

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

REESE GABRIEL

Nyssa's
GUARDIAN
MORE THAN MALE

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Nyssa's Guardian

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NYSSA'S GUARDIAN

Reese Gabriel

Dedication

With love and thanks to my best fren-fren Rose, for setting my dreams free and believing in me all the way.

Chapter One

The High Councilor had no right.

Tricking Nyssa into a meeting only to introduce her to one of *them*.

"Fem Nyssa," said the gray-haired but well-preserved Fem Dekalia. "May I present to you Primale Theron of the Guardians."

Nyssa smiled icily. At least they were all standing, which meant it would not be a prolonged meeting. "It is my honor to serve, Primale," she offered, trying not to drip too much sarcasm into her deliverance of the formulaic greeting between citizens.

"The service is mine," he replied, expressionless.

Primals were all like this. Forever appearing on the holonews and tri-vids, rescuing crash survivors, fighting disasters and battling fearsome enemies. Insanely confident, duty-bound to the point of obsession, sickeningly, tediously brave—and totally fucking gorgeous.

This one had clipped brown hair, a military cut, framing a perfect oval face, a dimpled chin and firm jawline. His eyes were the kind of blue you would swear you could never see twice.

And in fact you wouldn't, because every one of these specimens of genetic triumph was uniquely designed, super-strong, and super-quick. Super-domineering.

His body made Nyssa want to do things. Sex-making things. Curse her traitorous anatomy! This was not the place for swollen nipples, not the time for cloying wetness, or creeping warmth at the delta of her skirt-clad thighs.

And certainly not the time for posing naughty questions to herself. Like wondering what it might be worth to see the primale naked. The splendid torso, rock-hard abs and biceps under his skintight, painted-on exo-steel suit. And that package below the waist—she could imagine his cock and balls, so tightly constrained under the material, ready to burst free, full and heavy.

She would lay him down on his back and crawl on top of him, kissing and licking him until he was groaning and begging for release. And then she would mount him, maintaining perfect control as she let his thickly veined, purple, throbbing cock slip between her thighs, parting the moist and eager envelope, filling that canal that was so perfectly shaped for sex-making.

Supposedly primales were super all over. Hugely endowed with incredible endurance. And a surprisingly keen ability to tune in to the female body for the purpose of delivering slow, maddening pleasure culminating in mind-blowing orgasm.

This she found hard to believe, given the primales' role as the hyper-masculine protectors of the society. They were the heroes, notoriously chauvinistic and narrow-minded.

To that end, they might well be the perfect lovers, handsome as they were, but for fems like Nyssa, engineered to be free and independent, primales represented a dangerous temptation. A forbidden fruit guaranteed to lead one down the path to destruction.

For primales did not take sex-making idly as did the ordinary brand of males, the mems. A primale took his mate as a possession and once he bonded to her, she became his for life. They were not evil or arbitrary, but they weren't liberal either.

Thus it was that the body of the High Council, the society's planners and overseers, had engineered in their wisdom a fourth sub-gender to fill the primale's needs, which no fem could ever manage.

These women were called obedients and it was literally their greatest joy and pleasure to find a primale to serve. Without such service, these creatures were lost.

"What is it I can do for you?" Nyssa inquired, desiring to end the encounter as quickly as possible. "A signed holoprint, perhaps? An authorized impression scan?"

His lips barely budged. She had said this tongue-in-cheek because primales were inherently practical, devoid of the kind of aesthetic sensibilities needed to appreciate her work on the hologrid.

"I desire neither," he replied. "Thank you."

"No?" His equanimity was beginning to annoy her. "What about for your obedient, then? Would your little mate like my print?"

"I'm unmated at present."

"Really?" Nyssa was already well past the pale of courtesy, but she had her reasons for pressing further. It wasn't just principle, either. She had experience to go on, too. Deeply personal experience. "I'm surprised...given what a great conversationalist you are."

"The choice was not mine," he said. "Guardians are not mated until after the conclusion of their service to the nation."

Nyssa offered a grudging, "Harrumph."

"Primale Theron has been engaged in defense work," the High Councilor sought to salvage the conversation. "He is a highly decorated veteran."

Now Nyssa was flat-out mad. So the man performed his engineered function—that was the responsibility of every citizen. Why should these primales get special treatment?

"Is he really?" said Nyssa. "Then perhaps the highly decorated veteran would be willing to explain to me why he and his fellows fight for the freedom of only some of our people and not all."

"Fem Nyssa..." the Councilor objected.

"To what people do you refer?" The primale addressed her directly.

She laughed lightly, hiding the way he was managing to put her off balance. "Why your precious obedients, of course. What freedom do they have?"

Nyssa fought desperately to maintain control. Was it his voice, with its undercurrent—not aggressive—but full of raw power doing this to her? Or was it simply his presence? The pumping of testosterone into the air? If she was another sort of woman—not a fem—would she be able to bear up? Or would she find herself down on her knees, while he stood over her...doing what...gloating?

Primale Theron's lips flattened into a slight frown. She imagined kissing them. More precisely, being taken by them. "Obedients are not compelled to do anything. I fail to see your point."

Smug bastard.

"Of course you don't. Fem Dekalia, if you will excuse me, I have a performance in three intervals. I need to prepare. Primale...it's been...an experience."

"Fem Nyssa," the Councilor stopped her at the rounded auto portal.

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid you've not given me a chance to explain the purpose of this meeting. Primale Theron is not to be a passing acquaintance in your life. He is to be an intimate part."

"Intimate?" Nyssa nearly choked on the word.

"The High Council has determined that you are in need of protective service," the woman explained. "Sun and moon time both. For the foreseeable future, at least."

Nyssa cast a glance at the statue of a man—at attention even when he wasn't. There was no way she could endure his presence even for a minute, let alone sun to moon. "But, I don't need a guard, Fem Dekalia."

"There is the matter of the threats made against you, dear. These must be taken seriously. Your liberationist views have made you unpopular in certain quarters."

"So? I have a staff already to watch over me. Lots of men."

"Mems, you mean."

She turned on him instantly. "That's right, *Primale*. I work with mems—sensitive, caring males who understand my female equality."

"Nyssa, please," Dekalia implored. "This is leading nowhere."

"You are right," she agreed. "Let me make this nice and simple. The only way this gorilla will be watching me is over my dead body. Are we clear? Good."

With that, she was off, her pert posterior making a rapid but imperious exit. *That was a close call*. She sighed, her inflamed sex continuing to throb as she took a vacuum tube to the nearest transport hub.

A little too close for comfort as a matter of fact.

One thing was certain—her viewers were in for an extra-special treat tonight as she performed on the grid, working out her sexual frustrations from meeting the primale.

Not that she would ever let him know.

* * * * *

The saucy little fem was in dire need of a spanking.

Never had Theron witnessed such insolent behavior. Never had he seen such utter disregard for propriety. Never had he viewed...such an ass. So maddeningly pert, so perfectly shaped, designed for no other purpose than to inflame the blood of a man.

"My apologies, Primale," said the High Councilor as they watched the beautiful young woman make her exit, impudently parading the back of her short skirt, the silver-blue flame of her hair shimmering and sweeping side to side across her exposed back as she moved. "My daughter tends to be a little...high-spirited."

Theron hid his reaction. So the High Councilor was her surrogate mother. No wonder the little creature was so spoiled. Strange, though, that a woman of Dekalia's rank would be assigned maternal duties. "I was not aware that members of the Council ever served as cluster parents," he said.

"We don't," said Fem Dekalia. "I was referring to our genetic link."

This time he couldn't help but reveal shock. How had Fem Dekalia come to learn this information from the Genetics Bureau? No citizen, no matter how important, was allowed to know how his or her DNA was being used to produce the next generation. Biological attachments only complicated the art of child-rearing and the functioning of a smooth society. Every citizen had parental figures within their growth clusters, but this was hardly the same thing.

"Nyssa has been created for a special purpose, Primale Theron. She is to lead our society in a challenging time."

Which meant what? The Narthians? Social unrest?

Dekalia's admission did explain one thing, though. If this imp Nyssa had the High Councilor's own genetic makeup in her spoiled little bones, it was no wonder Guardian Command had rushed him back from the front to baby-sit a hologrid star.

"Theron, I'm choosing you for this assignment for two reasons," General Morax said. "First, you're my most loyal and trusted officer. Secondly, you have the discipline and patience of a saint."

"The confidence is appreciated, Sir," Captain Theron answered, the cascade of emotion hidden behind a face of granite. "May I have permission to speak freely on the matter?"

Morax sighed. For three campaigns, over six solar cycles he had been like a cluster father to Theron. That meant much to a primale, as members of his sub-gender were removed at a very young age to be raised in structured military-like camps. To some it

might seem cruel, but it had a function—to keep the society's strongest fighters and protectors one hundred percent devoted to their work.

With the exception of the love they were allowed to share with their one and only lifemates.

"I can read your mind all too well, son," lamented the dark-haired, robust general as he put a hand on his protégé's shoulder. "You cannot bear the idea of leaving your men. Especially not with the Narthians gathering for a fresh attack. And least of all are you prepared to do so to assume work ordinarily left to men far inferior to yourself."

Theron felt a rare stab of pain. Was he letting the General down? "I mean no disrespect, Sir. We are all born as we are. I seek only to serve."

"I know you do, but I stand by my words. It is true. You are the best of the best. And though I cannot share exactly why, we can afford nothing less than the best for this particular job. May I count on your support?"

"To my dying breath," he vowed, his hand cupping his heart in a Guardian salute.

Thus did he find himself here, staring down an assignment that was shaping up to be the toughest of his career. "With all due respect, High Councilor, spirited is an understatement."

Dekalia smiled, the faintest bit of pride and amusement behind her professional demeanor. "My daughter has received quite a brew of DNA, hasn't she? We took special care in her mixing...and in her nurturing. We intend for her to be a creature of unprecedented abilities and character."

Something occurred to Theron. "She doesn't know who she is, does she?"

Dekalia nodded. "You are excellent proof that your kind is bred as much for intelligence as strength. You are correct. She is completely unaware of her lineage, or of her future fate. It was decided that she be allowed to enjoy her youth in an...unstifled atmosphere."

"She's provoked enemies, though," Theron noted.

"Yes. Her courage and leadership abilities, combined with a questioning imagination have led her to challenge the entire framework of society with only limited experience to judge. Frankly, she poses a challenge we have never before faced."

"She has twenty-five solar passings, does she not?"

"Twenty-seven" Dekalia corrected. "And yours is thirty-five, tempered with the experiences of battle and all the sweeping maturations of war. Your commanding officer sees great things in you, Captain."

"But for such an assignment as this..."

"You're what we are looking for," said the leader of the nation curtly. "And you will commence your service immediately."

The change in her tone brought him 'round, reflexively, bones and muscles easing wearily into obedience. The most reluctant obedience he'd ever felt in his career.

He did not wish to guard this woman. He did not wish to even see this woman. And that was more than a little disconcerting. For a primale was nothing without his duty. Theron swallowed hard. Like it or not, he was going to have to pour himself into Nyssa, learning her patterns, anticipating her motions and guiding her footsteps.

"Understood, High Councilor. My service is yours...and hers."

"Good. There's one more thing."

"Yes, Ma'am?"

Dekalia appeared to be weighing her words. "We...that is to say the Council and your own superiors, as well as myself, recognize that your challenge is going to be a difficult one. My daughter is a risk-taker. She is headstrong. She listens to no one. She has no fear at all—you saw her walk out of here defying me. And mind you, that was without having any knowledge of her blood ties to me. We have had to walk a fine line, keeping things a secret from her. Some on the Council argued that she be trained from an early age in the matters of government. It was my opinion that she be given a chance to mature on her own. When it is time for her to accept her fate, she will be ready."

Theron couldn't help but smile thinking of the fiery Nyssa learning that she had another identity no one had told her about. "I can only imagine the day you level with her. I suspect she will have quite a lot of questions for you..."

Although it did beg an interesting question. Such a special offspring, with such special maternal DNA must also have extraordinary paternal genetics as well.

"True," agreed Dekalia. "And until such time as we desire that she learn the truth... As long as you have responsibility for her, we want you to feel free to be...firm with her."

Theron raised an eyebrow. "Firm?"

"Yes, firm. A little primale discipline won't hurt her, you know."

He could hardly believe his ears. "But, Ma'am, she's a fem..."

Dekalia's lips curled playfully, almost impishly. For a split second he saw the younger woman. "Young man, despite what you may have heard, fems are neither shrinking violets nor screaming harpies. We are capable of appreciating the virtues of unadulterated masculinity."

Theron wasn't sure what to be more blown away with—the notion of the High Councilor even intimating attraction to a primale or the images he was now having of saucy Nyssa receiving the discipline she so obviously required.

And at his hand no less.

His cupped, punishing hand descending rhythmically and systematically onto her behind as she lay helpless across his knees, her loins grinding against his thigh, her breasts against his other thigh. That tease of a skirt flipped up to bare her flesh.

Theron fought back his erection. This wasn't possible. A primale did not get hard against his will and certainly not for the wrong kind of woman. Least of all one whose care was about to be placed under his protection.

"Well, Primale, are you up for the challenge?"

Poor choice of words, he grimaced internally. Very poor. "Yes, Ma'am. I will do my best."

"Excellent. I shall arrange for you to be settled in with her staff at once. You will occupy a single sleep chamber, naturally."

"Ma'am?" The hair on the back of his neck stood up at the prospect of being anywhere near a bed with such an erotically stimulating female. "Are you sure that's entirely...appropriate?"

"It's a matter of security. You are to be by her side night and day, without interruption," she insisted. "Nothing else will do. Now if you'll excuse me, I have much to attend to."

Theron saluted.

A moment later he found himself in the corridor, retracing Nyssa's steps. *Let this be a dream, he thought. Let me wake up and find myself in a slag hole, surrounded by hissing Narthian egg-bearers, armed with a single-shot sling ray prone to misfiring.*

Anywhere but with that impertinent fem who had already managed to do something no other female had ever managed, not even the most alluring obedient.

Namely take full possession of his cock—the mere sight of her tantalizing form enough to leave him wild with primale desire.

And *he* was supposed to discipline *her*.

Now there was a joke if ever he'd heard one.

Too bad primales weren't engineered to laugh.

Chapter Two

Nyssa was one of the most popular performers on the grid. Her current role was Vonda in a nightly serial entitled *Cutting Passion*. Vonda was a bit of a bad girl whose favorite activity was stealing the affections of the various handsome young mems belonging to her fellow fem students at a medical learning center in the imaginary city of Alpha Prime.

She didn't mind the show so much. It certainly beat her last role in a historical documentary series called *Ancient Horrors*. Nyssa had played a pregnant woman—complete with a swollen belly. The very notion of having to carry a human life inside her for nearly a whole solar's passing filled her with utter disgust. Never had she been so grateful to live in an enlightened world where all females were rendered safely sterile from birth. Babies belonged in tubes, not in stomachs.

Tonight's episode of *Cutting Passion* focused around Vonda seducing Mikal, the current sex-making mate of the lovely golden-haired Lynelia. As usual, naughty Vonda was skimpily dressed, her medical student's costume revealing substantially more cleavage than that of the others. The hem of her white skirt was also a full inch shorter.

In the key scene, Vonda arranged for her and Mikal to be "accidentally" stranded alone together in a transport bubble caught midair between the medical campus cylinders and the mile-high floating discs of Alpha Prime.

Thanks to the technology of the hologrid, which was a combination of three-dimensional digitalization and direct sensorial input, Vonda's experiences were as real as anything in the natural world. Nyssa's own emotions and physical presence were themselves a part of the production, which in turn was beamed to grid-sharers across the world.

Citizens could plug in and then they themselves could share in the character's experiences. They could take on one or both roles, or simply hover unseen as observers. They could even absorb the program simultaneously from more than one point of view if they were particularly daring.

Nyssa's greatness, according to critics, lay in her ability to throw herself completely into her roles. She held nothing back—using her own deepest feelings and passions. Tonight, she would translate her experience with the primale, as well as her ongoing horniness.

Jolando, the actor who played Mikal, was in for an explosive time, though he did not yet realize it.

"All clear," cried the director.

The lights in the beaming dome came on, signaling broadcast readiness. Within the clear plastic structure, some ten feet in diameter, stood scantily clad Vonda/Nyssa and the handsome Mikal/Jolando in his clingy, white jumpsuit.

He was not a bad-looking fellow. Curly hair dyed a light magenta, a noble Roman nose, long torso, strong thighs, a very nice ass and the outline of a long cock. A decent specimen overall, but obviously Theron would clean his clock, to borrow an ancient expression. But that was the price to be paid for male sensitivity, she supposed.

"Action," cried the diminutive director, hovering in his flying suit.

At once the beam dome came to life. Lights flashed, the digitizers hummed to life and Nyssa was Vonda, in the transport bubble.

"Oh, Mikal," she cried, scooting across the single couch-like seat of the egg-shaped vehicle. "What's happened? Why have we stopped?"

"We appear to be stuck," Mikal pronounced his rather obvious line.

"I'm scared, Mikal." Nyssa continued to recite her lines. Fear had made Vonda do strange things in past episodes. In this case, it induced her to unzip Mikal's jumpsuit and place her palm on his smooth, bare chest.

The feel of him made her nipples tighten and further moistened her crotch. It did not, however, overwhelm her. She was not losing herself, awash in her femininity, as she knew she would be with the arrogant primale.

"Vonda, you shouldn't do that. I have a sex-making pledge with Lynelia for this moon cycle."

"But I'm frozen with terror," she pouted, managing to climb across the mem's lap despite her supposed paralysis.

"We should call for help," he said, delivering his usual cardboard performance.

In real life, it would be a primale rescue unit they would call.

"Jolando," she whispered, tonguing his ear. "I want you to fuck me when we're done. I want you to grab my hair, push me down how you want me, and give it to me so hard – like a fucking animal."

Mikal/Jolando, who was usually more smitten with his mem co-stars than his fem ones, cleared his throat. "Let us use the gyrocommunicator." He attempted to keep to the script. "To...to call for help."

"I'd rather you use that cock of yours." She ground her pussy against his crotch. "Deep in my hot little hole. Show Vonda how a little cock-greedy bitch like her should be treated."

For the grid, she added, nice and loud, "Ooo, Mikal, you think of everything. You're so smart. I wish you were my sex-making partner."

Nyssa started rocking – she felt hollow inside, craving to know more about Theron, to feel him, to know his touch. Would Jolando be able to fill her in the same way? Would he bring her to that kind of ecstasy? Would he make her whimper and scream and moan? Not in a million years.

That prick, Theron – getting her all out of sorts like this...

She cursed his image, the hold he was having over her imagination, and her sex, too. Talk about an exercise in futility; her desires for Theron were doomed.

Primals ought to be illegal. Getting a nice innocent fem all worked up for nothing. Taking such total advantage of them. Why should a woman have to accept a lifetime of slavery just for some good sex?

She was halfway tempted to make Jolando come in his pants right now, just to reassert her feeling of control. It had been three full intervals since her encounter with the primale, and she was only feeling more ill at ease, more incensed.

The way he had looked at her and treated her, like she was some rare butterfly and he was holding the net. Like he had the right to catch her...to do what he liked. Ordinarily people were intimidated by her or otherwise enthralled. She had this aura that she counted on to make her larger-than-life.

In Primale Theron's presence, she felt oddly...contained. As if he was testing her parameters, judging precisely her limits. This shouldn't have been sexy, but it was. Fems weren't supposed to like the idea of being fenced in. Nor were they engineered to moisten for men who liked their females in cages, no matter how golden.

"Nyssa," Jolando pleaded through clenched teeth. "Stop."

A subliminal beep initiated by the director reminded them that they were getting off script. Jolando had a line he was forgetting. Look at him – he couldn't remember his own name at this point. Nyssa restrained a giggle. She felt a little guilty for getting him so hot and bothered, but she'd make it up to him.

Easing off, she blew him a kiss, mouthing the word "later".

Jolando panted, recovering himself. "Vonda, you know you are the most desirable woman at the Learning Center. I often fantasize about you naked. But I must be loyal."

She unzipped his coveralls, more than happy to continue the hackneyed plot. She had proven her point – he was putty in her hands. All men were. This Theron would be no exception. Why had she been so unsure of herself? Primale though he was, she was a trained seductress. "I admire that about you, Mikal, I really do. And if we are going to die, I would like to offer you something first..."

The grid did not show actual sex acts. These were up to the imaginations of individuals. What the actors and actresses did was set up scenes that could flow there ever so easily for the audience.

"Vonda, what are you doing?"

Mikal really was a dense and wooden character – she sighed, kneeling between his legs. Looking up at him with dreamy eyes she said, "I want to –"

Nyssa froze. Outside the dome, standing there next to the technician's consoles was a large man, legs apart, arms folded across his chest, watching like an old-time policeman on the beat.

The primale! What was he doing here? Who in molten blazes had let him in the studio? Heads would roll. Damn it, how could she let him see her like this, so...female. Even if it was an act. She struggled to keep her composure. What was she supposed to be saying, down here on her knees? Oh, stars and comets, it came back to her. No...she couldn't say this now, in front of him.

What choice did she have, though? Nyssa was a professional.

"I want to give you pleasure." The words zapped off her tongue like electricity. The change in the room, in her, was palpable. The primale was doing this, just by standing there, stone-still, watching.

"I want to taste you in my mouth...Mikal."

She looked straight at him, at the giant Guardian. She hadn't wanted to and she had quickly averted her eyes, but the damage was done. The substitution was there. In her mind. Mikal...for Theron.

And worse still, he had seen her looking.

"I want your swollen cock. I want your cum."

"Oh," he groaned. "I wish I could do that. I wish I could come in a woman's mouth. Lynelia won't do that."

"I would, Mikal." Nyssa stole another glance at the Guardian. Unable to help herself. "I would do that for you. I would suck you to orgasm and I would swallow your cum, too."

Was that a frown on Theron's face? She couldn't tell. Not without studying him more closely.

"Yes, Vonda," he groaned, stroking her hair. "Please, yes." The man was gone, his eyes rolling up in his head. One blow of moist air to his cock would send him blasting through the bubble.

"You have to promise me something first, Mikal. You have to tell me you will give up Lynelia and have only me."

"Yes, Vonda," he enthused. "Only you. You are every man's dream."

She laid her head on his masculine thigh, imagining the corded muscles of the primale. The feel of his rock-solid body hard to the touch. And Theron's cock—what might that be like? What kind of things would he do with it...to her?

Hands trembling, feeling shy, she was overcome by a tentativeness she had not felt since her very first days of performing. The scene was seconds away from completion. The intent was clear now—they'd shown enough.

She held her breath as the scanners and sensors continued to run. She wasn't sure if she should hope for the scene to end, so she could get out of here, or hope that it went on forever, so she never had to talk to Theron again.

"And...cut," announced the hovering director, behind his small, multicolored sensory glasses and tall, yellow wig. "That's a *finito*, people. See you all tomorrow...ten a.m. sharp."

"Nyssa," croaked Jolando. "You were on fire. Did you mean that, about later? I'd love to get together with you. You, me...and Mem Bobolo. You know him, don't you? From the Five In News on 3Net?"

"Yeah, sure," she said, her mind totally shifted to the primale, who was standing outside the bubble, looking about as wavering as a ten-thousand-year-old marmakao tree on Ceti One. "That would be stellar."

"Mem Bobolo has implants," Jolando whispered, seeking to entice her. "A second penis."

"Great." Actually the idea left her cold, but if it gave her the opportunity to blow off the walking wall of granite, why not? "Just give me half an in to freshen up. Should I meet you at the Pleasure Palace?"

"I'll get us a room. Maybe scare up a few more augments?"

"Perfect." Nyssa waited for the bubble to slide open and then she marched straight up to Theron. "Who told you to come in here? Get out right now."

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Nyssa. I have my orders."

"Orders," she scoffed, feeling suddenly very naked in her little costume. "What kind of orders could possibly involve me? I'm not some new hill to be conquered or a kitten who's run up a tree and in need of rescue."

"That's true," he concurred. "You're not. Because a kitten would have more common sense."

She was taken aback. "Are you mocking me? I thought your kind didn't do that?"

"We don't," he said flatly. "I was pointing out a fact. Have you any idea how unsafe it is for someone in your position to be at the Palace? Not to mention engaging in group sex-making with strange augmented mems?"

"I don't know." She crossed her arms over her loosely covered breasts. "Why don't you tell me, *Mom*. Oh, wait, I forgot, you're not one of my cluster parents—you're a busybody, killjoy primale with delusions of grandeur."

"Name calling won't change the situation, Nyssa."

"Sure makes me feel better—and how did you hear what Jolando and I were talking about in there, anyway? Were you using super-hearing or what?"

"I read lips."

"Do you, smart guy? Why don't you see if you can read this?" She formed her lips into a mild obscenity and turned away, set for a repeat performance of this afternoon's departure from Dekalia's office.

This time, however, she was stopped short. By a hand clamped on her upper arm, strong as steel, tight, but not painful. "Not so fast, Nyssa. You're not going anywhere tonight."

"How dare you," she gasped. "No one touches me. I am a star."

Her heart thumped in her chest. He had her in his grip, just as his eyes had promised he could. *The butterfly in the net...*

"We can call her, if you like," Theron said calmly. "As soon as we get to our quarters for the night."

The one word, ours, set off alarm bells. "What in the Moons of Sirius are you talking about? I have my own place in the Decompression Towers. And a ten-room floater barged at Dome's edge, as well."

"We are going to be using regular floatels. In case anyone is stalking your personal residences. You're going on tour tomorrow, anyway, so you may as well get used to living out of a travel case. We'll be spending a lot of time together, in some cramped quarters."

Oh, no. No, no, no. This is not going to happen. "Sure," she smiled sweetly, thinking how she would sooner bunk with a Narthian. "Can I just have a minute to tell Jolando that I won't be going out with him tonight?"

Theron's brow furrowed. "A minute," he conceded. "That's all. I have us on a very tight timetable."

"Oh, thank you," she trilled, secretly marveling that such an attractive man could be such a pompous ass, as well as such a sucker to fall for her trick. "You're too kind. I'll be back...ever so quickly."

"Hey, you gorgeous little thing." Jolando grinned. "Please, pretty please tell me you're going to bring that burning volcano of a man with you."

"Hush, Jolando, and listen." She made sure to face away from Theron, blocking Jolando's face with the back of her head. "He's a total psycho fire-killer and I need to dump him. And watch out, because he reads lips."

"How about a little doppelganger fun?" Jolando pointed down to the holo console. "All we need is a little diversion to cover the switch."

She caught his intent immediately. It was an ingenious plan. They could get him to look away and then turn on a holo image of her to make him think she was still there. By the time he looked back, he would see her again, standing just as she had been. She could run halfway to Orbit Station by then, let alone the Pleasure Palace. All they needed was the diversion.

Nothing too big, mind you, just big enough to fool a literal-minded, primale oaf.

* * * * *

So she thought he was a psycho fire-killer, did she?

There was a reason Theron hadn't flat-out denied possessing augmented hearing abilities. As a matter of fact, he did have them. If he wished, he could hear a micropin drop a kilometer away. He could also see across a spectrum twice that available to the standard human eye. These were obviously not powers he used on a regular basis. They

were for special occasions, like testing a certain stubborn, extraordinarily disobedient fem to see what she would do if given an apparent chance to escape.

Their plan was childish at best. Did they really think that a man able to battle hordes of Narthian Sting Beetles in subzero pitch-black for hours at a time would be unable to prevent a pair of actors from slipping out of a brightly lit studio?

A little doppelganger fun, indeed.

He was curious to see what they would use as a diversion. They opted for a sound effect, a projected scream from a sensor in the far corner of the studio. The untrained eyes and ears turned. Theron's, however, remained focused to the nth degree on the tiny female, zigzagging with the mem, through the small group of techs and actors, all the way to the portal door.

Theron looked through it before it opened, his mind already registering the escape possibilities. Before they knew it themselves, he had determined their course of action.

Sure enough, they leaped onto a passing transport bubble, an eight-seater, headed for the Waterfall of Light at the western edge of the Dome. He waited a few moments, long enough to make sure they would no longer be able to see him outside the rear view port.

Opening the electro-door, he stepped out onto the platform, a kind of shelf sticking out of the side of the cylindrical building in which the studio was housed. The building was a thousand stories high, a floater, hanging vertically, midway between the top and bottom of the great crystal dome of Tech One, the capitol city. Dozens of such structures were dangling, their shiny surfaces reflecting the gemlike hues of the carved star-diamond dome.

Transport bubbles floated to and fro, along with huge, puffy, cloudlike objects, the temporary travelers'ports known as floatels, with private rooms. Far below, at the upper surface levels, pedestrians of all shapes and sizes descended and ascended on shimmering, filament-like electro-glides. Revolving discs topped heavy metal columns, each crawling with ten thousand people, at cafes, in diners, shopping in curiosity stores. Below this, the belly of the whale, the bottom of the huge bowl of the city in which sat a maze of jagged technostructures of every color and covered in flashing lights.

All together the Dome housed fifty million citizens. And his job was to keep track of just one. A single fem, too stubborn to protect herself, and far too beautiful and independent for her own good.

He couldn't help but smile. Surely she felt completely confident of her escape. What man could track her down in a place like this? None – unless he was a primale.

Theron tagged the next available floater. He hitched a ride as far as Red Disc, and then picked up a private lift. Nyssa was still in the bubble, arcing for the Pleasure District when he caught up to her. Staying just out of range, he decided to track her a while, to see what she'd do. He told himself it was for intelligence purposes, to learn her movements and friends, and also to get a lead on any unfriendlies on her tail.

There was another purpose, though, too. Theron needed time. To cool his stel-drive. That little performance of hers had done a number on him. Never mind that she was only acting. Her body, clad strictly for male viewing pleasure, was real enough, as were her delicate hands on the mem's zipper, her full cheek laid down beside his swollen crotch.

Theron had wanted to yank the man from his place on the seat, to deny him the submission of the fem who did not belong to him. It infuriated him to see her on her knees like that for him...he wasn't worthy. The man was playing a part and cared nothing for her.

This was made clear enough in his response to her hot self-offering. Sure, she could lie down with him and share in carnal pleasures so long as he could invite others as well. People she didn't even know. Augments, with strange hands and eyes, to touch her and look at her. The very idea was insufferable.

Then again...she was a stranger to him, too. This wasn't rational, any of it. If he didn't know better, he would swear he was feeling the bond urges.

Damn it, he *was* feeling the bond urges. The unleashing of that deep, unspeakable drive that led a primale to ball his fist in the hair of one—and *only* one—woman, to draw her close, kissing her to the point of collapse, until blood trickled from the corner of her vanquished mouth, only one word left for him to utter.

Mine...

But only an obedient could respond to this level of power and devotion. By rights, he should not be attracted to a fem at all. He had been made to wait too long to mate, that's what the problem was. The rest of his age group had long since been given beautiful obedients of their own, females to treasure and possess and spoil, gentle creatures who understood primale ways and were not frightened by them.

Theron, however, was a member of the Guardians—a class within a class. Soldiers in this class were allowed no loyalty at all except to their units. Only when his term of service was complete and he had moved along to other primale work, like fire and emergency services, would he be allowed to seek a mate.

Twice already, he had been renewed in the Guardians on account of his skills. Much longer, and he might end up a monk—a lifetime officer like the General. His loins starved for a woman, as his soul ached. Much of what made a primale whole was his sense of duty and devotion to his female life companion. They were as much fierce protectors as they were dominators.

And right now his duty was to protect Nyssa, future High Councilor of the nation, and current brat. His own emotions, his own needs, must be as nothing. The pain he might feel at what he could never have, with her or any other, was simply part of the sacrifice he must make.

It was in his blood. It was his reason for being.

If nothing else, he would keep his honor. Even as he protected the life of the most beautiful, desirable...and untouchable woman he had ever laid eyes on.

A recipe for sexual frustration, to be sure. And the job was about to get a whole lot more frustrating. Because as soon as he caught up with the lovely little sprite, he was going to have to impose discipline on her.

Beginning with a little session over his knee.

Chapter Three

Nyssa was buying tonight. For the entire clientele of the Triple Splash Gas Emporium, which at the moment was closed to the public and consisted solely of her inner retinue. There were perhaps a dozen of them still left, hardcore tri-ox inhalers, greedily sniffing out the floating, colored tubes with various intoxicating gases, all legal. The bartender was a robot, a Smile-a-lot model 5000 with a bowtie over his springy, coil neck.

The place was intimate and round, decorated in late twentieth-century art, including those most beloved of icons, the silver circular decorations known as hubcaps. Oval windows in colored layzite glass revealed the gigantic hollowed-out space of the city, between dome and mechanoid-ground level.

"Tell us again," asked her hair-dresser Goomy, his floor-length wig of purple more than a little askew. "How you deceived the nasty primale."

"Yes," came the chorus of cheeky revelers, "tell us of the bold exploits of the fem supreme."

"No, I'm too tired," Nyssa complained, her head cloudy with a mixture of tri-oxygens and antique margaritas.

"Speak, damn you," Jolando grabbed her dramatically, mimicking Theron. "Or I shall be forced to manhandle you."

Nyssa squealed happily as he pushed her facedown over a padded table, lifting her skirt. She was still wearing the silly little holo costume, which lacked any underwear. He found her pussy wet to the touch, a fact that he shared with those assembled.

"This is all for me, I'll have you know."

Nyssa gripped the edge of the table and began to writhe. The current state of her pussy was not for Jolando, but she wasn't going to tell him that. All night, she had been feeling this dread excitement, looking over her shoulder, knowing *he* was after her. The unabashed hunter...and she his prey.

Over the course of the hours her hopes and fears had faded. No confrontation, no chance to feel that spark again, to tell him where to get off, to show him her half-naked body one more time, so he could see what he would never have.

The fool had simply lost her. He would go back to his headquarters, get relieved or whatever and then Dekalia would leave her be. She would go back to normal. Enjoying mems and the occasional fem with a pleasing, long tongue.

Then again...he might still be out there, his fury building, determined to enforce his will. To capture her.

She imagined the feel of him all over again, the hand clamping on her upper arm. One hand holding her, the other stripping her naked. His eyes letting her know that she was about to be his. Completely, no compromise, no quarter. His mind centered on nothing but her...and his sexual will.

"Jolando," she gasped, "domes and spinning planets...put it in me. Put your cock in me..."

"Beg for it, baby."

"Please...oh, please..."

"Shall I?" The fucker teased her clit. "Or should I try something else..."

He poked a finger in her asshole. "Yes," she groaned, her senses awakened, her needs turning deep and dirty. "Stick it in my ass. Make me take it...for you."

Her head was swimming and her cunt throbbed, craving attention for her body – male lust, primal, and overriding. The sort she could never afford, the sort...

"That will be enough of that."

Jolando's fingers disappeared from her tender openings. Her spine snapped like an electric whip. He'd found her...

"We don't want any trouble, friend," Jolando assured him, his voice tremoring.

"There won't be any." Theron smoothed down Nyssa's skirt and helped her to her feet. "We'll be leaving quietly."

"Wait a minute," complained Goomy. "You can't just come strolling in here and –"

"It's all right," Nyssa interrupted. "I can fight my own battles."

"I'm not your enemy," said Theron as soon as they were outside on the emporium's transport platform. It was dark now, the Dome having been dimmed for night. Artificial stars dotted the firmament, in every color of the rainbow.

"Sure could have fooled me."

"Come on, we're going to our floatel room."

She gave him a look. "In your dreams, Guardian. I'm just getting started here."

"Really? And what's next? Group sex-making? Or is robot sex more your speed?"

"Screw you, dickhead."

"Feel better now?" he inquired, steering her to a vacant for-hire bubble.

"No," she informed him as he sat her down on the passenger side.

"That's too bad." He climbed into the driver's side. "Because the night is going to get worse before it gets better."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Theron launched the bubble into traffic. "You'll find out soon enough."

"Ooh," she spat sarcastically, "I'm so scared."

He brought them to the Sapphire Shell, a pricey establishment currently moored at Dome Top. Appropriately enough, it was shaped like a shell.

"Wear this." He tossed her a gilded cloak. "We don't want you being recognized."

"Yes, mustn't hurt your fragile primale ego," she snapped. "Keep the woman nice and small and invisible, I say."

Theron offered no response as he ushered her past the robot doormen. He checked them in at the front hover desk, and then escorted her to the nearest elevator tube. Marvelously dressed couples and triples, fems and mems, passed them by, dripping in the latest gems. One rarely saw primales in public, unless in uniform. Rarer still were the obedient— they were kept under lock and key by their primale masters.

"I could escape again any time I wanted," she informed him as he placed his palm on the door to their suite. "Just so you know."

The portal slid open with a pneumatic hiss.

"Not bad." She observed the huge, fluffy bed, the size of an eight-seat bubble. "I think I'll be comfortable enough. Think you will manage all right with the floor?"

Theron punched a button on the wall console to close off the far wall, which at present opened to the City. He punched another to dim the lights. Next he moved to the décor selector, running through the standard offerings.

She watched the furniture moving about and morphing, accommodating itself to the various options. He settled on a sparse look. An antique metal frame bed and a single, heavily cushioned chair placed in the center of the room.

"I don't like that style," she complained.

"It's not about what you like, Nyssa. This is for punishment."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You're going to be punished for attempting to run away from me. Specifically, you will be spanked and put into restrictive bondage."

Nyssa's pussy flooded afresh, though she shook her head in fierce denial. A spanking... His hand on her ass. What if he wanted her bare-assed? She was wet and horny enough as it was. She would be humiliated. The man would think he was turning her on like she was some kind of obedient.

"You're crazy." She took a step backward. "I have rights. I demand you take me to Fem Dekalia."

"I told you that you could contact her." He pulled a transponder from his pocket. "You may do so now."

She snatched it from his hand. "Find me Fem Dekalia," she said into the little box.

The lights on the face of the transponder flashed for several seconds, one after another, tracing a pattern as the micro-intelligence sought to locate the person in question.

"Yes, Nyssa?" came the woman's voice a few seconds later.

"Fem Dekalia," Nyssa flashed a look to Theron, letting him know that he was about to get his, "it's about that Guardian...the primale you sent? I think you should know that at this moment he is attempting to assault me."

"To assault you?" She sounded skeptical.

"Well, not exactly an assault-assault," she backtracked. "More like a semi-assault."

"A semi-assault?" Fem Dekalia sounded justifiably puzzled. "What is it he is doing specifically?"

Nyssa swallowed. "He's threatening to...to..."

"To what, dear?"

"To spank me," she said, her cheeks flush.

"Well, do you deserve it?"

Nyssa's mouth hung open. She couldn't believe the High Councilor would say such a thing. "Of course I don't deserve it. No woman does. It's abuse, Fem Dekalia."

Dekalia sighed into the receiver. "Put Primale Theron on the line, please."

"It will be my distinct pleasure." She handed it back, giving him a "you're in for it now" look.

"Yes, Fem Dekalia. Uh-huh. Yes, all right."

Nyssa barely contained a smirk. The poor boy wasn't getting a word in edgewise. He was getting what-for, all right.

"Yes, Fem Dekalia," he said at last. Then to Nyssa, "She wants to talk to you again."

Nyssa snatched back the transponder. "So I get to leave, right? You'll send someone for me?"

"No, Nyssa. You will remain where you are."

"So he's leaving then?"

"No, he stays, too."

"But —"

"No buts. I instructed Primale Theron that he is to apply his judgment as he sees fit. You will submit to him in all matters or face the consequences of his choosing."

"Fem Dekalia, you can't do that!"

"I already have, dear. Good night." The transponder went dead. Nyssa was white as a sheet.

Theron was standing there, calmly waiting. She swallowed hard. For some infernal reason he had decided to unzip and remove the top of his two-piece exo-suit. The man's torso was deadly hypnotic, a thing of captivating beauty. Well-earned, perfect tawny muscles with a couple of downright sexy scars across his left pectoral leading down to an abdomen that would put a steel wall to shame.

And those hands. By all the galaxies, those capable, well-formed hands. Did he really intend to use one of them on her poor little behind? Lightning-fast, she weighed her options for avoidance of the sentence he was about to impose.

His apparent ease at the moment was a ruse and she knew it. He was more like a jaguar than a man. Sleek-muscled, laser-eyed, poised to go for his quarry.

Which at the moment was her. Without thinking, she threw the transponder at him and charged for the bathroom. He intercepted her out of thin air. The next thing she knew she was being tossed over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

"Put me down!" she screamed.

Theron sat in the cushioned armchair, laying her across his lap with her head hanging down to the floor. "If you can't keep quiet, I will be forced to gag you."

She squirmed, kicking. "This is so illegal! I will see you sent to a detention colony."

"The High Councilor just gave her blessing, Nyssa. I don't think you have much hope for appeal."

"If you were a gentleman, you wouldn't do this," she pronounced in a more civil voice, none too anxious to end up with some rag tied in her mouth.

"And if you were a lady, I wouldn't have to." His hand was on the small of her back, keeping her in place. She had already figured out that struggling only served to maul her breasts against his leg, not to mention grind her pussy against his crotch.

"Just because I'm not one of your primale slave girls..."

"Obedients are not slaves," he insisted. "They enjoy a fulfilling and beautiful way of life."

"Bullshit. Then how come you don't ever let them speak for themselves?"

"I'm a soldier, I'm not privy to decisions of the Council. Ask your Fem Dekalia."

"Why bother? She'd only take your side."

Theron slid his hand along the back of her shapely leg and up her firm thigh. She drew a steadying breath, digging her fingers into the rug as his fingertips moved under the hem of her little skirt. Stars and planets, his hand felt so strong and masterful. And his cock was so hard against her. That wasn't supposed to be part of the discipline, was it? Could it be he wanted her even half as much as she wanted him?

"You can't touch me under my clothes," she protested.

"It is necessary, Nyssa. Skin to skin. This isn't going to be gentle. What you did tonight could have put your life in jeopardy. Do you understand?"

"You found me, so what difference does it make? I'll even bet you were following all along."

"It might have made all the difference in the world, if I hadn't." He lifted her skirt, allowing the cool air to waft over her cheeks. "I sincerely hope this is a lesson that will stand out in your mind."

She tried not to respond as he let his hand rest on her buttocks. She didn't want to writhe, bucking ever so slightly for him... She didn't want to release a tiny, jagged moan from her half-open mouth either, but she did both.

"You will keep the count," he told her. "Repeat the numbers after me."

"Just get it over with..." He had her so helpless, her body bridged, her head down, her hair lying over the carpet in a corona.

"One," announced the primale, as his hand rose and fell, cracking efficiently down on her already tingling ass.

"Ow!" she cried. "Fuck it, Theron! That hurts!"

"We'll begin again," he announced with the patience of a pedagogue. "This time you will remember to count. One..."

"One," she grimaced, tears in her eyes.

"Much better. Congratulations, that was your first act of obedience."

She wanted to tell him where to shove his obedience, but he was delivering another spank. This one erupted like fire all across her backside. "Two," she cried.

"Good girl." He gave her ass a condescending little pat.

"I'm not a girl." She pushed her ass up at him.

"My apologies." Theron landed another smack to bring her back down. "Three...fem."

"Three," she moaned, wanting desperately to say more.

"We'll go to ten and then you'll be bound for the night."

"Oh, goodie..."

"Four."

"Four," she repeated, scarcely aware where three had left off and this new one had begun.

His hand vanished again, only to return, just as fast, this time with a whole rake of fire slashing across her skin. "Five. And just so you know. With each offense, Nyssa, your punishment will only increase, should you ever be tempted to defy me again."

Something happened at five. Even as she was reciting back the number, the surface agony in her flesh was sinking deeper, mingling with the already present aching in her pussy. Combine this with the mental image of herself, open, exposed and sexually vulnerable to the man's every whim, and she was suddenly feeling things more complicated than pain.

It was hard to put into words—part of it was because it was this particular man doing it...so very controlling, so totally able to take possession of the female. Another part had to do with a dark secret, long-buried, something known only to her, to her closest cluster sister Estriana—an obedient—and to Kilak, the primale to whom Estriana was betrothed.

Like all clusters, Nyssa's was balanced, an equal number of fems and obedients. It was thought that each could learn from the other, forming a stronger whole. In most clusters, fems and obedients tended to segregate. Nyssa and Estriana were a notable exception.

"Six," said Theron.

Nyssa moaned. She could feel the heat pouring off his hand. So much power under such tight control. Those hands could bend steel, tear a NARTHIAN limb from limb, and yet he was applying only as much force as was needed to spank her. To punish and dominate her.

Dominate...

The word made her pussy spasm almost as much as what he was doing to her. She was being dominated...like an obedient.

"Six," she hissed, adding in the same breath. "Theron, please, I can't take any more."

"You should have considered that before running off."

Nyssa squirmed in response to his damnable primale logic.

"Hold still," he ordered, giving her a punitive smack.

"Seven," she gulped.

"Don't bother," he informed her, "that one didn't count."

Nyssa was a mess of hot need by now. Her nerve endings were so confused. She didn't know if she wanted to be touched, left alone or both.

"This one, however, does."

"S-seven," she winced in response to the extra-hard blow.

"After this," he paused to resume lecturing, "you will see why it behooves you to follow my instructions to the letter. Rest assured, they are for your own good. You will keep to my schedule and you will see no one without my approval. We will travel alone."

"But I need my staff," she whined.

"Floatels have grooming robots. Any of the holotheaters you're going to will have their own staff as a backup."

"Theron...this is mean."

"Eight. And no more sex-making, either. Not without my approval."

Nyssa forgot the count. "You can't do that!"

"I just did. Eight." He slapped his hand back down on her jiggling flesh.

"Eight," she spat back. "You miserable —"

"Nine."

Nyssa cried out, her protest cut short. "Nine," she responded reluctantly.

"And ten."

"Ten," she gasped, never so thankful to have heard that number in all her life.

Theron raised her up off his lap. "Remove your clothing," he said.

She stared at him, a little unsteady on her feet. "What for?" she asked, her vision obscured by her mop of disorganized, silver-blue hair.

He arched a brow. "Are you looking for another spanking so soon?"

Nyssa quickly pulled the little white blouse over her head and undid the little white skirt. One fiery ass-beating a night was quite sufficient, thank you very much. "I'm not disobeying, I'm just asking a question."

Theron waited until she was standing before him naked to respond. "I'm not obligated to answer questions," he informed her. "In this case, however, I will tell you. Primales bind their women nude and no other way."

Nyssa moved her hands to cover herself, suddenly flushing. "I'm not your woman, and I am not going to be bound."

"You are *a* woman, though. And you are under my discipline for the present."

Hating herself for her sudden lack of resolve, she switched to a different tack. "Theron, I don't want to be tied up. Please don't do that to me."

Stars and planets, listen to her. She was practically whining.

Unmoved, like a monarch in his infernal chair, Theron snapped his fingers. "Go to the bed, Nyssa. Lie on it facedown and wait for me."

She met his gaze for all of half a second. There was something in it she dared not defy. "Yes, Theron," she heard herself say, staring down at her toes.

Her knees were like poli-rubber as she went to do his bidding. The truth echoed through her mind like a hot, perverted whisper.

I'm obeying a man. I'm obeying a man. Going to bed naked, at the snap of his fingers...to be tied.

It came as a chant, the very same tune of nine solars ago. Only then it had been Estriana being taunted. She had just been introduced to Kilak, who was to be her primale dominant. Both had obtained their eighteenth solar passing. The period of courtship would take several months, but the changes in Nyssa's cluster sister were immediate. No more laughing and joking with the mems, no more doing anything without checking with her betrothed first.

Almost invariably, he'd told her no. The primale coming between her and her cluster sister had angered Nyssa. Indeed, though he was posted on the far side of Celex 7 as a cadet at a reconnaissance base, he might as well have lived in the room Nyssa had shared with Estriana for his power over her. One night, after Nyssa had returned from a party that Estriana had been forbidden to attend, she'd found the beautiful blonde obedient naked in the sanitizing chamber. She was standing against the wall, pushing a large cyber dildo inside her asshole. She had a gag in her mouth and clamps on her nipples. The warm, red cleansing beams were pouring down on her as she moaned through orgasm after orgasm.

Nyssa had asked what she was doing and she'd said that Kilak liked her to do things to herself, the kind of things he would do in person. The very next time he'd come for a visit, Nyssa had confronted him, calling him a bully. Kilak had dismissed her, telling her that she was just jealous of the attention Estriana was getting.

"You wish a primale would want you," he'd told her. "But none ever will, because you're a fem."

Ever the hothead, she had slapped him in the face. "Liar."

The slap had had no effect. "Prove me wrong, then. Show me you're not in heat."

Nyssa had clamped her slick thighs. "I don't have to prove anything to you."

He'd raised his hand, oath-style. "Lift your skirt, then, and I'll check for myself."

Her breathing had been ragged and she had been as weak as a rag doll. She'd known she would fail the test, so why had she been prepared to let him? To risk so much just to feel his touch? She would likely be spoiled forever for another man, left aching and unsatisfied the rest of her days, unable to enjoy the only sex-making available to her—that of mems and fems.

And what of Kilak? What had he risked? He'd had a future, a career, and a golden-haired beauty to worship him.

It was Estriana herself who had saved them from their fate. Entering the room and seeing what was about to unfold, she'd gone to her knees, begging Kilak's touch upon her womanhood instead.

The young primale had stood paralyzed a moment. "Get out," he'd growled at last to Nyssa.

She had heard the screams behind the closed door. Kilak had taken Estriana ahead of the official bonding ceremony. By that evening, she had been his—as much as a woman could ever belong to a man. Estriana had packed her things and had been escorted promptly to newlywed quarters.

"I'm sorry, Nyssa," she'd apologized, though she'd had nothing to be sorry for.

"It's all right." Nyssa had embraced her one last time, though it was a long time before she would allow anyone to talk about Estriana without becoming cross. Eventually she had realized that it was her own jealousy still at work. She'd sought Estriana's forgiveness and had been promptly granted it.

Nyssa made it as far as the bed, crawling up onto the mattress before the tears came. She felt like such a little fool, embarrassing herself this way. Burying her head in the pillow, she had no choice but to let it all out. She wasn't even sure why or exactly where they were coming from. She had always been so strong in front of everyone. Her cluster sisters had always turned to her for everything, like when their pet gleenat had died or the time the girls at their rival cluster, White Roses, were giving them all that trouble.

Now it was the whole of the nation turning to her, absorbing her performances, looking for diversion, for hope, for entertainment.

"Nyssa?" Theron touched her shoulder. "What's the matter? Are you hurt?"

"Of course I'm hurt," she cried. "*You* hurt me...and I hate you! You're nothing but a bully."

She heard him sigh. "Nyssa, what I did was for your own good. You'll see that soon enough."

Her anguish turned instantly to rage. "You don't know what's good for me!" She turned to face him. "You don't know anything about me, so why don't you get the *fuck* out of my life? Go find a nice little obedient girl-slut to get your rocks off!"

Theron's jaw tensed. "I'm getting tired of your insults, young lady, and if you persist in this childish behavior, I *will* gag you until domelight."

That was all Nyssa needed. "Not if I scratch out your eyes first!" She was on him like a wildcat, all claws and naked flesh. Unfortunately, this was a primale she was attacking, which meant the battle was over before it began.

Theron pinned her, wrists overhead on either side of her body. He was on top of her, his chest inches from hers.

Nyssa was breathing too heavily to speak. She should be protesting, objecting, doing something, but all she could do was look into the man's eyes—the eyes of desire, the eyes of male need as she had never seen it before. So very fierce and intense—the power of faraway suns burning in the black cosmos, mountains, liquefying on far-off worlds. By all the stars and planets, why hadn't she seen this before? The invincible primale, underneath his armor and intellect, his readiness for every situation, was...lonely.

"Theron," she spoke his name, and then it was too late to turn back.

Chapter Four

The woman beneath him was not his own. Painfully as his cock might strain, as deep as his heart might yearn, as much as he might be enslaved by her unparalleled beauty and desirability, he could not, must not take her. Not here, not now, not ever.

But the way she said his name, pronouncing it as no one ever had, as if she were prepared to journey inside him, to know what all others feared. And to do this...she would surrender all.

"Theron..." she was saying it again. "Take me."

"Nyssa," he croaked, "no."

Her lips reached toward his. "Yes," she defied.

The touch of her was more than water to a thirst-maddened Bedouin, more than food to a starved beggar, more than wine and more than life. Mouths pressed, exploring—her small body offered up. Theron's tongue plunged, just as it was primed to do. This was his programming. No hesitation. No mercy.

Nyssa had opened the door.

Theron shifted his grip, gathering both her wrists in one of his hands. With the other he began to explore. Nyssa shivered as his fingers played across her rib cage to her trembling belly. Every inch of her fascinated him. The million-trillion responses she might be capable of, eyes fluttering, delightful womanly expressions dancing across her face. If he could make this last forever...

Desire had other ideas though, as her panting indicated, and the rise of her scent in the air, and the way his hands itched and could not wait to expose the center of his need...

Like the wolf, he nibbled at her ear, squashing her breasts. Her legs separated as naturally and gracefully as any obedient. The zipper on the exo-suit gave way and his cock came out into his hand—so ready, so far beyond ready.

Nyssa's mouth opened in a sigh of wonder as she felt him against her hip. "Theron..." She said his name in two syllables as she pleaded inarticulately. He knew what she wanted, knew what she needed right this instant, and in other ways too that he had not yet begun to examine.

"Nyssa," he felt obligated to warn, "I'm large. Not all women can take a primale."

Her teeth were clenched. She shook her head, dismissing his objections. "Shut up, Theron...for once. I want it in me, just put it in... I'm a big girl."

He didn't need to be asked twice. Her labia parted as he lowered himself tentatively. She encouraged him with little moans, bit-by-bit, ever deeper into her pulsing canal.

By the Oath of the Guardians! Nyssa was so wet, so warm...she was like...home.

He sheathed himself, his body making the descent slowly and steadily. Exact.

Her legs wrapped around him like they were made for this, to lock ankles behind his clenched buttocks, and deliver weak, hot half-kisses along his neck, wherever she could reach.

"Please..." she whimpered, wanting him to move, to begin the thrusting they both craved so badly.

He could feel the fire of her yearnings...almost bottomless. Could it be her heart was as empty as his? Despite all the glory of her position, and the brightness of her future?

There would be a price for this, warned the voices in his head, stern voices of elders and commanders. He was fucking the wrong kind of woman. He was ruining them both.

How could he care, though? With this body so tight to him, this person so close?

"Is this what you're looking for?" Using another of his super gifts, Theron clenched and unclenched the muscles in his cock, willing its expansion. He made it just big enough, and then stopped, giving her mind a chance to blow safely.

"Oh, my fucking fem soul." Nyssa made a deep sighing sound. She arched her back like a cat, feeling her way around him, accommodating, getting herself used to primale cock. Under different circumstances, a primale might torture a woman all night long with his erection, but there would be no holding out tonight.

Theron's explosion was too close to the surface. Too closely woven into the fabric of all their interchanges so far. It had been sex between them from the very first second he had laid eyes on her. The way she had sassed and taunted him.

"Come on, baby," she sought to urge him into motion. "Let's do it."

"Beg me, Nyssa." His teeth went for her nipple. This sweet little body was fucking *his*. He had swatted this hot little ass and he was inside this hot little pussy—this woman they all wanted on the hologrid, this defiant little fem.

"Please..."

"That's not begging." He chastised her with a sharp bite, the rubbery, swollen nipple yielding to the vise of his carefully applied teeth.

"You...motherfucker," she stifled a scream.

Theron withdrew his cock nearly to the tip. "I said beg."

"F-fuck me, Theron!" Her tune changed to a pliant pant. "I-I need it... I'll fucking do anything."

"You already do plenty...for your mem friends." Stars...listen to him, he was sounding like her dominant wannabe.

"They...they aren't anything."

"You asked for this," he reminded, though they were both guilty here, a mutual disaster.

"Theron, I'm begging you...make me come."

"You're a fem," he reminded, to little point. "I'm primale."

"I need to fucking come," she whined. "Pretty please, with sprinko cream on top of it."

Theron slammed his cock to the hilt. "That's enough, woman. The next sounds out of your mouth had better be moans."

"Yes...yes," she concurred, the sounds coming in stabs of breath.

Theron pulled out and thrust again. Even here, she'd defied him. "Yes is a word, not a moan."

She reached up to bite his shoulder. He gloried in the feel of her sharp little teeth. This was a woman, all right – like a she-cat off the veldts of Sirius Seven.

Releasing her wrists, he placed both palms down on the bed on either side of her. It was time to devour, time to fuck for real. Nyssa took advantage of the opportunity to reach with both hands, blue syntho-tipped nails digging into his upper arms.

She wanted blood, this one.

Theron's rhythm made the bed scream out before it did Nyssa. He hoped the syntho-brass would hold up. Nyssa clung to him as he lifted again and again, driving her down. It was like float-forming, or bari-sailing. Except with pleasure, two bodies clinging. Was her ass stinging? It sure was red from where he'd disciplined her. Nothing like a good hand spanking to stir the primale juices, or so his mated colleagues had told him.

Theron himself was a virgin. Though he would never give this information to Nyssa. He'd had options. Professional sex-makers were made available. As long as credits changed hands, most primales could avoid the bonding urges. Theron knew he could not manage that. Merely to look on a woman he wanted was to feel the craving.

To own.

Nyssa was trying to say something. Stubborn little creature – she was determined to keep her vocabulary to the end. "I'm...I'm...com-ing..."

That was the cue he needed. One final descent, holding himself back just enough so as not to drive them through the floor, he released the pent-up tension, the white hot flow, the seed of his primale lust.

Theron came and came inside her. Primales tended to have copious issues. It was a matter of marking the female, branding her internally. Nyssa's body exploded around him, a million tiny supernovas. Her pussy conformed perfectly, giving him what he was sure was ultimate pleasure.

Like cresting the top of one of the black crystal mountains on one of the ring worlds, like plunging the waterfalls of doom on Narum 2, like having one's belly pumped with adrenaline at the kickoff of stardrive. All this rolled into one and a million

times more, sweet and naked, skin to skin with a female, smelling so right, so perfectly fit to be held and lifted.

He brought himself down in true disciplined fashion. Making a count in his head. Turning his mind over to speed thought, he assessed...

There could be nothing higher than this. No woman, not even an obedient could take him here again. He was ruined for bonding with an appropriate mate. Thus would he make the decision to follow the path of Morax. The path of lifetime service to the guard. And bachelorhood.

He waited for her to subside. He would not abandon her in this state. He would not abandon her period. Though he could not be a mate to her. This—the sex-making between them—would not happen again.

"Mmm," she murmured, stirring beneath him half-awake. "That was *sooo* good...let me..."

She was reaching for his cock, trying to excite him all over again. "No, Nyssa," he said sternly. "No more."

"Not even a little?" she rasped, caressing him.

Theron's blood began to pound all over again. "I said no." He got up off the bed. "And I meant it."

The gorgeous little nymph sat up, pouting. Never had he seen such a sight, such a totally, sexually desirable creature. Completely wily and wicked, and yet still possessing this incredible innocence. It seemed a magical quality, like he could have her again and again and still feel her as if for the first time. "Killjoy," she declared.

Theron went to the objecticon on the wall next to the door. Activating the sensiscreen, he informed the machine of his desires. "Handcuffs," he said. "Old-style police special, and a unit of rope, silk. And a half dozen scarves...oriental," he added as an afterthought.

The machine hummed, processing the order. Behind the wall, within the unit, from the memory banks, the objects were being manufactured from atoms. Seconds later, the tray slid out, laden with Theron's treasures.

He weighed the handcuffs in his hands. Not bad at all. Although he'd forgotten to ask for a key. Taking off the rope and colored scarves, all purple, he placed the second order. The tray retracted and a second later reemerged with the tiny key.

Nyssa was watching with great interest. He half-expected her to make a break for it or put up some kind of fight, but instead she sat there on the bed, quite docile.

"This isn't intended to cause you trauma," he announced from the end of the bed. "The restriction you will feel is designed to reenforce upon you the resoluteness of my will in this matter, and also to teach you some respect for authority."

"Yes, Theron."

"Put your hands together in front of you. The handcuffs go on first."

Nyssa scooted forward on her spanked bottom, nice as can be. He ought to have known better, he really should have. A woman like this would never tame so easily.

She made her move as soon as the silver bracelets were locked in place. With both hands, she took hold of his balls, massaging them. His cock, already half interested, sprung to immediate attention.

Somehow his lightning reflexes failed him. Nyssa's naughty little mouth was already nibbling at the head of his cock.

"Nyssa, that's enough," he warned, not very convincingly.

Nyssa opened her mouth, insolently taking him deep inside. Theron groaned at the sensation. Nyssa was good, very good. She knew how to suck, and how to apply her teeth. Along the ridge at the bottom of his shaft, and on the vein. She had an agile tongue, too, which she kept constantly busy.

"This...won't change anything," he said with a low growl. "You're going to be tied up... You're going to be...disciplined."

Did his words sound as empty to her as they did to him? *Face it, Primale*, he lamented. *She is taking complete advantage of you.* So much for the vaunted superiority of his sub-gender.

Damn it, he could come like this. In Nyssa's beautiful mouth. Would she swallow his cum? There was no greater sign of devotion an obedient could give her mate than this. It was considered the crowning joy of her life.

Nyssa, however, was a little more complicated.

"You just don't learn." He plucked himself from her suctioned opening. "Do you?"

"Sure I do," she countered. "I just learned that getting fucked by a primale doesn't turn you into a zombie after all."

"On your back," Theron grumbled. "Hands over your head. Legs apart, wide."

"Sure, why not?" She shrugged, making it quite clear that she was doing this as a lark.

Theron decided it was time to take off the kid gloves. If she could endure the sexual contact without feeling the effects of primale bonding, than so could he. And simply because he had never participated in sex-making before did not mean he was lacking in knowledge. As a matter of fact, the entire Sexclopedia, all fifty-seven volumes, had been downloaded into his brain.

Among the topics that had interested him was cunnilingus. The art of seduction, and sometimes domination, by the tongue.

"It is time to learn your place," he informed her. "Female."

"And what place is that?" she teased. "Giving you orders, like Fem Dekalia?"

Theron bristled. She had come close to the truth. One day she would give the orders, to him and all other Guardians. That day was not today, however. "You are a female under my command," he elaborated. "And Fem Dekalia is not."

She watched as he grasped her ankle. He took one of the scarves, and wrapped it. He tied a knot and then secured the other end to one of the rods on the foot of the brass bed.

"No wonder you wanted a rickety old bed like this," she observed. "Tell me, though, is this the only way you can take command of a woman? Rendering her unable to defend herself?"

Theron moved to the second ankle. Her attitude made no sense—instead of being subdued by the sex-making, she seemed to be drawing strength from it, minute by minute. "I would never do to a woman that which she does not desire," he pointed out. "In my experience, women draw comfort and great sexual arousal from confinement by a strong, caring lover."

"Obedient women, you mean."

"A sub-gender from which you obviously do not spring."

"Nothing gets past you, does it, cowboy?"

He ran the reference through his databanks. Cowboys worked steers and horses on the old frontiers. "Generally not," he pulled a counter-phrase. "My little filly in need of taming..."

"Aren't you the clever one?"

"You're about to find out just how clever." He tied the cuffs to the headboard. "Go ahead, try and escape."

"What for? I'm sure I can't."

He tickled her concave stomach, making her laugh against her will. "Resist," he said again.

Nyssa jerked ineffectually against her bonds. "Satisfied?"

"Try harder."

She cast a disgusted look. "Get a life. I'm not going to twist around for your jollies."

Theron took hold of her nipple. "Try harder."

Nyssa wailed. "You said this wasn't going to be traumatic!"

"Pain isn't trauma. They are two different things."

Nyssa bucked against her bonds as hard as she could to get him to stop.

"Enough." He released her.

Nyssa's eyes narrowed like a hawk's. She was ready for a fight, he could tell. The worst possible thing would be to acknowledge her strength. He would treat her in the way that would infuriate her most—as a charming little plaything.

"You move well." He patted her hip. "Your mem friends must enjoy using you quite a lot."

"No one uses me," she rebuffed proudly.

"Really?" He ran his hand over her mons, settling his palm just above the cleanly lasered surface, smooth as silk, thanks to the finest personal grooming technology of the

super-space age. With every breath, she could not help but push her pussy lips against him. "But you seemed so ready to be used by Mem Jolando. Or was that Vonda in the Gas Emporium, begging for his injection?"

"I like sex-making." Her voice tremored. She was trying to push her ass down into the bed to resist him, but he could see that was causing pain to her spanked cheeks. "Is that a crime?"

Theron moved his finger to her clitoris, isolating it. "So I could bring Jolando in here now, or anyone else, and it wouldn't make any difference?"

She gasped as he pressed her button. "Oh, fuck..."

"Yes, Nyssa?" He teetered her on the edge of orgasm, denying her.

"You...wouldn't...do that," she cried in stabs of breath.

"Why not?"

"You...won't...share me."

Theron felt a jolt through his finger, straight from her sex. Was it his imagination playing tricks? "I told you before, you aren't mine."

"Theron?" Her voice was meeker, more respectful.

"What is it?"

"Will you let me come?"

"No." He pulled his hand away. "Not for quite a while."

Her eyes were glazed with erotic pain. "How long?" she whispered.

Theron steeled himself, wondering who was going to suffer more. "Until you've learned, Nyssa. By daylight...you will submit."

Chapter Five

Theron stood over her in all his splendid nakedness. The lean waist, the muscular thighs and full balls. His perfectly sculptured arms and solid chest. The look on his face. The fearsome resolve. She felt as if she had awoken the beast within him and now she wished only to put it back to sleep.

"I won't cause you any more trouble," she bargained. "What can I do anyway? You have me totally at your mercy."

"That's not sufficient, Nyssa."

"But what more is there?" She clenched her fists, helpless in the silk bonds. "What more can you get from me? You whacked my behind red and I know I'll get it again if I step out of line."

Theron's cock was rock-hard, like dura-metal. At least as hard as before, and, unless she missed her guess, longer and thicker to boot. "You are afraid of punishment, and you'll do what it takes to avoid it. That is not the same thing as submission."

Nyssa was still back on him telling her she was going to have to go a long while, maybe even hours without any sexual relief. Talk about trying to avoid something...

"Is there anything I can say or do?"

"You'd be going through the motions," he shook his head, "out of fear. It has to come from your heart."

"But I want it to," she pleaded. "I really do."

"Wanting a thing does not always make it so, Nyssa. This is a good lesson for you to learn."

She stifled her standard urge to call him an arrogant cocksucker, a self-righteous prick who was trying to lord it over her like he was twenty years her senior when he was practically the same age. He had the advantage here, and she did not want to irritate him any more than necessary. She had already made a mess of things, opening her big mouth. She could be sleeping by now, left alone, she was sure of it. If only she hadn't gone bragging about how strong-willed she was.

Immune to a primale's power...

There was a laugh. The man had her in knots, wrung out, drained and burning to a sizzle all at the same time. She just wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing, that was all. But she wasn't hooked on him or anything. In fact, first chance she got tomorrow she would sneak off again and find herself a new lover.

"I learn better sitting up," she offered sweetly.

Theron pursed his lips — had she almost forced a smile?

He went to the objectifier again—a device which up until tonight she had been a great fan of. Her skin tingled with light dread as he read off a new shopping list.

A white candle with matches, a glass of ice cubes, a feather duster, a riding crop and something called “closed pins”.

The crop, as far as she knew was something for horses. She had no idea what the pins were for and why they would come closed.

“Theron, what is all that for?” She reacted as he brought the new items on a tray. “Tell me it’s for a game of twenty questions?”

“I’m going to blindfold you,” he said, “and then we’ll begin.”

“What are those things?”

He picked up a plastic pincer. “This is a clothespin. They used to be used on laundry lines. They have other functions, too.” He pinched and unpinched it in midair.

Nyssa tried to disappear down into the bed. “What if you just fucked me again? That would teach me a lesson.”

“I’m going to put them on your nipples.” He picked up the other one, too.

“No,” she cried.

Theron sat down on the edge of the bed and put his fingers strategically into her sopping, ready sex. “What did you say?”

“I-I said...” He had her writhing, back to the point of agony in seconds. “Nothing,” she moaned. “I said nothing.”

“Ask for them.” He moved his other hand to her breast, caressing the tight nub. “Ask me to put the pins on your pretty pink nipples.”

He had her shaking, nearly shattered already. “P-put them on me.”

“Are you sure? They sting.”

“Y-yes,” she hissed as he grazed her clit.

“Arch your back for me, like a good fem.”

Nyssa pushed her breasts up toward him, well aware that this was obedient’s behavior, not fem.

“Good girl.”

Nyssa whimpered, lip sucked into her pearly lower teeth as he flicked the swollen little berries one by one with thumb and index finger.

“This will hurt, Nyssa...at first.” Taking her left nipple, he applied the clamp. Slowly, with finesse. The pressure rose, from an ache to a dull roar. Theron caressed her sex to maintain the right mix of pain and pleasure.

“Theron,” she gasped. “Oh...”

How could she hate him and need him at the same time? He was doing these terrible things and yet he was steadfastly and gently guiding her all the way through step by step. It made no sense...

Unless there were some deeper emotions at work. Honest to goodness feelings of affection. Could a primale react this way to a fem? And what about the way *she* was responding and reaching out for him? That wasn't just about making sex, either.

"Trust," he whispered, brushing the folded silk over her eyes.

She lifted her head on cue, so he could tie the scarf. Trust, indeed.

"Yes, that's it, Nyssa."

She felt his kiss on her forehead...so very tender, so completely...contradictory.

Theron laid her head back on the pillow. "It's time for the other clothespin," he told her. "After that, you will not know what is coming next."

Nyssa held her breath—as if that might make her other breast disappear. The already clamped one was throbbing. It was like a cord, tugging, aching, all the way down to her gaping pussy.

The indignity of not being able to close her legs, the humiliation. The excitement.

Theron pinched her nipple, as he had the other one, readying it for the plastic pincer. This one hurt worse than the first. It was a heat, spreading across her chest.

She wanted to buck, to shake it off, but she found that her movements, even breathing, only added to the sensations.

"You are one in a trillion women," said Theron, stroking her cheek. "Do you know that? And it's not the hologrid, either, or the way you look—though the universe knows you would waken a man from the dead. No, it's something else—something no one else sees."

Nyssa laughed. It was the feather duster running across her breasts, tracing a zigzag down her belly! "Theron...stop."

He did. Abruptly something hissed through the air. Leather. Punishing. To her left thigh. "Be careful what you wish for," was his only comment.

Nyssa gritted her teeth. She would not make that mistake again. The duster returned, teasing, tantalizing, pricking at her tiniest little nerve fibers, a million sneezes she couldn't let out. The feathers settled over her pussy.

Theron dusted her labia. Nyssa moaned, curling her toes. Oh, stars...this was it.

Whoosh. The feathers vanished. Slash, the crop descended on her a second time, this time on her belly.

"That's for squirming," Theron complained.

Nyssa grimaced. Oh, how she wished he would not keep adding rules.

The crop had its way with her now as Theron caressed every part of her body with the thin leather rod. From the bottoms of her feet all the way to her cheeks with an eventful stop in between her slick thighs. A cold sweat sheened her forehead by the time he reached her lips.

"Kiss," he ordered.

She pressed her lips to the instrument of discipline, braided and rough. It had a harsh smell, severe, like animal hide. It smelled like her, too.

"Lick."

Nyssa dabbed her small tongue hungrily. Her passion was craving it—the drama, the intensity, the sensation. She wet the crop down, every part of it he would give her.

"If you were an obedient," he said, "and you had done what you did tonight, you would have gotten this right off. You would have been chained up naked, hands over your head on tiptoe, and you would have been thoroughly lashed...ass, back, breasts, and belly. Even your pussy."

"I couldn't have endured it," she said hoarsely.

"That's where you're wrong, Nyssa." He slapped the crop lightly on top of her clit, making her scream. "If you were an obedient, you would have begged for your punishment. Whatever the reason for displeasing me, you would come on your knees, naked. You would offer me the crop, and you would have no peace until it was done."

"Tell me more," she hissed, seeking entry into that dark, forbidden place.

"An obedient," he lifted her chin with the tip of the crop, "is the extension of her dominant. He adores and treasures her above all else. He will accept nothing less from her than everything."

Nyssa tensed. She heard the grate of the match lighting, the brief smell of sulfur. Once before, at a live performance she had seen one of those quaint devices. It had been used to light a candle. Candles were made of wax. Wax that softened when hot...

"And everything is what she gives. It is the deepest form of love. Stronger than any feat of primale strength. We would all do well to humble ourselves in the face of what obedients are capable of."

Plink, came the first drop on her belly. Not burning, but hot enough. Nyssa gasped. "Theron?"

Drip, drip, two more, tiny tears of wax, splashing upon her defenseless body. Nyssa writhed in response. Theron continued the application, silent and thorough. Over her breasts, in the hollow of her belly button...and at the apex of her thighs, just above the soft pink folds of her sex.

A finger hooked inside her. Nyssa shivered. "Need to..."

"Come?" He supplied the missing word.

Plink, another drop. More wax? No, this dribbled across her thigh. By the universe, now he had the ice. He put it to her lips, wetting them.

"Mmm..."

Quickly, he slid the ice down to the hollow of her neck. Now he alternated, hot and cold, hot and cold. At a certain point, she could no longer tell the difference. Her body undulated in rhythm to the erotic assault. Skillfully, wickedly, he played her on the razor's edge and then, when she was sure she could take no more, he withdrew his attentions.

Nyssa's heart slammed in the blindfold-imposed darkness. She strained to hear him, some sign of his continued presence. "Theron?" she dared to whisper at last.

Nothing.

Emptiness, aching, terrible need. Tears filled her eyes. "Theron," she called again.

He put his finger to her lips. "Hush."

Her body leaped to his touch. "Yes..." she sighed, grateful.

Theron went to work again, playing with her body. Slow, steady massaging, picking up where he'd left off. "Do you enjoy that, Nyssa?"

"Yes, that's it, don't stop," she pleaded shamelessly.

He withdrew his wet hand. Stars—how much more was she going to have to go through?

"I give the orders," he waved his fragrant fingers under her nose for reminder, "and you submit."

Nyssa inhaled her own heat. Her own desire.

"Open," ordered Theron, giving Nyssa her own liquid to clean off his fingers.

She suckled hungrily, anxious to prove herself.

"Maybe I will let you come now," he thought aloud. "Yes, in fact, I will."

"Oh, thank you, Theron," she said, jumping the gun.

"You might not want to thank me yet." He tucked a few errant hairs behind her ear. "I intend to orgasm you with the crop."

Nyssa swallowed hard. "The...crop," she whispered.

"Yes." He slashed the black crop through the air. "I will strike your pussy until you come for me."

Nyssa recommenced struggling, the actions quite useless against her bonds. "You're insane, Theron...you wouldn't dare."

"Lie still." He delivered a single hit, measured, controlled, light, but more than enough to get her attention.

Her labia zapped as if electrified. Her pussy muscles clenched and unclenched, shamelessly accepting the stimulation, no matter what it was.

"You whipped my pussy, you asshole," she swore at him, returning her ass back down flat to the bed as ordered.

Nyssa tried to comprehend the reality of it all. He'd done it...he really had, violating her in the most intimate way possible. And she was throbbing, unable to help wanting another in spite of the terrible sting.

Theron rubbed the tip of the crop lightly over her thrumming sex. "Before I am done," he countered, "you will beg for it."

"Never," she vowed, instantly regretting her bravado.

Theron removed her blindfold. She squinted, readjusting to the light. The first thing she saw was the intensity of his features. It was a warrior's expression, the look of a man who always got what he wanted, but appreciated a challenge when he could get it. "Tell me, Nyssa, do you consider the tongue a weapon?"

"With anyone else...no."

His lips curled ever so slightly. Was it a sign of humor...perish the thought? Was there something under there after all—something human?

"I am going to remove the clamps now. You will feel some pain as the blood returns. Squeeze my hand if you like."

"No." Her sympathy for him evaporated on the spot. "I'll handle it on my own," she said stubbornly.

"As you wish." Theron moved quickly, efficiently releasing one of the clamps. Nyssa shouted, stretching her fingers in his direction. He gripped them tightly.

"It's all right," he whispered in her ear.

She jerked her head away. "Stop trying to make me like you."

Theron removed the second clamp. He was watching her closely. She could swear he was enjoying himself.

"Arrggh!" she protested. "Bastard!"

Theron applied his lips to the offended nipple. Nyssa's breathless scream turned to a moan. He was awakening things in her that she never knew existed. How could this cold fish of a superman do more to her sexually than any of her hip mem playmates?

"You won't be the same," he promised, "after this."

She *already* wasn't the same.

Leaving her nipple exposed and wet, he moved to the other, kissing away the throbbing. Her pussy was in so much need it hurt and her nipples felt so much residual pressure it was more like a kind of cold ecstasy. He had played her so many ways by now—the ice, the wax. His hot hand. His cock.

"Theron, I need your cock... I'll do anything," she croaked.

"You will do anything already, Nyssa. Haven't you figured that out?" Theron's tongue dabbed at the valley between her breasts. Warm and teasing.

"Oh, baby..." she crooned.

He licked down her stomach, blazing a trail like invisible, cool fire. Her every nerve opened, surrendering. If only she could reach up to him, show him her needs, her desires. Not to mention how well she could please him.

"Theron, untie me... I'll be good," she pleaded.

"I think we'll leave you as you are." He patted her pussy. "You're quite good like this."

"Oh, stars," she moaned. "Touch me, touch me more...do things to me."

Theron obliged, though she was quite sure things were still on his timetable not hers. She bucked at the prickling sensation of his tongue parting her lips, tentatively parting them like a tiny cock.

"Remember," he told her, "if you want to climax, you know what you have to do."

She did? Theron flicked at her clit with his rolled-up tongue and it came flooding back to her. The crop. He intended to make her orgasm with the device. If she wanted relief, she would have to take it with the stinging and degradation of the crop.

"Theron, if you let me go, I will let you do something to me," she sought to bargain. "It's something many men desire...but which I guard very closely."

"If you are referring to your anal charms," he paused, leaving her in the lurch yet again, "I got a good look at how you like to 'guard' them back at the Gas Emporium."

Oh, hell. She had wanted Jolando in her ass when Theron had come barging in. How could she tell him it really was something rare, that she was only feeling horny that way because of the things he had stirred in her body? She didn't dare give him any more power over her than he was already claiming.

"Besides," he said smoothly, "do you think you could withhold from me anything I desired?"

He let her think about that as he lightly suctioned her clit between his lips.

"You...fucking...cocksucker," she cried.

"You know what you need to do," he repeated stubbornly, abandoning her.

"Stop doing that! Stop starting and stopping!"

"That is the idea of sexual torture. Tell me, Nyssa," he seemed genuinely puzzled. "Why do you fight this so hard? There is no shame in admitting your defeat to me. I am primale, and I will take from you exactly what I wish. Owning and controlling the sexuality of females is in my nature."

Now he'd done it, thrown down a gauntlet. "Not this female, buster."

Theron caressed her full, aching breast as if it had been formed for his touch. He was not forceful or overbearing, but there was no mistaking the possessiveness of the touch. "Any female, Nyssa. You may be fem outside the bedroom, but in it, you are only another woman...to be tamed."

He spared her the obscenity, moving to her lips for a kiss. It was a searing brand, molding to her, intensely deep, reflecting his more intimate having of her. Indeed, he knew her far better now, her body and her responses, strengths and weaknesses, and he was telling her this. She could only imagine what it might be like after knowing her a few more days...a week...a month.

Her breathing settled yearningly into his. She felt if he released her, she would die, but that was part of the game. The tease.

"Say it, Nyssa." The words were breathed a bare millimeter from her face. Immediately, he took her mouth again.

This time penetrating her mouth. She let her tongue fence with his. The only part of her not tied down. A few precious seconds of playing, of secret communication and passion, the raw energy of nature, and he disengaged again.

"Say it," he repeated.

Her head pounded with blood. Her whole body pounded. She was an enormous itch of need. Confusion and sheer wanting—any kind of stimulation now was better than none. "Wh..." Her mouth opened, forming the syllable.

"Tell me, Nyssa." His eyes were expectant. How she longed to know what was behind them. To find some way to draw closer to his soul, even as she craved his flesh.

"My pussy," she replied in utter sensual obliteration. "Whip my pussy."

Theron sat up. With one hand grazing her nipple, the other gripping the crop, he began to tap down her belly. Her flesh undulated—good, tight, healthy motions along her genetically sculpted flesh. Every part of her itched and burned and shivered at once. She would have done anything, betrayed anyone for contact with her cunt. Her whole world was consumed with needing an orgasm. Her god, this primale who had vowed to push her to the very brink of oblivion.

"This is your moment of truth," he declared, settling the crop over her crotch. "Time for you to open yourself..."

"I am, Theron, I couldn't be more open," she promised.

He slapped her pussy with the crop. Almost immediately the burning sting gave way to even deeper hunger, inducing a groan.

"You will hold nothing back," he informed her.

"I'm not, I swear..."

A second thwack reduced her to crying whimpers. Her body was so confused, so utterly lost. What was good? What was bad? She knew only that she must have his attention—his further abuse, even, so long as he did not leave her alone.

"You are holding back," he insisted. "It is written all over your face."

"There's nothing..."

Theron struck her breasts. "Lies mean pain, Nyssa. We can't afford lies between us. A lie could cost your life. What if someone is really trying to kill you? How will I protect you?"

"What do you care?" Her eyes teared up, the emotion unexpected, complicated. "You hate me, anyway."

"No. It is you who hate me. Why?"

"If you must know," she spat, "my dearest cluster sister was an obedient. I watched a primale take her away, turn her into a robot."

"Was she unhappy?"

"Of course she was. No woman wants to be dominated like she was. It was demeaning, humiliating. He treated her like...like a dog."

"The primale way is to love with utter, complete devotion. As for domination – are you sure women hate it so?" He delivered a reminder swat with the crop.

"This doesn't count...it's under duress. Oh, fuck," she groaned. "Why are you toying with me? Letting me fight you one minute and the next..."

"Overpowering you?" he supplied. "Perhaps I am teaching you something."

"Yes...to be your little slave girl," she retorted, the vehemence of her own emotions catching her off-guard.

"Does the idea repulse you?"

Nyssa flushed red, head to toe. "Of course it does, you pig...how can you even ask?"

"I misread your sexual responses, then?"

Another hit, a smooth efficient blow to make her pussy throb like mad. She had no immediate answer to this. She was aroused, that was the hell of it. But what was she upset about exactly? Did she want him to be less than a Master to her—a mere acquaintance or polite friend, or did she want something more, something intimate and romantic?

"You want to know why I toy with you?" he replied to her earlier question. "I might tell you it is part of your training. But that would not be the only reason. I do this, Nyssa, because I can. And you endure it, because you must."

There was no apology in his voice, no hesitation. No boasting, either. It was a statement of fact, pure and simple. For the first time, she grasped just the tiniest bit of Theron's true nature.

And it made her hornier than anything in her whole fucking life. "I really don't stand a chance with you, do I?" she whispered, well aware that she was staring down a lion now, in dread fascination.

"In this arena? No."

Her breathing was deep and full. "Take it from me, primale." She arched her back, acknowledging his power. "Take it all..."

Chapter Six

Nyssa held her breath. The universe suspended itself. *Now she'd gone and done it. Given him everything...*

Theron had no problem receiving the offering. The crop came down in slow motion. A quick tantalizing snap. Followed by another and another after that, delivered across her pussy and inner thighs.

"In the morning, when you awake, what will you do?"

Nyssa knew what he was driving at. "I'll...obey," she panted. Her teeth gritted as she waited for another hit. Just a few more hits and she would be there. What was the bastard waiting for?

A fresh slap. Only one, not enough to finish it damn it.

"No," he countered. "You'll submit."

"Yes, yes, I will..."

"For all intents and purposes, you will be an obedient."

"An obedient..." she promised. "The most submissive ever."

"When I let you climax," he instructed, "you will writhe for me...you will show me Vonda."

"Yes." Did he like Vonda? she wondered. Or was he merely trying to humiliate her further? She wasn't sure why she cared, but for some reason she did. "I'll give you all..."

Theron applied the crop, simultaneously suckling her nipple. Her spine contorted to a picture of pure sex. Switching nipples, he cropped her again. She was feeling the tremors, on the verge of unstoppable.

"Now?" she asked.

His reply came in the form of a kiss, his tongue devouring and holding her completely. At the same time he moved his thumb for the coup de grâce. Nyssa saw the stars of the heavens, the galaxies, the light of every dome in the world. A constellation of exploding sex, living, pulsing sex, every bit of her tension and energy and frustration siphoned off, catalyzed and converted into body-rocking bliss.

He fucked and fucked with his hand. Her nerves coiled and uncoiled, the heat pooling in every soft and vulnerable part of her. The orgasm had no beginning, it had no end...it was everything.

She could never feel this with a mem. She could never trust one enough, never trust herself enough. She might end up dissipated, spilled into the void, never to find her

way back. But he was there, standing with her, and over her. Fucking her without fucking her, being inside her head.

Nyssa continued to moan softly as the largest eruption passed. There were aftershocks, but the real damage was done. The real ripping open of her consciousness. How much of this would stick? Would she be stuck following his will like a zombie, after all?

For starters, would he release her from her bonds and maybe back off a little? Not that it mattered, as drowsy as she felt. Truly, she could melt into him at this point and feel none the worse for wear.

He stroked her hair, a benign enough gesture. After that, he worked on untying her ankles. What a figure he made as he moved. She took in his every motion in complete awe. The way he bent, the way his muscles worked, that little crease in his forehead as he concentrated. His hair was so completely inviting for female hands to run through. His nipples so in need of kissing. Tight, downward curling lips, so naturally begging for sweet, soft love to win them over...

But she shouldn't think like this, she shouldn't want him that way. Really, this whole night should not have happened.

Theron knelt over her and tenderly rubbed her ankles, making sure they had enough circulation.

Oh, yeah, that was the good stuff...

"Baby, you didn't get to come again," she murmured.

"Never mind that. You need to get some sleep." He freed her wrists, checking each in turn.

His massaging fingers felt so good. He had such a magic grip, always the right amount of firmness, enough to let a woman know she was being held, but never enough to hurt. Did the obedient really have it that badly in the hands of men like this? Maybe there were perks to being one that she didn't know about.

"Theron," she whispered. "I want your cum...please. Come inside me?"

"Penetration wouldn't be a good idea. Not again," he told her, as if his cock were some kind of lethal weapon. "We can't risk the possibility of igniting bond urges."

She wasn't sure exactly what he meant, but it sounded sexy.

"Risk it." She lifted her pelvis.

"You don't understand, angel."

Nyssa felt a fluttering in her stomach. No one had ever called her that before. "Can I at least suck you off?" she wanted to know.

Theron frowned, not convincingly. "Woman, you are supposed to be obeying. Have you any idea how much time I just spent breaking your will?"

She flashed him a look. She was waking up at last. "I promise I'll act all nice and broken first thing in the morning."

"Forgive me if I'm skeptical."

"Hey, I've got an idea," she enthused. "What if you were to come on me?"

His eyes narrowed. The boy really was naïve in some ways. "You know, ejaculate on my body. Wouldn't that be a turn-on? Like a primal thing, marking your territory and all?"

"Nyssa, this isn't a game." He seemed the tiniest bit exasperated. Her every instinct told her to keep digging. Under no circumstances would she cut him slack. Ever.

"Who said I was playing anything? I want your hot, primale semen all over me. Think you can handle that?"

Judging by the hardness of his cock, he seemed more than ready. But he was hesitating.

"What's the matter?" she teased. "Is your semen super-powered, too? Is it acid or will it just brainwash me?"

"There's more of it, Nyssa, if you didn't notice already. And it's stored at a warmer temperature."

Nyssa tried to see this as a problem and couldn't. "I think I can manage without drowning."

"Hold your breasts, then. Cradle them."

Nyssa wrapped her fingers around her tingling breasts, compressing them, offering them. "Theron, is it true that obedients call their mates Master?"

"This is for each primale and his obedient to decide, but some do, yes."

"So that would make them slaves?" She couldn't believe she was asking this without hostility.

"Not in the way you want to think of it. What they call each other...how they interact...it's a mutual decision. An obedient gives up only what she feels is right in her heart, and no primale would ever take more...or less."

Nyssa's nipples were still sore from the clamps. Her ass still stung, too. It had been quite an education. "But how far, Theron? How far can it go?"

Theron climbed across her body, his motions graceful and predatory at the same time. His tawny muscles flexed, putting him in place, his knees on either side of her belly. "As far as they wish. I have seen obedients who remain always naked and collared and who are subject to the strictest discipline. On the other hand, I have seen relationships where the woman's submission is expressed in profoundly subtle ways. The lowering of her eyes in deference to her man, the licking of half-open lips, the slight arching of her back, displaying her breasts.

"As many different individual human combinations as there are, that's how many possibilities for relationships there are. Whatever works between them...is right."

He was stroking his cock, running his hand up and down the rock-hard length, so very smooth, but ridged with veins of a bluish-green hue. The sight of it fascinated her.

The thickest, longest shaft she had ever seen. And those balls of his—so high and tight. He really must have a lot of semen in there.

A big part of her wanted that cock back inside her, but the idea of being showered in his emission gave her a wicked chill to the core. With thumbs and forefingers, she tweaked her nipples. "I'm ready, Theron..."

The look on his face was so beautiful. Intent concentration focused on what he was doing and on her that she had never seen in a male before. The best of her mem lovers always seemed...preoccupied, distracted, and almost timid.

This man was with her now and she felt like there could be no other woman on the planet for him. If only she could find a mem to love her that way. An appropriate mate.

"Nyssa," he groaned, the sound low and satisfied.

"Yes, I'm here for you," she answered the hidden call. "For your pleasure."

I exist for you...

"Let yourself go...shoot it all over me..."

His teeth were clenched, fierce warrior teeth. "Between..." he was saying.

"Between what, Theron?" Her breasts—that was it. He wanted to fuck them. "Oh, stars, honey, yes," she encouraged.

Nyssa slithered underneath him, helping him to position himself. He moaned in pleasure as he shifted, sliding his turgid, hot cock into her cleavage. She held him tightly, delighting in the heat, the pulsing energy.

"That's it...Theron...yes."

He pulled back, the sinews in his neck tight with his building need. He was the predator now, a creature of the wilds. No more speaking, it was time for action. Once, twice, he pumped himself between the bulging flesh of her soft globes.

"Fuck them, Theron, fuck my breasts."

Another groan, his hands settling over hers, and then it began, the motions, ancient and animal, pure instinct, pure male...primale. Lightning-fast, Theron used the sculpted valley as he had her cunt. His eyes rolled up to the heavens. Oh, what those eyes must have seen. The pain, the battles.

"Now, Theron...now..."

Theron roared. She felt his cock swell. Her sweaty hands started to slip. She couldn't hold him...too fucking big. How was he doing this? The balls on her belly were hot, almost searing her flesh. The pain of the spanking, the crop, reawakened in every part of her.

The first blast hit her chin, the thickest, fullest semen. Then he pulled back, abandoning her breasts to take himself in his fist. "I'm going to...fucking soak you," he vowed, sounding so very unlike the rigidly guarded, disciplined man she knew. "Take it, Nyssa..."

"Oh, baby, I'm yours..."

Hot semen on her face. Fountains of it on her cheeks, on her lips, and on her tongue. Her neck arched, her chest was bathed, coated, like with the wax. Everywhere. All over her. Eyebrows...hair. Until she felt completely soaked and owned. A primale's play toy. The most feminine woman in the world, for having given this man so much pleasure and caused him to lose himself for her.

Grasping his cock, running his hand up and down, he milked the precious fluids. Nyssa licked her lips, tasting what she could. She wanted more, a sampling of the sprayed drops on her breasts and belly, scandalously white and thick.

At one point, he reached back, with the fingers of his free hand, and worked her pussy. He brought her to instant orgasm, making her shake helplessly on his fingers. "Yes," she screamed about a thousand times in a row. "Oh, my fucking planets..."

When at last the spiraling came, the descent, Nyssa clung to him, needing to feel his impossibly strong body. His heartbeat gave her orientation, showing her the way back home, to the present time and place. Presently, he pulled her up, scooping her off the bed and into his arms. This time she was too torpid to even speak. He carried her to the hygiene room, and into the sanitizing chamber. He held her under the cleansing beams, the shimmering, fluoron lasers gently but efficiently removed every bit of sex. The rays were warm on her skin, but he was warmer. He was so strong. She had never felt so safe and secure in her life.

She murmured against his chest, though even she did not know what she was saying. It might have had to do with a thought capsule she'd digested once, feeding information about how in the old times showers had been waterfalls from the ceiling.

But he probably knew that. He knew everything...or so it seemed.

The beams clicked off, leaving them tingling all over, pure and sterilized. She was a little sad, because she liked the sex smell, the sweat smell. She thought of them in a jungle, no chamber to clean them. She would use her tongue, licking every inch of his body clean. Then they would find a stream and he would bathe her. They would be aroused all over again. They would fuck in the water. Or on the shore. Or both. She would wrap her legs around him, she would lay her ass in the mud, she would let him tie her to a tree and take her from behind.

Or maybe in her ass. Damn, wouldn't that be something—having *that* cock up inside her. It would be like having her entire body fucked all at once...having him in so deep and far she would never get the curls out of her toes again. And the orgasms...imagine what he could give her if he had play over both orifices at once.

Theron took her back to the bed. He remade it into something modern, a fluffy futon bowl shape, fur covered with a series of decorative golden horns, ten feet high, curved in ivorex and pseudo-gold, rising straight up from various places around the bowl's lip.

She should have known he hadn't picked the design for art's sake. Laying her down on her side, head on the pillow, he went back to the objectifier to order something new. He returned with gleaming silver chains. And shackles.

"On your back," he commanded.

Nyssa rolled over, exposed. She felt deliciously wicked, her skin so vibrant from the beams, so primitively caressed by the fur covering of the bed, silver-white nano-wolf fur from the extreme reaches of space.

"Extend your left leg into the air."

She did so, flexing the calf and pointing her toes. The movement was instinctive, but very feminine. She blushed at the implications—she was trying to please.

Theron's face was unreadable. He took her ankle, holding her instep. She shuddered, imprisoned. As for the touch of his fingers on the bottom of her foot, he might as well have touched between her legs for the impact it had. "This is to complete your punishment," he reminded, his voice slightly raspy. "You will spend the night in bondage."

The word was electric in the air, pregnant with unspoken possibilities.

Bondage wasn't only about restriction of motion or captivity; it was something sexual. A woman in bondage was a target for males...she was available.

Her pussy spasmed sharply as he grasped her ankle firmly and locked it in one of the shackles. She felt its weight at once, the cold metal, and traced the attached chain to its end. She watched him wrap it around one of the horns, securing it.

She swallowed hard, letting the reality sink in.

Nyssa was in bed to stay now. Until such time as he released her.

"Lift your bottom off the bed."

Nyssa sucked in her lower lip. Was he going to make sex with her? If so, should she fight him or welcome him?

There didn't seem to be a lot of point in protesting, given how obviously wet and fragrant she was.

"Higher," said Theron, rejecting her initial efforts.

Nyssa arched her back, humiliated.

Theron made no move to touch her, except to wind one of the chains around her waist. He secured it and told her to lie back down on the fur. Nyssa resumed contact between the bed and her spanked and flogged ass, more than a little curious as to his next move.

"Wrists."

Nyssa held them out, almost by reflex. Theron's lips angled slightly in self-satisfaction.

Fuck...

Now the bastard thought he was training her.

He had a snug silver cuff for each wrist. This time he didn't put them together. Instead, he hooked each to short lead chains on either side of the waist chain. Two simple clicks later, and he had her immobilized, hands at her side.

Theron stood up straight to admire his handiwork. "Attempt to free yourself."

Nyssa tried, pulling at the metal in various directions. Frustration mounted. She could stretch her hands and bend her arms a little, but freedom was beyond her. So was any ability to cover her pussy or breasts from his gaze or touch. Feeling thoroughly outwitted, had and fucked, she looked up at him. "You know I can't."

"Say it, then."

"I can't free myself," she said, intending to cheat him of victory. "I'm your happy little hostage."

"No," he corrected, his voice tinged with a subtle new energy. "You are being punished."

"I'm being punished," she repeated softly.

"You are in bondage."

"I'm in bondage," she acknowledged. Her chest was rising and falling more rapidly. Her nipples were tight, tiny peaks. She was helpless, completely accessible and mountable.

Theron frowned. His cock was stirring. Apparently the scene was getting to him, too. "It's time to go to sleep."

She sensed there would be no getting around him this time. "Where will you be?" She wanted to know.

"I will be awake, watching you."

Her heart leapt to her throat. The idea of having his eyes glued to her chained body all night, with his cock that close, was more than she could bear. What if she did something lewd in her sleep, egging him on? What if he decided to slip himself inside her while she was unconscious and completely defenseless?

"Kind of carrying this guarding thing a little bit far, aren't you?" She sought to conceal her anguish with a quip.

"A chained woman should never be left alone while sleeping. I will make sure you don't cause yourself any discomfort."

"Whatever floats your bubble." She tried to make light of the churning in her belly, the hot flippings and flutterings. "Can you at least cover me with a sheet? I don't want you finding all my imperfections when I can't defend myself."

He shook his head. "You will remain exposed. Nothing will hamper my view of your bondage."

Her heart was going like a rabbit's. "Surely my chains aren't that dangerous," she scoffed. "I'm sure you can fight off a mean old sheet and save me if you need to."

"The exposure isn't for safety," he said, "it's part of the punishment."

She clenched her small fists, slippery with sweat. So he did intend to take advantage of her.

"The right to cover your nakedness from me is part of the freedom you have lost tonight. You will sleep knowing that your body is visually available."

Nyssa clenched her pussy, tamping down the desires as best she could. The fucker was making her want the whole thing all over again—the terrible, agonizingly sweet ordeal of fighting, resisting, only to be overwhelmed and had. "You're a real dick, you know that?"

"Thank you for your input. I suggest you go to sleep now. We have a long trip in the morning." Theron pulled a gravi-stool from the air, resting it on the floor on its narrow, pointed bottom. It was a match to the bed, part of the new ultra-hip décor.

"I know what you're gonna do," she said, "and you won't get away with it."

"What are you talking about, Nyssa?" He sat down heavily, still naked.

She tried to keep her eyes off his half-hard cock. *In the ass*, she kept thinking, *I want it right up my tight little ass*. "You're going to fuck me in my sleep," she goaded. "If you do that, it will be rape."

Theron's expression darkened. It was a look she hadn't seen on him before. "If you were a male, Nyssa, I would demand satisfaction for that remark. As it is...I think you had better quit while you're behind."

She couldn't, though. Not when she was this close to satisfying her obsessive need to expose the man. "So what is it, then? Are you going to jerk off all night? You get off on chained, naked girls, do you?"

"This conversation is ended," Theron declared flatly. "You will go to sleep now or face the consequences."

"Is that the best you can do?" she shot back, desperate to spur him into an argument. "Bully me to silence? Why don't you just admit it? I have a hot body—men on twelve worlds masturbate to me all the time. You think Vonda is kept on the show for her ability to engage the intellect? You think people vid my solo performances to hear me rail against the system? I'm larger than life. I'm a goddess."

His jaw tensed. She was definitely touching some nerve...finally. "You would do well to have a reality check, *holostar*. There is more to this universe, much more, than the grid. Real suffering and dying. And don't fool yourself. There are millions of women like you. I've seen my share, trust me."

"So now it comes out," she smiled coldly. "Look who's hiding things now? Care to tell me where all that hatred comes from?"

"I hate no one," Theron defied. "I am what I am. What I was made to be."

"Your cock is hard, buddy boy, that's all I know."

"Maybe it is," he shot back. "But it sure as hell isn't for you."

Nyssa's lip trembled. Real tears were there—not like the ones the crop had brought. "Good. Because I wouldn't let you in me if yours was the last prick in the universe."

She threw herself to the other side of the bed, wriggling like a worm to turn away from him. She would be damned if she would talk to him anymore or let him see any

more of her than absolutely necessary. Tightening herself into a ball, she tried to vanish, like she used to do, back in her cluster, when she felt overwhelmed or threatened or scared.

That was the way she fought off the feelings. Bad feelings, the kind that came in the middle of the night. Feelings of danger and far-off battles – as if she had been places she could not possibly have been, seen things no fem could have seen. And worse still, that she might one day face it again. The terror of death, and the awful weight of decision, and the lives of millions in the balance.

Her robo-therapist had told her it was just an overactive imagination, too much time with the grid. Or maybe it was something genetic, something left over accidentally from one of her gene donors. Which would be odd, because her donors would all be fems and mems, and none of them ever went to battle.

When things had gotten too hard to deal with, especially after puberty, she'd started wishing she could be like Estriana, with her path laid out for her so clearly, every decision made, a super-strong companion by her side. What was a little thing like freedom to give up...or even pride?

A part of her, in fact, craved that very loss, to be forced to surrender her pride to an all-consuming man. It made her horny, stars help her, and many times the thoughts led to masturbation. Lying there, wanting no one to hear her as she imagined a primale coming for her, declaring to the world that he was going to take her. And being forced to strip naked for him, in front of everyone, and then to get down on her knees and suck him, declaring that she was his mate...his slave.

Theron was reawakening all of it, but it wasn't like fantasy. It was all twisted, with so many more emotions. She hated him. She despised him for putting her in chains, for spanking and fucking her. Never mind her part in all this, she had been used, or felt that way now.

But wasn't that what she had wanted? Had she not played an active part in all of this?

Oh, why had Fem Dekalia done this to her? Fems and primales didn't mix. They were oil and water – shouldn't be together at all, much less within a parsec of a bed.

Nyssa buried her head into the pillow. No matter what, she swore to keep her resolve. She would give him no satisfaction. He would not see her face, would not see her emotions. Fuck – he could see her ass, though, and enjoy what he had done to her. Should she roll onto her back? No, that would expose her pussy. He'd been there, done that, too. He would also see the breasts he had managed to fuck and her mouth and well...all of her.

That was the trouble. Every inch of her had been tainted. From her curled toes to the ends of her hair, every bit of her was alive and sexual...and his. She could still smell him, even after the cleansing beams. She could feel his touch, too, like invisible hands creeping across her skin.

She tried to roll herself tighter. She tried to move further away from him to the edge of the bed. The ankle chain stopped her. If she could move down a bit, and then over, she would get a little more play on it...

"Nyssa, lie still."

Fucking prick.

"You're not my cluster father," she snapped.

"Do I need to take my hand to your ass again?"

Motherfucking, good-for-nothing prick.

"No," she sulked.

"That was your last warning," he informed her. "Do you understand?"

Motherfucking, good-for-nothing...egomaniacal prick.

"Yes."

"Go to sleep, then."

"Yes..."

She'd almost said yes, Master. It would have been spat in sarcasm, but the word was making her feel other things, too. Why couldn't she just flat-out be disgusted by him? Why was she waffling? Why was her body so uncooperative? With every breath, she was only getting slicker, more needy. It was like a volcano building at the apex of her thighs. What kind of fem reacted like this after being stripped of her dignity, put at a man's total mercy...a primale's mercy?

Nyssa could hear him breathing. A fascinating sound. She wasn't used to having others in her sleeping quarters overnight. Ever since Estrania had left, she had preferred to be by herself. Even her lovers knew to leave after the sex-making was done. Funny, she had never thought before about what it meant that she was so truly alone in the world. Now it occurred to her, without him here...might she feel lonely?

Even...scared?

Nyssa had not allowed herself to think about the threats up to this point. She had dismissed them so far, but no longer could she deny the truth. Fem Dekalia had not had a valuable soldier recalled from the front for nothing. She believed Nyssa was in danger. Nyssa had laughed it all off. It was someone's bad idea of a joke. Idle blips on the grid. Probably some kids. Some of the younger mems were getting out of hand these days. Maybe it was about the NARTHIAN War—the rumors of a draft. Who knew? Whatever it was, she was Nyssa...fabulously popular, untouchable.

Her fans loved her.

No one would hurt her.

She sucked in her lower lip. A little voice inside her made her admit at least for a passing second that she was glad Theron was there to protect her. Just in case...for that one in a trillion chance.

The admission made, she pushed it back down. Theron was her known enemy, a lot closer and more real than the mystery person or persons threatening to end her life for speaking out against discrimination.

He had used her and now rejected her. He deserved every miserable thing she could think up to do to him. "Theron?" she called out with mock sweetness.

"What?"

She smirked at the grumble in his voice. Damn it, if he wasn't cute for a motherfucking bastard. "I'm thirsty."

She heard him rise. He walked to the hygiene room and returned with a small glass of water. "You'll have to help me," she smiled, drawing attention to her bound state.

Good...now he would have to touch her.

Theron frowned and stiffened, as if trying to find a way out of making bodily contact. Apparently finding none, he lifted her up a bit, just enough to put the cup to her lips. She took little sips, looking at him with doe eyes the whole time. She wasn't Nyssa anymore – she was Vonda.

"Thank you," she said, playing her performance to the hilt.

"No problem," he replied, though it was pretty clear it was posing him a very big one.

Time to move in for the kill. Waiting until he had laid her back down, she plied him with a new request.

"Could you fluff my pillow now?" She was playing a dangerous game, trying to get him to the breaking point before she burst at the seams and started begging him to take her again.

His frown deepened. He had to lift her again, putting their bodies into contact. She made sure to arch her back, thrusting out her breasts as he leaned over her. With her hands chained and her lips soft and pliant, she hoped to appeal to his primale desires to take advantage of female helplessness.

He did his best to concentrate on the hand fussing with the pillow and not the one holding her by the small of her back. His touch, the heat of him on her skin was making her want to scream out for him to take her, chained as she was, enslaved as any obedient.

She must not let her hunger show, however. She needed to stay calm, cool and in control, making him suffer sexual frustration as payback for his callousness. His cruelty.

"Oh, thank you," she sighed, settling herself on the pillow with all the teasing aplomb of Vonda. "You are too kind."

His cock was vibrating, stiffening and swelling before her eyes. She had him for sure. Just one or two more little maneuvers and all that man-flesh would be screaming for release...on her terms.

No drooling, girl. You're playing it cool. You're Vonda...bitch goddess extraordinaire, nymph, par excellence...

"Just go to sleep," he told her.

"I think my chains need adjusting."

"No, Nyssa, they don't."

"Is something wrong with your cock?" she asked innocently.

Theron barely restrained a bark. "No. It's fine."

"Oh," she shrugged. "Well, I was just wondering...because we know it's not me turning you on or anything."

Theron walked off without comment, fists clenched. She wasn't going to let him off that easily, though.

"Theron, it's too hot in here," she whined, waiting until he was sitting down.

"This temperature is optimal for human comfort. You're just making excuses not to sleep."

You catch on fast for a primale.

"Well, you would know better, being that you're a man and all," she said, doing her best Vonda. "It's just that I *feel* so hot. My legs...and my breasts. Oooh, and in my secret sex place, too."

"Nyssa...enough." He spoke sharply — she would be getting a fresh spanking next.

She decided on a different tack.

He sighed heavily in response to her manufactured tears, entirely indistinguishable from the real ones. "I didn't mean to make you cry. If I adjust the temperature will you go to sleep?"

"I will." She suppressed her laughter.

She gave him some time to fiddle with the controller and return to his small perch. "Theron?" she whispered.

"Yes." She could hear the strain as he tried to hold on to his patience. "What is it now?"

"I just wanted you to know that in the morning, I intend to be submissive."

"Hmm," he grumbled.

"Oh, but I will, Sir...I promise."

"Sure. And maybe the dome will walk off and jump into the ocean tomorrow, too."

Nyssa giggled into the pillow. Closing her eyes, the hysteria eventually released, she felt strangely satisfied. She had tomorrow to concentrate on, and all the fun she would have exacting fresh revenge on Theron.

Chapter Seven

Theron watched the small, sleeping female. She was on her side at the moment, breathing peacefully, eyelids fluttering, her body in sensual repose. The artificial dawn under the city's dome was less than half an hour away and then he would awaken her. Not a moment too soon, either. Guarding her lithe, chained body overnight had been sheer torture. Crueler than anything the Narthians could devise.

If he didn't know better, he would swear she was tormenting him on purpose, managing to twist in her sleep, contorting herself so as to inflame his blood to unbearable levels. Over and over he'd had to go to the hygiene room to pour water over his face, cold as he could stand. He'd even had to order ice off the objectifier so he could draw off some of the heat from his shaft.

He had plunged his fiery cock into bucket after bucket of the stuff, the cold cubes sizzling and evaporating before his eyes. His balls had filled to the point of pain, the mixture of elements enough to cause unbearable agony to a normal male, and still he had been unable to reduce the throbbing erection. His special primale meditational techniques had been equally useless.

Was his nervous system malfunctioning or could it be his emotions had been engaged? Was it possible he was feeling something for Nyssa that was driving his sex-making desires? Primals were known to sexually fixate on a woman, but only when they were sure they had found their mate. Nyssa certainly was engaging and fascinating, along with driving him wild, but surely he wasn't falling for her?

Theron did have to admit the strength of his reaction, though. He had never been inside another woman, but he imagined that no other could be like her. He could still smell and taste her. He could still feel her skin. And there was no escape, because he was obligated to keep on watching her all night, to keep her safe and to make sure she didn't get tangled in the chains.

There was no greater misery he could imagine. It had been hard enough holding himself back, keeping his cock from attaining its true dimensions inside her. Had he not done this, she would have been lost to his powers, and he lost to the allure of her flesh. It was the nature of things, part of the bond urges.

Damn it. Was there nothing this woman could manage to do that was not fraught with sexual meaning? The way she murmured and pursed her lips in seeming innocence, her hip thrust out, her ankle turned. The way she breathed so softly, advertising the silkiness of her full breasts, inviting him to come and touch her, to play with her.

He didn't know which was worse, looking at her ass, pink and disciplined and womanly, or the front of her, the equally pink labia, like butterfly wings, waiting to welcome his cock home between her shapely legs.

An interval or so ago, he had very nearly taken her. Her legs had been spread wide, her chest rising and falling, her nipples like hard buds. She'd been moaning in her sleep. Had she been dreaming of one of her mem lovers? The idea had infuriated him. Once again, the bonding urges had come to the surface.

He could not afford such weakness, not now. For not only was he charged with protecting the beautiful holostar against an unknown enemy, he must do so in spite of her, regarding her, too, as hostile.

Indeed, she was shaping up in her own way to be the most formidable opponent he had run across on or off the battlefield. She was beyond distracting in beauty and physical allure. Her emotions spun on a dime and she was sharp as a laser tack and twice as keen. If she were male, he might stand half a chance to guess her strategy, to see what was coming next, but this whole fem thing had him spun around completely. Every time he pegged her left, she would move right. Just as soon as she was pinned down in one spot, she would wiggle her pretty behind free and end up in another.

The question remained. Had he won any real and permanent submission from of her? If push came to shove in a situation of mortal danger, would she obey now? Did he dare let her run around loose? What a puzzle she posed! Why couldn't she have been born an obedient? Than it would be as simple as taking hold of her, speaking the words of claiming in her ear, a hot and sacred whisper meant only for the two of them.

You are mine.

Instinctively, biologically, she would open and blossom like a flower. And all that she had hidden within—her feminine nature which she had kept safe from any despoilers up to now—would become his. To guard and treasure and protect.

Then and only then would he become fully the primale he was meant to be. Strong and proud and free. But it did not work that way with these fems. Loving them seemed an exercise in futility, sheer self-imposed torture.

Curse his lack of discipline for giving in to her sexual overtures. He should never have let it happen. Not only was there the current mission to consider, but the added responsibility of helping to form the character of the next High Councilor. So far he'd taught her that primales have no impulse control where fems are concerned. Now he had to untangle the entire complicated mess. There was really only one way to do this effectively.

He was quite sure it would infuriate his little charge, leaving her fit to be tied. And that was how he knew it was the right thing to do.

Theron went to the view port, opening it to full capacity. The entire wall seemed to disappear. Outside, across the vast contained space of the City, he could see the palest pink and blue beams reflecting off the far edge of the shadowy dome. Another artificial dawn.

Below, the various layers of streets were coming to life. Buildings were waking and rising for the morning, finding their place in the sun, like old-time balloons, rising lazily in the park.

A few ins from now and they would be long gone, on the way to Nyssa's live venue on Tarsus Seven, an artificial moon orbiting a world in a nearby system. She would be performing for half a million live entities there, human and robot, along with the usual adoring masses on the grid.

She would make a target, if anyone were seeking her out.

Going to the objectifier, more convinced than ever of what he must do to protect them both, he ordered up the necessary device. "Chastity belt," he told the molecular arranging machine. "Maximum strength lock. Retain pattern for key...but do not manufacture."

Thus would he ensure the removal of all temptation where Nyssa's beautiful pussy was concerned. First and foremost to himself. While he could break any lock, he counted on its presence as a constant reminder to his moral duty. That would solve one problem. The other concerned her ongoing pattern of defiance. There was no telling what sort of mood she might be in when she woke up. She might try to seduce him. Or slug him. She might also opt for a tongue-lashing. Least likely, in his estimation, was a doe-eyed, eager willingness to cooperate. In all likelihood, he would awaken the banshee in her.

If that was the case, discipline would have to be swift and complete. Followed immediately by the chastity belt, or perhaps preceded by it, lest they find themselves once more locked in passion's embrace.

Focusing on various technical matters, such as the fuel-weight lift ratios for G-17 Star Jumpers and the recommended tactical approach to a Narthian Mother Colony, he managed to deflate his cock yet again.

Everything was set now...it was time to wake her up.

* * * * *

Nyssa awoke in bondage. In *bondage*...chains on her bare skin, deprived of her own hands, imprisoned in a bed, nipples swollen, aroused, ankles shackled. What had happened? What had she been doing and with whom?

A man was whispering in her ear, telling her it was time to wake up. *Theron*. Memories rushed back in, embarrassment, and indignation. Flat-out anger. At herself for getting carried away like a foolish obedient wannabe—and at him for taking advantage.

"Take these fucking things off me," she demanded. "And if you ever so much as dangle a chain in my face again, I'll see to it you are court-martialed."

Actually, she had no clue how she could do a thing against him, especially given how unhelpful Fem Dekalia was becoming in her cause. Still, she had no intention of just lying here, letting him think he could get away with this.

"Nyssa," he began, sounding quite infuriatingly calm and disciplined. "You need to know that today is a new day. Things are going to be different."

*Different...*as opposed to putting her to his pleasure, exploding his cock within her, leaving her burnt with his seed, her nostrils filled with her scent, her will shattered into a thousand disparate images of a taken woman. Begging for a crop across her bare, wet pussy, holding her own breasts up to be cropped, crawling and talking dirty, like a lowdown little obedient pet, hotly collared and primed.

"Different," she mimicked. "Really?" She pulled on her wrist bracelets defiantly, as if she could break metal. "I don't see how—you still look like the same asshole to me."

Theron's face bore no expression as he turned away. A part of her was disappointed not to get more of a reaction. Did she mean so little to him?

"Quitting so soon?" she taunted, though she knew he wouldn't. A man like Theron would never quit. That was the absurdity of this—she knew there was no way she could win. And yet she couldn't bear to lose either.

"Rubber ball gag," he said to the objectifier. "Old-time specs."

Hmm—she didn't like the sound of that.

"Better order yourself a reality check, too," she called out. "If you think I'm going to be bullied anymore."

The gag was a rubber ball, all right, attached to straps. He held it in his hand as he spoke. "Last night," he reminded, "you swore to the moons and stars that you would be my sweet little submissive."

"I was horny." She scooted back on the bed, trying to yank her ankle free. "Fems say things when they want to get laid. Just like you men do. Now unchain me and stop this foolishness. I have a show tonight."

"You're not going anywhere until your behavior is rendered acceptable. To begin with, an apology is due for your comments to me this morning."

"You mean about my saying you're an asshole? Well, it's true, so why don't *you* apologize."

Theron popped the ball in her mouth, catching her completely off-guard. She tried to spit it out, but he was too fast, fastening it behind her head. She bit down, regarding him with seething hatred.

"Rule number one," he pronounced. "No speaking until you are willing to address me and all others with courtesy."

Nyssa rolled onto her stomach making a valiant effort to extend both of her middle fingers in her current state of bondage.

Theron promptly swatted her with his hand, hard. It hurt—it really, fucking hurt.

"Rule number two. Acts of disobedience and disrespect will be dealt with on the spot—and I mean on the spot. In other words, if I need to, missy, I will take you over my knee and spank you in public. With full broadcast on the hologrid for all I care."

Nyssa's pussy was tingling. He was asserting himself, strong and hard. She could almost smell the testosterone. If only she wasn't craving this so much. If only she wasn't feeling such a strong need to be with him, to share every part of his nature and to share hers with him.

"Which brings us to Rule number three... Just one more detail first."

Now what was he doing? Unshackling her ankle apparently and helping her to sit up. He gave her a few moments and then had her stand.

"Do you need to use the hygiene chamber?" He asked.

She nodded, trying not to drool.

"Let's go." He unlocked her wrists from the waist chain, then took her by the arm. When they got there, he stood watching.

"Do you mind," she said around the gag, the words hopelessly garbled.

"I think it's a little late for modesty, don't you?"

She flushed red, lowering her head. In a few seconds she was tinkling away. After this he locked her wrists together in front of her and took her back to the bed. She hadn't noticed the belt thingy before. Instinctively, she backed up. He was right behind her. A poli-steel wall.

"Rule number three," he repeated. "No sex."

Her eyes widened. Holy comets—she'd seen things like that in history books. It was a chastity belt, designed to imprison a woman's sex. Rapid-fire, she shook her head, "mmmphing" away in protest.

The display earned her two swats, enough to inflame the entirety of her backside, and also to set her pussy dripping freely. Damn her screwed-up body, anyway—this was protest time, not "suck up to the enemy" time.

"This is for your protection, Nyssa," he explained once she was docile. "I don't want you exposing yourself to any danger. This will keep you free from all temptations. It will do the same for me. The key is stored in the memory bank of the computer, but none has been made."

All well and good, she thought, but Theron had super strength. There was no way a metal belt would keep him out if he wanted in. Or maybe that wasn't the point—maybe this was just one more step toward owning her, keeping her from other men, or even from touching herself.

She felt a dark excitement at this. Was she really the kind of woman, completely desirable and passionate enough for a man to give up all others in order to possess exclusively? Maybe that's what was wrong with mems—they weren't exclusive. They were always comparing you to their last fuck and looking forward to their next.

"Put your arms in the air," he commanded, "and arch your back."

Nyssa did so, not wanting to be spanked anymore. The lift to her breasts made them swell. She was glad she couldn't speak, because she might seriously have asked him to touch them, to let her feel just for a second those warm, enveloping, dominant hands.

Oh, stars, he was kneeling in front of her. Right in front of her pussy. She tried to still her breathing, to keep from vibrating her labia. He smelled her arousal for sure, not to mention getting an eyeful of her glistening cream.

Why was he making her hold up her arms? This was only heightening the helplessness. Did he have some other point to prove? As if it hadn't been made clear enough what he was capable of doing to her body.

Oooh, what a devil he was, taking away her only defense...her tongue.

Then again, if she hadn't been so impudent, he wouldn't have gagged her, would he?

No, she told herself, I won't give in to his line of thinking. I won't be brainwashed or trained or anything. I have a right to speak my mind, whatever that may be.

"The belt has a grille," he explained. "Simple wire mesh. You can pass liquid through it, but there will be no way to achieve any sort of insertion. Spread your legs, please. Wide."

Nyssa spaced her bare feet, spreading her thighs.

"This should not cause pain," he informed her.

She would like to have asked him how the fuck he could possibly know this, being that he had likely never had a wire grille put across his own crotch.

"There is one other thing. In the back, this device here goes into the opening..." He showed her the small extension. "We will add that in a moment."

Nyssa wilted. Heavenly meteor showers—he was going to shove something up her ass, too?

"It's important to be thorough," he continued. "We don't want to leave any temptations for anyone."

Well, that was fair, she thought. Men can't keep their cocks out of my ass so I have to be plugged up like a corked bottle?

Theron spread the fingers of his hand, applying the screen. She bit down on the gag. The metal was cool and tingly on her swollen labia. She couldn't hold back the spasms for anything. Humiliated, Nyssa pushed her crotch against him, craving his touch. She felt like some kind of pet, begging inarticulately for contact.

Why couldn't he just fuck her again so they could get on with the day? Didn't he realize he was only going to make it a thousand times worse denying them both? It didn't matter if they liked each other or what their values were. It was biological. Indefensible.

Stubborn primale.

"Let's see if you're ready for lockdown, shall we?" he said, announcing the next phase of his military-style operation. Holding the grate over her vulva, he moved his other hand to cup her ass cheek. Oh, fuck...she was liable to come at this rate.

Theron slid his hand across to her crack and inserted a finger. "You're tight," he observed.

No shit.

"This will go a lot easier if you don't fight me," he lectured.

Easier for him maybe. She swooned as he made his move, pushing a second finger in, up to the knuckles.

"That's it, Nyssa, good girl..."

Her toes dug into the thick carpeting. She was a woman not a girl, but that didn't seem important at the moment. He had her sex straight and he had her number, too. Her anal canal was taking him deep, absorbing his pushing digits. At the same time, her empty, craving cunt, locked up in its lonely prison, pushed desperately through the grate at his hand. Unbidden, her body began to gyrate, slowly at first and then more boldly. Still more sensations followed as Theron took more liberties, running the connector chain between her legs, tight and smooth. The links worked their way up through her crack. Little teasing bites of metal, each tiny sensation sending messages of imprisonment and confinement to her brain.

The device featured two more chains, one for each side of her waist. These would help to hold the anal invader in place. Removing his fingers, he prepared to replace them with the anal plug. Gauging her readiness, he pushed it up inside, just a little.

"Take it, Nyssa."

His words had their effect, showing once again how completely capable Theron was of getting in her head and making her body respond according to his sexual will. The choices removed, she let it happen.

Take it...yes. Her eyes slid shut as the soft, pre-lubricated horn-like object wormed its way up inside her. Deep into that most private of openings. In it went, all the way, until Theron was satisfied.

"Turn around," he ordered, his voice gentle but unrelenting.

Nyssa could hardly stand. The signals to her brain were confused. Her elevated arms felt like lead, and yet she was pretty sure she would float away or combust like paper under the influence of a single kiss.

Her legs were limp as old-fashioned spaghetti. Her belly was doing butterfly flips, dragonfly soars into a pink, imaginary sky of desire. If only he would take this crazy thing off her and put the real chains on her. The chains of sexual conquest. Let her taste his cock, let her feel his intimate touch and she would have little choice but to forget any ideas of freedom.

But Theron had his own ideas, and as usual, they were not her own. He spun her by the waist. Her cunt screamed out not to be forgotten. A second later she heard the lock close at the small of her back.

Her pussy was officially in bondage. Secured, along with her ass, against all comers. Until such time as she could find a way to pick the lock...or be released by Theron.

And as close as he seemed to be watching her, she was pretty sure the first option was a no-go.

"This will be good for you, Nyssa. You'll learn discipline."

Who was he trying to convince, her or him? All she knew was that she had been left horny as hell, with no prospect of relief.

Theron stood, towering over her. "Are you ready to get that gag off?"

She gave no indication one way or the other.

"Put your arms down." He reached behind her, temporarily embracing her to undo the straps. She could smell the manliness of him, the clean pure scent of primale. Like pine and musk. And raw power.

"Your jaws are going to ache a little."

She resisted the urge to bite as he pulled out the little ball. She hated the thing, the way it made her drool, the way it made her shut up. And yet, when combined with work on her pussy, it made for a wicked little aphrodisiac.

"How does that feel?" he wanted to know.

A fine time to ask...

Nyssa shifted, trying to accommodate that she was grilled over and artificially impaled. With every breath, it was like a man in her, fucking. Surely it was not going to stay this intense? "It feels just fine," she said respectfully. "But haven't you forgotten something?"

"What's that?"

She paused to lick her lips, nice and slowly, like she had a big old ice-cream cone. "My mouth," she said in her most sultry voice. "A man could still put a cock in there. He could make me suck one, real deep, until I gagged and then he could shoot all his semen into my hot mouth and make me swallow it. Shouldn't we protect against that...Sir?"

Theron pursed his lips, disappointed no doubt that he didn't technically have grounds to smack her ass or gag her again. After all, she was just being cooperative—trying to help him do his job.

"Oh, and my tits." She gave them a little shake, bimbo-style. "We both know those are fuckable, too."

"It's not going to work, Nyssa."

"What isn't going to work...Sir?"

"You are not going to make me lose my cool. You're not going to break down my established order. You have the three rules," he held up his fingers, "and they will not be defied."

"No, Sir."

"Don't call me that."

"Why not, Sir?" she asked innocently.

"Because I am not your commanding officer, nor are we involved in an intimate relationship," he replied curtly.

"Sorry, Sir." She jolted inwardly. Hearing those words from his lips—intimate relationship—charged as they were, had an unexpected effect. It was as if he were giving voice to the very question resounding deep in her brain. Was he thinking about the same thing—whether or not there might be the basis here for a relationship, a genuine sharing of their hearts and lives?

It seemed improbable. They were dead opposites. Then again, wasn't that the basis of all universal attraction?

He pointed to the hygiene room, his face a study in suppressed reaction. "Conversation over," he declared. "You have half an in to get yourself ready to go. And don't even think about trying to make yourself a key from the objectifier in the sanitizing chamber. I have made the belt unique to my voice print. There will be no key issued to anyone against my authority."

Damn, how did he know that would be my first move?

No matter, she had other tricks up her sleeve. Lots of them. Nyssa resisted the urge to salute. She would so run circles around him. The poor man was not going to know what hit him by the time she got through with him.

As she took her first step, however, Nyssa's bravado evaporated. It was the damned belt, the pressure inside her anal cavity as she moved, the pulsing she felt in her pussy and all through her belly with every breath. The infernal thing wasn't a chastity belt—it was a horniness belt, filling her mind with sex-making ideas. And not just any old sex-making, but sex-making with Theron.

As always, the images grew complicated in her mind—he made her see things, feel things differently. Her curiosity was boundless. Who was he and what made him so sure of himself to do this to her? So calmly...so decisively.

He had locked chains on her body. He had claimed her sex, intimately sealed her. Her thighs chafed, reminding her of the flogging. She could hear the tiny jingle of the metal links. The grate pushed against her labia. She wanted to stop, but he was behind her, probably watching her naked ass. Naked and plugged. And if she stopped, if she disobeyed his order to go directly to the hygiene room, he would swat or flog her again.

Stars, she was in trouble. If she were feeling this aroused and needy after traversing only a few feet in this contraption, what would it be like after a few ins, or a full day, universe forbid? She would be a nervous, steaming wreck.

One thing was for sure. Whatever she was going to do to break down his will, she would have to do it quickly. Before *she* was broken down.

It wasn't until she was inside that she realized there was a slight problem here. How was she supposed to do anything with this infernal belt on?

She retraced her steps and brought the matter to Theron's attention. He frowned, and for once had no snappy comeback. She repressed the urge to gloat openly as he was forced to remove the belt temporarily. Was there some small cause for hope here? Might she actually be getting to him just a little and putting him off-center? After she had seen to her needs, he immediately replaced it.

Chapter Eight

Theron managed to keep his erection down until Nyssa was safely ensconced the hygiene room. The last thing he needed right now was her seeing him forced to give in to uncontrollable sexual desires. Going to the objectifier, he ordered up an appropriate item—a velvet pouch, fit to sheathe himself for stroking. Blast it, he had not been reduced to masturbation like this since he was a teenager.

And it wasn't just his cock. There were other physiological reactions, too. A rise in his pulse every time he looked at her. An increase in heart rate when watching her move. An intense mental preoccupation with every detail of her body and her face. Those beautiful, sparkling eyes, her full lips, that sassy smile. Really, though, she was just one more female in a world full of them. It wasn't logical.

Was he suffering from overwork?

A lesser man might be tempted to call it something else entirely, maybe even something emotional. But that was not possible. Theron was not made to fall in love. That would be a violation of his character, not to mention his personal military aspirations.

Double-checking to make sure Nyssa was occupied under the cleansing beams—she was, though she seemed none too happy with the hardware around her midsection—Theron went back out and sat on the edge of the bed. He intended to make this quick and businesslike. He would derive only the minimum enjoyment needed, thinking of something sexual, but impersonal. One of the dancers of Rysis Eight maybe or a nameless pleasure robot. Anything but the woman in the next room with that maddeningly beautiful body and infuriatingly uncontrollable will.

By the Oath—the way her ass moved with the plug in it, the way her pussy creamed as he placed the grate over her vulva, the way her breath caught as he locked the chain on her waist, the tiny, jagged sigh as he pulled the cold metal between her legs and up through her crack.

Damn it, what a fool he had been. His foolproof plan for stopping the sexual fireworks between them was backfiring, blowing up in his face. Chaining a woman, placing metal links upon her body, irremovable by her delicate hands, was, for a primale an act of intimacy and power as fulfilling as sex-making. Maybe more so. He had hoped to avoid this form of bonding by putting it under the heading of duty in his mind, but there was no denying the feelings.

He had placed poli-steel upon her body. And she had consented. He had staked a claim of possession and she had submitted. No one could touch her unspeakably beautiful pussy, not even she herself, except by his hand.

The act had aroused her. He'd smelled her scent, seen the glistening drops. Locking her up, taking her sexual freedom away had been an aphrodisiac. This was not fem behavior. This was obedients' behavior. He'd seen it before, the soft breathing, the large doe eyes, the sweat on the female's palms, the million little signals that she was ready, that she wanted it, that she craved it, that she was willing to do what was necessary to get it.

Nyssa's reaction was pure instinct. She wouldn't know to fake such things. Her sarcasm aside, in calling him Sir, there were deep things in her body. Things that called to equally deep, complementary impulses in his own.

Thoughts had raged through his mind as the padlock closed, thoughts of what he might do to her. He rehearsed them again now, even as he inserted his cock into the pouch and squeezed tightly with the fingers of his right hand.

So many possibilities. Another kiss, perhaps, one from which she would never recover. Whispered commands in her ear, which she would not be able to defy.

Drop to all fours, crawl to the bed...cheek to the pillow, ass in the air, facing me. Await my pleasure...legs apart, pussy wet behind the grate...scorching hot...and open.

Going to her, her body prostrate, naked and submitted, he would rip away the belt, the pathetic metal. He would seize both openings at once in his fingers, telling her that no one else would go there again, ever. That if any man so much as thought of penetrating her, if he dared look within so much as a mile of her with lust in his eyes, he would not be long for this world.

It might sound cruel to the unknowing ear, but it was the primale way. Only through the fiercest of jealousy could they guard their one and only lifemates, assuring that they would be showered with the devotion and care that their delicate persons required.

A woman like Nyssa could never endure that sort of possessiveness, from him or any other primale. Yet another excellent reason to maintain his objectivity and not give in to the strange tenderness he felt where she was concerned.

Theron increased the blood flow in his cock, creating tighter, more delicious pleasure. Bittersweet, to be sure, in the absence of the woman. Closing his eyes, he imagined himself sheathed not in the manufactured material, but inside her sex. It was more than a physical sensation he had felt with her – something that affected every part of him, mind and body.

Closing his eyes, he imagined himself taking the feisty fem from behind. The vision was as clear as a holo, clearer even. He saw himself ordering her to push her ass against him, to increase the pleasure for both of them. She could not come without permission. He took the back of her hair in his hands, and pulled it tight, like a set of reins. She was his...his...his. He rode her to thundering climax, his cock burying and unburying itself, thrusting, pistoning with the power of a rocket. Her body shook and shuddered...he covered her and loved her and could not, would not ever get enough of her.

Theron bit down, clenching his teeth, summoning his eruption. A flood of seed spurted into the end of the mitt. He pushed his toes down into the rug, flexing his muscles, straining up and down his torso to squeeze out every drop. Softly, he expressed his release.

Yes, this was what he needed. What a smart fellow he was. Now he would be able to face the day. Now he would be able to do his job and take care of Nyssa without distraction. All he needed to do was clean up and she would be none the wiser...

"What the fuck are you doing?" The painfully familiar voice crashed into his consciousness.

Theron's stomach clenched. Like being sucker-punched and swallowing a meteorite simultaneously. In a hundred campaigns against the hideous Narthian menace, the mighty Guardian had never felt such a thing. If he didn't know better he would think he was...afraid.

Of a fem?

He wiped his mind clean, opening his eyes. Nyssa was standing there naked, freshly scrubbed, hands on her slender hips, tapping her foot. Her eyes were like moon lasers, burning holes through him.

"That's not your business, Nyssa." He affected a martial tone. "Your only concern is following my orders. You will choose an outfit from the objectifier and be ready in five sub-ins."

"The hell it's not my business," she fumed. "You've been in here jerking away, having a grand old time and I have to fucking pee through a strainer. Did it ever occur to you I might like a little satisfaction, too, Ace?"

"Primals have certain needs, Nyssa. It's a matter of biological fact."

"Don't you give me that primale need shit, Theron." She was pointing at him now, utterly fearless. "You're using that age-old double standard. Just because we don't have dicks to wave in the air like frigging beam swords doesn't mean we don't get horny. And just 'cause pussies can be locked down doesn't mean you have the fucking right."

Clearly he needed to deescalate the situation. "You're violating Rule number one, Nyssa. You may consider this a warning."

Nyssa saw the opening and pounced. "Oh, no, that's fine—go ahead and whale on my ass. Then we'll whale on yours for violating Rule number three."

Theron said the next thing that came into his head. "The rules aren't the same for me." He regretted the ill-chosen words instantly.

Nyssa's lips curled as she savored her triumph. By the stars and galaxies, how did she keep painting him into corners like this?

"Of course they aren't." She smiled as sweetly as nectar. "What was I thinking? I'm such a dumb little fem."

"Stop being so blasted sarcastic. I have rules, I answer to my superiors. I follow the Guardian's Code."

"Some code—lets you bully women around."

"For the last time, are you going to get dressed?"

She tossed her hair proudly, insolently. "If I must."

Theron's soul went mad with passion. It was another bad sign of his over-involvement with her. He seized her as she sought to turn away. There was no reasoning with his body's desire to pull her against him. She voiced a protest, but it was in vain. The intended words turned to a garble as he owned her lips. She was squashed against him, her breasts flattened against his chest. He could feel her nipples rising helplessly against her will. Her squirming indignation only made it worse—like a red flag waved under the nose of a snorting bull.

His cock was iron. Compared to this, every other arousal in his life had been pitiful and flaccid. Theron let her register her protest—because it amused him. Her body sensed this almost immediately, and she went into a fem version of what would be called the bloom in an obedient.

The opening of a woman's heat, her soul. Her sex. In seconds she was responding. Inviting, pulling at him with small fingers, trying to communicate, leg between his, chest rising and falling in pants, lips moving to moans, mouth accepting the utter invasion of his tongue. Every inch of her begged to be shown, to be put in her place, to know the consequences of arousing a primale.

In such a state, there is no foreplay. The primale penetrates. He need not question whether the woman will be ready. There is simply no choice, no quarter left her by his touch. She will take every inch of his cock. It will be the best sex she has ever had and they will come...together.

Theron forgot the grate. Until he scraped his thrusting cock. He cried aloud from the pain. Idiot! How could he have forgotten? He had his hands cupped under Nyssa's ass. He was holding her, legs dangling. It took a moment for the pain to subside. She put her head on his shoulders meanwhile, sobbing.

He put her down as soon as he was able. Fuck—he'd made ten times the mess of before. Did he dare wipe the tears from her eyes?

He made the attempt.

"Don't touch me," she sobbed. "Just...just get out."

Theron stoically went to the objectifier. He ordered a new suit, took it to the hygiene room and cleaned himself up. The rays of the cleansing beam did little to refresh. His mind was awash in anguish. A hundred different tortures at once. He had been right in the beginning—he was utterly and completely unqualified for this assignment.

Nyssa was dressed by the time he emerged from the hygiene room. The objectifier had furnished the outfit while a dressing and makeup robot had handled the rest.

Theron held his breath. Nyssa looked absolutely stunning. Her dress was short and red with a narrow V that plunged to her waist, revealing a synthetic ruby in her belly

button. The waist was snug, accentuating her figure splendidly. The pleated hemline came to the middle of her thighs. She wore red heels with crisscrossing laces that ran up her leg. The upper halves of her arms were nearly bare, the full sleeves having large cutouts from elbow to shoulder.

It was her hair that dazzled him the most. She had lengthened it to mid-back, and then put it up in a swirl, intricately woven with jewels, a half-dozen shades of red. She had altered the color of her hair, too, to offset the dress. It was a pale copper with golden highlights. She had managed to match the shade exactly to her eye shadow and lush, glistening lip paint.

All this accomplished in a matter of minutes...

Theron wanted to fall on his knees before her. She was that beautiful. That worthy of worship.

"Ready to go?" he inquired as matter-of-factly as possible.

"Yes," she replied, expressionless.

Theron frowned. It was as though she was gone—replaced with a drone, the emotion chips yanked out. "Is that all you have to say? No comments? No discussions?"

"No."

"Oh." It was the damndest thing. He had exactly what he wanted at last. A cooperative woman. So why did he feel so totally miserable? Could it be that a part of him enjoyed the challenge of her? That a part of him liked the feistiness?

I really have been fighting Narthians too long, he thought. I've actually turned into some kind of masochist. "So you're comfortable to travel?" he asked. "The belt won't...give you trouble?"

"I'm fine."

"Good." He nodded. *She wasn't taking the bait.*

"Is there something you're waiting for?" she wanted to know.

Theron blinked, realizing he was standing there staring. "Nothing. Nothing at all. I'm just...pleased you are being so reasonable."

Nyssa stood there, unblinking.

"We need to go," he said gruffly, unable to endure any more silence.

"Yes," she replied without a trace of sarcasm.

Theron ordered the lights out behind them, feeling lonelier and more confused than he ever had in his entire life.

Chapter Nine

Nyssa's mind danced with questions as they ate their breakfast in the two-person bubble floating a thousand feet above the floor of the hotel lobby. Did he like what she was wearing? What about her hair? The color of her lips? Nyssa wanted to blow him away. She wanted Theron to want her so badly that it hurt him. She wanted him to feel rejection, to experience all the stings that came with being tossed aside, with being used and batted about like a soko ball, like he was so fond of doing to her. Flipping her emotions on and off, flipping her passion on and off. Heating her body—making her unable to do a fucking thing about it.

More than that, she wanted to follow through on her pledge to break him, to win back her independence, so she could rub it in Fem Dekalia's face.

No one owned her. No one foisted things on her or treated her like a child. Not even the High Councilor.

Let Theron use his super powers. She had powers of her own. She was a woman. And an actress. So he could bend steel and see in the dark? Well he'd never see her coming. She would work him, manipulate him, and drive him out of his fucking mind without him knowing she was doing a damned thing.

He was weakening already, hesitating to talk to her, feeling uncertain in her presence. All the way through their meal, served off hovering white disks by tiny robots, she had given him the silent treatment. He had actually tried to start up a conversation. She had to keep from laughing over that. Primales were *so* limited in their worldly knowledge. How on earth he could think it would be interesting to her to discuss the barometric pressure on the outer moons of Lathos or the mating habits of the Turgian mud beetle was beyond her.

Although the beetle mating thing did remind her of her own current struggles. Sitting on her soft, white cushion, trying to eat her succulent little pieces of fruit, the anal intruder worked her over, making her feel full and yet so empty at the same time. It was a dangerous balance...attracting the man without falling headlong into the pit of lust. Theron thought she wasn't interested right now, but that was only because she was an actress. She was keeping him at bay. If only he knew how much she wanted him, how badly she needed to be touched. His primale loving was like a drug...if he only knew how little it would take to make her beg for another fix.

She couldn't kid herself that she was under his spell.

She had dressed for him. Changed her hair for him. She was trying to use it against him, sure, but it was still all about him. Everything on her mind, all she was doing and thinking was about him. And the harder she tried to be indifferent, the worse it got.

She simply could not stay neutral. She couldn't *not* be preoccupied with him. She could hate him, she could be infuriated. She could sure as hell feel attraction, too. Attraction so extreme as to be too dangerous to even contemplate let alone touch. But nothing in the middle. Nothing safe.

When she had seen him before, back in the room, with his cock in his hand, she had swooned. She'd seen that incredible body of his, muscles flexed, arm and hand pumping, the purple bag over his huge cock, the look on his face as he pleased himself.

Twice she had gone back in the hygiene room prepared to wait him out. Her time under the warm, tingling sanitizing beams had been hell as it was. Her pussy throbbing so badly, needing just a little stimulation to push her over the edge. She'd tried pressing with her palm and fingertips, tried aiming the cleansing beams into the openings in the grille. But she couldn't get deep enough, couldn't get at her clit.

Twice, she had tried to hide from it. By the second time, she had been ready to go to him on her knees. Ready to take him by mouth, whispering, pleading for the privilege, kissing his body, his knees, his thighs, sucking his fingers, burying her head to his feet, letting her hair spill across the carpet. Hoping against all hope that he would accept her, take her by the hair, raise her up, put her lips to the tip of his cock, allow her to taste the glistening drop of pre-cum, let her feel the weight of his balls in her hands. She would have run her tongue along the underside of his shaft, feeling the pulsing vein, licking the salt, the sweat. Making him sigh and moan with deep, manly sounds.

She would have devoured him, fitted as much as she could down her throat, greedy to be the perfect vessel—her mouth the pouch, her mouth doing the caressing, the stimulating.

He could have come that way, letting her swallow it all—she wouldn't have minded. Or he could have taken something else. Making her stand before him, his hand over the grate he had put on her. "Whose belt is this?" he would ask.

"Yours," she would say.

"Who may take it off?"

"Only you."

"Are you wet?"

"Yes."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"What will you do for my cock?"

"Anything..."

Only at the last possible second had she managed to stop herself from going to him in such a way, defenseless, completely exploitable. Once again within her that pendulum had shifted, indignation replacing desire, and fury replacing lust.

She'd gone to him, all right, but standing. Accusing. She had given it to him with both barrels and he had deserved it. She had won the battle, but then, when she'd sought to turn away, she had lost the war.

That look in his eyes as he had pulled her close. She'd fought him, but it was herself she was fighting – the very part of her that wanted to be taken, silenced with a kiss.

Forever.

Oh, it was real all right. Everything they said about primales. A woman could get lost in there. Theron wasn't even trying and he nearly had her snared – in fact, he was trying *not* to snare her.

All the more reason to end this association sooner rather than later, to get him to call it quits, or else to find some way to compromise him and get him reassigned. Maybe a fresh escape attempt.

Yeah, right, she thought glumly. The man had managed to track her halfway across the dome without breaking a sweat the last time. *Face it – you're a mouse to him, a pretty, perky mouse, but still just a mouse to his very formidable cat.*

Unless she could think up some new angle. Some spectacular way to give him the slip. What about at the show tonight? She would never be able to sneak out a back door or do anything behind his back, but what about onstage, right under his nose? Staring down at the forest of artificial crystals in the hotel lobby, along with the rows of bubbled windows alongside them, she got an idea. The hologrid was a beaming device. During the performance, she would be transported to various places in the amphitheater, above the spectators. At the climax, there would be a huge hyper-light explosion during which she would be lifted aloft, a hundred feet into the air.

Suppose she didn't come down? At least not in the same place from which she'd gone up.

It was not impossible. She had friends. Techs who could arrange to re-beam her, say, a dozen or so miles away to a waiting hyper-light rocket. By the time Mr. Super Senses managed to blink and figure something was amiss, she could be in another star system.

She would still have to arrange things without him knowing, but imagine if she could. Imagine being able to innocently call Fem Dekalia from Rigel or Centaur, wondering where her bodyguard was...hoping he was okay, because he just wasn't anywhere around.

She could call his Guardian superiors, too. Oh, this was too rich. Theron would be a laughingstock. He would be yanked off the case, and oh-so very sorry for putting a fucking chastity belt on her ass and treating her like his little slave girl.

He would spend the rest of his career guarding some pathetic mining colony on the Outer Rim. And she would blow him kisses on the Grid every Universal Solstice Holiday.

"You're smiling," Theron noted. "That's the first time all morning."

She cleared her throat, taking a sip of herbal tea. "I was just thinking," she replied, sipping loudly. "About my show tonight. I think it will be especially good."

Theron's devastating blue eyes deepened a shade. Stars, why did the fucker have to be so gorgeous? And why did he have to make her heart beat so fast? At first it had been just a sex-making thing, but now she was finding herself enjoying every little aspect of his presence. Sure, he could be a tyrant and he drove her mad, but she felt safe with him. Understood. No one had ever focused himself so completely on her being before. And she was finding she could understand things about him, too. He wasn't nearly as harsh as he liked to pretend. There was tenderness underneath.

For the first time she found herself wishing that his security assignment protecting her would not end too quickly. She wanted more time to answer the growing questions. What was it that made them so good together in bed? Why did she keep catching herself at odd moments hearing those words he had pronounced to her before?

Intimate relationship.

He'd been ruling it out, trying to keep their relationship appropriate and safe. And that was a good thing. Wasn't it?

"I was thinking, too, Nyssa."

"Oh?"

"Yes." His lips thinned.

He was doing this crinkling thing with his forehead that she was coming to associate with perplexity. She hated to admit this, but it was sort of endearing, because for such a strong, smart fellow, he seemed to be perplexed by some of the most elementary things. Like manners. And women. And conversations.

It shouldn't be a big deal, knowing and liking things like this about a man. Although some people said such things were the foundation on which love was built.

"I was thinking that something I said to you wasn't true," he said.

"And what thing was that?" She stabbed a triple-headed grape.

His features were tense. Lands and oceans—he was nervous!

"About my erection last night. I said it wasn't for you. But it was. The flow of blood was in fact connected to the physiological effects of being in your presence."

"Why...thank you," she replied, having no earthly idea what to do with this unusual compliment. "That was so very honest of you...and so very clinical, too."

He seemed relieved. "Truth is important among primales," he explained. "We cannot function without it. The lies literally build up and corrode our functioning."

Nyssa sighed. It was time to go for broke. "Last night...when we were together, I mean, don't get me wrong. You were the best lover I have ever had. You were like in this whole other league I never knew existed. But there was something... I can't quite put my finger on it. Anyone would figure that you have done it all a thousand times, but it seemed somehow fresh. And I doubt it's me... I'm not all that special."

"I can't compare you, Nyssa, because you were my first. Perhaps that's why it seemed so fresh."

The enormity of that hit her like a wave—guilt, shock and tenderness. "Oh, Theron...you gave me what your lifemate should have had."

"That isn't something to concern yourself with," he assured her. "Primals are capable of sex-making with any number of females, prior to life-mating. I was the exception. Most of my fellow Guardians make sex with prostitutes all the time. Some are even offered under contract for use by entire units."

The bastard didn't even seem to realize how he'd insulted her. Nyssa tried to hold her heart together. It was hurting, deep inside. "Oh, good." She smiled frostily, covering over the wound. "I wouldn't want to complicate your life by being anything more than a common tramp to you."

Theron's brow wrinkled double time. "Nyssa, what are you saying?"

She stood up, tossing her napkin on the table. "I'm saying that I'm done with breakfast and I'm ready to get on the fucking shuttle and go do my fucking concert. Can we fucking do that?"

"Well...yes..."

"Fucking awesome."

She was going to fix his wagon all right. Naïve as he was, he still had to be accountable.

She was going to escape tonight and make him look like the biggest fool in the galaxy. Then he could run crying to all the little prostitutes and contract women he liked.

And he could forget the holo kisses for the Solstice Holiday.

He was off her fucking list. Forever.

And no, she was not acting like a woman scorned. Just a woman who'd remembered her true place. As a fem. Not some silly little obedient chasing after a dumb brute of a man.

* * * * *

Theron's attempt to mend fences with Nyssa over breakfast had not gone as well as planned. For some reason, his explanation had only alienated her further, to the point of open hostility. This puzzled him, because he assumed she would have been relieved to know that their sex-making together was not important and that there were not going to be any harmful aftereffects of their sex-making together. For whatever reason, she'd taken it as some sort of insult instead.

This was not the logical response of a disinterested fem. It was more like...well, the reaction of a jealous obedient. Once mated, an obedient could not bear the idea of any other female pleasing her primale—even in the past. She would insist on learning any of the techniques practiced on him before by any prostitute, so she could surpass them

and she would scratch the eyes out of any female who made a move on him in the future—be it another obedient or a fem.

Contrary to what some might think, obedients were not doormats. And while they tended to have gentle, cooperative, follower spirits, they fiercely defended what was theirs.

Fems were not supposed to be like this. Fems took multiple lovers. Fems were free spirits, they lived in the now and took their pleasure as it came.

Could it be that Nyssa was being influenced by his primale energy? This had been his worst fear—that she would find herself yielding to her deepest feminine self, unable to resist a permanent sexual attachment, maybe even a love bond.

On the other hand, she kept reacting to him with such fury, and this was not behavior he was familiar with in obedients. All in all, he had to assume that she hated him, though the personal vehemence she felt was a little hard to understand.

Had he made all the right decisions where she was concerned? Was he being a little tough on her with the belt and all? Probably. Truthfully, she was being penalized for his being a man—a man unable to keep his hands off her. She had been sexually used and now she was being forced to accept sexual bondage to keep him from doing it again.

Okay, so he had to protect her from herself, too. He couldn't afford to have her making sex right now with anyone she pleased. Someone was out there threatening to kill her. Maybe more than one person. There was no telling how serious those threats were. So far, he had detected nothing, but the biggest challenge lay ahead, at the live show.

An audience of half a million would be in that amphitheatre, any one of whom could have motive and opportunity to kill the holostar. Should such an attempt occur, he must be prepared to risk, and ultimately surrender, his life to preserve hers.

No matter how much she despised him.

Theron felt a clenching in his chest. If only she understood the things he was feeling. If only he could understand them himself. In the beginning, her protection had been an order and nothing else. Now he knew her—hell, it felt like he had always known her. He could no longer imagine the universe without her. What a dull and colorless place it would be. He was fascinated with her spirit, the way she met new challenges so courageously, the way she seemed so unafraid of the unknown.

He was a better man for knowing her. He wanted to know more, too. In some ways, he would be sad to see this assignment end. She was driving him crazy, but he had never felt more alive.

More a man.

This made no sense, of course. It was not only illogical thinking, it was dangerous. Emotions decreased efficiency. If he did not contain himself and fast, he might make a mistake. And that he could not afford. Protecting the little spitfire Nyssa was going to be hard enough as it was.

Nyssa gave him the courtesy of her ass as they left the hotel. He stopped her short, gripping her arm.

"What the hell are you doing?" she demanded.

"You need to let me walk in front, so I can make sure there are no dangers ahead of you."

"I walk where I like," she snorted. "You want somebody to heel you like a dog, it won't be me."

He frowned. She was referring to the habit of obedients, whereby they remained just behind their mate's left heel in a position of respectful subordination. "An obedient starts behind so that her mate may bring her forward to a place beside him," he quoted the primale saying. "But that isn't the point here. This is for security."

"The hell it is," she spat. "Tell me, for the privilege of walking beside her man, what does an obedient have to do in return, kiss his feet?"

Theron was finding it difficult to keep his temper. That was not like him at all. "That would be up to the primale in question. But you know what I would make her do?"

"No." She turned up her nose. "And I don't care."

"I would have her get on her knees and pleasure me," he said, shocking himself with his own emotions, "right there in public."

Nyssa showed her disgust, but too late. For a split second before that, she had revealed a dark fascination. A secret thrill at the scandal of it.

Interesting. Very interesting.

"That turns you on, doesn't it? The idea of being under a man's control, of having to accept a place of inferiority—even to the point of sucking his cock in front of a million people."

By the Code, that wasn't what he wanted to say at all. He would never do that to Nyssa. Why was it getting so hard to keep his thoughts straight around her? What kind of spell was she casting?

"You're a pig," she told him.

Lacking any sort of intellectual retort, Theron whirled her about and swatted her posterior hard. Several people noticed, but seeing Theron's Guardian uniform, they took it to be a typical primale domestic situation and moved on.

"Apologize," he ordered.

Tears dotted her eyes. Blast, he was making a mess of things. The sweet little beauty rubbed her chastised behind. "I'm sorry," she said. "Are you satisfied?"

He wasn't, not by a long shot. Unfortunately, this was neither the time nor the place to resolve matters with a heart-to-heart conversation. "You may walk alongside me," he declared, extending the olive branch, "but you will remain at my arm and you will follow my orders to the letter if any danger is encountered. Is that clear?"

"Yes. It's clear." Nyssa fell in beside him. It felt natural, comfortable. He could almost imagine reaching out and taking her hand. Would she be repulsed, or would she accept the gesture?

He pushed the idea away, knowing any form of contact between them would lead to other things in short order.

They crossed the ped bridge to the Outer Atmosphere Shuttle Service. Theron wanted to fuck her so badly he could taste it. At one point a man brushed past and he instinctively wrapped his hand around her backside. He felt the end of her butt plug against his palm. She collapsed against him with a tiny gasp. She was so primed to be bent over the railing, her hem lifted, her glorious hindquarters exposed. He would dispose of the belt and push himself in. For once he would win a fucking argument.

Hah. Like that was ever going to happen with this woman.

Theron hired them an auto shuttle. A private model. While he could certainly pilot it himself, he intended to use the time to study the transmissions and intelligence surrounding the threats against Nyssa. If he was able to understand the psychology and motive of any would-be killer, he would be that much further ahead in trying to stop him.

Nyssa sat as far away as possible, against the window. He observed with rapt attention from the seat across from her as she slid her bottom across the artificial red leather, nearly the same color as her dress. He imagined tying her in leather, binding that sweet flesh of hers. If he had her in his possession, he would lock her away for a week, doing nothing to her but making sex and love-torturing her. She would know the freedom of passion. He would lock her in steel, and throw away the key. Or ropes of silk, or other even rarer fibers designed to come alive and tickle a woman's anatomy.

She would lose count of the orgasms, she would melt into one long climax and he would teach her to call his name, to say it in such a way as never had been said before, and he would be reborn in her...in them.

"Stop looking at me," she demanded. "It gives me the creeps."

"I was merely memorizing your features. Primales do that for people they are guarding." This was technically true, though hardly keeping in the spirit of what he'd been doing. By the universe, he grumbled to himself, he had just been reduced to another lie. What was it about this woman that made the truth so difficult to speak?

"I think you memorized me plenty fine last night."

She had a point. Theron sighed and called for a pocket screen. A panel opened and a wafer-thin disc about the size of a human hand descended. It remained in midair, facing him like a mirror. He gave the verbal initialization, accessing the System. The lights on the screen pulsed and swirled. Plugging in a mindlink, he made the interaction private.

"Greetings Guardian Captain Theron. Welcome to the Infogrid. Security Clearance, Level Three," the feminine voice of the System beamed cheerily into his brain.

Greetings, he thought in reply. Request to review all records, concerning threats against holostar Nyssa.

The first of them appeared on the screen. A piece of neon filth, hand-scribbled, which had appeared on the entry page of her personal data cruncher not too long ago.

You'll pay for your lying mouth.

He glanced toward Nyssa out of the corner of his eye. She was restless, moving about on the seat, squirming. Resisting the urge to go to her and cradle her curvaceous, infinitely desirable body in his arms, he ordered the Infogrid to display the second threat she had received, this one in the form of an automatic letter.

Go away, you whore, and don't come back.

Theron's heart rate quickened. His muscles tensed nearly to fight mode. He hadn't expected this sort of reaction to the threats. He was angry. He went on to the third. He was supposed to be objective, but it was all way too personal. This was Nyssa being talked about...

Everyone knows you're a liar and you don't deserve to breathe.

His fists clenched. If these were the work of someone serious in intent, or even if they were not, they had crossed a line, and they would be sorry. In fact, they would do well to hope the police caught them first.

He read several more. Nyssa, meanwhile, appeared to grow frustrated looking out the view port. As the shuttle left outer orbit and entered deep space, she released her copper-gold hair, allowing the artificially lengthened but very real-looking tresses to cascade down over her shoulders. Theron could smell her exquisite scent, like flowers in sunlight. Presently, she shook out the remains of her hairstyle and lay down on the seat, curling her legs up underneath her.

His heart swelled. She was such an amazing creature. So much smaller than him, so very delicate in comparison, and yet so wonderful and strong. Clever, and quick. No one had ever given him a run for his money like she did. And damn it, she made it fun, somehow. A challenge.

The thought that anyone would want to hurt her...

He could feel the protective instincts welling up. They were deeper than the anger, more potent. They were primale feelings. Indescribable in any other words. Only another primale could understand them. Or the woman he was guarding.

This was no longer just a job. That alone would have made him die. Or kill. Now it was personal. Someone, somewhere, had just opened for himself or herself a personal path to hell, and he was going to kick them down it.

And then, when the threat was gone, Theron would leave Nyssa, and never bother her again. He closed his eyes, thinking how much that was going to hurt. A million times worse than any battlefield experience. He would spend the rest of his days praying to die, but he wouldn't, not until he had lived way too many years and known far too much loneliness.

Ironically it was a loneliness he would never have known without meeting Nyssa. Whereas once his longing for companionship was vague and faceless, it now revolved around a single image, a single possibility – one which would never come to fruition.

Still, he could no longer imagine not having known Nyssa. Life meant inevitable pain, and the bravest of men risk the most and suffer the most. For a primale, there was no real option but to follow that path.

Literally was it written in their blood, handed down and refined from the great adventurers, the audacious explorers, the arrogant conquerors, the wild lovers, the cowboys and pirates and astronauts. All those who had refused to be tamed. Their blood distilled and refined and then given a home in bodies truly worthy of their overarching desires and dreams.

And what did these men dream of most, if the truth be told? Of the perfect woman. One woman above all others, a Helen of Troy, to launch a thousand ships, and ultimately break the hearts of a million men. Nyssa was his Helen. Nyssa of the hologrid, more than lovely enough to launch his primale heart...

Straight into oblivion.

Theron closed the connection, ordering the disc away. It was time for sleep. Primales didn't need much, a few hours a week would do. In his case, it was the last he would get until his job was done.

Until the author or authors of the threats had been disposed of.

Once and for all.

Slowing his breathing, he put himself deliberately into unconsciousness. It was not sleep in the normal human sense. A part of him remained awake, internally, and ready to respond to the slightest disturbance in the environment. In the event of any trouble, he would seize control from the autopilot and proceed to evasive maneuvers. He would also employ the cloak. Electronically activated from his belt pack. Few people outside the Guardians knew of the device, which was the way the Guardians wanted it kept.

Within seconds, Theron achieved the desired mental state. No dreams, of course. Primales preferred to keep their images real. And sharp. The seconds ticked, and eventually an in passed. The bubble sailed across the void.

From deep within his still active mind, Theron's subconscious focused on the sounds of the ship, the hum of the engines, the whirl of the navigators. It was the ships heart and its lungs.

At a certain point, the bubble turned, arcing downward, seeking fresh orbit. A blue light activated on the rounded ceiling indicating planetfall. Theron's eyes opened immediately. He was refreshed, alert.

"Nyssa," he whispered, touching her shoulder.

She sat up sleepily, rubbing her eyes, her hair tousled. Looking at her filled him with devotion. Such a sweet and beautiful little creature.

"Where are we?" she mumbled, her lips puffy.

Theron's erection stirred. It had been a constant battle, keeping his mind otherwise engaged. Though unable to think of anything but Nyssa, he had at least fought to keep those thoughts platonic. The urge to push her back down on the seat, however, was nearly overwhelming. He imagined his hands everywhere on her body, tearing away the clothing that dared restrict his privilege of touch. He would make that flesh of hers sing, he would rip away the metal, dive between her legs, lick her senseless and then fill her with his turgid shaft, and relieve the agonizing ache. Lightning-fast motions, their skin as one, her teeth sunk into his shoulder, his hands gripping the ass that was his, the spanked ass of this fem who would and should be his, if not for the vagaries of her genetic birth.

He wanted to ride her to inevitable climax, higher than this shuttle was ever capable of going, and more explosive than its engines could ever manage, resolving at a single stroke all their difficulties and misunderstandings. But that was never to be. No arcing or falling, no single moment to make the whole of his life worthwhile, no spilling himself ever again in the body of beautiful Nyssa. No holding her through the conclusion of her own spilling.

No pleasure, no sexual anguish and no release. None. None at all.

"We're coming in for a landing." He forced his mind to more prosaic matters. "You can see the amphitheatre out the view port there. They're already setting up the beams. I'll have to give the place a once-over. For security."

Something flashed behind her eyes. "That's a good idea," she offered, a little too eagerly.

Theron's primale radar moved to high alert. There was only one reason Nyssa would say anything even remotely nice to him, and that was to cover up another of her ridiculous escape attempts. "I'd hate to drag you along when I do it, though," he said nonchalantly.

"Well, I suppose you could leave me backstage. I've a million things to do. And it's not like anyone will let me walk out, right?"

He smiled indulgently. For a woman who made her living on the hologrid, she really was not a very convincing actress. "An excellent idea," he approved. "I think that is exactly what I'll do."

She tried to contain her glee, even as the shuttle set down on the landing pad. "Okay, if that's what you want."

Theron folded his arms over his chest. He could hardly wait to see what the little imp had in mind this time.

Chapter Ten

Nyssa was not entirely certain that Theron trusted her. He'd given in a little too easily when she'd suggested staying in the backstage area while he did a security check of the mammoth amphitheatre. Was he setting her up again to see if she would attempt another escape, or was her plan to blunt his steely resolve with her feminine wiles actually having some effect? His energy did seem a little diverted. He was acting a little less cocksure, a little more brooding.

Or was he just on edge because of the number of people who were going to be here tonight? She had to admit, she was a little nervous herself. Almost, but not quite enough to call off her plan. Theron still needed to be taught a lesson. For her part, she would be perfectly safe without him. The amphitheater already had security, and there would be police as well. She was a star—they wouldn't let anything happen to her. Who had ever heard of a real-life murder or assault, anyway? Crime was just about as old-fashioned and outdated an idea as letting people give birth to babies out of their own bodies, with no genetic control or enhancement whatsoever.

Weighing it all out, she decided to go for it.

"Nyssa, we love you," shrieked a small throng of teenage girls waiting for her just outside the backstage door.

"One in to commencement," said a producer nervously standing beside her elbow.

"One in," echoed two of his toadies, ready to usher her inside.

She took a deep breath, readying herself. From this point forward it would be one great big whirl of activity and sensation, from preparation to final ovation. A few blinks of the eye and the whole night would be over.

"I'll leave you here," Theron said, his massive primale body framed the triangular doorway. "While I do my check."

Nyssa hesitated. Was she doing the right thing? If somebody *was* after her, she was a fool to let this Guardian out of her sight. "Are you sure I'll be safe?" she heard herself ask.

His brow furrowed. "You've said all along you had nothing to worry about. This is just precaution. Overkill."

"Sure." She managed a thin smile. "All right, then. I'll see you in a bit." Nyssa resisted the urge to go on tiptoes and give him a peck on the cheek.

Not that he would have responded, blockhead that he was. Why couldn't he just be like a mem? Give her all the sex-making she wanted and then leave her alone? Right now, she wanted plenty. Her untouchable crotch was on fire. The sexy little outfit was

making her want to rub herself against Theron, to let him know what she could do to him – for him – if only he would free her.

What was he trying to prove? He had plugged her up, taken control of her body, put her in her sexual place. Over and over. She would refuse him nothing. Not being vain, but she was a sex symbol on the mighty holo, and he was certainly interested. Those erections of his were nearly constant. Why deny himself? Why deny her?

She watched him walk away, down the glowing white ramp, a figure of utterly handsome perfection in his one-piece uniform. Any woman in the cosmos would be beyond proud to call a man like that her mate. It would have to be an obedient, though. Someone ready to submit to all that surging power.

He needed someone to keep him honest, too, though. Whether he knew it or not. She took a few moments now for her young fans, putting her insignia on the personal screens of as many of them as she could reach over the barricade. They shrieked with delight to be acknowledged by their idol.

“Nyssa, please...the show,” the producer cried, in near apoplexy.

With one toady on each arm, she let herself be guided inside. The thrill of preparation was evident everywhere in the backstage area. Men and women hustling to and fro up and down mirrored corridors, objectifiers and grooming robots whirring full speed to prepare her cast of extras and backup singers. And an army of technicians who were readying the mammoth light and energy show.

There were also the hangers-on, gaily arrayed men and women, holonews and gossip purveyors, endorsement seekers and self-appointed cultural experts, all of them flashing their backstage passes in her face, as if that granted them the right to invade her privacy.

Nyssa sighed. Much as she loved the limelight, she also liked the anonymity of the big-city domes where there was too much going on for her to stand out much. She and Theron had enjoyed their own little world under one of those domes, hadn't they? A world full of conflict and sparks and heartache...and unbelievable, indescribable passion.

A lump formed in her throat. Did she really want to betray him? Then she remembered all the bad things. The stupid anti-sex belt. And the way he seemed to run so hot and cold. He wasn't even that good at his job, or he wouldn't have left her like this, anyway.

Did he even care if she might be scared?

Oh, what was the use sorting it out? She wasn't being rational. She just wanted done with it. The time was here to be impulsive. End of story.

“Dromin!” she cried across the wide-open floor of the technical bay. “There you are!”

The mem with the plume hat, his eyes covered in a pair of sophisticated multi-phase glasses, waved enthusiastically. The senior holo-tech was a study in contrasts,

running over to her in his velvet and leather, the hat bristling with state-of-the-art antennas and holo-wires.

"Nyssa, you naughty little thing...spank, spank...you never call anymore. Where have you been? Under a rock?"

She felt a little charge at the word spank. Once upon a time, pre-Theron, that would have been a silly little joke. "Something like that," she laughed nervously, hugging him. "Listen, Dromin, I need a favor."

He dropped clownishly to one knee. "Your wish is my command, m'lady."

She pulled him to his feet. "Stop," she chided, "I'm serious. I need you to do a beam-out at the end of the show."

He arched a gold-flecked brow. "*Tres* interesting...making a secret rendezvous are we? New boyfriend? Girlfriend? Or is it both? Do tell!"

"So you can do it, then? It's not impossible?"

"Child," he scoffed, "it's done all the time. Trust me, there's plenty in this business who don't want to be where they're supposed to."

Nyssa bristled a little. "I'm not running away from anything."

He took her arm. "Didn't say you were. Come with me, we'll work it all out."

A man-sized wall blocked their way. "That's far enough."

Nyssa swallowed hard. "Th-Theron...I..."

"Sir, may I speak with the lady alone?" Theron asked Mem Dromin.

Dromin cast Nyssa a puzzled glance.

"It's okay," she told him, her voice a bit hoarse. "I know this man."

Theron promptly steered her down a nearby corridor filled with dressing rooms. He picked the first empty one and locked the door behind them. Nyssa backed against the far wall, beside the mirror and dressing table. "Theron, I can explain."

His face was stern and resolute. She could barely stand to look into his eyes. "You know the punishment for disobeying me?"

She felt anticipatory tingles down her backside. He was approaching her, reaching beside her on the dressing table to pick up a hairbrush. "But, Theron," she cried. "I didn't do anything."

His lips curled downward. "Don't make this harder on yourself by lying, Nyssa."

"All right, it's true, I was going to try and get away again at the end of the show, using the remote beam. That mem was helping me." There, it felt better to get it out. A part of her was relieved to have been caught anyway. Theron was back now, he would not let her go...and he must have cared a little after all to have not left her in the first place. The only thing she had to get around was the punishment thing.

"Take off your clothes, Nyssa."

"Theron, what are you going to do with that brush?"

"You know the answer to that."

She laughed, though there was nothing very funny going on. "You can't beat me with a *brush*. I'm a holostar."

"Brushes are perfectly appropriate to use on brats, Nyssa, and that's what you are. You were prepared to put yourself and possibly others in danger. That's irresponsible and immature."

"All right, I'm sorry," she conceded. "It was a stupid thing to try and do. Now can we just move on from here?"

"Yes," he said. "After your punishment."

Nyssa's protests turned to a whine. "But, Theron...I have a show to do."

"We'll be done in plenty of time. I've seen how fast you get ready. Now, strip."

Nyssa stomped her foot, making sure he knew how much she hated it...and him. "This isn't fair." She lifted her dress over her head. "People will hear about this."

"The shoes, too."

She made a face, then bent down to undo the laces one by one. A few moments later she stood before him, barefoot, stark naked save for the belt, which she could not remove if her life depended on it.

"This is for your own good," he told her.

"Yes, I'm sure it is." She looked pointedly at the bulge in his crotch.

Theron's jaw tensed. "Turn around, put your palms against the wall."

She did so, her pussy dripping.

"Cheek to the wall."

She took another little half-step forward, gingerly leaning her body.

"Closer."

Oh, god, he wanted it all...her breasts and belly pressed directly against the cold metal. She shuddered at the feel of it, like a lover's hands, alien on her flesh. Her nipples swelled under the icy pressure. She was so humiliated, so exposed, so totally fucking horny.

"Spread your legs," he commanded.

The plug in her ass shifted as she moved. Nyssa stifled a moan.

"You have to learn, Nyssa..." His hand went to the small of her back. Her breathing grew shallow. Her pussy grate moved, very slightly against the wall. Metal scraping metal.

The brush descended on her ass without warning.

She suppressed a yelp. This wasn't playing around, not like his hand or even the crop. This was meant to smart.

The smooth, hard plasticite surface of the brush reverberated against soft woman flesh. This time, there was no respite. The burning continued, straight up to number three and beyond.

Over and over he spanked her, each time moving the brush to a different area of her ass. It hardly mattered. There was fire everywhere, jerking pain and uncontrollable throbbing. Tears stung her cheeks while sobs choked her throat. She begged him to stop, but at a certain point other sensations kicked in. Her nipples engorged and pressed against the wall. Liquid dripped from her sex, the product of erotic shame, and her buttocks clenched and unclenched as he pushed the plug deeper with every strike.

It was a form of fucking—without being in her pussy. Caught between the man's will and the wall, nothing to do but undulate, working her belly until the sweat coated it, until her hair hung limp, until she was a shattered wreck, all pride vanishing in the blistering heat.

"Theron," she called, her voice a searing whisper. "Fuck my ass...like a contract girl, the ones you pass around in your units."

"Nyssa...you're talking crazy."

She turned around, pushing herself against him. "No, I'm not. You said so yourself—sex-making between us can never mean anything. I can't be your mate, so let me be your..."

He held her at bay, her upper arms in his grip, the brush dropped and forgotten. "You're not a prostitute, Nyssa... I never meant to imply such a thing. You're a star and you know it."

"I'm a whore for you." She spoke the truth. "You beat my ass and it made me hot. You can't claim my love but you own my body."

There, she'd said it—the "L" word. The gauntlet was down. Would he care that she was denying him? And how would she respond if he did make a play for her heart? A part of her was still pushing him away, but another part was like a magnet, trying to draw him closer.

Theron's features clouded. She was awakening the predator. She hoped to the stars she knew what she was doing.

"Very well," he growled, taking her hair in his fist. "You want to be possessed? So be it."

Nyssa winced as he clenched tightly. She wanted to beg mercy, but they were past that point now. Looking around for a place to fuck her, he saw the dressing table. One hand still holding her hair, he used the other to sweep it clean, crashing the contents against the back of the door.

He bent her over it facedown. The waist chain of the chastity belt snapped in his fingers like string. She gasped as he withdrew the anal plug and pulled the grate back between her legs. He tossed the ruined device to land with the rest of the table's contents.

"Submit," he advised, plunging a single finger between her swollen pussy lips.

"Oh, yes," she groaned. "Yes, Theron, yes."

"You will climax for me. Now."

Her belly pushed against the table. She scraped her nails on the surface. She was coming...on command. The orgasm shook her like some alien thing, like her entire body was being lifted outside of itself, massaged with raw electricity and redeposited, every atom scrambled into a new position.

Three times he did this to her, each time sifting out more and more of her conscious will. This was only the beginning. The tip of an iceberg. She could spend a lifetime with this man and never know it all. He was primale, and he would only become stronger, more willful. More demanding.

Theron removed his cock, pushing the tip of it against her blushing butt cheek. "You will take my full size this time, Nyssa."

"Yes," she promised, though she had no clue what she might be letting herself in for.

The answer came shortly as he plunged into her hot, gaping canal. All the way to the hilt, sheathing himself.

Theron sighed in anticipation of his next movement. He was going to show his primale nature, she could feel it. His control amazed her. Whereas by this point a mem would begin thrusting in earnest toward conclusion, the primale took a series of deep breaths.

It was after this that she felt the first signs. The fulfilling of what he had said about her taking his full size. Indeed, Theron's cock was changing inside her. Swelling, and lengthening. A tiny bit at a time, but with definite cumulative effect.

She gasped, pounding at the table. The sexual pressure was overwhelming. So good...and yet so powerful. All-conquering.

"You will take it." He clenched her waist with his hands. "You will submit."

"It's...it's so big," she cried in astonishment. "I-I don't know if I can."

His hand cracked against her ass. "You can Nyssa. You must choose to obey, and your mind will compel your body to obey."

Nyssa's insides turned to jelly. For just a moment she had breathing room, but he quickly filled the space, once again pushing her to the limit.

Oh, stars, he was toying with her. Didn't he have anything else in his repertoire? Couldn't he deal with her on any other level besides Domination and submission?

"Theron, I'm as submitted to you as a woman can be. No more, please?"

"You don't know the meaning of the word, Nyssa. You give only what you want. You're a strong and a brave woman. But you live too much for your own immediate desires. And that quality will not serve you well."

Rebellion stirred, as it always did where Theron was concerned. "Damn it," she whimpered. "Why can't you let anything be? You over think everything. You make everything too fucking hard. Can't you go with your instincts...follow your heart?"

And tell me you love me the way I think I love you...

He withdrew nearly all the way, leaving her with only the very tip of his smooth, impervious shaft. "On the contrary, you're the one who makes it hard. You fight what your own body wants. You don't listen to your instincts. Tell me right now what you need, Nyssa, at this instant."

She clenched her fists and pussy both. She tingled and throbbed and ached all over. He was playing one of his mind games with her. Damn the bastard for fucking with her head. Even being overstuffing was better than this. "I need your cock," she conceded, knowing he would never relent.

"How do you need it?"

"However you choose, Theron." As if she had a choice in how she answered. The funny thing was, she liked the sound of the surrender on her lips.

Theron seized his victory. "Very well. I choose to fill you until you lose conscious control of your mind. I choose to push you past pleasure and pain to something else entirely. I choose to break you."

"Then do it...break me, Theron."

Theron bore down. His shaft burned inside her. She felt cock all throughout her insides. She was wickedly skewered, internally branded. The blood pounded in her ears as he kept on increasing. Stars, she was really absorbing him, she was taking the fullness of a primale shaft. The rush was like gas bubbles to the brain, pure intoxication. Never had she felt so female, her every breath a measure of male pleasure. He rocked her, easing in and out, exploding her again and again. Fireworks, shooting higher and higher. No end, not until he decided, and if he wanted, he could keep her in this state forever. Orgasming perpetually. She cried and screamed and wept and transcended all at once. She stared down at her body from above. She felt everywhere at once. In him, with him.

Theron did not climax. "Now you will give your ass to me," he declared, pulling himself out. "You will yield without question. You will take my seed there."

The words poured out of her mouth, luxuriantly animalistic and lust-filled. "Oh, yes...do that."

Theron used her own liquids to lubricate the canal. Nyssa was open and ready, more so than she had expected. Perhaps it was the anal plug she had been wearing that had loosened her up. Theron wasted no time. Using his finger, he did reconnaissance. She sought to relax, darkly savoring her slavish position. For a reward, he gave her an immediate but loving attack – the plunging home of his engorged, pussy-soaked cock.

She spasmed at once, as though he was taking the other, more familiar hole. "That's it, use me, Theron...use me...like an obedient."

"Beg." He punished her with another spank to her twitching posterior. "Beg like an obedient."

"Yes...yes...*Master!*" She let her imagination run wild. What would it be like if she truly belonged to him? If he had the right to take her however and wherever he wanted

because her body was his property? "Please use my body, Master... Please come in my ass."

"Oh, Nyssa..." He pushed deeper and deeper still. They seemed to be on the same wavelength. "If you were mine...I would chain you and cherish you. I would make you my secret slave, free to the world, worshipped by all...kneeling only for me."

"Only...for you," she gasped, following the fantasy, so pretty and hot and good. "Kneeling for your hand and your cock and your crop."

She knew, though, that this would never be enough for him. He would have to have a woman a hundred percent of the time. She would have to be his slave day and night, before the whole world.

"My lovely, savage pet." He stroked her hair.

"Your pet...only yours." Oh, yes, it was simple, at least like this, in the throes of passion. All she had to do was stretch, and take his cock, and feel the wicked burning itch and wait.

Theron's cock thickened and lengthened and he went in further, though not nearly as large as when he was in her pussy. He was respecting her body's limits, showing that while he would take her with every bit of his primale desire, he would never truly force or hurt her. This knowledge made her vulnerable to the man's charms in a whole new, potentially far more dangerous way.

At the same time he was inside her anal canal, he masturbated her with his fingertips on her clit. The world vanished in silent explosion. She lost all sense of time and space. She was naught but a naked, surrendered obedient, like any other, save she had this man, the most phenomenal primale of them all.

She heard him groaning aloud. It was a special sound, one she had come to recognize as signaling that he was just about to come. She'd know it anywhere, out of a crowd of a million orgasming males, and she did not think she would ever hear it enough times. As long as he was making the sound in and with her, that is.

Not with another. That was something she couldn't abide, not at this point anyway.

This was it. His palms pushed on her enflamed ass as he bent over her. His muscular chest was pressed against her back. His teeth bit down into her neck possessively, not painfully. He was letting her have it. The final surge. The payload. The overabundant rush of thick white emission out of the tip of his cock that made him primale. With each thrust he released a fresh burst. So much of it, like he hadn't come in months or years.

Theron's ejaculation triggered other responses. An explosion of warmth spread throughout both their bodies. With his every thrust in her tight little channel, she had come again for him, and that had only increased as he moved to his own climax. Locked together like supernovas, lighting the whole of the universe for one fleeting instant.

At last his body settled down upon her. Their bodies sorting out heartbeats, trading back pulses, separating out where one was supposed to end and other begin. She didn't want it to end, because she knew the questions that would be there. Not to mention the

newfound difficulties between them because of the rules they were supposed to be following. It would be far too much of a truism for either to say it shouldn't have happened. Obviously it had. Was it so wrong to just enjoy the glow a while longer?

She could see he was restless, though. "Let's get cleaned up," he said. "And get you ready for the show."

Nyssa walked with him, dreamlike. The cleansing beams of the waterless shower washed over her, awakening and filling her nerve endings. He stood behind her in the small shower stall, helping her clean her body. She leaned back against him. It was a scene of incredible tenderness and intimacy. Nyssa did not wish to spoil it with words. There was no context for their affection, no future or past, so why bother? It simply had to be what it was.

It wouldn't take much to initiate more sex-making. She sensed his cock could be ready at any point, but he was holding himself back.

The cleansing beams felt like heaven. Warm and pink, pervading her senses all the way to her core. Nyssa closed her eyes, imagining them in some alien landscape, or in each other's arms on a beach, perhaps on a gentle, sandy slope, a light breeze in their hair.

It was a silly fantasy. Immature. Impossible. Theron would never entertain such ideas. He was thinking about work. Or reviewing military strategy manuals. Wasn't he?

He took her hand, helping her out of the sanitizing cylinder. She was grateful, because she was still feeling a little woozy. Theron scooped her up into his arms. His face held no expression. What did this action mean to him? For the millionth time she wished she could understand the primale mind. Was it a bittersweet experience for him as it was for her, knowing that while he could hold her so well and satisfy her passions, he was not meant to be her lifemate. The one who would be with her through thick and thin to the end.

Pushing the thought from her mind, she concentrated on the present experience of pampering. From Theron—the strongest, most infuriating, dominating, and exhilarating man on the face of the planet.

Some time after this—maybe a minute, maybe a week—he called for an objectifier and a dressing machine.

"No, don't go." She touched his arm as he moved to leave her alone. "Stay and watch me. Inspire me."

Theron stood, his eyes drinking her in as she went to work, creating by verbal cue the magic of her first outfit of the night, the one she would open the show with. She tried a dozen things, each time looking for his reaction, the subtle motions of his eyebrows, the licking of his lips...and especially the stirring in his cock.

While she might have millions watching her tonight, she cared only for the opinion of one. For his sake she would weave this one particular look, and a whole show to go with it.

At last, she found the perfect ensemble. Something to match every bit of what she still felt...still tingling and loved, cock-filled and so very feminine. At once the virgin and the whore, the good girl...and the bad.

"You like this one?" she asked softly, knowing that he did.

"Yes," replied Theron, "more than anything."

Her heart soared, knowing that such things were not said lightly by primales.

"Does it hurt much?" He asked about her behind as she moved to the door in her new creation.

She smiled slyly. "A little." She kissed his cheek.

Was it her imagination...or was that the mighty Guardian blushing?

Chapter Eleven

Theron had never known that a female could look so incredible—fem or otherwise. As beautiful as Nyssa had looked that morning, she had been a mere waif in rags compared to now. Granted, he had good reason to be biased, having just partaken in incredible, mind-blowing sex with her, but he was not the only one to see the change in her. Nyssa's show was only two songs old and already some of the old-timers standing in the wings were saying it was Nyssa's best performance ever. She was outshining the very layzite beams themselves, pulsing flashes of red and orange, their energies timed to the rhythm of Nyssa's angelic voice, which even now was carrying across every populated world.

He knew that he could die at this moment and feel fulfilled.

The chosen stage was the perfect backdrop for her, with its shimmering light falls and popping gem glows. Nyssa had ordered up a last-minute volcano. The illusion of liquid surrounded her, inviting the eye to drink in her perfect, near naked form. The sequined top was in the latest fashion with thin shoulder straps, the material hanging just to the middle of her nipples. Her belly had been temporarily tattooed with a pair of dragons, one above the other. Around her waist she wore a simple silver rope to which were attached strips of glowing cloth. Depending on her motions, one could almost catch a glimpse between her legs at her honeyed pussy, but not quite. The same was true of her luscious ass cheeks.

The strips were red and black, like the dragons and the sequined top, which provided a good camouflage, should anyone get too close a look at the crimson color of her ass.

She was playing the dual part of virgin sacrifice and wanton fire goddess. A strip of cloth was wrapped about her head and she had changed her hair color to black. The songs, the dance, all of it she had contrived in half an interval before the show.

The producer had nearly had heart failure. Personally, Theron was tickled. Nyssa was indeed a woman without fear, without hesitation. She did not compromise, did not back down. And she was so damned sexy to boot. He could take her all over again, right on that stage, with her bare feet, bangled ankles and half-bared breasts. He knew the taste of those nipples she was showing off. He knew how to make that ass dance for real.

By the Code—was he ever going to be rid of this hard-on? Sex-making was supposed to relieve pressure, not add to it. Only with his intended mate did a primale ever experience this sort of torture. The only solution was to seal the bond...and then go wild. It was a standing joke among Guardians that after the mating ritual they needed at least a week with their new partner to get the built-up sex-making urges out of their

systems. It wasn't unusual for a newly mated obedient to be taken six, seven times a day for the first few months, if not longer.

In Theron's case, those urges were now getting out of control. He would have to learn to accept masturbation on a regular basis, or else make do with hired women. He could never dishonor an obedient by laying claim to her, with Nyssa's image so indelibly imprinted in his mind. The poor woman would forever be trying to live up to something that no one woman could.

Who could equal perfection, after all? Not that Theron was blind—he knew the woman's faults, and he had pity on any mems involved with her in the future. Especially any who might seek a long- or short-term contract with her for exclusive affections. Nyssa would chew them up and spit them out. Her diminutive size and seeming innocence were but a front for a most willful heart. He knew her sensitive side, too, though. He knew the pain she kept hidden.

How wrong he had been initially judging her by virtue of her profession. She wasn't like the other stars on the hologrid. Not like Senya who once upon a time had teased and nearly seduced him while seeking his warrior's heart as a prize in a pathetic game she played with her indolent friends.

Had not a battle intervened, forcing him away for a time from her influence, he might well have lost his wits. As it was, upon his return, his mind had cleared. Enough to see through her, and to follow her one dark night to the apartment of a holo director twice her age.

His illusion of her shattered, along with every bit of respect he'd had for that entire medium of entertainment. Personally, he found the Narthians less distasteful, for they made no attempts to disguise their harmful intent. Theron had kept the emotional scar buried deep, though Nyssa had nearly uncovered it once.

She was clever when it came to sniffing out what made him tick. Another reason to be sure to never mate with her. He would never get away with a damned thing.

But it would be one hell of a ride, wouldn't it?

He had to smile at that. Unfortunately, this was followed by tugging on his heartstrings. Another strange new experience he was having from this particular mission. Every time he thought of Nyssa, he felt this kind of melancholy, knowing she would belong to others and never to him.

Nyssa was starting a new song and the crowd was going wild. A sold-out house, and thousands more watching in packed hovers and floaters. She was sure to get calls for lots of encores. Theron hoped it wouldn't go on too long. He thought that afterwards, they could talk...

Nyssa's voice rose to a delicious high note as she began her love ballad. Was it his imagination, or was she smiling extra hard each time her eyes panned in his direction? His heart fluttered, more like a fem schoolgirl than a hardened warrior.

No wonder it was said a strong man should beware of love, it could make a man weak and bring him to his knees. That body of hers gyrating, the luscious curves, the

very definition of femininity, the eyes shaded deep green tonight, the shining skein of black hair, darker than the Caves of Soron at the bottom of the Doom World.

Nyssa...his heart called...my Nyssa. How close he had already come to confessing his true feelings. Back in the dressing room, in the shower, her body pressed against his with such innocent sweetness. There was no way she could have known what that would do to his blood. It had been a gesture of self-offering, one of seeking to lean on his power. He had nearly sealed his union with her right there.

Kneeling before her with that towel, touching every place on her body—that had nearly led to his confession of love, to his pledge. To protect and possess her, her every breath, her very soul. Forever.

Nyssa...the only home his soul had ever known.

Theron caught the microscopic glint out of the corner of his eye. A shard of light. Foreign. Unfriendly. Targeting. Homing in on the stage. *Damn it*—he'd fallen asleep at the wheel.

Instinct kicked in now, autonomic functioning hyper-powered by accelerated brainpower and lightning-quick reflexes. If he were too late...he would never live with himself...

Time slowed to clicks, frame by frame. He pushed aside the clueless security men like rag dolls—momentarily stunning them but they would recover. He would have to leap, try and push her out of the way. The weapon had already been fired. An energy beam, ultra-sophisticated, probably keyed in to Nyssa's heartbeat or maybe even her genetic coding. The thing would pass like butter, harmless, through anyone or anything else. And it wouldn't stop, until it got to her.

Nyssa couldn't tell, she didn't know. Neither did the rocking crowd, singing along with her happy hit. "Love you now," she sang. "Love you then. Love you why and love you when." His ears caught the sound of the assassin's weapon. And also his breathing and his pulse.

Later he would track him down. And tear him limb from limb.

Nyssa screamed. Everything converged—an implosion center stage, her voice emanating from the microphone, Theron's flying tackle, trying to move her out of harm's way. The death ray coming too close still, way, way too close. He was too late. His mind sorted the sizzles and cracks. He grabbed her and held her in his arms as they went down together. *By the universe, let her be all right, please.*

With a thud he landed, his shoulder absorbing the impact of the collision. A fraction of a second later, time speeded back up to normal and the sensations all came rushing in. Pandemonium. With his super-auditory functions Theron could hear the assassin curse, way back in the audience, a hundred rows or more. He was slipping his gun back under his long coat. He was not going to risk a second shot. He was calling it a night. Theron tried to visually follow his trail as he ran, the man's scent and breath emanations both, but there were too many people in the way.

Meanwhile up front, security was swarming—human and robot officers alike. Nyssa's staff was rushing in from offstage and the fans were coming up out of the audience. Theron feared Nyssa would be mobbed. His every protection instinct snapped back to life.

"Stay back," he roared. He must have had the devil in his eyes, because the lot of them stopped short, even the gleaming silver police robots. Laying Nyssa flat on the ground, gentle as could be, Theron called her name. He was hunched over her in maximum protective mode.

"Nyssa? Can you hear me?"

Her eyes opened, weak, confused. She saw it was Theron and smiled very faintly. "I guess someone didn't like the show, huh?"

"I guess not." He touched her cheek, emotions raging. "Just rest, Nyssa. You're going to be all right, baby."

There was blood on her stomach, red staining the red of her costume. She'd been hit. He covered the hole in her with the heel of his hand. Had the blast been sustained, it would have cauterized the wound. She would have had her insides fried, but as it was now, she was in danger of bleeding to death.

Why couldn't it have been me? Why couldn't I have taken it to the chest? No one would have missed me in this world, not for half a second.

"Fetch a medidroid," he ordered. "And stars help you all if it's not the best one in the system!"

"Theron..." Her voice was fading and her eyes were glazing over. He beat back a wave of panic. He had seen it go this way before on the battlefield. Last words, whispered to comrades. "Yes, baby," he kept his voice calm as possible, "what is it?"

"The...show," she breathed. "Did *you*...like it?"

He blinked back tears. The first ones of his adult life. How courageous she was—as much as any Guardian he had ever known. "I did, Nyssa. It was the best thing I've ever seen...next to you, of course."

Her smile angled rakishly, even as she fought back a grimace. She was having trouble breathing. "You're trying to...suck up," she accused. "And it...won't work...you still owe me...for...the hairbrush."

Theron's mind went to darkness. The ice-cold thoughts of a warrior. Someone would pay for this. The shooter and anyone who had ever so much as smiled at him or given him a cup of coffee...

"You had it coming, Nyssa, and you know it."

"Theron..." She grabbed at him. "I—"

She lost consciousness in his arms. Theron held her to his chest. The medidroid was there, hovering, but he would not let it get any closer. Unexpected new passion was clouding his reason. Raising his eyes instead to the stars above the amphitheater, he let loose a scream. A warrior's cry. The roar of the stricken lion.

There was only one who could get through to him now.

A single voice, a single hand on his shoulder...the last person he would expect in the world.

"Son," said Morax gently, "let her go. Let the droid do its work."

Theron released her. He was shaking, oblivious to his surroundings. Morax gathered him into his own arms. "Release it," he whispered, "don't be ashamed. The Code be damned — we are human beings, not machines."

Theron's tears soaked the old warrior's tunic. The General accepted his sobs, and treasured them, one soldier to another. Theron had not known he had such feeling in him — he would never have dreamed of such a thing even a day ago.

Had not the old man been here, he did not know what he would have done. "Sir, this was all my fault," he confessed once the worst of the emotion had passed.

"What are you talking about, Theron? You were a hero. You averted Nyssa's certain assassination."

"Yes, Sir." Could he tell Morax about his distraction? About how his loins had clouded his judgment and critically weakened his reflexes?

Morax patted his shoulder. "Be strong, son. There is no place here for guilt. Guilt is the mind killer. Nor must you allow yourself to doubt. Your heart is telling you she must live and you must allow no other possibility to exist. Nyssa will do the same."

Theron had many questions. How could he be sure Nyssa was still alive, much less how strong she was? And why was the Commander-in-Chief of the Guardians here, attending a holo concert on a remote satellite world in the first place?

The floating medidroid moved quickly, joined by two others. They were spherical in shape, approximately three feet across and bristling with special arms and dispensers. They did some initial stabilization work and then wrapped Nyssa in a medicon, an airtight transport container designed to move her quickly to a restoration facility. They would fly under police escort.

"Go to her," said the General, warding off any opportunity for inquires on his part. "Don't let her be alone."

Theron obeyed, though he walked as a ghost to the nearby police cruiser that would take him to Nyssa. Never had he felt so scared in all his life. *Please, he begged of the stars. Let her live. I will never spank her again or disturb her. I will let her go...I will let her be happy without me. I promise.*

* * * * *

Nyssa's world collapsed like a temp-bubble, its purpose served, conveying matter from one point to another. She could hear the voices around her, but nothing made sense. Theron was gone; he had been holding her and that had been her safety, her protection. Getting shot was nothing compared to losing him. She would have taken a hundred blasts so long as he was by her side.

But it was a little hard to say that when your lips weren't working. When your whole body was limp and you had to depend on people to lift you up and carry you and you weren't even sure if you were dreaming or awake or if you've maybe died outright and gone to some different plane of existence.

Some place without color, where bizarre and random shapes passed by and where the only memories are those of the dressing room, Theron behind her, pounding at her with his manhood, making her not care if she lived a second longer or if any man ever gave her the time of day.

Was there ever a time she didn't know him? Hard to imagine now...

Presently she heard blipping and saw a lot of small silver arms, spindly robot arms, more like wires and antennae poking in the air about her. Inhaling, she caught the scent of condensed sterility.

I'm in a restoration facility, she thought. I must not be dead yet.

"Nyssa, can you hear me?" The blue-suited doctor was so close to her face she could see up his nostrils. He had hairs in need of trimming.

Hardly the sort of sight one would pick after a near-death experience, she chuckled to herself. Fortunately, she did not laugh aloud. That would have hurt. A lot.

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

She blinked. "If you need me to figure that one out, you're in more trouble than I am."

The doctor, a member of the star physicians' guild, cleared his throat. "I think she's going to be all right. We caught the wound in time. The DNA knits healed nicely. She won't be getting up and dancing anytime soon, though."

Nyssa looked around the light-bathed room, pure as a freshly fallen star. She was sitting up, in a perfect position to see everything. There were a dozen or more top officials, doctors and nurses and a couple of holo reporters. Not one of the faces interested her, except for... "Theron!"

She made no attempt to hide her joy. Let the droidarazzi report what they liked. The man was a hero—*her* hero. She might have gone unconscious, but she remembered enough. He had knocked her out of the way, saving her life. "All of you," she declared, "leave us. I want to talk to the Guardian alone."

"You heard her," said the medic. "Let's give the lady some peace."

Nyssa waited until they were alone. She grinned. "Come here and get a hug, you big lug."

Theron approached, quite stiff. "I don't think you're in any condition for hugs."

She looked down at the flexi-bandage wrapped around her waist. "Maybe not," she admitted, "but you could kiss me."

He frowned. "I'm not sure that would be a good idea either."

Nyssa cocked her head. "What are you talking about...back in the dressing room you...I mean, we..." She trailed off. It wasn't her imagination, was it? There had been a breakthrough once the belt was off, pardon the pun?

"I think we should leave the past in the past," Theron said curtly. "Don't you?"

Oh...so it was time to play flip-flop again, was it? Now you want me, now you don't. The primale's favorite game, it seemed. Except this time she wasn't up for games. Not with Theron or anyone else. "No better place for it." She glared at him. "Along with all those other things in life that don't matter."

He thrust out his chin, taking the hit. "I came to see how you were." He declined the opportunity to spar. "That's all."

"I think you can see I'm just fine, Captain." She cut him off at the knees. "I guess that concludes your business, then."

"Yes...it does."

"Good."

"If you ever need anything..."

"Trust me, I won't."

"Suit yourself."

Callous bastard. "I will, don't worry."

Theron turned and walked out, giving her the last word. How could he be such a jerk? She never even had a chance to say thank you.

Nyssa reached for the first thing she could grab on the shelf beside her. It was a handheld diagnostic device. For her purposes, however, it would make quite a fine projectile.

Theron was gone by the time her missile reached the doorway, however. In his place was another man, much older, wearing the same kind of uniform. His reflexes were quick. "Do you greet all your visitors so warmly?" He snatched the thing out of midair.

"Who the fuck are you?" Nyssa demanded.

"I am Morax," he replied. "General of the Nation. Commander-in-Chief of the Guardians."

Nyssa snorted. "If you expected to impress me with titles, you picked a really bad day."

"Yes," he smiled thinly, "you have had quite an ordeal. We are just glad that you are going to be okay."

Nyssa narrowed her gaze in recognition. "You said you were in charge of the Guardians, right? That would make you Theron's boss, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact it would."

"Good. Then you're the one I need to talk to. I would like to bring him up on formal charges."

The senior Guardian's eyebrow rose. "What sort of charges?"

"You name it—he's done it. Harassment, kidnapping, assault...rape."

The other brow went up. "Are you sure we're talking about the same Theron? The one sent to guard you? You say he forced himself on you sexually?"

Nyssa fought back a blush as she thought of all the moaning she'd done with the man—and the begging. Still, she had a principle to uphold. "For all intents and purposes, yes." She stuck to her guns. "And he struck me repeatedly with a hairbrush, and he put a...a belt on me."

Morax's eyes lit up with understanding. "Ahh...Fem Dekalia spoke of this with me. Theron put you under discipline."

Nyssa swooned. Had the High Councilor broadcast on holo what was going on between them?

"I refuse to discuss this any further with you," she pronounced. "Not only are you a man but you are a total stranger."

"It is true, you have never met me," he acknowledged, "and it's certainly a fact that I am male...but I am not entirely a stranger to you, young lady."

Nyssa was rapidly losing patience. "What is that supposed to be? Some kind of riddle?"

The old man smiled enigmatically. "I suppose in a way it is. The reason I am not a stranger to you, despite our never having been introduced, is because we share a bond of a different kind. I'm your father, Nyssa. Your biological father."

Nyssa's mouth gaped. In two days of surprises, one after another, this one topped them all. "But...but no one can know that," she stammered.

"An exception was made in your case. You have been designed for a special purpose. To fulfill a place in the society requiring unprecedented energy and strength."

"Don't tell me," she couldn't help but quip. "Vonda's getting her own holoshow?"

"Actually, you are going to take your biological mother's place one day on the High Council."

"My mother?" Nyssa blinked. "But I don't have—" Of course...now it all made sense. "Fem Dekalia," she whispered.

"Yes. Her egg...and my sperm. With a little tweaking." Morax gave her a wink. "I think the results speak for themselves."

Nyssa ran the new information through her gray matter, to see what else would fall into place. "So that's why you pulled one of your best men out of the field to protect me."

"Correct again."

"Does he know?"

"Only partially. He knows of the connection to Fem Dekalia, but not to me."

"So he was part of the plan to deceive me?" She drew her conclusion, designed to condemn Theron afresh.

"He operated under orders, to protect your life. And that he did."

"Yes," she said, barely disguising her contempt. "He did his duty."

Morax studied her. "Do you still wish to file charges?"

She pouted her lips. "No."

He was silent a moment. "You know this is none of my business, and I can imagine you are pretty angry with all of us right now, but I want you to know something...if you're willing to hear it."

Nyssa fought to keep herself together. Before meeting Theron she would probably have thrown a tantrum. But he had taught her a thing or two, after all. Obnoxious and heartless as he might have been, he was right about her behavior. She did have a selfish streak in her. And maybe, just maybe, other people could be hurting, too, sometimes, besides herself.

"I am," she said. "But after you tell me, will you give me some time to myself. Please?"

"Yes," he smiled approvingly, "that I can do. What I wanted to tell you," declared the steel-eyed man with the noble, timeless features, "is that, while I have never met you, I have sought to keep up with your life. To learn as much as I could about you. And I am so very proud, Nyssa. You are a fine young woman. But Theron is a fine young man, too. He does not share my blood, but I know him as much as any father could know his son. He does care about you. Whatever happened between you—and I will never interfere, or seek information from either one of you—I do believe he acted with a good heart. The Theron that I saw tonight was not the same man I dispatched to protect you. This Theron has feelings that have awoken in his heart. This Theron has passion. You have brought this out in him...and I think he is bringing something out in you, too, isn't he? Don't try to answer now. Don't try to think. Just let it settle...let time work its magic. This connection between you is strong. It has not yet run its course."

Nyssa turned away, her head on the pillow. "Thank you, Morax. You are...a good man."

He leaned down and kissed her forehead. "Sleep," he whispered, "my daughter."

He turned off the lights at the door on his way out. She called to him just as he was about to close it behind him.

"Yes, Nyssa?"

"What is Theron going to do now?"

"He is going to hunt the one who tried to kill you. And all those others who may have been involved."

"I don't want him to get hurt," she said impulsively.

"He won't, child."

"That doesn't mean I like him...or that I want to see him. I just don't want him hurt."

"I understand. Get some sleep now."

Nyssa closed her eyes, but no sleep came. A single thought crowded everything else out, including the possibility of rest. *My life for his...let Theron live, and I will give up my own existence, my empty fame, and my life built on my own impetuous ego.*

She buried her head in the pillow. This was new territory. Regret. And guilt. She had given him such trouble. Made his job impossible. All he was trying to do was keep her alive. She didn't give a damn about the assassin. She would give him her life as a trade if that's what that cold-blooded, cowardly killer wanted so badly.

Theron had so much to live for. So many things beyond her own talents and capabilities. Personally, she would never, ever give him trouble again if she lived. She would never harass him or even talk to him.

The thing was, it was going to be awfully lonely and complex figuring things out without him. Yesterday she was a happy-go-lucky holostar. Today she was a High Councilor's daughter. A General's daughter. Genetically engineered for some special purpose that had required a fundamental breaking of the rules of gene secrecy.

A new thought occurred to her now. If Morax was her father, what did that make her? Stars alive—she was fifty percent primale! Yes, indeed, the surprises just kept coming, one after the other.

One thing made sense, though. Given her quirky biology, it was no wonder she couldn't make up her mind whether to keep taking Theron to bed...or take him out to some personal combat simulation facility and knock his stubborn block off.

She had to chuckle a little at that one. Like she could ever take him down. The movement hurt her side, but stars, did she need that little bit of levity right about now.

Chapter Twelve

Theron crouched behind the wall of gray, impervious ice. Silent as a stalking cat, he waited for the sentry to circle back on his rounds. A six-day beard covered his face, well coated with frost and miniature icicles. He wore no gloves, though the temperature barely exceeded negative ten degrees Celsius. Keeping his body at a warm and constant temperature in virtually any environment was part of his primale genetic coding.

So was the ability to track a pack of killers across deep space to a slag of an ice world with the intent of eliminating them, one by one. So far he had finished off three of them, the perimeter guards. Their bodies now lay under snowdrifts, eventual gifts for the white wolves of the planet, nearly twice the size of their Earth counterparts. It was the perfect hiding place, really, and had a vengeful primale not caught scent of their trail, they might have gone on with their intended killing.

Theron had tracked the original assassin to a deep-space liner. He'd then followed him through three ship changes to this place. His initial reconnaissance had indicated that there were ten to fifteen men inside the main igloo-like structure. It would be simple enough to detonate the lot of them, but he needed to keep at least one alive so he could find out once and for all what they were up to.

Granted, Nyssa was going to be High Councilor, but even assuming they knew that, why try and kill her? These men weren't lunatics—they were well-organized and funded. They had some agenda other than some idle hatred of holostars. Morax had provided little help, other than to give him a green light to pursue the matter wherever it led. Which is why he was here, poised like an ice panther, ready to strike out of the silent, frozen void. A day so cold that even the sun stood blue and still in the sky.

The sentry never knew what hit him. Theron put him down quickly and easily. He had no wish to torture unnecessarily. Much of his initial anger was gone. Now it was a mission. A sacred duty. Nyssa herself meant nothing. She was not his future; they had both said as much in the hospital. The fact that she was there each time he closed his eyes, the fact that her spectral image crawled into the furs each night with him, sidling up and begging for sex meant nothing. She was a dream, a will-o'-the-wisp in her fascinating costumes, blowing her kisses to him, jingling her chains, beckoning.

Always beckoning. Beckoning in the middle of the night, hammering at his will until he was forced to empty his cock of semen. Twice, sometimes three times before the dawn. And during the day as well, whenever he closed his tired eyes, or drew an unguarded breath. And off he would go again, to the nearest hygiene room, to whip out his burning, inflamed cock.

Running his hand up and down, pumping his ass and fucking Nyssa...always Nyssa. He'd bonded to her, and that was the problem. His once in a lifetime primale

urge had been imprinted, given her shape. There would not ever be another woman for him. No matter what he did. Or where he went. Every prostitute would turn into her and every contract woman, and even any obedient he might marry. She was everywhere, stamped on every face and every pussy. And the harder he sought to erase or devour that image, the more it would devour him.

Was there a name for this curse he was under? Maybe after he died of misery they would name it for him. Theron's Affliction.

He didn't bother picking up the sentry's weapon. It would only slow him down. If his hands failed him, he had his hunting knife. And his teeth. Probably his look alone could kill by now. Among the ancient warriors, there was a thing called the trail of blood—a path of vengeance that the warrior strode, each step making him wilder and wilder, like the beasts of nature. If the warrior did not slake his vengeance after so many steps, it was said, he would turn in to one of those beasts.

Good. At least he would have a place in the world.

No such luck, though. The assassins were slow and sloppy. One by one, he took them out, none of them ever knowing the fate of their predecessors. Eight were down by the time he breached the outer doors. Two more charged him simultaneously as he entered—always a foolish maneuver against a trained Guardian. Taking them one in each hand, he demolished the required bones, ending their illicit existences.

Several more met their makers as he made his way to the control room. Talk about pathetic security. A small child could have wandered in here.

"What the—" A man in black leaped from his chair as Theron ripped open the steel door with his bare hands.

A second tossed a knife, which Theron deflected. He returned the favor, landing his own directly between the man's eyes. The one in black took out a pistol, but he wasn't shooting just yet. There was a third sitting at a card table, very quietly watching what was happening, his eyes looking for some kind of escape. That was the leader. Theron would get to him in a minute.

"Fuck," said the man in black, fingers trembling on the stock of the gun, "it's a primale. What do you want me to do, boss?"

"What do you think?" croaked the skinny bald man in the white silk shirt. "Kill the fucker dead."

Too late. Theron had the drop on him. Kicking the pistol from his hand, he spun the man around and brought him to the floor.

"You're making a mistake," the leader said as Theron approached.

"And what mistake would that be?" Theron asked, standing calmly over the man who'd shot Nyssa.

"You're taking the wrong side. You're betraying your own people and you don't even know it."

Theron gathered him by the collar and lifted him six inches off the floor. "Talk," he said.

The dangling assassin gurgled as he spilled his guts. "I know you want to kill me on account of the woman – but you don't know who she really is. That's not just a fem you fucked, primale."

Theron growled, ready to rip out his throat.

"I swear to god," he wailed, "she's a half-breed, a freak. You don't believe me? Ask General Morax."

"What would he tell me?"

"Morax is her bio-father, that's what he'd tell you – if he didn't deny it first."

"You're a liar," Theron thundered. "A no-good filthy liar."

"Ask him," the man repeated. "Ask him yourself. Ask him about Project X while you're at it – they're going to fuck with the genetic code big-time in a few years, my super-power friend. So if you care at all about the purity of the subgenders, you better wise up in a hurry."

Theron had interest in only one thing now. "Who's funding this?"

"I don't know, I swear it. We all get recruited in secret. His name is Malthusalas. I've never met him. He makes sure we have what we need – credits, equipment."

"You're going to die now," Theron explained. "Any last requests?"

"Yeah – wise up, pilgrim. Before it's too late."

Theron combed the facility afterward for records. He found little of use. More out of symbolism than anything, he set the entire place on fire, watching it burn from his nearby encampment. The heat made him horny and he jerked off again to images of Nyssa.

Could there be any truth to it? Could Fem Dekalia's daughter also be the daughter of his commanding officer, his trusted mentor? It would certainly explain her strength of will and her cunning. But a female with primale genetics? It was impossible...almost blasphemy. Everything he had learned, everything society stood for was built upon the purity of the sub-genders. That was the way of the nation. The true and right order of human life.

What justification could his superiors have had for violating it? And what of poor Nyssa? Condemned to have a nature at war with itself – male and female elements in one skin. She would go mad eventually, wouldn't she? How would she find any happiness, a companion to care for her? Suddenly a chasm was opening beneath him. Whereas a few short intervals ago he had one set of enemies, a band of outlaws ranged against the woman to whom he'd bonded, he must now face the possibility that the entire state could be working against her interest. Using her as a pawn, or worse, as some kind of guinea pig.

In that event, Theron would have to become an outlaw himself.

It was not a prospect he relished, but he might very well have no choice. Doomed as he was not to enjoy her, Nyssa was, for all intents and purposes his woman. As far as his body knew – his fearsome will – she was the *one*. The female he was programmed to protect and defend. At the cost of his own life.

Returning to his shuttle, Theron prepared himself for space flight. It was time to pay a little surprise visit to his old mentor and commander.

Chapter Thirteen

Nyssa was no good without him. Her body had healed stronger than ever, but all it wanted was the man's touch. Theron...Theron...Theron. She was sick of him. She couldn't even make sex with anyone. Just the thought of it made her pussy dry up and freeze. Like the grate was back over it, like she was wearing the belt, like she only had the right to spread her legs for him, waiting dutifully for him to unlock the key.

Well, screw that. He wasn't even here. And that was another thing—from the moment he left, she had been worried sick about him. He couldn't at least drop her a scan, something, anything to let her know he was still alive? It was bad enough having to live with knowing he was out there in deep space risking his life to find the people who had tried to kill her.

The man was inconsiderate and selfish. Imagine him calling her that? What did he do for anyone else—life-saving aside? Did he have the first clue of how to be in a relationship? How to think about anyone else's thoughts and feelings? Never had she met anyone more inept at male-female negotiations. How was she supposed to interpret the things that came out of his mouth? He told her that she was nothing more than a whore to him and she was supposed to take that to mean he didn't want her feeling responsible for taking his virginity? He told her she meant nothing to him, and she was supposed to see that as some noble self-sacrifice?

Theron was really getting under her skin. And of all times, when she was supposed to be concentrating on learning the work of the Council. Politics was complicated. A whole lot more so than the grid, though she wasn't sure which was less of a circus. Departments and budgets. Hearings and projections. Protests and quotas. Honestly, she wished she could just go back to being Vonda and holo-fucking anything that walked.

For now she was lying low, public identity-wise. Her new bio-parents wanted her off the hologrid, but they didn't want her true identity exposed. Between the two of them, they had an endless list of things for her to do. It was like they were trying to make up in a single week for twenty-seven years of not parenting. She picked the stuff up quickly enough, and though she wasn't about to tell anyone, she found it kind of interesting.

She tried to make up little games along the way, too. The nature of these she kept to herself. One of them was called "Strip Political Science". She employed a robot, specially equipped, of course. This one was more fun when she got the answers wrong. To begin with, she would stand in front of the robot, which would ask her questions. For each wrong answer, she would have to give up an article of clothing.

Once naked, she would have no clothes to "pay" the robot with. From this point on, it was her ass that would suffer. Bending facedown over the desk or a handy chair, she

would continue the lesson. The robot's cold metal hand would swat her, soaking her pussy. She would think of Theron and the hairbrush. The way he had so beautifully mastered her, bringing her to ecstasy.

Another variation involved attaching a dildo to the robot's torso. She would then let herself be fucked by it, either facedown or on all fours, as she attempted to elaborate on fine points of law and custom. Wrong answers meant withdrawal. Right answers earned her swift, deep thrusts.

She could often come this way, though she had to be careful not to get carried away in her games of pretend self-denial. If ever she said no to the robot, begging it to stop, it would, at once. Hard as she tried, she could not program it to the subtlety of her female needs. Nyssa wanted conquest, captivation. Theron knew what that meant—he knew how to read her, how to push her just far enough, how to break her in all the ways she subconsciously wanted.

After a while, she started feeling guilty about taking pleasure this way while Theron was out there in such danger. She experimented with forms of self-torture. Beating her own ass with a hairbrush, and not letting herself come afterwards. She even tried self-bondage. One morning a servo-robot had to cut handcuffs off her. She had spent the entire night on her back on the mattress, with her hands attached overhead to the bedpost. She then let the key slip off the mattress, thereby trapping herself.

At times like that she wished the primale side of her genetics had included a little super strength. As it was, the Council had decided to give her the intellectual gifts only. She thought that a little unfair, though Morax had told her it had to do with concerns over female hormone balance. Dekalia took her aside and offered a different, more likely explanation.

"The primales don't want women who can equal or exceed them, dear. They're a rather insecure lot. So we allowed them to keep their strength superiority, which is obviously the least important advantage, though they think it's the most important."

Primals were all about ego—that much was clear. Although she was one, too, so she had to eat a little humble pie from time to time. Actually, she was enjoying the company of both her parents when they weren't being too overbearing. She liked the rest of her routine, too, the exercise and meditational disciplines. Sexual frustrations and Theron worries aside, she was ready to plow ahead for months if need be.

But then one day she got the word that she had been waiting for with bated breath. Theron had completed his mission and was just now on his way home. The message came from her father, though the strange part about it was that he didn't want her to tell anyone or to make any effort herself to contact him.

"You'll see him soon enough," Morax said. "We need to let him travel in peace for the time being. He'll be back in another week and then he and I have a little unfinished business. After that he's all yours."

Nyssa attempted to inform her father that under no circumstances did she actually want the man, but he broke the comm-link before she could get a word in edgewise.

Well, at least she didn't have to worry that he was alive. Now she had to think about seeing him, though, and what might happen if some of those tamped-down emotions inside her came spilling out.

The results might not be pretty. Not to mention very safe for bystanders. Maybe they could get space on the grid. The first ever he said-she said primale head-to-head conflict. At least something profitable would come out of the whole mess.

Nyssa called for her robot. It was time for Strip Political Science. She had a feeling this particular session might go long into the night.

"How's your battery supply?" she asked the machine.

"I have one hundred solars reserve," the machined replied.

Wow...a straight century of spanking. Maybe that would get Theron off her mind. Though somehow, she doubted it.

* * * * *

Theron discovered the tracker microbe in the bottom of his coffee receptacle just a day outside earth's orbit. He should have known better than to think he was traveling under the radar. Guardian Command would never let him go without monitoring him. In ordinary times he would be thankful. Brother primales had each other's backs. Should anything happen to him they would still be able to track his ship.

In light of what the leader of the assassins had said, however, he had to wonder if Morax was spying on him. Trying to make sure he stayed right where they wanted him.

So much for the element of surprise. He toyed with the idea of evasive maneuvers—dumping the microbe and heading back into deep space, but that would only delay the inevitable. Besides, if Nyssa was in danger, he could not afford to waste any more time. Perhaps he ought to go and get her now and spirit her away to safety.

But they would be watching him. If he tipped his hand as to his true intentions, they would watch her, too. Maybe even detain her. No, the only way was to play it cool. To go ahead and meet with Morax, size up the situation and look for a quiet opportunity later. If all else failed, he could fight his way out and go for Nyssa.

Truly, this whole enterprise broke his heart. Morax was the one man he trusted above all others. He was the living embodiment of truth, of the rightness of the sub-genders. If Morax should prove false, what more would he have? Nothing but shadows and memories, old scars, and false hopes.

As for Nyssa, she was lost to him, too. Although he might rescue her, she would never again be what she had been to him. They would never be able to share the kind of intimacy and passion they had known. And that was what hurt more than anything. For this betrayal alone, he might well be forced to kill his beloved mentor.

Theron found Morax in his sitting room, occupying one of two gray bamboo-cite chairs, the only furniture in the room. The apartment he kept on the three-thousandth floor of the Government Cylinder was sparse by most mem or fem standards. With its

bare walls, slate floors and opaque view ports, however, it suited the personality of the Guardian's top officer.

"I would tell you I've been expecting you," Morax smiled, "but you already knew that."

Theron handed him the microbe spy device.

"Won't you sit down?" Morax offered in exchange for the tiny silver ball, no bigger than a grain of dust.

To other than primale eyes, the thing would have gone unnoticed. To these men however, it might as well be the size of an ancient basketball.

"This is not a social call," Theron informed him.

"I didn't ask you to sit for social reasons." Morax snapped his fingers, signaling for a serving robot. He was wearing a white robe, open to the waist. His still-muscular chest was well revealed.

Theron occupied the opposing chair. *Rather like chess, he thought, without the board.* "No thank you," he told the robot that offered him a tall, thin tube of colored liquid.

Morax took one and waved the machine away. "I suppose you would like it confirmed?" he cut to the chase. "The origin of Nyssa's genetics?"

"Yes."

"She's mine. And Dekalia's. She will head the Council. And the Guardians."

"No woman can command primales."

"She's not just a woman. She has my blood."

"What you've done...is an abomination," Theron said bluntly.

Morax downed his drink. "She didn't seem so abominable before, Theron. When you were making sex with her...rutting like a couple of pack wolves."

Theron gripped the edges of the chair. "Morax, I honor you like no other. But I can and will kill you."

"Probably," the elder acknowledged. "But that won't help you take care of her now, will it."

"She's not my responsibility." Theron stiffened.

"The hell she isn't!" Morax pounded the edge of the chair. Theron had never seen the man so impassioned. "My daughter is devoted to you. She worships the ground you walk on. Though she's too damned stubborn to admit it."

Theron's first impulse was denial. "If you'd seen what I have, Morax, you would sing a different tune."

"Bah," he scoffed. "You are as pigheaded as she is. You are as in love with her as she is with you, though neither one of you will admit it."

"We shared sex, Morax. That isn't love."

"It's a damned good start. And sex isn't just sex with primales. You know that full well."

"With obedients, yes. Not with fems, or whatever in blazes she is."

Now it was Morax's turn to display the fury of the offended primale. "You may be younger and stronger, boy," he pointed a still formidable finger, "but so help me, if you do not retract that statement, I will rip your heart from your chest where you sit."

Theron bowed his head. "I spoke wrongly." He could feel the sting of tears behind his eyes. Curse these new emotions, bucket-loads of misery is what they were. "Please accept my apologies."

"Ah...by the Oath," Morax slapped his thigh, "you always were too intense about everything. A finer primale...a finer man or officer I've never known. You need to lighten up, that's all."

"Permission to speak freely, Sir?"

"Yes...of course, Theron, anything."

"The leader of the assassins told me that Nyssa was not the only...variation on the norm. He indicated there was a program. A Project X."

"Yes, that is true."

Theron's heart quickened. "But the natural order of society..."

"The natural order is what it is because at one time it was decided that was how it ought to be. We live in a world designed to serve our needs. Those needs can change, Theron."

"I fail to see how we can need different kinds of people..."

Morax sighed. "How do I best explain this? There is in our society a certain staleness today. We are getting stuck in a rut. And that's not good. Things are going to happen and we have to be ready."

"What things?"

"The Narthians, for one. We have beaten them back so far, but you more than anyone know their resources and determination. We primales cannot fight this war alone for much longer."

"You would put women on the front lines?"

"I would have more energetic citizens. Just a few at first, to try out. New variations, as you put it. People like Nyssa, combining the best of the old types in new ways."

"But, Sir," he appealed. "Think what you're saying. Nyssa's a human being. You can't just try out a life to see how it will be."

"You are right, my son, and the universe forgive us for the trauma we have caused such a splendid creature. We made her in good faith, that is all I can say."

"It's not enough, Sir." Theron was surprised by his vehemence. There was something about Nyssa's case that gave him a determination unlike anything else in the world.

"You think we could do more?"

Theron frowned. "I think you should have thought ahead, devised something, or else you should never have brought her into this world."

"We did think ahead, Captain. Eight years before she was conceived, as a matter of fact."

Theron stood hastily as Fem Dekalia entered the room. She was wearing a long green lounging robe. It was obvious she was naked underneath. "Forgive me," he said gruffly, "I'll make my departure."

"No, please stay."

Morax was more direct. "Sit, boy."

Fem Dekalia stood behind Morax, resting her slender, aging fingers on his shoulders. They made a handsome couple, he thought.

"Aren't you curious," The High Councilor smiled, "as to what we did eight years before creating Nyssa?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Why, we engineered you, of course," she laughed. "You are a genetic complement. I'd have thought you would have guessed that by now with that big primale brain of yours."

Theron's stomach slipped over and under itself, and over again, forming a huge knot. "I don't follow...that would make her my *sister*."

"Don't even think such a horrid thing," chastised Morax. "Nyssa has our genes, Dekalia's and mine. Yours are different, but equally special."

"Nyssa was made to be your lifemate," furnished Dekalia. "And you, Theron, represent the permanent protection you wanted us to conjure up for her. You were born to love and honor and cherish her until your dying breath."

"Which at the rate you're going is coming pretty damned soon," grumbled Morax, never one to mince words.

"Has it never occurred to you?" Fem Dekalia pressed their case. "Why you excelled at every enterprise, every sport you engaged in with your fellow primales? Why war came to you so much more effortlessly, and every other effort of the human heart and mind?"

"Yours really are the best genetics on the planet," Morax affirmed. "With the possible exception of hers. You were designed with her in mind...and her for you. That's why she responds to no one else."

"She responds to no one period," he protested. "The woman is unmanageable."

"Then you'll have to find a way, son. Or not. In either case, she's yours." He delivered the blunt truth.

"But I don't..." He was about to say that he didn't want her, but that wasn't entirely true.

Fem Dekalia must have seen the pitiful look on his face. "Theron, you have what it takes. We know that you love her, and that she loves you. That's what matters."

"How could you possibly know that?" he cried. "When I don't know it myself?"

"I heard it in your voices on the comm-link that first night," said Dekalia. "When she was trying so hard to get you in trouble."

"And I saw it written all over you when you thought she was going to die," said Morax.

Theron shook his head. "This makes no sense. We've spent no time together. We're the wrong genetic fit. All we do is fight...and make sex."

Morax grinned. "That's all any good couple does."

Dekalia slapped his shoulder lightly. "Mind your tongue, Morax. If it's any help, Theron, Morax and I will talk to her before you see her. I'm sure we can smooth the way a little."

And I'm sure you can't, he grumbled to himself.

"Absolutely," the General concurred. "She has our blood. She'll see the light of our wisdom."

Theron ran his hands through his hair. These people might be societal super overachievers, but in one way they were typical parents—totally oblivious to how willful and obstinate their child could really be.

"You will see her tomorrow morning," dictated Dekalia. "At ten."

"We will talk to her at nine and a half intervals." Morax nodded with characteristic military precision. "It will run perfectly smoothly."

"Yes, Sir," he said woodenly. "Yes, Ma'am."

Oh, it was going to be perfect all right...a perfect disaster.

Chapter Fourteen

Theron was sitting in the next room when Dekalia and Morax gave Nyssa the happy news of her engagement. At least he assumed that's what they were telling her judging by her vigorous reaction.

"Over my fucking dead body!" the charming Nyssa could be heard to scream in conjunction with the crashing of a large glassite object against the wall.

Morax was saying something about being reasonable. This launched her into a series of vituperative attacks against both parents. With plenty of "pleasantries" for Theron himself peppered in for good measure.

"You're all trying to run my fucking life! You think I want to be chained down barefoot and collared to some primale goon? How dare you! You people don't know me and you don't own me. I've got a mind to just chuck the whole bunch of you and go back on the holo. Vonda never got treated like this! Better still, maybe I can go off and get myself captured by space pirates and sold into slavery. I bet that would make you happy, wouldn't it?"

Theron rose to his feet with a heavy sigh. For the first time in his life he truly understood what it meant to have a call. It didn't mean that the job you were going to do was even remotely pleasant, or even that you had a clue how to do it—it was just that you were pretty darned sure that no one else did either and that if you didn't at least try you'd never have a moment's peace.

The doors were old French style, double ones with blue curtains. He opened them together, presenting himself completely unannounced. It was Nyssa who saw him first.

"You!" she hissed as though confronting the very devil. "I might have known you'd be skulking around my house. Who let you in?"

"I was invited by your parents."

"Well, consider yourself uninvited!" She tossed her long mane of silky, pale aquamarine hair over her bare shoulder. The color was a perfect match to her eye shadow and thinly painted lipstick.

Theron fought back a furious wave of lust. The curvy little fem was dressed as outrageously as ever—barefoot, in a tight, copper-colored brasserie-style top and a pair of tight, saucy matching shorts. She had delicious little bangs and gold hoop earrings. Tiny rings adorned her toes, along with one hooked through her navel. Her nails were a shimmery white-green that changed color with every movement.

The fact that she was standing on a thick, purple fur rug, with a purple teardrop fur couch behind her—just right for tossing her onto or over—did little to keep his mind focused on the conversation.

"Nyssa, that is no way to speak to your fiancé," Morax attempted to rein her in.

"Don't you dare tell me how to talk." She turned on him. "I learned just fine without you. Come to think of it, I managed twenty-seven years without both of you!"

"Nyssa. *Enough!*"

Nyssa moved to challenge Theron, but the words seemed to stick in her throat. Her split-second hesitation was all he needed to gain the upper hand, at least for this first round.

"You will apologize to your parents," he instructed. "And then you will kiss them goodbye."

Nyssa's eyes moved left and right. Her parents were hiding their smiles. "I'm sorry," she conceded with minimum civility to Dekalia and Morax. "But not to you, Theron, because I know this is all your fault somehow."

"Goodbye, dear." Fem Dekalia kissed her daughter. "We'll talk again in the morning."

"Be a good girl," her father hugged her, "for daddy."

Nyssa looked a little piqued. "You're not really going to leave me with *him*, are you?"

"Why wouldn't we?" asked Dekalia.

"Because...because..." Nyssa faltered. "I don't need a reason. I just don't want him around me."

Morax shook his hand. "Good luck, son. You're going to need it."

Dekalia hugged him. "Love," she whispered, "conquers all...and a few good swats never hurt anything either."

Nyssa waited until they were gone to launch her attack. She had obviously been saving ammunition for this one. "You just humiliated me in front of my parents, do you know that? Now they think I'm your little slave girl. I'll bet you think that too, don't you? Sure you do, that's why you think you can run all over the universe and never tell me a goddamn thing until I'm worried half to death."

"I couldn't tell you where I was, Nyssa. I didn't know who was after you. I had to keep a low profile until I got the bad guys."

"Did you?" she demanded.

"I got the tentacles. But there's a head somewhere I still need to go after."

She folded her arms across her chest, depriving him of a perfectly good view. "Just don't expect a 'thank you'," she told him. "Not after everything you put me through."

"Put your arms down."

"What?"

"Put your arms at your sides, flat."

"I will not!"

He moved to spank her. The gesture alone was enough to bring her in line.

Theron ogled his prize—heaving, unobstructed breasts, excited nipples tightening against the glittery, exotic fabric. “Good girl.” He praised her obedience, knowing how it would affect her. “I see you’ve remembered some of your training.”

He could smell the instant release, the arousal she felt at being treated like an obedient.

“It’s not training, sweetheart,” she bluffed, desperate to hide her vulnerability. “It’s just me, and trust me, what I’ve got, you can’t handle.”

As if he hadn’t handled her plenty fine already.

He stroked her cheek. “Tough little thing, aren’t you?”

“You know it.” She winked.

“So tell me, I’m curious. Who is it that *can* handle you? Would that be some of your mem friends like Jolando, or could it be you need a robot’s touch?”

Nyssa’s eyes widened, trapped little doe that she was.

“What’s the matter...*sweetheart*? Didn’t you realize I was amusing myself while waiting for you by talking with your robot?”

“The robot lies. Its relays are faulty.”

“They seemed in order to me.”

Nyssa backed up, with an eye toward running. He held her fast, his hand in the waistband of her shorts.

“Let go of me.”

“No.”

“Don’t you say no to me!”

“I’ll say what I like. Take off your top, Nyssa. Or I’ll rip it off.”

She tried to protect herself. He grabbed the material and yanked, severing it between her breasts. “Isn’t that better than strip games with a machine?” He waved the ruined top.

She tried to squeeze her ample breasts between her fingers, blocking any access. Taking her by the wrist, he whipped her around. In a matter of seconds he had her hands tied behind her back, using the shredded top. She was cursing, but he could read her excitement, her red-hot heat. It would have been evident even to the dullest of mems, much less an aroused primale.

There was no holding him back now. “On your knees,” he commanded. “Or I’ll kick your legs out from under you.”

Nyssa moaned helplessly, lowering herself into the subjugation he knew she craved.

“Use your teeth.” He pushed his zippered crotch into her face. “Take my cock out and suck it...all the way.”

This was sheer domination and submission now.

"Barbarian," she spat, but she was rubbing her cheek against his erection. "Is this how you win your arguments with females?"

"No, Nyssa..." he breathed her liquid surrender, "only with you."

"Mmmm..." she groaned, indicating that he had said the right thing.

"Do a good job, sweetheart, or I'll have your robot beat your ass while I watch."

Hungrily she bit down on the zipper. The sound was electric, ripping through the air as she tugged it down, parting the halves of his gray leather civilian pants. After just a few inches, his cock took its opportunity, and burst through the opening. He was still sheathed by the gray mesh underwear. Nyssa tried to pull the waistband down over him, but he was too big.

She looked up at him, whimpering. Smiling in pure primale triumph he took out his cock for her. "Would the little fem like a treat?"

"I'm half primale," she reminded, though at the moment she didn't seem very masterful.

"Very well," he shrugged, "if you feel your genetics are being compromised..."

"No, don't." Nyssa devoured him before he could stuff his cock away.

He chuckled, pulling her back by the hair to slow her down a little. "Easy, baby. We have plenty of time."

"Yes, Theron." She moved in reverence this time, like a penitent on her knees to a god rather than a starving little kitten. A single lick along the side of his dick to the very tip, and then along the bottom. She was playing the perfect obedient, though he had a feeling if he hung in there with her, over time, she'd teach him a trick or two.

For now Theron decided to teach her something new, a little secret that he had kept from her up to now. Primales could not only expand their cocks by their own will, they could raise veins close to the surface. Not just one underneath, but two, as well as many smaller ones, delicately crisscrossing the smooth surface.

"You're so beautiful," she whispered in awe.

He had to laugh, stroking her silky, artistic hair, the latest product of her whims. "I'm not anything, angel, you're what's beautiful. I dreamed of you constantly while I was gone."

Her eyes fluttered closed. There was no stopping her from taking him all the way this time. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he helped her absorb his inches. Careful not to swell too much, he found his place in the warm cocoon of her mouth.

A vise clamped on his heart. He could not imagine another mouth ever again. Only this one, so capable of sucking and sassing and arguing. He loved all three equally, that was the funny part.

"Did you service your robot like this, you naughty little minx?"

She nodded, as much as she was able.

"I'll bet you did," he growled lightly, enjoying the silkiness of her tongue, the sweet, gentle suction along the contours of his aching cock. "But robots with attached dildos can't keep you honest like I can. They can't tell you if you're doing it right. They can't punish you for mistakes."

The bound Nyssa applied herself even more diligently, indicating that she wanted to please. Such a perfect little prize. Naked in her place at his feet, her perfect breasts proffered, nipples hard as bullets, fragrant sex, hot...and waiting.

"Mmm...I can tell you've been practicing. Not any humans I hope?"

Her eyes angled high, flickered back and forth for "no". The acknowledgement of his own primacy heated his blood another notch. They might well never be able to work out an accord outside the bedroom, but in the sexual realm, things worked just fine.

Un-suctioning her before he could give into the urge for immediate release, he made his inquiry. "Your bed, Nyssa, where is it?"

Her pale, blue-green lips were wet with saliva. It took a moment for her mouth to form the words. "Up the stairs."

Theron glanced at the circular crystallite staircase in the middle of the room. Colored sunlight shone on it from various prism-shaped portals. "And your objectifier?" he inquired.

Her voice trembled just a little. "In the corner, over there."

He smiled. She was imagining the sort of things he might make to torture her with. "I will be up those stairs in a quarter interval," he informed her. "I expect to walk in and see you ass up, facedown on the mattress."

She lowered her head, her hair falling over her breasts, her hands still bound. "Yes, Theron."

Stars—he wanted her badly. "Wait," he commanded.

The kiss was intended as a prelude, a tease, something for her to think about while he prepared himself. As it was, it proved a profound reintroduction, the speaking of two souls. Nyssa melted against him on tiptoes, body obediently and lustily pressed, giving full indication that he was her man, as much as a free spirit like hers could belong to any man. His own body accepted every bit of her, as did his soul. Rejecting her, turning her away was not in his bones.

Or his genes, at least according to Dekalia and Morax. For a split second he envied Nyssa for being able to know her biological parents. Who had sired him? He knew only that his was the best blood, the finest of genetic combinations. He'd been made for destiny—made for Nyssa.

"Go," he ordered, gently enough.

She pleaded with her eyes. She wanted to be fucked now. On the couch, on the floor, whatever he might choose.

"No," he said, indicating he knew her thoughts. "You will obey me."

She drew a ragged breath and attached herself in protest, her open mouth suckling his breast, teeth nibbling, the full measure of female power. Admittedly it was difficult, but self-denial had its rewards. Including the punishment of disobedient little fems.

Leaving her in place, he cupped his hand for a swift, low smack, on the curve of her ass, just beneath where her tied hands were fretting, fingers interlaced. Another spank for good measure and he had her attention.

"Where do you belong right now?"

She grimaced slightly from the pressure of his thumb and forefinger, pinching her warm ass cheek. "In bed..."

"In what position?"

"Ass up," she panted, "face down."

"Does this hurt, Nyssa?" He twisted his fingers a tiny bit.

"Y-yes."

"Makes your pussy drip, too, though, doesn't it?"

"Yes..."

"What are you going to do when I let go?"

"I'm going...to bed."

"Correction – you're going to run to bed."

"Yes," she promised.

He decided to give her a dose of her own medicine first, lowering his head onto her nipple. She screamed from the sensation as he showed her how a primale suckled, tasting, devouring, chewing, biting, taunting, arousing. The nipple drew itself into his mouth. His...

"Go," said Theron when he had taken his fill.

Nyssa staggered, flush, bound, a hickey on her left breast. One final stern look told her to move fast, in spite of her wooziness. He made a point of enjoying her ass jiggling up the stairs, her breasts shaking. Were she his woman, he would never let her wear clothes inside.

Then again, she *was* his woman, wasn't she?

Theron went to the beverageator on the wall next to the objectifier. Scanning the selections, he chose a bourbon blueberry beer. He hated these retro drinks, and personally he doubted that the ancients had ever put all their alcohol types together into single beverages, but the choices were limited. He needed a little something to still his nerves. And keep his orgasm at bay. He wanted to enjoy Nyssa his first time back and at this rate he would be coming in ten seconds flat. The woman was just too hot, too entirely sexually stimulating for him.

The bourbon tasted like shuttle lubricant. Where the fuck was the blueberry? Sighing, he moved to the objectifier. He had some special items in mind, a few goodies

he was pretty sure Miss Nyssa had never experienced. Before this day was done, he vowed, he would turn her inside out.

Then they would handle the tough part. Talking about the future.

* * * * *

Nyssa's submissiveness lasted until she got to the bed. One look at the soft, comfy surface, her sanctuary away from all the troubles and demands of the world reminded her of what was really at stake here. This wasn't about her pussy. It was mind control. Theron teaming up with Morax and Dekalia to chain her down and make her into whatever they wanted her to be.

Theron's mate. What a nightmare. There would be no end to it—being told what to eat and think and wear. The man was an egomaniac! She couldn't let her loins trick her. Sure, it might be hot to *imagine* Theron ordering her about like an obedient, treasuring and possessing her like the ultimate female pet, but that was hardly in her best interest in the real world. How could they expect her to be a strong, free-thinking Councilor, anyway, if she was matched with a man who could make her crawl and beg at his slightest word or gesture—a man whose life, whose soul was coming to feel more and more entwined with her own, and she was finding it hard to know where he left off and she began?

She would have to make a stand. Here and now. For starters, she would free her hands. She gave herself a minute to wriggle. No go. Okay...so he was good with knots. There were laser scissors in her bureau, though. And failing that, the utility laser in the hygiene room. If she could find a way to grab it with her hands. She was working on opening the bureau drawer with her teeth when Theron walked in.

"You really don't learn, do you?"

She froze. Her mouth over the knob. He sounded amused enough, but that didn't mean he wasn't capable of mayhem over her poor little body. This could all have been avoided if she had left her room in another style—say modern Zalotian, which featured vertical spikes, sharp as knives. Then she would be free by now, and out the window.

"Or should we assume that you are further refining your oral technique?"

Nyssa let go of the knob. "Don't play with me, Theron. If you're going to punish me, just do it."

That really wasn't a smart thing to say, she decided.

Theron hooked a finger directly into her pussy, pulling her back. She shuddered, moving along the carpeted floor. "I blame myself." He turned her around to face him.

She gasped at the sight of him splendidly naked. She had missed him so much, his body, the way he smelled, the perfect lines of his muscles. No finer man had ever been designed. And according to her biological parents, he had been designed with her in mind. For maximum physical and mental compatibility.

Shows you just how fucked up genetic science can be.

"I allowed you too much freedom," he continued, running his hand lightly but insolently down her body. "Naughty little fems like you shouldn't have too much freedom, should they?"

Any resistance she might have offered died as he found her clitoris. He could make her do or say anything now. "No," she whispered.

"They need bondage. And discipline."

"Yes," she sighed, betraying herself.

Theron freed her hands, child's play to a primale. "There's a collar on the bed," he instructed. "And a leash. Fetch them."

Nyssa did as she was told, not stopping to rub her tingling wrists. There was no option of delaying his will. This was sheer control he was exercising. Direct mind fuck. Her knees nearly gave out when she saw what was on the bed. A metal-studded leather paddle. A series of silver clamps with dangling chains. A bit and bridle, woman-sized. A horsehair tail, attached to a handle. Scratch that—attached to a plug, like the one she'd had in her ass. And a thin, leather, diamond-studded collar attached to a delicate silver leash. It was exactly the sort of thing one might use on a poodle.

"I'm waiting, Nyssa."

Reaching out, she snatched the collar. She half-expected it to burn in her fingers. Seconds later, she was presenting it. To him...the man engineered to complement her heart. And possess her flesh.

"Arch your neck."

Nyssa exposed her delicate throat. Theron's powerful hands, large, capable and more than a little arousing, closed in, holding the collar. He affixed it, buckling the strap. She held her breath as the sensations traveled down her torso. Tickling. Mildly constraining.

Theron dangled the leash between her breasts. The handle grazed her vulva. Instinctively, her pussy muscles clenched.

"You look pretty this way," Theron praised.

Nyssa hated herself for drinking in the humiliating compliment, for needing more.

"On the bed," he ordered, "on all fours."

Nyssa put herself in place, facing the wall. He made her wait in silence. She could hear him behind her, but she couldn't see. His soft, full breathing filled the air. Was he doing something? Or just looking at her? She shifted, squirming. The room was cloyingly hot. Sweat collected on her skin. Her thighs were miserably slick. She was painfully aware of her pussy lips—painful and cum-soaked—a total invitation to Theron's worst depravities.

He must think I want this, all of it...

"There are a lot of things you don't know about primales," he said, his hand suddenly on her ass, caressing it. "Intimate things. Were you an obedient, you would have been trained."

Nyssa relished the irony, even as she melted at his touch. For all intents and purposes she was an obedient. At least to him.

"Primale sexuality is designed for lifemating." He ran a finger around the edge of her throbbing pussy and then her puckered asshole. "We can find relief prior to that, but we don't mature until we are matched. Part of maturation involves multiple orgasms. When I am inside you, Nyssa, I will climax consecutively, three, maybe four times."

Nyssa grew weak. She would never hold up to that kind of assault.

"In order to achieve this level of build-up, we must feel the complete submission of the partner." He smacked her ass. Hard.

She rocked forward, moaning, as if penetrated.

"You will do that for me. You will submit. Even as you take your punishment." He had the paddle. It was as long as her lower arm, about two inches wide, an inch thick. She shivered as he dotted her spine with the studs, running it down the length of her back. She arched expectantly, like a cat being scratched.

The hard thwack on her ass caught her off-guard, reminding her quickly just how little control she had. He hit her twice more. Pure pain. Then he took her cunt with his hand.

"You feel what I want you to." He explained the lesson. "You trust me where your sex is concerned."

Oh, stars, did she dare?

He reached around and tapped the paddle on her belly. The leather and the studs made her cringe with arousal. When he slapped the sides of her breasts she went into orbit. "You're trying to hold out," he laughed. "Don't you realize I haven't even started?"

"Theron...it's difficult..."

"No, it's not." His fingernail found her clit, isolating it. "It's pretty fucking simple. You give me everything you have, and after that I find even more."

Her fingers clutched at the mattress. She shook to the core, giving in to the small, but toe-curling, orgasm. The paddle exploded somewhere in the middle, between the bursts of pure, womanly passion. "Did I say you could come?"

"N-no."

He was pulling back on the leash, pressing the heel of his hand into her spine. "Orgasms are mine. You have them with me, when I say."

She thought of the belt and the iron grate. The way it had made her feel. At once so violated and protected. Such a complicated mix. And come to think of it, why was he talking about things like they were going to have a tomorrow...like they were going to do this ever again?

"Too much freedom," he hissed. "Still."

Now it was the bit inserted into her mouth, the harness over her head, secured by leather straps. She shook with fury and rage...and fucking horniness. He whacked her back into line with the paddle. Deprived of voice, she whimpered for him to finish her off. Shove his cock into her, to make her his beloved possession, his sex slave.

But Theron had only begun his sadistic games. "Open wide," he teased, pushing the horsetail up her shapely posterior. To her shame, she took it all the way, her anal opening clinging, drawing it in.

"Good girl." He patted her down.

The horsey idea gave her a wicked thought. She couldn't call him a fuckhead – but she could sure show him. And what better way to get into the game than by bucking?

Even the paddle didn't slow her. She just took the pain, working it into her contortions. And when he finally gave up and pushed her facedown, she outwitted him yet again by plunging her own finger into her pussy. She would show him she was a woman, a fem, still, and not any silly, mindless girl...

The stolen orgasm felt good...almost as good as knowing she had defied the all-powerful primale. Again. Oh, she would pay for it, but that would be fun, too.

Theron flipped her over, onto her horsey ass. Straddling her middle, he said the fateful words. "Take them."

By this he meant the clamps...

Hands on either side of her head, as docile as if she were chained this way, she waited for him to affix the nasty silver devices. They were like the clothespins, only colder. He had the added advantage of the connector chain, which he could pull.

She chomped down on the bit as he stretched her sensitive flesh.

"I didn't only dream about you, you know," he chose this opportune moment to tell her, "I masturbated over you."

His hard cock was resting on her belly. She could feel its heat. She wanted it inside her. That was all the "punishment" she needed.

"I've never done that over any other woman."

She had masturbated for him, too. Long into the night, after the robot had done its best to slake her seemingly unquenchable desire. Her weakness and devotion for Theron was something she could not admit, though – not to him, or to her parents.

What a position she found herself in. Too afraid to admit just how far gone she was for the man, and yet completely unable to ever let him go. The very idea of him being with another woman, in fact, filled her with a rage the likes of which she had never known.

"There was so much I imagined doing to you," he licked his lips, "this was one of those things."

Nyssa forced herself not to resist. He had no idea what a test of will this was for her. He was putting the second set of clamps on her labia.

"Oh, yeah...that's it."

She shook her head...*no this was not it.*

"So fucking hot..." He tugged both chains at once.

Nyssa writhed, experiencing meteor showers of sex-pain.

"Orgasm for me," he commanded. "Show me."

His words touched her like a cattle prod. He didn't need to be in her pussy. Just his orders, the feel of the clamps, and his irresistible body above her were enough. And the whole time she was soaring, cutting through the black air of desire, he was talking to her, telling her his deep-space fantasy, which he was about to realize.

From the heaviness of his breathing and the rubbing of his cock on her belly, she knew he was getting off as he spoke.

"In your ass," he groaned, "with your pussy and sweet nipples clamped down, on your belly, fucking helpless, I take you in the ass. I pump and I pump. You're so fucking tight. Your ass...so fucking perfect. Your body, so creamy smooth...you're just lying there, taking it for me, and I come and I come, all that hot semen for you, only for you...shot right up your asshole, until you can't hold any more."

Nyssa couldn't stand it. *Just do it*, she thought. *Do what you dreamed...use me like you want.* She begged with her eyes, wild and willing...beyond abandon.

Theron's eyes turned to raw fire in recognition of their mutual desire. "Yes..." he vowed. He couldn't flip her over fast enough. Pulling the horsetail out of her, he scooped some of the liquid from her pussy. Using this as lubricant, he forged the way for penetration. "Wanna...fuck you...so bad," he declared in stabbing breaths.

Nyssa delighted in his loss of articulation. She had him right where she wanted him—out of his mind with lust. For her. "My ass, Theron...fuck it..." She might well have added only my ass, never anyone else's again, but he probably understood that.

Not that she could be held later to anything said now in the heat of the moment.

Theron entered her, crying out in savage delight. Even in his mad passion, however, he was careful to reduce the size of his cock so as not to hurt her. That was how she knew she could let go and scream for him to do his worst—because she was so sure that he would never, ever harm her.

Ravishing her, however, was another story. Grabbing her hair he pushed down, as much as she could take. The clamps, meanwhile, bit into her nipples and pussy lips. Her entire body was lit with fire—filled, invaded, under glorious primale attack. His execution was flawless, moving just slow enough to go deep. Nyssa gave him the space, opening her body in infinite trust. He pushed her to pain but not beyond—never more than exceeded the countervailing pleasure.

Pulling back halfway, he pushed down again. Taking more. The decision was not hers. How long she would be fucked. How deep. Her pussy liquefied all over again at the realization. She was his erotic prisoner.

In and out, again, still staking territory. Oh, stars, she groaned, this was only the beginning. The man was only warming up. His cock was getting bigger, too, giving her

no quarter. A man like this could fuck ten fems like her in a night. A sobering thought, and a little nerve-racking. Lucky her, she had been made the focus of his energy. Born that way, in fact.

Like a lion, he began to roar. She feared he would push her through the mattress, but again he knew exactly how much force to apply. Just enough for her to know he was a man and she was a woman. A man fucking like a piston while she pushed her ass up for more. He responded by spanking her, taking her to the next level of nirvana.

She was totally consumed with Theron's power, his drive. No woman had ever been loved so well. Nyssa was not only born for this, she was being born *in* it. *So this is what my body is for*, she thought with pre-orgasmic delight. No mem had ever had a fucking clue compared to this. She was so past letting go that she couldn't hold onto anything if she tried. The nearest thing was the sound of his guttural passion. Theron's orgasm was a silent eruption more deafening than sound. Her ass orgasmed with him – if such a thing was fucking possible. Her pussy and breasts enjoyed their own paroxysms, throbbing waves and needle jabs, soft and hard, climax radiating everywhere at once. She clamped down on the bit, unable to resist wishing for and imagining more...the paddle, the crop...pins to prick her everywhere on her body. Would she ever get enough?

Eventually they both subsided, riding the crest of a final waterfall, straight into a lush, lazy green valley. Nyssa was spaghetti – she couldn't have moved if her life had depended on it.

Theron took responsibility for removing the bondage items. Turning her to her side, his long, full body hard against hers, he began with the collar. Lightly nuzzling her neck, he undid the bit harness and then reached down to undo the clamps. Nyssa felt only mild stings and soreness, so warm and comforting was his embrace. She snuggled back against him, feeling so wonderfully sleepy and cozy. Greedily, she took his powerful arm and pulled it down on top of her, ensuring their connection, spoon-style.

"Nyssa," he whispered, "we need to talk."

"Not now," she mumbled. "I need sleep...I'm human, remember?"

"I'm human, too."

It was too late. She was already drifting across to the other side. The world of dreams. Though this time, Nyssa was quite sure she was too worn-out to dream. Unless it was about him...doing a whole hell of a lot more things to her like he had just done.

Chapter Fifteen

Nyssa looked adorable as a dominatrix, all dressed to play in her thigh leather boots, crotchless panties, captain's hat and metal-studded bra, all black leather. She was wielding a multi-stranded flogger, too, which she fully intended to use on Theron's naked ass.

As an act of pure love and devotion, he had allowed her to chain him in the middle of the room, his hands shackled overhead. She had stripped him first, making sure his cock was good and hard. He had told Morax that he would stop humoring her once the mating ritual was complete, but the old man had shaken his head and laughed.

"You may know the battlefield, boy, but you know nothing about fems."

His current predicament as her temporary slave for the afternoon was the prerequisite she had posed for carrying on their mating negotiations. They had been "negotiating" for three days straight. So far there had been much more sex-making than anything else.

As far as he was concerned, it was a done deal. There was no getting away from the woman. If he sought even a moment's peace, she would start hounding him, wanting to fight more. That was a sign of love, according to Dekalia.

If the courtship was any indication, being mated to little Nyssa was going to make battling the Narthian hordes look like a walk in an agropark.

"We need to talk about the sex-making," Nyssa announced, tapping his hip with the crop.

"I fail to see the point of discussing what we do already almost constantly," he pointed out.

Nyssa swatted his cock, sending a wave of pleasure through his body. Once again, he was allowing her incredible liberties. Such was his love for the feisty holostar.

Nyssa loved every minute of it. "Silence, you insolent brute."

Theron sighed. The illogic of wanting to discuss something without him talking was typical of the "negotiations" so far. For the present he would humor her, occupying the time by thinking of new ways to torture her.

Which was probably what she was trying to provoke him to in the first place. After all, it wasn't as though steel chains could hold a primale.

"I need to know how many times a day you plan on making sex," she said. "Assuming we mate...which I doubt highly we ever will."

"At least eight." He aimed for the high end.

"Don't be absurd." She snapped the crop at his cock again.

"We'll make it easy," he teased. "You can wear a dildo all the time to keep in practice."

"I'll make *you* wear a dildo." She thwacked his chest.

Theron relished the sensations, the brief illusion of helplessness. There must be some advantage, he thought, to being in another's control, letting them worry about all the decisions.

"What about spankings?" he said. "We have to talk about them."

"Oh, yes," she agreed. "I'm going to spank you every chance I get."

"Actually, I was thinking of you on the receiving end."

"I'm sure you were," she wrapped her fingers around his throbbing, desperately engorged cock, "*slave*."

"Didn't your mother teach you not to play with loaded weapons?"

She dug her nails in just hard enough to get his attention. "Who's playing?"

"That hurts, Nyssa."

"Does it now? Guess you better do what I say, huh?"

"Looks that way." Actually, he was far from trapped, but what the hell, they were having fun.

She dragged her nails possessively along his shaft. "If we mate, this becomes mine," she let him know. "I don't share well."

"Nor do I."

"If I let you down, you need to promise to lie on your back like a good boy."

"What if I don't?"

"Then you can hang up there all by your lonesome." She pushed her fingers between her legs, extracting some of her moist, fragrant liquid. "You don't want that, do you?"

Nyssa put her cum-soaked fingers up to his lips. He sucked them clean, shaking his head "no".

"I didn't think so." She let him suck a little longer and then ran the glistening digits down his chest. She paused to pinch his nipples, one after the other.

Theron clenched his fists...unlike with a fem, who became erotically passive, such an assault to a primale only made him more raring to go. "Let me down, Nyssa. I want you."

Nyssa blew him a kiss. "We don't always get what we want."

He was on the verge of pulling down the chain when she moved behind him to stand on the little stool she had used to lock him up. Fiddling with the cuffs, inserting both keys, she freed him.

Theron was all set to grab her when he remembered his sort-of promise. Under duress though it might be, he needed to be a good sport by honoring it.

"Down, boy!" She snapped the ends of the flogger in the air.

Theron lowered himself to the padded floor. They had made a dedicated space in her loft just for their new sex-making games. Today's variation, apparently, would be fem-on-top.

"Being at my feet agrees with you," she lorded over him. "Maybe I'll chain you naked all the time down there."

"I'd rather you fuck the hell out of me."

She grinned mischievously, touching the pointed heel of her boot to his dick. "Anxious, are we?"

"A little," he said dryly.

"A little...Mistress."

"A little, Mistress," he grumbled slightly.

"Do you want me to take you, slave?" she inquired imperiously.

He drank in the sight of her luscious leather-clad body. Wanting her was an understatement. "Yes, Mistress."

"Stroke your cock for me, show me how bad you need to be mounted."

He grasped his rod, holding it tightly. He slid his fingers up and down, his breath thin and steely.

"Beg for it."

"Mount me, Mistress Nyssa...stick my cock deep inside you."

"Hands behind your head," she pressed her victory, "legs wide apart. If you move from this position, I won't make sex with you for a week."

Theron highly doubted that she could abstain for half an interval let alone a full week. Assuming the position, he braced himself for her worst.

"Oh, and one more thing," she offered with deceptive pleasantness, "you are not to come without my express permission."

Comets and meteors, he thought glumly. "I've taught you a little too well."

* * * * *

As Nyssa looked down on the perfect, naked specimen of manhood before her, she could not conceive of ever living without him. Certainly, her body wasn't about to give him up, nor was her soul. They were going to be lifemates, and that was that. Lowering herself to all fours, she started licking him, beginning at the bottoms of his feet. The big man laughed and jolted as she tickled him, but he kept his discipline. His skin tasted good, musky and a little salty.

Slowly she worked her way up over both of his legs, his calves, his kneecaps, and then on to his thighs. She never tired of looking and touching and sensing Theron. She hoped that she never would. Climbing astride him, aligning his cock to her opening, she

made her announcement. "Theron, if you'll agree to my terms...I will give you my pledge...forever."

He groaned as the head of his cock sucked up inside her. "What terms?"

Nyssa liked him this way, writhing, so completely masculine and needy. "You have to complete me, not own me. Let me fly, don't break my wings, and I'll come home to you...always."

"I can do that, angel."

She lowered herself, shivering, taking, absorbing, fully engulfing her and him in the realities of sex-making. "Tell me what you want, Theron."

"To protect you...to care."

"But you have to love me, too. I won't mate without love." Nyssa settled herself, Theron's cock completely inside her. She took a breath. He took one too, aligning his rhythm. Two hearts connecting.

"I don't know what love is," he said honestly, "but I know I can't not think of you, I know you drive me crazy, and I have to have you constantly. I know I'll never be able to touch or sex-make with another. I know that without you...I'm nothing."

"That's close enough for me." She lifted herself slowly, letting him feel the pleasure of her silky canal. Soon, very soon, they would be thrusting and counterthrusting like wild demons.

"Do you love me, Nyssa?"

"Only a primale would ask such a silly question," she teased.

His hands shot out to take control of her breasts.

"Hey," she protested. "You're supposed to stay still."

"Tell me you hate not being able to control me."

She moaned inwardly as he massaged her twin globes, working the nipples, pressing her into sheer combustion. "I hate it," she lied.

"I'm still waiting." He squeezed.

"Ow," she squealed, not very seriously.

"Do you love me, or not?"

"What do you care?" She decided to give him a run for his credits. "You get whatever you want out of me."

"I want love, too. It's a package deal."

"Well, you can't have it. I'm going to be an important politician one day and I have to remain objective."

Theron's hands moved to her waist, gripping firmly and securely. "This is your last chance."

"Unhand me, you devil!" She tried to keep from laughing.

"You asked for it." He lifted her in the air, nearly pulling himself out.

"Hey, put me back."

"No."

"Please?"

Theron set her down and lifted her. "Tell me you love me."

"I did...until this."

He repeated the action, impaling her again and again. Each time he let her get close to orgasm, but not go over the top. The motions left her panting, craving more. "All right, I give up," she cried. "I love you. Now can we make sex?"

"You're only saying that so I'll let you come."

"No," she laughed, nearly hysterical with passion, "I swear it. I do love you, you stubborn fool. Now fuck me already."

Theron yanked her arms close and devoured her breasts one by one. She clamped her pussy muscles, letting him know how powerful the sensations were. His cock reacted, lengthening and thickening, just as it always did when he was getting really into it.

"Oh, honey," she moaned. "Oh, god, I do love you...baby, I love you so. From the minute I saw you...but I'll never stop fighting you."

"You damn well better not," he growled. "I like my fems feisty."

"You're not getting any other fems," she clawed at his chest, "or any obedients either. You want me? You forsake all others, buddy."

"That goes both ways. No more robot fucking."

"What if you're away at war?"

"That's what the belt is for."

"No fucking way!"

"Why not?"

"Because...it's inhumane."

"Keeps you honest."

"So would cutting off your dick and keeping it in water by the bed."

"Won't do much good there."

"I'll find uses for it, trust me."

He slapped her ass. "Less talk, more sex-making."

Nyssa pushed her palms down on his formidable pectorals for a springboard. "Aye, aye, Sir." She launched herself into a bucking frenzy, bronco style.

Theron's muscles tensed. His cock grew hot inside her. He was breathing through his teeth, increasing his momentum, matching her rhythm, and preparing himself for their mutual bliss.

"Remember to wait for permission," she reminded him, as if she could hold him back at this point.

"Better...give it...fast," he breathed, serving notice that he wasn't going to be playing her game very much longer.

That was fine with her. She arched her back, the tide of pleasure surging within her, filling her every pore, readying itself to overflow her body's bounds and join his.

"Now." Her insides turned to lava, to molten sex-making.

He cried out, thrusting one last time. His cock seemed to push all the way up to the back of her throat. It felt like gallons of his cum this time, shooting up into her. She released a small flood of her own down onto him. Their bodies crackled with wet electricity, merging in the moment of their built-up energies.

It had never been this good. Then again, she'd said that last time and the time before that. On back to the beginning. It would always be this way as far as she was concerned, one highlight after another. Yes, they would face challenges, dangers, but they wouldn't be alone. They knew how to laugh and love and cooperate. Had the genetic engineers known all this down to the last detail? Had they blushingly installed these orgasms inside each of them, had they made sure that this particular day would come, hot on the heels of all the others? Or had they made the most of a possible destiny, seizing it for themselves?

All Nyssa knew now was that the love they had made, like the sex, was something that belonged to them and no one else. Whoever might have come up with the idea initially could never have known how it would come down in the real world.

"I love you." She collapsed onto his chest.

"I love you, too." His big arms encircled her, making her the happiest woman on this or any other world. "I know that now, more certainly than I have ever known anything in my life. And I owe it all to you that I have the courage to confess it."

Nyssa sighed, tuning her heartbeat to his. It was all perfect.

Almost.

The only negative thought, tiny seed of doubt that it might be, concerned the "head" of the dragon that Theron was hunting. The one who had tried to kill her, presumably, was a mere tentacle. She asked him if that put her in grave danger at this very moment.

He held her all the tighter. She feared he might try and humor her with his answer, but he gave the most honest answer he could. "We all face some kind of danger. Yours is specific, yes, but the good news is, it's something I can hunt. I like hunting, Nyssa."

"And I like you," she sighed, snuggling.

"What happened to love, young lady?"

"Well, you know love fades with time...relationships change."

He reached back and smacked her rump. "You don't get the right to change. Especially not after only a quarter of an interval."

"Oh," she feigned disappointment, "in that case, you'll have to twist my arm."

He gave her posterior a pinch, inducing a feminine wriggle. "Your arm isn't the only thing twistable on you."

"Or you either." She snaked her hand down his thigh, looking for pay dirt.

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

"Spoilsport."

"Spoiled brat," he shot back.

Ah, yes, thought Nyssa, we are off to the right start, all right. A perfect challenge for both of us. Never a dull moment, never a quiet second. That's the kind of life we are in for together.

"You know when I'm High Councilor, you will have to start taking all your orders from me."

"At work, yes," he agreed readily, "but not at home."

"Right, because you will already be taking orders there."

"Don't you forget," he pointed out, "that it's my job to keep you humble."

Nyssa went to work on his cock, making it hard all over again. "You suck at it so far."

"Speaking of sucking..." He pushed her head down.

She evaded him. "Uh-uh, Mr. High and Mighty Guardian...it's your turn."

"I can't reach my own cock," he teased her. "And besides, I don't like the flavor."

"Add some peppermint." She played along with his bad joke. "As for making the connection between your mouth and your cock, I know you can stretch the fucker up to your mouth if you try."

"I could also stretch it long enough to make a paddle to spank you with."

"Promises, promises." Nyssa crawled into place for a kiss, lips sealed, tongues dancing, doing a mating ritual all their own.

Completeness all the way around, halves of a whole. And enough future fireworks to light a galaxy.

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 Ave., Akron OH 44310-3502.

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