

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



LYCAN WARRIORS

# FERAL

NATHALIE GRAY

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Feral

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# ***FERAL***

**Nathalie Gray**

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## Prologue

*21 August 2533 Era Vulgaris, 0927 hours  
Global Alliance of Nations Headquarters  
Seoul, United Koreas, Earth*

"Farewell, Chancellor," Prime Minister Vonatos sneered.

A second after he took a sip from his glass, Chancellor N'Namdi slumped forward, his forehead bumping against the teak desk with a dull thud.

"Finally," growled Vonatos as he stood and activated the digitex strapped to his wrist. After giving a brief set of instructions, he circled the desk and pushed his former boss off the chair so he could sit in his place. Leaning back, he raised his feet on the corner of the genuine wood slab and crossed them. Now he'd be able to instigate much needed change, free humanity from its apathy and guide it toward a purer, genetically untainted future as a species. Freaks and deviants...their days were numbered.

A faint click made him lurch back down.

On the desk, one of those miniature music-playing devices had just turned itself off, its tiny red light staring at him like a one-eyed demonic beetle. He hadn't seen it before then.

"Damn!"

He grabbed a heavy titanium sculpture—some people saw art in everything, even misshapen lumps of metal—and crushed the device, sending bits off the desk and onto the dead N'Namdi's white gown. Vonatos knew he was too late. The machine had already sent its message. Used for relaying music channels into homes or offices, those newer models could also be used to record, as had been the case now. And although he'd destroyed the actual thing, the transmission hadn't been stored anywhere near HQ but somewhere in town.

His hands shaking, Vonatos brought his digitex back up to his lips. "We have a problem. Get me our best agent."

His contact gave him two names, one of whom he knew. "She'll be perfect."

"What about the other?" asked his contact. "May I suggest we secure his services as well? He is highly qualified and eager."

"We'll get him on too. Better safe than sorry."

"Indeed, Chancellor."

## Chapter One

*3 January 2534 Era Vulgaris, 1300 hours*

*GAN Octant, Leviathan class*

*Approaching Proxima Centauri, 4.22 light-years from Earth*

Eva gave a good tug on the five-point harness. When the ship would jettison their recon cruiser, the jolt would likely make her faint. Her flawed Eustachian tubes had never been designed to take the transitions between normal flight and faster-than-light travel. Her ears would buzz, she'd get dizzy then faint. Every time the same. Not that she could do anything about it, but the thought of keeling over in front of these guys made Eva clamp her jaws tighter. *Govno!*

Shit! How her native Russian came back quickly in times of stress.

She could fake myriad skills, could talk about subjects she knew nothing of. She could lie right through a polygraph test, cheat like the best computers and deceive even a close friend – not that she had any. The badge on her arm? Fake. The nametag on her chest? False. Her reason for being part of this mission? Bogus. The security brief she'd given to her mission leader earlier that morning? Incomplete at best. But she couldn't fake through transitions to FTL travel.

Another thing she couldn't fake...the heat wafting up through the parted collar of her flight suit – more like full-body black swimwear – whenever she peeked at her team leader. *This* was very real. That he kept narrowing his dark eyes at her, as if trying to decide if he should trust her or space her skinny ass out the nearest airlock, didn't help either. She knew that he *knew* something didn't add up about her. Some people just couldn't be fooled. But she'd take care of him later, when her stomach wouldn't be about to come out of her mouth.

Another heat wave coursed through her. Eva's gaze was drawn to his body again, the strong neck where a tuft of blond hair emerged from his parted collar right down to the muscle-bound rest of him. No man she'd ever known could wear an antique felt greatcoat the way he did, with an upturned collar that underlined his dark blond hair, double-breasted top that highlighted his thick torso and flowing bottom that hid legs she *knew* were just as drool-worthy. All in all, Dex Solomon was a handsome man. If a bit scary.

*Okay, a lot scary.*

He *was* a lycanthrope, after all. And brutal even by his own kind's standards, if she were to believe her confidential reports.

No wonder Chancellor Vonatos had asked his top spy to keep an eye on the team until they found the clip.

*Actually, more than keep an eye.*

Despite the name, these unfortunate people had little in common with the folktale creatures who changed with the full moon. Eva wondered if she'd get to see one of them change. She'd never seen the transformation in real time or on a vid. She'd been told if they did change, say if all hell broke loose or if one were wounded, they would retain a semi-human form, but still. To see people change into...it had to be quite the sight! It must have been painful as anything though. Poor buggers. And all because of some long-dead mad scientists' dream of creating tougher humans for the harsh environments outside Earth. She wondered if they'd lived to see their "creation" become a hush-hush weapon, a state shame. And now a menace. That ought to teach humanity about playing genetic god. They'd inadvertently created Solomon's "kind", a sub-species that through gene splicing had acquired a semi-lupine form much similar to old movies' werewolves, hence their being called lycanthropes.

And now humanity had to get rid of its creations' descendants. One by one. Only not officially. Nothing this distasteful was ever done officially.

That she'd been sent to betray them all should've bothered her more than it did. But she'd been at the employ of the Iron Conclave—Earth government's shadow enforcers—too long for her conscience to be intact. At thirty-eight, Eva Grigorevna Serova was a lost cause. She'd never change. Still, her latest mission wouldn't be easy. Or pleasant.

Retrieving a stolen data clip containing *sensitive* information—whatever it was—that could topple Chancellor Vonatos wouldn't have been simple in the first place. Hell, hadn't she just spent five months tracking the damn thing down as it burrowed deeper in the political underworld? Which meant whoever had it—and she had her suspicions—boasted connections that rivaled her own. Damn she hated it when the bad guys had more pull than she did!

But hunting for the data clip while pretending to be an intel officer would add layers and layers of fun. She would've preferred working alone. Usually did. But Chancellor Vonatos wanted to get rid of Solomon's increasingly dangerous team *and* retrieve the precious recording. Multitasking. She'd do her jobs, both of them, and try to keep her libido dormant.

She mentally reviewed her kit safely stowed under her feet. A deceptively small bomb filled with an ionized gas that would make for one hell of a light show and trigger a chain reaction, one that would destroy the entire station. A handful of packets containing cyanide salts for the less-than-cooperative team members and finally her handheld digitex stocked with everything she'd need including maps and charts, schematics of the station, personnel files and more importantly, relaying capability so she could transmit the data clip's message to Vonatos on his personal line.

But first, she'd have to get a hold of her spiking sexual energy.

After a quick check at Solomon, sitting across from her in the cramped recon cruiser—more a reinforced steel sardine can—Eva wasn't sure if *that* aspect of the mission might not be the hardest yet. Ha.

*I wonder how he likes it. From behind? Or does he prefer his women to straddle him? Mmm. I'd straddle him, no problem.*

An image of his powerful thighs pumping between hers made Eva salivate. With a bit of tweaking, she had the perfect vision...she on her back while he knelt between her thighs, thick muscles—of course—bulging with the effort of pinning her down. She'd last just long enough for an honest fight, but not too long that he'd give up and find something else to fuck. Then he'd grin a wicked little lopsided one and take her.

Eva sighed.

*I need a good lay.*

She searched her memory for the last time she'd had a good one and couldn't remember getting any action since her breakup with Perez four months ago. Nothing post-Perez? Jeez.

Smells from heated plastic and metal made her want to fan her face. A great lurch and she gripped the straps tighter. Across from her, Eva swore she saw Solomon's upper lip curl in a smirk. *Yeah, smirk all you want, big guy. But I'll have the last laugh.*

"How long?" asked a black-haired woman with blue-tinted goggles that barely hid her milky white eyes. According to Eva's background checks, Liberty was blind, on a biological level anyway, but the female lycanthrope had an implant—illegal—that allowed her to get pixelated feedback. Eva wondered how the world would look as a collection of tiny squares. She also wondered why a woman from a rich and powerful family would hang out with this team of soldiers-for-hire. If Eva's family owned one of the most influential media conglomerates, she wouldn't be dodging bullets for a living.

Solomon pulled his sleeve up and revealed one *hairy* wrist as he checked the time. "Fifteen minutes."

Liberty nodded and cocked her head in the general direction of Cupcake. Eva's research had revealed something very interesting about *this* guy. He'd been a star street fighter at some point and had the oft-broken nose, thick eyebrows and a V-shaped piece of his right ear missing to prove it. But he'd also been embroiled in protection-for-hire. The mob. Eva doubted Solomon knew one of his men was an ex-pugilist, ex-mobster, ex-killer. All the while being a full-fledged lycanthrope. And the name. Cupcake. Who had called him that and had they survived? Anyway, Eva had readily classified the Antioch Station-born under the "dangerous at all times even asleep" category. Liberty, well, Eva suspected the chick had classified him under "drool-worthy". She hadn't *seen* him though, not really. Maybe she'd change her mind then. The guy looked exactly like what he was. A killer.

Then there was Dragana, whom Eva privately referred to as "The Nasty Bitch from Hell". Muscled, loud, obnoxious and pushy. Eva had spent a whole three minutes on the skinniest file of all. The Valkyrie was as obvious as her crude sense of humor. Her



twin Ivan was just as blunt if a lot cuter. They'd each spent a while in prison for various minor offenses, all involving demonstrations and protest rallies. It seemed their entire politically active family was against *everything*. Next came Palmer, the comms tech. This one had an eclectic but clean background in computers and communications. Though by no means skinny, he resembled a nerd compared to the rest and was the newest member on Solomon's team. He sat next to the last two members, Harris, a blonde with enough hip to cause some serious testosterone-induced bar fights, and the ex-teacher Larabie.

She'd gotten used to deciding who was a threat and who wasn't. So far, Solomon ranked first, followed closely by Cupcake, the twins then Liberty. The rest didn't even make it on her list.

"How long have you been intel, ma'am?" Liberty asked after she cocked her head from Cupcake, who tried his damndest not to look at the blind chick—he was so obvious, this one. There was something eerily keen about the way she looked at people, as if her sightless eyes could see through one's soul.

*They call each other by first name, but I get the "ma'am" treatment?*

"Nine years."

*Keep it short. Those make the best lies.*

"You sound young though."

Eva shrugged, realized Liberty might not have seen this and cleared her throat. "Nah, I'm tickling forty. You? How long have you been in this team?"

"Eleven years. I was the first member," Liberty replied with a crooked smile before winking at Solomon. He just nodded, which made Liberty grin wider.

So the blind chick *could* see subtle head movements. Eva made a mental note of that.

"Well, isn't that precious," Dragana put in from a few seats to the right. "The only thing missing is a campfire. We could trade ghost stories and read each other poetry. Oh I know, we could share our *feeelings*." She shared a snigger with her twin. Both scratched their blond heads at the same time.

Eva took a deep, deep breath.

After he'd quieted, Ivan grinned at Eva. He had some gorgeous teeth, large and white. "My little sister can be such a big baby."

The sister in question pushed him on the shoulder. The muscled man barely moved. "That's because you're just an old man."

Eva couldn't help returning the male twin's friendly grin. "You were born first?" By two and a half minutes according to her memory of his file.

He nodded before grabbing Dragana into a loose headlock. "The good one got out first then the rest followed."

"Who are you calling 'rest' you big—"

"Prepare for transition," came the distorted crackle over the intercom.

Solomon stared straight at Eva, his dark brown gaze sliding down her harness-enclosed breasts, her belly and thighs, even down to her multi-clipped boots, before raking back up to her face. *Whoa*.

Was she getting hot flashes already?

Eva couldn't help but wonder if he liked what he saw. Not all men were into fake redheads with chemically altered purple eyes. She'd had her hair and eyes changed so many times by now that she could hardly remember their real color. She'd been born a brunette with brown eyes. She thought.

Before she could give him the once-over as well—not as if it'd be her first time on this flight—a high-pitched pulse indicated imminent transition, followed by the interior lights switching to tactical amber. Eva leaned back against the padded backrest, fisted the straps and clamped her jaws.

Sometimes, she hated her job.

Solomon watched their intel officer bite down hard enough to make the muscles bulge along her sculpted jaw. The slim redhead must have had some kind of medical problem to be this tense about transition. Inner ear?

When a great lurch shook the cruiser, rattling them all before plastering them against the backrests, feet practically glued to the deck, Solomon gritted his teeth and watched GAN's liaison officer squeeze her eyes shut. When her head lolled down over the harness, Solomon knew she'd fainted. Yep, inner ear problem. No way would a tough-looking woman such as her faint for anything other than a medical issue. Why had GAN assigned her to this mission then? They knew his team would transition at least twice on the way out then the same to come back.

This latest mission left him edgy for some reason. All he knew from the spotty brief Agent Valen had given him this morning was that he had to land on ST-3 station and retrieve a data clip stolen from Global Alliance of Nations—GAN for short—headquarters. And even if he was to get it back no matter what, a private meeting with the chancellor last week had revealed the man to be as desperate for the clip as he was for extreme “discretion”. His word. Solomon liked the “no matter what” part the best and intended to leave discretion to the political spin doctors. He knew this mission must have been of the utmost importance because lycanthropes—social lepers, genetic deviants or victims of the government's creep show, depending on whose point of view—wouldn't have been called unless the stakes were stratospherically high. And the success rate catastrophically low. In other words, someone in HQ had messed up and his team got to clean the mess. Again.

At least they'd sent him someone with experience. Agent Valen's file was impressive. She could apparently speak more languages than all his team combined, could crunch numbers almost as fast as a computer and had taught for a few years at a now-closed martial arts school. She could take care of herself and probably wouldn't

end up as that other intel officer HQ had sent him. That damn cretin! Solomon would hate having to zip a body bag up over her pretty face.

*So all this and brains too? Not bad.*

He wouldn't mind testing some of her other "skills" as well but didn't really trust her yet. He trusted no one. Well, except for his longtime friend Liberty. But she was different, she'd earned his trust and respect a long time ago. Agent Valen would be with his team for the duration of the mission only and then leave. The thought of not seeing the cute redhead again made him cranky for some inexplicable reason. Even if she did have her hair in a weird asymmetrical jagged cut that was just asking for a trim.

He went over mission details once again. *Break into waste disposal station ST-3. Kill everything that moves. Get the data clip. Go back home.*

That ought to do it.

Somewhere in the cargo niches beneath their seats, weapons and gear clattered and rattled. What moron hadn't anchored the gear?

"Look at *that*," Liberty murmured as she leaned forward and looked out the lone porthole at the front of the cruiser.

Large flares surrounded the sun, or what portion of the sun he could see as their cruiser spiraled madly.

Liberty blinked several times. "That's not normal. Look at the size and intensity of those solar flares."

*Not another solar storm.* Those motherfuckers could disrupt planet-wide electrical grids, never mind a station this close.

He wished he could ask his intel officer if she'd been briefed about any potential solar storms as she'd seemed competent enough. But she would've told him if she had. "GAN would've put any mention of a storm in the briefing. It's probably just plasma acting up."

Liberty shrugged, clearly unconvinced.

Solomon gritted his teeth when successions of sun, black, sun, black in the porthole made him dizzy. Then the station started to replace some of the sun apparitions during their mad spinning. Whoever was piloting their recon cruiser was doing a shit job! He'd love to get his own ship and have one of his guys pilot it, but since Chancellor N'Namdi's suicide and Vonatos' hurried appointment, things really had taken a nosedive for Solomon's kind. That the new chancellor of Earth's government wasn't friendly toward lycanthropes and other genetically tweaked people would be similar to Solomon saying he didn't like liars. An understatement of an understatement. He couldn't abide liars. No matter the lie, large or small.

Vonatos had made it extremely clear during their meeting how Solomon was on a "tight leash" for this mission and no collateral damage would be acceptable. The man's exact words. Tight leash. Another thing Solomon hated. Puns. But at the same time, the weasel wanted the clip bad enough to send Solomon, knowing his tendency to shoot

first and ask questions long after, which made him highly suspicious as to the chancellor's motives.

*What does he want, dammit? Get the clip back or not? No use sending an armed unit if they can't use their guns, right? Right.*

So back to the redhead. Or Little Red as Dragana had called the woman as soon as she set foot in the cruiser. She didn't seem to mind the moniker.

Solomon shifted in his seat as his cock started to press against the harness. *Well would you look at that? Getting a hard-on just eyeballing her.* If he hadn't had a rule against dating GAN intelligence personnel—the lowest form of life in his book, with perhaps one redheaded exception—Solomon would've considered asking her out.

He wondered yet again how her lips would feel. They looked so soft and glossy. He caught himself imagining how her slim thighs would wrap around his waist while he fucked her and filled his face with her perfect little breasts. She looked in shape, would probably make for an excellent lay. And Agent Valen seemed to want it as much as he did.

She'd given him all the appropriate signals, in the expected order. Looks, semi-looks, pretend looks, veiled looks and the last one, an open and deliberate visual disrobing. So he'd given her one right back. What was a guy supposed to do?

*Keep his dick in his pants. That's what.*

Yeah. It'd be better if he did. At least until after the mission. Then maybe he'd break his rule just for this once. Solomon knew he was smirking and wondered why he felt so damn crabby that Agent Valen wasn't conscious to see it.

Everyone gave their own personal version of a strangled "urgh" when the cruiser stopped twirling around while attitude jets fired to stabilize their descent. He would've preferred having a gun in his hand but with recent incidents of people getting the bends upon transition and firing at their friends, he'd ordered them all to leave the hardware in the cargo niches. He doubted Dragana and her equally stubborn twin had listened. She was very attached to her custom-made volter, which she'd affectionately named Peanut. Odd name for a gun as big around as his arm. He wasn't their mom and wouldn't search their pockets. But if he found that they'd fucked with him, he'd get them hard. Dex Solomon meant business. Always.

When pressure inside the recon cruiser steadied to one-atmosphere, Solomon's ears popped. Firing at intervals now, the attitude jets gave just enough lift to approach the huge black-and-yellow-striped tarmac. Good thing the mostly automated station wasn't armed or his team would've had to sneak in, something he disliked to the highest degree. Sneaking around was for, well, the sneaky types. He was many things—lycanthrope, barely civilized asshole, snarly and irritable. But he wasn't *sneaky*.

Beside Little Red, Cupcake used his foot to prod her on the ankle. She snapped her head up and looked around, obviously ill at ease.

"Inner ear?" Solomon asked, for some reason needing to confirm his theory while making sure his team got the hint.

She nodded, looking thankful for the clarification.

*See? I can be something other than an asshole.*

Solomon knew she'd been "briefed" by Chancellor Vonatos, suspected the narrow-minded, prejudiced jerk had chosen his "inside *man*" carefully for this dangerous mission. She'd undoubtedly seen some kind of file they kept on every lycanthrope since the Privacy Act Bill requiring anyone genetically freakish to register at their local law enforcement entity so GAN could keep an eye on them. That humanity had created people like him in the first place, with their dumb super-soldier ideas and harsh environment tests, pissed him off. They'd wanted a race of super-resilient people to work on the less hospitable planets, to withstand all kinds of nastiness. They'd tampered with gene therapy, made some terrible bumbles along the way and created lycanthropes. That was the name the media had given them anyway. And it had stuck. Then in the stupidest move in the whole fucking history of the human race—which was known for its fathomless capacity for idiocy—they'd quashed the project and let the subjects go. Generations later, people like him were still cleaning up those mad scientists' mess and living in ostracism, most of them unable to get decent jobs while at the same time being called reprobate, lazy bums.

And he was cleaning up their mess in more ways than one. But even if they needed his kind for the most dangerous missions, they were still treated like sub-people. Not that he cared. Dex Solomon cared for nothing and no one. He didn't give a fuck if they demanded a sample of blood or shit. They wanted him registered? Sure. Why the hell not! He'd gone and gotten himself registered and had left it at that. But some political-activist lycanthropes he knew—the twins among those—didn't live well with the idea of being second-class citizens. Bleeding-heart socialists and their freedom-of-being-morons bullshit! Go chain yourself to a Bengal tiger already! Solomon snorted a laugh that made Little Red throw him another veiled look. She never missed anything, that one.

*POF-POF.*

With a great tremor, two of the cruiser's three skids touched down on the concrete pad. Solomon didn't wait for the last skid to touch down before unbuckling his harness and stretching up. The last skid touched while a whirr announced engines were powering down to dormant mode until his team would hightail it off the station, data clip in hand, gun gauges hopefully at "empty".

"Gear up. Don't waste time," Solomon said over the low whirr of the rumbling engines.

Palmer, his new comms tech, a guy Solomon was learning to dislike with a passion but who was skilled enough to tolerate, strapped the black polymer relay to his chest, hooked the many straps and wires to various parts of his person and distributed the latex earpieces to everyone. He spent a full three seconds checking out Little Red's ass as she got her small pack from the hold beneath her seat and strapped it to her waist. Palmer licked his lips and gave the thumbs up to Solomon.

For some reason, Solomon envisioned a fiery and violent death for Palmer. That intel officer was sure bringing out the territorial lycanthrope in him!

After everyone put their earpieces on, Palmer tuned them all in. "Report with call signs."

Solomon pressed on his earpiece to activate it. "Big Bad Wolf."

He saw Agent Valen's eyebrow arching way up but she didn't say a word. Good woman. "What's mine?"

"Little Red," Solomon replied without missing a beat.

"Little Red," she repeated to Palmer after putting her index finger to her ear.

One by one, they all reported their call signs so Palmer got them all nice and clear while the relay on his chest would record everything and simultaneously transmit it to the database on the cruiser. Solomon hated this latest GAN intrusion into his affairs. That new chancellor really didn't trust lycanthropes. His predecessor N'Namdi had never ordered anything like this. GAN was a much scarier place without him. They'd already reinstated the Social Class Law and Charter of Genetic Precedence for school enrollment and employment. N'Namdi wasn't even cold in his grave that they were undoing his work. *Earth* was a much scarier place without the tall African who'd made politics almost palatable for Solomon. He'd had some hope while N'Namdi was in office. That hope hadn't been long-lived.

After checking in with Palmer, they strapped on whatever weapons they'd decided to bring on this mission. Solomon never took a chance. He brought them all. The pair of volters strapped to his twentieth-century leather utility belt, a knife inside his boot and two stun grenades. That design was as old as the world but still perfectly able to detonate and daze the bad guys. It wasn't designed to kill, just make a big ol' bang that caused a lot of confusion. That was usually when he pulled his volters out and mowed the pricks down. From his pocket, he retrieved the sheet of plastifilm and went over the schematics again, just to commit to memory the layout of the place. Each member had a copy in case they were separated. His intel officer had barely looked at hers and he suspected she had something even better. But he was just an expendable lycanthrope, no need to spend big government credits on him. Ha.

With their usual flamboyance, Dragana and Ivan made a big show of pulling out from underneath their seats and strapping on the biggest, baddest guns on board, checking and rechecking the gauges to make sure they had enough nickel to last a while. She kept Peanut for last and rubbed a hand over the muzzle.

Armed and ready, the team waited while the station's automated landing tugs pulled the cruiser inside. Then Solomon would have his team activate a burst of electromagnetic energy that would disrupt any and all weapons in a six hundred feet radius. Except for theirs, because they'd be protected by the cruiser's honeycombed insulated resin plating. Solomon wished he could do things manually as before. Development his ass. Progress meant *dependence*. Dependence on machines, on operators sitting safely at the other end of light-years or on politicians who'd do away with his kind in a matter of

nanoseconds. Good thing none of those gene-purity cheerleaders had balls, otherwise Solomon suspected, lycans wouldn't reach the next century. The chancellor may have wished Solomon's kind and other aberrations would pack and find themselves their own planet, he was still damn glad to use them when crunch-time came around. Two-faced asshole.

"Teams of three," Solomon said, nodding at Liberty, who'd go with him as usual. "Little Red, you're with me."

She narrowed her purple eyes at him, her chemically altered lips glistening a dark shade of candy red. He'd never gone for the color-enhanced women before but she did wear it well. It gave her mouth a wet, luscious sheen. Damn she was cute. Five and a half feet of trouble on legs though. He could tell. By his side, he saw Liberty trying to hide her grin behind her hand. The urge to slap her upside the head tickled his palm.

As his team stood in two files, one along each row of seats, the six-eight Cupcake towering over everybody else, Solomon hooked his thumbs in his wide leather utility belt and spread his feet. "Palmer, fry me these fuckers."

Grinning maniacally, Palmer opened the control panel and activated the EM charge. A deep *whomp* reverberated inside the cruiser then the smell of burnt plastic wafted in through the vents. That ought to occupy the crooks for a while.

"Go."

As one, his team prepared their weapons and as the closest to the hatch, Harris opened it. Only to shudder and collapse, her chest a smoking mass of molten flesh.

"Fuck!"

Everyone started yelling at once.

Cupcake used his body mass to cut a swath to the hatch, Dragana and her twin on his heels as the trio pushed their way forward so they'd be the first ones out. Solomon caught himself taking a step sideways to provide fire cover to his intel officer. She had her own gun and knew how to use it according to her file. What the hell was he doing!

"The EM burst didn't work!" Palmer snarled as he adjusted the comms relay strapped to his chest.

"No shit!" Dragana replied. She shouldered the grenade launcher, jammed it against her hipbone and widened her stance. "Keep back!"

She fired.

The monstrous volter recoiled, forced her back a step as it launched a carbon fiber sphere the size of a walnut and filled with static-charged nickel beads. The pea-size beads would rip out in all directions, pierce through anything and, if meeting a conductive substance—say, a *body*—trigger an electric arc that would melt a nice big hole. As had been done to Harris. The thing was, Solomon didn't know how those fuckers could have functioning weapons after Palmer had fried them with the EM burst.

But he'd ponder on this later. Harris was dead. He'd lost one.

Solomon roared orders as he charged down the cruiser, taking position just outside the hatch and both volters out, returned fire. He could see at least four or five spots where the telltale bright blue-white glow indicated a weapon being discharged. So he aimed for those. When one was foolish enough to poke his head over the piece of rigging equipment he'd been using for cover, Solomon fired a well-aimed shot.

*See if an air vent in the skull will cool your head off, jackass.*

Another let his foot stick out from around the corner. Solomon fired. That one would walk funny for a bit.

By his side, Little Red slunk down from the hatch, all grace and fluidity, and leaped—*vaulted* actually—to the left where piles of cargo netting would provide perfect cover. Taking her time to aim, she fired once at a particular spot high overhead. A strangled yelp announced she'd hit her mark...that and a guy landing a few feet from her. She'd put another one in the smoking body before he was done rebounding. Little Red may be an intel officer, but she knew how to put nickel into a guy. He'd never seen anyone move the way she did, all flexibility and smoothness. Hot damn.

A vivid image of her naked butt slamming against his hips forced a very real hard-on and nearly made him trip over his feet in his hurry to pump bullets into the bad guys.

*Christ, man, get your head out of your pants. Or hers.*

While he fired long volleys—he had plenty of ammo to spare—Solomon waved his team forward. They spread around the back of the cruiser, exchanging nickel until Dragana pumped another grenade into the sneaky fuckers waiting for them, this one high and to the right where it exploded on impact against some sort of control booth surrounded with Thermopane. The cries coming out indicated a damn good hit for his expert marksman. She may be loud, bitchy and obnoxious but she could down a guy at two hundred paces without ever taking aim.

Enemy fire died down.

The twins took turns advancing, creeping forward and checking the numerous hiding places around the mammoth cargo bay. When they'd cleared the place, Solomon joined them by a gal lying on her back, a hole the size of his hand—and he had big hands—in her chest. Blood gurgled up her mouth, her eyes rolled in the back of her head.

Liberty scowled. "She's suffering."

"And beyond questioning," Solomon remarked before speeding up the process and firing once in the gal's head.

By the corner of his eye, he saw Agent Valen looking away. For some dumb reason, his callousness embarrassed him. Where the fuck had *that* come from?

"How come their weapons weren't affected by the EM burst?" Ivan asked. He had blood on his bearded chin.



Liberty cocked her head and looked upward at nothing in particular. Solomon knew the routine. She was *pondering* as she called it. "Maybe they knew we were coming and raised some kind of EM-proof shroud."

"Not possible," Solomon replied as he slid a gun in its holster, adjusted his belt and hooked his thumb into it. "Vonatos would have made sure no one knew, not the council, not even their shadow big brother. Nah, something must have malfunctioned and it didn't fry their weapons, that's all."

"But it fried everything else," Liberty put in.

Now that he could look around, she was right. Everything was dead. No light other than the EM-proof emergency pot lights along the ceiling's steel I-beams, no movement around the air ducts, despite some obviously light material lying about, plastic wrapping, coats on racks. So the fans were off. They'd have to breathe ambient, stale air for a while then, until the systems came back online. But with a station this size, they had a good while before oxygen would start to lack. Anyway, Solomon would be out within hours and didn't really care about ventilation.

"Maybe they *did* know we were coming," Dragana snarled. "Some government snitch maybe?"

Solomon wanted to roll his eyes. Dragana and her conspiracy theories. Not that GAN hadn't given her political views some credence of late. Sometimes, it really *did* look as if Vonatos were after them in more active ways than just wishing they'd take their defective gene out of the communal pool and get their own. He'd felt like a leper when he'd spoken with Vonatos. The guy hadn't even shaken his hand.

"Or," Little Red put in behind him. Solomon turned to see her crouching by the guy she'd shot from the ceiling.

*Hot damn, those are fine legs.*

"Someone has connections and got his hands on some of these." She showed him a small object he'd never seen.

*Can I fuck you?*

Solomon jerked his chin at her. "What's that?"

Little Red drew near and opened her palm for him to see. A small black tube with a coupling on both ends. He took it in his fingers, grazed hers in the process and had to fight the shiver that raced through his body.

*Hell, man, focus.*

"It's a dashpot."

Solomon crossed his arms. "And?" He couldn't very well admit he had no idea what a "dashpot" was, now could he? Of course not.

Liberty beamed. "Ohh another tech geek. I like you already, Agent Valen. A dashpot, Solomon, would theoretically put a resistive force in the volter's mechanism. It's like a damper actually, and would negate the effects of an electric charge. But I thought it was still a twinkle in some researcher's eye, if you smell what I mean."

Solomon wanted to shake his head. He'd known Liberty for several years and her peculiar way of speaking still startled him. She had good ones though. "Can you smell what I mean?" "Do you hear where this is going?" She may have been biologically blind—except for her implant—but Liberty could rig any system to do pretty much everything. The only thing he couldn't figure out about the calm, classy lady was the reason why she chose to be part of his team. Her family was rich. Why would she put herself in danger?

Cupcake scratched his head as he looked at Liberty. Solomon could tell his brain hurt. "So it's like a condom? Them little electrical critters can't get through?"

Liberty turned her cloudy, unseeing eyes toward him and smiled broadly. "*Exactly* like a condom."

Little Red shook her head. "No one outside GAN should even have one, never mind," she looked around at the many dead bodies, "eleven."

"How would you know that?" Palmer asked as he came over to inspect the little black tube in Solomon's hand. "I mean if it's hush-hush gear, how would *you* know if GAN are the only ones with it?"

"Intel officer, *gospodin*. *Intel* being the keyword here," Little Red snapped, rolling her pretty purple eyes.

"What did you just call me?"

"*Gospodin*. It means 'mister'."

"In what language?"

"Russian."

Liberty adjusted her goggles as she cocked her head in Little Red's direction. "So you speak Russian too. My, you're full of surprises, aren't you?"

Solomon could tell Little Red was getting annoyed. She closed her eyes briefly then nodded at Liberty.

He couldn't stop the mental trip of her eyes closing for *him* as he kissed her and tried to imagine how her mouth would taste. As sweet as it looked no doubt. Solomon gritted his teeth hard against the adult movie playing in his head. Agent Valen sucking him, those lips glossy and stretched around his cock. Did she swallow? No matter, just getting his face and hands and dick full of her would be gift enough.

Solomon shook his head. *Argh, get a grip.*

So GAN had sent him someone with a brain *and* combat skills for once. It was enough Vonatos was now sending along babysitters—the unofficial name for government matrons tagging along to make sure his team didn't take any candy from the jar—at least this one knew her stuff.

"I thought I put that in my security brief when I reported in this morning," Agent Valen said, turning to him.

"That's what you call it back at GAN-morons-HQ? A one-pager with nothing on it?" Solomon snarled. "A *security* brief?"

"The rest is on a need-to-know basis."

He gripped his volter hard enough to make the resin membrane squeak in his fist. "And I 'need to know' something. Did you expect those fuckers to have GAN gear?"

"No."

"Just 'no'? Some intel officer you are."

"Some of us at GAN-morons-HQ aren't chatty."

*Right in the balls.*

He liked it when a woman could send him spinning this way. Only in front of his team, he didn't enjoy it so much. Solomon promised himself she'd get one back.

"I don't care who speaks what language and who should have the good stuff or not...*we* have it now. So retrieve them all and put them on your gear. Ask Little Red or Liberty to show you how. And stop blabbering. We have a job to do and it doesn't involve debating procurement procedures."

*Nor does it involve mental fuckfests with intel officers.*

## Chapter Two

*Well, that required some fine backpedaling, miss.*

She'd just basically blurted out how only GAN owned that sort of gear. Comms tech guy had been right. How would *she* know about *that*? Intel officers wouldn't normally know about experimental weapons. But no one caught on to that apparently.

A lie to cover a lie. She'd had to start much earlier than anticipated.

When she'd expected a bunch of barely civilized half-thugs, she'd instead joined a smart, cohesive team led by a sharp if aggressive leader. Not at all the murderous brutes Chancellor Vonatos had warned her against. He'd spoken of them as little more than monsters, out of control, a menace to society. A menace he in good conscience had to get rid of.

*Well, actually, I have to get rid of them for him.*

True, Solomon's success rate was as high as the death toll. Still, they'd all been bad guys. Barely any civilian casualty, despite some seriously tangled missions right in urban centers. So Vonatos obviously didn't like lycanthropes. Eva shook her head. It didn't matter if the chancellor had fabricated part—or most—of his justifications for getting rid of his predecessor's team of soldiers-for-hire. Her job wasn't to determine their loyalties but to make good use of them while she hunted for the damn data clip.

Eva threw a sneak peek at Palmer, her new number one on the list of people to keep out of her blind spot. She hated sniper personalities and much preferred tank ones.

Like Solomon.

*Yeah. Only you're about to betray him. So you should keep the libido switch in the off position.*

She still felt the heat of his fingers as they'd grazed hers. His skin was *hot*. Not imagining how the rest of him would be just as hot to the touch proved difficult. Make that impossible.

He'd make for an epic lay, she was sure of it. With a muscled body such as his and those wickedly gorgeous lips. And she *loved* cleft chins. The dark blond stubbles on his jaw made her rub her fingers together as she imagined the feel of it on her hands, her face, her inner thighs. Whoever had had Dex Solomon between their thighs had been lucky devils indeed. Too bad she couldn't even get a little taste.

*Well... Maybe just a mental sip then?*

First, she'd get rid of the felt greatcoat. Imagining his broad chest and shoulders, Eva disrobed him right down to the big black boots and ran her mental hands on his—hairy, since she'd seen bits of it—skin. It'd be just glorious. And so hot. Then she'd kiss his thick neck all around, his shoulders. Of course, he wouldn't be able to endure her

particular brand of torture and would wrap his arms around her waist, bend her back a little. Yes, perfect. She had no doubt he could do some damage with a mouth such as his. Mmm. She'd let him rake his teeth along her throat while his hand would trap a breast, roll a nipple. That would be when he'd squeeze a thigh between hers, push her back against the wall and press his hips against hers. Very real juices presently slicked her panties. Eva bit her tongue as she enjoyed images of some fierce and disorderly mating. Maybe against a wall? That'd be nice. In her fantasy, Solomon took her hard.

Ahh.

Someone said something and Eva came crashing back into ST-3's landing bay. *Govno*. Sweat tasted salty on her upper lip. Talk about a mind screw. Literally.

The dire turn of events came rolling back over her. Her mark flared and started to itch. Subcutaneous, the Iron Conclave mark contained all her stats should something happen to her. Only ultraviolet light could reveal it. Hers was safely hidden on her left hip, near the groin. Not many people went there anyway. Less risky. Ha.

Who the *hell* were those thieves? Where and most importantly *how* had they gotten their hands on government equipment that would cost the equivalent of ten years' salary for an average family?

Shit.

*Govno*, they even had experimental Iron Conclave gear on them, not just the dashpots, for she'd surreptitiously slipped in her pocket an item she'd found on the dead guy, an item she'd only seen back at GAN labs. *Secret* labs. How the thieves had managed to get their hands on one-step capsules astounded her. And she wasn't easily astounded. One of those babies could put down a man the size of Cupcake. Thus the "one-step" moniker.

"Nice landing spot," Liberty commented as she looked at the cruiser. "I would've put us right over there, nice and neat." She pointed along the wall at shuttle niches, all empty. "Should we ask them to move it a bit?"

Eva noticed the *Octant* crew had remote-landed their recon cruiser right on top of a large trapdoor in the deck. Some sort of chute probably.

Solomon marched past. "What a bunch of idiots but fuck it. We'll be back home before they take out the trash. The command post is this way. Let's go."

Eva strapped her gun back in its holster at her thigh and fell into step behind him, one hand on her pack. Even if she got shot at close range, the bomb wouldn't explode unless it was armed, which it wasn't and wouldn't be until she was sure. Only with the data clip in hand and Solomon's team secured somewhere would she arm the thing and make for the cruiser. No one would ask questions back on the GAN *Octant* if she were to return without the team. Not after she'd show them Vonatos' personal ID code to enter in their digitex. Within a matter of hours, she'd be back on Earth, looking at a few days off before the next job. Judging from her carnal response to Solomon, her body wanted his, even if her brain—when it wasn't occupied with visions of his naked butt—

tried to deny it. She was old enough to recognize the potential problem there. Maybe this time she'd need more than a few days off to purge the mission from her system.

With the twins providing ample coverage—if only by the sheer mass of muscles and gear—the team crept single file along the bulkhead until they came to a wide set of double doors. On the concrete deck, flaking black and yellow tape rounded the corner and disappeared into a darkened corridor beyond. No light in there. So their EM burst *had* worked on certain electrical systems. Only not on the right ones.

Eva wondered what had happened to the original station crew. Dead probably. Poor buggers. They wouldn't have had a chance against thieves armed with Iron Conclave tech.

Solomon raised a fist above his head. The team froze in place.

"Dragana, Ivan, provide cover," he murmured as he plastered his back against the metal bulkhead. "Liberty, can you hear anything?"

The blind lycanthrope crept forward, stuck her head near the doors and waited. Eva noticed how Cupcake leaned forward as well, gun in a white-knuckled grip. No one made a move. Eva barely breathed. Maybe the full-of-surprises Liberty should be higher on her list.

Shaking her head, the tall woman snuck back behind Solomon. Sweat glistened on her obsidian skin. "I couldn't see or hear anything. No heat patterns either, which means no light or heat."

"Just in case." Dragana stood in the doorway and launched a grenade down the corridor. A bright blue-white burst illuminated the bulkheads. No screams. She grinned. "Clear."

Before she could take a step, Solomon stalked forward, grabbed her by the front of the jacket and hoisted her to him. "Don't *ever* do that again," he growled an inch from her face. "You wait until I give the order. Got it?"

The muscled blonde paled and nodded when he released her.

Eva tried not to do a jig at seeing the loud-mouthed bitch get some attitude across the teeth. Ha. Then the thought occurred to her that if Solomon could make a tough chick like Dragana look this nervous, maybe she ought to be too. Um.

*So gorgeous and dangerous.*

Of course he was dangerous, she reminded herself. She'd read the report of his lone transformation into the lycanthrope form several years ago. His team had been trapped somewhere with the bad guys mere feet away when an enraged Solomon had changed. Eva couldn't believe at first the report as it listed the damage he'd made, the casualties he caused while in his other form. It'd taken his entire team to restrain him until he changed back. Other sources had also confirmed the numbers. Of the registered lycanthropes—who numbered in the several hundreds system-wide—Dex Solomon was the largest and most dangerous. Even Cupcake, younger and larger as a man, didn't compare.

Still, she'd gladly wrap her legs around the grumpy guy any time!

Serious sexual hunger tightened Eva's pussy. No amount of thigh squeezing relieved it either. But she knew of something that could. Solomon's undoubtedly big, smooth cock would put everything right. As would his large square hands. And that mouth...

*Argh, please, woman.*

Trying not to dwell on her assignment wasn't so easy this time. She could usually tune out pretty much everything, her desiccated conscience included, and this time wouldn't be an exception if she wanted to keep her head attached to her shoulders. She'd known of many a spy who'd developed a conscience, only to be killed by it in the end. Eva wouldn't make the same mistake. She had a job to do—Chancellor Vonatos had been very, *very* adamant about the importance of retrieving the stolen data clip *and* getting rid of the lycanthrope menace. "Genetic deviants" he'd called them. Letting such a minor thing as horniness get in the way would mean she was losing her edge. And she wasn't.

While they padded up the slightly slanted corridor, darkness creeping in by increments, half the team took one side, the other half—Larabie, Palmer, Dragana and Ivan—scattered across and in front as they systematically cleared side passageways. Eva kept well hidden behind the large shield of muscle provided by Cupcake. Yet she kept an eye on Palmer, the comms tech guy, for his waspish comment still rang strangely in her mind. What had caused him to be so damn bitchy all of a sudden? She hadn't even said a word to him. Maybe that was his problem. Whatever it was, she'd fix him later on that day, the sneaky little shit.

When they emerged into a cavernous chamber, the "Non-Hazardous Waste Processing Division, Stage 1" according to the metal sign riveted above the door—she loved industrial orderliness—Eva's stomach tightened into a knot.

The station was *huge*.

Retrieving a thing the size of her baby finger would be a bitch. Where were those thieves anyway? Aside from the welcoming party, there was no one around. How weird. So unlike the well-organized entity she'd traced for months before intel reached her one of them had taken the clip off planet. It'd taken her another few weeks just to extract information on which station or colony the thieves had taken the target. Eva had had to use all her connections, all her cunning, just to get the mention of ST-3. But no names, no details. Whoever was behind the theft had not only connections but the will to get in a world of trouble with, well, the world itself. She knew of only one kind of criminal who would fit that description...those with a cause. And causes were the scourge of any government. For there was nothing worse on the logistics, nothing that produced more obstinate and desperate reactions than a cause.

Eva sighed.

Solomon's decision to go for the command post was as good as any. She wished GAN would speed up the process of coming up with better scanning gear though.

Something that told them where every single human hid would be nice! Taking them out one by one would be a breeze. But ST-3, being a waste disposal station, the largest in fact, was equipped with dampening, multi-layered plating that stopped solar radiation from killing its crew and also prevented any sort of sensor or searching tool from penetrating the thick outer shell and interior partitions. On her digitex, which she'd consulted when no one was looking, all that showed were the main areas with the most important details such as locations of hatches and the likes, but no vital signs or little red dots that moved about. It would've been too easy, would've made her life too simple. It could never be simple.

Ah well, they'd have to do things the old-fashioned way. Room by room.

A metal gangway ran along the bulkhead to their right. The twins had already gone down a few steps, their boots not making a sound on the metal grille. Soon, the entire team was down on the main floor where a wicked-looking sorting machine stood poised in mid-motion, bits of scrap pipes and other refuse that resembled a giant robot's innards dangled from between its pincers.

Solomon motioned with his hand for Larabie to clear the way ahead, who leveled his volter and crept forward. A faint smell tickled Eva's nose, reminded her of something, somewhere, she couldn't quite place. Like that peculiar odor when she'd scrub her stainless steel sink too hard, the dusty, acrid smell.

Liberty stopped so abruptly that her looming "shadow" that was Cupcake walked right into her.

Eva remembered the smell.

*Oh shit.*

"Prox bomb!" she yelled out.

Too late.

Solomon was leveling his pair of guns when a loud explosion ripped through the processing chamber, made Eva's ears ring painfully. The shock sent her flying back. She bit her tongue when she collided against a barrier not hard yet not soft either. While she floundered to her knees, she watched, stupefied, as body parts and other lumpy fragments fell around in sickening, wet thuds. Remnants of the ex-math teacher Larabie. Bullets thudded somewhere to her left. She pulled her volter out.

"Go back to your masters!" a man yelled. She didn't recognize the voice.

Amid the smoke and chaos, she spotted a few figures slipping back from the doorway across the room. Sneaky little shits! She fired once. Probably missed for no yell accompanied her round.

She'd wondered what it'd be like to watch a lycanthrope change. Well, was she ever served when not just one but four did.

Both twins, Cupcake and Liberty began to convulse and bend over. The baggy uniforms – which she'd thought looked a bit old-fashioned – and stretchy belts and boot tops proved a perfect fit for their suddenly expanding forms, their thickening torsos



and elongating limbs. It was much quicker but just as violent a transformation as Eva had expected. Terrible snaps and cracks indicated their skeletal structure was also readjusting, not just the exterior. The pain must have been agonizing. Eva thanked her lucky star she hadn't been born with the genetic condition.

Dragana finished first and Eva couldn't help but liken the woman to some sort of large, upright hyena-type creature with a massive set of teeth that protruded from her mouth...*snout* and sharp, forward-pointing ears that twitched as she sniffed around. Despite the transformation, they remained humanoid and she would've been able to recognize each one of them. They only were hairier and much, much *scarier*.

Eva realized it'd been Palmer who'd softened her fall. He helped her get from kneeling position to her feet, clutching at her ass and hip in the process.

"Are you all right?" he asked in her ear, his hands still grabbing her.

Eva nodded, yanking her arm out of his too-hard grip so she could grab her volter with both hands. He hadn't changed to his other form. Neither had Solomon for that matter. But *he* was scary just the same.

"Come on!" Solomon growled as he charged after his lycanthropes, who had as one man, rushed across the main floor after the retreating enemy and disappeared through the doorway.

Growls, sharp man-barks and all-too-human yells indicated which way they'd gone. The rapid-fire *twop-twop* of several volters made her twitch. Eva was still trying to reconcile the people inside the lycans as she sprinted after Solomon who, in spite of all the muscle and greatcoat and weapons, could easily outrun her. No easy feat.

This particular passageway was lit, indicating the end of their EM burst's six hundred feet radius. They'd have light now. But so would the thieves, whom she'd come to view as more than mere crooks but extremely dangerous and well-connected political tools.

Who would fund dashpots for them? And one-step capsules? Who had that sort of money? And access to Iron Conclave installations?

*An inside job. That's what.*

Eva ran after Solomon, keeping the man well in sight. Why hadn't he changed? And Palmer? The rest had. She checked her volter's gauge and prepared to have to fire between the two "friendly" heads if need be. She was a good shot and wasn't afraid she'd hit either man, but with Solomon being one of them, a sudden compulsion to be absolutely true in her aim made her lower her weapon. Friendly fire incidents were always upsetting but she couldn't even imagine shooting Dex Solomon by mistake. The fear it caused surprised her.

Hatches on either side with timer bolts blinking green to indicate they were unlocked flashed by as she ran full tilt to keep up with the man's impossibly strong legs. His greatcoat fretted on either side of him, his arms pumped hard. Just as they reached the end of the passageway, a volley of bullets exploded along the bulkhead to their right, creating burn marks where they hit. One shot of these and they could kiss

whatever part had been hit goodbye. Static-charged nickel rounds had been specifically meant to hurt people without causing damage to the infrastructure. So while a nickel bead would cause an electric arc on impact and melt a guy's head off, if shot at the deck, it would only cause a scuff. Twisted engineering but effective just the same. Particularly on a space station floating so close to the sun. No wonder the thing was as impregnable as a bank shuttle.

Solomon leaped sideways and yanked on her wrist as he swerved left, right then across the corridor toward one of the hatches. Nickel beads thudded, zipped by and clunked all around them. "Take cover!"

Before she could do anything else, he propelled her inside a stairwell where she quickly understood his intent, sheathed her volter and nimbly climbed up the metal rungs. Solomon's head right in her butt, she scaled the ladder up one level. Still he followed her, one gun pointing down by his hip in case they were followed. They weren't, which was strange.

Eva hooked an arm over a rung and looked down over Solomon's imposing shoulder. "Where's Palmer?"

Her suspicious, scheming mind replayed the scene of Solomon rushing to close the hatch behind him, stranding Palmer alone outside. Why would he do that?

He looked up, stared for a second. His nostrils were dilated, his mouth parted with a feral grimace that sent shivers down her back. Solomon shook his head, swallowed hard then looked down between his legs.

Fingers to his earpiece, he growled, "Palmer, where the fuck are you?"

*As if you don't know.*

Eva didn't hear anything in her piece and guessed neither did he for he cursed. "He's gone."

*Of course he's gone, you locked him out.*

Only one more set of rungs and they reached the next level. Eva climbed over the circular manhole, used the guardrail to propel herself forward and meant to carefully open the hatch so she could peek outside but it was locked. No way in frozen Siberia they'd be able to shoot their way through *this* hatch.

"Shit."

"Locked?" Solomon muttered not far behind her. "We'll have to keep going up."

"Or down."

"I said *up*."

"You're the boss."

"Damn right."

His breath stirred strands of her hair along her nape and she shivered. Turning, she carefully avoided coming in physical contact as she circumvented the man, went for the ladder and craned her neck so she could have a look. But all she saw was one other level up for the holes weren't aligned in case someone fell.

"You go," she said, stepping sideways. Eva didn't deal well with the idea of anyone having access to her back. Old habits.

"Ladies first."

Why the suddenly intense glint in his eyes?

She was old enough to recognize the early signs of sexual tension and lamented the lack of proper timing. Any other time and place, she wouldn't have minded flirting with the man. But right now, they were both kind of busy. Weren't they? Yet the ardent sparkle left her thighs cramping at the idea of Dex Solomon pumping between them. There wasn't a guy on Earth she knew of—or in orbit for that matter—who was sexier than him. Sexy in a feral, snarly way.

"Why don't you go, you have the bigger guns."

His nostrils flared. He was obviously used to his team listening to his orders the first time around. "Something wrong with your hearing, Agent Valen?"

Eva tried humor to dispel the suddenly thick sexual tension. "No, not at all. Is it because you want to keep looking at my ass?"

"Dead on."

*Ohh.*

She *did* ask.

Heart pumping for reasons that had nothing to do with physical exertion—she was horny badly enough to hump the guy right then and there—Eva grabbed the first rung, swung her leg around the ladder and climbed up to the next level, the entire time forcing herself to forget the blistering look in Solomon's eyes. It wouldn't be good for her mission, getting involved with him, if only on a physical level.

The feel of his lips on hers, his hands squeezing her breasts. She wondered if he ate his women? With a mouth such as his, it'd be incredibly good no doubt.

*Think of something else.*

His thighs jammed between hers as he pounded away. His teeth on her skin.

*Govno, woman!*

They must have used a secondary access route because the third level was the last, which couldn't have been the whole of the station for it was much higher.

"Argh, it doesn't go through to the rest," Eva growled as she tried the hatch and found it locked as well.

The timer bolt indicated it'd been set only a few minutes ago. If her suspicions were right, they were trapped inside the stairwell, with every hatch time-locked until they would automatically open after however many preset minutes or hours. The bad guys had locked them in. And Solomon and she had let them. Like rookies. That was dumb.

"Well," Eva said, crossing her arms and leaning back against the inside of the hatch. She gave it a sharp little back kick that did wonders to her frustration level. "That wasn't very smart."

Panting, Solomon closed the distance between the handrail and the hatch. He shook his head. "Nor is this."

"What is?"

He leaned in and kissed her.

*Yeah, not smart at all.*

But damn good.

And if the redheaded she-devil didn't respond just as eagerly! Little Red pushed her chin up, literally ground her mouth against his and showed teeth right away as she grabbed his nape and hoisted herself up against him. Whoa.

He'd hoped for a kiss, not a total-abandon, lip-biting feast! As though he would complain. With time locks, there was no telling how long they'd be stuck there. Minutes or hours. Twenty-four at most until the bolts would have to be reset for another cycle. Why waste time playing word games when he knew for a fact Agent Valen wanted him as much as he wanted her?

After shoving his volter back in its holster at his belt, Solomon used both hands to frame her head and give that luscious mouth all his attention, sucking, nibbling and pulling on her bottom lip and making it as red and kiss-swollen as he could. They *did* taste just as sweet as they looked too.

Solomon fisted her red hair, pulled her head back, stretched the skin of her throat so he could better savor it. While he licked up the length of her neck, his other hand snaked down, captured a breast through the adjusted suit, which he squeezed. Little Red moaned against his mouth. When she crushed her pelvis to his, Solomon thought he would explode. His body clamored for hers. His cock stiffened. His skin felt on fire.

Pinning her against the hatch, Solomon squared his pelvis so he could rub his cock against her, pronounced hip rotations just the trick to alleviate the burning in his lower back, burning that demanded he take her right then and there. But he couldn't. If he did, he wouldn't last five seconds. Better build it up first.

The sound of a zipper going down made him detach his mouth from hers. He watched, mesmerized by the cleavage emerging from beneath the black cloth, avid and exalted all at once, hungry for that moment when the crease of her breasts would curve outward left and right to reveal what he knew would be particularly juicy offerings. And they were. The no-nonsense gray bra didn't do justice to the hard, just-the-right-size breasts it forced close together. Solomon wanted to see them apart, weigh each in a hand, assault one with his mouth, bite the nipple hard enough to make her gasp while he gently massaged the other.

Little Red looked down at her chest, back up into his face and grinned knowingly. "Breast man?"

"You bet."

Solomon stepped back so she could snap her waist pack off, holster as well, and squeeze out of the tight-fitting flight suit. She rolled her shoulders when the garment trapped her arms back. He couldn't resist anymore.

He bunched the thin shiny fabric in a fist, ensnaring her arms along her back, while he pulled the bra elastic down and over her nipple. And it was a perfect dark rosy color. Actually, she reminded him of a bowl of candies. The hard, glossy ones that glistened like marbles. *Mm-mm*. Grape-flavored for her eyes, creamy bonbons for her pale and smooth skin, and those burn-a-hole-in-your-tongue cinnamon rocks the color and shine of fire engines. Yep. A bowl of hard, glossy candies. Just for him. No sharing.

With a growl, he covered her nipple with his mouth. She must have liked this for she pushed her chest up toward him. She fit so perfectly in his arms.

Stepping out on either side of her feet, Solomon arched her spine but kept an arm around her waist so she wouldn't fall back against the hatch. As if she knew what he wanted, Little Red let her head loll back. The front of her, stretched so taut for his taking, proved Solomon's instincts about her—they were both wired the same. The way her breasts strained under the elastic, the abdominals played beneath the pale skin, a teasingly faint shadow of gray panties barely visible through the zipper...it was all too much.

"Damn, woman, you're making me want to rip my own clothes off," he growled through his teeth.

Straightening, Little Red finally twisted her arms out of the flight suit, let it hang around her hips and planted a palm on his chest to push him back. "There's something I've been wanting to do first."

He looked down at himself when she deftly undid the twin rows of brass buttons, managed the complicated utility belt and its many pouches as though she'd been the one to wear it for years, dropped it to the floor without a spare look before yanking his greatcoat opened and taking one long, hard look from his face to his boots.

A wicked smile pulled her lips sideways. "Just as I thought."

"Oh you've been thinking about it, have you?"

"All day, but don't you get a fat head, *gospodin*."

Russian had never sounded so damn sexy.

He let her look her fill, feeling proud in a juvenile, dumb sort of way. He liked it when women found him handsome enough to stop and stare. It didn't happen that often, truth be told. At forty-three, with some gray hair and a whole lot of mouth to run him into trouble, Dex Solomon probably didn't qualify by a long shot as a potential lover. Maybe a good lay. Never a lover.

Little Red just put her fists on her hips, one nipple showing over the elastic, her belly rising slightly with her labored breathing. She looked in complete control of herself, unlike him.

"You just gonna look?"

"Tell me something," she started, flicked the corner of his greatcoat collar. "Why didn't you change back then? The rest did. Well, except for your comms tech."

"Palmer hasn't been with me long, so I couldn't tell you why. But me, I've only ever changed once, and I think you've been briefed on it."

She nodded, none of the horror or shock he'd come to expect appeared in her expression. "Does that mean you can control yourself better than them?"

"Yeah, something like that. Let's just say that if I change up here, on a station that's half locked down, it's not gonna be pretty." He gave her an explicit once-over. "So, can we get back to our previous occupation?"

That grin!

Her purple gaze on his, she came up to him, slapped his hand away when he meant for a quick grab at her breast. Whoa. She had reflexes. He had another try. She deftly parried it as well, sent his hand out and wide with a twist of her wrist. Pretending to try yet again, Solomon baited her with his left hand while he snatched his right and fisted the garment hanging on her narrow hips.

She fell for it, went for his left hand. Looking shocked, she humphed loudly when Solomon slammed her against him, pinned her wrist behind her back and slowly, purposefully, let his mouth hover over hers, not touching, just letting her want it first.

Against her mouth, he growled, "I've been wanting to do this since you reported in this morning."

With his free hand, he squeezed past the barely there suit, followed the natural curve of her belly and hip, sneaked in between their pressed bodies and found that sweet, moist fruit he'd been drooling over all day. Just as he thought, nice and wet and so goddamn hot. Her panties were drenched and stuck to the back of his hand.

"Hey..."

She'd just snaked her free hand down there as well, joined his fingers as he rubbed her clit. Teeth showing when she bit her bottom lip hard enough to depress marks into the glistening flesh, she pressed her middle finger inside.

"Oh you like to have things in hand, do you?"

Eyes half closed, she grinned. "I'm good with my hands."

"I bet you are, Little Red," Solomon replied, his middle finger also sinking in. But his entry wasn't as gentle as hers. She huffed when he curled his finger in and started to rub her frontal wall. "Like that, do you?"

"Mm-mm."

"I'm good with my hands too."

It was his time to gasp when—and he had no idea how—she used her free hand to grab his thumb back from the rest of the fingers and painfully twist it so he'd have to release her. He never expected the amount of pain involved from such a subtle move. He released her, cursing. So it'd been aikido she'd taught at that martial arts school.

Although he'd never practiced the ancient Japanese discipline, he'd seen enough of the deceptively graceful moves to know when pain was about to hit. Hard.

"Okay, okay, dammit. That's aikido, right?"

"Yep."

"Been doing it a while too is my guess."

"Fourteen years."

"Good enough for me. Can I have my thumb back?" Solomon gave up trying to pull it out in case she decided to keep his thumb as a souvenir. "You like to make a guy work for it, don't you?"

While she used finesse and smarts to keep his hands off her, Solomon, his hunger rising to dangerous proportions, resorted to crude force and tackled her down under him. He managed to soften the fall by rolling on his side at the last moment so she'd land on him instead of the deck. But the little eel coiled right out of his arms, again went for his thumb, which she grabbed in a surprisingly tough grip. So his finger wouldn't be pulled out of its socket, Solomon had no choice but to roll away from her, keep going until he lay on his front, one arm bent painfully high over his back.

"Nothing this good is free, *gospodin*."

"Took the words right out of my mouth," he snarled. He had a few tricks up his sleeve too. Nothing fancy. Just brutishly effective.

She reacted, but too late.

With his free hand, he pinned her knee by his side, rolled over her leg until she had to either follow him or accept two hundred and forty pounds on one of her sinewy thighs. She went with him. His pride swelled, his cock even more so, Solomon grinned as he turned over until he had her immobilized under his much heavier frame. Making sure she didn't have an inch of play, he hurriedly switched hands then faced her. His weight settling over her brought a crooked smile to Little Red's glistening lips. The she-devil! She'd be the end of him.

Solomon curled his lips and denuded his teeth then nipped her naked shoulder, the space between her breasts, the nipple that showed over the gray bra. She squirmed when he drove his pelvis hard against hers. The suit had bunched down around and behind her hips. Then she moaned louder when he did it again.

Her teeth clacked not far from his chin. If he hadn't moved back, she would've bitten him hard.

"Come on, tease," she hissed.

He spared only one hand when he pulled his zipper down and freed his aching cock. Sinking in her would be special. He knew it would.

Good woman was already spreading her legs for him!

With a violent yank, she pulled her black flight suit and panties the rest of the way down then kicked out of both, with boots still on. The woman could move. He'd never fucked a woman wearing only military-issue boots and gray wool socks before. Sexy.

He was pulling his own pants down when she sat brusquely, fisted his cock and hauled him on top of her. "Come on. Now. I've been drooling over it long enough."

She had, huh?

"You've been wanting it?" he asked, longing to hear how she had indeed wanted to fuck him. Men and their egos.

Her eyes narrowed dangerously. She still had her fist around his dick and pumped him once, quick and hard. Solomon's breath caught in his throat.

Good enough for him.

While she planted her feet flat on the deck and raised her pelvis high enough so he could fit both knees underneath, Solomon licked his thumb and rubbed it on her pussy, shocked at the amount of honey there. She'd already been so wet just a moment before. She was more than ready. Foreplay would have to wait. If he didn't sink inside her tight little pussy right this instant, he'd spontaneously combust.

Solomon grabbed his cock in a loose fist, knelt up so he could enter her and was about to do just that when she abruptly dropped her pelvis. So he basically stabbed through empty air.

"Oops, missed me." Her throaty laugh made the hair on his arms stand on end.

She wouldn't pull that prank on him twice.

Gripping her hips brutally—much harder than he'd ever allowed himself with a woman—Solomon pinned her down beneath him then stabbed his hips forward. He sank in all at once, penetrated her hot and tender flesh. Crying out, she latched onto his waist with her legs. Not that he meant to go anywhere, but no chance now that he'd force his way out of the trap that was her thighs.

Like a piston, he drove his cock in and out while she moaned and lolled her head side to side. She wasn't tight per se, but she had exercised those muscles because she gripped him like a fist would, milked him to the point of pain and while he thrust in deep, churned her, tamped and stretched her, the woman became wild. Her arms flew over her head, scratched at the steel deck. Hot damn!

His hands unyielding, knowing in the back of his fuzzy mind he was probably digging in too hard, Solomon drove in with brutal shoves that made their skin clack when they connected. Her keens resonated inside the steel stairwell. And he had barely given her appropriate attention, no proper finger-fucking, no eating her out or teasing her until she begged him to screw her.

When she began to undulate and writhe beneath him, he thought his world had been reduced to a thin sliver that only she occupied, her berry-colored lips, her purple eyes so dark in her pleasure, her pale skin flushed, muscles rippling. When he came up on his hands so he could look at her pussy while he hammered and pounded into the slick, burning flesh, the sight of her distended lips drove all other thought away. He forgot about her delectable breasts, the nipples just hard enough, just large enough, the wicked eyes that could hold him captive for an eternity. Solomon licked his lips as he



retreated to the glans, his entire length coated with her generous essence, each ridge and vein glistening, as if she'd melted from the inside, melted around him. *For* him.

With the strength of her legs alone, she flipped over him, rolled on top. Okay.

Sitting up proud, she flicked her bra off and to the side. And he still wore all his clothes. Dammit.

She must have understood his frustrated look because while she clutched his shaft repeatedly with vaginal muscles that must have had a daily regimen of exercises, Little Red undid the buttons on his old-fashioned, Army surplus wool shirt. She grinned when she parted the shirt wide and denuded his hairy chest. Her grin turned lascivious as she pinched his nipple, her gaze on his face to see the effect.

Solomon meant to speak some to-the-point remark but she leaned back, anchored her hands over his parted knees and began to gyrate, offering him a spectacular view of her distended pussy. So she'd straddled him for his benefit? So he could watch her?

And watch he did.

He stretched her nether lips with his thumbs, used one to rub her clit in slow, circular motions. Little Red growled in what he thought was Russian. Oh that was sexy!

So he rubbed again, harder, quicker, pulled on the sensitive skin to uncover her glossy little pearl. He would've loved to eat her. Too bad they'd gone so damn fast. But sometimes a quick, hard lay put everything back in its place. Maybe he'd be able to focus on something other than her now.

Her breasts bouncing, she sat up to the end of him then bore back down, repeated the motion but with a twist of the hip, a tightening of her vaginal muscles that just about made him lose all coherence. Her rosy lips looked stretched to the maximum around his shaft. The sight of it alone almost made him climax.

"I shoot blanks," he snarled through clenched teeth.

"Oh?"

"It's better to tell...before...than after." Oh he was close.

Little Red burst out laughing, which served to tense her pussy even harder around him. Like a belly dancer, she rolled her abdominals while she sat up and down.

Solomon gritted his teeth. Damn she was good. Too good. With a breast in each hand, he came violently, shot deep when she crushed her sex against his, pubic hair touching, tickling, sticky with both their sweat and essence.

Solomon closed his eyes, opened them when he felt the weight of her stare on him. Little Red cocked her head, smiled then stood from him. Cum trickled down her sinewy thighs as she nonchalantly used her panties to wipe herself, stuffed them in a pocket of her flight suit then donned her bra and suit. After she snapped on her waist pack and holster, she planted her fists on her hips. Solomon felt as though he should get up as well. Not that he needed to get dressed, only pull his pants up and zip them. If only there had been more *time*.

"We better find a way out of here," Little Red said as she zipped the suit back to her neck. "Time is money, right?"

*"Time is money?!"*

Talk about a mood killer.

## Chapter Three

Eva forced her face into a relaxed mask when all she wanted was to throw herself at him again and again, let him do to her—*do* her—everything he ever wanted to do to a woman yet had been afraid to ask. Solomon taking her from behind ranked high on her to-do list. But she doubted she'd have the opportunity to be intimate with him again. As soon as she got her hands on the damn data clip, Eva would be gone in minutes. Back to the cruiser, leaving them behind, stranded while her bomb would tick their lives away. The notion of fucking him—figuratively *and* physically—made her squeeze her eyes tightly shut. Shit. Why did she have to let her guard down? Why couldn't she have seen the warning signs before?

But what an epic ride!

With that muscled back, she suspected—would even put money on it—that he'd last for hours and hours. A treat she'd never get to taste.

*Just forget him.*

Easier said than done. *Govno.*

Both looking as though nothing had happened, except for her lack of underwear and happily slick pussy, she followed him down the ladder, back to the first level. They were still up a few rungs when the hatch suddenly opened and Cupcake's face appeared in the opening, the muzzle of a gun having preceded him.

"We were looking for you," he remarked before shaking his head and muttering to himself.

Solomon threw her a slanted look that meant "don't say a word" then preceded her out of the stairwell. The rest were there—Liberty, both twins and Cupcake, except for comms tech guy. They looked a bit bedraggled, had blood on them.

Solomon checked both sides. "Where's Palmer?"

Liberty adjusted her goggles, a smirk on her lips as she "looked" in turn at Solomon then Eva. "We thought he was with you."

"No. We lost him right after you guys changed. He's not responding. If he's not dead yet, I'm gonna kill him myself. Did you find anything?"

*We lost him...more like you lost him.*

Cupcake nodded, resembling a bear who'd found a good honey jar but had been unable to open it. "We know where they're holed up. But they have the place barred shut and booby-trapped."

The lights along the central I-beam on the corridor ceiling began to flicker. Everyone looked up a split second before their earpieces began to fizz loudly.

Eva threw hers on the deck with a muttered curse.

"Argh, what was that?" Dragana demanded as she looked at the latex item in her hand as though it had crawled out of her food. "Almost made me drop Peanut. Shit."

*Peanut?*

With a gasp, Liberty grabbed her head with both hands and lurched forward. She would've fallen had Cupcake not caught her. With a mix of extreme gentleness and awkward hesitation, he lowered her to the ground where she knelt and leaned her elbows on his thigh.

Solomon must have thought he was doing a good job pretending Liberty's obvious pain hadn't affected him. After pulling his own earpiece out, he hooked a thumb in his belt and snapped his chin up in her general direction. Mister Cool. Right.

"Are you all right?"

She nodded. "That power surge...it wasn't some residual static from our EM burst, I can tell you—" Liberty's voice broke abruptly as she looked up and around.

Strangely, the keen edge was gone from her cloudy eyes. Eva thought the chick really looked blind.

"My implant," Liberty breathed. "It's dead."

His large hand under her elbow, Cupcake helped her get back to her feet. "What do you mean, it's dead?"

Concern tightened his face. Damn the guy was obvious. Get married already!

Even Dragana looked worried.

Liberty turned her blank eyes toward Solomon, probably going on memory. "I can't see a thing... I don't know what happened. I'll be completely useless to you. Just leave me in the cruiser, okay? I'll monitor from there and help as I can."

Eva's heart skipped a beat. No, no, no. No one was supposed to stay in the cruiser. She didn't want to have to murder anyone up close and personal. Bombs worked well for spies with a budding conscience. But murdering a *blind* woman? Well, jeez.

While her mind worked furiously to find a reason for the woman to stay with the team, Solomon shook his head. "We're staying together. Ivan, you —"

"I'll do it." Cupcake stared at Solomon, blue eyes unblinking, both massive hands curled into fists at his sides. The missing notch in his ear a constant reminder of the man's past. She wondered again if Solomon knew just who he'd hired.

Solomon looked ready to butt heads but Dragana and her twin had already started checking each other's gear and moved a pace or so away, muttering among themselves like the good anti-everything activists they were.

"Okay, let's go say 'hi' to these fuckers. I want off this place ASAP."

Eva doubted Solomon would get off the station "as soon as possible". *Never* was more appropriate.

*And why does that make me bitchy as hell?*

She followed in morose silence as the team, twins leading, retraced their steps back to where the terrorists were apparently holed up. Thieves, terrorists, crooks. She didn't even know what to call them anymore. There was so much more than met the eye, such danger lurking in each detail she was mentally tallying. But large pieces were missing from the puzzle. A political Russian roulette waiting to blow someone's brains out.

Solomon pulled his second volter out and kept one in each hand, pointing down, trigger fingers never far from their marks. "How many are left, did you get a head count?"

Dragana shook her head. "Around five, six. Cupcake got a few, Ivan and I did too. Liberty got a whole one, I think." She peeked back with a mocking grin on her square face but sobered when she probably remembered Liberty could no longer see.

"I caught *two* actually."

Another flicker of light silenced everyone. Smells of exhaust and fumes reached them.

"There goes the rest of the ventilation," Solomon murmured under his breath.

Eva couldn't believe how quickly things were turning to shit. She needed *power*, dammit, to make her escape. Without power, some of the hatches would be locked, the cruiser would be inaccessible and even if she managed to reach it, it wouldn't go anywhere as the mooring clamps wouldn't be able to release. So these lycanthropes would be her new best friends for a while still. She'd have to be extra careful so as not to draw suspicions on herself when crunching time came around.

"Did you hear that?" Liberty asked suddenly.

Eva couldn't hear anything. Shakes of heads all around.

"You have to speak up now, remember?"

Solomon threw a pained look at her, one she obviously didn't see. Eva doubted she would've liked the pity there. "What did you hear?"

"Come on, no one hears that? Static like you wouldn't believe. There..." she raised her hand, looked up. "It's getting louder. No one?"

At first, Eva heard nothing then at the extreme range of her hearing, she thought she detected a faint hiss, very similar to the sound of bacon frying in a pan. A low shudder vibrated under their feet. Dragana raised the grenade launcher and looked around, her face tight, Ivan doing the same by her side.

"What the fuck is that?"

Cupcake, volter in one hand, his other hovering near Liberty's shoulder, looked over their heads at the corridor ahead of them. "I don't think that's normal."

"Hell no, it's not!" Solomon snarled when everyone turned their attention to the deck up the passageway as it buckled and twisted like a wave coming closer.

The bulkheads remained pretty much straight but Eva could tell the station was slowly doing...*something*! They scattered on either side of the passageway as the

“wave” rolled past them, popping rivets, sections of deck and dislodging years of grime and industrial-grade paint from between the steel plates. Eva swallowed hard.

Then it stopped.

Liberty looked up, opened her mouth to speak just as a long whine like a dying beast ripped through the entire place, filled the air, pressed in on their eardrums. Eva tucked her head between her shoulders, squeezed her eyes shut.

What little light that had remained after the initial flicker died out, plunging them into deep, impenetrable darkness. Even the EM-proof amber lights had gone.

“Great,” a male voice remarked.

Ivan?

“What’s going on?” That had been Liberty.

“The lights are gone,” Solomon replied, his deep voice sounding tight.

“I didn’t notice anything.”

Dragana managed to laugh. Eva didn’t even smile. She switched her volter so she could rub her sweaty palm on her hip. Shit. She could name at least twenty catastrophes this electrical failure had just caused. At least they still had gravity.

Hey.

How come?

The spy in her wanted to know why only non-essential systems such as lights and ventilation had gone while gravity remained? If something had disrupted the grid, wouldn’t the entire thing go bust? It was as though whatever had sparked the malfunctions had intent behind its actions. Like a brain.

A soft blue glow appeared when Solomon flicked on the thin flashlight attached to his scope. Then others did as well, the twins lit theirs then Cupcake and Eva respectively.

“Fuck, don’t we make nice targets now,” Solomon snarled. “We better hurry before everything else goes.” His command was followed by a long string of curses that would have raised the hair on a trader’s arms.

With only the blue light beams of their scopes, they advanced through the darkness, slowed considerably by uncertainty. The bomb in Eva’s waist pack felt suddenly unstable and heavy. This was the most frustrating and potentially dangerous mission of her life. Things usually went so smoothly, with only an occasional hitch or bump. Those who should die did so silently and unseen, what she’d come to retrieve would be in her hands and Eva would report back to GAN, getting a nice bonus for her effort. Not this time. She doubted she’d be back home within hours as she’d forecasted.

They reached a set of thick-looking steel doors with bright, multilingual yellow logos that read, “Observation Bridge—Supervisors Only”.

“They’re in there,” Cupcake remarked as he eyed the access panel. The way he palmed his gun let Eva know just how he’d take care of this latest obstacle.

"Move over," Dragana snarled as she leaned in close to the panel, tapped it to see if any juice ran through it, got nothing else but a blank screen. "What do we do? Want Peanut to make you a door?" She patted her monstrous silver volter.

*So that's Peanut. A gun.*

"Damn right we do," Solomon spat, sheathed his volters then meant to grab "Peanut". Eyes narrowed, Dragana pulled it away and indicated he should take the grenade launcher instead, which he did before aiming it at the doors. "I'm done pussyfooting around these fuckers."

Eva barely had time to scurry back a few steps when Solomon fired the grenade at the doors, which slid partly open in a shower of electrical sparks and molten metal. He threw the weapon back at Dragana, slid his own guns out and pointed them forward with his arms at full extension. His expression read death in every language Eva knew. With bright blue-white bursts of volter shots illuminating his hair and face in mottled patterns, he stepped through the still-glowing embrasure, both muzzles flashing. His greatcoat parted on either side of his forward leg.

Screams, curses and yells erupted from within. Flashes of weapons spilled out of the gap.

Though the twins were quick to follow him, by the time they stepped inside and fired—at will, which was what Eva suspected to be their only way—the sound of resistance had already died down considerably. Cupcake, who'd remained behind so he could cover Liberty, looked as though he itched to go too. Eva couldn't help feeling for the guy. He clearly liked Liberty and wanted to protect her but the brute in him wanted to break some heads, dammit!

Hell, with the amount of frustration they'd suffered so far, *she* wanted to break heads.

All of a sudden electricity came back, flickered, died then returned. When she stepped inside the place, gun at the ready, a scene of chaos greeted her. Cargo crates and all sorts of stuff had been piled high against the doors. It all looked so amateur, so disorganized, so...staged. Surprising coming from the well-connected and highly capable thieves she'd been after for months. At least four bodies lay in pools of blood. All young people. Eva couldn't help the feeling something didn't quite fit in all of this. She checked behind her shoulder at the empty passageway and thought she saw a hatch closing but couldn't investigate as the sight of Solomon drove all other thought away.

In the midst of everything he stood, leaning over with his large black boot on a guy's ankle while he pointed his gun at the trapped foot.

He really *was* the Big Bad Wolf. Now more than ever.

"Where's the data clip?"

The guy shook his head, looked away when Solomon leaned even closer, gun muzzle now almost directly on the man's foot. If he fired, he'd blow the whole foot off. Or melt it off more aptly.

Solomon tut-tutted. "Where. Is. The. Data clip?"

The man looked away, snarling curses. "Fuck off, you government whore! I'm not talking."

"Let's see if this helps you play nice."

Solomon fired.

Eva winced when the foot all but disintegrated under the point-blank shot, the statically charged nickel shredding the flesh, before triggering an electric arc that melted skin and tendons, tissues and muscles, right down to the bone, which had charred to a brown dry stub. Like being hit by lightning. All of which happened in a split second.

The man howled in pain, tried to crawl away but Solomon put his foot back down, this time on the man's knee. "Let me repeat my question—"

"Wait!" growled the wounded man, both hands raised in front of him in supplication Eva found unnerving. She was a *spy*, unused to getting her hands dirty this way. Her style was more the "hit and run" variety. The man seemed to notice her. His eyes flared wide.

Solomon straightened, cracked his neck then pointed his gun at the man's lower leg again. "Tell me who has the data clip."

A quick nod confirmed the man's willingness to cooperate. Eva didn't like the sudden glint of desperation in his eyes. She looked at his hands. Empty.

"Tell us who it is, dammit!" Dragana demanded as she went around the cluttered room, rolling a form—man or woman, hard to tell—onto its back and grimacing.

A shot illuminated a corner of the room. Ivan cried out and staggered backward a few paces, his shoulder a mass of pulpy red flesh. Literally jumping *over* a console, Dragana was there to cushion his fall before he hit the deck.

"Christ!"

Cupcake hadn't finished saying the word that he'd fired at the man in the corner, who slumped back against the bulkhead, clearly dead this time.

"Oh man, *ohhh*," Dragana whimpered as she cradled her twin's head on her lap. His eyes were closed.

Eva quickly went around the dead and pulled a guy's vest off his back. Rolling it hurriedly, she came over to Dragana and put the cloth on Ivan's shoulder. His sister looked up with tearful but thankful eyes. She pressed it hard to his gushing wound, which brought a whimper out of him. But the more she put pressure, the more blood seemed to find ways around the compress. Eva added her hands to the woman's to try to stem the flow but could tell it wasn't going to work.

Ivan let out one long breath and lay still. His lips were already turning chalky.

Eva swallowed hard. *He'd had such a nice smile.*

"No."

The tiny voice surely didn't belong to Dragana. But as she repeated it, the voice grew in intensity and volume, frayed as she wailed her pain.



Though they'd been annoying to the highest degree, Eva envied the twins' easy trust, the loving bond they'd shared. She'd never known anything such as that, even with a lover.

Her eyes staring vacantly, Dragana sat on her heels. Her hands were still on her twin's chest and shoulder, crushing the makeshift bandage that had let his life trickle away. He looked younger in death than his twenty-four.

When she straightened, Eva saw Solomon take aim at the guy's crotch. "Now I'm pissed off. Where's the fucking data clip?"

"*She* has it. Her, right there! She's one of them!"

Eva swallowed hard when the guy pointed at her. She looked behind, just to make sure. No, he really *was* pointing at her.

"What?" she croaked, cleared her throat. She knew she didn't sound convincing. She hadn't expected that at all. What the hell was going on?!

Dragana's gaze snapped up. Oh and there was murder in it too. "Fucking *what*?"

Both Solomon and Cupcake stared hard while Eva, trying to appear outwardly calm, dug her sticky-with-blood hand in a pocket, frantically fishing around for the one-step capsules in case things turned ugly. She didn't want to have her feet shot off. There was nothing in her pocket.

The capsules were gone.

Shit.

She pretended to shrug but in fact rechecked her pocket. *Where are those stupid capsules?* Her hand closed on something her mind refused to assimilate.

No. Shit... *Nooo.*

But there it was, all sleek and plastic and feeling exactly as a *data clip* from any old digitex. That hadn't been there before. Sweat pearled at her temples. Someone had planted a data clip in her pocket. Who could've slipped that in there? No one had been near her.

*That's not true. Someone's been close.*

Solomon.

But why would he have done something like this? Unless it wasn't him. Whoever it was, the person had *skills*. As in professional skills.

Eva shook her head, rolled her eyes. "The guy would say anything to get away from you," she said nonchalantly. "I'll point my gun at him and he'll say it was her."

Eva pointed to Liberty, who nodded her assent. "Desperate measures and all that," she put in mildly.

Dragana narrowed her pale eyes, looking unconvinced. She lowered her face to her brother and seemed to forget everything else.

Before Eva could say more, the man popped something into his mouth and winced.

"No!" Eva reached out. "Don't let him — argh! Shit!"

Solomon jumped away when the man began to convulse, saliva frothing at his mouth, his eyes rolling inside his head then he lay still with his swollen tongue hanging out. His face was still contorted in pain.

Well, at least *someone* had had one-step capsules in *their* pocket. Man, and quick too.

"I hate when they do that," Cupcake muttered as he drew near, pushed on the man's shoulder with the tip of his boot and turned away, clearly disappointed. He inched closer to Dragana, put his bear paw of a hand over her shoulder, gave a squeeze then drew back.

"Yeah, I hate the sneaky type," Solomon added, his dark gaze set on Eva. He drew near, searched her face with cold hard eyes. "Nothing worse in my book than cheats and liars. Right, Agent Valen?"

"This is much more than a bunch of thieves with a precious bit of knowledge in their hands, Solomon. It's much bigger. Much deeper. They have GAN equipment, for heaven's sake, which means support. It's not good, man. And it looks fishy to me."

If she could aim their suspicions away from her, could play to their team spirit, act as one of them, Eva might salvage the potentially volatile situation. To take her act to the next level, she even sheathed her volter and snapped the loop over its handle.

"Damn right it does," Solomon growled through his teeth.

Eva nodded, desperate to agree with Solomon's reasoning. "You can never tell with GAN, right—"

"You know what else it looks like to me?" he added, raising his voice so it'd drown hers. "A setup."

Eva couldn't move, could barely draw breath. The feral intensity of his gaze nailed the soles of her boots right where they were. She was screwed.

Ha. Twice screwed actually. Although the first time had been heavenly. The memory of his lips on hers, his hands digging in her flesh, his cock pumping. Heat wafted out of her collar. She swallowed, tried to ignore the accusing glint in his eyes as he undid the buttons on his greatcoat then the first few on his shirt. She'd never felt trapped before. It was a horrible feeling, the sudden shift of power, the cold, clammy fist reaching up from behind to squeeze her innards and pull them down.

*Play it cool. You've been through worse.*

Hell no, actually she hadn't.

"A setup? Come on," she snarled, forcing her face into an impassive mask, her eyes to stare right back at him. Liars and cheaters didn't stare back. Or that was what people liked to think, liked to pretend they could tell honest ones just by looks alone. Actually, the best liars and cheaters—people such as her—could stare for hours and never look away, could charm the pants off most people. Not Dex Solomon apparently.

Cupcake guiding her, Liberty drew close to Dragana, wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "I'm sorry, Dragana, I'm so sorry."

She tried to console her but the muscled woman knelt pole-straight, her face a mask of seething fury. She was going to explode any second. Eva readied for the outburst.

"Solomon, you're making no sense," Liberty put in as she blindly palmed her way upright, her long fingers tracing the console over which Dragana had leaped. "Agent Valen was with us the entire time. She couldn't have taken it."

Liberty's argument, her taking her side, left Eva feeling dirty and gross. *Oh no, this is no time to grow a conscience. No damn time!* She did have a man's blood on her hands, through no fault of hers but still.

"It doesn't mean she's not in bed with GAN. What's in your pockets, huh?" Dragana asked, looking up from her lifeless twin and snarling a curse. "I want to see what you've got in your pockets."

"Okay, settle down," Solomon said, eyeing Eva's other pocket where she'd stuffed her sticky panties. "Cupcake, search the dead. Someone is bound to have it on them. Unless there are more around. Shit, I didn't even get to ask him anything."

While Cupcake went around the dead, systematically searching them and looking as if he'd done this often, Solomon knelt by Dragana and though he didn't touch her, Eva could see the compassion on his usually stoical face. "He died with his gun in his hands."

"He died for nothing!" she roared, pushing him away from Ivan.

Solomon snapped back to his feet. A tic tugged at his jaw. "Now wouldn't be a good time to change, Dragana."

She seemed to calm down a little bit and rubbed her face, spreading her twin's blood all over it. Eva shivered.

"This mission's getting costly," Solomon remarked in a dull, flat voice while his eyes, just as lifeless, skewered her in place.

*It was getting costly.*

Eva still had her fist tight over the "magic" data clip, which had appeared in her pocket. She agreed with a nod. Not only because she concurred with his comment—if only for entirely different reasons—but it also gave her something to do besides trying not to squirm under the intensity of his stare.

*Breathe.*

Some consoles whirled back to life, startling everyone. A fortuitous change of subject for Eva.

Liberty ran her hand over the closest, her unseeing eyes half closed as she lightly fingered the screen, the buttons, a series of levers. "What room is this? Is there a sign somewhere?"

Glad to have something to do, Eva drew near. "It said it's the observation bridge on the door. But there's nothing to see except large metal walls."

"What do these levers say?"

Eva leaned over. "Panels A to G, each one with a letter on a yellow tag."

"Let's see what they do," Liberty murmured as she pulled the first one down.

A hiss then sharp blades of light stabbed into the room as the walls—or what she'd thought had been walls—partitioned into horizontal slats a hand's breadth thick, slowly rising until the last one detached from the bottom sill to reveal a scene that made everyone who could see it gasp.

The sun resembled a giant golden Medusa with fiery snakes of flames twisting outward. Rings of blues and greens expanded away from the sun. Eva had never seen anything similar. It stabbed right into her brain, all that UV light.

"Oh Christ, this isn't good," Solomon whispered as he stepped over a prone form so he could reach the large rectangular window. "Not good at all. Liberty, what the hell is this?"

She turned to face the heat. "Describe it."

"It's more than a solar storm...the sun looks mighty pissed off. Flares like you wouldn't believe."

Liberty winced. "Are the flares continuous or come and go in clusters? Are there any colors, a halo? Blue or green, maybe purple?"

"Hell yeah. Flares, colors, you name it. It stabs you right in the brain too." Solomon shielded his eye with a hand.

"A CME."

"Speak English, Liberty."

"Coronal Mass Ejection. A *massive* solar storm."

Solomon shook his head. "Fuck."

"I agree."

"How long do we have until it hits the fan?"

Liberty turned her head toward Eva, "stared" for a while then lowered her gaze to her hands. "We've already been hit a couple of times, that's what caused the electrical malfunctions on the station. It must have disabled my implant as well. It's hard to tell. It could stew like this for days or it could hit within minutes."

"Why didn't GAN say anything?" Dragana spat as she rubbed her twin's blond hair out of his eyes. "They must've known, but they sent us here anyway." She threw Eva a murderous look. "Yeah, throw those dogs out into the storm, right, it's not like we're real people anyway, huh?"

"Hey, don't look at me that way, I just work for them, same as you," Eva replied, playing the role of offended intel officer while her mind worked furiously to understand Vonatos' motivation in sending his best spy out into harm's way. A solar storm, by frozen Siberia!

"I don't work for *them*," the woman shot back. "I'm no one's little whore."

Eva felt her blood pressure go up several notches. She could usually control herself much better than this. Must have been Solomon's accusing eyes making her jittery. *Focus.*

"Be careful what you call me, okay, *Dragana*?" Eva said slowly, very gently.

"What! You want to take this outside, you and me, bitch to bitch?" The muscled woman rose slightly but seemed unwilling to leave her twin's side. A twitch pulled at her bottom lip.

"*Dragana*!" Liberty snapped.

Solomon only looked at both in turns, not saying a damn thing. Eva took a deep, deep breath. Loss or no, this woman really was getting on her nerves.

"Believe what you want, I don't care."

"Ivan died —"

"Because he didn't use his fucking *BRAIN*!" Solomon banged the butt of a volter against the corner of a nearby console, cracking the tempered glass screen.

He hissed something, looked up at the ceiling and blew a long breath through his teeth. His eyes had narrowed to slits. After a moment, he appeared Mister Cool once more but Eva could sense the sheer brute strength swelling from within as a great heart, pounding faster, harder, and again tried to imagine the infamous scene of carnage that had accompanied his lone change into his lycan form. Vonatos had relayed every juicy detail on it too. *It must not be pretty.*

"How can you take her side? She's one of *them*."

"Would you just take care of your brother and shut the hell up!"

He turned to her and Eva thought, for the first time in her life, that she was going to actually blurt it all out, tell everything she knew, had been, was still, everything she'd done or wished she had, all the things left unsaid, that she was going to spill her guts to this man whom she barely knew just so the silent accusation would leave his eyes. Just so he'd look at her differently.

*How pathetic!*

"Something here obviously doesn't add up," Solomon began, looking at her before averting his gaze as if he'd seen something there he didn't like. Or could no longer stand.

Shame and desperation and self-directed anger battled in Eva. She was only doing her job, for Christ's sake! Nothing personal.

*It never is personal.*

She dredged deep within her, drew on every survival instinct to help her through this section and held his gaze, even though he seemed to have decided not to look at her anymore. If she had to fight her way out of this room, dammit, she would. She'd leave behind more than a few feathers though.

A tense silence settled over the room, which finally gave Eva some time to think.

Vonatos *must* have known about the storm. GAN knew those things, had labs dedicated to studying the effect of solar radiation and winds, plasma uses. Why wouldn't they have told her anything? Had the mission been so important and time-sensitive that delaying even by a couple of days would mean disaster? Or was it something else entirely?

Was Eva Grigorevna Serova suddenly no longer top spy or at least not valued enough to salvage from a dangerous mission? What if Vonatos had sent her to ST-3 knowing she wouldn't return but confident she'd manage to do her job first and relay the message?

Had she, unbeknownst to her, become like them, her lycanthrope companions, an obsolete weapon no longer needed...*expendable*?

## Chapter Four

Solomon stifled a curse when he popped his filling. Again. He had to stop grinding his teeth so fucking much. But the events were taking on a turn he didn't like at all. Everything was starting to *stink*.

*And it's getting harder to tell who let it out first.*

Cupcake brought back to the console everything he'd found on the dead so it gave Solomon the occasion to do something other than stare at Little...*Agent Valen*.

"Let's see," he said, sifting through the pile with the muzzle of a gun.

Lots of volters and extra nickel clips, some odds and ends, bits of nothing good to him. Someone had even had a condom foil on him. Poor bugger had died before using it! Solomon looked in disbelief at Cupcake, who only shrugged.

But no data clip. Not a one.

As if this mission weren't already turning to shit quicker than a cheap meal, a monster of a solar storm was brewing. Great. Just fucking great. He'd already lost Harris, Larabie and probably Palmer. Now Ivan, which meant he might as well have lost Dragana. Even Liberty was compromised with her vision entirely gone.

And the added layer of Little Red—*Agent Valen*, his brain, his large one, reminded him—perhaps being more than an intel officer just about made him want to shoot something. Although he wouldn't take the word of a dying man, for dying men often proved unreliable and desperate, it still bothered him. Actually, a bunch of little things bugged him and he thought it was high time to line them up and point his gun at them, see which one started squirming first.

One, he wanted to fuck the little she-devil again. But that sort of idiocy never proved helpful for a guy trying to get the job done. *Next item on the agenda.*

Two, her sudden and total change of attitude after they'd had sex still puzzled him. As if she'd flicked a switch and changed personalities or something. How could anyone go from fucking their brains out to "time is money"? Then again, maybe she was used to switching this way, being "one of them" and all.

Three, that now-dead guy—motherfucker shit-stirrer who died before telling the whole thing—may have been trying to save his skin and told the first thing that popped into his mind, still, the look of alarm and panic in *Agent Valen's* purple eyes had been very, very convincing. Like someone realizing they'd run out of road and were going to crash headfirst into a concrete wall. But then the look had disappeared. Just like that. Another flick of a switch?

Four, he wanted to fuck *Agent Valen* again. And again. Hard and fast, slow and tender. He wanted her on her elbows and knees, on her feet and facing the wall,

straddling him and working those delicious abs. Solomon literally *drooled* at the mere thought of crushing her cunt to his mouth and biting into her tender flesh, of plowing through her throat with his dick, letting her swallow him whole, suck and bite and pull him in and never let go.

Five? Well...

*So I'm basically going in circles.*

What a mind screw. Who was she? Intel officer or more?

Could he take chances though? Was he willing to sacrifice the rest of his team and himself on the odd chance Agent Valen might or might not be in bed with the other side? Whose other side anyway? The thieves'? Some other shadow government shit everyone kept going on about? Was this political, religious, industrial? Something else entirely?

Could he trust her now?

Sadly – or more to the point, frustratingly – the answer to most of those questions was no. Solomon no longer trusted her. Not that he had anyway. He trusted *no one*. Not because of some traumatic childhood experience, “my first girlfriend dumped my ass for another guy” or some such bullshit. It just wasn’t in his nature. Period.

He spat a curse, kicked at the nearest thing he could reach – some dead guy – and waved a muzzle at Agent Valen. “I want your gun, your watch and I want your pack, and don’t you dare give me any grief about it too, woman. I have enough shit to deal with.”

“Solomon – ”

Liberty meant to take a step forward but Cupcake placed a large hand over her shoulder to keep her back.

“You’re making a big mistake, Solomon,” Agent Valen began, something about the way she widened her stance made him squeeze his guns tighter. “It makes no sense.”

“She’s right,” hissed Liberty. The look she gave him cut deep. The one person he would’ve thought on his side.

“Shut your ass and do as he says,” Dragana snarled as she climbed to her feet and stuck her hand out.

A tense silence accompanied his marksman’s comment. Cupcake visibly tensed, a bull ready to charge. Although Solomon knew for a fact Dragana far surpassed the slender woman in brute strength, he doubted she’d be a match if Agent Valen decided to turn on the aikido switch. His thumb still hurt.

Her eyes narrowed, Agent Valen took a step back, removed her watch, reached to her waist, unsnapped the volter, pulled it out slowly and switched it around so Dragana could take it.

Solomon breathed easier. Good woman.

Dragana took the volter, but as soon as she closed her hand around it, she cocked her arm and struck Agent Valen across the mouth with the butt of it. Despite some



seriously quick reflexes and a near parry, the power behind the hit knocked her sideways. Her watch fell to the deck. She grabbed onto the corner of the console and yanked herself upright right away. Danger shone in her chemically enhanced eyes. She blinked.

Solomon winced as if he'd been struck himself. "Christ, Dragana! Control yourself!"

Seeing Agent Valen getting hit felt as though someone had just kicked him in the balls. A spike of adrenaline ratcheted up his heartbeat. Sweat clammed his palms. His gums and knuckles began to ache. Oh shit.

*This is no time to change.*

With him, it never *was* a good time to change. Unless he was alone on a deserted island. The one and only time he'd switched to lycanthrope form, several years ago, he'd left a massacre in his wake. Although the government of the time had quashed the incident and blamed some other guy, Solomon knew they kept files on it. He took a deep, steadying breath.

"This is all so fucking crazy," Liberty snarled as she threw her hands up.

He'd never seen her looking so *mad*. Or hear the classy lady use a profanity before, despite the years spent by his side, hearing them all.

"You're all turning into complete, idiotic dimwits, you know that? And *you*," she growled while pointing at empty space—but he knew she meant him. "We need to be searching this *place*, not each other."

"It's all right," Agent Valen said softly, that tone of voice doing nothing for his self-respect right about now. "Let's all see what's in my pockets."

Patting her mouth, which didn't bleed, thankfully, Agent Valen straightened and raked her hair back. Some of the shorter strands stood on end and really did give her the horned appearance of a she-devil. She didn't say anything. In a way, Solomon thought it was worse than if she'd started running her mouth and tried to take Dragana on.

"The pack too." Solomon hated every second of this.

With shaking fingers, which *did* surprise him greatly, Agent Valen unclipped her waist pack and put it on the console with the rest. That she'd add her stuff to that of the bad guys just about made him want to crawl back home and drink himself into next month.

Of course, ever-zealous Dragana was all over it, emptying its contents on the hard metal counter, little clicks of betrayal and other sordid sounds that made him grind his teeth all over again. Might as well pop the rest of the fillings!

When a silver cylinder rolled into Dragana's hand, one of its ends an obvious adapter, Solomon drew near to get a better look. He hadn't seen one in a while and couldn't believe anyone would casually walk around with it in their pocket but knew exactly what he was looking at.

He'd been around long enough to come across a few government agents, spies and other sneaky types in his forty-three years and could recognize second-generation, time-sensitive explosive technology when it fucking stared him right in the face.

Strangely, he just felt numb looking at it.

"Plan B, is it?" Solomon asked, rolling his eyes up at Agent Valen.

She didn't even say a word. Didn't need to. Guilt might as well have been written in marker on her forehead. She held his gaze but he could tell she wanted to look away.

The funny feeling of being simultaneously stabbed in the back and in the *heart* forced a bark of laughter, squeezed his lungs and made his shoulders shake uncontrollably. His lip twitched upward, denuded his teeth. A sound like a car crash in a tunnel made him squint.

Then it hit him.

Searing pain shot through his chest, enough to bend him in half. The sound of both his volters clattering against the deck made an odd, muffled sound in his ears. He'd *never* dropped his guns before.

*No, I did drop them once. Motherfucker...*

"He's changing!" Dragana roared.

Greatcoat splitting at both shoulders, his belt digging in his suddenly expanding torso and waist, Solomon curled in on himself, his arms bulging through the seams, tufts of dark blond hair emerging from tears and rends.

Eva only had time to take a step back when both Cupcake and Dragana, changing as well, threw themselves at Solomon and tackled his shaking form to the ground. All three heavily muscled bodies rolled and crashed around the consoles, among the dead, while Liberty fanned her arms and carefully stepped back.

"Don't let him catch your scent," she said softly, her unseeing eyes large in her angular face.

Eva couldn't even think clearly, let alone move.

"GO! NOW!"

Liberty's surprising vocal force propelled Eva a few steps to the right, trying to circumvent the violent battle, the rising snarls and twisting bodies. The awful sounds of rips and tears and bones snapping drowned the whoosh of her heartbeat. Fear made her palms slimy. God she was going to puke.

Finding strength from *somewhere*, Eva leaped over the dead man who'd started it all with his accusing finger, stumbled out of the mangled doorway—another testament to Solomon's ways—and whirled around just in time to see Liberty flying across the room to slam back against the bulkhead. As if in slow motion, she slid gently to the ground, her eyes closed, her nose bleeding.

Amid the chaos rose a tall, sturdy, slightly bent silhouette, hirsute, primal, with muscled upper limbs and an unexpectedly graceful head reminiscent of a large jackal lifting its face to the moon. The set of fangs pierced the vision. They meant death.

Eva ran.

Behind her, the violent noises of further titanic clash told her Dragana and Cupcake were still trying to keep Solomon from gutting her then and there. Why? It wouldn't change a thing in the end. The look of betrayal in his dark eyes when he'd spotted and obviously recognized the explosive, the disappointment, the *confirmation*, had all but eviscerated her. Like a clean surgical cut, burning, precise, she'd felt her soul slip out of her, guts spilling at her feet in a blistering pool of shame. She'd never before loathed her job so *much*. Nor herself.

Finding the mental acumen to zip her pocket over the data clip—whatever it contained and whoever had put it there—Eva ran down the corridor they'd just been through, in the back of her mind desperate to reach the staircase and lock herself in using the timer bolts. She didn't know how fast Solomon could move, but judging by the muscle-bound form she'd glanced, he'd move fast and hard.

Tearing around the last corner before the processing room with the frozen mechanical pincers, Eva snarled when she tore her palm against flaking paint, drew blood.

*"Don't let him catch your scent,"* Liberty had said. Easier said than done.

Eva pushed her body to the maximum as she navigated the mammoth chamber, dashing around machines, trying to ignore bits of the ex-teacher Larabie still lying around, and cried out when she came face to face with Palmer. She ran full tilt into him and knocked him back several paces.

"Jesus Christ..." he snarled, windmilling to catch his balance. "Where the hell have you all been?"

"Solomon's changed. He's coming," was all Eva managed to say.

He blanched.

She pushed away from Palmer and aimed for the metal stairs that would lead her up one deck and closer to the cruiser. If she could lock herself in it and weather the storm—both kinds—she might stand a chance. She could also radio the GAN *Octant* and ask for assistance. But she couldn't move.

Something held her back by the hair, threw her completely off balance right on the first step. Shit!

Instincts kicking in at high gear, she wrapped both hands over the back of her head, trapping the offending hand, twisted underneath Palmer's arm and took a quick step sideways, effectively winding out of his grasp. He looked shocked to see his empty fist in front of him.

"You're good," he said slowly, a smirk she hadn't seen on him before rising. A knowing smirk. The kind she hated most. "But they say you're the best, right?"

After she widened her stance, Eva unlocked her knees, loosened her shoulders but put all the steel in her soul—and god knew, she had plenty of the heartless stuff—into her chemically altered eyes. People usually reacted to her eyes whenever she looked angry.

It seemed to work on Palmer, but only to a certain degree.

"Never thought I'd meet the famous Eva Grigorevna Serova in person," he went on. "You're smaller than I expected." He laughed. The carnality-charged look he gave her made her want to roll her eyes.

"Oh please."

"What? Not your type?"

"Not even close, *gospodin*."

The suddenness of his attack really caught her off guard. So he was trained too. This wasn't just some turncoat or junior field agent selling his skills for a few credits, this was someone who knew how to use the terrain. This took *experience*.

Palmer's hand shot for her throat. Animal reflex be damned! She instinctively tucked her chin in but at least managed a pivot that allowed her to half parry the vicious palm to the solar plexus, which he followed with a grab for her wrist. Eva let him try, seized his thumb at the opportune moment and gave a sharp, brutal jerk. Palmer howled. The sound of bones crunching highly satisfied her. Had she had any time—and not two hundred and fifty pounds of werewolf on her ass—she would've enjoyed matching skills with the fellow backstabbing asshole. But she was a woman in a hurry.

"Don't even want to know who sent me along?" he growled, despite the raw pain twisting his mouth. "Don't care to know how you got the clip in your pocket?"

It was Eva's turn to sneer.

Ohhh.

The sly little prick.

"You planted it on me when we went through here, after the explosion."

She remembered flying back and landing on Palmer, who'd helped her get up, clutching at her ass and everything. "And here I thought you were just groping my ass. That's a blow to a woman's ego."

He chuckled. He could've been cute under other circumstances. "I thought that if I put the clip on you and locked you and Solomon inside the stairwell, I'd have even more chances of him finding it. He's so distrustful, took me months just to get a grunt when I'd report in for a mission. But he didn't find the clip...I guess he's a better man than I would've been in his place."

Eva wanted to open her mouth and let out a big O of understanding. He was the one who'd locked them in. Not the other way around. And she'd thought Solomon had stranded his man outside to face the bad guys.

"You're one of them."

He shrugged. "It's the real one, you know," Palmer remarked casually. "And the only copy too. Thanks for taking good care of it for me. And for luring that idiot Solomon after you. That'll leave me a few minutes to get my ass off here. *Octant* is waiting for my signal."

"The ship's crew is in on this?" How deep did the treason run anyway?!

"Of course not. But I'll have quite the tale to tell." He stuck his hand out.

"Why do you want it back? We're on the same side, more or less, no?"

"You're on Vonatos' payroll, the old guard, old business. I'm part of the new system—"

Palmer seemed to be listening for something. He suddenly looked worried. Eva wasn't sure if she should feel happy with that or not. What? Was another lycanthrope on her ass? Keep them coming.

"Okay, enough messing around. Hand it over." He stepped between her and the staircase, his eyes darting back and forth, never on the same spot more than a second.

Was he preparing to change and overwhelm her?

"If you change, I'll have time to kick your ass...that wouldn't be smart."

She didn't even have time to put more thought process to her threat when a sound raised the fine hairs on her nape. Palmer must have heard the low growling as well for he cursed, stepped off the staircase and crouched slightly. She'd already seen several lycanthropes changing and could now recognize the first signs.

Eva sighed. *What's another lycanthrope, right?*

Taking good aim, she leaped right, wedged the tip of her foot in the upper corner of the handrail, used the momentum to propel her up and high, and cleared Palmer's desperate swipe. What she didn't clear was the huge shape that tackled her mid-flight. Crying out in pain and shock, Eva landed on the deck, rolled and came up to her feet just as Solomon was going after Palmer.

The sight of him drove everything else from her mind.

Now only the wide belt, felt pants stretched to the limit and boots were left on his muscled body. That was why he wasn't dressed as the others. Since he never changed, he didn't need the stretchy clothes.

A ridge of dark blond hair almost like a Mohawk stuck high on his brow and fell back in tousled locks around his head and spine. Each breath swelled his massive chest. Though his face was definitely canine in nature and force, the smooth angles of his features really were *his*, not a stranger's and not anything less than a man's. She could still recognize the lips she'd kissed, the cleft chin she'd teased, the throat she would've spent hours nibbling and licking.

After violently sending Palmer slamming against the bulkhead, Solomon turned his face to her and stared. And those eyes, they were his too.

But the rictus of feral menace when he curled his upper lip whipped her attention back where it ought to have been in the first place.

Escape.

Now.

Palmer's growl proved her windfall as Eva crept backward from the battle about to rage. Not that she held any hope for the much smaller lycanthrope. Solomon would rip him apart. But if he took a minute or two to do it, it'd give her time to think of something. Because reaching the cruiser was now out of the question. No way in frozen Siberia she was outrunning him. She'd have to outfox him. Keep her scent hidden.

With a rumble that rolled in his chest, Solomon threw himself at Palmer and indeed began to rip him apart.

Blocking out the sounds of carnage raging on behind her, Eva ran full speed past the frozen machine with its pincer filled with dangling metal ribbons and tubing, spotted a thick-looking hatch behind a control booth and squeezed in so she could close it right away. It only had a magnetic bolt but it'd have to do. She clicked it in place, turned and realized she stood in some sort of decontamination area, with HAZMAT suits, rubber boots and other stuff hanging on hooks. The emergency light provided barely enough illumination to make out the details. Concrete walls and floor, the large channel down the middle of the room ending under another hatch confirmed her theory. There'd be some sort of shower or other water-jet system beyond. Decontamination units were always fed higher on the grid than anything else in case shit really hit the fan. So despite the fluctuating power and other nastiness caused by the bitchy sun, Eva suspected there'd still be power to this place and she'd be able to lock herself in. Leaving the hatch, she padded along the row of empty orange suits, their broken necks making the clear plastic helmets hang in a sinister way. What if she were to put one on? Would he still smell her?

Then it hit her.

"Woman, come on," she lamented, shaking her head at her own stupidity.

She'd been walking around bloodied and sweaty, with her *panties in her pocket*...panties filled with his semen and that still undoubtedly smelled of him. And she'd been wondering how to get rid of the scent!

Both boots had already landed under the bench by the time she had her flight suit down to her waist. She rolled it nice and tight, stuffed it in one of the HAZMAT suits, jammed the bra and socks in as well. She left the bloodied data clip in its pocket, safely zipped there. Solomon wouldn't go eat it or anything. It was her he wanted to slice up, not some piece of plastic.

A flaking placard reading "Watch Your Step" made her grimace. Butt naked, scared to her core and shaking, Eva snuck to the end of the room, her toes already cold and numb, and carefully tried the decontamination hatch. *Please let it be well oiled.*

*Thanks to my good star for small favors.* It didn't make a sound as she carefully pushed it in, slipped in as soon as the opening was wide enough and closed it behind her. Now this bolt was much better. She gave it two turns, locked the lever in place and hoped it'd be strong enough if Solomon came sniffing around.

The decon room resembled any other anywhere in the system. A stainless steel box with steam jets along the ceiling and floor, water jets set in close-together rows and a wide conduit that ran along the floor for immediate drainage.

She would've preferred a porthole in the middle of her hatch, to let her see if someone was indeed sniffing at the door, but she couldn't ask for much more than this. A thick steel door between a pissed-off lycanthrope and herself. She would've preferred a few light-years of separation. Better than nothing.

Knowing sounds wouldn't travel through the sort of plating and dampening layers around such a place, Eva closed her eyes, poised her fist over the activation button—a glorious, shiny red mushroom-shaped thing—and took a deep breath. At once, steam and water hissed quietly around her. She didn't know how long she'd have to be there and frankly didn't mind getting soaked to the bones. If she ran out of hot water, it was still better than facing who was waiting for her outside that hatch. One last check to said hatch—she just hoped she'd be able to undo those extra-tight turns she'd just given—and Eva went to stand in a corner of the decon room.

Well, she'd messed up pretty bad. Her first real failure too. How embarrassing at such an advanced stage in her otherwise flawless career. And that Palmer guy, who the hell was he working for? Iron Conclave? He looked too oily to be government yet too connected *not* to be. And her digitex back at the control room with its direct link to Vonatos—*har har*—with all her stuff. And her cyanide salts. The team had probably gone through her gear by now, saw exactly what had set Solomon off like a human bomb. That is, if Solomon had left any of them alive.

The thought he could've harmed them occurred to her only then. Eva bit her lip. What if he'd killed them all? Because of her. His colleagues...his friend Liberty. A blind woman, butchered by a longtime friend. *Argh, Christ, the fun never ends.*

And how she'd thought a good quick lay would put everything in order, would clear the air so to speak. All it'd ended up doing was muddying the water even more, confusing her senses, her instincts.

*What a mess, what a mess.*

She was leaning her back against the stainless steel wall, already warming under the steam and water, when a faint, subtle sound caught her ear.

Grating?

Metal against metal but with a thin layer in between.

Abject fear flared in her chest. She had to put both hands to her mouth to keep from making any noise, and even then, she swore she could hear her throat emitting a weird little whimper despite her best efforts.

Govno. Gospozha, *shut the hell up, woman!*

Yes, there again, definitely grating.

Her hands tight together, her legs even more, Eva squinted through the water and swirling steam ribbons at the hatch. It couldn't be it, the sound would be duller, the hatch was so thick.

What she kept hearing — or had heard, because it was now gone — had been higher-pitched. Thinner metal. Not anything plated or layered. Just plain old, single sheet metal.

*Dear god, noooo.*

Eva looked up just as part of the grilled ceiling collapsed.



## Chapter Five

The stench of fear assaulted his keen nostrils. It made him angry. Angry enough to pounce and tear and dig his fangs in to shake loose the awful pain in his gut. That burning ache.

Yet layers added themselves to the mix of blood and terror, a subtle gradation of scents, sweeter, softer, than the acrid tang still fouling his mouth. He rose, his body bruised, tormented, racked by forces beyond his control or understanding. The agony sliced through him. He heard his whimper and became even angrier by it. He'd been shamed. Humiliated.

*Deceived.*

Remnants of multifaceted concepts he couldn't quite grasp but that felt important to him floated all around his consciousness, creeping close but ever out of reach, as though each fragile bubble would only consent to being approached after much cajoling and scheming. He knew—remembered—that something terrible had been done to him, something had hurt him deeply. And he'd done something terrible in return.

Anger, confusion, grief and despair coiled in one uninterrupted vortex of sensations foreign and known. The knot was tightening around his heart. He was spinning.

The cause of his pain was near. It had to bleed. He would *make* it bleed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eva didn't think she could draw another breath and stood frozen against the stainless steel wall, her knees so weak it was a wonder she still stood at all. Her hands had fallen by her sides, hung loose and numb. Despite some debris still floating down on the floor, Solomon's arrival had proven relatively clean. Like a surgical blade.

The thought of his fangs and talons ripping at her made Eva gag. She gritted her teeth and watched as the lycanthrope stood slowly, his back arched slightly, his powerful legs ready to propel him great distances if need be. There wouldn't be. She couldn't move a muscle.

Fear gave way to horror, which readily dissipated into unadulterated primal alarm. Despite her still body, every last one of her nerve endings was working its microscopic ass off, firing signals to a brain long deadened by the overload. A frisson crawled up her spine with the tingly march of a caterpillar. She couldn't even shiver.

Solomon's chest swelled when he emitted a sort of half whimper, half grunt. He sounded in pain. She only noticed then the state of him. Shame and regret burned her cheeks. Lacerations—claw marks—covered his back and sides. Vestiges from his run-in with Cupcake and Dragana then Palmer. God, what had she done to the guy?

Though his eyes were a bit more slanted, the stare he planted on her face was the same that had accompanied her into oblivion back on the cruiser. The unchanged intensity...the fierce *appetite*.

With water now drumming on him, his hair started to slick down between his muscles, underlining the terrible force swelling his human frame, pushing it to the limit of endurance and cohesion. With a shake of his head, Solomon took a step forward. Then another.

Eva's heart beat so hard, she felt as though it'd become one continuous flutter against her sternum, in her buzzing ears. Water got into her staring eyes. She didn't blink. It seeped into her mouth. She couldn't swallow the excess and instead let it dribble back out again. Steam made everything fuzzy. Except the fear. This was plenty clear cut. And as Solomon continued his careful advance, some of the fear began to subside, be replaced with something she hadn't counted on at all. Adrenaline.

*Born out of what, for heaven's sake? I'm about to be butchered.*

Panting, Solomon advanced on her until he stood almost close enough for her to touch—as if she would. Eva knew if she made a single wrong move, too brusque or threatening, she'd be dead within seconds.

If she were lucky.

So she stayed perfectly still when he extended a taloned hand, the knuckles disproportionately large. But he froze, curled his lip and instead rammed his fist into the stainless steel wall an inch from her temple, buckling the panel as though it were cardboard. Despite her best effort, she let out a yelp of fright. He didn't like it at all.

She gasped when he wrapped his hand over her throat and pulled her closer to his face. Water ran in rivulets down his face, on either side of his flaring nose, into the cleft of his chin.

*Oh god...*

His mouth partly opened, he cocked his head, brought her face right against his nose and took a tentative sniff. After a series of quick sniffs, Eva's eyes filled with burning tears when it became obvious Solomon was going to bite her face off. She didn't want to see it coming. Not from him.

"I'm sorry," she murmured, closing her eyes and waiting.

The awful bite, the tearing and rending, the searing agony...they never came. Something hot and wet touched her on the cheek. She cracked an eye open just in time to see his ham-pink tongue disappearing back into his snarling mouth. He'd licked her face?

Stars began to fizz at the edges of her vision. His grip on her throat was making her dizzy. Perhaps he'd changed his mind and was going to play with her a bit before he shredded her lying ass.

*Not as if you don't deserve it.*

Solomon extended his other hand and delicately, as if he were only tapping his fingernails on a desk, punctured the stainless steel wall, each talon an anchor. Muscles bulged when he unlocked his elbow, leaned into Eva and gave her a really good sniff. Despite the state of her mental abilities, she could tell things had just switched gears, and she wasn't sure she didn't prefer the previous, carnage-oriented one. That Solomon had become so unexpectedly alert to her body did things to her she'd rather not dwell on right now.

His belt cinching his strong waist with each breath, he followed the contour of her face, her neck, across her bare chest then up the other side. He never touched her though. Only took intermittent inhalations. And when he licked her cheek, a good four-inch upward pass, Eva could only stare in incredulity. To her undying shame, an image of a sexually engaged Solomon—in lycanthrope form no less—triggered a heat wave down her belly, into her sex, along her cramping thighs. Her toes curled up.

With water and steam billowing in the decon room, Eva remained still as Solomon continued his olfactory inspection, each pass bringing him increasingly lower on her belly, which quivered with each of her superficial breaths. She looked down when he seemed to zero in on something he meant to inspect further.

*Ohh.*

Definitely human, his tongue flicked out, curled upright and touched her along the inside of the hip, where the panties elastic would normally be. The heat of his tongue produced a long shiver, which he noticed for he stared upward as he trailed a wide lick up her front, between her breasts and up under her chin.

The forbidden—*govno*, not forbidden, beastly, disgusting, inter-species yucky—desire engulfing her came from where exactly?! But this was Dex Solomon, right? A man she'd already had sex with. Not an animal but a man. Only *different*.

She could tell by the rhythm of his breathing that he was getting excited as well. With his hands still attached to the wall on either side of her head, he crouched this time, didn't just lean into her, and took a forthright, vigorous lick. The force pushed her against the wall. Then the good stuff hit. A wave of heat like nothing before. Honey gathered in her pussy.

He froze, rolled his eyes up at her.

Summoning inner strength she didn't know was there, Eva lightly put the pads of her fingers to his jaw, barely touching, simply smoothing the hair back. There was gray amid the dark blond. Solomon tongued her sex this time and seemed to know what he was doing too for he made the tip of it narrow so he could touch the inner lips, not just lick over the pubic bone. Eva instinctively closed her eyes. She sucked in her bottom lip.

*This is wrong on so many levels.*

When he abruptly unhooked a taloned hand from the wall, Eva started. Then his other hand disengaged. Solomon brought them both down by her hips where he wrapped her pelvis like one would a cushion before rubbing one's face in it. But he didn't rub his face in her belly. Instead, Solomon curled his claws in, made her suck in a

few quick breaths in the process before giving her a sharp little push back that forced her against the heated stainless steel. The skin on her butt squeaked when he pressed her hard. Obviously, he meant for her to stay there. Keeping his thumbs over her hipbones, Solomon squared his massive shoulders, slanted his elongated jaw and opened wide.

The burning ribbon of tongue against her pussy forced a strangled moan out of her. Solomon licked her again. And again. His hands became harder, digging into her flesh. She whimpered at the pleasure-pain combination. It was becoming too much. Panting hard, Eva looked down to see a trickle of blood where one of his sharp thumbnails had pierced the skin. Almost right where her hidden mark was situated. The irony.

"Solomon," she murmured before attempting to angle his jaw away.

Big mistake.

With a sharp growl, he slammed her against the wall, a child shaking an uncooperative doll, and rested his long fangs over her entire cleft, which burned with pent-up hunger. How could she want this? How could she want him like *this*?

"Cool down, Solomon...please."

He cocked his head, straightened and took a step back.

Eva's belly burned where he'd dug in, but the discomfort paled compared to the depth of her excitement, titillation and bewilderment.

After he checked down at himself, Solomon seemed to be looking for something, stood around staring at the belt buckle, the pants literally tearing over his muscled thighs then he emitted a long, guttural growl. Quicker than she thought anyone able to move, he fisted the front of his belt and yanked it off. It clacked like a whip, taking one of the pant loops with it.

Eva watched, aroused, fascinated and terrified all over again as he clumsily slid his hand down the front of his pants. Judging by the bulge there, the size of him looked the same as the last time she'd seen it if a bit thicker. Despite some serious body hair—which he'd had all along anyway—she spotted the pink flesh in his fist when he managed to pull himself out. The pants gave their last stand before the zipper busted in a wet, metallic click. With barely a look, Solomon ripped them down his thighs. One pant leg came completely undone, hanging loosely around his knee as it was still tucked inside his boot. The other still managed to wrap his solid thigh, the wet, dark gray felt stretched and glistened like skin.

Should she help? Should she even *think* of moving?

Solomon took that option from her roster when, his intense gaze on her face, he approached her again, still fisting his cock as though he'd found something incredibly fun to show around. She could almost hear his not-quite-human psyche commenting, "*whoa, man, would you look at that thing*". A nervous giggle made her choke. She coughed.

Without warning, he pounced, plastered her against the wall so he could lick her throat, her breasts, her belly and pussy. Eva withstood the brutal attentions with her

eyes squeezed shut and her body on fire, afraid to hell he'd start taking *real* bites out of her, afraid he'd stop licking and most of all she stood there unconditionally dismayed she could feel anything else but the most primal, gut-twisting terror at what was being done to her. But the arousal that knifed at her gut—she wasn't making it up. It was there for real. Like a fresh cut, a burn. It couldn't be ignored. And it was spreading.

She wanted him, she really did. How...*ugh*.

Her nipples felt pulled and bitten. She didn't look down. Her pussy stretched, throbbed when something rubbed at it vigorously. Despite her better judgment, she fisted the back of his head and forced him closer, arched her back off the wall. Waves of violent rapture tightened her anus and sex. With a buck, she crushed her pelvis to his jaw. A rhythmic sound caught her attention. Eva realized with shock she was thumping her head back against the stainless steel wall with sustained cadence and force. Like a skin and bone metronome to her throbbing need.

Growling, panting hard, Solomon ate her as she'd never had it done before. One of his hands trapped her breast, isolated her nipple, and she swore the thing would come off if he rolled it any harder.

"Solomon," she whimpered, her head lolling side to side.

Water and steam filled the spectrum of her stimuli—she could see nothing but water hammering on her skull, and despite a tiny, blacking-out portion of brain screaming at her to show some reflexes by god, she drank some of it, snorted some, shook it out of her ear—while Solomon's ferocious appetite overwhelmed everything else. The extreme sharpness of his teeth provided such incredible contrast to the silk of his agile tongue. After a particularly deep and determined lick, Eva cried out.

And she came. Good god, she came right there standing in a decon room, against a stainless steel bulkhead with a lycanthrope's face between her thighs.

Her climax must have triggered something in him for he grabbed her by the pelvis, angled her sideways as though she were a rag doll and slammed her rather violently against the deck. She barely avoided knocking her head by wrapping both arms around it.

"Okay, big guy, gentle," she whispered, still afraid to set him off. She'd seen what he could do.

Eva rolled on her back and despite her brain firing all kinds—not all kinds, firing *them all*—of aikido moves and countermoves, she propped herself on her palms, bent her knees slightly and faced this man. The urge to scoot back against the wall and adopt a fetal position...it was damn hard to ignore. But she did. In her thirty-eight years, Eva had never sat with her legs spread open for a guy, her body as an offering, preferring instead to make them work hard for the simplest lick, the faintest touch. *She* worked hard on her lovers and expected the same in return. Hell, she worked hard to keep herself in shape and wasn't about to let just any old guy get his hands and face and cock full of it. But the huge specimen presently crouching down on all fours as the predator he was wouldn't be anything like other lovers, would he?

Her chest heaved quickly when he stretched a hand outward and planted it between her ankles, rolled his shoulders so he could place his other hand beside her knee then shifted his considerable weight forward.

Breathing arrhythmically now, Eva let him push against the inside of her calves so she'd spread wider for him. Another body shift, roll of shoulders brought him higher. The entire time his upper lip never stopped quivering above his gum line and the intense appetite in his gaze never ceased to burn a path straight down to her pussy.

Gradually, inch by menacing inch, Solomon crawled up along her legs until his face stood poised over her mons, his cleft chin close enough for her to feel the body heat despite the water and steam.

He now knelt between her knees, his arms bowed push-up-like on either side of her thighs. Water ran down his head and torso, followed the natural—and unnatural—curves and depressions, the man and lycanthrope fusion a playing field for each droplet.

With a tight gulp, Eva stopped breathing.

Staring up into her face, Solomon unsealed his jaws, fangs pearly white jalapenos, dropped his chin past her sex, lower until the top row of teeth rested against her pubic bone. He froze. So did she. Hell, she was near fainting.

With his jaws clamped over her entire sex, from perinea to mons, Solomon began to apply pressure. Eva felt the canine teeth digging in first, top ones followed by bottoms, then in a series of sharp little pricks, the rest of his dentition penetrated her flesh, branded her as surely as if Solomon had used an iron. The act should've scared her or at least shamed her. It did neither.

Each great intake of air rumbling in his cavernous chest was accompanied and followed by more force from his jaws until Eva's pain threshold hovered dangerously near. Had not water drummed on her head, she knew she would've been drenched in sweat. Gritting her teeth, she endured Solomon's mark. It could've been much worse.

*In fact, he could've ripped me in half already.*

When she thought she couldn't take much more pressure, that his teeth were going to sink all the way in, Solomon released her and, his gaze still locked to her own, raised his face slightly so that he could unfurl his tongue and lick the tiny bead of blood his canine had drawn. The silk of his lips and tongue proved so damn smooth after the toe-curling bite that Eva sighed deeply.

He seemed to be contemplating her as she panted great gulps of air. Was he wondering what she was? Could he recognize her scent as hers or just as different from his?

But his need must have been knifing him as well for he rose to his knees, squared his shoulders. Eva knew then.

Lying on her back, she could only watch when Solomon crawled forward between her parted legs, his cock glossy with water and hanging heavy. As he'd done during their previous encounter, he knelt right under her butt, lifted her above his lap. His

dark brown eyes were narrowed as he fisted himself, his upper lip curled just the way she'd come to know it would. Eva gritted her teeth.

Solomon took her.

The initial thrust was so sudden and powerful, Eva let out a yelp of pain and shock. As soon as the instinct to kick out and run had fired in her stupefied brain, a heat wave spread through her entire body.

"Haa!"

She hadn't been able to keep this one in. Solomon didn't seem to care as he stabbed his hips upward like pistons. Aided with the steam and water, his thick member easily glided out before ramming back again. This time, she didn't try to stop him. His hands iron bands around her waist, Solomon pounded into her slick pussy and all she could do was writhe over his lap as she clawed at the deck. Never had such violent bliss been visited on her flesh. Her spine about to snap in half, her legs cramping on either side of his powerful waist, Eva welcomed this man, this lycanthrope's savageness with not a stitch of shame left in her. She no longer cared what form he took. Solomon fired her body as no other lover. So what if he was a bit hairy. And *fangy*.

But his shoves became brutal, his taloned hands began to dig in deeper, until even the ecstasy could no longer mask the pain. With a long, harsh grunt, Solomon rammed himself in to the balls but unexpectedly pushed her at arm's length and pulled out.

Eva groaned her loss as she rose on her elbows to look at him. "Solomon?"

His sudden exit left her pussy twitching impotently. Yet his cock still stood proudly between them and quivered with need. He hadn't come. So why –

She yelped when he hooked a hand under her knee and flipped her over as though she weighed nothing.

"Ohh...okay –"

On her elbows and knees, Eva barely had time to cringe before he was thrusting back inside her. Thankfully, the angle of his push was true and instead of the searing pain she'd feared, a thick, burning climax accompanied his cock. She arched back, let it all out in one lengthy cry that reverberated inside the already noisy room. Unable to keep them in, a series of rising keens accompanied Solomon's claiming.

Behind her, his hands clutched at her ass. With precise and brisk pushes, he gradually sank deeper until one particular thrust made Eva see stars. *Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah.* Her voice filled the room while his low, rasping breath provided a backbeat.

His penetration felt entirely novel, as though one spawned another, generated farther depth, more intensity. No more a piston-like force, a back-and-forth momentum, Eva felt as though Solomon's member throbbed inward more profoundly with each drive, that as he pushed within, his cock swelled proportionately to conform to her channel until her feverish flesh was filled with his own.

Instead of keeping up the beat, Solomon slowed. He released her aching hips, wrapped his arms around her waist instead, even leaned his head on her back,

completely wrapped himself around her. Another intense climax ripped at her distended sex, swelled outward through her entire body. And just as she was feeling too drained to even come, Solomon draped his massive arms around her upper body, trapping her bent arms over her chest while he did the same with his legs.

Slowly, they slumped to their sides, encased still, with his much larger frame covering her own, his heat seeping through, his cock snug and still. Then deep inside she felt the pulsations, felt his belly constrict with each. She'd never had a man come so quietly. His body felt still and warm and comforting, despite the talons and the fangs and the anger that would surely claim him again. Eva sighed.

*What a mess I made.*

As he obviously prepared to sleep, Solomon let out a long breath that swelled his chest and pressed it tighter against her back. The conformity of their bodies surprised her. He was so large, especially in his present form, she so much more slender, yet they matched flawlessly.

Then the thought occurred to her as they lay in the decon room, a most unlikely couple, that he hadn't killed her.

Eva tried to find some good in it but wasn't sure there was any to be found. Had he merely wanted to fuck her then kill her when he "woke up" a human? Had he only been sidetracked and would finish the job later?

Should she be there when Solomon came back to his man form?

*Oh shit. No. I should be long gone.*

Years of sneaking around and lying couldn't be erased so easily, even with the sort of inconceivable sex she'd just experienced. She was a spy, for Christ's sake. All she had ever done since she was a teen was hide her true self, it was what she knew how to do best.

Eva surreptitiously tried to coil out from underneath Solomon's bulky embrace but couldn't even worm an arm out. Water and steam still hissed around them. She wished she could turn it off and hoped it'd at least stay warm for a bit longer. As she waited for – she wasn't too sure what – she watched water rivulets slithering down the drain in the middle of the room and wondered if her heart and soul hadn't just followed the same route.

*She felt so empty, so drained.*

For the first time in a long time, Eva wondered how it would feel to wake beside someone else, to wonder what their first thought would be upon seeing the other. Although in her particular situation, she wasn't too sure she wanted to know what Solomon would think when he woke and saw her in his arms. He'd guess what had happened, that they'd had sex while he was in lycanthrope form. Would he be grossed out? Had he ever screwed while in this form before? With a human woman or one of his kind?

*Too many questions, gospozha. Let it come to you.*



\* \* \* \* \*

Solomon's first impression was that his dick must have been stuck to his leg for quite some time for it was hot as hell and sticky. He shifted his pelvis but discovered that his cock was comfortably enfolded by something hot and very wet. A *pussy*. Not a bad way to come to. A nice pussy too, tight yet flexible. *That woman works it out.*

And he remembered perfectly to whom *that* sweet fruit belonged.

Solomon raised his head to find himself lying on his side with the slender redhead tucked between his legs, her butt secured against his belly while his dick was deliciously sheathed in her warm flesh. Her eyes were closed. She was *not*, could not, be asleep this way. But she was.

*Okay.*

*And what's all that motherfucking water? Where the hell am I?*

"Hey," he said with a gruff edge to his voice that slipped by him. If they'd just had sex, he could be a little bit kinder, now couldn't he?

Then the entire shitty mess came roaring back to Solomon's dazed mind.

"Get off me," he snarled, giving the woman a not-so-subtle shove between the shoulder blades.

She humphed, rolled once and came up on an elbow. That toxic-spill hair of hers was plastered on her skull and made her look as though she were wearing a jagged red latex hood.

Solomon pointed at himself, fury rising like bad beer on an empty gut. "What the fuck is *this*? Would you kill the mo-ther-fu-cking water!"

With obvious difficulty, she stood and padded across the room where she fisted something that thankfully made the water—and the noise—go away. Christ his head hurt.

"You're gonna tell me how come I'm waking with my dick up your..."

The rest of his sentence trailed off, words left his poor, man-waking-up-without-coffee stupefied mind as he watched her come back and sink down to one knee, gingerly placing her foot under herself before more or less slumping to one side. She sat as only women could, one hip up, both legs folded underneath. He'd never seen bruises such as those on a woman's body before. And if the sight of those awful black and blue marks didn't just piss him off even more! Then the rest of his brain cells finally decided to converge somewhere and Solomon understood. The room, some sort of decontamination unit or something, the hatch still bolted, the collapsed ceiling. Agent Valen's bruises...

He'd done those.

Dex Solomon hadn't known it was possible he could feel so goddamn wretched about something that A, he couldn't remember doing, B, that the someone in question wholeheartedly deserved and that C, he'd do anything to reverse.

Jutting his chin in her general direction, Solomon cleared his throat. "I, er, I did that, right?"

A nod confirmed it.

Judging by the location and angle of the marks—long dark lines and purple puncture wounds all over her lovely breasts and lower belly, between her thighs—Solomon could only guess what else he'd done. With pitiless clarity he saw himself raping that woman. Bile rose in his gut. He coughed. Squeezing his eyes shut didn't do a damn thing. Made it worse in fact, for he could see it all too well. Christ, he'd woken still *inside*, of course he'd raped Agent Valen. The poor woman hadn't been able to escape him and had been forced to wait until he'd slept the change off. The indignity.

Forcing himself to sustain her unwavering gaze—the woman was made of steel—Solomon knelt, planted his palms on his thighs and took the biggest breath of his life. "I raped you, didn't I? I did, I can tell. I want you to know that I've never, *ever*, done a disgusting thing like that in my entire life and that I'll—fuck, I don't know what I'll do, but you just...you just—*fuck*—press charges, aikido my ass, I dunno. But—"

She raised her hand, which shook slightly. "It wasn't rape."

"Argh! That's even worse! Don't blame *yourself*. No," Solomon shook his head damn near hard enough to pop something. "It's rape. There was nothing you could've done, for Christ's sake, I was a...I wasn't even human. I've only changed once before and we all know what happened. So, no, don't go dropping blame anywhere else but at my feet. I'm not the kinda guy who'll twist that shit around and put it on you."

She narrowed her purple eyes at him as if he'd just said something incredibly dumb. "I said, it *wasn't* rape."

Well, that was...

*Unexpected.*

He couldn't help it and let his gaze slide down to her thighs again, where he could've counted his dentition depressed in her flesh, each small puncture wound testament to his conduct. If it wasn't rape, what in the motherfucking frozen hell was it?!

"How—what do you mean, it wasn't?" Solomon heard his voice asking although he couldn't remember forming that particular bit of dialogue inside his head prior to launching it.

She shrugged, which lifted one of her breasts. He stared at the nipple until he reminded himself of the bruises. *Yeah, focus on the marks, man. You made those.*

"Agent... Christ, what's your name, anyway?"

"Eva."

He rolled that one on his tongue. Eva. Brief and to the point. He liked it. "Eva," he began again, picking his words as he went—and *guys aren't exactly equipped to do that, now are they?* "How can it be anything else *but* rape? I mean...*shit*." He stretched his

arms outward, pointed at himself and shook his head. He was a mess of torn clothes, his pants barely hanging on his hips, the zipper was busted. Not his brightest moment.

"What do you want me to tell you, Solomon?" she snapped with that typically female zero-to-nuclear-in-five-seconds tack. She even had the lift of the chin going too. "It was sex. Pretty damn good sex too, if a bit..." she looked down at herself, rubbed one nasty blue line along her inner thigh. "Unusual."

That did it for him.

Solomon stood, meant to plant his fists on his hips but his pants kept inching downward, ruining the whole effect. "What the hell is the matter with you? *Unusual*? Un-fucking-usual? I'm a lycanthrope, for Christ's sake! Even in my normal state, I barely qualify to be human—hell, I don't even get to vote—but when I change...you *let* me get near you?" A violent shiver locked his jaws together for a few seconds. Shit, he was going to puke.

"Yeah," she replied, standing as well and crossing her arms over herself. She was cold, he could tell. She had really nice nipples. "Yeah, I let you get near me. Not only that, I spread my legs and I let you fuck me too. Hell, I fucked you back. How 'bout that! Never had it done before, did you?"

There were several things he wanted to say at once, none of them made an iota of sense, most of them were rude things to say to a woman, and all of them would be duds if they ever got out. So he snapped his mouth shut and ground his teeth.

*I'm sure I can find one last filling to pop in there somewhere.*

There was suddenly not enough air in this motherfucking tin can and he wanted out like yesterday. Solomon charged across the room, yanked on the bar and opened the latch. The difference in temperature froze him in the doorway. Cold air was a wall out there.

"We're gonna catch our death," he grumbled, stepping over the hatch and keeping it wide for Eva. *Eva...mpft!*

She followed him out into the changing room, where a dozen or so HAZMAT suits dangled on hooks. He grabbed one, checked against his waist for fit then slipped it on over his wet and torn pants. At least his dick wouldn't dangle. Wouldn't he look just the perfect idiot giving orders and walking around with his dick swinging out of his pants! After she'd strapped her bra on, squeezed into her flight suit—the black shiny material forcing him to bite down and look elsewhere—socks and boots, he saw Eva slip her hands in her pocket. She proffered a small, gray plastic thing for him to take.

"It's the data clip we were sent to get. Palmer gave it to me."

Solomon avoided her gaze as he took the nasty little thing and checked it for damages. "Palmer? When I get my hands—"

"You already did."

"Oh."

*So Palmer is dead then. Great. Just great. All the guys I want to question die before I get to it. I'm starting to take all this shit pretty personally.*

"He was underground, a rogue spy. I have no idea who sponsored him. I don't even know if it was political."

"Well, I just seem to collect backstabbers, don't I?" he spat, enjoying for a full second the look of hurt in her eyes then loathing himself for it. Pathetic. "Okay, here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna sit right here and you're gonna tell me everything. And I'm not taking any bullshit, you got that?"

Eva nodded as she sat beside him. He noticed she sat slowly. Why did that make him all icky inside? He shouldn't care what happened to her. In fact, he should space her nice little ass out the nearest airlock.

"I'm an agent for the Iron Conclave, a spy. I've been sent to get the clip while making sure your team didn't come back."

"Nice and to the point. I like that," Solomon replied with as much derision as humanly possible. "Who sent you?"

"As I said, the Iron—"

"I said *no* bullshit."

His tone of voice, though soft, must have convinced her to play nice or else.

*Else what? He'd put more bruises on her? Christ.*

"Chancellor Vonatos."

"Vonatos himself? Man."

He hadn't expected that. The chancellor in person had tasked a spy to make sure his team didn't come back home. Even if it was a huge stroke on the ego to know the chancellor himself and not some political drone would get down and dirty to deal with Solomon's team, it was still one hell of a kick in the balls. Why? What the hell had he done to those people? Except clean up their messes?

"He feels you've become dangerous, unpredictable and out of control," Eva murmured as if she'd heard inside his head. Her red hair was starting to dry in places and stuck straight out. His palms itched to rub it back down for her or caress the longer sections resting over her back. Or just touch her anywhere for any reason.

"Dangerous? I've never done anything to those cretins. They're the ones who— Who's getting unpredictable anyway, my team or *my kind*?"

"Your kind. Werewolves."

"We prefer *lycanthropes* or lycans, thank you very much. It's much less degrading," Solomon replied in his best sissy, lisping impersonator.

"How come you changed now but not back when the rest did?"

"You don't get to ask questions, okay? And, Christ, you people think changing is that easy to control? It's in my DNA, not some switch I get to flick whenever the hell I want. It's like sweating, woman, I can control it only so much."

"Sweating? Um. And how fast can you heal?"

"What, feeling guilty or are you planning something?"

She shrugged.

Solomon looked at this woman, all chemical enhancements and loveliness—a bowl of candy, he'd once compared her to—and wondered if he'd been lucky or cursed. Because he had a problem with her. Not only had she been sent to steal something from his mission and kill him—and his team—but the worst was that she'd also managed to worm her way into his brain. She was all he could think of. Eva was under his skin in ways no one had ever been before. He liked her. Or more precisely, he wished he could trust her enough to like her. But she'd pretty much fucked it all up on that count. Solomon scratched his head. What a mind screw.

"Would you have done it? Kill us all?" *Kill me*, he added mentally, ashamed and pissed off he'd need to know in the first place. But he did and that was that.

Eva stared at him for a long time. Those lips still looked as juicy as ever and Solomon had to do some serious mental drills not to forget what had happened in that decon room. She'd let him...as a *lycanthrope* too. Damn.

Although the notion was starting to make him increasingly less disgusted and merely intrigued. She said it'd been good sex. Not that he could remember! All he could see were the aftereffects. He'd been rough obviously, judging by the bruising, and could never forgive himself that, no matter if she said the sex was the best she'd ever had. There'd be no way in frozen hell he'd let himself get near her again. As a man or less than one.

But one thing bugged him. He'd been close to her—ha—yet hadn't killed her. What did this mean? Could it be she meant—

"I don't know if I would've done it, Solomon," Eva said at length, cocking her head and pursing her lips. "I honestly don't know."

"Don't use that word, it doesn't look good on you."

His barb must have dug deep for those were tears he saw welling her eyes. She looked away and adjusted her clothes.

Standing, Solomon stifled the little voice of remorse telling him to apologize to the lady and tied the sleeves of the suit around his waist. He looked like a moron. After checking around, he retrieved his belt and strapped it on. But his guns were missing. Then he remembered. Before he changed, he'd dropped them in the control room. With his guns he'd feel better. At least he hoped so.

"We're going back to the control room to get my guns and see what kind of damage I've done. I hope for your sake I didn't kill any of them."

## Chapter Six

*Well, woman, consider yourself fired.*

Had she ever messed everything up!

First, she'd just relinquished the data clip to Solomon, second, not only was he still alive, but he knew what she was, knew her real first name and third, along the way, she'd developed a little bit of a crush on the snarly, unrefined man. Well, more than a man actually. A lycanthrope. One she'd had sex with in his other form. It had to mean something, that she'd let him near her, make love to her. It had to indicate trust on some deep and twisted level. If not trust then animal attraction. Something. Only Solomon seemed to view it as a repulsive transgression. Oh well.

She walked by his side as they made their way to the control room, having first searched Palmer and made sure he was indeed dead. As though anyone could've survived the injuries he'd received. His head was barely attached to the rest of him, *govno*. Ugh.

Suddenly, the main lights came on and a deep whirr indicated the station's ventilation had come back online.

Solomon nodded, a small grin on his face. "Liberty's been busy."

With the addition of plentiful and merciless light, Eva felt even worse looking at him. He looked so tired and worn-out. Cuts and scratches marred his chest and arms, his back, while his dark blond hair was still plastered to his head from his time in the decon room. She must not look better herself, come to think of it.

"What now?" she asked, feeling the need to drown the noise in her head. Several voices clamored for an all-out retreat while some advocated finesse and more scheming. A faint, soft voice at the back of the crowd offered to make peace with Solomon, try to patch things up. Eva chastised the little voice and called it a sad little sissy.

Solomon threw her a slanted look. "Why do you ask? Got some tricks up your sleeve still?"

As much as the words cut her, Eva didn't let it show. Or she tried not to anyway. "Just trying to figure out how to stay alive, that's all."

He stopped, grabbed her by an arm. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? You think I'd put nickel in your head? Just like that?"

"I was talking about the Iron Conclave and Vonatos. You think they won't know I messed up? You think they'll let me live with everything I know? My days or weeks, thanks to the storm, are numbered, Solomon. As are yours. They're going to send a team up here to either breach the station or blow it up, whichever is easier."

He obviously hadn't thought that far ahead.

"Motherfucker."

"I agree."

He released her arm, slipped his thumbs in his belt. "We need to get the hell off this station."

"We can't. There's the storm, plus the cruiser will ping on the *Octant's* screen if we so much as get near it. They'll know we're trying to get away." Eva zipped her flight suit tighter around her neck, despite the heat the sight of his bare—albeit scratched—chest generated. "No, Solomon, we're stuck here for a while."

He didn't say anything.

When they reached the control room, Eva could tell Solomon had kept Cupcake and Dragana busy. She hoped Liberty was all right. The mess in there, whoa. Upturned consoles, busted screens. But the bodies were gone, even Ivan's.

A deep whirr made the plated deck vibrate under their feet. Like a beast waking, the station was slowly coming back to life.

On one of the screens left intact, Eva saw the station's schematics. She had one herself but all her stuff had been taken as well. The last accessed area had been the sickbay as it still glowed yellow against the gray screen. A trail of breadcrumbs.

"Here," she said to Solomon, who was cursing and snarling as he pushed and rolled broken things with the ball of his foot. "I think they've gone to the sickbay."

He checked the screen, muttered something before heading out the control room without a backward glance. Eva followed him with a heavy heart. As much as she tried to convince herself his acceptance—or lack thereof—didn't matter, the rancor she saw etched in his strong features gnawed at her spirit. She'd stabbed him in the back. Something told her he wasn't the type to let his guard down, to "show his back" to many people. *Don't I feel special.*

They traversed countless passageways and triage bays, the last ones becoming less industrial and more personal with attempts at decoration other than gray paint. They finally emerged onto a large open area with several cabin doors along the bulkhead and one hatch where a red cross gleamed like blood. Solomon charged for the sickbay, pushed on the hatch and had his hand on his empty holster the next second.

"Motherf...don't point that thing at me, Liberty," he snarled.

The dark-haired woman sat in front of a desktop digitex and must have been tapping away before Solomon barged in. She still had a volter in her hand. Despite the blue-tinted goggles, Eva could see a nasty bruise covered the bridge of her nose and one eye. She clicked on a key and a computerized voice announced it was powering down to dormant mode.

"Are you all right?"

Solomon nodded, grimaced when he must have remembered Liberty could no longer see. "I'm all right. Just scratches. They'll be gone in a couple of days."

"You found our wayward spy. Hello, Miss Iron Conclave Person." Her smile wasn't mean or triumphant as Eva had expected or feared.

"Yeah, well, hi." What else was there to say?

After a chuckle, Liberty turned toward Solomon's general direction, her blind eyes narrowing. "You smell like pain, my friend. Have a little sit right over there." She pointed at the bulkhead to the right of the examination table. Blood dotted one end of it.

"No time for that," Solomon replied gruffly. Drawing near Liberty, he put his large hand over her shoulder and gave a squeeze. "I'm glad you're fine."

"Fine? You broke my very expensive nose. But we'll talk about this later. I'm just glad you didn't end up floating in space or facing some unpleasant by-products of your little outing."

Solomon only grumbled in reply.

With a knowing grin that seemed to make Solomon want to break something, Liberty turned back toward the keyboard. "You might want to contact them to make sure Dragana doesn't shoot her on sight."

Eva didn't need a diagram to know Liberty meant her.

Solomon rolled his shoulders, looking suddenly weary beyond words. He cracked his neck. "Dragana will have to take a fucking pill and calm down." He stomped to a pile of stuff on a corner of the counter and retrieved his guns, which he slid in his holsters. Eva spotted her things there as well. The bomb among them. "Where are they anyway? Are they okay?"

"Mostly, although Dragana should have someone look at her back. Cupcake said the lacerations were deep."

For a whole five seconds, Solomon looked as though he were going to say something but he took a deep breath and raked his hair back.

"They're clearing the station right now." A series of rapid-fire clicks from the keyboard indicated Liberty was working fast. The smooth computer voice punctuated each of her commands. "Dragana took care of Ivan's remains." She cleared her throat. "It would've been nice for you to be there."

"No guilt trip, Liberty. You know better than anyone they don't work on me."

*Then why are they working on me?* Eva thought. If Solomon didn't feel bad for missing his man's "funeral", she sure did.

Liberty shrugged. "You can't blame me for trying to make a decent man of you. Anyway, we sent him off through one of the smaller chutes about an hour ago."

He rolled from his heels to the balls of his feet, his jaw bulging. He must have been grinding his teeth. Eva had noticed he did that a lot. "What else?" he asked gruffly.

"Nothing to report except that I've located some really interesting bits in one of the cargo bays. Anyway, Cupcake and Dragana are looking for you now and radioed to tell me they were coming back here."

"Bits? Bits like what?"



"Oh just about enough spare parts to make another station. It was candy land in there. I even—" She abruptly turned toward the door. "They're coming."

Eva heard heavy footsteps outside the hatch and a voice she'd come to dislike with unhealthy passion.

"...unless the little bitch has some wicked fingernails, I take it Solomon found Palmer first," Dragana was saying as she stepped inside the sickbay. Her expression went from pissed off to super-nova. A couple of tears in her uniform—and that of Cupcake as well—let Eva know just how strong Solomon was in lycanthrope form. And otherwise.

Raising her silvery volter Peanut, she leveled it in Eva's direction. "Say good night."

"Put that away, Dragana."

Solomon's voice carried with it so much barely repressed fury that Dragana lowered her gun right away. Her bruised face looked pale but tight. "Where were you when we took care of Ivan?"

He sent her a menacing glare. "Use that tone with me again and you'll join him. Got it?"

"You're the team leader, you should've been there."

A tense silence settled in the sickbay. Cupcake stood in the doorway, taking pretty much all the space except for little bits on either side of his head. He cleared his throat and gently moved Dragana aside so he could walk in. A large rip in his pants ran from his knee to his hip and showed one muscled thigh. Bandages hid that knee while a nasty laceration marred the back of his hand. Eva thought he had the pale, pink complexion of someone not used to sunlight. The wounds were a stark reminder of what he'd done. Eva promised herself to thank him later on.

The muscled woman sneered at Eva. "Don't we have questions for *you*."

Cupcake stepped in, gave Eva a quick, uninterested once-over before going to stand by Liberty's chair. He even put his hand on the backrest. Not on her though. Eva wanted to pat him on the back for his progress.

"They're going to wait, your questions," Solomon replied as he sat on the table and cracked his knuckles. "We have a much bigger problem. Her bosses aren't going to be happy. So that means they'll be sending others to bring her back or blow us up or both—who the hell knows with them. I get confused when I deal with liars and cheaters. That's why I usually just shoot them and step over the carcass. Anyway, we're gonna have company soon."

"We need to get off ST-3 before they get a chance to send ships," Liberty replied, coming out of her chair. "*Octant* is probably floating not far from here. While they wait for the storm to abate, we'll have to tinker with the cruiser. It shouldn't be too hard with the equipment we found."

Solomon nodded. "Can you make it so they won't know we touched it? Because plan B will be my style—you know, lots of nickel and nastiness for everyone. So if you can make me a nice simple plan A, that'd save me from popping an artery."

"Of course I can. But I'll need eyes." She "looked" all around, settled on some point to Eva's left. "Our smooth operator here should do nicely."

Solomon and Dragana were both shaking their heads before she'd even finished her sentence. "I don't think so," he snarled, took a deep breath and looked at the ceiling. "I'm not letting her out of my sight. Find something else."

"Suit yourselves," Liberty replied. "There won't be anyone else small enough to come with me so I'll have to go alone."

Without thinking Eva asked, "Small enough to go where?"

"Outside."

Cupcake's pale blue eyes flared, he blanched noticeably and looked horrified enough to be funny. Eva didn't laugh. One didn't laugh at an anxious bear.

"Why do you need to go outside?" Solomon asked. He glanced at Eva sideways. "And you want *her* checking your back?"

"She's small enough to fit in the comms relay booth with me and something tells me she's good at tech stuff. Better than any of you, that's for sure." She smiled sweetly. "And yes, I trust her to watch my back because my safety will mean *hers*." Eva could see the steel in her blind gaze. This was a woman not to be messed with. It probably came with being from a wealthy, powerful family and used to having people listen to them.

"Well, *Eva*," Solomon said after he'd stared at her for a good long while. "It looks as if we're going to need you after all. Doesn't that just suck. Okay, let's go."

\* \* \* \* \*

Solomon watched the pair through the portable view screen Eva was carrying. She'd activated its magnetized tripod so the rest could watch from inside the station. He'd wanted to argue against sending them together but couldn't see anybody else who'd fit in the tiny booth—a shoebox in his point of view—that allowed emergency access to the comms. The thing was barely big enough for both slim women to crawl into. Liberty's plan was to create a phantom signal to mimic the powered-down cruiser's signal so the *Octant* wouldn't know they were trying to retrofit the vessel to have FTL capability. It wasn't a dangerous mission per se, but the thought of losing Liberty—or Eva, he might as well admit it—made him want a drink bad. So Cupcake and he watched every move the women made outside while Dragana forlornly polished her guns and inventoried their supplies. On food and water, they'd outlast the next century according to her but on nickel, they didn't have near enough. They never had near enough according to the twins.

Shit.

Solomon had forgotten about the bodies they'd jettisoned while he was busy fucking around with their little spy. No wonder Dragana wanted a piece of Eva. Not that all their troubles stemmed from the spy's actions. Far from it. Palmer was more to blame than anyone else. But he was dead, the slimy little shit, with many of the answers with him, and Eva was taking the brunt of everyone's anger. From Liberty's cool demeanor, Cupcake's indifference and Dragana's seething fury to his own nasty brand of treatment. Eva was taking it all with relative stoicalness. He wasn't sure he'd be so detached himself if half the team wanted his ass diced up on a platter.

Cupcake's jaw bulged as he briefly closed his eyes then stared at the screen again. "Which station are we going to, Thebes or Antioch?"

"Antioch is closer."

Solomon couldn't remember the unshakable Cupcake looking so damn worried. He'd seen the man stand in the middle of a gunfight and calmly move a civilian out of the way then come back to exchange nickel with the bad guys.

"Something I should know?"

Cupcake shook his head, his gaze never left the screen.

After forty-seven minutes and some change—and damn if both Cupcake and he hadn't checked their watches twenty times—Liberty announced she'd created her phantom signal and with Eva's help had coupled the landing bay's wires with the spy's portable digitex. A continuous loop would make the *Octant* think no one was touching the cruiser.

"Good work," he murmured through his teeth when Eva unhooked the view screen and tucked it under an arm. Despite the thick a-suit, he could see her ass clearly from that position and his dick stirred at the image. No amount of polymer on any atmospheric suit could hide such a fine behind. He sighed.

"What do we do with her?" Cupcake asked as he straightened from the screen. A nasty cut ran along the back of his hand right up over the wrist bone. Solomon knew he'd done that. Along with the guy's bum knee. And Dragana's back. And who knew what else.

"There's nothing to *do* with her."

"Um."

"What 'um'?! Don't you 'um' me, man. Spill it or get out of my face."

"She's a stray bullet waiting to blow someone's brains out and you know it."

"She has intel we need."

"If you can't do it, I understand," Cupcake remarked. "I could—"

Solomon's heart skipped a beat. He felt himself flush beet red. "If you so much as touch her, I'll rip you apart."

"You'll still need to deal with her eventually." Cupcake nodded then left.

Okay.

Solomon watched the giant leave, all the while thinking that for once the man had outthought him. He should be doing *something* with her.

*It's just that I don't know what it is I should do with Little Red.*

After both women had reported back to the sickbay, his impromptu command post, Solomon had them all sit on the various stools and chairs for the debriefing.

"Okay, it's like this. We need to get the hell off this station before Vonatos' personal army comes to kick us in the balls—or ovaries. So." He stopped for emphasis, gave everyone The Eye then slipped his thumbs in his belt—he sure would enjoy wearing something other than an orange HAZMAT suit but hey, it was better than being half naked with his dick dangling out. "Either we get them first or they get us and we die horrible deaths. Myself, I'd like to give a few more kicks at the can before they get me, so I want that cruiser online and ready for FTL. Liberty, think you can do that?"

She looked up, adopted the "pondering" look then nodded slowly. "But it's going to take some time. A day at least. Those cruisers were never intended to be used this way, only dropped from a much larger ship when in close proximity. But I think I can retrofit ours to reach one of the closest stations. After that, it's out of my hands."

"And into mine," Solomon said. "Someone on Antioch ought to have a decent ship we can 'borrow' to go back home and lay low until we figure out how bad they want lycanthropes out of the gene pool."

The look on Dragana's face! It played right into her conspiracy theories. "What do you mean, out of the gene pool?"

*Here we go again.*

"Vonatos thinks we're becoming more than a nuisance. According to our latest report," he gave an askew glance at Eva, who merely stared back at him, "the chancellor is getting mighty scared of us and basically wants our hairy asses off his planet. Dead preferably."

"I knew it!" She launched into a tirade about Earth government's involvement in unethical testing done on captured lycanthropes, how members of her own family had been taken and never returned, stuff that had happened decades before. Stuff he didn't give a rat's ass about.

He noticed only then the nasty bruises on her jaw and neck. Dammit, what else had he done?

"Okay, okay, Christ, woman, we get it. But you know what, I don't give a shit. I want to go back home so I can have a drink and get laid and eat hamburgers with half a cup of ketchup on them each. I'm not going back to start some political war or get involved in some lycan fan club."

"How can you not care?" she demanded, color rising to her cheeks. She could've been a blonde bombshell of woman had she not been prone to let her mouth run her into trouble. Anyway, she was too big for his tastes. And too loud. "You're a lycanthrope, you *should* care about what they're doing to us!"

"It's when you start to care that they get you."

Everyone, including Dragana, turned toward Eva and stared. Obviously, her comment had hit a nerve for even the twin shut her mouth and leaned back in her chair.

"Couldn't have put it better myself," Solomon replied. "Which reminds me. We need to have a chat, you and I." He rose, indicated she should follow him. "You guys find some quarters and hit the sack. We've been up for twenty hours. Report back at oh-seven-thirty."

An air of resignation flashed in her purple eyes before the smooth mask came back down.

*Gotcha.*

Oh she was good at hiding her emotions, but this one time he'd seen it, the misery, the hurt. And it burned his ass to think he was going to add to it. No other choice though. He had to know how far he could trust the redhead.

She followed him placidly into one of the personnel's quarters, formerly H. Cooper's according to the plate on the door. Judging from the mess he found inside, the thieves had tossed the place pretty thoroughly before settling in. But it had a clean bed and a working shower. And for now, it was all he wanted.

Solomon checked his watch. Damn. It was two a.m. He felt like crashing in bed and forgetting the day, to hopefully wake and discover it'd all been a bad dream, that he hadn't been saddled with this mission, hadn't developed a weak spot for a tasty redhead and hadn't been stabbed in the back in the most vicious way possible. But most importantly, he didn't want to remember he'd changed and done terrible things to Eva, despite whatever she chose to call it.

He still couldn't believe he'd lost control over the rage and pain of discovering her true identity. How could he have let a pretty face get him so deeply in shit?

When he opened the door, sunlight in weird, smoky colors filtered in through the rectangular porthole. Ultraviolet purples and greens and blues filled the spacious room. Whoever Cooper had been, he or she'd been important enough to get some nice lodgings. He squinted against the strange light.

"Come in and shut the door."

Eva stepped inside the room and closed the aluminum door behind her. That chemical hair of hers looked bright pink in here. Even more like a candy.

*Go back to sleep, he told his cock. You're not getting fed for a while.*

"Lock it."

She did, activated the magnetic bolt. A tiny red light indicated the door was locked. He went to the porthole, tried to pull down the screen but it wouldn't budge. So they'd have to live with the funky lightshow for now.

"Okay, we're taking a listen to this fucking thing," he brandished the data clip as if it were a weapon, "and then you're going to tell me what the hell is going on back on

Earth. I want to know every bit of theory and gossip you're sitting on. And Christ, don't give me that look either."

She shrugged. "What look?"

"The 'I don't care 'cause I'm a smooth spy' look. Argh, you're so full of it! You think you have everyone wrapped around your little finger, that no one can see behind the poster girl. Ha. Some spy you are."

Now he did get a reaction.

She seemed to grow a few inches taller as she straightened and put a fist on her hip. "Don't you dare accuse me of not doing my job well. I've conned bigger men than you, Dex Solomon, and if Palmer hadn't been in bed with...whoever he was in bed with—search me if I know—this mission would've been another hit. You can't even begin to understand what it takes to do my job, what it costs."

She cleared her throat, looked away but he'd seen it again. The pain. For the first time in his forty-three years, he tried to see from someone else's angle. Being an undercover agent must be lonely work. One couldn't befriend anyone for fear of their being used as leverage later on. Did she have a boyfriend? Had she always worked alone? Was there a man somewhere who got to kiss her candy lips and fuck her sweet pussy every time he wanted? The thought of another's hands on Eva didn't do anything for him and he pushed the images away.

Eva took a deep breath, waved her hand in a manner he could tell she strove to make appear indifferent but ended up the call for truce it was meant to be. Cracks were appearing all over the glossy veneer the little she-devil had going. Solomon feared for a second she was literally falling apart on him.

*If she starts crying, I don't know what I'll do with myself.*

"We'll listen to the clip and see what it says," he said hoarsely, his throat suddenly too tight. What in the frozen hell was wrong with him? He couldn't get sick now. Extremely bad timing. Unless it was something else.

After rummaging through the messy quarters, he found a small music-playing digitex on a table and brought it back to the common room. There, he indicated Eva should sit but she shook her head and crossed her arms.

"Fine, stand. I'm sitting my ass down before I keel over." His stomach chose that moment to make itself heard. "We'll find something to eat afterward."

"I thought you'd already fed," she remarked caustically.

"Ah, the bitch is back, good, I like you better that way. But just so you know, lycans don't feed on humans, we just tear them apart for fun. Now sit."

She didn't but he let it slide. "*Choose your fights*," his first boss had told him. She'd been dead-on. The thing was, he chose his fights all right...he chose them *all*. Well, except for this one here. He had neither the heart nor the energy to force someone to sit if they wished to remain standing. After pushing all the crap and mess from the polymer couch, he gratefully sank in it, placed the digitex on the plastic table—which

resembled a giant toy block more than anything—and activated it. At once a voice was heard. It sounded angry.

*"What do you mean you allowed the Iron Conclave to get someone on the Security Council? I didn't approve of this."*

Solomon could readily recognize Chancellor N'Namdi's rich, deep voice. A sting of anger made him clench his teeth.

*"I no longer need your approval, sir,"* replied someone Solomon couldn't recognize. He threw a questioning look at Eva, who silently mouthed the name "Vonatos". He nodded.

A strangled sound made Solomon grip the edge of the couch and stare at the tiny digitex, which now represented what he abhorred most in Earth government in general and humankind in particular. The potential for dishonesty and corruption.

*"What did...you do to...me?"* N'Namdi sounded in pain.

*"Farewell, Chancellor,"* Vonatos said. His voice had drawn closer to the receiver. Solomon could hear the man's quick breathing.

*Getting a high off assassinating a guy, do you, you backstabbing, slimy son of a bitch!*

A moan made the tiny receiver hiss.

*"Finally,"* growled Vonatos.

Some noises were heard followed by a soft thud Solomon knew was a body falling on the floor. He'd heard enough to recognize the subtle rustle, followed by the uneven thump of the main body mass landing on a hard surface. Then nothing for a few seconds.

*"Damn!"*

That was Vonatos again. Someone was messing with the digitex then a click indicated the end of the message.

Solomon closed his eyes for a second, tried not to imagine N'Namdi's stout body slowly slumping to the floor, his white robes—usually pressed razor sharp and impeccably tailored to his wide shoulders—now crumpled and messed up. Solomon hated that last image. The former chancellor reduced to a twisted body on the floor.

*"Your boss is quite the piece of shit,"* he said, opening his eyes to see hers full of tears.

*Whoa.*

The rest of her face was still set in that implacable mask she kept on but her eyes, damn, her eyes could've been a conduit for all the pain in the world. A tear spilled over her unblinking eye and rolled down her cheek. The urge to rub his thumb over it and make it all go away nearly moved him from the couch. Nearly.

*"This another act for my benefit?"*

*"Zatkni!"*

*"If you're gonna insult me, do it in a language I understand, woman."*

“Shut up, you big...you – Just shut up!”

She started pacing the place like a trapped wild beast would and all he could do was watch her. *Whoa*. Females had that thing about them when they were angry. A sort of primeval, jungle-fever death stare going on, suddenly changing from soft and cuddly plush toy to venomous scorpion, all of which made them formidable and menacing.

And so motherfucking *sexy*!

But he couldn't let her see how her distress bugged him. *Way too much leverage there. So back to asshole mode*. “You won't mind if I get a shower while you tear the place apart? I'll see you in a bit.”

He left her standing there panting, pacing. Crying. And if he hated himself for having touched her—hell, fucked her apparently—while in lycanthrope form, he positively loathed his own skin right now for letting her cry alone. But he wasn't ready to hand over his balls just yet. As much as he wished he could, he no longer trusted Little Red.



## Chapter Seven

*I've been such a damn fool. Such a damn FOOL!*

Eva had the very real urge to stamp her boot on the digitex. The nasty little thing. As much as she'd been gifted with a shrewd and devious mind, she hadn't expected, hadn't even *suspected*, Vonatos had killed N'Namdi. The former chancellor's "suicide" had been so plausible given the state of Earth's affairs and the rising hysteria about gene purity, precedence for increasingly rare jobs and everything else in between. She'd thought, as had everybody else, that Chancellor N'Namdi had no longer been able to withstand the pressure and preferred to take his own life. But no, Vonatos had taken it. And then he'd turned around and changed everything his boss had done, the tiny but important improvements he'd brought.

And she'd unwillingly played a part in Vonatos' budding little regime.

"Such a fool," she snarled through her teeth. She angrily wiped the tears away, cursing at herself, at Vonatos but mostly at Solomon, the snarly, stubborn asshole of a lycanthrope.

The look in his eyes. He thought she was a willing drone in Vonatos' army. She wasn't, *govno*. She did her job, took the missions assigned her, just as Solomon did. Where was the difference? They were both tools. Instruments on a rack their betters shopped when crunch time came around, to be used and discarded as needed. She was no worse than Solomon. She lied to make a living. He *killed* for his. That self-righteous, two-faced, hypocritical jerk!

Without thinking, Eva marched for the bathroom pocket door, slammed it wide and stepped into the hot and steamy cubicle. Images of their mating inside the decon room flashed in her mind but she pushed them away. She wasn't there for mind-blowing sex—har har. She was there to force this arrogant, obstinate man to hear the truth. Eva Grigorevna Serova wasn't the enemy. And if she had to pin him down on the toilet to do it, then so by god, she would.

Thankfully, he wasn't on the toilet but already in the shower with his torn clothes and the HAZMAT suit strewn about the place and resembling leftovers from an explosion. *Men*. His volters were there too. *Now, that's a big slip*.

Should she?

Then what? What exactly would she do with the volters? Kill him? Not likely.

Eva made a straight line for the clear plastic door, wrenched it open and held it there with her boot.

Solomon whirled around. "What the fuck!"

Soap lather covered his thick torso and shoulders, his thighs. Eva focused on his face instead, for she knew if she allowed her gaze to wander, she'd forget everything else and just stare like an estrogen-stupefied idiot.

"I have something to say to you and for once in your life, you're going to shut your mouth and listen," she snapped, holding the door wide, despite water drumming on the rubber floor around her feet. "I had no part in this, I didn't know Vonatos had killed N'Namdi. Not that it would've changed anything because I don't choose my jobs, I just do them. But for what it's worth to you, I may be a liar and a sneaky bitch, but I'm not a political assassin. Not in my job description, okay?"

He looked at her, water running down his hard face. "But you were going to stick a bomb up our asses...that's not assassination? What do you call it then, a public service? Sanitation? Oh I know, *pest control*. We don't count, lycanthropes, do we."

His voice so gentle, so *deadly* gentle, made the fine hair on her arms stand at attention.

"It's different—"

Without warning, he grabbed the front of her flight suit and hoisted her up to his face. "Tell me *why* it's so damn different or, I swear, I'm about to lose it with you and space your ass out the nearest airlock."

Eva tried to isolate his thumb but couldn't force her fingers in his steel grip. So she hung on to his wrists and stared right into his dark brown eyes. "Because I wasn't going to do it."

There, she'd said it.

How he managed to arch only one eyebrow yet narrow his eyes simultaneously, Eva didn't know. All she did know was that it made him look fearsome in some seriously sexy way. So when his mouth landed on hers, she was more than ready to give it all her attention.

Solomon pulled her inside the shower stall with him—flight suit, boots and all—and closed the door. "How did you manage to get in here?" he growled between kisses, tapping hard on his forehead with the knuckle of his index finger.

She wanted to reply, "How did you manage to get in *here*?" and point to her chest instead. She might as well admit it, at least to herself and preferably during this less than logical moment so she could later deny it. She was developing an acute liking for Dex Solomon, even if the prospect of nothing else but heartache awaited her.

*I guess the heart chooses and the brain follows.* How different from her usual style. Dangerously different in fact.

His mouth was demanding, conquering, as he kissed her face, her mouth, her throat. Eva wrapped her arms around his thick neck and pulled herself closer, not caring if the position was far less independent and woman-in-charge than she wished. Her need for his embrace far surpassed her entrenched tendency to keep people at arm's length.

As he pulled her zipper down low, Eva twisted shoulder and arm out of the restricting garment, out of the bra as well, only too happy to proffer it all for him to take. And he did. Pitiless, his hand yanked the flight suit down her back so he could seize her breast and bring it up high for his hungry mouth. Her spine arched. Juices slicked her pussy. Eva groaned when his lips trapped her nipple and sucked hard.

His five o'clock shadow chafed her skin, heated her already feverish face and neck and Eva thought she'd go up in flames for the burning treatment he gave her more-than-willing body. She welcomed his intensity, matched it. Both snarling incoherently, they thumped around in the shower stall, slipping, bumping into plastic walls and faux-chrome activation valves in their desperate pursuit to enmesh their limbs, their mouths. Her boots felt soggy and heavy, as did her partly done suit.

"Give me a foot," he growled against her cheek, already reaching down to her knee and yanking it up.

She stuck her foot up so he could undo the boot and tug it and the sock free. Solomon lobbed them over the stall.

Panting hard, she gave him her other foot, movement that produced a most satisfying rub against her throbbing clit. The second boot-sock duo arched high over the stall, caught the ceiling and fell below the plastic wall.

"Now take that damn thing off before I rip it in two."

While he watched—she couldn't help the feeling of power as he waited for her to finish—Eva twisted out of her black suit, hooked it with her foot and showing her flexibility, brought it up for him to catch. He did, his upper lip curling up to reveal his big, perfect teeth.

"Oh you little she-devil."

The flight suit followed the boots beyond the shower.

"I want you," she sighed, leaning in so she could kiss his throat, his shoulder and sides. Chest hair curled into tight coils glistening wet and so tempting under the ribbons of water trailing down. Eva kissed around the couple of wide claw marks on his pectorals then bit his nipple. Were they already healing? She thought they didn't look as deep or as wide as before.

"You better not bite my dick," he warned with a slap on her butt that burned like a bee sting. The sound of water muffled the clack but not the effect.

"What makes you think I'm going to suck you, huh?"

"You will."

"Oh?"

Solomon's grin turned feral. "You want my dick in your mouth, Little Red, I can tell just by the way you've been looking at it."

"I wasn't looking at your cock, Mister Fathead. But now that you mention it, it is a nice one, isn't it?" Eva enjoyed the look of frustration and impatience in his dark orbs. She parted her mouth, looked up so she could get a bit of water in it.

*Let them wait for it. Nothing that good should be free.*

Making a big show of running her tongue across her upper lip, Eva let her hands run down the length of him, down to his thighs, which she gripped hard. "Spread your feet."

He did before planting his hands on either wall, braced for impact.

She knelt in front of him and caressed his veiny cock. It really was a nice specimen, all smoothness and gleaming, dark rosy skin, especially under the shower. His thick body hair came down the middle of his belly in a wide strip that flared again when it reached his pubic area. Eva grinned when she noticed a bit of coppery red mixed in with the dark blond.

"Who's the redhead in your family?"

"What?"

"The redhead, is it your mom or dad?" she asked while she cupped his balls and played with them a bit. His member bobbed with his heavy breathing.

"Why the fuck do you... Christ, woman, whoa...it's from the old man's side."

She'd just squeezed his balls in her fist while simultaneously wrapping her lips around his glans. *Mm-mm*, Eva slid down his thick girth, retreated to the end of him, tasted the salty pre-cum on her tongue then pushed her forehead against his belly again. She was feeling more in control now than ever before. She enjoyed it quite a bit. For now anyway. Then she'd let him get his way and she'd enjoyed *that* quite a bit too!

Using soap as lubricant, she rubbed circles around his hips, his thighs, in between them, and when she wormed a hand up high, her middle finger finding his tight hole, Solomon squeezed his cheeks.

"Hey!"

Eva drew back to the end of his shaft, relinquished it with regret. "Would you just let me do my thing?"

Solomon muttered something but eased his butt so she could move her hand again. The thing was like a bear trap!

She went back to his cock to make sure she was curling up his toes. By the corner of her eyes, she saw him looking down at her with a mixed expression of awkwardness and incredulity. But as she rubbed round and round, her mouth still pumping his cock, he seemed to relax and let her pleasure him. He'd obviously never had this done to him. She started nice and wide, rubbed the insides of his upper thighs, narrowed her circles until she was stroking the space behind his sac then zeroed in on his anus, against which she pressed with a gentle middle finger. With the pad of it, she massaged the tender skin before tipping it. Solomon inhaled sharply. So he wouldn't run away cursing, Eva made sure she gave his member plenty of attention while she pushed her finger inside him, retreated then rubbed the entrance again. After a quick check, Eva caught Solomon with his eyes closed and his mouth curving up at a corner, then looking down, she saw that he had his toes tightly curled. Satisfaction swelled her chest.

Eva gave Solomon her best performance to date, sucked him hard enough to make herself gag yet worked through the reflex, used her hand as a merciless ally as she clawed and tilled the skin on his hips, worked her tongue, her jaw, while gently rubbing his nether hole. His thighs twitched. Poor man was about to explode.

He wrapped his large hand over the back of her head. "I want to come in your mouth."

She *mm-mmed* in reply, used his hard belly as a trampoline against which to bounce her forehead. She abandoned his butt so she could use both hands as counter-anchors, slammed him to her repeatedly and as his hand fisted her hair, his other cupping her chin, Eva knew he was close.

As much as she'd been in control until then, Solomon took it into his hands—literally—when he trapped her head against his groin. She replied in kind, clutched at his butt cheeks and locked herself around the base of his shaft.

*Come, Solomon, come.*

He did. In burning jets of liquid silk, he came so deep down her throat she barely had a taste at all. Damn.

His fist still tight behind her nape, Eva twisted her head side to side so she could torment his cock a little bit more before he pulled out, show Solomon she wanted this, wanted all of him.

After his shaft began to soften slightly, his balls tight and hard, Solomon released her hair, which he slicked back over her head. She rolled her eyes up at him and caught him with his eyes closed, an expression of such peace and elation that it made her want to stand and hug him fiercely. But she fought the urge.

*No emotions, gospozha, just the great sex. That ought to be enough. Ha.*

Because her knees were about to fuse in the bent position, Eva stood and leaned her forehead against his wide chest. Her own need was becoming pressing. Sucking Solomon had triggered a massive amount of hormones and she knew of only one way to gainfully employ them all.

"I want you like it's not even funny, *gospodin*," she murmured, her voice muffled against his chest. "What are we going to do about that, huh?"

"This, for now."

He knelt, pushed her against the wall and was using his thumbs to spread her pussy wide when he slowed then stopped entirely. His hands were gentle when he caressed her lower belly and thighs.

"Damn, how could I do this to you?" he murmured under the drum of the water.

He proceeded to kiss every bruise and scratch, lightly lip then tongue each one in turn until he'd covered her belly and thighs with his burning kisses. She felt herself melt between the legs.

Solomon looked up into her face, stared for a long time despite water hitting his face, and Eva could see the turmoil behind the hard expression, the confusion and

disorder she brought to his undoubtedly uncomplicated life. Just as hers had once been. No more. Not with him in it.

She cupped his cleft chin, which she adored. "Just sex, okay? Nothing complicated."

A crooked smile pulled his lips to one side. "That has to be a first coming from a woman. But you're right. No mental screw, just the real thing."

Eva meant to grin but ended up "ahhing" when Solomon parted her nether lips and took a solid lick that pleased her clit as nothing else. Of its own accord, her fingers curled in his hair. She fisted it.

Adding pressure and force, Solomon licked her in bold, upward strokes, each one targeted her clit alone and after a while, she felt the first signs of climax tightening her channel. Man, he could make her come so much faster than any other lover she'd had. Hell, even herself!

In her twisting and arching, she'd deactivated the shower. Deafening silence settled into the stall as water stopped, only occasionally broken by her moans or Solomon's greedy pulls. Eva pushed her pelvis forward, pressed her sex against his face so he'd eat her more deeply, suck her all in and push her over the edge. She was so close.

To add more pressure, she wrapped a leg around his neck and cramped her thigh. Solomon had to plant his palms on the wall on either side of her hips to keep from getting his face crushed against her pubic bone. But he growled his enthusiasm nonetheless. Damn, he was good!

With a long whine, she came.

Just as the first ripples constricted her pussy, Solomon stood, stepped in between her feet and took her. His shaft had hardened again, if only slightly less than before he'd come. Eva was glad he had...they could play for a while then.

Skin on her back pulled when he hoisted her against his hips, grabbed her butt with brutal hands and pushed in deep. Like a mechanical bull, Eva rode him with one hand around his nape, the other over her head, her spine arched in a tight curve.

She didn't even try to stifle the moan swelling her chest. "Ahh. AHH."

As if spurred by the vocal response, Solomon pumped with enough vigor to make her breasts bounce. She moaned when he suspended her completely around his waist, grabbed her behind the thighs and kicked the shower door open so he could stumble out and slam her against the bulkhead. Rivets dug in her shoulder blades. As if she cared.

He slowed, put his chin against her collarbone. "Eva, damn, I can't even think straight," he snarled in her ear.

She bit his lobe for making her lose her impetus and force him to get back to his. Boy, did he ever!

Still carrying her around his middle, he staggered like a drunkard out of the bathroom, collided against the doorjamb, which knocked her on the hip, and in a show of impressive strength, hoisted her higher with his arms alone when she started to slip.

Their wet skin created the most intoxicating stimulus for Eva and she arched back, only to knock her head against the rectangular porthole when Solomon plastered her against it. The sun was still giving off all those weird UV blue and purple and green bursts that illuminated the room with the multicolored effect of fireworks. Eva managed to hang on to the ledge above her head and kept herself suspended as Solomon twisted underneath so he could take her even more deeply.

A wave of near euphoria enveloped Eva, curled her toes. "I'm coming...oh..."

Why the hell had she just announced it? Oh well.

With near violence, Solomon anchored her ass against the clear Thermopane and thrust hard and deep, reached the very end of her channel and threatened to turn pleasure into pain but didn't, instead bringing Eva the most acute, puissant peaks she'd ever experienced. The room rang with her release. While she was still writhing with pleasure and her voice returning to more normal proportions and timbre, Solomon deposited her on the carpeted deck and pulled out.

She opened her eyes. "Hey!"

"Turn around."

He didn't even wait for her to get ready, and after planting a palm on the Thermopane, fisted his cock and pushed in again. Eva curled up her butt so she could take him to the hilt. They both groaned when he slid in and snarled incoherently when he began a slow and torturous retreat before slamming back. Their voices mixed, dueled for supremacy, became a rhythmic murmur before swelling to cries of deliverance again. With the sun's corona, her breath created swirling patterns similar to puddles in the streets when fuel mixed with water.

Eva snaked her hand beneath his. They stood joined against the porthole, her hand in his, willingly trapped, freely cuffed in his strong fingers. Sheltered. His thighs piston-like, he drove upward, curved his hips to come from underneath instead of from behind, created even more pressure on her clit, which throbbed and burned. He slowed.

Eva bucked back. "Keep going." She was close to another.

"Were you going to finish your job?" he growled against her nape.

"I told you, no." She could barely form the words. "Come on, harder."

He slowed even more, pulled out to the glans. His hand around hers on the Thermopane became painfully tight as he forced it higher until her arm was completely extended upward. "I don't believe you. I don't *trust* you."

"We said..." Eva closed her eyes when a tiny ripple tightened her pussy. She shivered. Fuck, she was going to lose it. "Just sex."

"Well," he replied, raking her hair back from her face, "I lied."

Eva wanted to turn back but couldn't when Solomon crushed her against the porthole and pinned her there with his hips. His tight belly and rock-hard chest pressed against her back and butt. He was panting. "Were you going to?"

"No, I wasn't."

He put his mouth right against her ear. "You're lying again?"

"No."

Circling her waist, he snaked a hand down to her pussy and tormented her clit with a finger that was way too light. Eva tried to shift downward so she could add to the pressure. Her shoulder burned but she wasn't about to let him know. What was wrong with him? An attack of honesty right in the middle of toe-curling sex? Shit.

His finger teased her relentlessly. Eva tried to push against the Thermopane with her free arm, only managed to create more stress on her other shoulder. She groaned. In pain and thrill and frustration. That damn tease, that...

"Why weren't you going to blow us up?" Solomon demanded. He curled his finger, isolated her clit, before rolling his thumb on it. "Why?"

"Ahhh...because I couldn't, that's all." It was coming back, the ecstasy, the near-pain thrill. A tiny shudder down low in her belly heralded a fine orgasm. If he'd only stop tormenting her.

"I said *why*?" He stabbed his finger in.

She cried out, bumped her forehead against the pane. "Sol...Solomon..."

"Why?"

"Because I couldn't do that to you, shit! Just...just sex, you said, you liar." Eva hated the way she sounded, but a climax that good she didn't want to miss. Couldn't he just do that again with his finger?

He did.

She nearly came. Oh but he knew exactly what he was doing, the jerk. "Again," she growled through her teeth.

"Couldn't do it to us...why? What changed?"

Relentless, Solomon rammed his finger in a couple of times, spread her plentiful juices around then went back at her clit, this time his finger wasn't so light. Eva twisted against his fury, welcomed it, craved and ached for more. Then Solomon stopped right on the edge again.

Fuck!

"What changed? What happened?"

She couldn't even roll her hips to accentuate the chances of her coming despite his rationing. A growl of pure frustration left her. "Come on, man. Do it."

"I'll fuck you like you've never had it done, Little Red," he whispered in her hair. "But only after you answer me. What happened?"

"YOU HAPPENED!" she yelled, tried to coil out of his steel grip but failed. "Are you happy? I couldn't do it because of *you*! So there! Dammit!"

What the hell was wrong with her? Blurt out her most intimate thought this way, let go a piece of intel without getting anything in return! Well, except for a good lay. If she were lucky. She couldn't remember divulging such a personal sliver of her soul to



someone else. Hell, she couldn't remember the last time she told the truth. To anyone. Even herself.

So yeah, she couldn't finish her job because of Dex Solomon, lycanthrope, stubborn asshole and torturer extraordinaire. Go figure.

She could feel the effect her words had on his entire body. The rigidity left, the implacable grip around her hand loosened, his finger circled her aching bud while his tongue softly traced a path below her ear.

"I believe you," he said simply then released her hand.

Panting and groaning, Eva rolled against the Thermopane and stared guns at him. Her legs shook. "You're a piece of work, Dex Solomon."

With the solar storm, his face looked painted green and blue, his hair a mottled shade of aqua while his dark eyes glowed like forest green crystals. He flashed a wicked grin at her. "No one can lie when they're coming."

Eva lifted her chin. "I'll remember that."

Solomon bent down so he could stamp his mouth on hers for a feast of a kiss. He couldn't believe how hard he'd had to work to wrestle that tiny bit of intel from her. But in the end, he'd gotten what he'd wanted. Some truth, for Christ's sake!

And the kind of truth she'd flung in his face, Solomon wished he could receive every day. Even if her masked declaration had thrown his world into even worse turmoil than it was already—she'd basically told him she liked him, right?—Solomon couldn't help the feeling he'd just received a huge pat on his male ego. Eva the Spy had failed her mission because of him. Not that she'd boasted, but he knew she must have been a hell of a spy for the chancellor to personally task her. Yet she'd failed. Because of him. *For him.*

After she raked her fingernails along his flanks and nearly triggered his "fuck now" alarms, he abandoned her mouth so he could take in her breasts instead. She had such nice ones. Candies.

Solomon stared into her eyes when she looked down for they'd taken on the vibrancy of a purple sports drink with the crazy-colored light the sun cast into the room. Around her head, a jagged halo of fuchsia pink made her a luscious, purple-eyed and glistening-lipped Medusa. His own little Gorgon. And just as treacherous.

"You know," he said between kisses, "my life used to be simple. None of this mind-screwing or wondering what the hell is going on. I used to go in, keep my trigger finger squeezed until I got cramps or until there wasn't no more nickel to be had. Then I'd change guns and start all over. But then you showed up."

She cocked her head, raked his hair back. "And your life became a whole lot more fun, right?"

"Yeah, if you say so."

When he rolled her nipple in his fingers, not even trying to be gentle, she lost the smug grin.

"Oh you want to play?"

Solomon barely had time to cringe when she managed to grab his thumb again. Oh Christ, this was going to hurt. And it did.

The lithe and devious woman had him nearly dancing on the spot when she twisted around—taking his digit with her—and bent his arm completely behind his back. Solomon had to arch back so his arm would stay attached to the rest of him. To his complete shock, Eva slapped his butt—and the sound just about busted his eardrums as efficiently as his male ego—and gave him one helluva push that propelled him several feet forward against the bulkhead. He only had time to brace his landing with his other hand.

Mentally wrestling between outrage and exhilaration, he whipped around just in time to avoid her next stunt. With a grunt, he snapped back, let her hand chop go by an inch from his face and parried the wickedly sneaky joint lock aimed at his other hand. She'd already retracted hers by the time he meant to grab her wrist.

"You're quick," he snarled, using his greater reach and strength to push her away.

She leaped back, brought both hands in front in a loose, balanced aikido guard and waited. "You're not."

Solomon realized his smile wasn't very refined. The idea of wrestle-fucking such a bristly, strong, *naked* woman all but clouded his vision with images of animalistic coupling and primal yells. He was afraid to start grunting. It didn't seem to bother her though as she grinned, kissed the air and unlocked her knees in a slight crouch.

"You know I'm gonna win in the end," he said with fake composure. He was burning with adrenaline and ready to explode.

She shrugged. "But you'll have earned it if you do. And I'll make *sure* of that. Now stop talking and come get it."

"Well, HA!"

Solomon pretended to go for her right, which had her spinning counterclockwise half a turn, but at the last second he pivoted and went instead for her left. She must have been involved in the same bar fights he had for she didn't fall for his little ruse and was waiting for him when he made to grab her elbow. Once, twice, the heel of her hand hit him in the sternum, right where it hurt the most, dammit, and when she put her knee against his belly, grabbed his wrist and leaned back to overbalance him, Solomon barely had time to snarl one last curse.

"Motherf—"

He soared right over her head as she rolled backward, her knee a sharp axle in his solar plexus, and sent him tumbling head over heels into the couch and the plastic table, which he neatly demolished when both his feet crashed into it. But she'd made a mistake. Miss Aikido had forgotten he was much stronger than her if a lot less refined.

Solomon grunted with the effort of twisting his body such but as he landed, he kept an arm over his head—never mind bracing for impact—and waited the half second it took her to roll backward to avoid the dangerous tangle. She didn't. He brought the tangle to her.

She *humphed* loudly when Solomon trapped her ankle and dragged her to him. He had the redhead in a bear hug within two seconds. And she stayed there for about that long too.

Solomon yelped in pain. "Argh! Fuck!"

She'd bit his shoulder! She'd actually bit him. Of all the...!

He released her so he could look at his shoulder. No blood but one bitchy red mark was already swelling. "It's payback time, I'm guessing?"

The expression on her face—the sexiest mix of provocation and resolve, Eva nodded. "You bit me first."

"Fair enough."

She didn't see this one coming.

Solomon struck while his words were still passing his lips. Despite serious parries and painful hand blocks, she wasn't able to keep him from wrapping a hand over her wrist and yanking her to him. The force of his tug combined with her desperate jostle to use his momentum against him, propelled them both onto the couch where they rebounded against the backrest and piled onto the seat, Solomon—thankfully—on top of the nimble woman.

"Tell me something," he said, pinning her hand by her side and the other above her head. "Are you always so damn disagreeable in bed?"

A good twist of her hips nearly freed her from his weight. He adjusted a leg to better restrain hers. She squirmed but was getting nowhere. *Ah, there, much better.*

"Only when I'm turned on."

As she lay beneath him, restrained through sheer brute strength, gravity and pure luck, Solomon couldn't help but admire this feisty, tricky, multilayered woman. *More than admire actually.* Man, he had such a juvenile crush on her it wasn't even funny! A guy his age too, pathetic. Eva What's Her Last Name could take him on, give him a run for his credits, turn the tables on him—turn them over on his head even, Christ—and still manage to not only look delicious doing it, but make him feel like the luckiest guy in the system. *How's that for a brain fuck?!*

Speaking of which.

"You won't mind if I get a little taste first?" he asked.

When he trapped a nipple in his mouth and drew on it hard, Eva arched against him, moaned her excitement in utterly unladylike ways. Oh he liked this woman.

"You like it when I suck your nipples?"

"Mmm."

"How about your clit? Do you want another go?"

Eva's eyes flared, resembled hard white and violet candies in the funky lightshow. "I'd like that."

Solomon made room so she could hook one leg over the backrest and let the other dangle down to the floor.

"Show me where?" He raised himself off her slightly and freed the hand he had trapped over her head, expecting her to either break his nose—he'd never had his oft-rebuilt nose broken by a woman before—or do as he said.

Wicked grin firmly on, she snaked her hand down between her breasts, splayed her fingers when she reached her pubic bone and slowly followed the natural curve below her mons. Solomon watched as she used her middle finger to circle her engorged clit—she'd come enough times for it to remain a rosy little pearl for a while yet—and spread her juices around.

Unable to stand it any longer, Solomon crushed his face to her pussy and ate her until she was writhing again. He pushed himself up on his hands, meant to take her but she had her hands there and didn't seem as though she needed anyone's help for the next stage.

"Hey," he snarled, pushing one hand away. "How about the real thing?"

Head lolling side to side, she smiled. "Don't need it."

"Like hell you don't need it!"

Solomon should've seen it coming. Dumb, sex-drunk, idiotic man that he was. Eva had already snapped her feet and caught him in the chest by the time he realized she'd retracted her legs. He flew back and landed sprawled on the end of the couch. A second later Eva was straddling his lap and gyrating right over his dick. But because she had her legs completely bent under her, with her feet cleverly snaked between his thighs, he couldn't pump his hips up and take her hard as he wanted to.

"Ohhh you..."

One half of her bottom lip disappeared between a row of perfectly aligned and blinding pink-white teeth. She rose on her knees, put her breasts an inch from his face and froze.

"Why didn't you space me?" she asked. The heat of her pussy reached his glans but didn't touch it.

Solomon realized he was panting and sweating like a pig. His dick was about to explode. She had him right where she'd wanted him all along. *Women.*

He clutched her waist with both hands, tried to force her down onto his cock but she wouldn't budge. Lean thighs worked hard, he could tell, but she never moved.

She tossed her chin up. "Why?"

"You're serving me my own sauce, right? But see, I don't care, stay there if you want. I'll just wait until you can't take it anymore. Then I'll take *you*."

Rolling her pelvis, the hot redhead pushed down against his cock, let it penetrate an inch or so but retreated when Solomon showed signs of pushing his hips upward.

"Nuh-uh. Answer first."

Because the couch was so deep and inclined, he couldn't get up or even roll her on her side and fuck her tight little pussy. And man was he dying to! An impotent snarl left him.

She came down on him again, thrust down hard and deep. She gasped, just as he did. But she was gone again. Damn!

"And? Why didn't you space me? You like me or something?" If her mouth was mocking, her eyes weren't.

He craned his neck to get at her breasts but she leaned back, took them out of his reach. Her hands behind his neck became talons she dug in his skin. The burn was nothing compared to the one in his balls. He was literally going to *e-splode*.

"Stop your games, Eva. I'm not laughing anymore."

"Neither am I."

Another torturous penetration, another goddamn retreat.

She abruptly sat on him, took his dick to the hilt. He snarled a curse, so did she.

"You couldn't space me because you feel something for me. Right?" she demanded, gyrating, rolling her delicious hips. "Right?"

"What do you care?"

Now riding him like a bucking Bronco, Eva bounced, twisted, recoiled and slammed down against his lap, her powerful vaginal muscles a fist around his cock, milking him, exigent and steadfast. She was going to be the end of him, that woman.

He squeezed his eyes shut. "Fuck, yeah, I couldn't space you. Happy now?"

She nodded. "No one can lie when they're coming. Isn't that right, Dex Solomon?"

*Well, fuck me.*

And that was when she really gave him an epic ride. Solomon had no idea a woman could take a man this way, ride him so violently, so forcefully. He let her work her magic, vowing that next time it'd be his turn.

*Next time? Christ, she's really got you now.*

"Eva, *Eva*," he growled, finally able to capture a nipple with his mouth and suck at it to his heart's content.

Her hips moving in ways he hadn't known possible, Eva spread her thighs even wider, left his nape so she could grip the backrest and unleashed herself on him, who took it all with a rumble of male satisfaction. The best lover. Hands down.

Solomon forgot her betrayal, he let go of his remorse over those shameful bruises and the problems stacked against them. But most importantly, he forgot to keep his guard up and let Eva in. For a while anyway. There'd be plenty of opportunity for distrust and uncertainty later on. There always was.

With a violence that cramped his lower back and thighs, his cum fired out of him in burning jets, this time with enough intensity to make him dizzy. Instead of continuing her feats of physical endurance, Eva slowed then stopped completely, even rested her head on his shoulder. His arms moved of their own accord and he held her in a fierce embrace as the remnants of the most powerful and mind-numbing orgasm ripped through his shaking frame. Because of the immobility, he was able to experience for the first time immeasurable sensations in his body but also in hers. A gradual relaxing of muscles, breathing slowing, deepening, an occasional muscle twitch of after-climax.

Solomon closed his eyes, unable to remember the last time he'd come twice in a row and do it so ferociously, only to enjoy the softest, calmest *awareness* imaginable the second after. Such a mind-blowing combination! He felt one with her. She fit him so completely, so perfectly.

In the strange UV light of the solar storm, Solomon caressed her lithe form with his gaze, followed the lean curves, the tight muscles, until he came to her hip. There, shining bright with the green of deceit and treachery, was a mark he'd seen several years before. On a dead guy—dead because of Solomon. Subcutaneous, the inch-wide tattoo-like circle was what the Iron Conclave put in their agents in case they were messed up enough no one could recognize them. ID and other stats were programmed into the gel then injected under the skin. They must have needed it to recognize the agent Solomon had caught messing with his informant.

He looked at it, this symbol of the barrier between Eva and him, and hated it. Not her though. Never her.

Their gazes met. He could tell by the look in her eyes—embarrassment, chagrin—that she knew he'd seen the mark. To show her, for some reason needing to, that he didn't care right now about the damn mark, he wrapped his arms around her again and pulled Eva close so he could gently kiss her throat.

"You know," she said after a long silence, "you never told me why you couldn't space me."

*Argh, Christ, women never give up, do they?*

"Nope, I haven't."

She arched an eyebrow, obviously waiting for the rest. Problem was...no "rest" came along with the first bit he'd blurted out like a fool instead of just giving her The Eye.

"Where are you from? Earth?"

He nodded. "You're not meeting my parents, if that's where you're going with this."

Why was he always such an asshole? Damn.

With a look of feigned indifference, which he could easily see through—he was getting good at seeing through her veneer—Eva shrugged. "I'm from Earth. Latvia, actually, but my parents moved to Moscow when I was little and opened a bed and breakfast there. That's where I got the accent."

Not that he'd notice the difference.

Solomon realized there were many things he hadn't noticed on her before, like that little mole near her jaw or the way her left eyebrow arched higher than the other. For some reason he'd rather not point his gun at right now, he felt guilty about it, berated himself about his lack of perspicacity. He should've paid closer attention to Little Red instead of enjoying mental fuckfests with her. Or the real thing. She was an iceberg with only a tiny point sticking out with the massive, silent rest just under the surface, and if he didn't take better care, she'd sink his ship.

"Do they know what their daughter is doing for a living?" He hated himself instantly for acting so damn bitchy.

"Of course not," she replied deadpan. "That would kill them. Literally."

To ease the tension, Solomon decided sharing a bit of intel wouldn't kill him. He hoped.

"I'm from up north, Alaska. Both my parents are drunks, my older sister raised me and did a pretty good job considering she was only three years older. I live alone, I watch sports on the digitex every chance I get, I drink a bit too much sometimes and act like an ass...what else?" He pursed his lips. "Oh yeah, I'll read anything that'll sit still long enough and I collect guns. Anything else?"

"Are any other family members lycanthropes?"

"No. Go figure. I guess it skips some and it tags some. I'm no scientist."

Eva was grinning wide. "So, why didn't you space me?"

*Argh.*

He closed his eyes and pulled her in so she'd rest her head on his shoulder again. Much better this way without all of that *sharing*. "There's a motto that says 'quit while you're ahead'. Know that one?" Solomon said through his teeth.

He felt her sigh.

## Chapter Eight

A weird sound woke Eva. She was instantly alert.

*ST-3 station. Cooper's quarters. Fell asleep on the couch...with Dex Solomon, lycanthrope, cranky jerk and lover extraordinaire. Oh gun collector and avid reader too.*

A life of checking her back paid off in this regard. She was a light sleeper. Not many could sneak up on her.

*But what's the damn noise?*

She raised her head to find him on his back, his mouth partly opened. His thick, hairy chest rose and fell with each thunderous snore.

"Well, talk about supercharged booster," she muttered, giving him an elbow in the ribs. She was practically falling off the couch for all the room he left her.

He cursed, opened his eyes to glower at the intruder who'd dared interrupt his sleep. When his gaze settled on her, the scowl smoothened. He muttered something that resembled "*What you hitting me for?*" But it could've been something else entirely. She wasn't even sure it was English.

She grabbed his wrist, checked his watch. "Whoa, it's almost seven o'clock. *Govno.*"

Eva had already crossed the room by the time Solomon looked at his watch and cringed. "Fuck."

While she had a shower, he stood in front of the mirror, checking his face and rubbing his stubbles. She could see him through the clear plastic pane and tried not to stare at his butt while he was leaning over the sink. Impossible.

"Is something dangling from it?" she heard his voice, muffled.

It was too good to last, this camaraderie, so Eva fought the grin and went for her usual Distant Bitch routine. "From what?"

"My ass," he replied, turning and coming over. "You've been staring at it nonstop." He stood by the stall and gripped the top so he could lean on it.

"So you're going to stare too?"

"Yeah."

She went on with her ablutions but kept an eye on him in case he decided he wanted more than just to watch. Not that she'd mind, but they had places to go. As in off this station before the Iron Conclave sent somebody else to get the clip or more aptly, blow the whole mess into a million bits.

Actually, it would've been her first instinct, to destroy the clip, not try to get it back. Although it made more sense to catch the thieves and force them to talk, to reveal possible accomplices or copies of the message instead of just blowing up the station—



deal with the news coverage—and possibly sever the intel chain. Never a good thing to do. With the chain intact, Iron Conclave might eventually get at the source behind the theft but should the chain be severed, they'd never know who did it.

*Inside man, no doubt about it.*

But who? There were tens of thousands of employees on GAN payroll. Although not that many with access to the chancellor's office.

Solomon was good the entire time she had her shower and when she stepped out, he passed her a towel. She couldn't help a small smile of gratitude.

*Don't let your guard down. Only pain there.*

Especially since she knew there was more hurt than anything else in falling for a man such as him.

"Does that mean we're buddies now?" she couldn't help asking.

Solomon stared. "No."

"Ah, good to know."

After she tried to do something with her hopelessly straight hair—at least there was a nice cut and color to it—Eva pumped a measure of toothpaste on her finger and rubbed it around her teeth. Better than nothing. Back into the common room, she rummaged around the closets and drawers, looking for clothes that would fit. She found a pair of dark blue workpants and a matching shirt that looked as though it'd hang half decently on her. She put them on, not bothering with underwear for the moment, and was clipping her still damp boots tightly when Solomon emerged from the bathroom. Sunlight hit his broad body in a most glorious way. The smell of minty toothpaste made her want to rub her cheek against his, kiss his lips.

Her body triggered the appropriate female response when faced with that sort of male specimen. An embarrassment of saliva and juices made her hot and twitchy. His wild dark blond hair was raked back over his skull, revealing a nicely formed forehead and silver temples.

So damn sexy.

"Something tells me Cooper wasn't a big guy," he commented as he went around the place also scrounging for clothes.

He found a gray T-shirt he had to wrestle on and a pair of tight cargo pants that did nothing to connect Eva's scattered wits. Boots and wide belt back on, he slipped his volters in their respective holsters, a knife she hadn't noticed before in his boot and looked around the room. He was squinting against the bright sunlight. "Anything to eat?"

She shook her head. Something was bothering her, tickled the back of her brain.

"Let's go find the galley then," he muttered.

Then it hit her.

"Solomon," she whispered, looking at the porthole. "The sun."

He followed her gaze, squinted then let out one long string of curses.

The storm had abated. The sun blazed in all its normal golden radiance. No more purple and blue flares.

Eva tried to swallow but failed and coughed instead. The *Octant* crew could be here any moment.

"Ordinarily, I enjoy a good fight. But this time, I just want to get the fuck away before the bad guys get here."

She agreed with a nod.

She followed him outside the cabin, feeling debilitated in her usually clear mind and prickly as she fought the rising lust knifing her gut. And the fear. Without the solar storm, Iron Conclave would be sending ships any time. What if they destroyed the station? What if Solomon died that very day?

Even if she'd be dying with him, the thought of Solomon losing his life this way made her gag. She was no longer hungry.

*What have I done?*

A faint odor of coffee greeted them as they barged into the galley. More like a large closet with sink and cabinets in her opinion. Cupcake was there, sitting alone at a table that looked ridiculously tiny compared to the giant of a man. He must have been what, six-six, six-seven? He nodded, brought his cup to his lips and took a delicate sip.

"Hell, man, the storm's tapered off. We need to get moving."

Cupcake nodded again, straightened in his chair.

"Any grub to be had?" Solomon asked, going for the cabinets and yanking open each in turn.

Cupcake shrugged. "Instameals."

"Ugh."

Eva noticed how Solomon made the motion of giving her a pouch first but seemed to rethink this and instead turned back and fumbled with the opening. After pulling the spoon out of the packet, he attacked whatever was inside. He didn't raise his eyes once.

She followed suit and used all her years of training to visualize real food as she wolfed down her breakfast. Soy-based paste could do only so much.

"Okay, time to rig that cruiser," announced Solomon.

"Liberty is already on it."

Solomon motioned for Eva to follow him outside. "I swear that woman never sleeps. Cupcake, you gather the nickel and make me a nice pile of it. I want to know how many assholes I can blow out of my way today. And I want some supplies, anything not bolted down you take. Got it? Report to the landing bay ASAP."

Cupcake nodded, drained his cup and stood slowly at first, seemed in pain then straightened. He didn't look as though it was in his nature to do anything "as soon as possible".

Despite their precarious situation or perhaps because of it, Eva still had visions of Solomon naked and making love to her when they joined Liberty in the landing bay. Blood still marred the deck where the thieves and Harris had been shot down. Dragana was there as well, a blowtorch in hand, making sure no outward sign of Global Alliance of Nations ownership remained on the hull. It wouldn't do to fly around in a clearly stolen GAN cruiser. She narrowed her eyes when the pair drew closer. Eva could swear her bruises were already fading. How fast could these guys heal anyway?

"How's the retrofit going?" Solomon asked.

Liberty stuck her head from underneath the school bus-sized craft and shook it. "Not that well, I'm afraid. The signal is holding but I can't reroute propulsion."

"We're running out of time. Fuck."

"Indeed."

Dragana straightened to her considerable height and toyed with the blowtorch in her gloved hand while her pale eyes went from Solomon to Eva then back again. "Nothing like a good lay, huh?"

"Damn right," Solomon snapped, shoving her aside and crouching so he could look at Liberty's work. "You should try it. Might do you some good."

She flushed and threw the tool on the ground. Eva tried to subdue the triumphant grin as the woman stormed away. Cow.

"Eva," Liberty said, extending her hand. "I need the long-nosed pliers and the smallest three-ended coupling you can find. Size eleven or twelve max."

While she crawled on her knees under the cruiser with the items in hand, Solomon stepped out of the way but remained close by and stared at Eva, a dark expression on his face.

She could feel the accusation burning in his stare and it hurt her to her soul.

*Why should it?*

*Then again, why shouldn't it?*

She'd let one in. She'd allowed someone inside the inner sanctum reserved for, well, no one, come to think of it. Ha. Never had she held affection for anyone. The loneliness of her life suddenly crushed Eva. If only things had turned out differently. If only she could've met Solomon earlier, under different circumstances.

She looked back at him, this strange man, and wondered what the hell was wrong with her! He was barely domesticated, for goodness sake! Bold facial traits, as though someone had blasted his features with explosives. He had none of the smoothness and sophistication she'd so far gone for in men or their attractiveness and charisma. Dex Solomon was all rough surfaces and gruffness. None of her ex-lovers compared to him. They might have been different species. Especially in bed.

He looked so uncomfortable in his too-tight T-shirt, but she thought the thing couldn't have fitted better. He pulled at the collar, snarled something then slipped his thumb in his belt. With the wide brown leather belt and extra-tight gray top, he looked

like the yummy, seriously sexy man he was. No more felt greatcoat to hide all that scrumptious maleness. Eva sighed. She herself didn't look so great in the scrounged clothes. If they were too tight for Solomon, they were much too large for her, but beggars couldn't be choosers. That they'd scrounged around some dead person's closets for clothes should've bothered her more than it did. Maybe she should attend the GAN ethics seminar again.

After they'd moved their operations inside the cruiser, Liberty passed her the riveter. Eva noticed the blind woman had ingeniously arranged her tools and other components in neat rows at her feet, obviously so she'd be able to tell them apart and find what she needed.

"Here," Liberty said. "Try to ignore the gorilla at the door and rivet the electric panel relay to the deck there." She patted a spot by the bench on the left side of the cruiser's interior.

*Gorilla?*

Eva grinned.

"I'll go check on Cupcake, see where he's at for the ammo," Solomon announced before turning back. Eva craned her neck to admire his butt. "If she gives you trouble, Liberty, just shoot her."

Solomon was still sniggering when he left the landing bay, his wide back disappearing around the corner. Eva wanted to kick his butt but thought better of it. They'd come to a fragile, uncertain truce that morning and she wasn't about to blow it by sinking to his brand of humor. But he sure could get her heart pumping fast. Not just in anger either.

*What a lover.*

"He likes you," Liberty remarked, smiling wide. Then her grin crystallized, her eyes narrowed dangerously. Eva was afraid the woman would pull a volter out and melt her head. Blind or not, Eva was sure the cunning woman would manage to get a good shot. "And if you *ever* hurt him again, I'll kill you. Are we clear?"

"We are. And I'll try to stay away from Cupcake as well, just in case."

A tic pulled at the blind woman's eyelid. "Oh?"

Eva tut-tutted. "Give me some credit here. I *am* trained to spot these things."

The other woman shrugged noncommittally. "I guess you would be."

"Not that he's a bad-looking man but I would've thought...well..."

Liberty looked up a bit too high to "meet" Eva's gaze. "What? That I'd be more interested in a man of my social class?"

"Yes."

The woman laughed. "Solomon is wrong, you can be honest. Brutally so." She rolled the wire between her fingers. "I've never seen him properly, even with the implant, everything was in pixels. But what I did see was pleasing enough. And he always smells nice."

"Cupcake smells nice?" Eva cocked her head. "I guess I've never noticed."

"People don't notice much about him. Too bad for them."

"I wouldn't have guessed from..." Eva wasn't sure Liberty knew about Cupcake's shady past and suddenly felt bad for the woman. She didn't want to destroy her image of the guy.

"From?"

"Such a big manly man, you know. And your family, what do they think of your *employment*? Do they know?"

Liberty arched an eyebrow. "They have their affairs and I have mine. Is it Eva asking or Agent Eva?"

"Just Eva."

"Well, 'just Eva', I was born blind and spent many a year miserable about it. But money talks, they say, and mine said that I wasn't going to take it anymore. So my family found someone willing to implant me with a microchip. Yes, it's illegal, but until the solar storm, it worked perfectly. So in exchange for a small fortune and a large contribution to a political party, I got the gift of sight. And independence."

Eva shook her head. "How ever did you end up with Solomon?" She just couldn't see them frequenting the same places.

Liberty grinned wide. "He was a dog trainer for the military, did he tell you that? Just by looking at the way the dogs behaved around him, I knew what he was. A lycan, just like me. We became friends right away."

A dog trainer? Eva didn't know if she should laugh or...she didn't know what to do with that bit of intel. It sure hadn't been in the background report she'd consulted. She wondered what else the Iron Conclave had missed.

"Yeah, but that's a big stretch, from dog trainer to..."

"Killer?" Liberty put in with a knowing wink. It felt strange to get a wink from a blind person, especially when it was aimed a bit too much to the right. "He worked for the military as a civilian contractor. It's easy to see the transition."

Eva agreed with that. She still couldn't see Tough Man Solomon saying, "*Nice doggie, sit. Sit.*"

They shared a relaxed silence while Eva replayed the sentence in her head. "*He likes you.*"

The three words had the effect of a knife in the chest. Did he? She doubted it. But Liberty had been his friend for a long time, according to the files she'd read and their conversation, so she would know. Wouldn't she?

Feeling simultaneously elated and miserable, Eva riveted the relay to the deck by the seat so Liberty—or whoever would pilot the thing—could do it while safely strapped in.

Turning back to the bunch of wires coiled at her feet, Liberty palmed around for a pair she'd isolated from the rest, fingered the coupling Eva had given her earlier and

soon had a relatively organized array of electrical components set in front of her like offerings to a goddess.

"We'll have to run some tests to see if it'll work," she said. "Can you turn the power back on?"

Eva was about to open the instrument panel near the tail hatch when Solomon, Dragana and Cupcake came running inside the landing bay. They carried weapons enough for a small army. The woman seemed to limp slightly. Eva couldn't help but feel badly that Dragana was wounded because she'd tried to protect her. Both Cupcake and she had taken some punishment for trying to subdue Solomon. And even if Dragana could be quite the B-Queen, Eva had to remind herself the twin had lost her other half in the cruelest way possible. Ivan had basically died in his sister's arms. Eva didn't think she'd ever forget his big, bright smile. So infectious.

Solomon managed to run with about eight volters strapped to his waist and a large carrying case under an arm. "Christ! Liberty! Haven't you turned the comms back on inside the cruiser?"

Eva flicked the master switch. After an initial jumble of static that tickled her memory, an artificial voice came on and kept repeating the same sentence over and over, the monotone timber similar to the buzz of an insect.

And underneath the main message, playing like a backbeat, was something for her ears only. A coded transmission, the static a telltale sign. But it was the fore line of transmission that sent her heart racing.

Liberty hissed a curse. Everyone froze to listen to the robot's ghostly voice filling the cruiser's cabin. A single sentence. Over and over.

"Station ST-3, respond or prepare to be boarded."

"Motherfucking great!" Solomon snarled.

He pushed his way past a startled Eva, leaned over the tiny view screen at the front of the cruiser—barely enough for a few hundred miles of gray-on-gray view—and manually clicked over to the right until he spotted what he was looking for. It was even worse than he'd feared.

"Four, Christ."

He turned to his team, each wearing their own personal version of shock, and punched the bulkhead. "The GAN *Octant*, plus three other ships, all Leviathan class from what I could tell. We need to get off this station yesterday."

Liberty let her hand slide along the bulkhead as she drew near. "We'll need to run tests, Solomon, we can't sit in this thing and just go."

"No time for tests." He unloaded some of the volters into the cargo niches under the seats and straightened. "We're leaving now."

Even Dragana was shaking her head. "Won't we make a nice shooting star when we hit FTL...if they let us get there."

Eva's eyes flared. She stepped forward, seemed to rethink her decision and slunk back toward the hatch where she stood in tensed silence.

"Something to share?" he asked, staring at her.

She shrugged. "I think we'll need a diversion."

Liberty grabbed his arm. "Great idea. Something big and showy to occupy them while we try not to get fried. It's our only chance."

Solomon humphed as he slipped his thumb in his belt. Why did the notion of relying on Little Red bother him so much? "What do you have in mind?"

Eva pointed at Dragana's webbed belt where hung a nice array of stun grenades and one particular little item that Solomon instantly knew to be the spy's idea of a diversion.

"You mean to blow the station up?"

She nodded. "Timed just right, it'd give us some time to get enough distance. The cruiser is small enough to avoid detection, especially now that Liberty's rigged it. They won't see such a small thing on their screen." She was pointing at their getaway craft.

*So my life depends on "a small thing"*. Why couldn't he shoot his way out of this one? It'd be so much simpler.

"I'll do it."

Eva shook her head. "I'll do it. It's mine and it's coded."

"Coded?! Why didn't you... Argh, Christ, all right. Not as though we have a choice, do we." He indicated Dragana should hand over the deceptively small bomb to Eva, who pocketed it after his marksman proffered it, a scowl on her face.

While the team prepared for the undoubtedly bumpy—potentially deadly—ride, Solomon walked Eva to the large double doors.

"Plant it then get the fuck back here. In..." he checked his watch, cursed when he remembered hers was still somewhere in the sickbay with the rest of the stuff they'd confiscated. "Here, take mine." He gave her his watch, which she strapped to her forearm. It was much too big for her slender wrist. "Set it for twenty minutes. In ten, if you're not back, I'm coming after you. And I better not find you messing around or trying to contact your bosses. Is that clear?"

Her chemically altered eyes narrowed. Those candy-sweet shiny lips of hers pursed. The she-devil was making another appearance. "Still don't trust me, do you?"

"For this once, yeah, I do. So don't make me regret it. Now go."

Displaying incredible agility and speed, she took off running down the corridor, in her hand his team's and his own salvation. And a piece of his trust.

He rushed back to the cruiser. "What time is it on your watch?"

Cupcake said, "Eleven-oh-five," without any trace of emotion on his wide face. What was the guy made of? With his past—he didn't think Cupcake knew that his past had followed him to Solomon once...and been neatly dispatched—there was little

surprise in this. He'd done this sort of thing before. Solomon too, only usually he could at least shoot something. Not this time. He'd get to sit and wait. Great. Just his style.

While they secured any loose bits inside the cruiser with Liberty keeping a hand on the "control panel" she'd fashioned with cannibalized parts from various places in the station—hell, he could recognize a personal digitex in the convoluted mess of metal, wires and polymer couplings—minutes crept by. He kept looking for his watch, only to snarl each time as he remembered he'd given it to Eva.

He patted his belt where he'd put the one thing Earth was so desperate to get. At least they'd found the data clip. Well, Palmer had anyway. Then he'd slipped it on Eva so Solomon, like the jackass he could sometimes be, would blame her while Palmer did his thing. Only Eva had been even more cunning. Solomon ground his teeth. The sly little thing would have access to everything she needed to contact her bosses now. Any digitex would do at this range. Twenty minutes was all the time in the world to betray him. Again.

What if she did? What if she were going to backstab him? Wouldn't that make him quite the fool, to be boned twice by the same woman! *Yep. Dex Solomon has become a fool.*

"What's the time?" he snarled to Cupcake.

"Eleven-twelve."

Fuck, only three minutes left.

*I swear, if she's messing with me, I'll strap her skinny ass to the prow.*

A deep whirr indicated Liberty had disengaged the lock and powered up the cruiser's systems. Ventilation came whirring back online, lights and sounds alerted him the little craft was coming to life. The plated deck vibrated under his feet.

He turned toward Cupcake, who without a word showed him his watch.

"Two minutes...the little shit did it again." Solomon kicked at the plated ramp, which Liberty had lifted halfway so it'd be faster once they were ready to lift off.

"Want me to go get her?" Dragana offered, a grenade launcher and her Peanut safely tucked between her ankles.

"We need her, woman!"

*More like I need her.*

With a curse, he jumped off the ramp, started running toward the passageway Eva had disappeared into.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eva felt as though her lungs had suddenly lost half their capacity. She panted hard as she turned the corner and barged into the control room. She had to find a working digitex. That sub-message was for her.

One of the consoles gently purred so she leaned over it, rolled the cursor over to the comms symbol and activated a signal. Only one burst. Right away, the GAN ships'



message played in a continuous loop. She isolated the fore line, deleted it then played the rest. What sounded like static to the team.

*"Secure target. Disable electrical grid. Wait further orders."*

She let air out through pursed lips. She could still get out of the mess she'd created, could still fulfill her mission. Solomon had the data clip. It'd only be a matter of sending one well-placed stunner shot—GAN security forces' service weapon anyway—and he'd go down without too much damage. Except for his inflated, macho ego. She'd play the oblivious chick, hoping it'd work.

Her hand hovered uncertainly near the roller. She pulled it away, placed her palm over it, moved the cursor a few inches toward the rectangle at the bottom left where the small caption "Systems" glowed acid green. A couple of clicks would end it all. She took her hand from it again.

He'd trusted her, sent her back to plant a bomb that would destroy the station so his team—and her along with it—could have a chance to escape GAN's long arm. Solomon had even given her his watch! Eva rubbed a thumb over it, remembering how his dark blond hair had provided a bed for the thick silver and black affair.

On the one hand, she was still a member of the Iron Conclave, still an undercover agent, the best. She had a mission to finish, a government to protect. What sort of chaos and civil rift would news of Vonatos' deed trigger? Civil war? Mass exodus to the independent colonies, which would cause market crashes on all continents? What price did her budding conscience have? What did it make of her that she'd work for someone like Vonatos, an assassin who'd done away with the charismatic N'Namdi?

On the other hand, Solomon may be an uncultivated, pig-headed lycanthrope but at least he was an honest one, which was more than could be said for her boss or herself. And there was the growing sense of attachment she had for him, even the others.

Eva sighed as she wrapped her hand around the roller below the screen and clicked on the comms once. GAN would know right away their coded message had been received and read.

No turning back now.

She'd basically just told them all she'd read the message and taken action. The bomb in her hand suddenly felt heavy and cold. She looked down at it, resting in her hand, so shiny, so deceptively small.

A quick peek at Solomon's watch made Eva squeeze her eyes shut. Her time was up. She had to act now.

*"I hope I won't live too long to regret this."*

Because she'd used her digitex containing Vonatos' personal line to power the phantom signal Liberty had created, now she wouldn't be able to prove he was behind her mission. Either way, she was betraying someone who counted on her. And for the first time in her life, the deed hurt.

For with the kind of betrayal she'd just carried out, it'd be hard to look at herself in the mirror.

## Chapter Nine

Solomon cursed at his own stupidity. For someone who wouldn't even trust his own mother—especially not his own mother—he was showing an incredible capacity for the ridiculous when it came to Eva the Sexy Spy. And she'd made off with his watch too!

Why had he trusted her? There'd been that look in her eyes and he'd fallen for it. A ton of dumb, brainless bricks. Wasn't he an idiot now, stuck in the landing bay with a GAN spy about to do who knew what to the station, probably lock them all in until her bosses showed up. He'd go down, no doubt about that, but he'd go down with style, Christ. And in a hail of nickel!

"That little —"

The little yet-to-be-renamed Eva burst out from around the corner, made a straight line for the cruiser.

"It's set for eleven thirty-five!" she yelled as she rushed across the reinforced concrete deck. Her hair appeared on fire, all fiery red and sticking out in places while the longer strands flew back behind her.

Solomon couldn't remember anything that made him feel more like pumping his fist in the air. Hot damn, she'd come back!

She ran past Solomon, avoided his gaze when he meant to intercept her. He spun on his heels and rushed back for the cruiser. A rumbling emanated from it. Reddish shadows inside the three boosters indicated they were on, heating up, ready to blast them off this goddamn hunk of metal. As he watched Eva leap the four feet up to the ramp, all grace and nimbleness, Solomon wondered if there was anything sexier than the she-devil in her too-big clothes. She'd done it! She'd actually planted the bomb. Only there was something in the way she avoided his gaze that left an ashy taste in his mouth.

His heart sank to his heels. Was there a price tag attached to that little reprieve she'd given them? But he'd dig around that scab later, when he didn't have a bomb ticking away seconds of his life.

With much less elegance, Solomon jumped onto the ramp, rushed up to the cabin and strapped himself inside his seat. Liberty had already closed the tail hatch by the time he leaned back against the bulkhead and waited for liftoff.

"Get ready for a rough ride," their "pilot" commented, her usually smooth voice tight.

She palmed the seat beside her for a while, found the relay she must have been looking for and after some fiddling, flicked a tiny switch. The cruiser quivered when all three boosters roared to life. Solomon expected movement. Nothing.

"Something's wrong?"

Liberty did that thing again, the pondering pose. Oh fuck.

"The mooring clamps won't release the skids."

Eva leaned over since she was closest to the lone porthole and craned her neck. "The doors are still closed."

Liberty arched an eyebrow. "They are?"

"What the fuck's wrong?!"

"I can't open the doors, something must be wrong with my top-of-the-line nav console," she snapped, lifting the clump of wires from her lap. "So that means the firewall inside the bay's systems won't allow the clamps to release the skids. We're not going anywhere, I'm afraid."

Eva sat back. "Maybe there's something wrong with the grid." She scowled. "Can't we open the doors manually?"

"Would you like to volunteer?" Dragana asked. "Peanut and I will even help you off the cruiser, how's that?"

"I meant with a *suit*."

Solomon wanted to give each one a kick in the ass. And he was enjoying a sudden vision of just that when a thought came to him. *If the front door won't open, then make one in the wall.*

"I have a way."

Eva could only look at him for a full three seconds of stunned silence after he'd announced his big plan for escape.

"The chute? Are you completely brain-dead?" Eva cried, forgetting just whom she was talking to.

"Solomon..." Liberty started, shook her head. "It's impossible."

"Why? All we need to do is bypass the safety then the chute will just hang wide open."

He meant to use the chute under their cruiser, the one he'd bitched about when they'd landed, complaining about GAN *Octant* crew's lack of piloting skills. And now he wanted to use it for their escape route? A *garbage chute*?!

"Yes, but so will everything else! They'll know something is up when the power surge pings on their screen," Eva replied, fiddling with her five-point harness so she could get up.

"You," he pointed at her, his cleft chin set forward. "Sit."

Eva wasn't sure if she should sit quietly or kick his ass for his trouble. She chose the safest course for the moment and leaned back in her seat. Dragana smiled wide. Cow.

"She's right. We can't open the bay from inside the cruiser, I haven't rerouted *every* last system to this thing." Liberty pointed to her impromptu console pooled at her feet.

"As soon as the doors open, you'll be sucked out with everything else that's loose," Eva commented, still mentally killing Dragana-the-bitch. "You wouldn't make it back in time."

She tried to modulate her voice to hide the horror of Solomon twirling out and into the black void of space. She shivered.

"I won't be going very far," he replied, unbuckling the harness. "When I tell you to, Liberty, pilot the cruiser about five feet forward so we're directly over the opening then let gravity do her thing. Now open the hatch."

Solomon's grin wasn't friendly when he stood, snatched the grenade launcher from between Dragana's feet and marched to the hatch.

*What was he...?*

The ramp lowered in front of him. He took a few steps, raised the launcher high, widened his stance—Eva thought she was going to start drooling from the vision of his glorious butt and legs, so tight in his too-small clothes.

With a dull thud, Solomon fired a grenade. The recoil tightened his back and thigh muscles yet he didn't move an inch when Eva knew for a fact that particular model packed quite a punch. Neither did he take cover when the projectile exploded across the landing bay. Then he fired again.

"Govno!" Eva yelled when the cruiser shook with the thunderous blasts the grenades caused.

Cupcake checked his watch. "Remember the bomb, everyone? We have eight minutes."

*Oh great timekeeping.* As if they needed to be reminded.

Solomon fired yet another grenade, this time aiming it high.

Eva flinched when a series of electrical explosions announced he'd hit his mark. A loud grating noise was heard then an angry whistling as air hissed out of the landing bay. There'd be no oxygen left in a matter of seconds.

"Go!"

At once, Solomon threw the launcher over the edge, rushed back to his seat. Liberty closed the hatch, reestablished pressure, which made Eva's ears pop painfully, and she braced her feet.

"Here we go!" she said through her teeth.

With a quiver, the cruiser lifted off, thudded back down against the concrete. So the clamps had let go. All Liberty had to do now was try to drag the cruiser fully over the opening and let them fall into it.

*So easy, right?*

Eva widened her legs, planted her feet firmly as the cruiser tilted forward and to the left before leveling. One of the three skids must have scraped against the ground for an awful noise accompanied their slow progress.

“Raise us higher!” Dragana snarled.

Liberty didn’t seem to hear or care as she fingered, pinched and flicked the mass of couplings and scavenged digitex parts. Behind the blue goggles, her eyes were closed. Across the narrow central aisle, Cupcake had his big foot securely over the electric panel Eva had welded to the deck just as Liberty had told him to. His bandaged knee stuck out of the torn pants.

The heels of her boots in the pitted plating, Eva fisted her harness and squeezed her eyes shut as a godawful metal-against-concrete grating sound filled the cabin, made the hair on her nape stand on end, her teeth rattle. She swallowed hard.

Like a teeter-totter, the cruiser tilted farther, straightened.

“It’s not workiiiiing,” snarled Dragana. She had her eyes squeezed shut.

Liberty plastered herself back against her seat. “Hold on to something!”

The cruiser tipped again.

Only this time it didn’t swing back the other way.

Something below their feet slid and banged about in the hold. A slight forward momentum forced Eva to grit her teeth hard enough to cause damage. They were tipping over the edge of the chute.

*Oh boy...oh boy...OH BOY!*

Freefall.

With the first knock, tactical amber light came on, flickered then died out, plunging them into complete darkness as they careened and banged down the chute like a rock thrown into a pipe. A series of violent hits resonated inside the cruiser. Eva swore they were going to crash one too many times and either gouge the exterior plating bad enough to compromise their environment or hit hard and reduce them all to pulp. As though she sat in an amusement ride gone wrong, she closed her eyes and waited for the inevitable fiery end.

Which never came.

After the violence of the rebounding and knocking, the sudden silence and immobility pressed in all around her. She opened her eyes to see by the too-small porthole.

“We made it,” she murmured, shaking her head in disbelief.

There above their heads, spinning gracefully—or more aptly it was they who were spinning—was the mammoth ST-3, its dark outer plating reflecting the blazing sunlight. And right next to it, their weapon bays wide open, were four GAN Leviathan-class ships.

"What are the ships doing? Can you see them?" Solomon asked, his harness in block-like fists.

"They're just holding position."

Dragana snorted in derision. "Chicken shits."

Lights came back on inside the cruiser to a collective sigh of relief.

"Three minutes," Cupcake announced.

Everyone looked at him.

The mass of wires tucked between her feet, Liberty fiddled around then pursed her lips when it appeared as though she'd found what she was looking for. "I'll punch in Antioch's coordinates in case I pass out or something happens to me."

By her side, Cupcake scowled.

Solomon cracked his neck loudly. "Can you take us close to Antioch?"

"Right into their airspace."

"Good woman."

A bright flash of light caught Eva's attention. She twisted her torso out of the harness so she could have a better look out the porthole.

"One of the ships is turning..." her voice trailed off.

Shit.

Her thighs burned from the strain of keeping herself halfway up. "It's coming for us."

Liberty shook her head. "A coincidence. I haven't fired anything yet, there's no heat signature, nothing to trace us with. Is the tactical amber light on?"

"No, just the regular kind," Solomon replied.

"Kill it. Now. Maybe they're tracking us via thermal imaging but I doubt it."

After a nod from Solomon, Dragana stretched a long arm out, flipped the main electrical panel opened then switched off the lights. Gloom spilled into the small cruiser.

Eva kept her vigil at the porthole. The ship kept powering toward them, a great whale closing in on a goldfish.

"It's still coming at us. Shit."

"How the motherfucking hell did they know we're here?"

Solomon's accusing glare in the semi-darkness answered his own question. Eva tried to ignore it but the burn wouldn't go away. Not this time.

"Where are they now?" Liberty asked, for the first time showing apprehension. "We can't reach FTL if I'm aiming at a Leviathan."

But Eva could no longer see the ship as the cruiser continued its lazy spin.

She hurriedly unclipped her harness and stood so she could press her face against the Thermopane and hopefully get a better look.

"Christ, woman, would you sit your ass back down!" Solomon snarled.

She ignored him as she anxiously waited until the too-slow revolution would give her a view of the GAN ship once more. Then her tiny porthole filled with plating and rivets.

"Oh... They're right..."

"Fuck. You brought them right to us!"

Liberty cursed. "Stop it and shut the hell up!"

Amidst Solomon's barked orders to "sit her ass the fuck down" and Liberty's warning that she was firing the FTL boosters, all Eva could do was gaze at the vast ship go by her porthole, watch helplessly the rivets and scratches and antennas. Yet her main concern was Solomon's gut reaction to her words. He'd accused her right away.

And, *govno*, did it ever hurt.

She *hadn't* betrayed them, betrayed him. She could've sent a coded message back to the GAN *Octant*, could've powered down the entire grid. And it would've been so easy. A couple of clicks of the roller and that would've been the end of Solomon and his team. Yet she'd chosen to ignore the message, knowing the consequences and accepting them. For Eva Grigorevna Serova was now a fugitive, a traitor and a wanted woman. Her face would be on every government agent's digitex, on each of Earth's spaceports and its closest colonies.

But none of it counted if he didn't trust her. Nothing *mattered* if Dex Solomon thought she was a liar and a cheat.

Dragana then joined Solomon and yelled at her to strap herself in while Liberty announced there was no choice but to fire the boosters now.

She'd be propelled against the back of the cruiser, hit the bulkhead with enough force to kill her instantly. Pulverize her more appropriately. A quick death. She'd always hoped for one. Yet it wouldn't really be painless. Not with the raw agony of losing his trust. Of losing him.

Eva turned back. Her gaze settled on Solomon's. She saw his mouth moving and knew he was telling, threatening, *begging*, her to sit. He was such a handsome, albeit coarse man. Too bad the circumstances didn't allow for more than what they'd had.

Eva smiled.

"Forty-five seconds," calmly remarked Cupcake.

*What the fuck is she doing?*

Eva stood by the porthole, one hand against the bulkhead, her eyes blood red in the amber light. A half smile pulled her lips.

Then he knew.



Solomon yelled incoherently when the cruiser gave a tremendous lurch forward that plastered him against the harness. His vision doubled, his ears popped. But through the violence of the FTL transition, all he could see was her.

That fiery hair whipping back from her face, her limbs suddenly like flags, her body a projectile.

Through strength born of pure fear—fear he'd lose the single most important thing in his life—he strained against the harness, extended his arms and legs as far as they'd go so he could catch the untethered Eva when she flew past him. Because she was so slender and wore loose-fitting clothes, Solomon was able to grab desperate fistfuls and yank her to him. Blinding stabs of pain raced up his right arm. Yet he didn't let go.

Cupcake grimaced as he checked his watch. "Three...two...one...boom."

The man's tenor voice barely registered in Solomon's mind. Eva's arms hanging loose on either side, he cradled her to his chest while the cruiser reached FTL then began to rattle, each individual plate seemingly about to pop out and vomit their shredded carcasses out into space. And while he held on to her, Solomon couldn't ignore the implications of what he'd done.

For several minutes, brutal twists and turns and spins plastered them against their seats, forced groans out of their tightened throats, made their eyes sting with sweat and tears. Illumination from the hyperspace conduit stabbed into the cruiser like a multi-colored searching light. Then as suddenly as it'd begun, it stopped.

Subtle signs told him they were crabbing to the right. Not much Liberty could do about that. She'd already rigged a cruiser for FTL. The woman had done enough for today.

"Eva's hurt," he said through a tight throat. No one met his gaze.

Solomon cupped Eva's chin and turned her face so he could check the damages. He'd never heard of anyone going through FTL transition without the safety of an anchoring niche.

Blood trickled down her chin. The sight of it nearly made him change. His jaws began to ache, his teeth to feel loose. Solomon fought against the change clawing at him. *Deep breaths*, he kept chanting mentally, all the while keeping an eye for the faint vein pulsing at her neck. She was alive. For now.

"Someone will have to be my eyes if we're to reach Antioch in one piece," Liberty said, her voice hoarse, her eyes squeezed shut.

Across from her, Cupcake was on his feet looking out the porthole and down at the incoming station before her request had even registered in Solomon's dazed brain.

True to her words, Liberty had delivered them right into Antioch's airspace proper. Its beacon light flashed in the porthole as the blind woman, Cupcake as her navigator, maneuvered their cruiser toward the largest human colony outside Earth.

"We need to go faster, Christ," he growled. After he unclipped his harness, he gathered Eva's limp body to him and folded her arms over her chest. She looked so pale.

"Any faster and we'll draw attention," Liberty replied. Reaching blindly toward him, she found his knee and patted it. "She'll be fine. She's a tough woman."

As if her words had triggered a response from the woman in question, Eva stirred against his chest then opened her eyes. The look on her!

"What am I doing here?" She straightened, pulled her sleeve up.

"We'll have a little talk, you and I," Solomon replied, half angry at her little stunt, half wanting to hug her until she turned blue. Relief this intense, he hadn't thought possible.

*Christ, the little she-devil really will be the end of me.*

"How do you feel?"

She shrugged. "I'm not sure yet. Ask me again later."

Solomon knew then she'd be fine.

To him, Antioch resembled more a cluster of spherical habitats around a thick core than a normal space station. He'd been to numerous stations, to Thebes and its cylindrical marvel, all Thermopane and polyceramic. A beauty. To Byzantium, the smooth, bullet-shaped, silvery station a marvel of engineering...and then there was Antioch, which was ugly by anyone's standards. But because it had voted itself out of Earth's dominion, it was a popular spot for all kinds of interesting characters.

*Like us.*

After requesting landing protocols, they waited for clearance to dock. Within minutes they'd settled along one of the farthest mooring stations, well away from the dock master and any security station. Antioch might have been independent and far from GAN's reach, but it was still a human community with desperate people looking for a few extra credits.

Liberty lowered the ramp so they could disembark.

"Weapons," Cupcake indicated his own, which he removed and tucked under his seat. He scratched his notched ear.

"Christ."

Solomon had forgotten Antioch's no weapons law, which was one of the most enforced laws on the station. There was no way toward trouble quicker than carrying a piece on Antioch. Keeping the knife safely hidden in his boot, Solomon relinquished the small armory he had strapped to his waist.

Eva put her hand on his arm and stood. "We'll have to be subtle, right?"

"You mean sneaky?"

She seemed about to retort but shook her head, dabbed at her mouth with the cuff of her sleeve and walked unsteadily past.

"Smooth, Solomon, very smooth," Liberty muttered as she passed him as well.

*Argh, Christ, just what I need...a women's league.*

The group left the cruiser with Liberty having locked it with a magnetic bolt she'd brought with her and walked the crowded concrete dock up to the first intersection. The mass of human bodies pressed in on him. Solomon took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He was already itching to break heads. Damn he wanted a drink.

"Let's get some grub," he announced, marching in front so he could part the crowd for the blind Liberty, although she'd grabbed Cupcake's belt and kept close to him, and for Eva. She still looked dazed and shaky and as much as he tried to ignore it—or at least not let it show—he was still worried for the tough little spy.

*But that didn't stop you from throwing one more dart at her?* Liberty was right, not very smooth at all. Gorilla, she'd called him.

They trooped into a narrow pub, the decrepit décor a sign authority didn't make many appearances down there. Solomon spotted the appropriate number of seats by the counter along the wall and claimed them. While Cupcake gently but firmly pushed a pair of startled patrons aside so he could place an order at the bar, the rest sat. He came back carrying a large bottle and plastic tumblers.

"That's all they had," he said, sitting down. Despite the cacophony of voices and noise, Solomon swore he heard the stool creaking in protest.

He poured a measure of the liquid into each glass, his hands the size and color of hams.

After a sip, which nearly made him lose his instameal, Solomon coughed. He had no idea beer could be that bad. Like room-temperature piss. Probably was. But that was all they could expect from a place like this, a place that only accepted untraceable cash-credits for payment instead of the conveniently traceable ID chips.

"Thanks for the rigging job," Solomon said, raising his tumbler in Liberty's direction. He didn't take a sip to conclude the toast. Already what little he'd drunk was churning in his gut. Cupcake didn't seem to mind the awful taste and drained his tumbler. But then again, the guy was probably made of tungsten alloy. Solomon should check for a pulse sometime, might be surprising.

"What now?" Eva asked. She hadn't touched hers. Smart woman.

Solomon didn't like how she kept looking back and around. "What's bugging you? No one knows we're here yet...do they?"

He hated himself for the look of pain that flashed in her eyes. But what was he supposed to do, let her stick a blade in his back again? Yeah, he liked her. Sure. What man wouldn't? It didn't mean he was willing to hand her his balls. Some things couldn't be fixed. Broken trust was one.

Eva's eyes flared. She stood. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Liberty, go with her."

"No," the redhead replied quickly. Too quickly. Then shrugged. "I can go to the toilet alone, you know."

"I'm sure you can but I'd feel better knowing someone's there to keep an eye on you. Liberty."

He didn't realize the hurtful pun until Cupcake threw him a menacing glare. *Keep an "eye"...* And Liberty, totally blind now without the functioning implant.

Shit, his brain was melting out of his skull whenever Eva was near. He'd have to do something about that.

*How about a quick lay?* Solomon shook his head at the moronic thought. She probably wanted to kick his ass right now, not suck his dick. But the image of their last go made him sigh. Last and final go, no doubt.

Liberty stood and the expression on her face told him he'd have to be extra nice to his tech genius afterward. He hadn't seen that eyebrow arched so high on her smooth dark brow in years. Man, he was in shit now. With both women probably. Maybe he should date Dragana...at least *she* was uncomplicated. Loudly so.

The pair left with the blind woman fisting the back of Eva's shirt to navigate the crowd. Their food arrived and he ate some of it, trying to ignore the knot in his gut. After a while—he still hadn't reclaimed his watch—Solomon turned to Cupcake, who showed him his own watch.

*Talk about foresight.*

"Where the hell are they?"

He looked around the crowded place. Amidst the many heads, he spotted Liberty's. She was alone. And she looked upset. "Shit."

After spinning on his stool remarkably fast for a man his size, Cupcake was instantly on his feet, pushing his way toward the tall woman, Solomon and Dragana on his heels.

"She's gone," Liberty said as soon as Cupcake wrapped his bear paw of a hand on her shoulder.

"I knew it, the motherfu—"

"Would you stop!" Liberty yelled, blindly punching in his direction and managing to catch him on the shoulder. "She's gone because they took her away."

*They took her away.*

The words could've been stones added one by one on his bent back. They *took* her away. She didn't leave of her own choice. Someone forced her to.

"The motherfuckers won't know what hit them!" Solomon snarled as he made for the back of the room.

"She's *gone*, Solomon. I barely managed to sneak back when she spotted one of them."

Solomon felt a strange kind of calm envelop him. He approached his old friend, put his face close so she'd hear him clearly. "One of them *who*?"

"No, no, you have to know something first. She told me the GAN *Octant* had sent a signal to the station before we left and that she'd read but deleted it afterward. So they know, Solomon, they *know*."

"Yeah they do, we blew up the goddamn station. Of course they know we left—"

"You don't understand." Liberty took a deep breath as though trying to calm herself. He'd never seen her looking so disturbed. "She *deleted* the message but didn't take action."

"They know she changed sides," Cupcake remarked with a nod. Dragana whistled in open astonishment.

Changed sides?

Then he understood.

The Iron Conclave had made contact with her on the waste disposal station, right before they'd left. Probably while she was planting the bomb. She'd read their message, coded undoubtedly, and ignored whatever they were asking her to do. Of course they'd know their agent had changed sides. Only *she* could have known there was a message there in the first place. Only *she* would've been able to decipher it then reply. Or not.

So Eva was now a traitor. And high treason was punishable by death.

To his undying shame, a tiny, little, insidious thought—a hope—crept to the fore. Had she done it for *him*?

"Where did they go?" He reached for his holsters, cursed when his hand met nothing but leather belt. Stupid, moronic, brain-dead law that...ARGH!

"Before she pushed me back into the crowd, she said they were like her, agents, because of the way they moved. Then I heard a man asking—Eva, I'm assuming—to not make a scene and follow them. She must have because I didn't hear her voice again. Then one said to get the ship ready." Her chin trembled.

"Give me the code to the bolt. I'm going after them."

Liberty shook her head. "I'm going too."

"No, but we'll talk about this later. Let's just get the fuck out of here before I tear the place apart."

Even Dragana paled when she stared at him. "It's too crowded, Solomon, you can't change here."

"Like I can control it!" he growled back. Already his gums ached.

Cupcake leaned into him, put his large face right in Solomon's field of vision. "It wouldn't help her to change. Control yourself...for her."

Solomon's first reaction was to adjust the giant's attitude with a good fist in the mouth. But he stopped to consider the wise words.

Control yourself...*for her*.

He had to, but fuck he was close. His knuckles burned, which was a clear sign of the change looming close. A single spike of adrenaline would send him over the edge. But the image of Eva and how she'd need him with his faculties intact kept him sane, kept him calm. For now.

But if they touched a single, chemically altered hair on her, there wouldn't be a crack deep enough for them to hide into. He'd tear the whole damn nest of the little rats apart.

It hit him as they exited the crowded bar to press along walls of the crowded street. Fuck he hated crowds.

"An inside job."

Liberty cocked her head as she kept her fist bunched on Cupcake's belt. "What do you mean?"

"Iron Conclave, Earth government's big brother, they have rodent problems. Moles."

She looked up, adopted the Pondering Look then nodded. "Undoubtedly. That could be how they knew where to find the data clip or more exactly, who had it on them. Palmer must have been their man. Just as Eva was the 'official' man for the chancellor."

"That or the whole fucking thing's coming apart and the rats are jumping ships all over the place." He shook his head, ran a hand in his hair. "Frankly, I don't give a shit. I'm gonna rip apart anyone who stands in my way."

"And I'm sure there will be plenty," Liberty replied, her expression somber.

"Anyone considered it might have been *her* all along?" Dragana said. "Just pretending it was Palmer? And now that he's dead, we can't prove a thing either way."

Solomon stared. "Drop it."

"Oh I forgot, if you fuck the boss, you get to fly below the radar."

Only through a supreme effort of willpower did Solomon refrain from punching the bitch right on the snout. But the look he gave her must have conveyed the message just the same.

They retraced their way to the cruiser, the entire time checking over their shoulders. Obviously, Iron Conclave had only wanted their agent back, not whatever ragtag mercenary lycanthrope pack she'd collected along the way. Maybe only Vonatos cared about that. As much as it was a kick in the balls ego-wise, it would afford Solomon a bit of maneuvering room. And hell knew he needed all the help he could get. According to his guesstimate, if the agents who had recognized and arrested Eva ran full tilt to the docks to get back on board their ship and wait for clearance, that'd give him an hour. Tops.

He meant to check his watch. The empty spot on his wrist reminded him acutely and in a symbolic manner he would be quick to mock any other day, of the sensation her absence caused. Emptiness. Like a blank screen after a loved one's face had

disappeared, a comms link ringing in an empty house after the kids had grown up, moved out, or how weirdly hollow his chest would feel after someone had ripped his heart out. Like right now.

*And Christ does it ever hurt.* He'd rather take nickel in the balls instead.

The ramp was still four feet off the ground when he leaped over the rim, charged for the volters he'd stashed underneath his seat and retrieved three. On second thought, he got himself a fourth and stuffed them all into one of the emergency supplies packs he upturned to let the contents scatter at his feet. Turning, he noticed the rest were doing the same, emptying bags and cramming weapons in.

"This doesn't concern any of you. I'm going alone."

"You'll need the extra eyes," Dragana commented as she loaded another grenade launcher—where the hell did she keep them all—tried to fit it into the bag she'd scrounged, cursed when it wouldn't and reluctantly put it back into the niche. She retrieved her custom-made volter. The silvery Peanut gleamed like molten metal in her hand. "Plus, the little bitch and I have a score to settle and I'll be damned if I'll let some government drone take the fun away from me."

Solomon shook his head. He turned to Cupcake. "I hope you haven't lost all your street fighting skills 'cause I'm betting we'll need our fists for the first round."

At the mention of his tumultuous first career, Cupcake flushed beet red, cleared his throat then rummaged around the hold until he'd managed to stand as far away from Liberty as the cruiser would allow. She had her head turned to her right, where the large man had been, a look of puzzlement on her angular face.

Solomon adjusted his belt. Those fucking pants would make him impotent, for Christ's sake. He could barely feel his dick.

After he shouldered the pack, he jumped off the ramp. "Let's go get our spy back."

## Chapter Ten

One of the agents held her arm so tight she'd lost feelings to the tips of her fingers. She tried to pull it away but he squeezed harder.

"I never would've thought a veteran like you would turn traitor," he said, shaking his head then giving her a long once-over. "Such a shame."

"Yeah, well, don't get any idea, *gospodin*, because you're not my type. I prefer them smart and cute."

He chuckled, gave a brusque tug on her trapped hand. "But you're *exactly* my type."

Eva wanted to roll her eyes. At least she'd managed to put some distance between the rest and her. The thought of fellow agents getting their sneaky little hands on Solomon was too much. After she'd pushed Liberty back so she'd blend with the crowd, the trio of agents had converged on her like sharks. She'd known their nature right away for the look in their eyes alone.

One of them was a woman—barely—and she turned back to the one squeezing her hand. "We should get clearance now so the ship is ready when we get there."

*So he's the leader of this little expedition.*

He nodded, which dislodged a strand of his black hair. "Do it."

"What kind of ship do you have?"

The guy scowled.

"I was just trying to make conversation."

With an arrogant toss of his head—he was cute, in a slimy, skinny sort of way. "It's the kind no one can trace or ID. It's equipped with a shroud, so no signal can penetrate its hull and it can transition to FTL speed in ten seconds."

"Wow," Eva replied, nodding. "They didn't spare any expense on you. How did you guys ever find me?"

He just shook his head. "You should get that hair altered. Gave you right away."

"You recognized me because of my *hair*? How did you know to look for me here in the first place?"

*My hair, of all things!*

"HQ figured you and your hairy friends rigged the cruiser for FTL and contacted every station within a reasonable distance so they'd monitor the reported mass of every ship as they'd request clearance for docking."

*They found us because of the cruiser's small size.* Dammit. They should've thought about that. Not many ships that light came in from FTL travel and docked at Antioch.



"It was a pretty good try though," he remarked with a wink.

All the while, her trained brain was taking notes, even if the eventuality of using any of them was pretty much nil. One couldn't erase a lifetime of scheming in a single day.

"I have a private cabin on board," the guy said. His smile was nothing compared to the lopsided thing Solomon could pull. She wanted to cry.

Instead Eva pushed the pain down and shrugged. "Don't get your hopes up. Or anything else for that matter."

He laughed. Idiot.

She could've broken his arm in at least three places had she wanted to. She didn't. The fight had left her as surely as any chances of patching things up with Solomon. Not with the snide comments he kept sending her way. He wasn't the forgiving kind apparently. She'd lost his trust and that was that.

So what awaited her was one hell of a painful interrogation, months of it probably, then the needle. The hurt would pale compared to the ache in her heart at losing the one man she thought would've made a perfect lifelong boyfriend.

She bumped into someone, meant to apologize but the agent pulled hard on her arm. The wide street was packed with people and improvised vending stalls, cook shops and old-fashioned bicycles. Antioch had already been overcrowded by the time the first real wave of settlers had arrived two hundred years prior and even if Eva had never been here, she'd heard of the population problems on the largest station outside Earth's authority. But some creative soul had come up with an ingenious way to store people with the addition of clusters of spherical habitats stacked high into the dark sky. Eva had always thought those resembled bunches of gigantic aluminum grapes resting on top of the jagged skyline made by the angular buildings. Despite the ingenious measure, the streets down below were hell.

"The ship's ready," the female agent announced after a while.

Eva noticed the comms link, shaped as a normal metal pendant so out of fashion back on Earth, dangling from her throat.

"You might want to revamp your camouflage gear," Eva offered with a wink. "It's three years out of date. At least."

The female agent turned back, her eyebrows arched, mouth opened as if to say something. Then the side of her head blew off in a geyser of dark red pulp. She collapsed.

Before Eva could grimace, the crowd reacted as one and began stampeding and shoving, pushing and screaming to get out of the way. The guy squeezing her hand pulled a volter and made a complete rotation. He never let go.

He spoke under his breath and Eva realized he was wired too, only in a much more subtle way for she hadn't seen anything on him except for his nondescript clothes. The

third agent, a man with a mustache that defied every law of gravity she knew, whirled around, a pair of volters pointing back and front.

"Come on!" her captor growled, yanking on her arm and nearly dislocating it.

By the corner of her eye, she spotted Cupcake, towering by a good head over everyone else. The contrast of his dark hair and pale eyes made him a stunning—and scary—sight.

Both agents started shooting at once, obviously not caring about collateral damage.

Nickel started ripping through the crowd, killing some instantly while shredding those unfortunate enough to only be wounded. She twisted her arm out of the guy's hand and brought the edge of her palm down against the nape of his neck. But he'd seen her move and had tucked his chin in so she hit his shoulder instead.

Eva cried out when he jammed the palm of his hand right in the middle of her chest. Backpedaling, she collided against something hard, floundered to keep her balance but lost it and sprawled backward on her ass.

The dark-haired agent turned to her, aimed his volter at her head. "They said alive unless I had no choice."

He fired.

Eva didn't even cringe.

*Good, she thought, that ought to take the pain away.*

But somehow the nickel bead never made it to her even if the guy stood barely three paces away.

A scene that burned an imprint of itself into her brain made her stare open-mouthed.

A massive, hairy shape had barreled in at the last second, taking the agent down and was presently tearing him up in great chunks of ruby-red flesh and dark clothes.

"Solomon! No!"

He turned toward her, his muzzle—face, damn it—bloodied and snarling. But he didn't come for her, instead went after the mustachioed agent, who'd taken off running as though hell itself had come for him. It wasn't far from the truth.

Eva got to her knees just as Cupcake was plowing through the last of the thinning, rioting crowd and grabbing the back of her shirt to hoist her up.

Liberty was right on his heels. "Follow him! Don't lose him!"

He nodded.

Whistles were heard in the distance.

Dragana leveled Peanut toward the incoming security forces. The effect of their urban camouflage gray and black mottled uniforms was ruined by the blue-white flashes of volters. "Shit! The guards! You guys go, I'll cover your asses!"

Because Cupcake had already charged after Solomon, who could be seen about a corner ahead still ducking bullets as he tried to get at the agent, Eva took off running with Liberty once again fisting the back of her shirt.

They met remnants of Solomon's passage as they barreled down to the docks. People lying in the street or trying to crawl away. Blood like grout between the concrete slabs. Eva checked back once and spotted a few guards spilling out from between buildings far behind them, their uniforms blending with the surroundings. Not enough for Dragana though, who downed one after the other.

As they reached the docking stations, Eva spotted Cupcake returning rounds to a pair of men running down a freighter's ramp. Solomon was loping toward them, still in lycanthrope form, with only his boots and volter-packed belt still on. Before either man could turn their weapons on him, he'd leaped, tackled both and dove for one's throat. Eva gasped when, with a great shake of his dark blond head, Solomon ripped the man's throat open to let a gush of blood arc surprisingly high in the air. The second man rolled away, hurriedly came back up on his feet and fired. Solomon yelped and drew back by a couple of paces, appeared ready to tackle the man before slumping to a knee with a strangled whine. He'd have no chance to either attack or get out of harm's way now. He may be fast but no one could dodge bullets.

Fury hit her like a monstrous wave. Before he could protest, she took a volter from Cupcake's hip and advanced on the lone survivor, now aiming directly at the doomed lycanthrope. She marched for that man who would dare touch Dex Solomon, who would be foolish enough to stand there and point a weapon at the man she'd come to cherish.

She kept the nickel coming as she closed the distance, finding a knee here, a shoulder there. The man was kneeling by the time she made it to him. Without a single compassionate thought, she pulled the trigger once more and was already crouching beside Solomon by the time her not-quite-headless victim hit the pavement with a wet, muffled thud.

Eva ground her teeth as she reached toward Solomon. He clacked his jaws at her hand, which she hurriedly snatched back, snarled then whipped back on all fours. His hackles right up, Solomon stood. Blood had mixed with his saliva and made pink lines dripping down his chest.

"Damn," she heard Cupcake say behind her. "Get back, I'll take care of him."

Eva dropped the volter and spread her hands on either side in a show of peace so Solomon wouldn't think someone meant him harm. "No, he's going to be fine, give him some time."

"Eva...that's one hell of a chance you're taking," warned Cupcake.

"It's worth it."

He stepped back until she couldn't see him anymore. She would've thanked him had she not been afraid to set Solomon off.

Her gaze never left that of Solomon's. They stood staring at one another, the woman and the lycanthrope, emotions clearer in that single look than a lifetime of words, and finally, when Eva thought she just might have misjudged the man's ability to reason through his change, his hackles lowered. He took a great breath and whined softly.

Solomon started to shake. His face retracted to human proportions, his hands straightened, his back as well. A naked Solomon soon stood and rubbed his shoulder where a cut marred the skin. His eyes flared and he put a hand to one of the small square pouches on the belt, snaked a finger in it. He sighed in relief then seemed to remember the present situation.

"What the fuck am I doing here?"

Eva wanted to smile. He was going to be all right.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time they trooped around the jerks' ship, Dragana was sprinting down the docks toward them, a hail of nickel in her wake. Yet she grinned widely.

They clustered outside the ship, an old cargo freighter to him, where Eva started working at the magnetic bolt on the hatch. Some getaway craft.

"We'll take their ship," Solomon said, feeling stupid giving orders while his dick dangled and his ass was bare. But hey, he was still the boss, naked or not. "Let's go."

Liberty shook her head as she hunkered down by the ramp, ever-present Cupcake providing massive coverage to the tall but slender woman. "I have to stay here and get my implant fixed."

"We can come back later —"

"No," she replied with a lot more force than he'd ever seen her use. On him anyway. "I'm not stumbling around blind as a bat, Solomon. I'm staying here and getting this thing fixed. I know people, they'll help me, if only to make good with my family. We can rendezvous somewhere later on."

He looked at Cupcake, knowing the large man would stay too. Theory confirmed for the guy nodded, checked the gauge on his volter and pursed his lips. "I'll need nickel."

"Here," Dragana said, panting, handing over a handful of clips. "Never leave home without them. And I'm coming with you." She turned to Solomon, shifted from one foot to the other, rubbed her thumb over Peanut's muzzle. "I have to go with them, Solomon."

Solomon wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. His shoulder burned. "What the hell is this? A mutiny?"

"There's nothing for me anymore but this." Dragana looked down at her volter. "I want to find who's behind all this shit about lycanthropes being someone's idea of a bull's eye. Ivan won't have died for nothing, I can tell you that."

He threw his hands up. "Palmer is dead. There's no way for anyone to know shit."

Dragana shook her head, winced then put tentative fingers to a fading bruise along her jaw. "Someone hired him. That person knows. And I'm going to make them tell me." There was steel in her pale gaze.

"We'll contact you," Liberty said, rising and turning away.

"How are you gonna do that, woman?"

She grinned. "We'll find a way."

"Cupcake," Eva called from the ramp. He turned back. "Thanks."

He looked surprised and pleased for a split second before the gruff bear expression returned.

"And you too, thanks," added Eva for Dragana's benefit.

The tall woman turned around without a word. She checked Peanut's gauge and cursed.

With Cupcake's belt in hand, Liberty gave Solomon a quick wink then the trio hurried past the chain link fence separating the docks from the suspended cargo tracks that led into the city proper. Nickel started hitting the concrete twenty feet to their left. Time to go.

"Come on," Solomon snapped.

He felt suddenly cross and twitchy. He'd had his team around him for a while now and felt strange watching them leave. But station security would figure out Dragana was no longer raining death on them and would be here any second. No time to boo-hoo. Plus, he had the damn data clip to protect now. And Eva.

*Not that she needs it.*

He jumped over the ramp just as Eva had managed to get the bolt open. Good, because his method would've involved two volters and a busted bolt. Messy, time-consuming but efficient. Her method was much better. At least they'd be able to reuse the bolt.

A nickel bead thudded along the hull right where his hand had just been a moment before. "Christ! Hurry up, would you!"

"Why don't *you* do it then."

"Fine. Move over."

"Rhetoric, Solomon, rhe-to-ric."

Both fought to squeeze through the embrasure and crammed inside the airlock, closed the hatch with enough force to slam it right out the other way and had secured it when sharp little clicks indicated someone was using the ship as target practice.

"Can you at least pilot this thing?"

"Hey, you want off this station or not!"

She ran to the ladder and climbed up to the next deck. He followed her. It had to be a first for him, walking around a ship butt naked, with only his belt—a lone remaining

loop from his too-tight pants – and a pair of boots on. *Don't I make a nice image.* At least he had his guns.

A twitch at his cheek made him pause. Fuck, he'd changed back so damn fast, he was still on the edge with adrenaline spiking like crazy. Anything would make him switch back to lycanthrope form. He took a deep breath. On his way to the bridge, he spotted a first-aid station that he slapped open and sacked with shaking hands. Finally, he found some sanitizing wipes and used the whole box to clean himself. He threw the bunch of pink-with-blood wipes into a garbage chute on his way to the bridge. His shoulder burned. He'd been shot and couldn't even remember it. At least it was superficial. Still burned though.

Eva was sitting at some fancy-looking console when he joined her. He looped his belt containing the precious data clip on one of the four swivel seats then piled the guns on a nearby console. "Whoa, man. Government has money." Yet the exterior was so humble, an old freighter carcass hiding a state-of-the-art craft.

Already he could hear the ship's propulsion firing up. She didn't even wait for clearance or for him to find a goddamn seat before tapping away at the keyboard. With a shudder, the ship tore away from the docking station, probably taking the clamps with it.

Instead of going up, as any sane person would've done, Solomon saw by the portholes that Eva was going down. He snarled a cursed when she came *that* close to slamming against the station's lower levels.

His knuckles ached. Shit. Not good. "Are you sure you can pilot this thing?"

A curt nod was his only reply.

"Brace for FTL."

"What? Already?"

He stumbled to a seat across from hers and clicked the harness in place a full, oh what, two fucking seconds before she transitioned into faster-than-light mode.

"Thanks for the advance warning."

A violent series of thuds indicated the ship had achieved the right speed – so much faster than any other he'd heard of – and was ready to blast out of normal space and into a conduit that would take them hundreds of light-years away. He squeezed his eyes shut. Blood rushed to his head.

*No. Not now.*

Rattles, groans, the sound of something breaking underneath the deck right below his feet...each sound made him hiss a curse. Hunched over the keyboard, sweat clumping her hair to her forehead, Eva was proving to be one bad pilot. Not as if he would tell her though. She *did* have the controls in hand, even bent over them quite closely. But then Solomon noticed her eyes were closed. Damn. He'd forgotten about her ear condition. At least she'd programmed the ship beforehand. Fancy ship, this thing.

After a few minutes, the ship decelerated rapidly, which forced him against the harness, his feet wanting to leave the deck, his head feeling heavy. With a jerk, Eva's head snapped up. She rubbed her forehead and grimaced.

"You okay?"

She nodded.

Now that the threat of imminent death by unconscious pilot at the controls had passed, the sight of Eva in her too-big clothes did something to the adrenaline still raging through his body. Blood rushed to his ears, swelled his muscles. When his gums began to ache, he forced his eyes closed.

*You are not changing on a ship, man.*

Especially not with Eva's proximity and vulnerability. He'd done that to her once, he sure as hell wouldn't do it again. To think he'd touched her, *bitten* her. Solomon looked down at his hands. He cringed.

Eva straightened, rolled her shoulders then swiveled her seat so she could look at him. "I'll be a popular woman for a while. Do you know a quiet place where I could hide?"

Cupcake's words came back to him. She'd switched sides.

How the hell was he going to address this? Should he *thank* her? Maybe he ought to. She'd become a traitor for them, would have her face on every wanted billboard from Earth to the lowliest human outpost. Shit, she'd be the most popular girl in town, wouldn't be able to get any decent job—not anything honest at least—and would have to deal with every bounty hunter in the system. The thought of someone dragging Eva back to Earth for some prize money just burned his ass like nothing else.

*Yeah, you ought to thank the woman.* He cleared his throat.

"Don't mention it. It was my pleasure."

"What makes you think I was gonna say anything?" he growled, avoiding her gaze. *Women.*

She shrugged.

The movement lifted her breasts underneath the man's shirt and did nothing to his rapidly diminishing self-control. But he was still too close to changing, could feel the lycan breathing down his neck, and wasn't sure he could handle himself right now. He didn't need the sexy she-devil messing with his brain on top of things.

"Why did you get involved in my business?" she asked.

"Don't you have a ship to fly?"

"It's on autopilot. And anyway, the ship's equipped with a shroud, so not even GAN Leviathans can track us. Now answer my question."

Her purple eyes narrowed, her mouth thinned, but Solomon knew pain hid beneath the stoical exterior, the "I'm a cool spy" mask, and it didn't fool him at all, especially not with the little stunt she'd pulled back in the cruiser.

"You're answering one of mine first. Why the *fuck* didn't you sit your fine ass back down when I was telling you to?"

"Why do you want to know? It's not as if it matters to you, right? Me being a liar and a cheat."

*Oh it matters more than you know, woman.*

"You stabbed me in the back, Eva, what am I supposed to think? Each time you disappear somewhere, I think you're doing something for your bosses. Don't blame me, woman. Blame them."

Her eyes welled but she said nothing. "Now answer mine. Why did you mess with Iron Conclave business?"

He knew brawny, hardy men who weren't as tough as this woman. Yet there was a vulnerable spot to her and it seemed as though he occupied much of it. Damn.

"What do you want me to tell you? Christ, you're so fucking complicated."

Her silence proved much worse to endure than any insults she could've thrown in his face.

"You want to hear it, don't you?"

A tear rolled down her cheek. "Hear what?"

She'd deny her pain to the end, wouldn't she?

Solomon shook his head, rolled his eyes. "Come here."

Her hands in her pockets, Eva stood and came over to his seat but well out of his reach. The harness was still clipped. Before he could undo it, Eva sat on his lap and triggered one massive hard-on that almost made him faint for lack of blood to the head.

"What was it you wanted to tell me?" she asked, a finger running down his chest.

*Well, the tease.*

With her other hand, she was slowly buttoning down her dark blue shirt. Each button revealed a sliver of that precious pale skin he'd come to worship even in his sleep. He'd missed the feel of her so much, even if barely a shift had gone by since the last time he'd touched her.

But did she want to screw *him* or was she just interested in screwing with his *mind* again? Anger flared like a fever.

"I don't have anything to tell you," he retorted, remembering too late to smooth the edge to his voice. It was still Eva he was talking to, he should be more careful. Fuck, he was such a gorilla. Liberty had been right.

The words might have hurt her or not. Hard to tell for she closed her eyes, cocked her head to the side and stood abruptly. He could tell she was angry. Solomon meant to follow her, try to patch the giant hole he'd just punched and hope to frozen hell he hadn't just used his last chance. But he couldn't get up. Okay...

Looking down, Solomon's heart skipped a beat. The magnetic bolt she'd taken from the ship's entrance now kept the harness securely locked on him. No way in hell he'd be



coming out of that seat. Blood rushing in his ears like war drums, Solomon raised his gaze to her.

No triumph, no "ah-ha, gotcha!" Nothing but resolve.

"You shouldn't have done that, Eva," he murmured.

"I want to hear it."

Another button on her shirt bared the space below her sternum and hinted at the gloriously warm and soft breasts on either side. He could see a shadowy line curving under one.

"Well, woman, you won't. Not like this. I'm not saying a damn word. Unless you come over here and convince me to talk."

She let out a mirthless chuckle. "Not that I don't enjoy having sex with you, Solomon, I do, but this is not what it's about."

*Now that hurts a guy's ego.*

He started panting. Out of excitement, raging lust, but also because he was slowly losing it, losing control over his responses and soon, he knew he'd revert to lycanthrope and there wasn't any way he'd be able to subdue that thing inside of him. Maybe that's what she'd intended all along. Who knew?

"That harness won't hold me if I change." He hoped the warning in his voice would make her rethink the foolish thing she'd just done. While there was still time.

"I know."

"You meant for that? Are you nuts?"

She shook her head. "No, I only took advantage of a situation. That's what I do, right, stab people in the back. You should've seen it coming."

Solomon could only look when she unclipped then kicked her boots off, undid the last button on the shirt, which she parted over her chest.

*Those awful bruises...fuck.*

"Don't pity me, Solomon," she said, a clear warning in her tone of voice.

What was he supposed to think of the nasty black and blue marks on her belly and thighs? He'd done those. "I'm so sorry," he murmured. *So sorry.*

"Don't you realize what they mean?"

"That I'm an asshole."

She rolled her eyes. "Do you realize how gentle you had to be not to injure me badly, kill me? I've seen you punch through stainless steel with your fingernails without even breaking a sweat. But all you did was bruise the skin a little."

"You're offering me an out?"

"It's not an out, Solomon. It's the truth. Now," she said, one hand caressing her pale side, up under a breast before resting over it. "I'd prefer to get back to our business here and now."

Despite her claims, Solomon knew he'd never forgive himself for bruising her this way and he also knew the visceral fear would keep him in control, that he would never, ever, again allow the lycanthrope to rule him. Dex Solomon was in command of Dex Solomon, not some genetic condition, some side effects from DNA tweaking gone wrong.

He sighed when his gaze was once again drawn to her beauty. Rosy and pointing directly at him—*calling* him—her nipples looked hard and sweet like the candies they were. And below, along the shirt's opening, glistened her dark, narrow patch. He could *smell* she was ready for him.

"Eva...*Christ*..."

He'd lost his battle.

His vision sharpened as did his sense of smell, and damn it if all he could get was her feminine scent, that piquant perfume that he could spend a lifetime breathing in. A sharp pain started in his jaw, spread to each of his teeth, stabbed under his nose as the change slowly altered his physique. But there was none of the usual violence. Then it unexpectedly stopped. He looked down at his hands to see not claws but human hands, albeit a tad heavy on the fingernail. Solomon couldn't come up with a rational explanation for the astonishing occurrence. To change only halfway? He looked up at her.

"See? You're not *it*. When you're the lycanthrope, it's still Dex Solomon I see, still Dex Solomon I made love with."

"I could hurt you," he said, his voice so much lower than natural.

"You didn't and you won't."

"How can you trust me when I don't even trust myself?" The fricative whistled between his fangs. He cursed.

"I don't know why, Solomon."

He looked down at his swollen cock, shook his head. "Lock yourself somewhere on the ship, Eva. I'll come get you when I'm more...presentable."

Eva slid her hand down into the undone shirt, toyed with the workpants' waistband then slipped underneath. "I find you presentable aplenty."

"Don't..."

But she did it anyway, reached down into the pants while her other hand stroked her breast, lazily drawing circles around her nipple then switching to her other, which she pinched. In his enhanced vision, the pale skin turned an alluring shade of rose. His balls were so tight they hurt. He looked down, took a deep breath then raised his gaze just as Eva was stepping out slightly, spreading her feet, a bulge in her pants indicating she was teasing herself for his benefit.

"What would you like me to do, Solomon? What would you do if it were you?"

"Eva, the harness won't hold..."

She stared at him hard. "Tell me what you'd do, Solomon. This?"

Her nipple darkened to a sunburn shade of red when she squeezed it between two fingers.

"Yes," he growled, no longer able to keep from voicing his fathomless desire. He had no idea to what lengths he would go to satiate his lust, but this woman might just be the one to accompany him there.

"What else?"

"I'd weigh them, each one."

Eva did, pulled her hand from her workpants and cupped each breast. "And?"

"Then I'd roll those fine candies...roll them hard." His voice had frayed near the end. Solomon cleared his throat. Fuck, he was seeing stars!

Hissing, she cradled each nipple between her thumbs and index fingers, lifted her breasts and gripped them hard enough for him to see the fingernail marks.

"Then I'd..." He growled under the sudden twinge of pain along his jaw. "I'd slip a hand down there, make you all nice and wet."

She did as he told, snaked a hand back into her pants, the bulging slender wrist the only sign she was moving her fingers. Then an expression of delight came over her. She licked her lips, not in a provocative way, but one that achieved the same outcome. Solomon leaned forward, muscles banded against the effort. The webbed belt held. For now.

"Would you slip inside, Solomon?"

"Yeah."

"Mmm. Then what?"

"I'd finger-fuck you, woman, I'd ram my finger in and... Christ, Eva, I'm gonna go nuts here."

The bulge in her pants rose and fell in a quick rhythm. Eva closed her eyes partly, cocked her head. "That's good."

He couldn't help himself, wanted to see her body react to his instructions, as though he were fucking her by proxy. "Do it harder."

She did, moaning low in her throat.

"Harder. Come on."

"Oh Solomon, *govno*."

When his instincts kicked in, he leaned forward again to try to force the harness but it wouldn't budge. Meanwhile, Eva was going at herself with a fury Solomon wished he could share with her. "That's it, do it like this," he panted, "put another finger in. Push. Come on."

A flush rose to her cheeks. Her nipple still trapped in her hand, she brought herself to a climax. Solomon knew just because of the way her abdominals worked. He'd love nothing better than to taste their vigor again.

"Ahh." Her eyes flared wide. "I want you."

To his shock and horror, Eva drew close, well within his reach, and sat back on his lap. His dick was about to explode as it rubbed her pubic bone through the workpants. He kept his hands well away from her and wrapped around the armrests in a white-knuckled grip. He couldn't touch her with those hands.

Solomon swallowed hard. Images of taking her flashed in his agitated mind. Brutal images, filled with frenzy, carnal abandon. Ferocity. "You're playing with fire."

"It's worth getting burned."

When she leaned over his shoulder and licked him from collarbone to jaw, a powerful shiver arched his back off the seat and forced a growl from him that seemed to stimulate Eva into a feeding frenzy. She bit him, clawed at him, rubbed herself against his cock. She fed him her fingers, still smelling and tasting of her fine pussy. He licked them clean, bit them to keep her from taking them away. Her nipples brushing against the hair on his chest, she rolled her pelvis so she could switch sides and assault his other shoulder. She licked his Adam's apple then rested her teeth against it, chuckling when he swallowed hard and it bobbed out of her control, only to capture it again and this time, sinking her teeth into his flesh.

Solomon meant to come off the seat but she clamped her legs behind the backrest, trapping him.

"You're not calling the shots this time. Not until you tell me what I want to hear. And you're not copping out like the last time."

Her breath stirred some loose hair, a teasing reminder of how much this woman elicited a slew of emotions he'd never had to deal with. Searing lust, hesitant hope a woman out there could take him on and then some, and affection—plenty of that—assaulted him from every angle. He just wished he could've trusted her more. He winced when she bit his lobe.

"Come on," she murmured, licking him under the chin. "What are you going to do to me, huh? Just sit there?"

Solomon squeezed his eyes tightly as he pushed hard against the backrest. *Control, man, stay in control.*

Her mouth turned his throat into a wet circuit that she traced over and over with her tongue. He bared his teeth when she bit his neck. With a sharp roll of pelvis, she crushed his cock between them. The swivel seat creaked under the furious assault. Still, he fought the rising excitement, afraid to his core he'd hurt this woman. If he opened his eyes, he'd see clearly the marks on her, marks he'd made. And there was no way in hell he'd do that again. Even if resisting the fiery redhead was proving the hardest thing he'd ever had to do. It was so worth it. *She* was so worth it.

When she trapped his bottom lip, sucked it hard then pulled, Solomon dug his heels in the plated deck.

When she ran her fingernails up his sides, leaving his skin burning and tingling, Solomon thought he was going up in flames.

And when Eva abruptly slid off his lap and fisted his cock so she could wolf it down her throat, pumped him brutally, Solomon knew he was lost.

One of the armrests creaked then gave way when he pulled against it, transferring the adrenaline the best he could, given the circumstances. Eva pushed his thighs wider so she could kneel in between. The top of her red head bobbed up and down as she sucked him. His skin burned when she pulled it down while simultaneously drawing hard on his glans.

“Argh, Eva...motherf—”

Then she really gave it to him. Up and down her hand went while her mouth never left the tip. His pre-cum smoothened the assault she gave on his cock but couldn't prevent the fire from building inside his balls. Up and down. Hard.

“Eva.” He stretched the last syllable like the warning it was.

Up. Down. He was going to come and do it violently.

He looked down, ready to burst at the seams. Her fist glistened with saliva. Then she stopped.

Solomon arched back so violently, the other armrest ripped off. With a growled curse he threw it far then fisted the seat under him. She'd left him right on the edge. His dick throbbed with unspent need. His injured shoulder burned.

That poker face firmly on now, Eva stood and straddled him again but she didn't sit this time, instead she leaned over his face so her nipples teased his hungry mouth. He tried to trap one but she nimbly moved away.

“You're not very convincing,” she murmured against his cheek. “And I thought you wanted more from me than just this. I thought you'd take me hard and ride me all night. Mm?”

Their gazes met. In her chemically altered orbs he saw a lifetime of loneliness and unforgiving single-mindedness, a life of all work and little play. So very similar to his own.

He didn't trust his voice right then and just kept staring at her beautiful, mocking mouth. Solomon began to shiver all over. She must not have known what it meant. She'd have run away. Right? She couldn't want him this way. What woman would?

“Well, Solomon,” she said as she gathered her breasts in the middle and offered them to him only to retreat at the last second. “How much—”

Unable to keep himself in check any longer, Solomon crushed his mouth to hers, wrapped his arms around her slender waist and held her close. Her breasts pressed against his naked chest.

A growl left him. Yet he didn't slip deeper into lycanthrope form but stayed right on the edge of humanity. He loved the feeling of power and *control*. It was a drug and he could deny it no longer.

Dex Solomon was more than human but not less than a man. And he had Eva to thank for that. She was allowing him to be something he'd never thought he could be—or permitted himself to be. She *trusted* him with her life.

Maybe he ought to give the woman a break and start trusting her too.

## Chapter Eleven

Eva hadn't thought it possible that she could be so aroused, miserable and exultant all at once. Aroused because of the man sitting beneath her, the strong man she would die to be with. Miserable in the face of his refusal to acknowledge out loud what she knew—hoped, prayed for—must have been there. And exultant as he gave up all reticence, wrapped his arms around her and held her close.

Yet Eva decided she wouldn't ever again ask him to say he loved her. He wouldn't do it or *couldn't* do it. Fine. She could live with the fact he'd stick around for the good sex then eventually leave. But it wouldn't change her own feelings for him. She'd had the realization while he stood unarmed with the Iron Conclave agent ready to put nickel into Solomon, and the sight alone had all but driven her mad with desperation and fury.

She'd realized she loved Dex Solomon a split second before she came *that* close to losing him. *Govno*, the fear had almost stopped her heart. And it could only be love. Nothing else could trigger that sort of response. In truth though, Eva suspected she'd fallen for the snarly lycanthrope long before. Only she'd hoped it would one day be reciprocal. But no.

*Oh well.*

For now, she'd take his lovemaking and try not to expect anything else. But the pain was deep.

With a growl, Solomon lurched forward. Three of the five points on the harness ripped with a dry, brittle sound.

"Sol—"

Muscles banding over his thick chest, bracing his legs wider, which spread hers even more, he tilted once again and gave a mighty tug forward. The harness ripped clean off the seat and sent the bolt skittering across the plated deck.

She gasped at the brute strength required to achieve this. He wasn't even in complete lycanthrope form yet had just ripped triple-stitched webbed belts. Five of them.

"That's it, Solomon, that's how I want you."

He licked her throat in a wide, rough pass. "Then you're gonna have it."

She buried her face in his neck as he carried her. "Love me," she whispered, too low for him to hear. "Please love me."

After a few steps, Eva's backside connected with something and as Solomon lowered her gently, she recognized the charts console. After he sat her on it, he leaned

forward, licked her throat in great upward swipes. She arched back, let herself fall completely flat on the console.

When nothing more happened, she opened her eyes.

Solomon stood between her knees, panting hard. "You want to hear that I love you—no," he raised his hand when she meant to reply. "Let me finish." His hands were merciless when he gripped her knees and pull them wider. "I'll do even better, Little Red. I'm gonna make you *feel* it."

Before she could say anything—unsure if she had anything coherent to add in the first place—Solomon crouched down and assaulted her pussy with his mouth. Eva bumped her head when she arched violently back.

His thumbs digging in her inner thighs, he kept her spread so wide she feared popping a hip. But she wouldn't change a thing! His tongue proved just as persuasive as the last time he'd licked her while in lycanthrope form, but added with Solomon's human cognizance and precision, she experienced the most satisfying orgasm of her life. And when she spilled her pleasure for him, he drew it all in with guttural growls.

"That's what you want, isn't it?"

Eva nodded.

"You're gonna have to do better than that. I want to hear it."

"I want you this way." She exhaled, sucked in a quick breath. "I want you hard."

Sharp points of fire poked her sex. Eva looked down to find Solomon with his mouth wide open, his sharp teeth resting against her pussy while his dark gaze was fixed on her face. His hot breaths served as added stimulant against her flesh and Eva came again.

He pulled away a few inches. But his gaze never left her face. "So," he began, tapered his tongue and flicked her clit twice. "How do I make you feel?"

Eva's moan made him grin in a feral way. "That's what I thought. But I'm not nearly finished yet. All this time I've been meaning to fuck you properly." Another flick of the tongue made her spill even more honey. She was so incredibly wet. "And that time is now."

The sibilants hissed past his fangs and added to the adrenaline cramping her muscles.

He dove for her pussy. A cry left her.

With an abandon she didn't think possible, Solomon feasted on her like a man starving, stretched her nether lips, used his thumbs to denude her tender bud and whipped her with his tapered tongue until she swore the console had started to move under her. Eva arched until only her butt and head provided support. Her arms high above, she withstood Solomon's feasting. Sounds from his mouth elicited even more ecstasy.

Solomon, his hands still clutched around her knees, brought them up high then over her chest, spreading her wide for him.



"Hold them up," he said before plastering himself against her butt, his cock rubbing along her glistening cleft. "I want you nice and open for me, Eva. Wet and wide and ready."

While she held her knees tight against herself, he licked her cleft from anus to clitoris before pressing the pad of a finger against her nether hole, watching through the aperture between her legs for a reaction. A long moan gave way to a whimper of delight. Eva shamelessly bucked against his hand and while he kept the pressure on his thumb, which entered her and created delectable pressure, he used his forearm to brace against the back of her thighs. Trapped, Eva lifted her head so she could see what he was doing.

"Solomon?"

Not quite lycanthrope as he was, his face bearing only slight traces of the change—in the way his mouth had come a bit forward with fangs for teeth and how his eyebrows had thickened enough to shield his gaze—Solomon squared his shoulders. Something was about to happen. Eva braced her arms on either side of the console.

His dark gaze on hers, he angled the tip of his thick shaft right along her cleft and without any attempt at making his entry cordial, he took her.

Climax lanced in burning spikes along her distended entry, into her channel and spread outward in a fiery wake all over her body. She let out such a loud cry that it left her throat raw.

His thick cock stretched her, searched her, branded her all over again. And with the subtle penetration of his thumb in her anus, the pounding he was giving her pussy only accentuated the violent wave of bliss unfurling over her. He spared an arm, snaked it between her thighs so he could grab at a breast and leaning over her, forcing her thighs apart once more, sucked at it. Eva's keens matched Solomon's powerful thrusts. Her skin against the console screen's smooth Thermopane squeaked under his brutal taking.

"Now I'm ready to *show* you," he growled. His temples glistened with sweat. "You'll never doubt me again."

He hooked her legs over his shoulders, snaked his large hands in the crook of her hips and stabbed twice hard, once slow. Repeated the process. Each third push a languorous and gentle affair. But each first and second jabs ripped a crescendo of cries from Eva, made stars pop behind her eyelids. God she loved him. So much. So damn much.

Solomon let out a deep-throated growl, followed by one intense series of quick jabs. "Do you believe me?" He retreated, stabbed back in.

She knew what he meant, even if he'd probably never say it out loud. She nodded, lolled her head and waited for more.

"Say it."

"Yeah."

"‘Yeah’? Just ‘yeah’? You’re gonna have to do better than that."

"Yes, I believe you."

He left one of her hips so he could gather her hands and clutched them tight over her head. He was leaning completely over her now and the weight of his thick body crushed his cock deeper into her.

"You're lying again."

"No. I believe you," she breathed, panting.

"I don't care for words, Eva. *Show* me what you mean."

Showing incredible strength, he straightened, kept Eva securely around him with an arm while he braced himself against the console and flipped them over. Like a pendulum, he tilted back, back until he rested on the console with her now straddling him. His muscled thighs bulged with the effort.

He stared at her hard. "Show me."

There'd never be another moment such as this in her life, she knew. If she messed this up, if she held back and let her scheming mind take over, he'd know for sure and she'd lose him. She had to let go of the ulterior motives, let go of years of machinations and maneuverings. Completely.

She was going to show Dex Solomon how much she loved him. And she'd make damn sure he'd remember it too.

So she began slowly by gyrating over him, squeezing her abdominals until they burned, knowing he'd feel the pressure around his cock. He must have for his eyes flared. Then she used her pussy as a mouth and "sucked" upward before twisting back down. She did it enough times to make him start clawing above his head at the console edge. With a sharp brittle crack, he broke a portion of the polymer trim, which he threw away with a snarled cursed.

Eva used the break to quickly pull away, switch sides then come back down around his stiff rod. Now facing away from him, she rolled her pelvis in the infinity symbol, as a never-ending eight figure of her love for him. She took him all in, used her muscles and gravity to crush her slick sex against him, to mix their essences, the heat of their flesh.

Then she began to work faster, achieved a furious rate that made her breasts bounce wildly. Solomon clutched at her ass and panted audibly. Each time she slammed back to the base of his cock, he let out a grunt until she was bouncing so hard and fast Solomon seemed to empty his lungs in a long groan of contentment. Arching back, Eva gave her combined wrists to him so he'd hold her back, stretch her far, adding pressure to her swollen folds and creating one hell of a climax. Secured in his large hands, she made fists. She was close. Another buck, followed by uncoordinated tremors. Underneath her Solomon pumped once furiously, urgently.

Her cry filled the bridge, just as a tiny, burning pulse rewarded her efforts.

God, she loved him.

"Well," she asked between pants. "Do you believe me now?" When she looked behind her, she gasped. He'd changed back and she hadn't even noticed.

"I do believe you, Eva. And I think I owe you one." He shook his head, closed his eyes and scoffed. "I can't even say the motherfucking words without feeling like an ass. But since you asked so nicely...I love you. Always have."

She knuckled the silly tears away as she switched sides again and nestled his slick cock between her thighs. Straddling him, she leaned forward, put her chin on his chest and stared into his dark gaze.

He linked his hands behind his head. "What?"

"Thanks."

"My pleasure. Anyway, it's not as if I have a choice. What other woman would want a guy like me, over forty, grumpy and hairy?"

"Bite me."

"Okay."

When Solomon captured her wrist and pretended to bite down on it, she let him. Because she knew he wouldn't hurt her. She trusted Dex Solomon. Lycanthrope, lover extraordinaire and now her man.

"So," he asked after a quick kiss on her palm. "Mind telling me where we're going? Because something tells me we should avoid Earth for a while." He craned his neck to peek at the console.

"Where do you want to go?"

"With you, Little Red," he said, running his large hands into her hair, slicked it back. "Anywhere."

"How does New Ceylan Colony sound? I hear they have great kennels there..."

He scowled. "Obsolescent, smelly and overcrowded. Great...hey! Who told you about that?" A blotchy shade of pink spread on his neck. He cleared his throat.

Was he *blushing*?

"Liberty told me. So you were a dog trainer. Um. You trained them to do what?"

"Bite the seats off sneaky spies."

Eva laughed. "Okay, okay, I deserved that one. But I'll be a wanted *gospozha*, Solomon, remember, so New Ceylan would be perfect. I need a place where I won't stick out in a crowd."

"A blind guy with half a ball would spot you at two hundred paces. But I get you. Safety in crowds, right." While she slid off him and stood, semen slicking her sex nicely, he sat and rubbed his chest. "Speaking of which, I hope you don't mind the sight of blood, 'cause I intend to put some nickel into any asswipe who gets within a ten feet radius. I don't care who I piss off."

"I believe you."

They shared a smile.

## About the Author

I am a mother, spouse, older sister, writer, ex-soldier, high school drop-out, dog owner (or dog owned), half couch potato/half intermittent jogger, wannabe renovator and avid reader who watches too much television, sinks too much money in clothes, likes animals more than humans, recycles, wore braces, never downloads copyrighted stuff, was a nerd without the grades, has a belly laugh that turns heads in theaters, can't stand bullying, is mother hawk more than mother hen, votes even if candidates aren't that great and thinks formal education is highly overrated (probably because she has none).

Nathalie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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