When Nyssa had first raised the idea of coming out here with Theron as he met with Azar to enlist the pirate's help and check on the status of things between he and Theryssa, Theron had gone through the roof.

"I will not put you at risk," Theron thundered. "It is out of the question."

Nyssa had waited for his bluster to subside and then said her piece. Short, sweet and to the point. "Theryssa is my daughter, too, Theron, and if you think for one minute I will sit by, half a galaxy away, while you go after her, you are sorely mistaken. I am getting on that ship with you, and there will be no more discussion. Ever."

It was one of the few times in their marriage that Theron had backed down without a fight. He had known she was right, he'd just been afraid for her. She loved that about him, how protective he was. And how he did what he could to keep her calm and peaceful, like playing sex games on the way to the pirate ship.

She gave Theron's hand a squeeze as their small ship eased through the doors of the much larger pirate vessel. This was it, the moment of decision. Up to this point, Nyssa hadn't really considered what might happen if they failed. Theoretically, they could be killed or held hostage.

Not that her husband was a man to be taken prisoner easily. He was a force to be reckoned with. The Guardian had yet to be commissioned who could beat him one-on-one, in fact. With the possible exception of his brother-in-law Raylar.

Their personal combat record was a source of much argument between them, much to the consternation of their wives. Boys will be boys, was Seria's analysis. Nyssa knew there was something deeper at stake.

For Theron, maintaining supremacy against his eventual successor was a sign of his own ongoing vitality. More than anything he feared that once he retired he would pass quickly into decrepitude.

As if that was ever possible. Theron's predecessor, his mentor Marax was still rim gliding on Cerus Minor, winning races against pups young enough to be his grandsons.

"Are we ready for this, babe?" Nyssa asked as they stood side by side at the exit portal.

"We were born ready." Theron winked.

Their ship was landing, still under the automatic control of the beams. Nyssa's stomach tightened a little at the sound of the metal doors closing behind them. There was no turning back now.

"Should we be armed?" Nyssa wondered.

Theron tapped the key pad, unlocking the portal and extending the ramp. "I already am."

She noted the solid figure of the man she loved. His hands were weapons enough, and the rest of him, too. Happily, proudly, she stood beside him to face their fate.

"Come out with your hands up," growled a particularly nasty looking pirate as the portal slid open.

Nyssa gauged him to be at least seven feet tall, with enough muscle to outfit an orbit ball team. There were five more, gathered around the base of the ramp, armed with beam weapons.

"Where is your Captain?" Theron ignored the giant of a man.

"You deal with me," snarled a bald man, pointing a silver laser rifle. "And you better not give me any trouble, or I'll melt you down right where you stand."

"Look at this, Oleron," said the giant to the bald man. "The troublemaker brought us a wench for sport."

Nyssa leaned instinctively against her husband.

Theron's body tensed ever-so slightly. "I'll ask one more time, politely. We are here to see Captain Azar."

The one called Oleron laughed out loud to the others, the sound echoing in the huge, empty bay. "You hear that, boys? He's only going to ask us once...politely."

"I'll be polite, too," the giant took a step up the ramp. "While I'm giving it to his woman."

Theron moved so fast Nyssa didn't even have time to think how fucking stupid and suicidal that bruiser was. It lasted less than five seconds. Theron simply grabbed him by the neck, hoisted him into the air and threw him a hundred feet against the far wall.

The other pirates were so shocked they just stood there for a moment, mouths hanging open. Finally one of them got the brilliant idea to shoot. Before he could pull the trigger, however, Theron reached forward and bent the barrel one hundred and eighty degrees.

"Captain Azar," Theron reiterated to Oleron, who had claimed to be in charge. "Tell him it's a ghost from Bralon."

Oleron's eyes were wide with terror. He and the others almost fell over themselves in their retreat, running backward, trying to keep their guns aimed at Theron.

"How did I do?" Theron asked once they were gone.

"Not bad," she conceded. "Maybe a little melodramatic."

He pulled her close for a kiss. "Are you mad I didn't let you stick up for yourself?"

"Nah," she grinned, "I like it when you act like a brute."

He held her tightly against him. She relished the sound of his heartbeat. There was no more calming, centering sound in the entire universe. As long as she had this heart to attune herself to, and these arms to hold her, everything would be all right.

For her. And for Theryssa, too.

There was only one variable left here. And that was Azar, the mysterious former Guardian turned pirate captain.

Should she be worried that he wasn't here to greet them? Maybe he was busy with Theryssa. Making sex. With any luck it was even more than that.

Chapter Seven

"Falthar is dead," said Oleron, standing at the entrance to the bridge.

Azar sought to contain his glee. That was one less of Oleron's thugs he would have to deal with down the line. "I take it you encountered something a bit more hazardous than tourists?" Azar asked dryly.

Oleron did not appear to appreciate the humor. He never did, especially when he was the butt of it. "They want to see you," he said flatly. "One man and one woman."

"Two people?" Azar raised a brow. "It ought to have taken an army to bring down Falthar."

"The guy is an army," he said bitterly. "He's got to be some kind of cyborg."

Or a primale.

"What about the woman?" Azar inquired.

Oleron shrugged. "She's a looker. About forty. But don't say anything to her, or that cyborg thing will tear your fucking head off."

"Duly noted. Have them meet me in the war room. I will speak to them alone."

"You'll get no argument from me," Oleron declared. "If you want me, I'll be in the galley getting drunk."

"You'll tend to Falthar first. Dispose of his remains out of the main hatchway."

"It'll take a while to find all the pieces. He must have hit the bulkhead at light speed."

"What exactly did he say to this woman to get the man so angry?"

Oleron's grin was physically nauseating. "Nothing we don't say to the rest of our female guests."

Azar frowned, thinking of Theryssa. "You're dismissed, Oleron," he said curtly.

Oleron grumbled and left. A second later he popped his head back in. "I almost forgot—he had a message for you."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, something about him being a ghost from Bralon?"

Azar's blood chilled.

"You know him?" Oleron read his expression.

"Of course I do, you fool," hissed Azar. "Everyone in the galaxy does. Except for you and your idiotic cohorts."

Indeed, there was only one person such a description could fit. This man was indeed a ghost. At least he would have been had Azar not pushed him out of the way of a collapsing beam tower under Narthian fire.

Theron had come to see him.

But why? He was Commander in Chief of the entire Guardian force now. A sworn enemy. The man was as good as turning himself over as a hostage. For what purpose?

Had his old comrade gone mad? Bringing himself and his woman here?

By the gods, this wasn't just any woman, either. His mate was Nyssa, the Head of the Council.

"Who are they?" Oleron demanded. "What are you hiding?"

Azar struck him, the pent-up fury boiling over at last. A single backhand sent the man sprawling. "Silence, you imbecile. Speak to me like that again and I will have you drawn and quartered."

"Yes," the man groaned, licking the blood from the corner of his lip, "sir."

Azar stepped over him, his mind already racing ten steps ahead.

Theron had come here. To him.

Something was going on. Theron was not a madman, nor was he a fool. He had come, unarmed, bringing his mate. The highest official in the government.

His heart raced as he descended in the elevator, to the war room. It did not take a cyber genius to figure out his extraordinary new visitors bore some connection to his other guest, a person whose presence here was equally improbable.

Theryssa. The female with the genes of a primale. A creature who, by all rights, should not exist at all.

At this rate, he could only imagine who would be coming to see him tomorrow.

The Narthian Next Queen maybe, begging to make peace? Or how about Santa Claus, asking him to deliver toys throughout the galaxy in his pirate ship?

One day I'll laugh at this, he thought. If I live that long.

* * * * *

Theryssa stood on the mattress, pulling the chain with all her might. Gritting her teeth, she let loose a grunt of sheer anguish.

The novelty of the whole shackle and fur thing had most definitely worn off. Theryssa was bored. And pissed. And more than a little anxious about what was taking Azar so long. She should have pressed him for a specific amount of time. What if he was in trouble? Here she was stuck, chained up like a girl.

Which is what she was, technically, though that hardly represented the full fearsomeness of her woman's spirit. She was a warrior—her mother always said that. Dad had called her Wild Thing since before she could properly talk and say her name.

Fuck. Maybe she could twist the thing off her wrists.

It was such a joke. Confined in a bed. A sexual prisoner. A freaking slave, according to her captor.

What a little fool she had been, getting all wrapped up in his whole snake charmer routine. Now that he had been gone a while, things seemed a lot clearer.

At least as much as they could in a situation like this.

Azar was either a traitor or he wasn't. He was in bed with the Narthians or not. In either case, he was a pirate, who attacked Earth ships. Guardian ships flown by men who were her friends and brothers in arms. He also made slaves of women, although he seemed pretty sensitive with her.

When he wasn't making plans to whip her.

Damn. The twisting wasn't working either. Maybe she could use something else. Where had that lance ended up – the one she had attacked him with?

It was then she saw a tiny glimmer on the floor, near the end of the bed. Her heart skipped a beat. It looked like a key. Son of a bitch. Had the all-knowing, in control Azar actually screwed up and dropped the key to the shackles on his way out?

It sure as hell looked like it.

It was about time she got a break her way. The question was – could she reach it. Not with her hands, but she had feet and toes. She was pretty good with them, too, thanks to a lot of sessions of toe wrestling with her father, a game the two of them had invented when she was little.

How easy it was back then. When he would just play with her and talk and laugh. Once she had grown up, it all seemed to get so much harder.

Theryssa scooted down the bed, stretching her arms over her head. It took her a while to find the key again with her foot, since she was on her back, staring at the ceiling.

Finally, she felt the cold metal with her big toe. Now came the tricky part. Getting it between her toes without kicking it out of reach for good. Once she nearly lost it. A couple more times she came close, only to drop it halfway up.

Finally, she was able to lift it all the way over her head and drop it straight down.

She caught it with true sass, clamping it right between her teeth.

A second later she was free.

Now all she had to do was find her way out of the cabin, past a whole crew of horny pirates and make it to Azar. Then she could make her decision.

Either to kill him or kiss him.

Whichever of the two came into her mind first.

* * * * *

It was not his old compatriot who Azar noticed first. Of the two highly attractive, physically fit persons of early middle age standing in the war room waiting for him, it was definitely the female who caught and kept his attention.

"You...are Nyssa?" he asked, astonished.

Azar had seen holoids of the woman here and there, official pictures off the hologrid, and scenes from Council meetings. But nothing up close and personal. In real life there was no mistaking the resemblance.

She could be Theryssa in twenty years.

"I am." The woman nodded. "And you are Azar. King of Pirates."

Azar was at a loss for words. Was the Council cloning its best citizens now, creating new organisms from the exact same genetic material?

"Nyssa is Theryssa's mother." Theron inserted himself into the conversation. "That is the reason for the resemblance."

"Her...mother?" This was getting more incredible by the minute. "But natural genetics has been outlawed for centuries. You mean to say you carried her...*in your womb?*"

"Perish the thought." Nyssa shook her head. "I love my daughter to death, but I would never endure such a thing. Theryssa was made in a test tube, the healthy way. It just so happens that her genes, unlike the rest of the population, are an exclusive mix. Mine and —"

"Yours," Azar finished her sentence, looking directly at Theron. "Theryssa is your daughter. I should have guessed as much from her stubbornness."

Theron attempted unsuccessfully to hide his pride. "She does tend to take after me, it's true."

"But she has your beauty," Azar declared to Nyssa.

Nyssa smiled in definite appreciation. "Thank you," she said, "though there is no need to flatter an old lady."

"You are hardly old, Nyssa." This from Theron, who clearly adored his wife. "But see here, Azar," he riveted his eagle eyes, "now that the introductions are out of the way, I must insist that you guarantee the safety of my wife and my daughter from this point forward. Otherwise, I will not be held responsible for my actions."

"You have my word. On my life," said Azar. "As for the men you encountered, I shall deal with them. I promise you, they did not act on my orders."

"We believe you," said Nyssa speaking for them both. "And we trust you."

Azar marveled at the woman's grace and boldness. Theryssa had learned much from her mother, no doubt.

"Theryssa's name," Azar exclaimed, the pieces continuing to fall into place in his rapidly whirring brain. "That's a mix, too. Theron and Nyssa. Therr — yssa."

"I can see your powers of deduction remain as strong as ever," Theron quipped. "I imagine you will be able to guess the real reason why we sent her here, too."

"Not bloody likely. By the gods," he shook his head, still overwhelmed at seeing Theryssa's progenitors, "I can't believe my eyes. It's so clear. She is the perfect combination of a warrior and a politician. Tell me, is she truly unique, or are other couples being allowed to create natural children?"

"It's a very select group so far. Our daughter, as well as our nephew born of Nyssa's sister Seria and her husband. Of course Nyssa and I are natural, as well," Theron explained. "Although Theryssa is unique in being the first female born of a primale father and a half primale mother. That makes her quite extraordinary. She is the first female in the Guardians, as a matter of fact, though she is seldom linked to me or her mother."

"We have tried to protect our children's identities," said Nyssa. "Theryssa was raised by us, but only a few outside the family know who she really is. It's the same with Seria and Raylar's son."

"Which begs the question," Azar decided to get to the meat of the situation, "why tell me all this? For that matter, why choose my humble ship for this little family get-together of yours in the first place? Are there more coming? Should I expect a reunion?"

Nyssa's smile broadened. The room lit up, the same way it did when Theryssa smiled. "Not exactly. Could we sit down, though? I'm afraid it's a bit of a long story."

"Forgive me." Azar rushed to get a chair for this dazzling woman...the mother of the woman he had been sharing such incredible sex with.

The same woman Azar currently had chained on his bed.

How could he have forgotten such a thing, standing here, casually talking to the woman's parents? Looking at Theron, he had sudden visions of himself flying through the air like Falthar.

"If you'll forgive me, I need to tend to something." Azar bowed, offering Theryssa one of two simple metal seats. "I'll be right back."

Theron remained standing. "If you don't mind, I would like to get right to business."

"Theron," Nyssa scolded lightly, "stop being such a bear."

"It's all right, Nyssa," said Azar. "If Theron was too easygoing, I would start to worry."

Theron sat down, with Azar following suit. Unfortunately, Theryssa would have to wait just a little longer.

"I'd worry, too," agreed Nyssa, squeezing the powerful arm of her husband.

"The first thing I must ask you, Azar," Theron settled imperiously into his seat, "Is to confirm your receipt of my transmission. I assume so, since you haven't tried to blast us to atoms."

"I did receive it. As for letting you live, credit your lovely wife. I'd have shot you on sight if you'd come alone," he joked grimly.

"It's true," he acknowledged with a gallows smile. "We have been enemies, you and I, for a long time. Were we meeting under different circumstances, I would be sworn by my office to destroy you."

Azar nodded, seeking once and for all to lay to rest the memory of Solania. Whether it was indeed an accident or that she had killed herself after being told by Theron that she couldn't see Azar anymore, it wasn't Theron's fault. He had come under orders and he was not responsible for her subsequent actions. "That said, let's get down to business. The past...shall be left in the past. I accept your personal words to me and your invitation to dialogue."

Theron nodded. "In that case, let us propose to you a new beginning between us."

"What new beginning could there be, Theron?"

Nyssa eyed her husband, indicating a desire to take over their end of the conversation. "Azar, we sent to you the most precious thing to us in the entire universe. Our only child. Forgive us for not being up front about why. Forgive us, too, for sending her in disguise, and for keeping tabs on her while she's been with you."

"Keeping...tabs?"

Theron nodded. "Unbeknownst to her, we inserted a transponder into her retina. The procedure is a new one. It was done while she was asleep one night. A remote android, a ball little bigger than a man's hand administered it by microbeam. It's painless and is designed to dissolve in a few weeks. Thanks to it, we have been fully aware of everything happening to her since her arrival."

Azar swallowed. "Everything?"

Nyssa smiled knowingly. "Don't be embarrassed Azar. We are adults, we are aware of what sex-making is. Theryssa is grown, too, and we know that all that has transpired between you is consensual and fully natural."

Azar looked at Theron, blinking. "You saw..."

Theron was frowning heavily, fists clenched. Clearly he was far less comfortable with his daughter's sexuality than his wife.

"Let's not drag this out," he cut Azar off. "We did what we had to for Theryssa's security. This is a pirate ship for star's sake. You have my word, the receiver will be deactivated as soon as we get back on our ship. The point is, Theryssa came to you unmated, you interacted with her and now you will be her lifemate."

Azar's eyes widened. Was he hearing right? Theryssa was certainly sweet, but what, for nebula's sake, gave Theron the idea they were going to hook up for life after less than a day together.

Although now that he thought about it, he did feel intensely comfortable and at home with Theryssa...more so even than in his own skin.

"Theron, with all due respect..."

It was Nyssa's turn to interrupt him. "Azar, you needn't answer now. I know it's a lot to absorb. And we owe you an extra apology for spying on you in bed. We just needed to know she was safe at all times."

"It's lucky for you she was," Theron said. "I have had half the fleet on standby in the next star system."

Azar had had just about enough. "Well, you might as well use it on me, Theron, because I am not mating with anyone against my will. Ever."

"You have no choice," Theron pressed. "You possessed her...as a primale. She is your woman. You must protect her, and lay down your life for her if need be. Your genetics will allow nothing else."

Azar's blood pounded in his head. "I have been with many women...with all due respect, and never had that happen," Azar argued, as much against himself as Theron.

Theron was on his feet. "Do you dare to compare my daughter with a horde of pirate wenches?"

Azar, no physical slouch himself, met him eye to eye across the table. "I said no such thing, Theron. And if you think for one moment that I dishonored Theryssa in word or deed, then you will meet such wrath as you have never known."

"Both of you, that's enough!" Nyssa was standing, too, holding them back, one palm on each of their chests. "You are both acting like boys in a schoolyard."

Theron's breathing slowed and gradually his face resumed a less predatory expression. Azar extended his hand. "Forgive me...old friend."

This sudden act of mercy surprised Azar as much as it did Theron. Truly, Azar would not have been capable of this a day ago. Something about Theryssa, her warm beauty, the hope she held in her arms was making him see the world differently.

"Theron," Nyssa prompted, her voice possessing more than a little authority, "take the man's hand."

Theron's handshake was firm, bordering on painful.

"Now, Theron," Nyssa instructed, "I want you to stop playing the warrior for a few minutes and tell Azar what you really feel."

Theron looked as though he would rather slit open a NARTHIAN bug and eat its insides raw. "It was my idea," he confessed. "I thought that you were...right for my daughter. Our daughter. You're the only man, after all these years..."

Azar came around the table to embrace him. "We are brothers," he whispered, "we owe each other our lives."

And yet Azar could not marry Theryssa. All the more so for how much he loved and respected Theron, and now Nyssa.

"Theron, listen to me. We can settle everything between us. If you can forgive me for leaving the Guardians. If you can understand that I could not accept the death of Solania. If you will recognize my subsequent actions had to do with Council policy."

"I do. Things in those days were...not so clear. Malthusalus was a dire threat. He nearly killed Nyssa."

"I know, Theron, and I understand why you stayed a Guardian. And why you are one today. And why you kill pirates like me. We are outsiders, threats to your way of life. Which is why you must take Theryssa away from me. Forever."

"Is that what you really want?" Nyssa asked. "If this is about Council policy, you should know things are changing. Theryssa is only the beginning. We now see there is wisdom in letting people have more choices. We are actively seeking to vary the possibilities of humanity."

"The future is wide open," said Theron, "but we need good men like you to help us."

Azar's heart was aching. He did not want to abandon the human race, even more, he could not imagine never seeing or holding Theryssa again, never seeing what new adventure another hour with her might hold. And yet, he could not take the next step. "It's what's best for me personally," he insisted.

"Damn you, man," thundered Theron, "she opened herself to you. The transponder readings show passion deeper than anything ever seen on a woman, next to her mother."

"I'm sorry Theron, but you can't just manipulate people's hearts. We aren't pawns to be played with. That's the problem I had with the Council's way of doing things in the first place and now I wonder if you're really capable of change at all."

Theron's goodwill was threatening to go up in flames. It was typical of the men's relationship. Love and hate. "And your problem is an inability to accept authority," he pointed out accusingly.

"I have one authority, Theron, and that is my own conscience," Azar declared. "And I will thank you not to raise your voice. In case you haven't noticed, we are out of your jurisdiction."

"Well, it's going to be Narthian jurisdiction if you don't stop being so blasted selfish and start cooperating with your fellow human beings," Theron exclaimed.

"What are you talking about?" Azar demanded. "There are no Narthians within a dozen systems. They won't be back for generations."

Theron threw up his hands. "You see," he said to Nyssa, "the man knows everything. Far be it from us to try to enlighten him."

"Honey, you need to calm down," said Nyssa. "This is getting us nowhere. And Azar, you need to hear what Theron has to say. Just because the Narthians are not on our doorstep does not mean they aren't a threat. We have intelligence, credible information, that they are growing new nests. A super strong variety which we've faced only once before. And it didn't go well. If not for the bravery of my sister's husband Raylar, we would have lost an entire company. We had hoped that was an isolated strain, but we are seeing birth nest heat traces all along the rim area."

Azar turned to Theron, the wind momentarily taken from his sails.

"We give them six months, a year tops, before they hit us straight across the galaxy arm. From the Centon System all the way to Devalos," Theron elaborated. "In the meantime we have to build a larger fighting force."

"A fighting force of Guardians," Nyssa said. "And pirates."

"Pirates...under my command, I assume?" Azar guessed the rest of their plan.

"Yes," said Nyssa.

"And you want it kept in the family," said Azar to Theron. "You want me as your son-in-law before you will go back into battle with me. Is that the real reason I'm supposed to marry Theryssa?"

"Of course not," Theron snapped. "I already told you why I chose you. It's a matter of your character. At least the character I thought you had."

Azar laughed without humor. "You pick the strangest ways to flatter a man, Theron. With that approach, I wish you luck giving Theryssa away."

"Don't you take that tone with me, Azar. You will marry her, and that is final!"

Azar was about to retort when he was preempted by a new voice. Very female and very angry.

"What the hell is going on?" demanded the tousle-haired, freshly escaped Theryssa, her body deliciously clad in one of Azar's tunics. "Mom, Dad, what are you doing here?"

Nyssa ran to embrace her daughter, who was not very interested in a hug. "We came to check on you, baby."

"Like hell you did. I could hear you in the corridor. You're in here planning my life. Dad, you're trying to make me marry Azar?"

"This isn't the time to talk about this, Theryssa."

"What do you mean it isn't the time? When would be a good time? During the mating ceremony?"

"You know I don't like it when you raise your voice," said Theron.

"And I don't like it when you try to make me marry a man against my will."

"You're being melodramatic, Theryssa—"

"I'm being *what*? Dad, have you lost your mind? I feel like I have woken up in some bizarre nightmare, except it's my real life."

"Sweetie, it's not as bad as it seems," Nyssa attempted to calm her down.

"It's not? By all means, Mom, enlighten me. I'm all ears." Theryssa thrust her arms in the air, employing the very same gesture Theron had a few moments ago.

"We wanted you to get to know Azar," explained Theron, "and this seemed the most logical way."

She whirled on her father. "By sending me halfway across the galaxy to spy on him while posing as a courier? You couldn't have introduced us at a dinner party?"

'Theryssa, this is our sworn enemy I've been trying to kill for twenty years. I hope you two will be very happy.' That has a real ring to it, doesn't it?"

"You are being sarcastic, young lady," her father disapproved. "But you are owed an explanation, nonetheless. There are things in my history that I've not been able to reveal up to this point, Theryssa. Azar and I were once allies. He was a Guardian too, a few years younger than me, not that it mattered. Much happened between us. He saved my life, and I returned the favor. We were as close as men can be. But then political circumstances intervened. An unfortunate...situation with a woman. We parted ways. Each of us acted in good faith, but there was nothing we could do to prevent our becoming adversaries. That was a very long time ago. Circumstances have changed and we must reunite to fight the NARTHians. This new alliance allows me to renew my relationship with Azar and to express my long-standing hope that the two of you might somehow be mated. I always thought he would be the best man for you, Theryssa, and now there is nothing standing in the way."

Theryssa turned to Azar, a mixture of emotions on her face. "Azar...this is true? You served with my father?"

"We were comrades," Azar confirmed. "Your father was the finest soldier I ever served with, though he had a tendency to ignore orders. It was a habit that nearly cost his life on more than one occasion."

"I ignored orders?" Theron defended himself. "What about that little stunt of yours on Teranium?"

"How else was I supposed to save your miserable neck?"

Theron shook his head. "You see what I had to deal with," he said to Nyssa.

Azar smiled thinly. "We muddled through, somehow, didn't we? It's a wonder either of us made it."

Theryssa's eyes narrowed. "So you knew all about this?" she asked Azar. "You were in on my father's scheme?"

Azar shook his head. "I had no idea, Theryssa. I did not know who you were. Your parent's arrival here is as big a shock to me as it is to you."

There was so much more he wanted to say to her. But he couldn't form the thoughts clearly in his head. There were too many questions. For one thing, he had yet to figure out how she had managed to escape.

That metal in her cuffs was strong enough to hold a full-grown Mongro beast.

"Oh, I doubt that," Theryssa countered. "Shocked doesn't even begin to cover what I'm feeling."

"Baby, I'm so sorry." Nyssa stroked her hair. "You know the last thing in the world we would ever do is hurt you. We wanted you to be happy, that's all."

Theryssa shook her head. She looked at a total loss. He would give anything to be able to hold her in his arms right now.

"Mom...I know you mean well...but, damn, you guys are just...you're just not normal."

"You'll think about it," Theron predicted. "It will all make sense soon enough. To both of you."

"Dad, I'm sorry, but you can't just snap your fingers and make it all fall into place. I know you see it in your head, and you love me, but life just isn't like one of your strategy games."

"You liked my games just fine when you were younger. You even beat me once or twice."

Azar could picture the two of them, intently concentrating, on opposite sides of a holoscreen. He would give anything to have known her then, to have watched her grow up. Every second of her life was so very precious, just as was everything about her now. Just seeing her parents made him feel more alive, more a part of her. If only this could have happened differently. If only it were not about to come to an end. Abrupt and bitter.

"Theron," Azar interjected, making a valiant effort at defending the woman who had worn his chains and turned his world on its ear in a matter of hours, "Theryssa is right. Emotions cannot be manipulated. Nor can loyalties be manufactured. I cannot, in good conscience, join my forces with yours. Should the Narthians come, I will meet them as best I am able, fighting to my last breath. I do appreciate the offer, but I think it is best we part ways. As friends."

Theron's face showed no emotion. "Very well," he said stiffly. "Nyssa, Theryssa. We are leaving."

"I will see to it the three of you are escorted safely back to your ship," said Azar.

"You've been very kind," Nyssa said. "And we wish you the best."

Azar gave a small bow. Let this be done quickly, he prayed, while I still have the strength to let her go.

"Wait just a minute," demanded Theryssa. "I'm not just a suitcase here. No one is telling me to go anywhere."

Blast it. She was asserting that firebrand will of hers. He should have known she wouldn't be pushed around.

"Theryssa, you can't stay," said Theron curtly.

She gave it right back to him. "It's not your ship, Dad. You can't tell me to leave it."

"Theryssa, please don't talk to your father that way," Nyssa said.

Azar felt for Nyssa. He had a feeling the woman was used to running interference like this.

"This is what I get," Theron complained to his wife, "for loving my daughter."

"You have strange ways of showing it," said Theryssa.

"Theryssa, please..." Nyssa's voice sounded strained for the first time.

The sound of it touched off something in Azar. "Theryssa, your mother's right. This isn't doing you any good."

Theryssa's displeasure shifted with a vengeance. Azar might as well have had a magnet on his head. "Excuse me," she blasted him, "am I wrong, or is this none of your fucking business? Because I thought you made it pretty clear I don't mean a fucking thing to you."

"Theryssa, I never said that."

"No," she agreed, "you didn't say anything. Not even goodbye."

"Theron," said Nyssa, "I think we need to give them some time alone."

Theryssa wasted no time gainsaying that idea. "Over my dead body Mom. I have nothing to say to this...this man."

"Theryssa, I think your mother is right. I would like a chance to talk."

"Well I wouldn't, Azar," she shot him down. "And seeing as how you don't fucking own me, I guess you're out of luck."

"Theryssa, don't be unreasonable."

"I'll be whatever I want to be."

Azar clenched his fists. His every inclination was to seize her in his arms, to settle this matter sexually, resolving the tension in the only way he knew...by pinning her body down, hot and hard.

If only her parents weren't here.

"Theryssa, we really need to talk..." His voice had more punch this time. Not strident, but...potent.

Theryssa scowled, but offered no immediate reply. Was Azar imagining things or was she conflicted...a part of her wanting to be with him as much as he wanted to be with her?

Nyssa seized the opportunity for a graceful exit. "Azar, I think it would be best for Theron and me to go. If someone could take us back to the hangar bay?"

"I'll send for my best men to escort you," assured Azar.

"Mom, you're not going anywhere without me," Theryssa insisted, in a sudden about-face.

"You just said you weren't coming with us," Theron reminded, slight exasperation in his voice.

"Stop arguing with me, Dad. I'll just take my own ship, then."

"Are you sure?" asked Nyssa.

"Yes!"

"Theryssa," said her father. "Do not raise your voice to your mother."

"I am sorry," she said.

"It's all right, darling." Nyssa smiled. "We just want to be sure you're going to be okay. It's been so much already for you."

"I'm okay." She forced a smile. "Really."

"We will meet you back home, then," Nyssa kissed her daughter's forehead. "We love you very much."

Theron turned to Azar. "Do I have your permission to dispatch a military patrol to the area? To escort Theryssa back to Earth in her own ship?"

Azar nodded. "Of course. I insist upon it."

"I don't need babysitters," Theryssa snapped at both men.

"Why not?" Theron showed his thinning patience. "You're acting childish enough."

Nyssa touched his arm, silencing him.

Azar pressed the intercom button on the wall. "Squad One to the war room. On the double," he summoned the escorts.

"That won't be necessary. We will go on our own," said Theron, straightening himself to his full, proud height. "Theryssa, you may kiss me goodbye."

Theryssa had a most delicious look of defiance on her face, but she went to her father nonetheless.

"Someday you will understand," Theron whispered, hugging his daughter tightly.

Theryssa hugged her mother, too. This was followed by embraces by both of them with Azar. A moment later, the pair left.

His pulse quickened as the servo door slid shut, closing them in the gray, metal room. They were alone at last.

"I have nothing to say," Theryssa announced. "And I really have no intention of listening, either. So how about we make it easy on ourselves? You leave me alone and as soon as my folks are gone, I will head off on my own."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Theryssa, but we have unfinished business."

She glared. "What business?"

"There was the matter of your punishment," he reminded. "Which must now be compounded as a result of your attempted escape."

"You can't be serious? Not after what's happened."

"I've never been more serious in my life."

Her jaw gaped slightly, ovaling her pretty lips. "But...I'm not your prisoner," she reminded. "I never was. You heard what my parents said. This was all a trap. A bizarre matchmaking ploy."

"I am not interested in the motives of your parents, Theryssa. You came here of your own accord and you subsequently submitted to me. You cannot renege now. You are a grown woman, responsible for your own actions."

She took a step backward. "My father will destroy you if you harm a hair on my head."

"I do not intend to harm you, little one. Only punish you."

"Don't call me that!"

"You're wearing my tunic," Azar pointed out. "I would like it back."

Her eyes flashed. "I'm naked underneath, Azar."

"That's a good way for a slave to be."

"I'm not a slave," she insisted.

"Aren't you?"

Theryssa backed up again, then ran from the room as soon as her ass impacted the heavy metal table, the one used for planning battles. In short order, it would be used for a conquest of a different kind.

"If you touch me, I'll fight," she vowed.

"You can. But you will lose."

"Maybe, but I will take the fun out of your victory."

"Oh, I think it will be quite enjoyable for both of us." He smiled.

She tried to dart past as he approached, but he was too quick. Grabbing her arm, he pinned her between the table and his rock-hard torso.

Her breathing was hard. Her chest rose and fell furiously, her breasts pressed to his pectorals. "I'm warning you," she hissed. "Get the fuck off me."

"Not until I've straightened a few things out."

Like his cock, which was pointed directly at the apex of her thighs. Theryssa grunted, more out of desperation than actual power. Her attempted knee to his groin was easily anticipated and fended off with a turn of his hip.

"That's a bad girl, Theryssa." Azar did a little jackknifing of his own, managing to wedge her legs apart.

"I'm not...a girl..." she pushed at him in vain. "I'm a...woman...a pissed-off woman."

Azar savored the scent of her sex, freshly released into the air. "You're aroused."

"I hate you, Azar," she spat.

Azar ripped open the front of the shirt, baring her heaving breasts. "You don't hate me," he palmed her left breast, clutching it in his hand, "you hate how much you need this."

"You're hurting me," she said.

Her flesh felt so good in his hand, so alive, so captive. "Then tell me to stop."

He was taking the risk of losing her, but it had to be done. He had no interest in forcing her, really.

Theryssa clenched her teeth in rage, but she couldn't get the words out. She was as hooked on this as he.

"That's what I thought," he declared in triumph. "You don't want me to stop. You know what I'm going to do to you, Theryssa? As punishment for trying to escape?"

She shook her head, trying to look away from him, over his shoulder, anywhere she could find relief from his unflinching stare. "No, and I don't care."

"Oh, but I think you do care." He massaged her breast, applying just enough pressure. "I think you care a great deal."

Theryssa arched her back, moaning. "N-no." In spite of her protests, however, she was giving him better access to the swollen globe.

Azar smiled wickedly. He knew damn well she was in too deep, but he gave her another out. One more, just in case. "If you want me to stop, tell me now. You can go home with your parents. Just say the word."

Her head was back, her eyes closed. She sucked in her lip...saying nothing.

"Very well." Azar leaned forward now, whispering in her ear what her punishment would be.

Theryssa gasped. "No, I can't. I've never —"

"Of course you can." Azar took her nipple between his teeth, bending his head low to get it. Employing a subtle but devastating mix of suckling and biting, he brought her to a state of near hysteria.

Her body was writhing, slithering in place like a snake straight out of Eden. The nipple was beet red, hard and supple when he finally released it.

She whimpered, abandoned. "Please...don't stop."

"But I thought you didn't like where things were going?" he reminded her. "You just rejected your punishment, remember?"

"Azar, you're tormenting me," she sighed, her breath coming in broken stabs. "Don't do this."

"Tell me, then. Tell me you are prepared to accept what I am choosing for you."

"Not...not that. Anything else."

Azar repeated the treatment on her other nipple. He could feel the energy surging through her body. She was close to coming, just from the pleasure of his mouth on her breast and his knee on her vulva.

"Tell me." He surrendered the second nipple to the open air.

Theryssa was writhing. "I...accept."

"Accept what? Speak the words."

"Your cock...in my ass." She mouthed the sentence hotly from dry lips.

Azar gave her breasts a mild slap, enough to jolt her senses and fill her with even more unanswerable pleasure. "Is that how you ask for something, Theryssa? From your Master?"

"No, it's not..." Her teeth chattered. Her forehead was drenched with sweat.

So much pleasure in her bittersweet expression, her curling lips. So much scandal, too. For she was once again enjoying and wanting things that good young women of Earth, good Guardian's daughters, were not supposed to want.

"You're stalling, Theryssa." He readied himself to slap her again.

She tried to cover her breasts instinctively, but he spoke a command, harshly, firmly. "Arms down."

She dropped her hands to her sides. His cock swelled in response to her act of lightning fast obedience. His desire to be gentle with her overcame his desire to be firm. Instead of slapping, he offered a caress, as soft as it was insolent, to her left nipple.

Azar could feel her sex liquid soaking through his trousers on his thigh where he was holding her legs open.

He thought she would melt from the act of submission...being made to endure his touches like this, having no ability to protect herself.

"I need your discipline," she cried. "Oh, god, I can't help it. I need to be fucked by you, hard and strong...in my ass."

Azar laid his palm on her cheek. Hot and pink. "Do you know why it will be punishment for you to submit anally?" he inquired.

"Because of the degradation?" She licked her lips. He could feel her sinking into a trance, readying herself.

He stroked her forehead, brushing away strands of her long, silky, damp hair. It was time to bring her deeper still. "No, Theryssa," he countered. "As my slave, you can't be degraded. Shamed, yes, but I define that differently—as part of the power dynamics between us, the thrill we share when I push you beyond yourself. Care to guess again?"

"No." Her voice was a ghostly whisper, erotic and curling up toward the bulkhead ceiling of the room.

"It's a punishment to sink my cock deep into your ass, because your pussy will be deprived in the process. You will endure the feelings of invasion without the normal stimulation. And you will know, too, that this is happening by my will. Because I am displeased by your behavior."

"I don't have to please you," she squirmed.

"But it arouses you to talk about it. To think about it."

"I don't want to think!"

"Very well." Azar spun her by the hips, facing her away from him. "Down," he ordered. "Palms and breasts on the table top."

She shivered as her sensitive nipples touched the cold metal.

"Open," he slapped her ass, compelling her to widen her stance.

Theryssa treated him to a most delicious view of her pink labia, thick and moist. No doubt, she would dearly love to come, but at the moment, he had only one use for her dripping opening.

Namely as a source of lubrication for the tinier one.

"You're a beautiful woman," he pinched her perfect ass cheek cruelly. "A man could easily be overcome by you. Which is all the more reason to keep you on a short leash."

Theryssa jerked, though not entirely in pain. Azar tore at the opening to his breeches. He could not get his cock out fast enough.

"You don't have me on any kind of leash," she defied. "You don't have me at all."

"You will only worsen your punishment, little one, by backtalking me."

"Fuck you, you bastard."

She tried to rise, he kept her in place, a firm hand on her back, fingers splayed. "Rub your nipples on the table," he ordered, thankful that Theron had promised to deactivate the monitor for the retinal scanner in her eye, hoping that he had, "my horny little spy."

Before she could think of arguing, he went to work on her clitoris. As usual he was able to get her body to betray both her will and her pride.

"I...hate you," she moaned as he plucked at the center of her desire, arousing but not satisfying, touching in such a way as to leave her hungrier with each passing second.

"I am waiting." He focused her on his command.

Theryssa submitted, sliding her breasts, slippery with sweat, over the table. Just a few inches up and back and she was out of her mind. The smooth hardness, imposed as it was on soft flesh...

"Azar," she gritted her teeth, "I can't take much more."

"You're a Guardian. Strong and quick enough to get out of my chains," he pointed out.

"Damn you, I'm female, too."

"When it's convenient."

"This is hardly convenient!"

"It is for me," he mused. "Tell me, what would make it better? How about if we go straight to here."

"Here" was her pussy, which opened like butter to his fingers.

"Oh, stars, Azar," she groaned. "Do it, fuck me, put me out of my misery."

"But we have to tend to discipline, don't we?"

He had her right where he wanted.

"Yes," she replied miserably.

"Tell me your punishment."

"You know what it is, Azar...you came up with it."

"Tell me anyway."

"Anal...intercourse."

"My cock inside your ass," he restated the matter in plain terms. "Using you at will." She gasped as his finger gathered moisture from her pussy. "A little lubrication," he explained, applying the liquid to the tiny opening. "You would do well to relax, Theryssa."

She curled her toes. "Azar, I'm not sure it will fit."

"There's no need to be nervous," he soothed. "This is erotic punishment. This is the pain of psychological submission...knowing Master can have you as he wishes."

"Yes," she picked up on his words, "I'm your slave. You can take me...even in the ass."

"Whose ass?"

"Your ass," she cried. "You can fuck your slave in the ass because it's yours."

He continued to prepare her, making her hole wetter and wetter. "My Theryssa." He stroked her pussy.

"Oh, god," she responded to his presence, his words. "Oh fuck."

Had it been less than a day since he had first called her his? How much more meaning it carried now, knowing as he did the connection to her father, the one true friend he had ever had in his life.

"Azar, wait, tell me something first."

"What is it?"

"My father mentioned a woman...is she the one you once loved?"

"What did I tell you about asking questions?"

"I want to know. I deserve it."

"You're a slave being punished. Concentrate on that."

"Do you still love her?" she persisted.

His cock was at the puckered entrance. The head of it was slick and moist. "That was another life."

She groaned as he slid his cock inward an inch or so. "It's not fair." She shook her head.

"What isn't fair?" He took another inch, making her breathe faster still.

"Any of this...how we met...how we are now...we didn't have a chance to..."

"A chance to what?" he pressed. "Fall in love? It doesn't matter how people meet. It either happens or it doesn't."

"I know nothing about you..."

"You know what matters." His cock enjoyed the raw tightness. A place no man had been before. Virgin Theryssa. Unknown, and yet surprisingly familiar. Pulsing and spunky...deliciously, yieldingly defiant.

"So full," she sighed. "So...different."

"It's another kind of closeness," he said, using his primale powers to regulate the size of his cock, allowing careful, but satisfying penetration, farther, farther. "I have wanted this since I saw you. Wanted to possess you this way."

"And I...wanted to be yours. Though I wouldn't admit it. Azar, I looked at your holos."

"Did you?" The idea made him smile. "Tell me more."

She sighed, pushing her ass back. He moved in farther, then retracted. It was time to fuck her for real.

"They drove me crazy...I masturbated."

"You wicked little girl," he teased.

Azar plunged himself back in, widening her a little more. He was tuned in to every subtle motion in her body, being careful to push her only to the limits of ecstasy and not beyond.

"I had to put up a blocker against you."

"I had the same reaction," he admitted, "when I saw you in your little uniform, flame of black hair, bright-eyed, putting on that little damsel routine."

"Pretty bad acting."

"Charming, though."

"Oh, Azar...come inside me, will you? Come in my ass? Show me I'm your girl. Show me why it is I shouldn't want to escape."

"If you insist," he said. "But I warn you, the journey is deep."

"Deeper than your cock can go?"

"Yes," he replied. "Much."

Chapter Eight

Theryssa should have her head examined.

Captured...naked and penetrated, ass full of cock, her pussy craving attention, dripping for it, her breasts squashed, helpless already...and she just asked for more?

"Use your tongue," he said. "On the top of the table."

"My...tongue?" Theryssa stiffened. Like the rest of this or any space ship, it was a clean, hygienic surface, but it was the symbolism more than anything. The idea of giving in to him, of behaving...like some kind of pet.

"Yes, lick it. And give in to the sensations. That is how you will feel your slavery to me. Your powerlessness to resist your own pleasure."

Tentatively, she opened her mouth. With her head sideways, she had to apply the side of her tongue. She did so, quickly retracting it. The taste was metallic, and deliciously wicked.

Azar told her to do it again, more lingeringly. Whimpering, Theryssa moved her head into position, just grazing the shiny metal surface with her pink tongue.

"Yes, Theryssa." His voice was a hypnotic rasp. "See how obedient you can be? See what a good little slave you are?"

Yes...Theryssa could see the point now. Hungrily, she lapped at the metal, again and again. Cold and hard, completely unyielding. She felt weak all over, her ass and pussy open and totally vulnerable in comparison. He could take her now, she was ready.

"Theryssa," he sighed in approval.

"Yes, Azar." She said his name as a plea, an encouragement, an utterance of awe, all wrapped up together.

"Theryssa," he said her name once more, sending spasms of joy through her body, "you are so incredible."

"But you don't know me," she reminded.

"I know what matters," he said, using the same words he'd used for himself.

The passion in his voice made her untouched pussy burn. "I want to take more of you. Make your cock bigger. I know you can. You're primale."

"It's your first time," he cautioned.

"I don't give a fuck," she defied. Adding, in afterthought, "I mean I don't give a fuck, Master. I'm three quarters primale—primefemale. I can take it."

Azar growled. "Tell me again why I let you stay?"

"You didn't. I'm here of my own volition. Oh, god, Azar, you're a perfect fit. Give me it all, I want it all."

He swelled his cock—thicker, longer, harder. "No woman has ever been able to bear this much."

"I'm not just any woman."

He reared back and slammed himself deep. "You talk too much...still."

"You love it and you know it."

"Only when it's what I want to hear...slave."

"You'd be bored to tears if I did that...Master."

She could swear that this marvelous, hard, veined cock of his was made for her and her alone. Theryssa thought of that cock being elsewhere. She thought of its history, even as she sought to take it deeper, inviting it inward to her center. She decided she didn't care for its history, for all the places it had been. And she did not care for its future.

At least if that future meant being inside any other female but her.

"Galaxy forbid boredom. Speaking of which, how is that pussy of mine?" Her pussy spasmed in response to his words of possession. "I'm burning up," she confessed.

Azar shifted positions somehow, putting a little pressure on her pelvis. She groaned, feeling suddenly better. And worse. She had no choice now but to move, rocking her hips from side to side.

It was her clitoris. He was using the edge of the table, the cold beveled metal for leverage. No direct contact, but something indirect, and therefore more teasing.

"Azar, tell me what it looks like," she said impulsively.

Azar laughed. She tensed just a little, knowing him well enough that he was about to shift once more, from doting lover, to his pirate persona.

"It looks like my little slave," he said, right on cue. "Bent over, submitting...taking her Master's cock."

The provocative words coursed through her, snapping at her sensibilities like a whip. "Yes," she hissed. "Master's cock in my ass."

"You attempted to escape me," he reminded her, pounding without mercy. "You were a bad girl."

"Yes...Master."

"There's no escape now, is there?" Another push and then another, until she felt she would split wide open, into pieces of herself—exploding, sizzling, lust-fried pieces.

"No..."

"I left you chained in my bed, Theryssa. That's where you belonged until I released you."

"Yes, Master."

"Take it, Theryssa. Take your punishment." Another push, decisive and domineering.

"Oh, god...oh, Master...it's so...tight."

"You're the most beautiful, captivating woman I've ever known, Theryssa. Every time I look at you, touch you, it's like I plunge into some unknown universe, one where I will never find the bottom, and yet I can't live without a second of the journey. You know what it does to me, to think of you...apart from me?"

"Oh, Azar," she cried, "what you do to me. I knew there was more to you, I saw in your eyes your history, your pain, the first time I beheld you."

"I want you chained, Theryssa." He pulled back, nearly to the tip. And then he descended again, reclaiming all the territory he'd won. And more. "I want you naked. In a collar. I want you in my bed. Begging. Dripping and open—helpless."

"I am helpless," she said. "You have me. I'm here...I'm yours. I shouldn't want it like this, but I do. I can't help it. I'm supposed to be a Guardian."

"You are," he insisted. "One of the bravest I've ever known. Coming here like you did..."

"You made it possible. You gave me courage, even though you were supposed to be my enemy."

"Mmm..." He grunted. "I'm going to come so fucking hard. I'm going to give you as much primale seed as I can muster."

"God, yes. Shoot it inside me. All the way, hot and thick." she acknowledged the genetic ability of all primales to control the amount and even the heat of their emissions.

"There's one thing more I want first, though. I want to hear you tell me...that you need to come."

Her insides twisted in reply. She squirmed, wanting to touch herself, him, everywhere at once. Sweat covered her, her nipples were on fire, her belly burned. It was agony. "Yes, Azar, I need to come. More than I've needed anything in my life."

"I know you do. But you can't, can you?"

"Not...without permission."

"Your body is mine," he affirmed. "It obeys my commands." And yet there was so much more. He sensed it. A spirit that would forever beg to play, to fight, to surrender and rise again. "In your eyes, I saw the burning fire. The unquenchable need. The wildness."

"Yes, Azar. You know me, like no one. I think you've always known me. Take me Azar. Oh, stars, tame me."

His fingers clenched in her hair, holding it tightly. Symbolically. Satisfyingly. "Surrender..."

His command opened her still further and he immediately exploited the opportunity—penetrating, expanding, until she could feel him, almost as if he were in her pussy, after all.

"Fuck...fuck me, Azar...Master...lover."

Azar's pace quickened. It was like magic. She couldn't explain how he was generating such speed, how she wasn't splitting asunder under the man's powerful assault. No doubt her own primale genetics helped, but her will must have had something to do with it.

"Almost...there," he said, his voice low and ragged.

She could feel the heat. Primale heat. So much blood pounding in his cock. So much pent-up energy. "Mmmmaster..."

One final thrust, in slow motion, the downward descent like the tripping of a trigger, the hammer slamming on metal, sparking old-fashioned gun powder.

The first spurt of Azar's semen shot deep into her anal canal, satisfying, rich and tantalizing. It was followed immediately by a second. And a third.

How many would it be in all? It was pretty much up to Azar, being that he was primale. And a fantastically virile primale at that.

"Oh, god, Theryssa, oh my fucking god." He was surging with power, his muscles driving him onward and forward.

"Give it to me," she turned from abject slave to demanding female. "Give it all to me."

Azar shot several more times and then pulled himself out. He wasn't done, though. Not quite yet. "I'm going to come on your ass," he said, breathing heavily.

He pushed a finger down on her clitoris.

"Please," she writhed, "may I...come?"

"Yes," he said fiercely, his warm thick jets already landing on her ass and back. "Do it. Come for me. Come now."

Theryssa did not need to be asked twice. The dam, held back by Azar's will, burst with a singular spectacular rush. She was twisting her torso, reaching around to find him. He took her hand in one of his, squeezing tightly. The semen sprayed wildly as he let go of his cock, concentrating on her finale.

He placed his finger—gently, firmly, decisively, lovingly—on her swollen, eager, overripe clitoris, urging, inviting, *commanding* her to give in to the deep rhythms of her body. Oh, how he knew her anatomy, how to set off the trip wire, releasing pulse after pulse. Theryssa felt the energy—microshocks through her entire system—even as the main eruption occurred in the vicinity of her pussy. Over and over she said his name as both of them completed their bliss.

At last, there was nothing of her left. Expended, she felt herself collapsing, fainting. But with a smile on her face.

Azar didn't let her slide down but scooped her into his arms. Immediately, she cuddled against the warmth and solidity of his chest. Superwoman though she might be, there was nothing like this feeling of being cradled, knowing that her weight was as light as a feather to this man.

"Azar...thank you."

"You'll thank me more later." He grinned mischievously. "Assuming you survive the flogging."

He was headed straight for the door, both of them sans clothes.

"Azar," she clung to him, "we can't go out there like this."

"Why not?"

"We're both nude!"

"It's my ship," he growled, "I'll go about it as I wish."

Theryssa made an appeal to his possessive nature. "You really want them seeing *me* naked?"

Azar frowned, considering the matter. "Good point." Setting her down on the edge of the table for a moment, he went to retrieve his tunic, the one he had been wearing, which was not torn. "We'll cover you up with this."

It was Theryssa's turn to grin. "I like that you don't want to share me...not even visually. I guess that means you won't be passing me around like a rum bottle the way you threatened, huh?"

"I wouldn't get too smug, woman. You may find yourself wishing I *would* share you."

"So I'm a woman, finally," she noted the change in nomenclature.

"It wasn't meant as a compliment...slave girl."

Theryssa couldn't help but laugh. How bizarre was that? And yet it made sense, given the special, magical bond between them. Like a dance, where each knew the limits of what was serious and what was play, each delivering precisely what the other needed.

"Of course not...Master."

Azar laced up his shirt, covering her nakedness. This time he put her over his shoulder, like a rolled rug, facedown, backwards.

"Azar," she screeched, "what are you doing?"

He slapped her conveniently placed behind, covered by the tunic which was long enough on her to be a dress. "I am taking you back to my cabin. To find the chains you managed to shed. I assure you that you will not shed them again."

"But people will see me!"

"You're not naked, Theryssa, I thought that was your chief complaint."

She sought to grab hold of the doorway as they walked out. "No, I won't be shamed like this."

"Let go." He stung her ass with a considerably harder spank.

She did so, her cheeks flushed, her pussy freshly moistened. "You are impossible," she declared. "Do you know that?"

"What is so incredible about a pirate carrying booty?"

"I'm not booty." She kicked.

"Keep struggling, little one, and you will be naked again. On a leash, dragged behind me."

Theryssa settled down.

Damn it, she was horny all over again. With his every jostling step, her insides only got more scrambled, more ready for more fucking. The elevator ride was even worse.

"Azar? I could go down on you," she tempted him.

"You can wait a little longer," he rubbed her upturned bottom.

Theryssa sighed in frustration. "No, I can't."

At last they got off the elevator. They were nearly home free.

Famous last words...

"Oleron." Azar acknowledged the man waiting for him outside his cabin door.

Theryssa held her breath. He was the last man they needed to be running into. To make things worse, she could see nothing, positioned as she was.

"Captain," replied the baldheaded pirate Theryssa hated on account of the threat he posed to Azar, "I was looking for you."

Azar's voice held little warmth. "You have something to report, Oleron?"

Theryssa could feel Azar's body on alert. Subtle, but very real.

"Yes. The Earth ship has left. With our two visitors." Oleron cleared his throat, probably in recognition of Azar's current state of nudity. "Am I to assume you will be keeping this one?"

"You are to assume nothing, Oleron."

"I never do, Captain. I prefer to gain my own experience. Take your new wench, for example. I would like to experience her. I assume she's a good lay? Judging by all the time you've spent with her."

"You will not talk about her that way, Oleron."

Oleron laughed under his breath, a kind of dark chuckle.

"I fail to see anything funny."

"I just never thought I would see the day, that's all," Oleron declared, "when the great Captain Azar would get himself wrapped around the finger of a common slut."

Azar tensed. It was a primale stance. Usually one that precipitated attack. Theryssa felt a complex wave of emotions. Part of her wanted to fight for herself, but another was flattered, even a bit overwhelmed that Azar would defend her honor this way.

"You will not speak of the woman in such terms, Oleron," Azar dictated. "In fact, you will not speak of her at all."

"He better not," Theryssa piped up. "Or he will find his words shoved right back down his throat. Along with my fist."

Azar smacked Theryssa's ass. "Silence, woman."

Theryssa drew a deep breath. She had been disciplined...in front of another man. Biting her lip, she held back a retort. Much as she might want to fight back, all she could think of was what Azar would do to her when they got inside his cabin.

Wicked, sexual things. Things she feared. Things she craved.

Oleron laughed again. "I see you've begun training her."

"She obeys me," said Azar, "and no one else."

Theryssa could kiss him. And kneel to him. And punch him, too.

It was complicated, this submission thing, this...

Theryssa stopped short. She had almost said this love thing.

How messed up was that? she mused. After all the men who had wine and dined her, making spectacular offers, this was the one sweeping her off her feet, literally. And he was doing so by ravishing her step by step, putting her into a place of complete sexual slavery.

She was supposed to be dominant, the daughter of Theron. So why did she want nothing more in the world right now than to be brought inside Azar's quarters, tossed down on the bed and told to strip in anticipation of his will? His chains. His cock. His punishing hand. His flogger.

"She'll obey me, too," Oleron defied. "Once I've taught her the meaning of fear."

"This woman will never fear you," Azar vowed. "Nor will any other."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that I must now attend to something I should have a long time ago." He set Theryssa down on bare feet. "Go in my cabin," he commanded her. "Clean yourself in the sanitizing chamber. Then choose one of the floggers from the wall. Place it between your teeth and wait for me on the bed, on your hands and knees."

She glanced quickly at Oleron, who was sneering. Her breathing was quick. Strangely, she did not feel degraded. It was just as Azar had predicted. She felt the definite sense of submission to her man, but in front of this other, she felt only pride.

There was no dishonor in serving the pleasure of the right man. She saw that now. For a man like Azar would honor her pleasure, too.

"Yes," she replied, catching Oleron's expression out of the corner of her eye, "Master."

Azar pressed the button to his cabin door, allowing Theryssa to go inside. "And now for you," he said to Oleron.

Oleron drew his sword. "I don't want to have to kill you where you stand, Azar. But I will."

"Be careful," she raised herself to tip toes to kiss his cheek. "Please?"

He smiled at her, giving a slight wink. Theryssa did not know what chance he was taking, really. Was Oleron a primale, too? He didn't seem to be, but he might contain

some superior genetic material. And what about the other pirates who seemed to be allied to him?

As the door slid closed, Theryssa heard the sound of a man screaming. A second later, she heard the sword fall to the floor. The suspense was too much. She had to know. Desperately, she pushed the button. Let Azar be upset with her, she just wanted to know if he was all right.

Oh, stars, if he'd been hurt or killed, she would never forgive herself. In a single instant, she came face to face with the most terrifying reality of her life. She was in love. With Azar Xenelion, King of Pirates. Against all odds, in a matter of mere hours, it had happened.

Was it just power of suggestion, the influence of her very persuasive parents? She might have dismissed it as such, were her heart not stopped at this very moment, its further beating hinged completely on Azar's existence.

The servo door whirled open. She held her breath. Oleron lay dead on the floor, a single stab wound through his heart, his sword beside him, broken into two pieces.

But where was Azar? There was no trace of him. Emotions flooded her. She had half expected to see his body out there. The other half of her expected to see him alive.

She was wrong on both scores.

Clearly he had gone off to take care of Oleron's allies.

He would be back soon. And he would expect her to be waiting. As ordered.

Touching herself briefly, sucking in her lower lip, she enjoyed a small jolt of pleasure.

I must prepare myself, she thought. I must clean my body. I must choose a flogger. I must be in bed. On my hands and knees. The leather handle between my teeth.

Waiting...for my Master.

Theryssa pressed the door button, sealing herself inside Azar's cabin. There was come on her fingertips. She licked it off, savoring, moaning, and removing the evidence.

But what about the button panel? That had come on it, too. Pressing her belly to the wall, she thrust out her tongue, licking the round surface clean. Her nipples were rubbing, squashed.

Oh, god, she needed sex.

Come back soon, Azar. Come back safe and sound.

And hard.

Yes, they would fuck. But they would have to talk, too. About each other's feelings. He was not indifferent to her, she knew that much. But how deep did it go? And could he get to it...while he had the chance to be with her?

One way or the other, the subject must be broached. And she would have to take the lead. For in as much as he was meant to be the Master of their sex-making, she was going to have to be mistress of their dawning relationship.

If indeed they had one outside of bed at all.

Chapter Nine

Azar struck terror into the hearts of his crew as he moved among them, stalking the corridors of the ship, searching for his enemies. He was like some animal predator—keen, intelligent and efficiently deadly, eyes intent on vengeance.

Like rats, they sought to scatter. They did not need to know about his being a primale, in the midst of attack rage to be convinced of the need to flee for their lives. It was enough to see the man, fists clenched, stark naked, his powerful body bathed in the blood of the dead Oleron as he hunted.

Weaponless, save for a pair of tightly clenched fists.

It was certainly a surprise, to say the least.

Azar himself had not expected to be put into such a state. Any more than Oleron could have known what he was unleashing, threatening the safety of Theryssa.

Apparently Theryssa meant something to Azar. Something deeper than mere sexual attraction. This was classic mate protection behavior, exhibited by primales in defense of their pair-bond.

No one could hope to stand against such an expression of power, not even another primale. It was said such a reaction was a sure sign that a primale had found his mate, the woman he was to spend his life with.

Once such a woman was found, he would never be able to touch or desire another. His monogamy would be unbreakable. Absolute. And so would his possessiveness.

Such absoluteness would overwhelm any fem, which is why there were the obedients, the women genetically designed to find bliss in submission to a super-strong, super-devoted...and super-domineering primale.

Azar had fought these feelings before, with Solania. He had been too afraid. Too young and unsure. His hesitancy had cost her life. For when the hour of challenge had come, when Malthusalus had stepped into the picture to prey on her vulnerability, he had not been there to protect her.

Nor had he fought the Council afterward, to secure her life.

Had he admitted his love, had he not been the stupidest and most stubborn primale in history, he would have brought down the whole of the Guardian force just to save her.

But that wouldn't have been necessary. For she would never have been caught up in spying. She would have been at home, where she belonged, tending to their domestic life.

It was absurd he should have to relive all this now. And with a woman completely wrong for any primale. Theron and Nyssa were wrong. There was nothing here that could bind him and Theryssa. She was just dredging up ghosts, that's all.

But she was damn good at it.

And right now, she had him walking as a man again, as a primale, for the first time in years. For her safety. And for the honor of the pirate code, which had its limits, its morals.

Those without honor. Those who abused females, who took from them what they did not wish to give in their hearts, including their own desire for slavery, were not fit to live.

Blast it, how long had he been walking the line himself? Wasn't he calling the kettle black?

"Captain," whimpered Vraaka, one of Oleron's henchmen, his sword hand trembling fiercely. "I swear, I wasn't never part of no mutiny plans."

Azar inclined his head in the direction of the man's weapon. "Do you intend to use that sword on me?"

"No, sir," exclaimed the man, realizing his error. "I swear," he raised his hands in the air.

"Drop it," said Azar, the quiet intensity of his voice only heightening the fearsome sense of his power.

Vraaka dropped the sword and fell crying to his knees. "Please, don't kill me," he wailed.

"You will come with me," said Azar "You will point out to me every traitor. You will reveal them all. If you exclude one, or falsely accuse any man, I shall remove your entrails and have them fed to the first dogs I run across. Is that clear?"

"Oh, yes," he cried, sweat beading on his forehead. "Oh, sir, I swear I'll not steer you wrong."

Azar lifted him by the collar, suspending his entire body in the air. "I hope not. For your sake."

One by one, they searched them out. Azar knew already who they were, but he wanted to see if the man would lie to him. In the end, he dispatched a dozen, without ever touching the hilt of a sword.

The first two sought to charge him with axes at the ready. He grabbed the handles mid air, snapping them. The men sought to run, but he grabbed them by the sides of their heads, crushing them together.

The third had a laser weapon. Azar was too fast even for this. Ducking the bright red beam he delivered a kick to the midsection, knocking the man through the bulkhead.

At this point two others attempted a cowardly attack from behind. He seized them in a bear hug, making them whimper for their last breath.

The next one begged like a baby on his knees. Azar handed him a knife, with which to dispatch himself.

Four more attacked en masse with swords. Azar cracked the blades, one by one. Then he broke their necks. The last two jumped into the airlock, in a crazed attempt to escape.

With the death of his final adversary came a return to calm. Albeit with an unspeakable desire to lie beside Theryssa, to smell her sweet skin, to kiss her lips and neck, to hear the sounds of her surrender, to seal between them the sexual bond that he must have...or die.

"You are second-in-command," he deposited the bearded information provider back on the floor when the job was completed. "From this moment on."

"Aye, aye, sir," the man saluted, his intensity unmatched in pirate history. "You can count on me."

"I know that," said Azar, his energy already shifting. To lust and conquest. "That is why you are still alive."

Vraka swallowed hard.

"I'll be in my quarters," said Azar.

"Very good, sir. Um...if I could ask a question, begging your pardon?"

"What is it?"

"The...uh...remains. What should we do with them?"

"Launch the bodies of the traitors into space. Let the universe deal with them."

He saluted again. "Yes, sir."

Azar did not think he would have any mutiny problems again for a very long time.

Unfortunately, his secret was out now. There was no mistaking he was more than a man.

Word would spread to other ships. The other captains, lesser though they might be, could decide to unite against him if they suspected that he was really a primale, a former Guardian.

He might well have to make a choice. Either surrender his command and flee to safer quarters, or else do what he had never been done before. Namely embrace both his primale nature and his pirate nature. This was what Theron was hoping for. That he would forge the pirates into a force worthy of battling the Narthians. Side by side with the Guardians.

It would indeed comprise a splendid navy. Worthy of the finest traditions of the Guardians and the pirates alike.

Now was not the time to face such decisions, however.

Theryssa was waiting for him in his quarters. Theryssa, the one woman who stirred his blood and his loins like no other. Who felt in his arms like beauty itself...and truth, and destiny.

A woman who was his equal in many crucial ways and who made up for her lack of male strength with cunning and a courage that outstripped that of anyone he had ever known.

Himself included.

The dynamics between them were subtle. Difficult to explain. It was interesting to watch Theron and Nyssa together. His authority as the male was quite evident, and he was quite sure that Nyssa yielded to him in all the appropriate ways. But she clearly had her own drive and she was not afraid to speak up and intervene when she needed.

He saw how Theron respected that, how he knew to trust her and to bow to her grace and wisdom when needed.

Azar would do the same with Theryssa, were he her mate. He would work carefully to be strong and not stubborn. Firm, but not pigheaded. He would take her submission to him as a gift, and he would never lose his humility.

A woman like that would have to be a man's partner.

She would pose challenges for her mate that even Nyssa did not. She was of a more martial nature, like her father. She would always want to fight. But with feminine strength, he had often seem, came a secret need to yield to the right man.

Theryssa responded to his power. She was turned on by his domination. Perhaps Nyssa found the same with Theron. Azar could hardly imagine Theron being less than a lion in bed.

Certainly Azar himself had requirements. Needs. He could respect and adore Theryssa, but looking at her body, seeing the flame in her eyes, he could never *not* want her as his absolute sexual possession, moaning and writhing at his touch.

In short, he would honor her as a queen in everything, but in bed, she would be his slave. All of this was a lovely theory, though. In reality, he could not see his life with her beyond today, let alone the rest of his days.

Perhaps that was his pirate nature, living for the latest plunder, always knowing death could be around the next corner. Or maybe it was his old fears. About relationships. About love.

Theryssa was not waiting for him in bed, where he had told her to be.

And why should she be? She was willful and spirited. And a bit of a tease.

Azar tried to hide his smile, affecting the serious countenance of the spurned Master. He found her still in the sanitizing chamber under the cleansing beams.

His cock sprang to life at the sight of her under the golden rays. She was like a sun goddess. A nymph, her body arched, her hands caressing up and down her body.

She was masturbating. Her mind and flesh lost somewhere far away.

For a split second he thought of leaving her to her dreams. But that could never be. If for no other reason than that his own male urges were too strong.

And not just for sex, but for bonding, too. It was literally implanted in his nature to lay hands on her such that she would forget every other man, to give her loving such that she could never lie with or even think of another.

He must chain her with invisible links.

Chains of the heart.

Azar's own heart swelled and ached with the implications.

A man did not lock a female in a golden cage of love unless he was prepared to meet her every need, to be the hero of her dreams.

She was so intent in her fantasy that she did not hear him approach from behind. One second under the rays and he was as clean as a newborn babe, the dead cells zapped from his body, his skin left tingling and refreshed, his cock twice as hard and a full two inches longer. Binding her arms to her sides, he cupped both of Theryssa's breasts. "You are not in bed," he whispered, grazing her ear.

"I lost track of time," she sighed, falling back against him.

"Are you making excuses?" he asked, massaging her nipples.

"No, Master," she breathed, slipping perfectly into her role, "I disobeyed you. I should be punished."

"We have such a backlog already," he teased. "I'm afraid I'll grow old before we're caught up."

"Worse things could happen."

Azar's heart slammed in his chest. Was she saying what he thought she was saying?

"Master...may I..." Theryssa had managed to work one tiny hand between them, her small fingers brushing his cock where it pressed into her ass cheeks.

Azar let her turn and sink to her knees.

"Forgive me," she looked into his eyes, her own moist, "my Master."

She kissed the tip of his cock, treating it as an object of worship.

"May I?" she asked again.

He laid his fingers on her cheek, lightly drawing her forward. Theryssa opened her mouth, taking him smoothly inside. He expected her to stop, but she kept on going. Inch after inch after inch.

By the gods, she was going to deep-throat him.

Azar groaned, feeling himself suddenly captivated. If he had any hope of holding on against her onslaught, it was blown to smithereens by her rapid-fire motions, sliding him out and then back in.

Like a hungry bird, she bobbed her head, holding onto his hips for leverage. She wanted him to come quickly, and on her terms.

She was going to get her way, too, for as much as he was supposed to be in control, this kneeling nymph was holding the key to his lust...and maybe his soul, too.

"Theryssa..." he exhaled, feeling like a man stabbed. Gone was his usual restraint, his ability to stretch the sex out, molding the experience for his partner's joy and titillation.

He was just releasing, his muscles taut, his pelvis pushed forward. Hell, he didn't even have to do the thrusting. Leaning his head back, he let loose with the cry of a warrior, a satisfied lion.

His semen rushed into Theryssa's mouth. She swallowed unabashedly. All of it, every last drop. He had so much of it, as though he hadn't orgasmed in months.

"Oh...baby. Sweet baby." Azar was orbiting. Launching from one mountain to another, rockets inside his cock, shooting one after another. He put his hands on her shoulders to steady himself. No one had ever brought him off like this. No one. This whole situation was getting more complicated by the moment.

Theryssa continued to suck him, getting the last available drops. Her mouth was like a vacuum, pure suction.

Were he an ordinary man, he would have been spent for the night. Out of commission for hours. But Azar was not ordinary. Besides, he was on a mission.

At last she released him, a catlike grin on her face. "I take it you accept my apology...Master?"

She spoke the word with mild irony. Probing, testing. The power had shifted again, like a sand dune, sculpted by desert winds. He could not get enough of this interaction between them. It was as though his body was coming to crave it like some drug.

Azar brought her to her feet and crushed the air from her with a kiss. By the time he released her, he had inhaled her very soul. She clung to him, whimpering, perspiring. From between her thighs, her wetness dripped. Her lips were puffy and needy. Above and below.

"Do you feel that?" he asked.

He meant his cock, pushing at her belly button, still rock hard.

"Yes," she panted, reaching for it with her hands.

Azar took her wrists and held them over her head. "That cock is going to be in you and at you. Nonstop. For as long as I wish it to continue."

Theryssa saw in this no threat, but only a promise. "Oh, yes, I want you to, Azar, I do."

"You do now. But it will change. Soon enough there will be too many orgasms and too much intercourse. You'll beg that the sex-making end," he predicted. "And there is only way I will make that happen. Do you know what that way is?"

She shook her head.

"By exchanging the sex for torture, Theryssa. Yes, you will beg for torture. You will beg for the flogger. Or perhaps we'll begin the other way around, by flogging you until you beg penetration. Do you think I could make you do that, Theryssa?"

"Oh, god." Theryssa shivered against him. Nibbling, caressing. She wanted to touch him everywhere at once. "Yes, yes to all of it. I fucking give in," she groaned, barely able to articulate.

Clearly his words had pushed her into a new place. A place of deep masochism. Azar instinctively knew how to treat her now to maximize the experience. Turning her about, he pushed her up against the smooth, rounded wall of the sanitizing chamber and entered her from behind. She was considerably hotter inside than the beams, her accompanying wetness in stark contrast to the dry, cleansing sensation.

Keeping her hands against the wall, effectively pinning her breasts and belly, as he had with the conference table, he indulged in her pussy. Long, languid strokes—powerful, animal ruts.

The rutting of a king, a lord of beasts. And why shouldn't he feel the sheer passion and glory of this moment? After all, he had Theryssa, and he had her for all the time in the world with no one to oppose him in his enjoyment of her full feminine delights. All of them, her body, her mouth, her sighs, her blatant desire serving to heighten his sheer ecstasy.

It was good to be a primale, able to fully exploit the situation. To have at Theryssa without the fear of losing control over his sexual releases. He could come now, and then keep going. And indeed, he would. "Theryssa," he told her. "You are so fucking incredible. Do you know that?"

"Oh, Azar." She was pushing her ass out at him, practically daring him to push on, as far as his will would allow.

In time...but for now, he made quick work of things, bringing Theryssa off to another orgasm, taking one for himself in the balance. It was a fast one, lean and low, just a few microbursts to whet his appetite for more.

She was still twitching as he pulled out of her. "To bed," he said.

Azar scooped her up, cradling her. She clung to his neck, holding on as he tried to deposit her on the furs. She was no match for him, however, and he easily managed to lay her facedown.

"Hold still." He patted her ass with his palm.

She clenched her buttocks instinctively, as though he had spanked her. Finding the pink folds irresistible, he pushed a finger into her pussy, hooking it.

He had her, frozen.

"Don't move. No matter what."

"Yes, Master."

Her breath was as still as her body. He had control, completely. "Theryssa," he called her name.

"Yes, Master."

"Come for me."

"Oh...yes..." She writhed wantonly, instantly obeying him, his little spy, horny, obedient. And in training.

Mesmerized, he watched the motions of her body, her beautiful slit, the pink folds, the mysterious opening wherein his cock had found such pleasure. On and on, it went, her flesh dancing, lifting higher and higher to a peak of liquid bliss.

He'd never been so happy as to be able to please a woman. And now it was time to take things a step further, to a new place.

He waited until she had settled back down. "I'll be right back," he whispered.

Azar went to the rack, retrieved a flogger—his favorite one, long and black, with a dozen strands of synthon, a material rather like suede, but with the advantage of feeling wet and liquid to the touch.

Synthon had another advantage, which consisted of microscopic sensors that reacted on a cell by cell basis with the victim, conforming after the first blow to a pattern of personal, maximum tormenting.

He also took a piece of ice—a small cube of it—from his beverage freezing unit. It was time to confuse Theryssa's sensations a little bit.

He sat down beside her. She tensed instantly. "That's a good girl for waiting." He ran his fingers down her back. He had the flogger in his lap, and the ice on the floor.

"Thank you, Master."

He smiled down at her, building the anticipation.

"Master?" She broke the silence.

"Yes, slave girl?"

"What are you going to do to me?"

"That's an easy one, Theryssa. Whatever I want to."

"Yes, Master."

He reached back, caressing her instep.

Theryssa startled, kicking out with her foot.

"You were told to stay still." He thwacked her, hard enough to leave a glowing pink patch. The next time would be worse, as the synthon learned her pain spots.

"Ow," she cried. "That hurt."

He spanked her again, on the same spot. "Were you given permission to protest?"

"No, Master." She gritted her teeth.

"I didn't think so. I want you to hump the bed," he said, quite abruptly.

Theryssa hesitated, as he knew she would. "Master? I don't follow..."

He spanked her again, inducing a stifled cry. "Of course you do, slave girl. You are to move against the mattress as though you were making sex with it. You're to give me a little show."

"Yes, Master." Her voice shook with shame. He was pushing her to a new level.

"You can do better than that," he critiqued her first efforts, which were timid at best.

Theryssa gave a little moan of frustration. Lifting her hips, she raised them in the air a few inches, and then lowered them, her pussy touching the furs once more.

"A virgin humps like that," he tapped her back with the flogger, "not a sex slave."

She moaned at the feel of the leather brushing across her flesh.

"That's right," he confirmed her fears, "that's the flogger. It owns you, and it's quite hungry for your flesh."

Her breathing shallow and rapid, she began to make love to the bed in earnest. Her aroma filled the air as she writhed up and down, helplessly revealing her deepest carnal motions.

She was like some exotic animal scratching an itch. All she needed was a little extra stimulation to put her over the top.

"What do you think you're going to do?" he demanded, lashing her ass cheeks with the flogger. "Come all over my furs?"

"Oh, god," she reacted, her cheeks vibrating and pinkening all at once, "what's in that thing?"

"It's synthon. Special memory strands. It remembers what you like..."

"I don't...like this," she protested.

"Are you lying to me, slave girl?" Azar slapped her with the whip, strategically dragging one of the stinging strands across the crack of her pussy.

Theryssa began to spasm uncontrollably. "Oh, my fucking stars."

"I'm thinking you do like this," he teased her, whipping the back of her legs, lightly all the way down to her feet.

She wriggled, trying to get up. He held her down, as he slapped the insteps of her feet. "Bad girl."

"I'll be good, Azar," she panted, desperately trying to dissuade him from using the flogger any more. "I swear."

"And obedient?" He lifted her face, tugging her head by the hair.

"Yes...I will...I'll be so obedient," she moaned as he swished the flogger across her face, over her twitching lips and smooth cheeks.

"I don't know," he feigned uncertainty. "How can I be sure you're trainable?"

"I am. I can follow commands. I can learn."

He slapped the whip down hard on the back of her left thigh, and then again on the right. "Turn over," he said. "Hold up your breasts for me to flog."

Theryssa scrambled to comply. Her globes were so very tempting, splendid and lusciously available as she cradled them, offering them up between her lightly pressed fingers.

"Beg for it, Theryssa."

"Please, Master. Flog my breasts."

Azar delivered a measured stroke. *Let's see how easy it is for her to beg now that she's felt the sting*, he mused. "Again, Theryssa, beg for it again."

Her face was twisted in dark lust. Her eyes were lit with desire. "Again," she said after the briefest hesitation. "Please, Master. Flog my breasts again."

Azar crisscrossed the pure skin a total of five times. Theryssa's head was back, her hair hanging loose, her torso bent as a self-offering. She was the perfect picture of submission. He had to have her. As never before.

"Prepare yourself," he ordered. "Legs spread."

Theryssa positioned herself with exquisite grace, like a melting goddess, a butterfly unfurling its wings, revealing a precious colored center. In this case pink, like purest coral. And glistening drops of white. By the gods, even her pussy was perfect and beautiful. A work of art. If ever a woman could be plunder, it was she. And yet there was no price in the entire universe to redeem such a creature.

He descended on top of her, a single measured merging, flesh against flesh. This time they began with an embrace. Doing nothing more than listening to each other's breathing, and feeling the tickle of one another's sweat.

They licked each other, each dabbing lightly at the other's skin. But still, they did not relinquish the bond, like two magnets, south to north, poles inseparable.

Azar just reveled in the feel of her, making his cock as large as he could, letting her accommodate, with all the seeming practice of a lifetime. Hand in glove, that was how to describe it. Hard muscle against soft curves. Male and female. A match, yes.

Logical, even inevitable, according to Nyssa and Theron. And good for him in so many ways. He was alive with her, and he knew that in her absence he would never feel joy again. But would it make her happy to be tied to a man like him? Did she not deserve more?

She did in fact, and he had to convince her of that. The sooner the better.

"Theryssa," he said, trying not to sound too abrupt. "I realize this has been...pleasant between us. But I don't want to hold you to any commitment...sexually or otherwise. I understand that you need to go."

She wrinkled her brow, smiling oddly. "Why would you say that? No one's satisfied me like you. I don't want to be with another man. Ever."

The finality of her answer startled him...and made him a little lightheaded.

"You should be with someone younger, more like you," he said quickly. "I'm a pirate, I'm set in my ways, and that's just for starters."

"You're not that old," she laughed. "And I'm as set in my ways as they come, ask my folks."

"I'm nearly your father's age," he reminded.

"You aren't him, though. I don't think of you like that."

"How do you think of me? Outside of bed, I mean."

She thought for a moment. "You're intriguing, sexy as hell, smart, exasperating, stubborn. And did I mention sexy as hell?"

Azar laughed deeply. It felt good. Not to mention way overdue. "You're not too shabby yourself."

"For a youngster."

"You're plenty old enough, missy."

"Old enough to know better?"

"I'm the wrong one to ask."

She pursed her lips. He could tell she was thinking. He was getting pretty good at reading her like that. "Do you think the Narthians will really attack in as large a force as my father says? I'll admit it's a little scary."

"I don't know, Theryssa. Unfortunately, I can tell you your old man is seldom wrong about these things, though I would never tell him to his face."

Theryssa's pretty eyes were studying him. A lesser man would be terrified by that kind of probing. "Why wouldn't you accept my Dad's offer?" she wanted to know.

"You mean to take you as my mate?"

"No. To join your fleet to his."

Azar frowned. "It's complicated."

"It doesn't seem complicated," she insisted. "Either it's the right thing to do or it isn't. Are you holding back because of your objections to the Council's genetics programs?"

"No, you are proof that things have changed. And I believe your mother and father when they say they want to work with me to improve the world. We can all learn from each other."

"Well if it's not that," she persisted, "what is it?"

He was tempted to tell her something along the lines of "*At your age it's all black and white...*" but he quickly dismissed it as an excuse to avoid the hard truth. "You're right, Theryssa," he dared to look into his deepest heart, "I'm only hesitating because I'm afraid."

"You? What could you be afraid of?"

He heard the awe in her voice. It was flattering, if misguided. "I'm afraid of just about everything," he said. "Beginning with myself."

"You're a good and noble man," she said with all the confidence of youth.

"You don't know that," he said gently.

"Yes," she replied, undeterred. "I do."

He drew a breath as she squeezed her sex muscles around his cock, letting him know just how confident she was feeling about him.

"A woman trusted me once with her life," he tried to put her off, "and I let her down."

"You mean Solania," she pressed. "Tell me, tell me what happened."

"Why? You can't change anything."

"But I need to hear," she took his hand. "I love you, Azar."

His lip trembled slightly as he prepared to relate the story, the whole story, including the deepest part of his rage...which had never been directed against Theron but against himself.

"Solania risked everything to be with me," he explained. "She was a fem. I should only have married an obedient like the rest of my kind. I seduced her. The Council found out. They sent Theron to warn her off. She was...confused, alone. She took an air-car...there was an accident, no one will ever know exactly..."

"But that isn't your fault," she said quickly, echoing the words he'd heard so many times.

"It is my fault, though. No one knows this, Theryssa, but she tried to contact me. After Theron left. I told her...I told her I couldn't ever talk to her or see her again. The Council had sent someone to talk to me, you see, at the same time Theron went to her."

Theryssa's eyes reflected his pain. "I'm so sorry, Azar?"

"Sorry for what? That I'm a monster? A coward?"

"You did what you had to," she insisted. "You followed orders. You know, like we all do. The Council is all we have. It is what makes us human."

"Damn the Council, Theryssa, and damn your Pollyanna mentality. For god's sake, must you have an answer for everything?" He couldn't believe he was getting impatient like this. It was almost like he wanted her to hate him. And he had been so anxious to hear what she felt about him, to see if she might like him.

To his surprise, she seemed unfazed by the outburst. "Well it wouldn't be much fun if I couldn't keep up with you, would it?" she quipped.

"I think we need to be realistic about what is going on here," Azar thought aloud, succumbing once again to that veil of fatigue and grayness he'd been feeling in the months and days preceding her arrival.

"And what is that," she asked skeptically, a distinct twinkle in her eye, "oh, all-seeing Master?"

"We're making good sex," he deliberately ignored her good humor. "That's all it is."

"Really? Then why do I feel like there's a hole in my heart whenever you're gone from me, Azar? Why do I bleed to death, in my soul?"

Her words cut him to the quick.

"After a day? Theryssa that isn't possible."

What was wrong with him? His emotions were on a cascade? He needed safety, needed to be alone.

"How do you know what's possible? Do you know what my heart feels like...and my soul?"

"No," he admitted grudgingly, "I don't."

"And what about you? What do you feel?"

"Me?" Azar scowled. "I feel like hell. Confused, churned up. All twisted. Out there, with my men, I would have killed them all to save you. Damn it, Theryssa, I bonded with you. What else do you want me to say?"

There, it was out. The truth he'd been hiding from himself all along. Azar rolled off her, landing heavily on his back.

She leaned across, propping her head up with her elbow. "You mean a primale lifemate bond?"

"Yes," he glared at the ceiling.

"Well, I guess that's that." She shrugged.

"That's what?"

"We have to be mated."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard," he retorted. "I bonded...by mistake."

"So you don't want me? You wouldn't care if I walked out and found the first guy to fuck? You would be cool with that?"

"Of course I wouldn't. I would want to rip him to shreds."

"Okay, suppose I find a nice man and settle down?"

Azar sighed, sounding more and more like a man playing a game of chess and discovering himself checkmated. "I would probably haunt you both until you had me arrested for harassment."

"I'm in the same boat," she told him. "I'm a primefemale, seventy five percent primale, remember? If you ever went near another woman, I would cut your balls off."

"How charming. Sounds like the answer is for you to stay in the Guardians, choose the path of lifetime commitment, no mating."

"No. I can't live alone my whole life. I thought I could, but thanks to you, I know I need companionship."

"So basically, I've sunk my own ship."

"If you consider mating with me a fate worse than death."

"Personally, I adore you," Azar admitted, still eying the ceiling. "You have completely swept me off my feet. But I still don't see how I can be the right man for you."

"Isn't that my decision?"

"I suppose, but I don't want you throwing your life away."

"Do you love me, Azar?"

Azar felt like a laser had been fired through his heart. "Love?"

"Yeah, you know," she quipped, "that four letter word that rhymes with above."

"Theryssa, you can't ask me a question like that."

"Why, does it scare you?"

"Look, let's leave it that I don't love you," he said flatly, "and we'll both be better off."

"But you bonded," she reminded him, mischievously fingering his cock. "We made sex, you bonded with me and now you have to love me. It's your biology."

"I don't have to do anything, Theryssa. And if you keep on pressing me, I will not be responsible for my actions."

"What will you do?" she asked, eager-eyed.

"I'll chain up these busy little hands of yours, for one thing. And I'll gag that impossible-to-argue-with mouth."

"I'd be helpless, then." She licked her lips. "And you could fuck me again."

"Damn it, no."

Theryssa was crawling on top of him, trying to mount his erection, which he could do not a damn thing about no matter how hard he tried.

"Why not, Master?"

"Because I said so."

"I'm being disobedient, aren't I? I need another flogging."

"You need to go home, Theryssa, that's what you need to do."

"You would miss me," she predicted.

"That's something we can certainly find out, isn't it...by going to different sides of the galaxy?"

"Nah, I'd rather just fuck."

Azar resisted in vain as she managed to slide his cock across her slit and between her gaping lips. His willpower pathetically low, he did little more than groan as she sheathed him completely inside her warm, tight opening.

"There, isn't that better?"

"No," he grumbled, "it's messy and complicated. And it's creating problems we will just have to resolve later."

"We can resolve them by making more sex."

"Theryssa, you are impossible," he declared.

"And you love that about me."

He had a lump in his throat. "Yes," he admitted softly, "I suppose I do."

"And you love everything else about me, too," she beamed.

"First and foremost your modesty." He rolled his eyes.

Theryssa slapped his chest, playfully.

Azar arched a brow. "I'll take care of the discipline, thank you very much."

"Aha," she proclaimed victory, "so you admit we have a relationship."

"I meant for this one-time encounter."

"Which began a half hour after we met and shows no sign of letting up any time in the next millennium..."

"I'm a quick seducer." He shrugged.

"And you have finally met your match."

"You wouldn't last a week," he predicted.

"Try me."

"There you go again, trying to make this permanent."

"Isn't it?"

"Nothing is permanent, but the stars," he said stubbornly. "And even those will burn out eventually."

"You think too much," she teased. "Tell me how this feels, not how it calculates."

"I won't speak to how it feels." Azar shifted, settling his cock an inch or so deeper. "As for you, you feel like...heaven."

"And you feel like a man with some unfinished business."

Azar smiled in spite of himself. As if one single orgasm would actually do it. Each one so far had only begged another—bigger, better and more spectacular.

Was Theryssa an addiction? Maybe, but she was the kind of habit a man was goddamn lucky to find. She was a one of a kind addiction, in a world of sleazy habits and mindless routines.

Would they make it a week together? Who knew the answer to that one? He was a pirate. He had today. And nothing more. He followed his heart and his head and right now they were telling him something.

More to the point they were showing it. And its name was happiness, in the most unlikely form of a young Guardian, the daughter of his brother turned enemy and quite possibly soon to be a brother again.

Who could argue with how alive he felt inside her, and beside her. Talking to her, making sex with her. Looking at her. Hell, just being in the same room with her, in the same ship, even, was enough to awaken him from an age-old slumber.

"Just promise me one thing," he said, grasping hold of her in preparation for riding her rapid-fire on his lap.

"Anything," she vowed.

"You won't run circles around me constantly, even though we both know you can."

"Absolutely not," she did her best to keep a straight face. "Master."

"I know I will live to regret this," he shook his head.

"I know," she bent to kiss his forehead. "I love you, too, you stubborn pirate."

The talking done, they returned to what had first brought them together, and what would always serve as their touchstone. Call it the forge of their bond, the source of their incendiary heat, the cauldron of their molten energy.

Sex, to use the technical word.

Whatever you called it, though, there was no denying they would never get enough of it. Not if they lived to be a thousand and crossed the galaxy a dozen times over.

They came together this time, their cries intertwining, their precious fluids flowing together, their fingers interlaced, their bodies moving in time, finding just the right motions to seal the gaps, to close the empty spaces. Her breast in his mouth, his cock in her pussy, their pelvises conjoined, and their flesh superheated.

Two persons. One destiny.

"That was good, lover," she whispered when she'd finally worn him out. "But I hope you have some energy left for fighting the Narthians."

"The Narthians are nothing," he grumbled, still holding her in his arms, loath to let go, now or ever, "compared to you."

"Thank you," she giggled. "I think."

"Seriously," he stroked her cheek, "thank you."

"For what?"

"For giving me my life back?"

"You're welcome. But you've had a life all along. The gods know you've been giving my father a run for his money all these years with this pirate rust bucket of yours."

He smacked her bottom playfully. "This rust bucket is older than you and deserves respect. As for my life, it was gray until you came along. Now there's color again."

"Well, I do seem to make you see red often enough."

He kissed her face – once, twice, a dozen times for good measure.

"What's that for?"

"Insurance. Against the next time I piss you off."

"Don't worry," she stroked his limp cock. "I have lots of ways to find revenge...*Master*."

"I'm not sure I like that look in your eyes."

"Is the big pirate scared of the little female?" she cooed.

"Damn straight I am."

She laughed. "You just better hope I don't figure out how to chain *you* up one of these days for a little payback."

"Actually," he grinned, "I'm kinda curious to see you in action...with a whip."

"Name the time and place," she said.

"Later. After a nap."

"Perfect time to chain you up."

"What you don't trust me to surrender willingly?"

"Not on your life."

"Smart girl. Very smart girl." He kissed her again. This time she kissed back.

"You can forget your nap idea," she murmured.

"Aye, aye," he said throatily. "Mistress."

Epilogue

Azar watched the ship's viewscreen, his every nerve ending on high alert. For a half hour now the attack fighters had been engaging the advanced force of Narthians. It was a test battle, designed to see if the new weapons were going to work against the super bugs.

Azar had wanted to fly one of the ships, but his skills were needed as a general. Should the fighter ships fail to stop the attack, the larger cruisers, his own ships and the Guardian fleet would have to do the job.

Naturally, he was concerned for all the pilots. But he had his eye on the left side of the formation. A certain ship, flown by a certain woman.

The woman who held his heart. Who was his joy, the color in his world.

If he should lose her...

Damn it, why weren't there any transmissions coming back?

"Reconfigure the transmitters," he ordered his first mate. "Make sure we're not being jammed."

"Aye, aye, sir."

There was a sputter over the loud speakers, and then silence.

He glared at the dark stars, in the center of which loomed a gray, swirling cloud. The battlefield. Narthian nest ships and Guardian ships, locked head-to-head.

"It's not worth the risk," Azar had thundered at Theron when the plan was presented to engage the small ships. "Why not meet them with heavy cruisers? We know their advance party is limited?"

"Because we have to know," said Theron. "If our battle plans work, if the weapons work. You know as well as I when they make their main attack we will be spread too thin to use the heavy ships everywhere. We have to know where we stand. Later on it will be too late to experiment and you know it."

"Damn it, you're thinking like a bureaucrat, Theron."

"And you're thinking like Theryssa's husband," he countered.

Azar had no response. His old friend was right.

"I'll be fine," Theryssa had insisted. "Stop fretting over me so much. I'm a soldier, not a baby."

"You're my baby," he insisted. "Always."

She kissed him soundly for that one. "And you are my hero. My swashbuckling, idealistic, grumpy, domineering pirate. I know you only want to protect me, but you have to let me go. It's my job."

"Do you have to be so dedicated?" he complained.

"I had a good teacher." She patted his ass.

Azar smiled at the memory.

"Sir, we have something."

"What is it?"

"A faint signal. Over the secret channel. Number Seven."

His heart thundered. He'd had that one put in for Theryssa. At his insistence. She thought it was showing favorites over the other pilots, but he didn't give a damn. He could fight just as well with one more channel to listen to. "Can you zero in?"

"It's in code."

"Give it to me," he ordered. "Quickly."

"It says...You owe me. Have I translated wrong, sir?"

"No." He sighed in relief, too deep for words. "You have it right."

They had made a bet. Theryssa's idea. If she came home safe, he would get flogged for giving her a hard time about going. She thought it the perfect bet.

"If I lose," she'd quipped in perfect Theryssa style, "I'll never have to pay up."

"Sir, we have more signals. It's the fleet."

"I know," said Azar. "The battle is won."

Azar felt the warmth return to his limbs. All would be well. For Earth. For the galaxy. And for his heart, which was at this moment sailing in space, somewhere out there, locked in a fighter ship piloted by the bravest soul, male or female, he had ever known.

After all, who else would dare to love him?

Yes, indeed, things were going to be well all over.

With the possible exception of his ass, which was going to sting like hell tonight.

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 Gabriel welcomes mail from readers. You can write to Reese c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

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