

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Angela Knight

A movie poster featuring two characters in a cave. On the left, a muscular man with long red hair and a goatee, wearing a brown loincloth, stands with his hands on his hips, looking towards the right. On the right, a woman with long black hair, wearing a silver bikini and arm guards, stands with her back to the camera, hands on her hips, looking into a dark cave opening. The background is a dark, rocky cave with a blue light source in the distance.

Mercenaries II: The Thrall

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MERCENARIES II: THE THRALL

Angela Knight

CHAPTER ONE

Stepping out of the *Starrunner's* shuttle onto the soil of Bedesem Colony was like stepping back in time.

A long, long way back.

Sebastian Cole stopped on the ramp to stare, taking in the horse-drawn wagons rolling past the field where the shuttle had landed. Picturesque stone cottages stood just across the rutted dirt road, surrounded by neat beds of vegetation and flocks of geese and chickens. Each of the cottages seemed to have a dog out front, every one of them barking in hysterical chorus as if whipped into frenzy by the shuttle's arrival.

Somewhere in the middle of the canine hysterics, a shout went up. A gaggle of kids poured out of one of the larger buildings at a dead run, headed in the shuttle's direction. The whole crowd pelted across the road to stop at what they evidently considered a safe distance, eyes wide in wonder as they stared at their starfaring visitors.

Like everything else in sight, they all looked distinctly medieval in their bright tunics, tights, and ankle length boots. One young lad had what appeared to be strawberry jam on his face and a wooden sword thrust in his belt.

"Damn," Sebastian commed, using the computer implant that allowed him to communicate silently with his *Starrunner* crewmates. "*Did this colony just punt the past fifteen hundred years, or what?*"

Beside Sebastian, Captain Nathan August frowned as he looked out over the scene. He was a big, hard-faced man, good to follow into battle, bad to meet in combat. "*They do seem to be a lot more primitive than I expected,*" he admitted.

"Primitive is right," said Nathan's wife, Trinity, stepping from the shuttle to gaze around them. *"This place makes Rapture Colony look high tech."*

The thud of hoofbeats made the three look around. A troop of men on big, muscular horses galloped up with a rattle of swords and a jangle of tack, sending the children scattering like geese. The whole bunch was kitted out in leather breastplates, loincloths, and thigh-high boots, a rig Sebastian would have hated to wear into combat. It wouldn't have stopped a swordstroke worth a damn.

On the other hand, he could see how the same costume might be fun in the bedroom, given a kinky partner with a sense of humor.

Sebastian the Barbarian? He smirked.

"Which one of you is Captain Nathan August of the *Starrunner*?" the leader of the troop called.

"I'm August," the captain replied warily.

The man nodded his helmeted head. "Greetings. We're your escort to His Dominance."

"Oh, this is going to be good," Sebastian commed as the three of them started down the ramp toward the horsemen. *"Nothing says, 'I've got balls' like making people call you 'His Dominance.'"*

The palace was a dark, towering structure built of brooding gray stone, embellished with gothic spires and stained-glass windows.

That church-like impression was instantly shattered when they walked into the gleaming white foyer. Dead center under the vaulted ceiling stood a towering, black marble statue of a naked woman kneeling before an armored man. Her wrists were bound behind her back, and she was sucking her conqueror's cock with submissive enthusiasm.

"You've got to admit, it makes a statement," Sebastian drawled finally, after a two-minute gape.

"Yeah, but a statement of what?" Nathan folded his arms and rocked back on his heels, looking the statue over with a raised brow and a grin.

"How about, 'We've got more kinks than a corkscrew.'?" As he glanced at his captain, Sebastian caught the gaze of a hard-eyed palace guard watching them suspiciously. He was unable to resist giving the man a taunting wink. Without an implant of his own, the guard couldn't hear the conversation no matter how he tried to eavesdrop.

"I can't believe they put that thing out where anybody can see it." Trinity sounded so thoroughly scandalized, Sebastian had to grin.

He wasn't surprised at her reaction, though, since Trin had been raised on Rapture's Colony among rabid religious conservatives. Nathan had expanded her horizons considerably, but even a year of marriage and her new life as a mercenary hadn't rendered her immune to shock.

Frowning, she added aloud, "I hope they don't let children in here."

"Children," a stuffy male voice announced, "are not permitted in this section of the palace."

They turned to see a man striding toward them. In contrast to their own conservative blue dress uniforms, he wore a pair of tight leather pants with thigh-high black boots. Black buckled straps circled his flabby biceps, and a leather breastplate covered his chest. It was sculpted to look a lot more muscular than he was. A leather codpiece completed the ensemble, draped with gold chains that jingled musically as he walked.

"Either he's way too happy to see us," Sebastian quipped, *"or he stuffs that codpiece."*

"He'd have to, or he'd get calluses on his dick," Nathan commed. "All that leather's got to chafe." Spotting Trinity's wicked smile, he added, "And what are you grinning at?"

"Actually, I was wondering if I could get the name of his tailor," she purred. "You'd look a lot better in that rig than he does."

Sebastian looked away, biting the inside of his cheek to control his own smirk. Maybe Nathan had done a better job at expanding Trin's horizon's than he'd thought.

Leather Man came to a jingling halt directly in front of them, shoulders drawn back, both chins lifted. "Welcome to the Dominality of Rabican," he announced. "I am Dom Javier Grosvenor Bayard, advisor to the Dominor —"

"Hopefully not on matters of fashion," Sebastian commed, keeping his face straight with an effort.

Trin made a strangled sound. *"Sebastian, if you make me laugh at this self-important clod, I'm going to spank you."*

"Oh, would you?"

Trin's snicker at his mock plea made Bayard peer at them in puzzlement.

Nathan, ignoring the byplay, introduced the three of them in grave, rolling phrases. Sebastian had no idea how his captain always managed to treat Bayard's ilk as if he took them seriously. Sebastian himself didn't have the patience, which was how he knew he had no business captaining a ship.

Oh, he might have the knowledge of strategy and tactics, even the necessary leadership skills, but he was just no damn good with idiots.

When Nathan finished his spiel, Bayard gave them all a short, stiff bow. "Very good. If you will accompany me, I will take you to His Dominance." Turning on one high, booted heel, he marched off down the corridor, right past a

wall-length mural of a naked woman writhing in a particularly uncomfortable arrangement of ropes.

"You know, we've been to some really strange Forgotten Worlds," Sebastian commed, eyeing the mural as they passed, *"but this one is headed for the top of the 'stories-I-like-to-tell-when-I'm-drunk' list."*

"Good," Nathan shot back. *"You needed new material."*

"Only because you've known me twenty years," Sebastian replied loftily. *"Others are riveted."*

"No, dear," Trinity said sweetly. *"They're just appalled."*

He eyed her. *"On second thought, I think you're the one who needs the spanking."*

His captain turned to give him a long, long look.

"And Nathan's just the guy to give it to you," Sebastian added quickly.

"He's brighter than he looks," Nathan told his wife.

She smiled wickedly. *"He'd have to be."*

Agonizing protocol notwithstanding, Sebastian thought, *following the others through the palace, this should be a fun mission. At least, judging from the file Trin had compiled in preparation for their meeting with the Dominor.*

According to her research, Bedesem Colony had been lost for a full two hundred years after being caught on the wrong side of the Tormod Front. That was an awfully long time to be cut off from the rest of the human race—and plenty of time to develop interesting kinks. Particularly for a colony that was already pretty kinky to begin with.

When humankind began its first major colonization push after discovering the secret of interstellar travel three hundred years ago, all kinds of groups decided to try their hands at creating Utopia. There were religious loonies like the ones who'd founded Rapture's Colony; bigots who hated anybody with a

different skin color, language and/or religion; neo-socialists, neo-fascists, and assorted other neo-ists; and finally, one shipload with a taste for Bondage, Discipline and Sadomasochism – BDSM. Which acronym had morphed over the past two hundred years into the word Bedesem, as in Bedesem Colony.

According to Trin's research, several thousand people with a yen to experience full-time dominant/submissive relationships had shipped off to found this colony. Unfortunately, no sooner did they have their fantasy world up and running than war broke out with the alien Tormod, who had taken violent exception to human incursion into their space.

Nobody was entirely sure how many colonies found themselves on the wrong side of the Tormod Front, but estimates ranged anywhere from twenty to one hundred separate worlds. Millions of people, all completely cut off from the rest of humankind.

Luckily, however, the Tormod were methane breathers with no interest in human-habitable planets, or things could have gotten even uglier for the Forgotten Worlds. As it was, the Tormod only objected to alien spacecraft crossing their space; they hadn't bothered to wipe out the colonies themselves.

Two decades ago, the Humans and the Tormod had finally signed a treaty. Finally, all the Forgotten Worlds were being rediscovered again, one by one. Bedesem was only the latest on that list, having been located just five years past.

Now one of Bedesem's ruling Dominors wanted to hire the crew of the *Starrunner* for some kind of mission. The question was, what use did the leader of a kinky feudal society have for a bunch of twenty-fourth century cyborg mercenaries?

And would it by any chance involve big-breasted submissives who loved to suck cock?

Sebastian hastily wiped off the grin that thought inspired as Bayard stopped before a massive set of soaring double doors. The advisor nodded regally to one

of the guards standing at attention beside it. The man stepped forward to open the door, and Bayard sailed through to the strains of drums and flutes.

Sebastian gave the hem of his dress uniform a straightening tug and followed the others as they filed in after the Dom.

"Captain Nathan August of the interstellar mercenary warship *Starrunner*, and two crew members," Bayard announced, with a grand gesture in their general direction.

Sebastian blinked.

A naked and very flexible girl was doing a slow bump and grind in the center of the room. Scarlet wall-hangings set off her creamy curves and waist-length blonde hair, and the polished marble floor reflected her full breasts as she bent and jiggled temptingly. Her evident intent was to display her no-doubt outstanding ass to the man sprawled in the golden throne behind her. But if she was trying to get his attention, she had her work cut out for her; two more women crouched at his feet. As one of them moved her head, Sebastian realized the pair was paying loving lip service to the erection the man had liberated from his jeweled codpiece.

Without turning a hair, Bayard stepped back and made a sweeping gesture at the fellatio recipient. "His Dominance, Xarles Ferrau, Dominor of Rabican."

"Ah, you're here!" the Dominor said, straightening belatedly. One of the girls made a protesting sound and moved her head as though trying to recapture whatever portion of his anatomy had escaped her mouth. Ferrau looked down at the dick-sucking duo and made a shooing gesture as he scooped his softening cock back into his codpiece with his other hand. "Enough! Take yourselves off!"

The girls, including the dancer, instantly scampered in different directions, jiggling deliciously. Sebastian watched them go with longing until Trin jabbed an elbow in his side. "*Pig*," she commed.

Rubbing his ribs, he grinned down at her fondly. Marrying Trin was the smartest thing Nathan had ever done. “*Oink*,” he agreed.

While he’d been distracted, Nathan and the Dominor had begun the obligatory protocol mating dance. They kept it up so long even Nathan’s patience began to fray.

“You said in your message that you were in need of our assistance, but you couldn’t discuss the details over the com,” the captain said finally, spreading both arms in a “Well, we’re here” gesture. “How may we be of service?”

The Dominor sat back on his throne and eyed them. He was not a tall man, and his round face was as blandly ordinary as his thinning brown hair. Still, there was something about him that drew the eye—some impression of intelligence and authority. “I have heard a great deal about the power of your...what’s the phrase?”

“Nanotech implants,” Nathan supplied. Then, just in case the Dominor hadn’t already heard the lecture, he added, “Cybernetic structures no bigger than molecules. They graft themselves to our muscles, bones and nervous systems to perform different tasks, ranging from strength enhancement to computation to detecting infrared radiation.”

“Nanotech implants. Yes, that’s it.” Ferrau gave him an intense, narrow-eyed look. “I’m told these things make supermen of you—that you’re stronger, faster and more clever than ordinary men. Is this true?”

“Yes.”

Damn, Nathan did that well. Just that flat “yes,” without elaboration. It made the statement all the more believable. As it should be, since it was the simple truth.

“Show me.” The Dominor gestured, and another naked lovely appeared, carrying a long object wrapped in a length of black velvet.

Sebastian contained a sigh. They always wanted demonstrations.

The girl started to hand the package to Nathan, but Ferrau said, "No, not him. The blond one."

Sebastian raised a brow but accepted the package anyway. He unwrapped the fabric to discover it did indeed contain the expected steel bar. Bored, he caught the bar by either end and twisted it neatly into a loop. With his nanotech implants, he barely had to expend any effort at all.

"Yes!" The Dominor sat forward in his throne, his eyes gleaming. "You'll do nicely."

"We're delighted to hear it," Nathan said patiently. "But again, for what?"

"Rescuing my son." Ferrau's mouth drew tight, and a hint of desolation flickered in his pale eyes. "He's been abducted, and I'm afraid he's in great danger."

CHAPTER TWO

"Someone kidnapped your child?" Trinity asked. "That's terrible! How old is he?"

The Dominor sat back in his seat with a sigh. "Actually, he's not a child—he's twenty-six. He was out with a hunting party when he was set upon by agents of Ila Orva, the Dominess of the neighboring dominality of Corvo." He rubbed the spot between his brows with the fingers of one hand, as if trying to ease a headache. "Arnoux has been Ila's prisoner for the past month."

"So you want to hire the *Starrunner* to attack Corvo?" Nathan asked.

Ferrau's head jerked up. "Sweet Goddess of Pain, no! You might kill him. Assuming she did not slay him herself, as she's threatened to do if I dare mobilize my forces for war. Arnoux is my only child, and my wife..." He trailed off. "No, I can't risk that. This must be done subtly, but with great speed. Before the Dominess..." Ferrau stopped, and his mouth tightened.

"Before the Dominess what?" Nathan demanded.

The Dominor rose from his throne and began to pace. Despite his height—or lack of it—there was enough muscle on his frame to indicate he did more than lounge on a throne and enjoy the occasional blow job. "Ila has sworn to break him to the collar," he said, worry and outrage lacing his voice.

Trin frowned. "What does that mean?"

Ferrau glanced up at her and made an impatient gesture. "Make him a Thrall, a member of our submissive class. It's a huge insult. Those of my family have been dominants since the colony was established. To imply any of us would

willingly submit..." He clenched his fist. "I'd declare war on her for that alone, if she didn't hold Arnoux."

"What'd you do to torch her cargo?" Sebastian asked, idly wrapping the bar around his wrist. Catching the Dominor's bewildered expression, he explained, "Make her angry enough to insult you."

"Ah." He sighed. "I backed out of negotiations to wed Arnoux to the Dominess' eldest daughter, Marcelle. I had discovered...things about that girl that put a bad taste in my mouth. She's hard on her Thralls—very hard." His expression grew grim. "It's said she's only satisfied when blood has been spilled." The Dominor shook his head and began to pace again, striding back and forth in front of his throne. "If Ila had offered her youngest child, Zaria, I might have considered it. Indeed, had she offered to wed her son, Brys, to my daughter, Seva...but she did not. And I did not want such a one as Marcelle raising my grandchildren."

"I don't blame you, but it sounds as though you've managed to offend her royal ego," Trinity said. "Which means she's not going to want to give him up."

"No." Ferrau sank onto the edge of his throne and slumped. "She's sworn she will force my son to embrace submission. But I know him. He's a stubborn one, and proud with it. She won't break him." He looked up at them. "I have warned Ila if she gives him to that vicious bitch Marcelle, I will have my revenge, even if I must reduce both our dominalties to ash. But I fear she will run out of patience and let her daughter have her way. You must free him first."

"We could launch a clandestine raid," Nathan said, his gaze taking on the distant, calculating expression Sebastian had learned to respect. "Something stealthy and fast. Liberate him and..."

"No." The Dominor made a slashing gesture with one hand. "There is too much risk. I've been unable to discover where in the palace Arnoux is being held."

If you try to find him during a raid attempt, they could kill him before you could pinpoint his location."

Nathan inclined his head, conceding the point. "I assume you've thought of an alternative."

The Dominor straightened eagerly. "Indeed. I have made contact with the Thralldealer who provides Ila with her stock. If you could place a man with him..."

"An undercover mission," Sebastian said, looking up from the rod he'd absently twisted into a corkscrew. "Send somebody in there posing as one of these Thralls, find out where Arnoux is, and spirit him out before they even know what hit them."

A fierce grin lit Ferrau's face. "Exactly," he said, rising from his throne and approaching Sebastian to stare up into his face. "And you would be perfect for it!"

Sebastian blinked. "Me?" Play submissive to some vicious female dominant?

"Yes. Ila would jump at the chance to buy you. The face, the hair..." He gestured from Sebastian's goatee to his waist-length blond mane. "I knew you were the man for the job the moment I saw the recordings your captain sent me of your team in combat." He looked at Nathan. "That's why I approached you to begin with."

"Sounds risky," Trinity said.

"Extremely," Nathan agreed. "Sending him in alone, without backup..."

Ferrau waved a hand at the piece of steel Sebastian had absently mangled. "A man who could do that would be more than a match for the Dominess' entire palace guard." His eyes glittered. "And I will pay you. Very, very well."

Sebastian lifted a brow, though Nathan still looked dubious. "Just how well are we talking?"

Ferrau told him.

* * * * *

The next day, Sebastian found himself riding in a Thrallwagon, on the road to the dominality of Corvo and his mission to rescue Arnoux Ferrau from Dominess Ila Orva. During which, it seemed, he'd be required to submit to some bad-tempered female dominant with pretensions of royalty.

Oh, well, he thought philosophically, staring out through the bars of his cage, it's not like I ever minded eating a little pussy...

* * * * *

Zaria Orva looked at the naked man who lay sprawled on the thin pallet and felt her gorge rise. His back was a bloody mess, scoured to raw meat by blow after blow of a whip.

"Marcelle really was on a rip last night, wasn't she?" she said grimly to the guard who fidgeted by her side. Dom Searle had bitterly protested her plan to enter Marcelle's pleasure quarters and rescue the Thrall, but she'd insisted anyway. "Mother's warned her about using that steel-tipped cat on her submissives. She's going to kill one of them one of these days. Assuming she hasn't already."

Sighing, she crouched to look into the man's pain-dulled eyes. At least the poor bastard wasn't Ferrau. When she'd learned Marcelle had beaten one of her Thralls again, Zaria had been terrified her mother had finally handed the Domince over. But no, she recognized this fellow as a prior member of Marcelle's long-suffering stable.

"Domina, you shouldn't be here," Searle told her. "If the Domina hears..."

"And who's going to tell her?" Zaria asked, glancing up in time to catch the narrow glare the guardsman aimed at her handmaid. "And don't give Gemma that look. I ordered her to keep me informed whenever Marcelle went too far. I don't care to put our mother in the position of being forced to charge my sister with the murder of one of her Thralls."

Or worse, covering that murder up to spare her favorite child.

"Milady," Searle said, sounding worried, "if your sister ever finds out that you've interfered..." He broke off. Dominant and warrior though he was, he couldn't quite bring himself to say that the next target of Marcelle's murderous rage might be Zaria herself.

Zaria felt her stomach twist in dread at the thought of her sister's vicious temper. Then she looked down at the Thrall's bloody back and felt her determination harden. She couldn't let this man die. And he would, if he wasn't removed from the palace tonight. Marcelle was fully capable of torturing him again whenever another rage took her, whether he'd healed or not. And that could be the death of him.

Zaria sighed. It had all been so much easier before Brys left. Her brother was only a year younger than Marcelle, and he'd grown into a big, strapping man even she was reluctant to challenge. He'd kept a rein on the worst of their sister's rages when their mother had not.

But five years ago, there had been some kind of confrontation between Marcelle, Brys and Ila, and he'd bought a commission in the army. Since then, he'd paid only brief visits, primarily to see Zaria. Meanwhile, Marcelle had grown steadily more violent, more out-of-control.

Well, Brys was gone now, and if anybody was going to save Marcelle's Thralls, it would have to be Zaria.

"Run and get hot water and clean rags," she ordered Gemma, rising to her feet to look around the small, narrow cell. "We'll clean him up here and bandage

him." To Searle she added, "Have the stable Thralls prepare a wagon with fresh bedding. I'll drive him to the Outworlder's clinic myself." Zaria returned her attention to the Thrall's savaged back. "I fear only their doctors will be able to save him."

Gemma was already heading out the door like the good Thralline she was, but Searle hesitated. "Milady..."

"Stop worrying, Searle," Zaria told him. "She'll never suspect me." Her mouth took on a bitter twist. "She doesn't think I have the courage."

* * * * *

The rescue went as smoothly as Zaria could have wished. The guards looked the other way as she, Gemma, and Searle carried the Thrall out and loaded him into a wagon parked in the palace courtyard. She had no fear any of them would tell her sister. They might not respect her—they knew too much about her tastes for that—but they loved her too much to let her suffer the brunt of Marcelle's rage. Besides, they had a duty to protect the royal family.

Even from each other.

She, Gemma, and Searle returned to the palace several hours later, the Thrall having been left in the Outworlders' care. The doctors at the clinic had promised to transport him to Rabican once he was healed. He could seek out a kinder mistress there.

But as she climbed wearily down from the wagon, she heard Searle's low-voiced growl to Gemma. "As for you, Thralline—you will meet me at dawn in the dungeon. I feel the need to...deal with you."

"Yes, Dom Searle," Gemma said. Her breathless voice sounded more eager than frightened.

Despite herself, Zaria felt a little kick of heat of her own at the thought of Searle's discipline. With a sense of shamed anticipation, she knew she, too, would be getting up at dawn to see what the Dom intended for Gemma.

* * * * *

The next morning, Zaria rose before the sun and rolled from her warm, comfortable bed. In the dark of her room, she dressed quickly in her Domina's leathers, hands shaking with eagerness and furtive shame. She knew she shouldn't be doing this. She should get back in her bed and go to sleep while Dom Searle disciplined his lover in whatever way pleased them both.

Instead, she lit a candle and padded out into the corridor in the wavering circle of its light. The echoing marble halls of the palace were silent this early, though she thought she could hear the faint sound of voices from the kitchens. The Thralls were already at work.

Hurrying in the opposite direction, she found the massive wooden door she sought and swung it open. It creaked loudly as it revealed the stone steps leading down into the dungeon. Lifting her candle, her heart pounding hard, she descended.

When she finally reached the echoing chamber far beneath the palace, Zaria could hear Searle's voice rumbling somewhere in the darkness. She threw a glance in that direction as she stepped behind the decorative screen that stood across the back of the room.

"Such pretty nipples," the guardsman said, stroking big, blunt fingers over Gemma's small breasts. He was naked, his brawny body gleaming in the torchlight as he stood over his helpless lover. The Thralline, equally naked, was draped on her back over a punishment bench that held her torso arched and her legs spread wide. He'd chained her down until she could barely move, but judging by her expression, she didn't mind at all.

“So pink and hard,” Searle purred, “and so delicately responsive.” His voice dropped to a suggestive rumble. “I think they need to be punished.”

The girl gasped.

Zaria licked her dry lips as she took her accustomed place behind the screen. It was designed for the Dominess’ use, for those times when she wanted to watch a Thrall’s punishment without taking a direct role. In reality, however, Zaria used the screen far more often than her mother ever had, especially since Gemma and Searle had become lovers.

As she settled into a thickly padded chair behind the grate, the guard’s gaze flicked toward her, tracking the movement of her candle. Searle knew she watched them, of course, just as she’d done so many times before. Yet he had never given her away to the Dominess.

Zaria was grateful. Her mother would have been outraged—not because Zaria loved to watch the guard take Gemma, but because her need to do so hinted she hungered for a man to dominate her the same way.

Now Zaria watched in longing as Searle turned to a nearby table and selected one of the erotic toys there.

It wasn’t only the couple’s passion she envied, though she yearned to experience that kind of heat for herself. No, what she envied most was their acceptance of the roles they’d been born to—Searle as dominant, Gemma as submissive. Neither longed to be anything else. While Zaria dreamed of a submission she shouldn’t want and never dared experience.

CHAPTER THREE

Searle let the padded clamp close over Gemma's nipple. The girl arched in her bonds, whimpering at the pleasurable sting.

Behind her screen, Zaria shivered with a combination of need and self-disgust. *I should have been born a Thralline.*

But she hadn't been. She'd been born a Domina of the house of Orva, and this hunger she felt was wrong. She should take as much joy in dominating a man as her mother did. She should yearn to watch Searle writhe under her boot and beg to serve her pleasure.

And yet, when Searle applied a second clamp to Gemma's other breast, her body leaped in need.

The Thralline whimpered, a long, voluptuous sound of mingled pleasure and pain, as he flicked and twisted and tormented her stiff nipples. His delicious ruthlessness had Zaria squirming in her chair, her fingers slipping under her armored bodice to tease her own tight peaks. By the time he rasped, "Are you ready to suck my cock?" cream was running hot in her core.

Gemma twisted in the wooden rack that held her body arched in a graceful bow, her clamp-adorned nipples pointing stiffly at the ceiling. "Yes," she groaned. "Oh, now! Take my mouth, Master—pump your cock down my throat!"

Searle strolled around to the head of the rack, where Gemma's head hung exactly at the height of a man's groin. She opened her mouth eagerly, and the warrior slid his thick erection between her lips. He let his head fall back with a

groan of pleasure, dark hair swirling down his broad back. As he slowly began to pump, Gemma suckled him with submissive hunger.

Zaria opened her mouth in a soundless moan. Of all the sex acts, this was one she was utterly forbidden to indulge in. No royal Domina would ever willingly suck a man's cock.

And yet, as she watched Searle stroke his width in and out of Gemma's lips, she closed her eyes in need. One hand sliding between her thighs as the other teased a nipple, she imagined herself bound and helpless in just such a rack, feeling the velvet heat of a warrior's erection sliding seductively over her tongue. In her mind, she heard his rough commands as he ordered her to suck him. She could almost smell the masculine musk of his scent as she obeyed.

Letting her head fall back, Zaria imagined herself utterly at the mercy of her handsome dominant, yet secure in the knowledge he loved her, as Searle loved his Thralline.

Shivering, she tightened her grip on her nipple, pulling and tugging as she stroked between her thighs. With a sigh of surrender, she closed her eyes and pretended the fingers caressing her belonged to the dark erotic conqueror of her dreams. The one who made her a willing captive, who stripped and bound her and made rough, tender love to her while she begged him for a mercy she didn't want.

The dominant lover she could never have.

"Enough," Searle said at last. Looking up, Zaria saw his grin flash in the darkness, very male, very knowing. "It's not your *mouth* I want to spill my seed into this morn." He pulled his ruddy cock tenderly from Gemma's lips and stepped between her splayed thighs. Zaria stood on her toes for a better view as he parted Gemma's nether lips and began working the thick shaft inside. His low groan of pleasure blended with the Thralline's whimper of delight. "Oh, fuck me,

Master!" Gemma cried, straining to grind herself deeper onto his shaft. "Give me no mercy!"

"Oh, believe me—you'll get none!" he growled, and began to pump. "Especially after that trick with the Domina yestereve!"

Zaria slipped her fingers under her leather loinband. She was very wet, very ready. Resting her forehead against the grate, she stroked herself deeply as the guard rode Gemma in hard, grinding lunges.

At last he bellowed out his climax, his cry blending with the Thralline's scream of pleasure. Zaria, hidden behind her grate, allowed herself no more than a gasp as she came in a flood of forbidden sweetness.

Minutes later, she crept back up the stairs to the palace's main floor, dogged by the guilt she never failed to feel whenever she yielded to the need to watch Searle dominate Gemma.

Zaria knew she dishonored her house every time she indulged her unnatural desires. And yet, she could not stay away, though she regularly swore to herself she'd never return to the dungeon again.

Her mother would be outraged.

And how Marcelle would taunt her. Even Brys would be disappointed that his cherished baby sister was a deviant.

Well, she simply wouldn't let them find out. She'd go on hiding her dreams of handsome dominants, just as she'd always done. Her family would never discover the truth.

And maybe someday she could resign herself to her proper place. Maybe someday she would finally discover the joy in forcing a man to bend to her will.

All she needed was the right man.

"Domina Zaria!" a male voice hissed.

Zaria blinked and looked around. One of the Thralls stood in the corridor, wearing only the scrap of silk wrapped around his hips that was all her mother allowed her submissives. His body was muscled and beautiful, and Zaria thought instantly of painting him. "The Dominess requests your attendance, Domina," he said. "The Thralldealer is here."

She contained a sigh. Her mother never lost hope some handsome submissive would finally move her to truly dominate him. Apparently Ila found Zaria's mechanical efforts in that direction less than convincing.

But perhaps today Ila would get her wish. Maybe today, Zaria would finally meet that perfect Thrall.

Fired by that hope—and more than a little guilt over her foray into the dungeon—Zaria strode off down the corridor toward her mother's audience chamber.

But even as she walked along the palace's winding corridors, her mind drifted back to the scene she'd just witnessed. She'd love to sketch Searle as he dominated Gemma, but she didn't dare leave a record of her wicked obsession. If Marcelle ever got her hands on such a thing, she'd use it at the most humiliating possible moment to discredit Zaria as publicly as she could.

But if she dared sketch the couple anyway... For a moment, Zaria let herself dream of capturing the lines of Searle's strong, muscled body rising over Gemma's slim, soft one in a dance of masculine and feminine, dominance and submission...

She was still imagining the pleasure of that sketch when a guard opened the doorway to her mother's chamber. With an acknowledging nod, Zaria stepped inside.

And stopped dead, gaping at the most beautiful man she'd ever seen.

He stood naked in the audience chamber, his head raised in a pose of unconscious male arrogance despite the silver shackles he wore on corded

wrists. His hair was a long, silken waterfall of gold down his back, matching the neatly trimmed goatee that framed his sternly beautiful mouth. His face was made for the fall of light and shadow, elegant planes and angles forming cheekbones, chin and broad, high forehead. His deep-set eyes were a color she'd never seen before, a vivid shade of dark green, as pure and sharp as gemstones. Looking at him, Zaria felt her chest ache with the need to capture the amazing color of those defiant eyes.

His body was a powerful match for his face, all chiseled muscle lying in great slabs across his broad chest, bulging arms and thick, powerful thighs. The only soft thing about him was the cock hanging impressively between those brawny thighs.

I'll paint him as a warrior, Zaria thought, gazing up into his face, bewitched and hypnotized. He looked down into her eyes with a curl of amusement in the line of his lips. She realized suddenly that she had crossed the room without being aware of it, drawn irresistibly to his arrogant beauty.

Perhaps he'd sensed her fascination. Perhaps that was why he met her stare with a boldness she'd never seen in a Thrall facing those who would buy him. Usually such men kept their eyes submissively lowered, but not this one. Indeed, his gaze flicked down from her face to brazenly focus on the cleavage revealed by her armored top.

Ten Gods, he was ogling her! As if she were a Thralline presented for *his* purchase!

Zaria stared at him, caught halfway between outrage and a feminine frisson of pleasure. He didn't seem to notice. A distinct heat grew in his eyes, and she felt something nudge her thighs. Looking down, she realized his cock had risen, growing quickly into a long, thick erection with an intriguing upward curve. Despite her sense of offended dignity, she felt her nipples peak.

"Oh, he is impressive," Domina Ila Orva purred.

Zaria started and looked toward her mother. With all her attention focused on the fascinating Thrall, she hadn't even noticed the Dominess was in the room.

Ila sprawled on her throne, wrapped in an elegant red silk robe shot with gold, her jeweled coronet glittering against her graying chestnut hair. Though nearly fifty, her long, elegant face still held the beauty that had once brought even dominants to their knees.

Now, as she watched Zaria, her dark, intelligent eyes gleamed with satisfied amusement. "I see the Thralldealer's merchandise has won your interest." Her gaze flicked toward the big male. "He's an arrogant one, isn't he? Wouldn't you like to tame him?"

No, the thought flashed across Zaria's mind, *actually I'd like him to tame me*. Her cheeks heated in embarrassment at her own wanton thoughts. "He does need discipline," she managed.

The Thrall's gaze lifted lazily to hers, and his lips twitched as if suppressing a laugh. His lifted gold brow communicated a silent message: *Do you honestly think you're up to the job?*

Stung, she opened her mouth to snap out a reprimand, only to be interrupted by the ring of boots on marble.

Marcelle strode into the room, slapping her quirt against the top of her boot. A tall, powerful woman, she had the same strong features and curling chestnut hair as their mother, yet she lacked Ila's beauty. Zaria had once been puzzled about that, until she realized the tight lines of cruelty around Marcelle's mouth poisoned her looks.

"Ten Hells," her sister raged, slinging her quirt across the chamber. "It's as though he vanished off the very planet!"

"Who has, dear?" the Dominess asked, the lazy humor vanishing from her face.

"My Thrall. The newer one. And I'd barely broken him in!"

Oh, to the contrary, Zaria thought, even as long practice kept her face impassive. You'd broken him quite thoroughly.

For a moment she considered telling her mother what Marcelle had done to the Thrall, perhaps even admitting her own role in his rescue. No, best not. Her mother wouldn't believe the extent of the man's injuries, and the Outworlders had already healed the worst of them with their advanced technology. Marcelle would reclaim her Thrall, and Zaria would be unable to rescue the next man her sister abused to the brink of death.

"Ahhh, but what's this?" Marcelle purred.

Zaria looked up in alarm as her sister sauntered over, eyes fixed on the big, naked Thrall. Instantly, everything in her cried out in protest. *No! She'll want him, and if Mother gives him to her...*

The blond Thrall, not realizing his danger, gave Marcelle the same lazy smile he'd given Zaria. Before she could step between them, her sister's hand flashed out, wrapped around his cock, and gave it a vicious twist.

The Thrall roared in startled pain. To Zaria's shock, he dared to grab Marcelle's hand and throw it off. Guards lunged toward him, and the Thralldealer made a sound of involuntary protest. The man and woman standing with him took a step forward, probably to beat down their recalcitrant captive.

"No!" Zaria cried, stepping between the Thrall and her sister's lifted fist. "He's mine! You will not touch him!"

An unholy light flooded Marcelle's eyes. She took a step forward as an ugly smile curled her lips. "Oh, won't I?"

CHAPTER FOUR

For an instant, as Zaria looked up at her taller, brawnier sister, something inside her cringed. Then she remembered the bloody back of Marcelle's last Thrall, and fury stormed in to replace the fear. "No," she gritted. "Not this one. I saw him first. I want him."

Marcelle laughed, a disbelieving shout of contempt. She lowered her head until she was nose to nose with Zaria. "You wouldn't even know what to do with him!"

"I'd know not to leave him a bloody ruin," Zaria snapped, refusing to back down from the frenzy she could see growing in her sister's dark eyes.

"That's enough." Ila's voice slashed through the atmosphere of violence swirling over the room. "Marcelle, your sister gets the Thrall."

Forgetting her fury, Marcelle swung around to gape. "But Mother! Look at him. She can't handle—"

"At least she's never had a Thrall disappear," Ila said. "How many have you lost this year alone?"

Six, since Zaria had grown sick of watching her sister's submissives suffer under Marcelle's brutal hand.

"He touched me!" Marcelle raged. "He should be punished!"

"Dear, when you twist a man's cock when he's not expecting it, these things happen." The Dominess' eyes flickered. "Besides, it's past time your sister developed a...suitable interest in a man." She turned to the Thralldealer. "How much?"

As the dealer diffidently named a price that was probably far less than he'd originally intended, Marcelle turned toward her again. The killing light in those black eyes made Zaria step back a pace. "You. Will. Pay." Whirling, Marcelle stalked out.

"You know," Sebastian commed as Marcelle slammed the door behind her, *"I don't believe I've ever wanted to kick a woman's ass quite that bad."*

"Yeah, well, it's a good thing you controlled yourself," Nathan replied. He, Trin and two of their crew were posing as the Thralldealer's assistants. Which meant they, at least, weren't standing around with their dicks hanging out for any passing lunatic to grab. *"We damn near ended up in a battle with the entire palace guard."*

"Bloody hell, we should have gone for it," Sebastian growled, his abused cock still throbbing. *"We could have taken the queen bitch hostage, and I could have given that vicious little lunatic the ass warming she so desperately needs."*

"We still don't know where the Domince is," Trin pointed out. *"They may be holding him somewhere else altogether. We can't take the chance."*

"Which means we're going to have to do this the way we originally planned," Nathan said, fixing a stern gaze on Sebastian. *"And that means you can't let yourself be taken off guard like that again. These women are sadists – and that includes your new owner. One of them will probably go after you again. Don't lose your temper next time."*

"Actually, I'm not so sure the other girl is quite that nasty," Trin said thoughtfully, eyeing the little Domina who still stood protectively at Sebastian's side. *"She was willing to step in front of him and defuse the entire situation. And judging from the look in Bitch Sister's eyes, she took a chance to do it."*

Trin had a point, Sebastian decided, looking down at his new "owner." Of course, he'd hoped to be bought by the mother, which would have simplified things considerably. Still, this girl had all the potential of being a much better

alternative, from a personal standpoint if nothing else. She might be short, but she had a luscious little body. He was particularly looking forward to getting his hands—among other things—on those magnificent tits.

Besides, the little chickie really did have spine. She had to be a good fifteen centimeters shorter than Bitch Sister, and at least fifteen kilos lighter. She was also curved where the bitch was all wiry muscle. Yet she'd been willing to tackle Marcelle on his behalf.

All of which couldn't help but give a guy a warm, fuzzy feeling. Especially since there was a chance he'd get to sample that tasty little body before he had to spring Ferrau. Particularly those galactic-class tits.

* * * * *

At last Zaria was able to escape back to her quarters with her new prize, Searle at their heels. She was itching to sketch him...

Among other things, whispered a wicked little voice.

Striding into the wide, airy room that was her studio, Zaria headed straight for the cabinet that held her supplies. Glancing automatically back at the Thrall—he had the unusual name of Sebastian, according to the Thralldealer—she saw he'd stopped to look around. His gaze was distinctly calculating, which might explain why Searle watched every move he made with narrow attention. Her guardsman plainly didn't trust him. Perhaps with good reason. Perhaps she should tie the Thrall up, just to be safe. Her mind flashed to the image of Gemma, her body arched into a bow in the rack that morning. She pictured the Sebastian's brawny form curved in the same dramatic pose.

Even her mother would approve of that composition.

"Lock him in the mounting block," Zaria ordered Searle over her shoulder as she opened the supply cupboard and contemplated its contents. She decided she'd start out with a charcoal sketch. There'd be time for oils later.

"Mounting block?" she heard Sebastian mutter. "What do I look like, a horse?"

"You look like whatever the Ten Hells the Domina wants you to be," Searle growled. "Now get into position."

It took considerable swearing and coercion, but by the time Zaria had her easel set up with a thick sheet of paper affixed to the clip, Searle had managed to get the Thrall manacled to the block. The female superior position had never done that much for her, but when she turned and saw Sebastian bent in a bow over the mounting block's padded curve, she felt cream spin into her core. The block was made like a wooden half circle standing on the floor. He lay on his back over it with ankles and wrists shackled to either side. Afternoon sunlight poured over his muscled contours and gleamed among the strands of his long blond hair as it spilled to the floor in a pool of golden silk. Zaria had never seen a Thrall look more beautiful—or more pissed off. The green of his eyes had gone positively icy, and there was a distinct snarl in the line of his handsome mouth.

And unfortunately, his impressive cock was completely limp. Not at all the effect she was looking for.

Zaria crossed the room to him, barely aware of Searle closing the door behind him now that the Thrall was safely secured.

Sebastian lifted his head and glared up at her. "This is damned uncomfortable."

"Oh, don't be a nig," she said, bending over him and taking his cock in hand. "I know you've ridden a mounting block before."

He watched warily as she began to handle him, as though afraid she was going to give his cock the same nasty jerk Marcelle had. "What's a nig?"

Zaria lifted a brow. It was a common expression. "A Thrall who whines at every little command." Keeping her touch light and tender, she caressed his cock.

She heard him swallow. "You do realize that doesn't detach? I mean, you can borrow it, but only if the rest of me comes along for the ride."

Zaria chuckled. "Don't worry, Sebastian. I have no intention of doing any damage to your magnificent anatomy."

He gave her a flashing, roguish grin that made his goatee tilt up and something turn over in her chest. "Magnificent, huh?"

She smiled and cupped his balls. They were heavy, deliciously full in her palm. His cock filled, swelling to equally impressive proportions. "Oh, yes. Definitely magnificent." Releasing him, she turned back toward her easel. "Now hold that pose."

"What?"

Zaria grinned at the outrage in his voice. Her sister had never realized that you didn't need a whip to instill discipline.

"A good Thrall doesn't ogle the Domina in public, Sebastian," she purred, as she stepped behind her easel and picked up a piece of charcoal.

She was going to *draw* him?

Sebastian stared at Zaria in disbelief as she stood behind her easel, sketching in long, confident strokes with some kind of black stick. He'd assumed she'd bought him for kinky sex, especially when she'd had that guard chain him to this...whatever it was. And he'd been perfectly willing to play along, as long as she didn't intend to yank any tender portions of his anatomy.

But he hadn't realized she'd intended to *torture* him.

Look at her, standing over there with those incredible tits just barely contained in two leather cups that weren't nearly big enough for the job. She wore some kind of narrow leather thong thing that passed between her legs and left most of her pretty ass bare, while thick leather straps circled her legs from small booted feet all the way up to her crotch. The whole rig was obviously

going for the *I'll-kick-your-ass-and-make-you-beg-for-more* look, but on her, it didn't quite come off.

That failure might have something to do with the softening effect of the lush sable curls tumbling over her shoulders. But more than likely it was her eyes—soft, brown, and damn near too big for her heart-shaped little face. Add the straight, delicate nose and the full lips that just begged for cock, and any pretensions of being a vicious dominatrix were simply doomed.

However, he could easily picture her all tied up and ready to take his dick in the orifice of his choice.

Damn, now there was a thought. He felt his cock twitch in lecherous appreciation.

Since there didn't seem to be much else he could do at the moment, he let himself sink into wicked daydreams in which she was the one shackled to the mounting block.

Only he sure as hell wouldn't be messing around with any little black sticks.

"There's a term for women like you," Sebastian growled after she'd spent a half hour sketching him. His cock had gotten longer and harder with every minute that passed.

Zaria wasn't sure she wanted to know why. She gave him a grin around her easel anyway. "Domina?"

"Tease," he growled. "You know what happens to teases?"

Something inside Zaria gave a hot little kick of excitement. A Thrall had never looked at her like that, with feral masculine heat in his eyes, as if imagining all the ways he'd like to take revenge for her taunting.

New Thralls more typically wore expressions of breathless anticipation, as if eager to see what wicked thing she would do to them. Those familiar with her,

however, only looked slightly bored. After all, they wanted a dominant as much as she did, and she simply wasn't convincing in the role.

But as she looked at Sebastian's powerful body locked to the block in a muscular arch, his thick cock pointing stiffly at his chin, his vivid eyes locked hungrily on her body, she felt a flood of heat. It was easy to imagine what he'd do to her if he got loose. The thought made her nipples rise to hard, tingling peaks.

Suddenly she wanted to tease him in truth. Wanted to watch all that male fury steam.

Slowly, she lifted her hands and reached for the laces between the cups of her armored bodice. Sebastian's gaze sharpened. "What?" she asked, her voice a throaty purr even to her own ears.

He licked his lips, watching her fingers pluck at the laces. "Did you ask a question?"

"You asked if I knew what happens to women who tease." Slowly, she pulled the lace out of another eyelet. Her breasts bulged, on the verge of escaping the tight leather bodice. "I'm asking—what?"

He shifted in his bonds as his eyes flared hot. If anything, his cock hardened even more. "Somebody makes them pay." The words were a low, velvet-edged growl.

She gave the lace another slow tug, pulling it out of the last eyelet. Her top sprang apart, liberating her breasts. The air felt cool on their hard, puckered peaks. "How?"

"With clamps," he rumbled, his gaze locked on her breasts. "Attached to stiff little nipples."

"Oh, I don't think so." She swaggered—and she'd never swaggered in her life—over to the nearest chair. Swinging a booted foot up on the seat, she bent to unlace her leggings. "Nobody would dare torment a Domina's breasts."

Deliberately, she began unwinding the straps of her leggings until the soft leather fell away from her thighs. She tossed the straps aside and threw a look at Sebastian just in time to see him roll his hips upward. His cock bobbed hungrily. She licked her lips. *So this is what it's like to dominate a man*, she thought, and went to work on her other leg, conscious of his burning gaze. "Nipple punishment is the kind of thing reserved for lowly Thrallines."

"Or pretty little Domina teases who find themselves kidnapped."

She caught her breath and looked up at him, startled that he'd dare voice her secret fantasy. For a moment, as she looked into his hot male gaze, it didn't sound like an empty threat at all.

Sebastian watched, all but drooling as the Domina stripped off the rest of that ridiculous armor, baring the soft, intensely female body that he'd spent the last half hour fantasizing about.

As she moved, the cloud of sable curls slid around her slim shoulders. She threw him a quick, dark look and arched her spine, lifting the full mounds of her breasts, pale as cream, crowned with plump pink tips that really did seem to beg for clamps. Her legs were slender, long in proportion to her doll-like height, with a fine thatch of soft curls between them.

For a moment, he seriously considered popping the chains that held him to this silly bondage rig. He figured it would take him about five seconds to get his "mistress" hogtied with the bullwhip hanging on the wall behind her. Then another hour or so for a highly erotic interrogation, during which he'd both extract the location of Ferrau and get her nicely wet. After that, he could give her the royal fucking they'd both be more than ready for, and then he'd go rescue the kid.

God, it was tempting, particularly when she turned her back on him, set her legs apart, and bent over, displaying glistening pink folds and a perfectly

rounded ass that made his dick jerk in lust. She looked over her shoulder at him. "Somehow, I doubt kidnapping a Domina is as easy as you dream," she purred.

Don't bet on it, sweetheart.

Unfortunately, this was no time to go off half-cocked...so to speak. He knew he needed to get a better sense of the guards' locations and patrols, not to mention where they had Ferrau stashed and what condition he was in.

So, like it or not, the little Domina's punishment was going to have to wait. But looking at that luscious butt, he could only hope it wouldn't be for long.

CHAPTER FIVE

Zaria straightened up slowly, giving him plenty of time to consider her delicious, wide-spread legs and utterly fuckable ass before she turned around and sauntered back over to him. Sebastian gave her his best menacing look, but she just lowered her lashes over chocolate brown eyes as one corner of her full mouth quirked upward in a taunting smile.

He was so hard, his cock throbbed.

Her gaze dropped to the aching shaft, and that wicked smile widened. Casually, with elaborate disinterest, she reached down to run the tip of one long nail along the length of his prick, which jerked lustfully as his balls drew tight “Oh, that looks... painful.”

“Climb on and see,” he growled, eyeing her erect pink nipples. He badly wanted to find out if they were as sweet as they looked.

“I could,” Zaria mused, contemplating the drop of pre-cum clinging to the head of his cock. “Or I could just...” She scooped up the drop with one long finger. “...let you suffer.” She licked it from her fingertip with a flick of her pointed pink tongue.

He went still as he fought to contain the impulse to break his shackles. “Oh, you’re living dangerously, little girl.”

She gave him an evil grin and bent lower until her head hovered just over one of his nipples. Smiling a dark, wicked smile, she gave the hard little button a lick. The pleasure of that hot, wet tongue made him jolt in his bonds and groan. “I’m not a ‘little’ anything, Thrall.”

“Better be careful.” Excitement burned in his veins. “Because neither am I.”

She reached down to wrap those cool, tapered fingers around his aching cock. "I noticed. And I wondered..." Another slow, taunting lick as her fingers tightened on his cock in a seductive pull. "...just how big can you get?"

"If you keep that up, you're going to find out."

"Oh, I hope so." Another taunting lick. She smiled as she watched him struggle not to moan. "I'm so looking forward to it."

"You do realize," he gritted, as she licked him again, then lifted one hand to rake her nails gently up his ribs, "one of these days I'm going to have *you* in chains?"

"That, I very much doubt." She laughed softly, tauntingly, and swung a leg over his torso, all but thrusting her butt in his face. Inhaling sharply, he breathed in the hot, musky cream of her arousal. "Now why don't you use that mouth for something other than silly threats? Eat your Domina's pussy like a good Thrall."

With a low growl of excitement, Sebastian lifted his head and obeyed, licking and biting gently at the wet, tender folds. She was just as delicious as he'd imagined. Flicking her tight little pearl-like clit with his tongue, he imagined her tied up, spread wide, and ready for his raging hard-on.

He suckled and nibbled until she dropped her bitch-goddess pose and backed into his face, grinding her hot, wet cunt against his mouth, finally forcing him to drop his head to breathe.

"More!" she whimpered.

"Fuck me!" he growled back, rolling his hips upward in a demand he knew was anything but submissive.

"Ooooh," Zaria moaned. "Yes!" Moving with lithe speed, she swung off him and turned around, her dark eyes meeting his with dazed heat as she mounted him again. Grabbing his cock around the base, she pointed it skyward, traced the head of his shaft through her creamy wet flesh, and found her opening. Slowly,

she settled her weight back onto his hard length, forcing it inside her sweet, clamping cunt centimeter by luscious centimeter.

He groaned in erotic pleasure. God, she was tight. And wet.

And amazing.

Zaria caught her breath in a gasp of pleasure at the feeling of the Thrall's massive cock working its way deeper and deeper into her sex. He was damn near too much for her, particularly in this position, arched hard upward, impaling her.

"You're tiny," he growled, rolling his hips upward. She sucked in a breath at the way he stuffed her so completely. "I like that."

For a wicked, forbidden moment, she found herself wondering what it would be like to be at *his* mercy – bound and helpless, while he fucked her with a ravenous male hunger he didn't bother to control. She shuddered in arousal, rose to her toes, and ground herself down hard.

"Oh, yeaah," Sebastian rumbled, meeting her thrusts with jarring strength. "That's it!"

The pleasure seared Zaria, maddened her. She began jogging up and down, fucking him hard, taking him deep. She could feel her orgasm gathering like a firestorm, jolted closer to breaking every time she rammed herself onto Sebastian's blade-hard cock.

Grabbing his hips, she forced him still harder, deeper, tossing her head at the blazing pleasure as that big shaft raked her tight inner tissues. "I'm coming!" she cried.

"Yeah!" he bellowed, hunching in and out of her in driving strokes. "Yeah, oh, you hot little bitch, just you wait until I get you –"

He roared under her, his body bowing, driving his cock impossibly deep. Zaria felt her orgasm tear free in a hot explosion of ecstasy that blasted along her nervous system.

She'd never climaxed harder or more ferociously in her life.

* * * * *

The next morning, Sebastian found himself trailing after his new "mistress" and trying to keep himself from watching her leather-clad ass with too much lecherous interest. He gathered from the ugly looks he got from the palace guards that Thralls weren't supposed to be quite so open in their admiration.

Not that he particularly gave a damn. There was a lot about Zaria to admire—even aside from the explosive orgasm she'd given him the night before.

Or, for that matter, the equally impressive ride she'd given him that morning. A ride that had done a lot to cool his irritation at being chained to the bed all night. Evidently, she still wasn't inclined to trust her new Thrall yet.

She had no idea how untrustworthy he really was. He'd spent hours last night fantasizing about what he'd do to her once the collar was on the other neck.

But as the morning advanced, he began to suspect he wasn't the only one concealing hidden depths, however. As he followed the Domina on her rounds, it became obvious the one who kept palace life operating smoothly wasn't the Dominess—it was Zaria.

First came a meeting with the cook to discuss which entrées to serve at the evening meal, how to prepare them, and what wines should accompany each one.

Next came a trip to the laundry, where Zaria inspected the job the Thrallines were doing there. Sebastian was interested to note that despite her merciless nitpicking, the women seemed to accept her criticism without resentment.

Evidently his little mistress was well-liked, even by those who didn't fantasize about seeing her in a ball-gag.

After that, she checked each and every bedroom in the sprawling building, making sure all the beds were made and the chamber pots emptied.

Sebastian trailed behind her, trying to look harmless while he scanned and recorded every centimeter of the place. She'd ordered him along to fetch and carry—and indeed, he found himself lugging various heavy objects around for her. But he didn't mind, because the tour gave him the perfect chance to count guards, note the movements and schedules of the staff, and generally fill in the blanks of his knowledge of the palace.

He'd already stored a map of the building in his computer implant's database, after generating it from scans the *Starrunner* had made of the building from orbit. Unfortunately, however, though it showed the locations of rooms and the largest concentrations of people, the map didn't tell him who those people were. Or, for that matter, where Ferrau was being held, since there was no way to pick the Domince out from the crowd.

Sebastian was going to have to figure that part out through sheer, old-fashioned surveillance.

Then Zaria led him to the mother-lode—the guardsmen's barracks. While she conducted a surprise inspection, Sebastian did a rough estimate of guard strength based on the number of bunks he counted.

As he trailed behind her wearing his best guileless expression, Zaria tore through the men's quarters—flipping open lockers, pulling swords from scabbards to check for rust, and generally sending the noncoms into a tizzy.

By the time she finished ripping strips off those who needed it, Sebastian felt much more confident in his manpower estimate, though not particularly pleased with the results. It seemed there were a good three hundred guardsmen altogether—more than even he cared to take on by himself.

As he meditated on that disconcerting fact, the noncoms vanished to do their own strip-ripping, and he and Zaria headed for the door.

Suddenly she stopped in her tracks and glanced around. Preoccupied with his calculations, it took Sebastian a moment to realize she was reacting to low, feminine moans and male gasps.

Zaria turned and headed down a short corridor, following the soft, intimate sounds. Sebastian grinned and sauntered after her. Obviously, she meant to catch some fornicating guardsman in the act.

She stopped in the next doorway and stood staring inside, as if frozen. Curious, Sebastian moved closer and glanced in over her shoulder.

Two guardsmen had a pretty blonde Thralline bent over a chair, wrapped in an intricate arrangement of ropes. One of them was pumping in and out of her from behind, while the other fucked her mouth.

"Oh, come on, Cherese, you can take more of it than that," the man said, with a low, dark laugh. "Relax your throat."

The blonde made a strangled, moaning sound of submission. He sank another inch deeper.

Grinning, Sebastian waited for Zaria to chew the three out for goldbricking. Instead, she whirled around and started to hurry from the room, almost colliding with him in the process. Her eyes were vague with startled arousal. A furious blush flooded her cheekbones, and she slipped past him without a word.

Sebastian blinked and used his computer implant to do a quick scan of her retreating back. It confirmed what he'd glimpsed. Zaria had found something wildly arousing in the sight of the blonde being dominated.

I'll be damned, he thought. *My little mistress has a submissive streak.* A hot grin of anticipation rolled over his face. *Well, isn't that interesting?*

Sebastian was still mulling the delicious implications of Zaria's taste for submission when she unwittingly led him right where he most wanted to go.

When they stepped inside, he first took the chamber for yet another of the palace's pretty sitting rooms. The marble floor was covered in brilliant, jewel-toned rugs, while colorful tapestries depicted naked men writhing in blended agony and pleasure. The furniture was made of some delicate white wood picked out in gold leaf and upholstered in the same jewel tones as the rugs.

The arching ceilings were supported by the usual thick white columns. But then he noticed something different about each of those supports—a strange projection sticking out from the base, thrusting upward at an angle. Eyeing one, he realized the projection was a rather intimidating dildo.

For a moment, Sebastian thought the false cocks must be intended for female pleasure. Then he noticed the rings embedded in the column's surface, presumably to accommodate shackles.

I don't think I even want to know.

"Hello, sister." Sebastian turned at the petulant voice to find Marcelle lounging sullenly in the corner on a pile of thick pillows. A bottle sat on a low table by her elbow.

Great, the little bitch had been drinking. This was going to get ugly.

That prediction proved true as she looked up at Zaria with something nasty flickering in her gaze. "What, out of the bedroom already, and you with a new Thrall?" Contempt dripped from Marcelle's voice. "What's the matter—couldn't he get it up?" Deigning to address Sebastian, she added, "Don't feel bad. Her Thralls usually can't. She's too soft and spineless to get them hard."

"Strange," Sebastian drawled, knowing quite well he should keep his mouth shut. "I didn't have any problem with that."

Zaria shot him a warning look. "In any case, Marcelle..."

Before she could get the rest of the sentence out of her mouth, a man bellowed, "*I said no!* Kill me and be damned—I'll not bend a knee to any Domme bitch!"

Sebastian went still, staring at the closed door the cry had come from. Oh, now *that* sounded interesting. Ferrau?

Before he could invent an excuse to investigate, the door opened. The Dominess stalked out and slammed it behind her. "That stubborn, arrogant little..." She broke off and began to pace the chamber.

Sebastian concentrated on doing absolutely nothing to draw attention to himself. He'd already noticed these people had a tendency to treat Thralls as furniture. With any luck, they'd let him spy in peace.

"Let me have him," Marcelle said into the thrumming tension, sipping languidly from her goblet. "I'll bring him to heel for you."

"No, thank you," Ila growled. "You'd have us at war in a fortnight."

"Not if the Dominor doesn't find out about it," Marcelle said with a drunken leer.

"Do you honestly think you could hide something like that?" Zaria demanded. "The minute he saw the scars you like to leave..."

Marcelle shrugged. "We'll just tell him Arnoux liked it."

"And what's Arnoux going to say?"

"Anything I tell him to."

Zaria threw up her hands with a choked sound of frustration. "You have no understanding of him at all! He is a Dom, not a Thrall, and you'll never make him anything else no matter how you beat him."

"I will." The Dominess' eyes narrowed and hardened. "That bastard Dominor dared say my daughter is unnatural and perverted. Well, we'll see who is unnatural."

"Everyone knows the Dominess has only one perverted daughter," Marcelle murmured into her goblet. "And it's not I."

Zaria stiffened at the dig. Sebastian lifted a brow, waiting for the explosion.

It didn't come. Instead she turned toward the Dominess. "This is madness, Mother, and you know it. Return Arnoux to his father before you plunge us into war."

"No!" Ila slashed her hand through the air. "We've come too far. It's war one way or another. But I'll have that boy's submission, if it's with my dying breath."

"But why?" Zaria demanded hotly. "Why court an unnecessary war simply because Ferrau refused to agree to a wedding between Arnoux and Marcelle? Why risk the destruction of us all?"

"It's not an unnecessary war, Zaria!" Ila whirled on her, a snarl curling her mouth. "Marcelle is my heir! One day, she'll be Domina of Orva. To slight her is to slight our very dominality, our people and our power! If we ignore such a grievous insult, we'll look weak in the eyes of our enemies—enemies I fear far more than Xarles Ferrau. By breaking his son, I will demonstrate to any who doubt that we are a power to be reckoned with."

"Only if we win the war, Mother," Zaria said. "Otherwise, we'll have brought down on our own heads the very destruction you fear."

Marcelle's slurred voice sounded from the corner. "You waste your time, Mother. Zaria will never understand." She lifted her head and curled her lip. "Submission is in her blood."

"And stupid viciousness is in yours!" Zaria turned on her sister, both fists lifted in fury. "If you'd been less bloodthirsty, the Domince would be in your marriage bed instead of a Thrall's chains. And none of us would be in this predicament!"

"Better a little fire than spinelessness." Marcelle threw her goblet aside and rolled to her feet, her gaze suddenly sharp and clear.

Sebastian tensed as she loomed over Zaria. Had her drunkenness been feigned as a means of luring her sister into the brawl she'd obviously been angling for?

"That's enough, Marcelle!" The snap in Ila's voice was enough to bring the Domina up short, eyes glittering with frustration.

Her own gaze fixed on Marcelle, Ila said, "How went your inspection of the palace this morn, Zaria?"

With a savage curse, Marcelle flung herself out of the room. Sebastian relaxed. That was when he realized he'd been willing to blow his own cover to protect Zaria from her lunatic sister.

When had the little Domina gotten under his skin?

CHAPTER SIX

Sebastian managed to keep his mouth shut as Zaria mechanically reported the results of her inspections to her mother.

He maintained that careful silence at the noon meal that followed. Dutifully, he stood behind her chair like all the other Thralls and Thrallines, stepping forward to eat from her hand when she summoned him. It all would have made him feel like an exceptionally large Pekinese, if he hadn't been so busy trying to decide how to turn this twist to his advantage.

By the time they'd disposed of both the rest of her duties and started on the evening meal, he'd mapped out a plan to secure the Domince's freedom, as well as a couple of potential escape routes.

As the serving Thralls bustled around with their trays, Sebastian used his internal com to reestablish communications with Nathan and his party. The mercenaries had withdrawn into the hills just beyond the palace's immediate environs to await his signal. Now Nathan listened as Sebastian detailed his plans.

"Sounds good," the captain commed finally. "I'll transport a team down from the Starrunner to back you up when you give the word."

"Give 'em all the copy of Zaria's vidshot I sent you," Sebastian told him. "I don't want any of them hurting her by mistake."

"You like this girl, don't you?" Trin asked suddenly.

"Of course he does," Nathan said with a mental snort. "Did you see that bustline?"

"Hey, Zaria's more than the sum of her cleavage," Sebastian said, indignant. "She's bright, she's got guts, and she actually cares about her people – which is more than the rest of her family can say. She..."

The com carried Nathan's hoot of astonishment. *"My God, he sounds like he's halfway in love."*

Heat flooded Sebastian's face for the first time in decades. *"Don't be ridiculous. I'm only interested in the tits."*

"I thought you said she was more than cleavage," Trin challenged.

"I lied," he said firmly, and stepped forward to accept a bite of fruit from Zaria's slim fingers.

Her smile made something turn over in his chest.

Zaria walked into her quarters rubbing the knots of tension gathered in the base of her neck. She was only vaguely aware that Searle and Sebastian had entered after her, too preoccupied with worry for her mother and the dominality.

Ila stubbornly refused to acknowledge that she'd put them on the road to destruction with her determination to tame the Domince. And Marcelle, vicious bitch that she was, was equally determined to take revenge on Arnoux for his father's rejection.

The two of them are going to be the death of that boy, she thought, pacing the room in long strides. *The question is, what in the name of the Ten Gods am I going to do about it?*

Suddenly Sebastian stepped up behind her, so close she could feel the heat of his body. *"Get rid of your watchdog,"* he breathed in her ear. *"If you dare."*

Zaria whirled around, startled by his silken challenge. He smiled at her darkly. Suddenly, she found herself aching for the distraction she knew he was

more than capable of providing. Her heart began to pound as she stared into those brilliant green eyes. "Searle, you're dismissed."

The guard looked startled. "But..."

"Go find Gemma and punish her for something," Sebastian said without looking around. "I'm sure between the two of you, you can come up with an excuse."

Searle drew himself up to his full height – which, she noticed suddenly, was still several centimeters shorter than Sebastian. "You forget yourself, Thrall! I could have you..."

"Dismissed," she snapped, suddenly impatient with the posturing.

Searle threw her a glower, but even he didn't quite dare refuse when she used that tone. Grumbling, the guard walked out. Sebastian followed him and bolted the door. She felt her mouth go dry.

"You people really don't take Thralls seriously, do you?" Sebastian said, turning to study her with narrow, calculating eyes. Slowly, he began stalking her, moving across the room like some big, feral cat pursuing something it could eat in one bite.

Automatically, she eased back, nervously aware of his sheer size. "What do you mean?"

"I mean if I were your bodyguard, I wouldn't have left you alone with a man like me."

She managed a casual shrug. "You're only a Thrall," she said, though the erotic menace in his eyes was anything but submissive.

"Actually..." Before she could duck away, a big hand clamped over her shoulder, spun her around, and jerked her back against his hard-muscled body. "...tonight I'm not. Tonight I'm a warrior who tricked you all into believing I'm

nothing more than a Thrall. Just so I could capture my prize—a pretty little Domina, left all alone.”

“Wha-?” Her surprised cry cut off as his big palm clamped over her mouth.

“None of that,” he whispered roughly. “I don’t care to have my pleasure interrupted.”

It couldn’t be, Zaria thought wildly, as he picked her off her feet and bore her backwards toward the bed. No Dom would ever stoop to disguising himself as a Thrall.

And yet, he’d never really acted like a submissive, had he?

What if it was true?

As he pushed her lightly down onto the mattress, Sebastian grabbed the whip she’d hung on the wall more for decoration than anything else. Before she could even muster her defenses to fight, he straddled her hips and tied her wrists behind her back with the light leather lash of the whip. Zaria squirmed, shocked and titillated as he lowered his head to whisper in her ear, “There now. Just the way I like my Thrallines.” He straightened off her.

“I’m not a...” But before she could get out any more of her instinctive protest, he’d ripped a strip of fabric from a sheet. She opened her mouth to scream, but he whipped the cloth around her head and tied it into a gag.

“Now, we really need to get rid of all this armor,” he said, and flipped her onto her back as if she weighed no more than a child’s doll.

Zaria stared up at him in shock as he went to work on the front lacings of her leathers with skillful fingers. She really should be fighting him, she thought, dazed. And yet...

His gaze lifted and met hers, hot with humor and male hunger. “I’m not going to hurt you, Zaria,” he said, and gave her a white and wicked smile so

completely devoid of any real malice, she felt the knot of fear inside instantly loosen. "Though I just may fuck you until you scream for more."

She didn't quite manage to suppress her helpless moan of excitement.

Big fingers peeled the leather cups away from her breasts, then began fondling the soft mounds possessively. "Oh, yeah," he purred, as he squeezed her nipples between thumbs and forefingers. "God, I've been dying to get my hands on these." That grin flashed again. "Along with my lips, my tongue, my teeth, and my dick." He rolled the little peaks, watching her face closely as she fought the need to squirm. From the look on her face, it must have felt good. "God, these are delicious. Ever been tit-fucked?"

She blinked at him.

Sebastian laughed. "I'll take that as a no." Lowering his head, he gave one nipple a sampling lick that sent pleasure shivering through her body. "Mmmm," he said. "That tastes as good as I expected." He studied the little peak as it drew tight and pink with her growing hunger. "I do believe I want more. And I'm going to get it."

Closing his wet, clever mouth over her, he began to suck hungrily. Zaria gasped behind her gag as cream flooded her cunt with every erotic pull of his lips. At the same time, his tongue flicked the tight flesh, pressing it up against his teeth. Gently, he raked her until she whimpered at the pure, hot pleasure.

She felt dizzy, overwhelmed, as if she'd fallen into one of her own dark fantasies. She had no idea whether he really was a Dom, or simply a Thrall who yearned to dominate as much as she longed to submit.

And she realized she didn't care, because she was more aroused than she'd ever been in her life. He was giving her exactly what she'd always wanted. Exactly what she'd always dreamed of. Need surged through her, hot and reckless. She knew she might never again get a chance to experience what it was like to yield to a man. And she meant to enjoy every second of it.

Besides, she was thoroughly sick of obeying the rules and ignoring her own needs. Ten Hells, her mother was willing to plunge the dominality into war, simply out of pride. Her sister didn't hesitate to maim men to serve her own lust. Why shouldn't Zaria let herself enjoy an experience straight out of her hottest dreams? Why did she always have to be the one who denied her own needs?

"You want it, don't you?" Sebastian asked darkly, his heated gaze locked on her face as he lifted his head from her wet, hard nipple. "You want to be taken. Fucked."

God, yes, she thought helplessly. Take me. Give me what I need.

His hands drifted down her bare torso, straight to her cleft. One long, strong finger slid between her lips and found her opening to slip inside. She whimpered behind her gag at the sensation.

"Mmmmm," Sebastian purred. "Just the way I like my captives—nice and slick and ready for cock." A second finger joined the first, and she writhed. "Unfortunately for you, sweetheart, I'm not prepared to give it to you yet. You need a lesson in what happens to pretty little girls who try to dominate men much, much too big for them." His smile was deliberately sinister. "And I'll bet you've got all kinds of toys that would be just perfect for the job."

The way Zaria's eyes widened over her gag made Sebastian's dick twitch in anticipation. He rose from the bed and looked down at her, letting her get a good look at the erection behind the ridiculous loincloth she'd given him. He bared his teeth at her, reached down, and ripped it off, freeing his cock to stand straight and straining with eagerness.

If anything, her eyes widened even more. He rocked back on his heels, grinning, to enjoy the view.

The way he'd tied her with her hands behind her back thrust those round, gorgeous breasts upward and emphasized the white curve of her hips against the dark coverlet.

He tilted his head, letting his blond hair slide over his shoulder. Reaching down, he stroked his cock with one hand and caressed his balls with the other. "Oh, yeah," he told her. "I'm going to enjoy making you pay."

His sensors picked up her answering leap of heat at the threat, and he concealed a grin. Subs always loved it when he played sadistic villain.

Leaving her bound and ready, Sebastian sauntered toward the big wooden box that stood at the foot of the bed. He'd noticed a stylized whip carved into the lid earlier, and he had a good idea what it contained.

Flipping it open, he discovered he was right. There was an array of dildos—including one in a harness arrangement he was instantly glad she'd never tried to use on him—cock rings, various cuffs, jars of what appeared to be lubricants, and several wicked-looking paddles.

Finally, he found what he'd been looking for—a small box containing a selection of clamps. Grinning in anticipation, he tried several of them out on his pinkie until he found two that had just the right bite—enough to sting without inflicting actual pain. He added a promising butt plug and a jar of lubricant and closed the lid.

By the time he turned around, Sebastian found Zaria watching him like a bird hypnotized by a snake. He gave her his best menacing male smile and sauntered over to slide a knee onto the bed. Tossing down the butt plug and the jar of lube, he leaned over and opened one of the clamps right in front of her eyes. Slowly, he let it squeeze closed. "You know where I'm going to put this, don't you?"

She blinked, and her eyes dilated with helpless arousal.

"Don't you?" he barked.

She jumped and nodded.

"You ever wear one of these?"

She shook her head, her nostrils flaring as she breathed in hard over her gag.

He gave her an artistic snarl. "And yet, I'll bet you just love putting them on your poor Thralls." Actually, he'd wager she didn't. But he captured one full, pretty breast, thumbed its blushing nipple, and glared into her eyes anyway. "Were you planning to use one on me?"

Her gaze flickered. To his astonishment, she lifted her chin and gave her head a short, defiant nod.

Sebastian barely managed to contain his shout of laughter. The little minx! He knew good and damned well she'd intended no such thing, but she wanted to play the role of deserving victim. He managed another growl despite his amusement. "Yeah, I'll just bet you were. Well, the clamp's on the other nip now, isn't it? Or," he added, hovering the little device over her eager peak, "it's about to be."

He let the tiny jaws close slowly, listening to her gasp of surprised arousal at its gentle bite. Sebastian smirked. "Bet that stings."

Slowly, he pulled the clamp upward until it lost its hold, then attached it again and twisted his wrist. Zaria whimpered deliciously, and her eyes drifted closed. "Mmmm. I've been dreaming about tormenting your big, pretty tits all day. I knew it was going to be hot." Picking up the other clamp, he rumbled, "Let's do both of 'em."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Zaria moaned as the second clamp closed over her nipple with a hot, erotic bite. Slowly, tauntingly, Sebastian began to flick and play with the two little toys, sometimes twisting first one and then the other, sometimes pulling them both off so he could suckle her, only to reattach them a moment later. She found herself writhing at the blend of pleasure and pain, rolling her hips in short pleading thrusts, desperate for him to mount her, pound into her with that big, curving cock. She could smell her own hot cream.

Suddenly he levered off her and moved down her body. She lifted her head, dazed, only to see him settle between her legs, the width of his shoulders forcing her thighs apart. "Now," Sebastian rumbled, "let's make sure you're good and wet."

Zaria caught her breath as he spread her wet folds with two fingers and bent his head. His first sampling lick brought her arching off the bed. "Ummm," he rumbled. "Creamy." Another lick. She whimpered. "If I didn't know better, I'd say getting your tits tortured made you hot."

If it hadn't, it would have as he went to work, licking and suckling her lips and clit as he used the clamps to tease her hard peaks. The ferocious pleasure-pain soon had her twisting on the edge of a pulsing orgasm.

Suddenly he lifted his head and met her eyes with a savage glare. "You'd better not come, you little witch."

Then he danced his agile tongue over her clit until her entire nervous system thrummed. She yowled, the sound muffled.

"Don't come," he growled again, and twisted the clamps until she started begging behind her gag for him to take her.

"You heard me, Zaria," he rumbled again, giving her clit another lick and the clips another twist. "By God, you'd better not let yourself climax until I say you can." Then he closed his mouth around her hard, aching clit and suckled.

The orgasm rolled up in clenching pulses that built and built and built until she screamed into the gag, unable to hold back her cries of maddened pleasure. The aftershocks were still rippling through her twitching muscles when she lay dazed and limp in the aftermath.

Then he reared over her. Before she knew what he was doing, he snatched her off the bed and dragged her head down over his lap, sending the clamps flying. "I told you not to come!" he growled.

The first impact of his big palm on her naked ass sent her jolting in shock. Her yowl this time was more astonished outrage than pain.

Another slap landed, loud and stinging.

That was when she realized where she was—draped over Sebastian's powerful thighs, bound and naked, her ass ready for a hard spanking. Just like in all her darkest fantasies.

The next slap was even harder, jarring her nether lips against her swollen clit. The last of her instinctive anger died without a whimper, drowned in lust.

Then he started spanking her in earnest. She found herself bucking and kicking with each swat. And with every bounce, her nipples rasped over his hairy thighs as her clit ached and throbbed.

She'd thought she couldn't get hotter. She'd been wrong.

Sebastian grinned in pure male pleasure as he watched Zaria's pretty cheeks turn a blushing pink under his hand. Carefully, he changed the aim of his next smack, angling it to reverberate right to her clit.

“Let’s get one thing straight,” he growled, still paddling her ass, “from now on, you’re my Thralline, and I’m the Dom. Got that?”

She groaned something that sounded suspiciously like agreement, her voice throaty and erotic even muffled by the gag.

He gave her another swat. God, he loved the way she squirmed, unconsciously humping his thigh, obviously burning to be taken. As he burned to take her.

But he intended to get both of them even hotter before it was all over, so he picked up the jar of lubricant he’d dropped on the bed and unscrewed the lid.

She stirred uneasily at the sound and lifted her head as he dipped two fingers into the cool, oily cream. Then he spread her pretty little cheeks, and she jolted with a protesting squeak that made his dick twitch in sadistic anticipation.

She started squirming in earnest as he slid one well-oiled forefinger into her deliciously snug backside. Between her shocked “Mmmmmph!” and the sensation of her tiny anus clamping around his exploring digit, his balls tightened in lust.

“Oh, come on, Zaria,” he purred. “I know you’ve seen Doms use tight little Thralline ass. Especially after a good, hard spanking...”

Her next helpless “Mmph!” held a distinct note of surrender.

He allowed himself the wicked pleasure of spinning out his exploration of her anus. She was going to be a delicious fuck when the time came.

Then, reluctantly, he withdrew his finger. “Luckily for you, though, I think you need to be stretched a little first.” He grinned evilly. “I’d hate to...tear anything with my big, hard cock.”

She whimpered. He felt the cock in question get even bigger as he reached for the little butt plug.

Sebastian took his time working the plug into her snug ass. A series of rings flared out from its bulbous nose, each bigger than the last, specifically designed to torment the victim's anus.

When he'd sunk it in all the way to the first ring, he breathed, "Now, brace yourself sweetheart. This is going to hurt."

Twisting his wrist, he screwed the ring in past Zaria's tight muscles. Her moan sounded more like pleasure than pain as it popped inside.

"You do realize, of course," he said, "that I'm a lot bigger than this little plug?"

Then he forced the next ring up her ass.

Zaria whimpered and squeezed her eyes shut at the fiery heat of the plug entering her, centimeter by wicked centimeter.

She'd watched guardsmen sodomize Thrallines before, of course. She'd found the sight darkly erotic, but it had never crossed her mind that anyone would actually do such a thing to her.

She was astonished at how hot it was, being forced to submit to a man this way.

It made her feel how utterly she was at Sebastian's mercy. Even the spanking hadn't made her feel so dominated. If he wanted to give her a brutal assfucking, there was absolutely nothing she could do about it, bound and gagged like this.

She was his.

Zaria moaned, helpless and desperately, blindly aroused.

She could feel the cream rising between her pussy lips even as Sebastian forced the butt plug all the way home. "There," he told her. "We'll let that stretch you a while. In the meantime, I think I'll stuff that creamy little pussy."

He stood, lifting her effortlessly in his arms before tossing her lightly back on the bed. She whimpered as the impact drove the butt plug even deeper into her ass.

Then he leaned over and jerked off her gag. "Got anything to say?" he barked.

She looked up at him, dazed and hot with need. "Fuck me!"

It wasn't a plea. It was a demand.

He grinned, grabbed her under her backside with one hand, and jerked her hips off the mattress. She cried out helplessly as the butt plug moved inside her. With the other hand, he seated his cock between her thighs, found her opening, and drove home.

Zaria convulsed at the sensation of his big cock filling her so completely, raking past the plug in her other channel. "Ten Gods, Sebastian," she gasped in shock, and wrapped her legs around his waist.

"Like having both holes stuffed, Zaria?" Grinning in triumph, he pulled her close and began to fuck her in long, slamming lunges.

The sensation of that big cock cramming its way into her was even hotter and more overwhelming than it had been when she'd taken him. For one thing, she'd always ridden her partners in the female superior position, but now he was thoroughly in control.

And he seemed determined to prove it, looming over her and bracing his weight on muscled forearms as he pumped relentlessly deep. Each stroke jolted the plug, which scraped her rectal tissues deliciously.

He lowered his head, and she felt his beard brush her ear. "Yeah, that's it, take every last centimeter. God, you're tight. And wet. And hot!"

And he was hard. She moaned helplessly as he pumped, driving her closer and closer to another shattering climax with every stroke.

Some prim part of her objected. It was wrong to submit to him—she was a Domina, she was shaming herself and her mother and her house with her submission to this ruthless Thrall's domination.

And she didn't give a damn.

Opening her eyes, she looked up at him, wanting to see his expression as he came inside her. Yet the look in his eyes wasn't, somehow, quite what she'd expected. The dark pleasure was there, yes, and the hot satisfaction of claiming her. She'd even anticipated his raw male possessiveness.

But what she hadn't expected was the tenderness mixed in with all that savage heat.

Then he threw back his head with a shout. "God, Zaria!"

He slammed to the balls, coming. Filled to bursting with the two shafts he'd driven into her, Zaria screamed in pure, helpless delight and followed him over.

Zaria lay limp and dazed in Sebastian's arms, her body still quivering. His head rested in the curve of her neck as he panted with exertion, and she was surrounded by the sweet-smelling, golden curtain of his hair.

She blinked, finally becoming aware that her arms were aching, bound as they were beneath her. Her abused ass stung even harder.

Sebastian sighed and drew her close, then began pressing soft kisses to the underside of her jaw and up over the line of her chin.

Hardly the gesture of a ruthless dominant in pursuit of some inexplicable revenge.

The fog of arousal began to clear, added by the ache in her wrists and backside. She moaned in pleasure as his gentle lips found her mouth and drew her into a sweet, slow kiss.

It seemed he'd been playing some kind of game with her after all. A *wonderful, wonderful game*, she thought, kissing him back, loving the sweetness in the aftermath of all that wild dominance.

Then she sighed. It had also, of course, been completely unacceptable. Not only had he taken her, he'd spanked her and plugged her ass as well. Not the kind of thing she could permit. "We can never do that again," she said softly.

He went still. "What?"

"I can't...you can't..." Zaria stopped, suddenly unsure how to put it. "Dominating me like that—it was wrong."

He lifted his head, and his green eyes met hers. She could actually see the afterglow in them cooling into something chilling and assessing. "Are you saying you didn't like it?"

"I think you know better than that." She shifted uncomfortably. "Untie my wrists. They're beginning to ache. And remove that plug!"

"Not yet. Why don't you want me to dominate you again when we both enjoyed it so thoroughly?"

Zaria huffed out a breath, suddenly impatient with him. "You're a Thrall, Sebastian. I'm a Domina. It's not natural."

"And yet, if you were the Thralline and I was the Domince, it would be perfectly acceptable."

She frowned at him. "You're being deliberately obtuse."

"No, you are. What we just did was a particularly delicious and arousing game. There wasn't a damn thing unnatural about it, any more than it's unnatural for two children to play starships and pirates."

Zaria lifted a brow. "Neither of us is a child, Sebastian."

"I'm not, but I'm beginning to wonder about you." He pushed off her and rose, towering over her beside the bed. "You do a damn good imitation."

Temper began to spark and snap in her. "You forget yourself, Thrall!"

"No. You do. So it's perverted and wrong for you to enjoy submitting to me? What, then, would you call kidnapping a man and sexually tormenting him to force him into submission?"

For a moment she stared at him in shock, unable to believe he'd dare talk about her mother's treatment of Arnoux Ferrau. "Do you realize I could have you flogged for that?"

A faint, cold smile touched his mouth as he scanned her bound nudity. "Not at the moment."

She rolled off the bed, tugging furiously at her bonds. "Who in the Ten Hells do you think you are?"

He straightened to his considerable height. "Commander Sebastian Cole, executive officer of the interstellar mercenary warship, *Starrunner*. And I'm here to rescue Arnoux Ferrau."

The bottom seemed to drop out of her stomach. "You're an *Outworlder*?" she asked numbly.

Then she pushed the idea away. He couldn't be, because if he was, he'd leave. "No. Stop playing games, Sebastian. This is no time for your jokes."

"I'm not joking." And for once, there was no humor in his eyes at all. "Dominor Xarles Ferrau hired me to get his son away from your mother."

She looked at him for a long, sick moment, trying to grasp the depth of his betrayal. "You're not a Thrall?"

"No. That was my cover identity."

She scrambled for a protective anger. "You lied to me!"

He shrugged. "A man's life was at stake."

The anger drained away at those words, and she slumped, knowing he was right. "But – why tell me? Why not just...do whatever you came here to do?"

His green gaze grew searching. "I wanted to give you the opportunity to help avert the war your mother is courting." He stepped closer, and she looked up at him, feeling the ache grow in her chest. He wasn't hers, and now he never would be. "Help me free Arnoux, Zaria."

"I can't," she said numbly.

"You can. Particularly given that helping him escape might be the one thing that will keep his father from declaring war." His mouth drew into a cold line. "Or would you rather watch men and women die for your mother's ego?"

She shook her head in despair. He was right, damn him. And yet... "What you're talking about is treason, Sebastian! She's not just my mother, she's my Dominess!"

Silence spun between them, swirling with tension and suppressed anger.

As she watched, his eyes seemed to freeze into green ice. "Fine." He went to the chest where she kept her armor and dug through it. When he returned to her again, he held a new set of leathers. "Come here."

She took a wary step back. "What? Why?"

Sebastian looked at her, his face utterly without emotion. "If you won't help me voluntarily," he said coolly, "you'll make an excellent hostage."

Zaria didn't resist as he dressed her in her armor, his movements as impersonal as if she were a doll, even when he pulled the plug from her ass. He did not, however, offer to untie her wrists.

She was surprised at how much his distance hurt.

She did not, oddly enough, fear he would injure her physically. But she was very much concerned about what the palace guard might do to him. He was one man alone—one man against the three hundred who protected the Dominess.

Those weren't good odds, even for an Outworlder.

As Zaria watched him dress in the loincloth that was all a palace Thrall wore, images kept flashing through her mind: of sword wounds marring that magnificent chest, of his glorious hair matted in blood, of his green eyes blank in death.

She swallowed bile.

No, she told herself. *He's got some kind of Outworlder weapon hidden somewhere, something that will allow him to free the Domince and escape. They would hardly have sent him in alone otherwise.*

Yet Zaria saw nothing on his body that looked like it could hide a weapon—not so much as an earring.

“Are you...are you armed?” she blurted.

He lifted a brow at her and took a sword down from her weapons' rack. “I am now.”

“That's not enough, Sebastian. All the guards have swords.”

His smile stretched coldly in the frame of his goatee. “I also have you, darling. Let's go.” He reached for her.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"You can't parade me through the castle bound like this," Zaria protested. "You'll never even make it to the Dominess' pleasure quarters."

He hesitated. Then she felt the cold brush of steel against her wrists as he sliced her bonds with one easy pass of his blade. Before she could catch a breath in relief, however, he rested the sword lightly against her throat. "Bound or not, I suggest you remember you're a hostage."

She caught her breath. "Even with me as a prisoner, they're not going to let you take the Domince."

"Oh, I think they will."

"But..."

"But nothing. I've got it all planned, my sweet. It's the middle of the night," he pointed out, looping his free arm around her waist and drawing her tight against his hard, powerful body. "And I've got the guard's patrol routes scanned and timed. Right now we have the perfect window of opportunity." He angled the blade up, forcing her to lift her chin. "And I repeat," he whispered in her ear, his voice silken and suggestive, "I also have you." His tone hardened. "Come along, my sweet. I'm sure the Domince is more than ready to go home."

He lowered the sword and caught her shoulder, pushing her lightly toward the door. Despairing, she went where he directed.

Why did she feel so bereft? He had been with her barely two days. True, she'd been wildly attracted to him, but then, her mother surrounded herself with beautiful males, so it was more than that.

He was intelligent, though this scheme to march through the palace and liberate Arnoux smacked of recklessness. And she'd enjoyed his irreverent wit, even as it sometimes scandalized her.

But more than that, she'd felt a sense of kinship, despite the supposed difference in their respective status. He, too, did not seem to fit the role he'd been assigned; she'd never met a less submissive Thrall in her life. It had made her feel less alone, less... *wrong* to feel this hunger to submit to him.

But he hadn't been a Thrall at all, so she was once again alone in her deviance.

Yet... She frowned, remembering what he'd said to her just before he'd revealed himself. *What we just did was a particularly delicious and arousing game. There wasn't a damn thing unnatural about it, any more than it's unnatural for two children to play starships and pirates.*

Could he be right? After all, she felt no particular need to submit to anyone in the rest of her life. She commanded Dom and Thrall alike in the course of her duties and thought nothing of it.

But if it was all nothing more than a game, what did that say about the rest of her culture, with its castes of Dom and Thrall, its Dominesses and Dominors?

And how immoral *was* it to kidnap a man from his home in order to sexually torture him into becoming a Thrall?

Suddenly Sebastian stopped dead in his tracks, grabbing her shoulder to bring her to a halt. Jolted from her preoccupation, Zaria glanced around at him. "What?"

"Shhh." He was looking toward the head of the corridor, a hard, intense expression on his face.

Then she heard it—a rapid swish and crack, punctuated with soft male grunts of pain—a sound she knew too well. A cat-o-nine tails was being used to beat a man.

Fury roared over her, and she started forward. Sebastian dragged her back. "Let me go!" she snapped.

He didn't even glance at her as he frowned. "If that's Ferrau being beaten, my scans say he's in a bad way."

"Of course he's in a bad way," Zaria growled. "My idiot mother let that sadistic bitch of a sister of mine have him! Let me go!"

Sebastian blinked down in astonishment at Zaria's small, furious face, then found himself releasing his grip on her arm. *So much for that submissive streak.*

She whirled and snatched the sword from his hand. Bemused, he let her take it, then ran after her as she sprinted down the corridor.

They rounded the corner to see two stone-faced guards standing before the Dominess' pleasure quarters. Zaria didn't even break step as she headed for the double doors.

The two men automatically drew their swords and moved to block her. Sebastian swore softly as his heart jammed into his throat. He shouldn't have armed the little lunatic.

"Out of my way!" she snarled viciously, lifting her weapon.

Both men looked uncomfortable, probably not sure how to handle their sweet little Domina in what appeared to be a homicidal rage. One of them stuttered, "But...but, Domina, the Domina Marcelle left orders she is not to be disturbed."

"I'm sure she did, the sadistic bitch. Stand clear!"

"Domina..."

It was time for a little strategic intervention. Putting on his best expression of diffident concern, Sebastian shouldered between them and Zaria. "Now, mistress," he began, "these men are only doing their..." Spinning, he slammed

his fist into the first guard's jaw. The man went down like a sack of meal, knocked cold by nanotech-enhanced strength.

Before the second could bring his weapon into play, Sebastian grabbed his sword hand and twisted. Something snapped wetly, and the guard howled in astonished agony. The cry cut off as another hard punch put him down on top of his partner.

He turned to see Zaria staring at him with startled respect. "Well," she managed finally, "I don't suppose you needed a weapon, did you?"

Before he could reply, a male voice screamed beyond the double doors, the sound raw with suffering.

Zaria spun and jerked at the double doors, but they didn't budge. "She's got them bolted," she said, wincing as another savage swish and crack sliced the air.

"Let me worry about that." Sebastian lifted one muscled leg. She opened her mouth to warn him about the door's steel-reinforced core and frame; there was no way he could kick it open.

Then his bare foot hit the portal with a thunderous boom. Wood splintered, steel hinges and bolts shrieked, and the door toppled in with a crash. She heard Marcelle's startled yelp.

Reminded of her fury, Zaria ducked around Sebastian and plunged inside to find Marcelle gaping at her, a bloody whip hanging forgotten in one hand.

Arnoux was chained to one of the room's marble pillars. Her stomach twisted at the condition of his back. If anything, he was in even worse shape than the Thrall she'd rescued a couple of days before. He'd be lucky to live out the night, if they didn't get him to the Outworlders.

"What are you doing here, Zaria?" Marcelle demanded, lifting the whip threateningly. If she'd noticed Zaria herself was armed, it didn't seem to worry her.

Zaria fell into guard, sword aimed at her sister's heart. "Give me the key to those shackles, Marcelle."

The Domina gaped at her demand, then lifted her chin. "I will not!" she spat. "I told Mother I would break Arnoux to the collar, and I won't stop until I have."

"He's the heir to Rabican, you vicious little fool," Zaria snapped, suddenly out of patience with her family's blind indifference to reality. "His father will raze this palace to the ground and kill every last one of us when he discovers what you've done to his son!"

Marcelle's eyes flickered, but she quickly recovered enough to sneer. "When I've broken him to the collar, he'll say he enjoyed it."

"No!" Arnoux's voice was weak with pain and blood loss, but there was hate in the look he cast them over one bloody shoulder. "I will never yield to you, bitch. Never. Never. Never!" The last word was a hoarse bellow.

"All right, I've had enough of this." Sebastian stalked over to the other man, wrapped a big hand in one of the shackles, and jerked. Its chain snapped with a musical clink. Arnoux's eyes widened.

"What?" The word was a shriek as Marcelle whirled toward the two men. "You dare!" She lifted the cat to strike.

Zaria didn't even think twice. She lunged to grab the lash, jerking the whip from her sister's hand. "You will *not* touch him!"

Marcelle spun, her face twisted with the wild rage Zaria had always found so terrifying. "Oh, you're going to pay for that!"

"I don't think so." Zaria brought up her sword, the point inches from her sister's chest.

"What do you think you're doing?" The Domina backpedaled, her gaze flicking down to the menacing blade.

Then she lunged, sweeping up her own scabbarded sword, left lying in a chair. She jerked the weapon out and threw the sheathe aside as she fell into guard. "I repeat," she hissed, "you're going to pay."

A prick of fear pierced Zaria's righteous rage. Her sister was taller and heavier than she was, with a longer reach and a stronger build.

Her gaze flicked to Sebastian. He'd freed Arnoux of his chains, and now he supported the smaller man with an arm around his chest to spare his bloody back. He looked from Zaria to Marcelle, and his mouth tightened as he started to lower the Domince to the floor. He intended to intervene.

"No!" Zaria ordered fiercely. "Get the Domince out of here!"

Then she lunged for Marcelle.

Before Sebastian could step in to put the Bitch Sister down for the count, a male voice bellowed from down the hall. "Ten Hells, what is this? Guards! The Domina has been attacked!" Running footsteps sounded, pounding in their direction.

"Shit!" The men he'd knocked cold had been discovered. Urgently, he looked at Ferrau's haggard face as he let the man's feet take his weight. "Can you stand?"

"I can...*run* to...get out of here!"

Sebastian doubted it. He wasn't even sure how much longer the Domince could remain on his feet, judging by his pallor.

But before he could say anything more, two guards plunged through the door. He whirled to intercept them. Slamming his fist into the first's jaw, Sebastian grabbed the toppling man's sword out of his hand. He brought it up and around barely in time to block a hacking stroke at his head even

nanotechnology would have been unable to heal. Battering his opponent's blade aside with sheer muscle, he slammed a left cross into the guard's head.

But by then, three more guards had arrived, and more were pouring in as shouts of warning went up.

Fortunately, the doorway formed a natural bottleneck Sebastian was able to defend with a combination of swordwork and gutter fighting. But for every guard he put down, another appeared. And the plain fact was, none of this was getting the Domince out of the palace.

But what was worse, he was terrified Zaria would lose her fight with her sister. His sensors told him that though she was fighting hard, she was tiring as Marcelle's greater strength and longer reach began to tell. It was past time to call for reinforcements.

If only they'd arrive in time...

"Fool!" Marcelle hissed, as they circled each other, looking for an opening. "You've finally given me the excuse I've needed to kill you! Not even Mother will question it, when she sees you felled in an act of treason!"

"The treason," Zaria gasped, "is plunging ...our people into war!"

"A war we'll win!" Marcelle brought her sword down in a two-handed blow right at her head.

Desperately, Zaria brought up her weapon. She felt the jarring impact all the way to her shoulders, and her sweating hands slipped on the sword hilt. Somehow she held onto it, but despair rose. Sooner or later, Marcelle would overpower her and take her down. And then the bitch would cut her to pieces like the sadist she was.

Over her sister's shoulder, she spotted a flash of motion—Sebastian, his big body dripping with sweat and blood, golden hair flying as he fought savagely to

keep the guards from the room. Another glance found Arnoux, lying in a heap on the floor. His eyes met hers before they slid closed. Silently, she prayed to all Ten Gods to spare him.

“Surrender, Zaria—I’ll make it quick!” Marcelle panted. Her mouth curled into an ugly smirk. “Besides, you know you want to. You’ve always had a taste for submission!”

Staring into Marcelle’s smug gaze, Zaria realized her sister had no doubt at all she’d win. She really did think it was Zaria’s nature to surrender.

At that realization, welcome fury surged into her blood, hot and strengthening. “Not to you, bitch!” She brought her sword up and around in a savage swing. Her sister blocked it, but she felt the satisfying ring of the blow all the way to her bones. For an instant, she saw surprise in Marcelle’s eyes.

And then Zaria went after her with everything she had.

CHAPTER NINE

Zaria pounded her sword against Marcelle's in a frenzy of rage as years of remembered torment boiled up from her soul. She remembered all the times her sister had belittled, shamed, insulted, and beaten her. The times her mother had turned a blind eye. The day they'd both driven her brother Brys away.

And all the good men Marcelle had flogged half to death out of her lust for the suffering of others.

Dimly she realized her sister was in full retreat, barely parrying the blows Zaria rained on her in her berserk fury.

Then Marcelle took one more step—and her foot slipped in a pool of blood on the floor where she'd beaten Ferrau so mercilessly. With a cry of shocked fear, she fell to one knee.

Zaria pounced, sweeping her sword down and around to hook her sister's blade with her own. She jerked upward. The weapon flew from Marcelle's hand and hit the opposite wall with a clatter that rang loud even over the howls of the men fighting in the doorway.

A savage grin stretched Zaria's mouth as she brought her blade around again to hover over her sister's bare head. "Now..." she breathed, as hot victory stormed through her blood.

Marcelle stared up at her with terror in her eyes. "No! Sister, you can't!"

"Oh, don't you *dare* beg, when we both know you'd have killed me without a second thought!" She set her feet apart in preparation for the blow.

"Zaria, don't! Mercy!" Marcelle threw her hands up, cringing back. "I beg quarter!"

Zaria reversed her swing to slam the hilt into her sister's head with both hands. Marcelle slumped into unconsciousness.

Panting as sweat streamed down her face, Zaria eyed Marcelle's slumped form with satisfaction. "On second thought, I've decided I want you to live. A long, long time." She wiped the sweat from her face and spat at her sister's feet. "And every day that goes by, I hope you remember what it was like to beg me for your life."

Then she strode toward the doorway. "Enough! Stand down!" Spotting an opening, she shouldered in front of Sebastian, throwing up her hands. Searle, at the head of the pack, dropped his weapon and called, "It's the Domina!"

Her men quickly dropped their weapons and stepped back, confusion evident in their eyes. Over her shoulder she said, "Get Ferrau."

Sebastian nodded and went to the Domince, then hauled the unconscious man over his shoulder. Ferrau's head hung limp.

"Ten Gods," Zaria muttered, wincing at the sight of his savaged back, "let him live!"

Behind her, she heard one of the guardsmen say, "Look! She actually beat Marcelle!"

"Good," somebody else said.

Zaria smiled at the lack of respect for her sister as she turned to them and gave them a bold gesture of dismissal. "Back to your quarters."

"But Domina," Searle protested, "the Thrall has Domince Arnoux, and Her Dominance..."

"Will appreciate our taking him for treatment before he dies of his injuries," Zaria said firmly. She narrowed her eyes. "Are you going to stand in my way?"

Searle looked at her a long moment. "No, Domina." He stepped back, clearing the way for her. She strode out into the corridor, Sebastian at her heels.

"Is he all right?" Zaria asked softly.

Sebastian looked grim. "No, but I think he'll make it if we can get him some decent medical attention."

"Then that's what we'll do. Searle, prepare a wagon..."

"That won't be necessary," Sebastian told her. "My crewmates are on the way. They'll transport him."

Zaria lifted her brows. "How did you manage to alert them?"

He shrugged. "I have my ways."

"Zaria!"

They turned to find her mother standing in the corridor, staring in shock at the guardsmen streaming past, carrying unconscious and injured comrades. Ila's gaze flicked to Sebastian and the limp, bloody body slung across his shoulder. "What in the name of the Ten Gods is going on here?" she demanded.

"At the moment, I'm rescuing your prisoner," Zaria told her coolly.

"What?" Ila gaped. "That's Arnoux?" Fear widened her eyes as it dawned on her what the Domince's condition might mean. Then she drew herself to her full height. "You return him to my quarters this instant!"

Weary anger rose in Zaria again. "Mother, look at him!" She gestured at Arnoux's flayed back. "Marcelle cut him to ribbons. What the Ten Hells were you thinking, giving him to her?"

Ila's face went slightly green as she looked—really looked—at her captive. "Marcelle did that?"

"Yes, and it's not the first time." Zaria shook her head. "You've got to face the truth, Mother. The Dominor was right. Something's twisted inside Marcelle. If you're half the Dominess you should be, you'll name my brother as your new heir. Brys would make a far better Dominor than any of us." *Including you.*

But she didn't say it. Instead, she turned and followed Sebastian as he strode off with his burden.

"Brys?" her mother called. "But what about you?"

"I have no interest in the throne," Zaria said, without looking around. "I'm going to save you from this war, and then I'm done with you."

"Permanently?" Ila's voice went shrill in alarm. "But..."

"Dominess," someone called. "Domina Marcelle has been hurt!"

"What? Marcelle!"

Zaria didn't even turn as her mother hurried off to tend her sister.

Before they rounded another corner, they were met by a grim-faced contingent from the *Starrunner* in full boarding armor, Nathan in the lead. Zaria stumbled to a shocked halt.

"It's all right," Sebastian told her, as he moved to meet his crewmates. To them he called, "Where's the trauma team?"

Then he saw the medical unit was already pushing its way through the crowd, towing a float stretcher behind them. Sebastian loaded Ferrau onto it, and they bore him away, already working furiously.

Nathan walked over to join him. Sebastian saluted him with a grin, and he returned it, crisply. "Sorry it took us so long," the captain said. "Ran into a contingent of mounted troops coming back from some kind of patrol. Took longer to dispatch them than I expected." He looked Sebastian over, then eyed Zaria as she hovered behind him. "In any case, you seem to have done pretty well. You managed to fight off that entire horde practically naked?"

"I had help." Sebastian turned back and took Zaria's hand. She looked up at him, searching his eyes, uncertain. "This is Domina Zaria Orva. She saved a lot of lives today."

The smile that lit her face made something warm and sweet expand in Sebastian's chest.

* * * * *

Zaria insisted on accompanying the medical team to the clinic to make sure Arnoux pulled through his injuries.

In the facility's waiting area, she and Sebastian sat together on one of the strange, Outworld couches that molded itself under them in a particularly disconcerting way. Zaria tried to ignore it as she clung to his hand. He seemed the only stable thing in her world right now.

"What are you going to do now?" Sebastian asked at last. "And what exactly did you mean when you told your mother you were done with her?"

Zaria shrugged, feeling more exhausted than she'd ever been in her life. It wasn't fair. She'd finally beaten her sister. So why did she feel so...defeated? "I have no idea what I'm going to do," she admitted finally. "I just know I'm not going back to the palace."

He hesitated. "You might want to give it time. Reconsider. Being Dominess sounds like a pretty good job."

"Yes, but unfortunately it comes with the necessity of dealing with my family. And frankly, I've got no more interest in that." She shrugged. "Besides, I don't really have the temperament. My brother will make a far better Dominor."

"I don't think I've met him," Sebastian said.

"You didn't. Brys is an Army captain, and he's rarely home." She grimaced. "I suspect he had some kind of run-in with Marcelle, but I don't know the details. I think when it came right down to it, though, Mother took Marcelle's side. And that was it as far as he was concerned."

Sebastian frowned. "Given that, do you really think your mother will disinherit Marcelle and give the throne to him?"

"Oddly enough, yes." She lifted a hand to rub at the knot of muscle between her shoulders. "My mother may be blind when it comes to Marcelle, but she's keenly aware of her duty to the dominality. When she saw what Marcelle had done to Arnoux, I think she finally realized just how...broken she is." Zaria shook her head. "Marcelle is just not suited to be Dominess. That temper of hers would drive her to plunge the dominality into war until someone finally invaded and killed her."

"I suspect you're right." Sebastian nodded slowly. Then he gave her one of his wonderfully wicked smiles. "By the way, I saw some of your fight. I was impressed. Marcelle's a hell of a lot bigger than you, but you beat her anyway. That took both guts and skill."

Zaria laughed. "Yes, well, she managed to make me mad, and the whole thing got surprisingly easy. Evidently she's not the only one in the family with a temper."

He snorted. "Your temper's not that bad."

"Oh, yes it is."

He lifted a blond brow. "She's alive, isn't she?"

She sighed. "Good point." Silence fell between them. He held his arm out for her, and she settled into the curve of it to rest her head against his chest. A lock of his long hair lay under her cheek. It felt like raw silk.

Zaria listened to his heartbeat for a while before she said, "She threw the same thing in my face she always did—about my being a deviant. Said she knew I wanted to surrender because I have a taste for submission." She laughed shortly. "That was when I went for her throat."

Sebastian chuckled warmly. "Good for you."

"What you said about my submitting to you being a game, not who I really am..." She looked up at him. "You were right. It really doesn't make me weak."

"Yeah, you definitely proved that in spades, the way you dealt with Mommy and the Bitch."

Zaria nodded thoughtfully. "On the other hand, Marcelle really *is* weak. When she realized I had the advantage, she caved right in. I never knew that before."

Sebastian shrugged. "But it's really not all that surprising, Zaria. People like Marcelle dominate others because secretly, they *know* they're weak. Only by breaking someone else can they convince themselves they're strong." He slanted her a wicked little smile. "Now, people like me, on the other hand..." He reached over and hauled her into his lap as she shrieked out a giggle of surprise. "...are just kinky as hell."

She lost the laughter when he claimed her mouth in a dark, devouring kiss. When he finally lifted his head again, he said, "Come to the *Starrunner* with me."

Zaria blinked at him in surprise. "You mean – visit your ship?"

"No." He met her eyes in a long, steady gaze. "I mean move in with me."

She gaped at him in shock for a long moment before she was able to manage a reply. "But you just met me, Sebastian! You don't know anything about me."

"I know I've never met another woman like you," he said, his voice low and fierce. "And I know I don't want to ever let you go."

A fierce, hot joy swept over her. "Yes," she breathed. "Yes, I'll go with you!"

And then he was kissing her again. She had no idea what she'd just agreed to, or what it meant, or where they were going with their relationship.

As long as they were going together, nothing else mattered.

The Dominor Xarles Ferrau of Rabican arrived twenty minutes later. By the time Sebastian and Zaria had finished relating their rescue of Arnoux, Ferrau was feeling so generous he offered to give Zaria anything she wanted as a reward for helping save his son.

Zaria promptly extracted a promise he wouldn't go to war against her mother. He reluctantly gave his word, which was a good thing, because by then Outworlder medicine had seen to the regeneration of Arnoux's back, and the young man was conscious.

Once the Domince finished relating his experiences at Ila's hands, Ferrau was ready to go to war again.

With a sigh of resignation, Zaria went back to work.

CHAPTER TEN

While Zaria conducted her passionate argument with the Dominor, Sebastian kept a watchful eye on the proceedings, half-afraid Xarles would turn on her as the nearest representative of her family. To his relief, though, he quickly realized he'd underestimated her charm.

He was watching her work the Dominor and trying to keep the grin off his face when he heard a familiar voice over his com. *"Sweet gods, look at him. I told you he's smitten."*

Sebastian looked up just as Nathan and Trin strolled into the room. He tried out a mock-offended glare on his captain, though he strongly suspected he hadn't pulled it off. *"Smitten? Me?"*

"You," Trinity agreed. *"I could almost hear the strains of an angelic chorus as you gazed at her."*

Nathan snorted. *"The word 'angelic' has no business being applied to Sebastian Cole."* The captain lifted a brow. *"He does look a little sappy, though."*

"Sappy?" Sebastian glowered at his friend. *"I've never looked sappy in my life."*

Then he heard Zaria tell Ferrau, *"Declaring war would actually be a less effective way to deal with my mother than a trade embargo. She'd be stubbornly brave in the face of a physical threat, but hit her in her purse, and she'll yield to your demands."*

Ferrau nodded thoughtfully. *"And you believe she'll name this brother of yours as her heir?"*

Zaria shrugged. *"She's halfway there now. The look on her face when she saw Arnoux's back—she was genuinely appalled. She's been lying to herself for a long time about how bad Marcelle is, but she won't be able to ignore what she*

saw. Anyone whose temper would drive her to such viciousness has no business being Dominess, and my mother knows it."

"But you believe I will be able to deal with your brother?"

She nodded. "Brys always had a profound sense of justice. When he learns what..."

"Damn," Sebastian commed, "*she's good. Isn't she good?*" He looked at his captain, feeling a proud grin stretch over his face.

Nathan gave his wife a knowing smile. "*I give it a month,*" he said.

They were the same words Sebastian himself had said about Nathan and Trin when the captain had asked her to become his lover last year. Sebastian had predicted his friend would be proposing within the month. And he'd been right.

Now Sebastian looked at the woman he himself was falling for. Her beautiful face almost glowed with passion as she argued her case to the Dominor. He felt his smile fade. "*That depends on Zaria, doesn't it?*"

Zaria started having second thoughts about moving in with Sebastian as she boarded the *Starrunner* with him and the combat contingent who'd mobilized to rescue them.

Though Captain Nathan August and his wife, Trinity, seemed to go out of their way to welcome her, the ship struck her as alien and intimidating with its warren of corridors and bewildering array of Outworlder technology. After all the marble and gold of her mother's palace, the *Starrunner* seemed a chill, too-professional place. Its curving bulkheads looked alien and artificial, despite the bright colored walls Sebastian said signified the different decks. Men and women hurried around, talking highly technical jargon at each other. Most disturbingly, computers sometimes joined in on the conversation, sounding far more human than machines had any business being.

By the time Sebastian ushered her into his quarters, she was having serious doubts. The cabin's walls curved, like those of every other room on the ship. Three-dimensional images hung on the bulkhead or stood displayed on furniture, depicting alien worlds she'd never even heard of.

Sinking down on the bed that looked wide enough for Sebastian and at least three partners, she gazed around in bewilderment. A gleaming weapon she vaguely recognized as some sort of gun hung on one wall, while one entire corner of the room was occupied by a massive console showing all kinds of bewildering displays.

And the strangest part of it all was Sebastian, who had covered his magnificent body with some kind of matte-black uniform that looked nothing like her own leathers. She felt primitive and ignorant next to his sleek blond beauty.

"I don't think this is going to work," Zaria managed at last.

He looked up from the console as his clever fingers stroked over the controls. A frown tightened his mouth. "What do you mean?"

"This. Me. This ship." She gestured at the console. "I don't even know what that is."

A sliding panel opened in its top, and two glasses lifted into view. "It's a drink dispenser, among other things." He picked the goblets up and carried them over to her, handing her one. "I'll show you how to use it. And once we get you a com implant, you'll find it much easier to make sense of what's going on."

"A what?" Zaria eyed the glass cautiously, evaluating its dark, foaming contents.

"A communications implant. It's what we use to speak to each other and the equipment, particularly when we don't care to be overheard."

"Where do they...put this implant?" She sipped cautiously. The cool, yeasty liquid foamed on her tongue, and she nodded in approval. "This is good. What is it?"

"A Star Mead. And the implant goes in your jaw, right under one ear. It'll build nanotech neural connections with your brain's cerebral cortex, and..."

Zaria shook her head. "And that's what I mean. I didn't understand any of that at all."

He looked down at her, his green eyes intense. For a moment, she saw desperation in their depths.

Then he plucked the glass out of her hand and put it down on the bedside table with his. Sinking down on the bed beside her, he slid open a drawer and reached into it. "So you don't understand the technology," he said, turning back toward her. "How about this?"

He held a length of gold cable in his hand. Before she knew what hit her, he'd jerked her face down across his lap, grabbed her left wrist, and wrapped the cable around it.

"Hey!" she yelped, squirming as he bound the other wrist too. "What are you doing?"

"You may not understand the technology..." He stood and pulled her effortlessly to her feet, then hooked one big hand in her leathers. A hard, strong tug and the laces snapped, leaving her breasts bare. He gave her a hot, wicked smile. "...but I'll bet you know exactly what this means."

"Sebastian, this is not going to solve the problem," Zaria protested, but her voice sounded breathless, and Sebastian's sensors told him she was getting wetter by the moment.

"Maybe not, but it'll make me feel a hell of a lot better." He bent down and attacked her leather groin band, ripping the tough hide apart in a deliberate

display of strength that made her dark eyes widen. Throwing the shreds aside, he whirled her around and knelt to finish off her leggings.

Finally he had her beautiful, peach-shaped ass completely bare. He stroked his fingers over the rise of one pale cheek and found the skin as irresistibly smooth and soft as he remembered.

Remembering the tight, clamping grip of her virgin anus, he felt his cock twitch in lust.

God, he was going to enjoy this.

But he had to make sure she enjoyed it even more—enough to forget her entirely reasonable doubts and stay with him.

Testing, he slid a forefinger down the delicate cleft of her backside and grinned as she squirmed. “You know, I think I want to bend you over this time.” Discovering the tiny rosette pucker of her ass, he slid his finger deep. Her little muscles clamped hard around him, and she gasped in arousal. “As I recall, my cock has an appointment with this tight little ass.” Unable to resist, he lowered his head and gave one perfect cheek a nip.

She jumped with a yelp. “Sebastian!”

He grinned, continuing his exploration of her tight channel. “Yes, Thralline?” With the other hand, he delved between her soft nether lips to find her deliciously wet.

Oh, yeah, it was working. But how could he make her even hotter?

Thoughtfully, he stroked the index fingers of both hands into each snug opening, enjoying the way she tightened around him and groaned in pleasure.

Suddenly Sebastian remembered Zaria’s barracks inspection, when they’d seen the two guardsmen with the girl tied to the chair. One of them had fucked her mouth while the other took her from behind. Zaria had found the sight wildly arousing. But had it been the idea of being taken by two men at once that

so turned her on? He pondered the question, circling his thumb over her clit as he watched her writhe, the strong muscles of her backside working as he fingerfucked each orifice.

Come to think of it, she probably *had* been taken by two Thralls at once—an image he refused to consider in any more detail because it pissed him off. But...

Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and he grinned wickedly. “You know, all of a sudden, I’m in the mood for a blow job. Ever suck cock, Zaria?”

Even without the slight shake of her head, he would have known the answer just from the way her slick inner muscles tightened.

It was all Sebastian could do not to moan himself at the thought of being the first to slide his dick between Zaria’s lush lips before making a slow conquest of her virgin ass. “Well now,” he purred. “That sounds like the perfect appetizer.”

He could, of course, simply make her kneel, but he instantly decided that wasn’t good enough. He wanted her to feel completely helpless, utterly at his mercy.

Then he thought of the Thralline tied to the chair.

Perfect.

Zaria yelped in surprise as he swooped down on her and snatched her into his arms. Before she knew what he was up to, he’d deposited her into the low-backed chair sitting next to that intimidating desk. “What are you doing?” she squeaked.

“Getting my little Thralline in position to entertain my cock,” he told her, his goatee tilting up with lecherous grin.

Actually whistling, he untied her wrists from behind her back, then lashed one of them to the arm of the chair. She twisted around to watch anxiously as he

retrieved several more cables from his toy drawer, along with what she strongly suspected was a jar of lubricant.

Then he went back to work on her bonds, tying her ankles and free wrist to the arms of the chair as he propped her chin on its padded back so her mouth was precisely at the height of his bobbing erection.

By the time he was done, Zaria was all but panting in arousal as she imagined what it would be like to feel Sebastian's long, curving cock sliding into her mouth.

But if she thought he'd simply plunge between her lips, she'd underestimated him – and forgotten his feral fascination with her anus.

Once he had her bound in a helpless crouch, he picked up the jar he'd left on the desk and moved around behind her. Zaria heard the rattle as he unscrewed the lid and licked her dry lips nervously.

"I figure," he said in an arousing velvet rasp, "that by the time I finish with your mouth, I'm going to be in the mood for a little virgin Thralline ass. So why don't we get you all greased up and ready for cock..."

Zaria stiffened at the touch of one fingertip on her sensitive asshole. He increased the pressure slowly, forcing the well-greased digit deep in her channel. She quivered. "Sebastian..." she groaned.

"Yeah?" He withdrew from her ass, only to enter again, this time with two fingers, stroking slow and deep. At the same time, he used his thumb to tease her clit, sending hot little jolts of pleasure up her spine to compete with the sensation of his anal probing.

Zaria swallowed, feeling the delicate tissues stretch, the sensation both erotic and delicately painful. "Your cock is so big..."

He laughed, the sound deep and male and dark with anticipation. "And getting bigger." He twisted his wrist, deliberately goring her tight opening as he raked his thumb over her clit again.

She shivered. "It's going to hurt."

"Oh, yeah. Especially when I start doing you deep and hard." He leaned over her to whisper in her ear. "But maybe if you do a really good job sucking me off, I'll be in the mood for a little mercy."

Oh, she doubted it. She really did.

Finally, he slowly removed his fingers and stepped around in front of her. As she watched breathlessly, he opened the fasteners of his dark blue uniform, revealing the magnificent body she loved.

"Ten Gods, you're beautiful," she managed, as he stripped before her hungry eyes. Here, surrounded by this cold, technological world of his, he looked even more barbaric and primal and male.

Sebastian laughed. "Not as beautiful as you." Threading one big hand in her hair, he tugged her head up gently, until she was face-to-head with his massive erection. "I particularly admire that luscious mouth. Open up, Zaria." His voice dropped to a sensual rumble. "It's time to get your first mouthful of your master's dick."

Shivering in delicious arousal, she obeyed, opening wide for the big, plum crown.

But he didn't thrust between her lips as she expected. Instead he ordered roughly, "Lick it. Stick out that tongue and taste me."

Swallowing, she gave the flushed head a slow pass of her tongue. The texture was like nubby satin, and it tasted salty. Deciding she liked the sensation, she licked him again, then again, until he groaned in pleasure and thrust into her mouth. Instantly, she closed her lips around the thick shaft and began to suck.

"Nice," he purred. "Now swirl your tongue around it and suck harder."

Quivering, Zaria did as he demanded. He began thrusting in slow, shallow rolls of his hips, forcing his cock in and out of her mouth, over her laboring

tongue. Suddenly, she was acutely aware of her own helplessness, bound to the chair, cable lashed tight around her wrists and knees. In this position, Sebastian could punish or fuck her at his whim. Her excitement rose as she sucked harder, servicing him with her mouth as eagerly as any Thralline she'd ever seen.

For a moment, she felt a hint of shame at her own arousal. Then she forced the embarrassment away. Whether she chose to submit to him here and now or not, she'd proven herself worthy of her name – she'd fought Marcelle and won. She earned whatever pleasure she took, just as Sebastian had.

"More," he growled, playing the dominant to the hilt as he stroked, feeding his massive cock even deeper.

With a moan, she angled her head and took him, swallowing him down right to the balls. Wanting it all.

The feel of Zaria's hot, eager mouth sucking his cock with single-minded attention sent heat spinning into Sebastian's balls. The need to spill himself inside her pounded in his blood.

And his sensors told him she was just as aroused as he was.

But he knew coming down her throat wasn't good enough. He had to claim her fast and deep and hard. First her cunt, then that deliciously tight ass. Ream her until she knew she could never belong to anyone but him. Could never belong anywhere but with him.

So she'd never leave him.

"Enough!" He dragged himself free of her luscious mouth with a deep growl of mingled frustration and pleasure.

"Noo," Zaria sighed, lifting her gaze to his. Her eyes were dazed with arousal, her mouth pouting. "Please, Sebastian, take me!"

"Oh, I will!" he growled, and grabbed the back of the chair. "In every single orifice." He spun it around so her lifted ass faced him, slid a knee into the seat of the chair between her wide-spread legs, and drove his cock deep into her hot, slick cunt.

Her gasp of pleasure, combined with the mind-detonating sensation of entering her, almost ripped him to orgasm on the spot. Somehow he managed to hold on to his self-control as he worked himself deeper and deeper into her wet, gripping flesh.

"Ten Gods, Sebastian," she groaned. "You feel so good!"

"Yeah," he panted, and pulled out, sliding slickly through her deliciously tight core. "So do you. Hot and slick and submissive...*ah!*...when it suits you." She yowled in pleasure as he slammed himself all the way to the balls. "Ready for this. Perfect for this. Perfect for me!"

"Oooh, gods! Sebastian!"

So he fucked her like that, driving her closer to climax with every long, demanding thrust. Fucked her even as he had to order his computer implant to keep him from blowing his own load every time he slid deep.

He had no intention of coming until he'd claimed her. Completely.

"I'm coming!" she gasped breathlessly.

"No, not yet." Gritting his teeth, he jerked his shaft out of her deliciously creamy grip, ignoring her wail of protest.

"Don't stop!"

"Sorry, darlin', but you don't get to come yet. Not until you've had your ass stuffed with your master's cock."

She jerked in instinctive protest, but he was already spreading her delicious, peach-shaped ass to reveal her last virgin orifice. He studied the tight little

opening with hot anticipation, imagining how it would feel to claim her this way. So completely. Beyond any possibility of denial.

“Mmm. Here it comes, Zaria.” Taking his dick in one hand, Sebastian pressed the big head against her anus. For a moment, he allowed himself to savor the contrast between his own aching width and her tiny, well-greased pucker.

She whimpered in instinctive anxiety.

God, this was going to be so good.

Then he leaned into her, pressing his cock against her rectum until it began slowly, reluctantly to yield. She was just as impossibly tight as he’d expected, and he grinned in sheer, sadistic pleasure as he forced his way up her ass a centimeter at a time.

“Mmm,” Sebastian purred in her ear. “You’re *tiight*.”

Zaria gasped helplessly as his massive rod slid another blazing fraction deeper.

For all her wicked fantasies, she’d never imagined anything like this—being bound and helpless over the back of a chair while her former Thrall slowly skewered her backside on his huge cock.

Her rectum burned in protest as it stretched impossibly wide around Sebastian’s width. “It hurts!” she gasped.

“Oh, I know.” He leaned into her, forcing her to take more and still more of the endless rod. “And you love it.”

She groaned. He was right. She did. She loved being wrapped in cable and spread wide while he impaled her ass. She’d been taken by the ruthless dominant of her dreams, a man intent on using her body without mercy, on wringing savage pleasure from her with every brutal thrust.

"There," he purred at last. "All the way in, right to the balls in my pretty Thralline's tight little anus." He leaned closer to her ear. "Ready to be fucked?"

"I don't think..." she gasped, "you care if I am or not."

Sebastian laughed. "Well, I am the Dom," he said, and began pulling out.

The retreat of that massive cock brought a wicked, surprising pleasure that made her whimper in surprise.

He began fucking her more quickly, as if he'd grown impatient for each hard, impaling stroke.

In. And out. In. And out. Pain and ecstasy, surging through her in dark, glittering waves that rolled her inexorably toward climax. She writhed, yanking mindlessly at the cable that bound her as Sebastian rode deep and hard in her butt.

"Oh, yeah," he growled. "Come while I screw your tight little ass, Zaria. I want to feel you milk my dick."

To her surprise, it was his next merciless inward thrust that shot her straight into a shuddering climax. "*Sebastiiiiiaan!*" she screamed.

Zaria was coming, coming even as he fucked her ass hard and deep. Groaning with pleasure as her inner muscles clamped down on him, he grabbed her hips in both shaking hands and started pumping. Reaming her savagely as she writhed on his impaling cock, he gasped, "Just so..." *thrust* "...you know..." *Thrust* "...I'm not letting..." *THRUST* "...you go!"

"*Sebassstiiiiiaaaaaan!*" she screamed again, her inner muscles clamping down on him even tighter as her climax strengthened under the lash of his driving dick. Just as he'd known it would, that sweet, inner milking kicked Sebastian over into his own fiery orgasm. His bellow of raw pleasure blended with her shriek of surrender.

It was much later before he found the strength to untie her and carry her to bed. Curling around her, he wrapped her in his arms, surrounded her in his warmth.

Zaria, still quivering from the blinding force of their pleasure, was about to drift off to sleep when he spoke. "Marry me."

The words were a rough command, but the faint tremor of need in his voice gave him away.

Zaria, curled in his arms, lifted her head to meet his eyes. "I have no desire to do anything else."

"Good," he said. "I'd never have lasted another month anyway."

As he dragged her down into a hot, soul-searing kiss, it occurred to her she didn't know what he was talking about.

Then again, she knew there'd be a great deal else she'd have to learn about this new world of his. Yet suddenly, it no longer seemed quite so intimidating.

When they finally drew apart to breathe, she gazed deeply into his eyes. "You know," she said, "next time I think I want to tie you up."

Laughing, he pulled her into his arms.

THE END

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