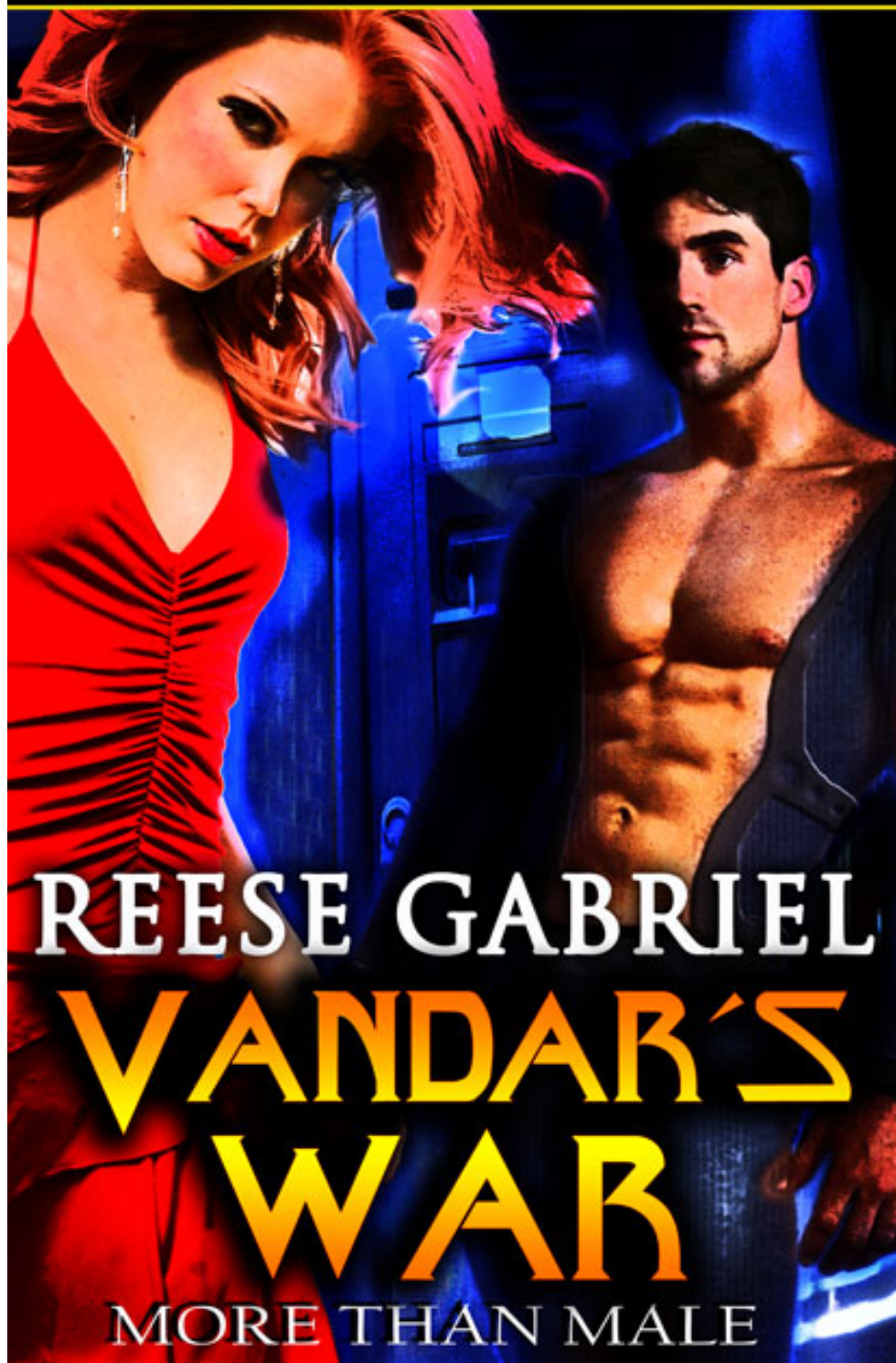


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



REESE GABRIEL

VANDAR'S WAR

MORE THAN MALE

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Vandar's War

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MORE THAN MALE:

VANDAR'S WAR

Reese Gabriel

Chapter One

At five foot nine inches tall with long coppery curls and stunning green eyes, Reevea was used to drawing male attention, but nothing in her experience prepared her for the reaction of the darkly brooding Commander Vandar to her arrival at Star Base 117.

He met her at the landing bay, her small cruiser having just settled down deep inside the bowels of the massive defense installation on the jagged third moon of Auleus Ten, less than a day's flight from the Narthian demilitarized zone.

"You are female," the Commander accused, making it sound like a capital offense.

She beheld him, a wall of masculinity—broad shouldered, powerfully muscled—in his blue uniform, nearly the same shade as his harshly judging eyes, all the more intense given the firm chin and the angle of the cheek bones.

Reevea's emotions ran a swift gamut. From sheer female awe to shock to anger to total contempt right back at him. Star's sake, she'd hardly expected the man to hold a parade in her honor given the job she was to do here, but surely he could maintain a modicum of courtesy?

"If my gender is a problem, Commander," she said flatly, "I suggest you take it up with the geneticists who created me."

Vandar squared himself in response, a frown etching deep into his classically carved features.

He would be a handsome man if he weren't trying so hard to be hostile.

"I, too, was created by the geneticists, as were all citizens," he spoke in a carefully measured tone that indicated he was not used to women who spoke back. "As a primale, and a Guardian officer charged with protection of this quadrant and that of the men under my command, it is my duty to prevent any sort of cross-sexual complications."

He placed just enough emphasis on the word men to reinforce the point—boys club, girls need not apply.

This was why Reevea couldn't stand primales, one of the reasons anyway. They were literal, stubborn, repetitious and arrogant. And those were the good points. They had no imaginations, they were brutally inflexible and when it came to sex, they liked their specially bred little obedients and that was it.

Most fems like herself steered clear of his kind by reputation alone. But this one, he was especially charged. She could see it in the way he held his full lips, the way his jaw stayed tense, the way his hands remained eerily still at his sides. There were torrents under his exterior, a volcano waiting to explode. She should know—it was part of her job as a psychosensologist.

"Commander, since we are dispensing with niceties, let me just go on record as saying I did not volunteer for this mission. The Council believes it is vital to Earth defense to study Guardian psychosensory reactions under field conditions so I am here to study your men. I have just as many reservations as you."

"In that case you'll be overjoyed to know you are going right back home."

"Excuse me?"

"My orders were to accept a trained psychosensologist and to cooperate in the program's implementation. No one informed me that this person would be other than a male."

"It's a fifty-fifty deal, Commander. I hate to break it to you but we are half of the human race."

"Not on a military base you aren't."

Reeva wanted to scream "Dinosaur" in his face, but that wouldn't be fair to the poor creatures. She could well point out that the times they were a-changing. The High Councilor Nyssa was herself part primale and her daughter Theryssa was three quarters. Then there was the legendary Jaxey, the first full-fledged primefemale. In another decade or two, the Guardians would be a fully integrated service. But that was sacrilege to men like Vandar.

"Look, Commander, I have orders as you do," she cut to the chase. "If you want to make a pissing match out of this, and I'm sure you do, let's go to your office and start calling up the chain. We'll see who has the farther aim."

She touched a nerve with that one. "This isn't a game, Counselor. The discipline on this base is a matter of life and death. In case you haven't noticed, not every creature out there likes us. Or has your profession found a way to analyze Narthians and turn them into productive members of society?"

Reeva stood her ground. It wasn't that Reeva was all that excited about spending the next three months with a bunch of glum-faced primales whose idea of a good time was target practice and fighter craft drills, but she would be damned if a male—a primale—was going to run her off, tail between her legs.

"You'll find I'm made of pretty stern stuff, Commander, I'm not going to wilt or fold just because of a couple of cheap shots. So how about you respect my profession and I respect yours?"

"I'll respect you as far as my office. Where we will make our calls." He signaled for a pair of armed escorts to accompany them.

"Is that really necessary?"

Another nerve struck.

"This base, Doctor, is not about necessary or unnecessary or anything else. It's about orders. *My* orders. Which is why you don't belong."

Reeva felt something in her belly on that one. What would this man be like in bed? That intensity, the eyes, the hands, that completely unbridled will. What would I be to him...without my clothes, my rank, or my degree?

Can't go there.

She clutched desperately at fact. Data, hypotheses, Council Policy.

It's the Commander who doesn't belong, not in the world being created back home. A world of male-female cooperation, communication, and free sexual choice. It wasn't just a matter of social fad either—it was a military strategy to create a new, more flexible army to meet future NARTHIAN attacks.

Not that these old school types would admit it.

Reeva was relieved to be on the move, through a trio of round, sealed doors, soldiers at her side. Inside the base itself, the corridors were gray and dull. She went into full observational mode. Time to start her work, time to apply her expertise, part education, part intuition.

Exposed bulkheads and endless rows of dormant emergency lights created a sense of impending doom, washed over with lethargy. Even the rec areas looked awkward, temporary, and unfit for human comfort. Everything was numbered, too, in stark reds and blues, no names, no hints of personality.

Definitely not a good atmosphere for the psychosensorium of the brain. Functional abilities and response potential of the men here might be suffering compromises of ten to twenty percent. And that didn't touch the interpersonal dynamics or the internal coping skills that must surely be in a shambles under VANDAR'S brittle and harsh command style.

Reeva made lots of mental notes all the way to the office of VANDARSaurus Rex. Wasn't he in for a few surprises?

There wasn't any question of Reeva's using a com link to reach her superiors at the Bureau of Psychosensory Study.

"Sit," he ordered as though she were some pathetic little obedient.

Her legs locked upright. *Not for all the gem-sicles in the Ring Nebula you pompous, dictatorial windbag.*

Vandar scowled, letting her know she had just added to her twenty lifetimes sentence in his doghouse.

"This won't take long," he assured her. It was a threat more than anything.

Her nose went regally up in the air as he stood behind his desk, punching in the linkup. A screen lit up, replacing the whole of the unadorned gray side wall.

Other than the Guardian flag and the flag of the Earth Council this man had absolutely nothing in here to say who he was as a person, even as an officer. *How sad*, she thought.

Then again, why should she even care? The man wasn't human, he was completely undesirable. She would never make sex with such a man. She would never kiss or touch

him and she would most certainly never want that sort of military hands on her body, no matter how capable and strong he might be.

She was a fem. Mems were her natural partners. Happy-go-lucky, gentle as lambs. A man like this would want a woman on her knees. He would want her at his sexual beck and call and he would see to it she did as she was told.

Reeva was slightly flushed. *Must be the temperature in here.* Or her body adjusting to the air of the base as opposed to that of the small ship she had been traveling on.

It certainly did not involve any ambiguity in her reaction to this man. She was solidly fem, devoted to her duty. She had passed a battery of tests to get this far, she couldn't fail them even if she tried.

And actually she had tried, but her superiors had caught on.

So why was she still anxious? He was only a man, though a well put together one. He would be a hell of a robo-ball player, with those muscles and the quick eyes and the intensity of his reactions. Some clubs required players to go nude, so as to eliminate computer misreads on the heat signatures from even a partially clothed body. Robo-ball was a game of micromillimeters. No one could beat Reeva. All the mems tried. They wanted her in bed, so they followed her to the clubs and the court. Sometimes for fun she would tell them they could have her if they could best her two out of three. But none could place the tiny silver ball faster, come off the curves smoother. When the white chamber opened back up after the match, the computer voice always announced her as the top scorer. They would beg for sex anyway because mems were pathetic, shameless puppies pursuing their lusts. Reeva hated men chasing her so she avoided them altogether.

Primals did not chase.

If a primale wanted you, you knew it. He would call and you would come. Or he would walk after you. Slowly, very slowly.

You did not run from a primale any more than you would from a jungle cat. You were prey to the cat and you were a conquest to the primale. You didn't even know what it was you would give him. *He* would tell you. He would find it in you. He would take it.

And you would say yes.

But that theoretical "you" was not her. Not Reeva. She wasn't an obedient.

Not even close.

"Vandar, voice access," he spoke to the machine. "Code 119. Request contact with Outer Rim Command. General Nayron."

"Request acknowledged," said the base computer, a pleasant contralto that reminded Reeva of her cluster mother growing up back in Rainbow City on Earth. "Stand by for pre-coordinated bypass."

"Bypass?" His eyes narrowed. "What bypass?"

"Direct connection to GHQ. Earth Command."

"Greetings, Base Commander. I anticipated your call."

Vandar stood at attention. "General Theron."

"At ease," smiled the most senior Guardian, his close cropped hair slightly graying at the temples. "We have no need of formality here. You must be Reeva," his eyes turned to the right.

"Yes, General," she replied, as surprised as Vandar.

"Commander Vandar, let me apologize first off for surprising you like this. I was certain you would have questions, and I wanted you to be able to bring them directly to me."

"Questions," Vandar nodded. "Yes. I'd like to know, Sir, why a woman has been sent to this base. A fem."

"It's unusual. Unprecedented, I know. But Doctor Reeva has unique gifts, she is the best we have and this program is of vital interest to the Council."

Reeva's lips couldn't help but curl up a little while watching the man's ill-disguised displeasure.

Now who was out of order?

"Certainly, Sir. But, surely there are...security concerns."

"I agree. And I trust you to use all discretion, to follow every military law. Doctor Reeva, you must consider yourself under Vandar's command when it comes to all matters outside the immediate scope of your work."

She swallowed, avoiding Vandar's glare. "Yes, Sir."

"And Vandar, I ask that you have faith in Doctor Reeva. She has not been chosen by accident."

"Sir."

Vandar's response was crisp, military to the core. He might as well have been ordered to storm a nest of Narthians single-handedly in his underwear, and probably he would prefer that to another minute in her company.

Talk about getting off to a rip-roaring start.

"I'd like to have a word with both of you." High Councilor Nyssa entered the picture behind her seated husband, the lower half of her gorgeous figure hidden by the general's desk.

Her hand was on his shoulder. "We are counting on both of you, more than you know. Earth's defenses are changing and will change more. The universe is not static. We must study ourselves, as we face adversity."

Reeva studied the Councilor's image, analyzing her words and tone. There was something she hadn't picked up before, when they had first given her the job.

What isn't she saying?

"If we can be of any help," said Theron by way of conclusion, "you know where to reach us. Over and out."

The screen went blank. Back to the lifeless wall. Back to Reeva's impossible assignment. "It appears we will be working together," she took a stab at a fresh start. "Whether we like it or not. What do you say to a truce?"

Vandar pointedly ignored the hand she had extended across the desk as a show of good faith. "There will be rules," he declared. "You will obey them at all times. Is that clear?"

It was clear, all right. Vandarsaurus Rex wanted war and she would give it to him. By the time she was done he would be begging for a transfer out while she converted his base into a model of psychosensual perfection.

"Clear as a crystal stream." She smiled sweetly, making rare use of that one weapon in her arsenal that no man had ever withstood.

Namely, her feminine charm.

Vandar didn't trust that expression on her face one little bit. It spelled trouble, it was impish, it was engaging in all the wrong ways and he didn't like it. He liked nothing about her, actually. What fool in genetic engineering had come up with a fem like that – with the lips and sweet ass and breasts of an obedient. Eyes, hot and piercing, a perfect oval face, trim waist to be held in a man's arms, hips to boil his blood, a belly flat and enticing.

Every mem she meets must walk around with a perpetual hard-on. Only his primale will kept his cock from surging – purple red, hot with the flow of blood, hard as a steel shaft, straining at his uniform trousers to get free, to get at her.

There was no way his men could handle this. There wasn't a pleasure girl in the whole Ark Brothel to hold a candle to her. Not even Penny, his chosen one.

Was headquarters giving them some kind of bizarre test? This psychosensology business of digging into men's minds was iffy enough. Why put it under the direction of a woman with the body of a sex slave and the disposition of a she-wolf?

Granted, primales were not designed to respond to fems, but this one was different, surely General Theron and High Counselor Nyssa realized that?

Not just her appearance, but her unbridled, almost ferocious spirit. And that mouth, surly at every turn – taunting him, practically begging him to take her over his knee and teach her a little discipline and respect for his position. It might come to that yet, if he was to be expected to tolerate her for an unspecified length of time, give her access to the base and to all its personnel.

What the devil was she smiling about? She couldn't be happy with him. What game was she into? These psychosensologists were smart, he would have to watch himself at every turn. They knew how to read a person, too, and how to pick up on clues of personality and behavior that the ordinary person would miss.

They were supposed to have some kind of deep intuition, too.

Did she have any clue that he wanted to take those lips and crush them under his, sweep her into a kiss so deep that she would no longer be able to stand up on her own, an embrace so passionate that she would have nothing at all to say afterward except for the two words a primale most wants from his woman—“Take me”.

“You were going to give me rules?”

Her voice jogged him back to reality. “Rule number one—stay away from restricted areas. Follow all safety directions and keep your whereabouts known to the Officer of the Day.”

“I can go on my own?”

“As long as you report once every two hours, yes.”

“Okay.”

Damn it—is she going to move her lips every time she talks? “Rule number two—no makeup.”

“I’m not wearing any.”

“You’re not?”

All that was just her—the glowing cheeks, the tantalizing eyebrows, the glistening coral pink lips?

“I don’t wear makeup when I am working. Could we please get this over with?”

“Rule number three...” He cleared his throat. “No provocative clothing.”

Like a skimpy negligee that would barely cover those full, firm breasts of hers, a dainty hem that tantalized the eye at the level of her neatly trimmed pussy. Her ass, caressed through silk.

“Excuse me?”

“Your outfits and behavior must be modest,” he persisted.

Reeva’s brows shot up, as did his blood pressure. “What do I strike you as, some kind of bimbo who’s going to run around getting your men all hot and bothered like a pleasure girl?”

Vandar pressed his lips together. She oughtn’t to have said that, because now he had the image in his mind of the tall beauty reduced to a barefoot, perfumed wench, teasingly attired in scraps of silk, locked in silver cuffs on her ankles and wrists, her graceful neck in a gleaming collar, chained to the bed in readiness for the man who would own her for the night.

“I’m concerned with your current display of femininity.”

“What display?” she protested, indicating her one piece crimson uniform with gold trim denoting, quite innocuously, her profession. “This is as unisex as it gets.”

He forced his eyes off the curves of her body. He wanted that flesh in his hands, at his mercy, wanted her screaming to be touched, panting, falling at his feet in readiness to be vanquished. Or maybe resisting, just a little, knowing that her own body would betray her in the end.

"We'll find you some looser jump suits," he said. "And you'll need to do something with your hair."

"My hair? What in blazing stars is wrong with my hair?"

She had it piled on her head, all those intoxicating curls, artfully arranged with two ringlets, the tiniest teases, in front of each ear.

"It's too flashy. Not practical."

"It's called a hairstyle, Commander. Most females have them. Even some men, believe it or not."

"Mems," he clarified. "Not primales."

"Yes, I'm sure you wouldn't come within a thousand light years of a styling robot. I bet you get your hair sizzled off by laser beam or some such nonsense."

"I receive a practical cut, the same one, on a consistent basis."

"Bully for you."

"Your hair is going to be a distraction for my men," he insisted.

"For your men?" she challenged. "Or for you?"

There it was. She was at it already. "You can spare me your psychosensology mumbo jumbo, Doctor. I don't believe in it."

"Its effectiveness does not depend on your belief," she informed him.

Vandar ground his teeth. "Rule number four—you will not analyze me in any way shape or form."

She thrust a hip out and folded her arms, denying him the pleasure of her breasts. "Is that how you keep from having to look at your own behavior, Commander, you dictate everyone else's?"

Rule number five, he thought. Hands stay at side. Unless they are pushing the micro button to open the uniform, causing the pieces to fall away onto the floor.

"It's called being in command, Doctor. There's nothing mysterious about it."

"Yes. Awfully convenient."

Vandar's palms were sweaty as he imagined rule six...

"Do you understand why I am punishing you, girl?"

Reeva, turned around, hands behind her head. His hand was on her bottom, resting there, in anticipation of a spanking. Her voice whispery rasp as she answered his question. "I've been disrespectful, Sir."

His hand caressed the flesh he was about to inflame. "What is the basis of all behavior on this base?"

Her breathing was shallow. "Obedience...Sir."

"There's nothing convenient about me or this place. In case it's escaped your superior observation skills, we are in a state of constant vigilance. That light," he

pointed to a dim red circle on the wall, "is one of a thousand like it in every room. It is connected to the early warning system. Once it goes off, we have less than an hour to prepare for attack. A Narthian attack, Doctor. Have you ever lived through one?"

"No, but I hope to learn from your men."

"There's nothing to learn. You experience it or you don't. And if you do, you thank fate if you survive and you keep your mouth shut."

"Keeping emotions in doesn't make them go away. You can't look at them like the enemy. They are part of us," she said. "They have things to tell us."

If I loved a woman, she would be one like her...

Vandar braced for the shock waves. Where had that come from? A different kind of red light was flashing across his nervous system. Too much stress, tension building. He needed a woman. He needed Penny.

He must call the Pleasure Ark back for an unscheduled stop. For him and for the rest of the men, as soon as they got themselves a dose of their sweet smelling, utterly insolent new guest.

"If emotions speak to you, that's your business. They have nothing to say to me."

"We'll find out," she challenged. "Won't we?"

He clenched his fists. Did she have any idea of the fire she was playing with? Did she think he was some weak-minded mem? Primales were all or nothing. A woman might think she was debating politics or the next day's weather but it was always about sex, and sooner or later she would wind up on her back—penetrated, succumbing to orgasms and taking the seed of the male.

"I will see to it your equipment is moved to a location near your quarters. Your personal effects, including your wardrobe machine should already be there. I will instruct all personnel to assist in your research if it does not interfere with their duties. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have a base to run. I will have someone show you to your quarters. I would imagine you are quite fatigued."

"Why?" she said sharply. "Because I'm a woman?"

By The Guardian Code, she should be a warrior as much as she liked to fight. "Tell me, Doctor, do you intend to go on being this difficult to manage?"

He couldn't read Reeva's answering expression, for all his Guardian powers—super strength, super hearing and super vision.

One smile, from one female, completely confounded him.

"On the contrary, Commander. It's my intention to be impossible to manage."

Vandar's reply was sheer reflex. "In that case, I shall assign a guard to you at all times."

Her eyes homed in, like a shark smelling blood. "I really do frighten you that much, don't I?"

"Only your lack of discipline," he declared.

The smile broadened, making his cock ache. He wanted Reeva in irons, in ropes of silk. He wanted Reeva in bed, tied and helpless, unable to go anywhere at all. Not without permission. And she would bloody well beg, even to go to the bathroom.

"I'm not the one revising his rules ten minutes after he makes them," she pointed out.

"I have revised nothing."

"Rule one," she reminded with damnable precision. "I was to go as I wished, as long as I reported to the Officer of the Day every two hours."

"You will do that as well. You're dismissed, Doctor."

"I'm a civilian."

"A fact you should be grateful for."

"Why is that?"

"Were you a soldier in my command I would have you put in confinement, in irons."

"Don't worry, you can think of me the next time you're doing that to some poor little pleasure girl."

He let her go, and she walked away, with a decidedly saucy sway of her ass. "If she only knew," he muttered under his breath, "how close she came..."

* * * * *

Reeva had gotten the last word in. For all the good it had done her. She had changed her mind about Vandar being a wall, he was worse than a wall. A wall you could at least consistently approach, study and eventually overcome. Vandar was like a maze and every time you thought you were turning a corner you ran smack into a new obstacle.

What was with all the rules and what in the supernova was he onto about her clothes? And her makeup and hair? If she didn't know better she would think there really was something personal going on.

She had thrown out that dart, accusing him of being affected by her and of course he hadn't reacted at all. It was a little test to see how well he held things together.

He was more than together, though, he was vacuum sealed. No surprise that his personnel record was just as terse and enigmatic. Graduated second in his class from the Academy, he had been given a coveted line officer's position. His battalion had been ordered to rescue a communications facility that was under Narthian attack. By the time he'd gotten there the Narthians had infiltrated and turned the humans into hosts for fresh larvae.

There had been an ambush and most of the men were killed. Vandar and a few others had held off over a thousand of the enemy until help arrived. He had received a medal from the Council and was earmarked for a generalship. Twice, however, he had

turned down promotions to stay in war zones. Now he was commanding this remote but vital base.

According to psychosensory data, he was a level one—maximally closed to communication of feelings. She had spent the better part of a week looking for further clues.

And what did she get for her troubles? A mix of cold indifference, hostility and a strange fascination with the details of her person. She followed the guard into a small elevator. Trying to block Vandar out, she focused on psychosensory data. There was an oppressiveness, a building tension as they went down three more levels. From there they walked across a large open area with access ports for missiles. Finally, they reached a narrow corridor which ended at a T intersection. They turned left and left again.

"Your quarters, ma'am." The young soldier stopped at last, in front of a nondescript metal door just like all the others along this particular walkway.

"Thank you, Guardian."

He stood at attention, waiting for her to open the door and go inside. Was he really acclimated to this strange subterranean existence, like a mole on constant, high tech alert, fingers poised on the triggers of enough firepower to knock half a Narthian fleet to kingdom come?

"Guardian, may I ask you a question?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"What do you think of Commander Vandar?"

Her question caught her off guard nearly as much as it did him. It was definitely not one that came from her conscious self. Maybe it was part of being down so deep, she mused, where the subconscious comes to the forefront.

"I don't understand, ma'am." The blond looked barely out of the Training Academy. He was very attractive, in the primale way. A lot of the fems she knew would pick him over a man like Vandar, if they had to choose. Those dreamy brown eyes and the enthusiastic glow of youth. The seductively false impression he gave of being a naturally egalitarian lover. As if the primales had ever heard of such a thing.

"What are your impressions of him," she rephrased.

"He is the Commander," the soldier replied as though this were the most profoundly obvious statement in the world.

"Yes...of course he is," she replied, adding, "and aren't we all glad of it, too?" before she could catch herself.

"Yes, ma'am." The sarcasm evaded him. "Is there anything else I can do for you, ma'am?"

Just get me a horny mem slut or two to fuck my brains out all night and make me forget about Vandarsaurus Rex.

"No, thank you, Guardian." He nodded leaving her to her own devices. *Interesting, she thought, that this primale is giving off no indicators of interest in me despite all of the Commanders dire warnings.* "Guardian, wait. I have to ask you something else. Do you find my hair distracting?"

"From what, ma'am?"

"Never mind," she smiled, "I have my answer."

Another corner turned. He *was* affected by her. But what did that mean?

Reeva knew what men like this thought about women—they were good for nothing but pining away in a man's absence and falling to their bellies in servitude in their presence. Reeva was not that kind of female and the fact that she was damp between her thighs meant nothing.

Nothing that Vandar could use against her at least.

Her new quarters were small but serviceable. The bed was attached to the wall in the corner. There was a sanitizing area and a small desk along with a standard mirror wall, currently in the off position.

The décor was standard, naked military metal, though for some reason the color scheme was olive green and black. How fetching. It was a wonder these men functioned at all. Keeping on a military footing was one thing, but living in a state of continuous sensory deprivation was quite another.

Then again, these were primales, known to be oblivious to the softer edges of life. So strong and hard, all that testosterone pumping through their veins, all that power contained in one structure, bristling with weapons and ships, poised at the lonely edge of the known universe, defending, protecting. Dominating.

Reeva touched her breast through her uniform.

The impulse surprised her, as did the discovery that her nipple was hard and aching. She pushed her finger to the button on her shoulder, disengaging the electronic seams. The urge to touch her own body, to confirm her femininity was overpowering. She ran both hands down her rib cage, shivering as she touched her bellybutton. She wished she had a mem she could direct to do this.

No, that wouldn't do. What was the point of telling the man how? She wanted to feel it from the outside in, she wanted to learn it, she wanted to discover male desire, she wanted to lie back for once and not be the one calculating, determining, defining.

Reeva wanted to be possessed. She wanted to lose control—no—she wanted it taken from her.

No more choices, no more having to analyze. Her pussy was dripping wet, she stifled a moan as she touched herself. It was almost painful, the jagged pent-up desire, so much she wanted to cry. What the hell was going on, how could she feel this much, this fast, all of it undocumented, unanticipated? Vandar was supposed to be the volcano waiting to erupt, not her.

Vandar.

Oh, stars, she thought, keep him out of this. Don't let my fantasies turn to that man, of all people. Let it be anyone else – the clueless young blond, the anonymous guards in the hall, the last mem I played robo-ball with.

Too late.

He was there, all right, and she could see him standing in front of her, those damnable eyes, riveted on her. Fixing her, like an Earth deer in the beam of ancient car lights.

Leave me alone!

He was not leaving her alone. He was opening his full, imaginary lips to talk, getting ready to invade her fantasy with sound. It was bad enough in real life because everything came out so smug, so...sexy. The way he rasped the words, the way he was so totally, stubbornly confident.

Vandar was wrong about so many things. Completely willing to trust his own instincts against reason, against the pervading sentiments of most of humanity. Why was that irrational willfulness such a turn-on. She was a scientist for galaxy's sake.

Not now she wasn't. She collapsed on her bed, lay on her back and parted her legs. Arching her back, she found her clit to rub and her nipple to pinch as the dream filled her senses, matching the beat of her burgeoning lust.

Reeva would regret this. This would be an ordinary woman's sex fantasy and she was not an ordinary woman. She was a psychosensologist. Behind her intense training in human behavior and its environment lay the gift. The ability to see into others and to see connections. In ancient times it was called witchcraft, or women's intuition. Many females were driven mad by visions of the future, by apparitions from other worlds.

Nowadays it was understood differently—as the mind's own power to link sensation, idea and emotion, creating internal visions that touched eerily on the fringes of reality.

There were possibilities with Vandar, under different circumstances.

She wished she could leave all that alone, but she couldn't. The fire was drawing her, blue-hot, beckoning her irresistibly—curious, too-clever-for-her-own-good moth that she was.

Vague and formless at first, the images congealed behind closed eyes. Two souls, wisps of smoke, intertwining, about to play the eternal game.

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They were alone in a room. And there was no way out. He closed the gap between them, all avenues of conversation exhausted. No more foreplay...

"You've taunted me long enough, Doctor Reeva. Now you will find out how primales handle arrogant women."

"I don't want this. I don't want you."



"You don't know what you want, Doctor." He crushed her in his arms for a kiss, she couldn't breathe, she couldn't react, she could only give way, remove her will from the line of fire, allowing him to have everything he wanted. Too hard to fight both him and her own body. "So I'm going to tell you."

"But...you don't know me."

His hands molded her breasts. "You're not that hard to figure out, female. You have a wet pussy, you want a cock in it and you'll get it...on my terms."

"No."

He laughed, low and satisfied. "That's not an option for either of us."

His hand grasped her wrist. She was powerless as he placed her hand over his crotch. "That's a primale erection. It's for you, Reevea. Only you."

"Yesss..." She was assailed by a sense of awe and duty and a need so deep she could not keep it at bay. Her hands grabbed at his clothing, she wanted him naked, she must see his body, she must let him follow through.

His chest was magnificent—hairless, smooth and muscled, marked with numerous battle scars. She kissed him, pressing her lips to his nipple. He held her head against him with such a combination of power and gentleness. Reevea suckled, excited, everything seemed new, as if she'd never tasted a man. He stroked her hair. He was so big all over. Stars...no mem was that tall, no mem could dwarf her like that and make her feel small and so very feminine.

His pale blue Guardian's uniform was gone in the wink of an eye. She held her breath, touching the tip of his cock. Hard for her and her alone.

He gave her free rein, caressing her back, letting her explore his cock and balls, the sacks heavy, the skin warm and deliciously rough. He was strong enough to let her play, but it was understood who was in command—he was allowing this to happen.

"I'm going to come inside you, Reevea."

Her knees buckled, her insides turned to mush. She dared to look up into his eyes, all the way up, bending her neck, losing herself in his world, in his will. "Take me, Vandar," was all she could say, it was not a request, it was a plea. "Make me yours."

His hand went to the back of her neck, he kissed her again and this time he owned her. "You already are mine, Red...from the moment I laid eyes on you."

He lifted her into his arms, scooped her up in midair before she could fall. She was nothing but desire and need now, an agonized emptiness, her mouth reduced to a tiny void where only seconds ago his tongue had been. Plunging, plundering, occupying. And her sex—that was transformed too, into nothing but anticipation as though it had been marked "property of" from the day she became a woman and other males had only been warming it up.

Her hands, so slender and delicate, wrapped around his powerful neck. As he laid her down she clung to him, unable to hold back. "Vandar, don't make me wait."

She knew the choice was his. He would torment her as he wished. He held all the cards, having revealed the full depth of her weakness in the fragrance of her pussy, the swelling of her lips, the desperation in her moist eyes. Conquer me quickly, they seemed to say...My Lord.

His hands moved to cover her wrists, confirming the surrender of upturned palms. He pinned her, though his power was a thousand times hers, rendering the point moot. She did not dare move or breathe—he was the tiger and she was the quarry. So different than anything Reeva had known. His was not a mem cock but a primale one. Longer, thicker with potential for surging orgasm minutes long, torrents of cum which the male could direct or withhold into the body of his lover. A primale's shaft was his weapon in a very real sense. He might take a woman in a million ways, he might confound her, punish her with pleasure or shame her to silence, but he *would* make her scream like the most desperate of females.

But nothing, nothing was like the first time with a primale. A woman could have a lifetime of sexual experience but she would still seem virgin.

Vandar stayed his sweet victim, giving succor to her whimpers. In one smooth motion, he claimed the canal which was his, which had burned and ached from first sight.

He filled her beyond all reason. Time and space disappeared. There was no before or after, there was only the now of Vandar's erection. Inside she felt every ridge, every vein, the pulsing of life, the heat building and building to the inevitable. His slightest movement would cause her to come, dissolving into ecstasy, but the question was whether she would be able to stop...ever. She had to grip those strong shoulders, she had to pray this man was every bit the god he appeared, able to hold her together when she exploded.

One look into his eyes told her it would be all right. She could let go, she could enter that land of volcano promises, red skies, red pulsing seas and molten air.

The scream was too deep for sound. He lifted himself, poising at the very entrance of her sex for a return thrust. Had she started coming already or was this just the buildup? Already it exceeded anything she had ever experienced.

She writhed underneath him while he held himself, his own position strengthening with each heartbeat even as hers weakened, as if she needed to give any further evidence she was naught but a slave in his embrace.

He waited until she moaned her surrender and then he descended. Immediately, he retracted and plunged again, his pace, his furious assault, powered precisely to give pleasure and not to cause a hint of pain.

But maybe pain would have been better than to be kept on the razor's edge, one orgasm after another, paradoxically receiving no satisfaction, only the yearning for more. He let her bite into his shoulder, tasting skin and sweat. He let her claw at him. He could handle that, after all he was not a mem who would howl and cry foul at a little pain. He was a man who accepted the consequences of his fully aroused woman.

His—the bottom line, beginning and ending. No point in counting climaxes anymore, or heartbeats or the number of times their bellies slapped together—male muscle on female flesh, soft curve on harder angle. She nearly lost herself for good when he took her breast in his mouth. It was like a final confirmation, a declaration, letting her know it was his right. *This is mine*, he was saying. *Woman, you are mine*.

Reeva came and came and came—*his*.

Until there was nothing more to the universe than his impending climax. She yearned to worship it with her flesh, to take his ejaculation deep into her body, her soul.

“Please...Master...”

He roared as he closed his eyes in sheer primale joy. The climax could have lasted a few moments or a lifetime, it made absolutely no difference. She was flooded, saturated by semen. Primale hot, primale thick. She smiled, contracting around him, holding him in, taking and pleasuring him even as she knew in her heart that secret, universal feminine peace of making her man happy.

He rested at last, settling on her breast. He stayed hard in the primale fashion, letting her know he was capable of more, that he intended to maintain his place in her fantasies. It dawned on her the boundaries were not what they seemed. A man like Vandar would inevitably want everything and he was built to get it. Used to obedients who were meant to give and give and give, submitting perpetually with lust-filled joy.

But Reeva wasn't in any way submissive.

Or was she?

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After her masturbation session, Reeva forced herself into the cleansing cylinder, located in the sanitizing chamber connected to her quarters. Naked in the small silver encasement, she allowed the overhead beams to pour down over her skin. Red for burning away layers of dead skin, pink for deep moisturizing, blue for restoration. Usually she enjoyed beam time, using it as an occasion to clear her mind and dwell in the moment. No worry for her job and all its manifold responsibilities for the mental health and well-being of her patients. A complete surrender of the stresses she felt for annoying mems, as well as her unhappiness with the political structure, particularly with primales.

Like Vandar.

Her body tensed instantly, all the benefit of sex-making with herself lost. To her amazement the beams were doing nothing to help. They were only heating her skin. Her mind.

She was ready to throttle Vandar. Or make imaginary sex with him again. Sighing, she switched to final healing mode, allowing the machine to inject her with microscopic building cells to invigorate her skin and bones. For the first time since her arrival she felt it. Fatigue.

For a long while she had been pushing it off. There were a lot of things she was pushing off. Unanswered questions. Much as she hated to admit it, Vandar was right about one thing. Sending a woman here could be problematic if the woman weren't very careful and well-equipped to keep the men in line.

Why did Theron and Nyssa send her, of all people? There were equally well-trained males.

Evantius would have come. He certainly thought well enough of himself. In his mind he should have all the best missions *and* Reeva in his bed whenever he wanted. But ego didn't turn her on. It was hard to explain the difference with Vandar. He pissed her off a million times more but he wasn't a braggart. Anything he said he meant and she knew instinctively he would never lie to her, no matter how harsh the truth might be in its place. There was something very, very sexy about that.

Speaking of the truth, the more she thought about Nyssa's words back in the conference room, and the look on her face, the more Reeva was convinced information was being concealed. Nyssa had a reputation—and Theron, too—for manipulating situations, putting people together, matchmaking even, to further the cause of Earth.

She felt a hot twist in her belly. Nausea and...something else.

Were they trying to mate her and Vandar? But why? They weren't special genetic experiments like Nyssa and Theron. Nor were they at the highest ranks of society.

Her brain was tired of thinking. She was on rational overload, testosterone pressing on her from every angle of this base.

She needed rest, though she was determined not to go to bed. Just to spite him for telling her how tired she was.

Reeva sighed. She was being childish. This was not good. Not good at all. She had to think clearly, sharply, she had to stay on her game. Rest wasn't an option, it was a necessity. A few hours down time and then she would have the strength she needed to work.

To lose herself in work, to be precise.

There were over thirteen hundred soldiers on this base. And she would study and analyze every last one, not to mention exhausting every single record of base functioning in order to show up Commander Vandar and prove once and for all that females could make contributions as more than pretty ornaments draped on a man's arm.

Although, if one was to be draped on an arm, Vandar's would definitely be the one to choose.

Chapter Two

Technically, primales did not sleep. They used periodic sessions of deep self-hypnosis which allowed them to enter into a state of deep restorative brain rest. As little as thirty minutes a day was required on average. Under battle conditions a primale might go three or four Earth day cycles at a state of high functioning. The advantage was that a facility like Star Base 117 could operate with less than half the personnel since each Guardian could work double, even triple shifts.

The disadvantage was that primales lacked prolonged opportunities to shut things out of their minds that might be disturbing them.

Such as tall and dazzlingly beautiful psychosensoral counselors who had no apparent respect for the position of a Star Base Commander.

It wasn't like Vandar was asking so much of the woman. Basic conformity, the barest amount of discipline. Reevea was impossible, even for a fem. She argued with him every time he opened his mouth.

One encounter with her left him completely agitated.

How in the world she was supposed to offer anything constructive toward efficiency and mental calm among the men was beyond him.

The best he could hope for was to hurry her work along and get her out of there. And minimize any damage in the meantime.

They were all going to want her. That was a fact. What man, what primale in his right mind would not need to possess such a beauty? Fights could easily erupt. The will to dominate that woman could disrupt the very life of the station.

From the moment she left his office, he made keeping tabs on her the highest priority.

Guardian Sordon had the first watch. He checked in hourly. The subject was sleeping in her quarters.

Over fatigued, though she had been too stubborn to admit it. Cranky and surly as a result. Obedients had bedtimes for this very reason. Their shapely behinds were to be on the sleep pad at a certain time or they would face the consequences. Oh, how he would love to give Reevea a little taste of order in her life.

Vandar toyed with the idea of employing the surveillance system. Every square inch of the base was under digital monitoring for security purposes. That seemed excessive, however, at least at this stage.

Anyway the thought of seeing her undressing, lying down, her body under his gaze was a bit disconcerting. As it was he kept having to fight down erections. In his head he

calculated the star flow matrix of every heavenly body within ten parsecs as well as over six billion possible outcomes of a standard opening six dimensional chess game.

He was all the way up to five billion nine hundred-ninety-nine thousand-seventy-six when he suddenly pictured Reeva sitting across from him, bending over to make the next move in the game, her luscious breasts hanging down, nipples pink as rose petals.

Sometimes it really was not fun to be a primale.

Vandar hoped the daily rounds would provide a little more diversion. He was in the process of checking the forward electro gun batteries when Sordon called him on the com link.

"Commander, the subject is emerging."

His heart quickened. "What is she wearing?"

"Sir?"

"Her clothing, describe it."

"It's...it's a jumpsuit, green and black."

"Does it cover her completely?"

"Yes, Sir."

He refrained from asking how tightly it adhered to her generous curves. Frankly he wasn't thrilled with Sordon looking at her at all. Still, it had to be done. "Sordon, I want you to explain to her that we must inspect the settings on her wardrobe machine."

Was it set to make pretty and revealing clothes, skirts to show those magnificent legs, something to bare that belly?

"Who are you talking to?" He heard an incensed female voice. Vandar frowned. She did not sound less cranky for her rest.

"I'm speaking to the Commander, ma'am."

"You're telling him what I have on?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What on earth for?"

"He asked me, ma'am."

"You must be joking."

"No, ma'am. He also wants me to tell you we need to inspect your clothes-making machine."

Vandar winced slightly.

"My machine? What the hell do you need with my machine?"

"The settings, ma'am, for what sorts of garments you make."

"All right, that's it."

"Ma'am?"

"Take me to that overbearing, micromanaging...*pervert* on the other end of the line," she insisted. "At once."

"Sir," Sordon began, sounding like a man under fire. "The subject is requesting—"

"I heard her, Guardian. Bring her to Forward Battery X-7. I'll meet her there."

They came in off the elevator a few minutes later. If possible, Reeva looked angrier than yesterday. Sordon gave him a crisp salute.

"Orders, Sir?"

"You may return to regular duties in the disposal chute."

"Yes, Sir." The man's relief was palpable. Who could blame him for preferring garbage management to dealing with the moody fem?

"Vandar, have you completely lost your mind?" she demanded, dispensing with any form of greeting.

"Come over here, Doctor Reeva, I want to show you something. He patted his hand on the sleek silver needle pointing up through the carefully drilled hole in the ceiling. "This is one of our electro guns, ignited from here the beam travels to the surface and from there is capable of maintaining a hundred nano-millimeter band over one-twelfth of a light year. In other words, we can punch a hole in a pebble five seconds from now at a distance a beam of regular light would take a month to reach."

Her arms were folded, the green eyes lit. Passion like that would have to translate into explosive sex-making...for someone. He wondered how in the world she found satisfaction with mems—she must chew them up and spit them out.

"That's a nice physics lesson, Commander, but what does it have to do with snooping into my wardrobe? What exactly were you going to do while your poor stooge described the schematics of my lingerie? Fire up your electro gun?"

Vandar stiffened. "Doctor Reeva, if you are implying—"

"That you are hard up for masturbation material?" she cut off. "Well what else should I think? You want to know what I like to wear? I like old-fashioned things from the twentieth century—garter belts and stockings, tight-waisted corsets, in red to match my hair. I like to make sex in red lingerie, Commander. In fact I'm going to make sex with everyone on this base, and every time your back is turned I will screw another of your men."

Vandar's cock throbbed in his uniform. He was still back in the middle of her harangue, putting himself in the picture, fucking her hard and fast, in her red undergarments, pushing himself in and out of her from behind while she submitted to him on all fours, on a creaking brass bed, with a collar on her neck for good measure and a pretty little chain securing her to the center rod.

"And then I will hop up on the old electro gun here and take it for a ride. How does that sound?"

His teeth ground. All this noise out of her and all he wanted was one moan. A single whimper.

One solitary "Yes, Master" to make all this hell she was putting him through worthwhile.

She was clearly waiting for an answer, hand on those proportionately slender hips, and that's what he gave her.

"Doctor, I am sure your little tantrums are quite effective with mems. In case you haven't noticed, I am a primale."

"Noticed? How could I miss that much ego, combined with rigid and nonsensical anti-fem attitudes, not to mention a resistance to the very idea of progress itself?"

"Any progress you have," he reminded, "is owed to some primale who laid down his life to keep Earth alive and Bug free."

"Don't you get all sanctimonious with me, mister. The survival of humanity does not hinge on my preferences in underwear."

He frowned. Was there no way around her? "I have never had my orders questioned like this."

"If they are all as ridiculous as the ones I've heard," she spat back, "they should be."

Vandar pressed his lips together. She had done it again, pushed him past the point of serenity into heavy primale mind space. "My orders may appear ridiculous, young lady, but they will be enforced. By me, personally, and in a manner, I assure you, you will not enjoy."

"Explain yourself," she demanded.

"Disobey me, Reeve, and you will be punished. As a female." His body hummed, his fingers tingled with the need to manipulate her flesh, to bring her in line.

She snorted. "What are you going to do, spank me?"

The adrenaline surged. He could no longer control his erection. To hear the words hot off her lips – was she goading him or was that his imagination?

"Yes, Reeve, that's exactly what I will do. Just like an obedient."

She closed the gap between them to mere inches. "In your dreams, primale."

The kiss should not have happened. He had no one but himself to blame. Reeve gasped, but had no chance to resist. He *was* a primale and she should not have called him out on that. Fem or no, she was a woman and he was genetically engineered to conquer women – as surely as he was meant to conquer Narthians.

Nothing could describe the feeling of her opening to him, that brittle exterior crumbling, those maddening soft curves yielding, her breasts pressing, inviting, her belly exciting, almost undulating. And the lips...passion beyond description. He wanted in that mouth, wanted to taste her tongue and play with it, to fence with her and gauge...for other activities. What would she be like with his cock between her legs? What would her absolute surrender look like, when she fell to him as she must? What color the rose of her sex? The sound of her sighs, what intonation and the words...what words would she beg with when it came time to plead for her release?

Primals controlled orgasms in their women as they controlled everything else. It was all sexual, all foreplay, every tiny detail of her.

His hands were cradling her back. He wanted to be everywhere at once. He wanted to have it all now, but he wanted to delay. His super-quick senses divided the seconds to milliseconds and then again to a thousandth of that. Slow motion, even as the higher levels of his brain told him this was wrong on so many levels and would lead to nothing good.

She made a small noise as he cupped her ass, the ass he craved so much to pinch and redden. This parted her lips for him and in went his tongue. His cock thrust at her pelvis through their uniforms. His other hand rose to her neck, and moved to undo her hair—all that glistening copper, tantalizingly arrayed in a different style, more dazzling than yesterday. He wanted it down about her shoulders, he wanted her vulnerable to his fingers, to entwine and yank, to pull her to heel. A woman's hair was her best weapon—swishing curls, long silky tresses, and it belonged in a man's grip.

Strangely it was the intimate feel of his hands in her hair which awoke her, even more than the erotic dance of tongues. They were drinking, testing flavors, mouths molded, eons of togetherness to go.

But when he released the tiny electronic lock on her barrette—that was when she reacted. As if he had just tried to pull off her suit.

Reeva squirmed. A muffled protest. Her hands pushed at his chest, rejecting his advance.

She wasn't supposed to be able to do that. She was only a woman. And he was a primale...in heat.

"Let go of me!" She slapped him hard.

He held his cheek, not in any sort of pain, but in utter disbelief.

She wasn't supposed to be able to do that either.

He stood, feeling very, very helpless as she backed away. This was not a good feeling. Not one he was genetically designed for.

"Okay, Mr. Vandarsaurus Rex, it's time for me to set some rules for a change." She fixed her hair and started counting off, using the fingers of her slender, smooth white hand.

"Rule number one. You keep your lips to yourself and every other part of you. Rule number two. You let me do my job. You don't send lackeys on panty raids in my room, you don't ask what I am wearing—in fact you ask nothing at all. Rule number three—no one follows me around and carries my books to school while I'm working. What I could use is a robot guide. Rule number four—if you so much as sneeze in response to anything I have just said, I will be on the link so fast to report you for harassment that it will make your considerably swelled head spin like a gyroscope. Any questions?"

Vandar shook his head no.

"Fine. In that case, have a good day."

She stormed past the elevator and stopped in front of the bomb disposal doors which were of a similar shape.

"That's not the exit," he said, trying not to sound inflammatory.

She whirled on him. He noted the erect nipples. Her lips were puffy from where they'd been kissed, the flesh pressed against pearl white teeth. He had liked her breathing up close, soothing, entrancing...enticing.

"You are talking to me," she accused.

He frowned.

In a moment she disappeared into the elevator. Leaving him relieved, but also strangely empty.

The com link chirped for his attention the moment the elevator closed.

"Vandar here."

"Commander, the Pleasure Ark is in orbit, per your orders."

Not a moment too soon.

"Very good. Coordinate sessions for all personnel. ASAP."

"And for yourself, Sir?"

"The usual."

Penya – before it's too late, before I bond with a fem...

If I haven't already.

"Yes, Sir."

"I want a robot guide sent for Doctor Reeva as well. She is coming down elevator 345-11."

"Yes, Sir."

"One more thing. I need the information banks to run a search for me. I need possible meanings for an unknown phrase."

"Go ahead, Sir."

He frowned, knowing whatever she had in mind, it wasn't flattering. "The phrase is...Vandarsaurus Rex."

* * * * *

Reeva held herself together until the elevator doors closed. How could one kiss have blasted her open like that, wasting her so completely? She wanted to make sex with Vandar so badly it hurt—no it agonized her. But the terror had held her back, neatly masked as anger. That would not have been sex-making, that would have been a very different animal.

He was a different animal. Memes were pups, he was a wolf. Memes were kitties, you put milk in a bowl, you let them rub on your leg and you made sure they got you off. He was a full-blooded tiger and its blood, its prey was the nude female human.

What did you say to a primale but "Take me" and even that was pointless. Did you order the wind to blow in your face, did you shout to thunder?

I was almost had...by a primale. If he had gotten inside me, if that shaft had pierced me, if those hands had gotten onto uncovered skin...

All of that was physiology and she knew it backward and forward. Primales were genetic super males, fems steered clear. "Primales don't make sex, they make slaves". So went the saying, and every fem, in her heart, both loathed and was fascinated. To be owned by a male...to have him focus that kind of power and control on you.

Yes, she knew the physiology, but that didn't explain what had just happened with Commander Vandar, standing there with his space needle.

Her hands cupped her sore breasts, sore because they were swollen with the need to be exposed, appraised...devoured. Leaning against the gray metal wall, she did a piss-poor job of holding them, molding them. What was she supposed to do with fem hands? That's not what her bosom needed. It was a frigging insult.

Her sex wasn't too pleased either, when she pressed the edge of her hand between her thighs. It was almost cruel, reminding her pulsing, wet cavern of what it did not have.

A primale cock. Thick and hard, bigger than any mem's and under the complete control of its owner.

This was one of the weapons of primale sexual domination. They could withhold an orgasm for hours, reducing a woman to a crying, begging pool of flesh or they could assault her with one, two, even three ejaculations mere seconds after entry. Everything, the size of the erection, the heat and the amount of cum was in his power.

What chance did a woman have? Fems weren't up for it. That's why there were obedients, niche creatures created as perfect vessels. The more the male controlled, subdued and took her over in and out of bed, the happier she was.

Which raised an interesting question. Why was Vandar attracted to her as he obviously was? She was a fem and a flamboyant one at that. He ought to be turned off by her. Had he gone rogue? It wasn't as though she sent out signals—treat me like an obedient, order me around, micromanage me, threaten to spank me.

A spanking...oh, stars, how had that come up?

Her big mouth, that's how.

Good going, Reeve. He certainly has no doubt what's on your mind.

The elevator slowed. She straightened up quickly and put her fem face on. All business.

The doors slid open. She was back on the level of her sleeping quarters.

A small, hovering sphere was waiting for her.

"Greetings, Doctor. Guide Bot Beta Three One Thousand at your service."

Reeve was surprised at the higher pitch of the voice. "Your programmer...was female?"

"Affirmative, Doctor. Fem Lesidia of Asteroid Normon Three."

Reeva inclined a single red brow. This had potential. "Tell me, Beta Three One Thousand, what can you tell me about the Commander?"

"I have over fifty-three million starbytes of information with regard to his actions on this station. You will have to be more specific."

"Really? How wonderful, Beta Three One Thousand – or can I call you Betty?"

"If that pleases you."

"Oh, yes it does."

Almost as much as it was going to please her to get to the bottom of Vandar's bizarre behavior.

And get control of him.

Not for personal reasons, no, but for the sake of her mission. Once she understood him, everything else would fall into place. At least in theory.

"What I am most interested in at the moment is any information you have on the Commander's relationships with the opposite sex? I know it's a stretch, given you only know whatever he chooses to share with his macho friends, but it would be a start."

"The Commander has a relationship." The robot said, shocking her. "A female comes to his quarters."

"A female? How is that possible?"

"A pleasure ark visits monthly. The woman is one of the pleasure girls."

Reeva promptly ushered her new ally back to her quarters. "You must tell me everything," she insisted. "Don't leave out a single thing."

For research, of course. For work, nothing personal.

* * * * *

Penya laid her head on Vandar's thigh, her golden curls spilling over his hardened muscles. "Master, please forgive me? I am not pleasing to my Lord?"

He stroked her head. Such a simple creature, obedient to the core. "This is not your fault, Penya, you are a good girl."

Her shoulders heaved. He felt her hot tears on his skin.

"Penya, look at me." Vandar took her chin, lifting it with his thumb and forefinger. "I am telling you this is not your doing. Do you doubt your Master?"

She shook her head, but she was beyond comforting. "I-I didn't make Master hard. Please, beat me, Master? Whip me until I am worthy of you again."

Vandar sighed. "Very well, you may fetch it."

This was not like him – to lack enthusiasm while indulging in domination play. He must rally himself.

"Thank you, Master, thank you." She bent to bestow a small kiss, her lips eager and pressing to his bare foot.

He watched her scamper off on all fours across the thick red carpet to fetch the old-fashioned black leather whip. She would return with it in her teeth. Penny was an exquisitely trained girl, and she was beautiful and shapely, too, designed at the level of her very cell structure to please a strong and demanding male. Every inch of her sweet, captive little body programmed to writhe and react and submit.

It was no secret that Penny desired that submission to be for him alone. If he permitted it, she would beg him to collar her each time they met. Indeed, most literally, she had no hope, no meaning in the universe but serving Vandar, and to one day be his lifemate.

She was a dream of an obedient, but he simply could not take a mate. There was no explaining it either. It was just a fact of how things were, how he was. Certainly he had the option as a Guardian, but he would never exercise it.

Some officers made a vow of commitment to the Corps in place of a lifemate arrangement, but Vandar considered that to be grandstanding.

As one small concession to Penny, as well as for the appeasement of his own primal possessive impulses, he allowed her to understand herself as spiritually mated to him. Which meant that in her heart she would know he was committed, that he would make sex with no other woman. She, in turn, would submit to whatever men came to call as part of her job. She would make sex as her duty, just as he would serve as a Guardian as his.

Vandar was not aware of any other relationship of this nature. He was mated neither to the Corps nor the woman, but somewhere in between. Whether other primals were capable of balancing out their desires he did not know.

The arrangement suited him, that's what mattered. He had no wish to complicate matters by being with another female. He liked the singular touch of Penny, liked how he was her only real Master though she called dozens of men that every week. Above all he enjoyed making sex with an obedient, commitment free.

The arrangement was also in Penny's best interest. Were she his sole property she would have to live all alone, in a home back on Earth or the colonies, doing nothing but waiting for his occasional leaves back home.

A perfect relationship, indeed. Except that it was predicated on his sexual arousal and at the moment he had none. Penny blamed herself, but he knew better. His cock, which was indelibly tied to his brain, was fixating on another female and therefore he could not respond to his lovely blonde mistress.

Penny crawled back, laying the whip at his feet.

He tried to imagine the circumstances required to get Reeva to do such a thing. She would have to be possessed, conquered to a degree unimaginable for a fem. How far would he try and push himself, given the opportunity? He had taken a kiss, could he take other things, up to and including her freedom?

Mems made sex, primals made slaves.

But the slaves they made were obedient, which didn't count.

Vandar was on his feet, stepping over the subjugated woman.

"Master, where are you going?"

"I must check on something."

This was bound to upset Penny all over again, not because she would dare question or resent his decision to put her off but because she would see his behavior as a reflection on her, as being a poor slave, not worth his time.

"Yes, Master..." She looked shattered, dejected and utterly defeated.

It occurred to him that obedients could be very tiring. They required so much energy. Subjugated as they were, they tended to need oceans of attention. Unlike Reeva who fought tooth and nail for freedom. That would be an interesting matchup in bed – her...and a primale.

Not any primale. He didn't like that. Her...and him.

"Status report," he linked to the Officer of the Day via his wrist com, which was on the nightstand.

Guardian Therax rattled off a number of statistics, star positions, maintenance updates, scout ship manifests.

Vandar responded here and there. There was nothing that couldn't have waited, he had an ulterior motive. "Any reports on our guest?"

"None, Sir."

"None at all?"

"No, Sir."

"Very well."

So his last round of threats must have worked. She was being a good girl. A good *woman*. He returned to Penny, who was waiting for him on the bed. She had already put herself in punishment position, facing away on all fours, ass thrust out and so very tempting a target. But where was the challenge? That little round surface had been smacked by him so many times, with his hands and whips and paddles and all he had to do was give the order, a little to the left, Penny, or a little to the right.

But where was the challenge?

"Penny," he said, "I want you to resist me."

"Master?"

"I want you to try to wriggle away when I whip you."

She looked over her shoulder, her blue eyes tormented and confused. "Master, I don't understand. Why would you want me to do that? That would be misbehaving?"

"Never mind." He touched her bottom lightly. "Forget I said anything."

"Yes, Master. Are you going to whip me now, Master?"

He looked at the whip in his hand. It felt dead and cold, no energy. Like his cock. The same cock that was so erect in Reeva's presence that he thought he might tear his uniform trousers.

"No, Penya. I've changed my mind."

Seeing her quivering lip, he said sternly, in a tone no obedient could refuse, "You will not cry, Penya. You will accept Master's will and Master's decisions."

That decision might well have to include the celibacy he had never wished to exercise. Some sort of crossroads had been reached. His sexuality had become unreliable, aberrant. Reeve was not an appropriate sex interest. Kissing visiting scientists was something that could never happen again. The entire process of erotic energy might need to be shut down.

At the very least he could not touch Penya any further today. It was not fair to her. He would see another's face and want her to be another woman. And he in turn would be torn apart.

The slave would not take this news well.

"Penya, I need you to sit up and listen to me, very, very carefully."

Penya sat cross-legged, dutifully, painfully attentive.

Vandar's heart clenched like a fist. Never before had he left before the conclusion of their allotted time, never before had he entered her chamber and not consummated his domination. "Penya, I am not able to make sex with you today. The reasons are —"

Penya didn't let him get any further. She threw herself at him, in hysterics. "Master, don't leave me, I will be a better slave, I swear it, I promise..."

He embraced her woodenly, a dark cloud descending over his mind.

Talk about temptations—blaming Reeve for all this would be so very convenient. But he mustn't do that. He was a man. A primale. She was a woman. Only a woman. She didn't influence things one way or another. Unless he let her.

By the Code, look how his decision to send for the Pleasure Ark had backfired. A simple attempt to keep Reeve's influence minimized had disrupted his relationship with Penya forever. Try as he might, Reeve's words burned in his ears.

On the contrary, Commander. It's my intention to be impossible to manage. She didn't intend to be difficult to manage...she planned to be impossible.

So far, her mission was succeeding wildly. As for his own—to maintain personal equilibrium—it was failing. Miserably.

"Please..." Penya sobbed, attempting to placate him with her body. "Please."

"My will is final." Vandar rose from the bed. There was nothing more he could do for this beautiful, devoted female. What she wanted—the pure possession of her flesh by an aroused primale—he could no longer give her. Penya collapsed, her head in her hands.

He put his clothes back on, his heart full of sorrow for the slave. He was doing what he had to, but she was paying the price. Curious about something, he checked the schedule which was posted on the wall.

The next man to make use of pretty *Penya* was to be *Guardian Sordon*. The officer who had guarded *Reeva*, the one who had provided him the description of what she was wearing.

Looking back, that particular incident irritated him. He rather wished he had not encouraged *Sordon* to see *Reeva* in anything close to a sexual manner. This was inappropriate for any of the men. Their eyes didn't belong on the redheaded fem any more than their hands should ever touch that skin of hers or their lips visit where his had been.

He felt his blood pressure rise. Was this a mere concern for base operations, or was he feeling a note of...possession. *Primals* were notorious for not sharing. Though a man be a lifelong friend, he would become a dire enemy indeed should he touch that man's woman.

But *Reeva* was not his woman. Never would be.

Back to the *Penya* situation. He had a brainstorm.

A way to deal with two problems at once. *Guardian Sordon* was young, close to *Penya's* age, they even had matching coloring. *Sordon* had no lifemate, no attachments. He had at times showed signs of sentimentality. *Vandar* was concerned for him. There were certain *primals* who did not function properly without a woman to dominate and call their own. *Penya*, for her part, was the sort of obedient better suited to belonging to one man.

Clearly, these two could fill a void in each other's lives. And that, in turn, would free him. To concentrate on his duty. His nonsexual life.

Certainly he could try and help things along. He must be subtle, though.

"*Penya*," he towered over her, "hear the will of *Vandar*, *primale*, *Guardian*, your Lord and spiritual Master. My decisions are always final and never to be questioned. Your obedience to me must be of a nature deeper than anything physical. Therefore in lieu of using your body for my pleasure today, I give you a far more difficult command, girl, and I expect it to be obeyed. Indeed, it shall be the greatest sign of your devotion to me and I will treasure this act as being greater than a lifetime of sexual servitude."

"Yes, Master." She bucked up.

"The next man to use you..." said *Vandar*. "You will offer yourself to him, with no reservations. I know you are a perfect slave, but I want more of you. You will bare your soul to him."

"Y-yes, Master." Her eyes were filled with awe...and terror.

She well realized what this could mean. She was to leave herself vulnerable for full mating with another.

"No more tears," he warned. "You must prepare yourself for what life may offer. The next man is *Sordon*. You like him, don't you?"

"I seek to please him," she whispered, her voice hollow. "As I do all men."

Vandar frowned. "Well look for more in him. He is a fine primale. Let nature work. We can't stand in its way. No one can."

"Yes, Master." Penya swallowed her emotions. She was a good little soldier. She was an obedient, the best he had ever known. He would miss her very much.

"M-Master?"

"What is it, girl?" He hoped she would not ask if he was going to see her again because he did not know that himself.

"May I...may I have a last kiss?"

By the Code, this was even worse.

The request, reasonable as it was, hit him in the gut like a Narthian body probe. He could only think of Reeva, the stolen kiss which still burned on his lips and which no amount of pleasure taken with the body of sweet Penya could ever remove. How could he explain that her touch, even the very sight of her had become painful.

Because she was not Reeva.

"No. I'm sorry. I cannot." He left the room, sealing the door behind him so he would not hear any further tears. Not his finest hour, but he was primale, not mem, and certainly not a psychosensologist to smooth things over.

Like Reeva. She smoothed nothing. How in the fire storms of Kiros did she ever get her license?

Vandar returned to his transport ship. Leaving the exit port of the Ark he called the base. "Have Guardian Sordon meet me at the landing bay. I have a matter to discuss with him."

Penya wasn't the only one he could order into submission. Sordon, too, would yield. The result would serve everyone's interest. Why was it so hard for a certain redhead to see the advantage of quietly conforming to his will? He was not put in this position by accident. He knew what the hell he was doing.

Didn't he?

As for the little Vandarsaurus Rex comment, which he now understood all too well, thanks to the information bank, it could not be further from the truth. He was no dinosaur, no prehistoric monster. He was cutting edge, he was up to date, he was...well, everything a dinosaur was not.

If it killed him he would think of a return insult. Trouble was, the primale brain didn't work that way. Puns were not a strong suit.

He could call her "Red", for her hair, or "Insolent Wench", to cover her attitude. Somehow that didn't strike him as being particularly witty, however.

What about "Little Miss Primale Wannabe"?

That might do it.

He made a mental note to try it out, next available opportunity.

Chapter Three

From the moment Reeva learned about Penny she determined to interview her. But she waited a full day before making good her escape from the base. Technically, she could justify her questioning of any of the Ark pleasure girls. She needed to know how the men played as well as how they worked and sex-making was certainly a vital piece to the puzzle. As for actually leaving the base, this wasn't exactly covered in her orders from the Council.

Vandarsaurus Rex would seize on that. He would smell out any doubt and he would refuse any request she made to go. Especially if he got a sense that this was about finding a way to talk to Penny away from his overbearing presence.

An old Earth saying definitely came into play—"better to ask forgiveness than permission".

"We aren't exactly trying to sneak out," said Reeva to Betty as they enjoyed breakfast in her room on her second morning at base—a tasty meal of grall eggs and bacon for Reeva and a can of synthetic lubricant for the silver-blue ball of fun with flashing red and pink lights that pulsed every time she talked. "We are simply trying not to burden anyone."

"This is not logical," said Betty.

"Yes," said Reeva. "But it's a female thing."

They had been working on this rather intensely. The main point about female things was that they were opposed to male things. The men were the enemy. In particular Vandarsaurus Rex.

Betty didn't comprehend all this fully, but she was willing to assist. The transport ships were going back and forth constantly to the Ark and Reeva could smuggle herself aboard, under the right conditions.

Reeva decided she would attempt it just before lunch. By that time she would have been conducting her interviews long enough for VSR's suspicions to be lowered. That increased her chances of success, she was sure of it.

She had to admit, planning the operation excited her. The idea of outwitting Vandar excited her more. As for the feelings awakened by what might happen if she failed, given his promise of punishment for breaking the rules, that was more complicated.

She would be mortified to ever be spanked. She would yell and kick and scream. But her body had certain needs, deep needs that she was not really willing to talk about, even with herself. Call it an itch, in a place she couldn't reach, either by herself or with the help of a mem.

Oh, sure, a mem would spank her if she told him to.

But that was hardly the same. Putting your head by a kitten, to stretch the analogy, hardly matched putting it in a lion's cage. Certainly sex ideas with mems never made her this wet. And wet she was, constantly, like a fountain. Her nipples were hard too. She was thankful none of these men knew her or they would see how differently she was acting—not exactly distracted, but subdued, a little dull-eyed, her lips lisping the words, almost imperceptibly as she spoke, her mind divided, always on two tracks. One, with the task at hand, the other, back in the weapon room.

He could have had me. He almost did...

A thousand times, over and over again and always the same question.

Why did he stop?

Yes, she had slapped him, and jabbered off her rules but all it would have taken was another kiss. She saw that more clearly with each passing moment. Another brush of lips and she'd have never turned back, indeed, had he even tried to stop after that, she would have had to beg him to continue.

What was she thinking—telling a primale how to behave? Talk about waving a red flag in front of a bull. Suppose he had chosen to point out to her that everything in his breeding cut against obeying a woman—ever. Suppose he told her what she could do with her rules? Suppose he showed her just how dangerous and foolish it was to play power games when you didn't have the equipment to play?

Suppose the unthinkable had happened? Suppose he had treated her like an obedient? Up until the kiss she would have answered without doubt that she would never submit, but what could she say now?

Talk to Penya, that was the key. She wasn't sure why, but she knew it was the next step, the only possible step in solving this dilemma.

Reeva had herself fairly well convinced, when midway through the morning everything turned itself inside out, beginning with her own stomach. She was right in the middle of conducting a group session interview when in he marched, old thunder lizard himself, asking to have a word with her in private.

Naturally, it was one-sided—him haranguing her just to hear the sound of his own voice.

"What do you think you are doing with my men?" he asked her after stepping into the corridor.

She tried to keep her body from shaking as she explained the principles of interpersonal communication and sensory feedback. It wasn't fear of his bluster, but of her own body's betrayal that had her so jittery. Would she throw herself into his arms, would she collapse on her knees and admit she couldn't fight it anymore, that she needed him to do his worst to her, put her out of her misery?

His reaction to her explanation moved from disbelief to contempt to disgust. As a psychosensologist, she felt it in his very presence. His whole being was on the offensive, like waves overcoming her.

"It's bad enough you have them navel gazeing along with you, now you want to put them in a circle like a bunch of puffy mems? Doctor, these are disciplined fighting machines, you have to count on the man next to you for your life and you can't afford to know that deep inside he's still all broken apart because one of his cluster mates stole his pookie bear when he was three years old. As for sensory feedback, I sure as hell don't want to imagine the implications the next time the Narthians decide to swoop over the border and they find Earth's Guardians sitting around sniffing incense out of each other's asses."

"This has nothing to do with the anal region," Reeva found her strength through sheer indignation. "Once again, you have proven yourself to be the consummate dinosaur. Ignorant, judgmental and outmoded."

"You left out extinct. I looked up your insult...Miss Primale Wannabe."

He seemed pleased with himself, though she had no clue why. "Only an egomaniac like you would take my behavior for gender envy. For the record, I would rather be a gung worm or a linc beetle than a primale."

"Well, I thought it was a pretty good insult."

"Vandar," she practically pleaded, "do you have a point in being here? Or are you just taking another step forward in your plan to drive me completely insane?"

"I am Base Commander and I'm keeping on top of things, that's all."

"And doing a lovely job of it, I might add."

His lips thinned, his brow furrowed. Damn it, why did he end up looking so adorable when he did that?

"You will not meet with the men in groups. I forbid it."

"Rule Number six billion and five," she sassed.

"You have as many rules as me."

"All of which you ignore."

"I don't ignore them, they are simply irrelevant."

She really wanted to zing him for that. "Kissing me – was that irrelevant, too?"

"Not irrelevant," he retorted, his voice frigid. "Unstimulating."

Her lip quivered. Come on, keep up, where's the quick return comment? "You know," she said, sounding a whole lot more like a hurt female than she wanted to. "When I first met you I thought you were hiding your feelings too deep in your heart to be detected. I was wrong – you have no heart at all."

"I am what I am, Doctor Reeva."

"That's an understatement. If you will excuse me, I have work to do."

* * * * *

Vandar did not remember walking down the corridor to exercise room five. Nor did he recall punching the body bag so hard that it was propelled clear into the

bulkhead. Looking down, his fist still clenched, he saw the shattered bag, the scattered sand. Such an archaic piece of equipment, kept at the base for the purists, who liked boxing with fists and dueling with swords.

Talk about unleashed power.

He was not angry at Reeva. He was angry at himself. He had been a complete ass. So wrapped up in trying to verbally joust like a ten-year-old he had lost track of his very real ability to hurt others with his aloofness. This had always been the case. Any time he felt threatened, he could put up this defense, even as a small child. Whereas others seemed to have limits to what they might say because of their emotional attachment to the other, he knew how to cut it off, allowing him to go for the jugular.

It didn't usually work on strangers, though. You had to know people to know their vulnerabilities. How had he managed to lash out at Reeva like that? Why should she care if he was stimulated by kissing her? She was a fem. It should be all about her needs. She hated him, so she said — she ought to be happy not to give him pleasure.

And why was he so intent on hurting her? What threat was she becoming that he had to resort to personal attack, to the point where she was owed an apology? For one thing it was a lie. He was stimulated beyond belief, so much so that he hadn't been able to think straight since. All he did was wonder where she was and try to think up excuses to go talk to her. When he'd seen her doing the group therapy, he'd taken the opportunity.

In the form of anger. And why shouldn't he be angry? Seeing her like that, a spectacle, with all those men eying her. Was she such a fool that she thought those primales were thinking about incense? In their minds she had just been taken and used a hundred different ways, each more intense than the last. He couldn't stand that idea.

And the thought of those men having to share their hearts. Reeva didn't know what it was like, trying to maintain order and discipline within yourself, with your fellows. She wanted them to open up? Men who had seen combat against the Bugs? Well she would get more than she could handle. He was trying to protect her — why didn't she see that? Why must people make things so difficult?

Sordon's time with Penya had not gone as well as planned. Sordon had told him he liked her, but things felt forced. As for Penya, Sordon reported it was clear she was missing "her Master Vandar" and that did not help, hard as she tried to be a good girl.

Damn weak sand bag.

One punch. One full strength, super primale punch.

The truth was like a punch, too — right to his own gut.

I have to apologize to Reeva.

Vandar would rather face Narthians. Naked, defenseless. With sap smeared on his body.

To his knowledge, he had never done that, not in so many words.

Could you really teach an old dinosaur new tricks?

They would soon find out.

* * * * *

"Are you *really* sure it's all right for me to speak with you?" asked Penny, wringing her delicate, beautiful hands.

Reeva, sitting across from her on the luxuriously covered, blood-red bed, touched the shoulder of the blonde. "Sweetie, this is the work of the Earth Council that I am doing," she painstakingly repeated the speech she'd made not five minutes ago upon entering the room, between visits with clients. "I am under the orders of The High Councilor Nyssa, and the Supreme Commander of the Guardians, too. He is her husband, you know."

Reeva emphasized this last part, knowing that to an obedient a female's authority counted for little, even if that woman was the most senior politician in the government.

"You mean General Theron? I have heard of him. He is a brave warrior. Why do you think he took a fem for a mate do you suppose? And not just any fem, one with...with primale blood." Scantly clad Penny shuddered. Reeva could see the darkness of her nipples under the diaphanous, red silk dress—if you could call a garment that barely covered her upper thighs a dress.

"I imagine he did so because he loves her."

"But how can a primale love a fem? And how could she love him properly, when she doesn't have it in her to crawl and worship? A primale's body is a temple—no woman can go there who is not slave."

Reeva felt a flash of hot desire. Vandar's body was a temple, all right. Living marble. Just seeing him made her want to bow, to offer herself completely. "I imagine they make...accommodations."

Was that what you called it? That seizing of her lips, his ripping away of her petty defenses in his embrace? Much as she hated to admit it, maybe every woman was a slave—to whatever primale might choose to put her in chains.

But Vandar wasn't that kind of man. He didn't have the decency. His specialty was forcing through a woman's defenses, just to rub it in her face that she was not good enough, not female enough or whatever.

"But what of the Commander?" Penny asked the question Reeva was most afraid of. "Is he approving of this? He did not mention anything to me when he was here yesterday."

"This has developed since then," she said truthfully. "He doesn't know I am here at this exact moment, but he is fully cooperative with my mission, we listened to our orders together."

Penny's eyes were focused on her hands. She sniffled.

"Honey, are you crying?"

"It...it's nothing."

Reeva took her hand. "It's obviously not 'nothing', please tell me. Maybe I can help."

"No one can help." She wiped her eyes. "My Master has decided. He is not a man to change his mind. He did not say it in so many words, but I saw it in his eyes."

"Decided what? I don't understand."

She took a deep breath, steeling herself. "Vandar—he has held my heart. He has had the key to the cage of my soul. Though he would never claim me fully. He always said I deserved more, that he was not a male to be at home much, to manage me properly, but he doesn't understand. If I were only his mate, if I were only marked, then I wouldn't care if I saw him once a year, once a decade. Oh, it would be horrible to miss him, but living as only his in secret, having to take on other men...that was the real agony. And now—and now he has..."

She broke down. Reeva gave her time.

"He has rejected me." She said the dreaded words at last.

"Rejected you?"

Penya nodded, putting her face in her hands. "I will never be his slave, he will never own me. I fear he will never even touch me again. He practically threw me into the arms of another man and told me to be *his* slave."

"Another man? But who?"

"Sordon."

"I don't know the name."

"He knows you. He was here—he told me he took you to your quarters when you arrived."

The young blond, of course. Well he did look like Penya, at least.

"Yes, I remember him. He seemed like a good man."

"I like him well enough," Penya admitted. "But I am confused. I feel...lost. Why didn't Master Vandar want me? What is wrong with me?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

The problem is him. Vandarsaurus Rex strikes again, breaking hearts the galaxy over.

Hearts plural? As in hers?

Where had that come from? Vandar might have wounded her pride by rejecting her as a sexual being, but he certainly hadn't touched on her deeper feelings.

Had he?

He had made her lose her cool. She was overtired, stressed and he'd won a round in their ongoing war. That was all. She would take the next one, no big deal.

So why did she wanted to cry right along with Penya?

"The Commander has issues, Penya, that's what it is."

"What issues?"

How about being an arrogant pigheaded prick for starters. "He doesn't know how to process emotions, he won't open himself up and he is not able to communicate with the opposite sex except through acts of sarcasm and sex."

Great, thought Reeva. You pretty much described yourself, at least according to the last dozen or so lovers you've had.

"He was very clear to me. He's always been clear, actually."

Curiosity got the better of her. "Penya, if it isn't too painful, may I ask a question or two about your relationship?"

"Pain is part of service," said Penya proudly. "Obedients do not ever shy from it. If I can help you, I am grateful, you give me reason to live."

Reeva swallowed. Talk about feeling humbled. This uneducated pleasure girl had a better focus on the purpose of life than she did with all her education.

"Was the Commander a good lover to you?" she asked, trying to keep objective.

"Do you mean was I permitted to flourish as his slave? Yes."

"So he provided you adequate sexual relief?"

Penya laughed. "Forgive me, I don't mean to make fun of you, but you really don't know much about primale sex, do you?"

Reeva flushed. "I studied seven years at the Psychosensory Institute. I'm aware of the mutual dominance and submission needs of primales and obedients. I was just...just seeing if he was reasonable toward you."

Or was it more like a vendetta? Collection of ammunition for fights?

Penya smiled. "One night he tied me to the bed and blindfolded me. For three hours he worked on me, with his tongue, a flogger, a handful of clamps and his hands. He kept me on the brink of orgasm the entire time, most of which I was also riding the razor's edge of sweet pain. As my intensity built, he made his caresses lighter and lighter, until I couldn't tell the hurt from the bliss—everything just made me cry out. Finally he told me I could come with his cock in my mouth. Oh, how I begged to suck and worship him. He never even laid a finger on my pussy to make it happen. The moment I tasted his skin, the very second his shaft parted my lips, I was exploding for him, straining at my bonds. I left my body...I left the known universe. I couldn't move when I came back down. He held on to me, he unbound me and he held me close, allowing me to settle into reality. I lay against his muscular chest, I felt the protection of those arms, heard his breathing, the mysteries of his soul, Doctor, and I prayed for fate to take me, because the very thought of another moment in the world—after that—filled me with agonizing despair. Does that answer your question?"

Reeva was reduced to silence—wasted more like. Finally, she was able to speak. "Yes, Penya, yes it does. I think I have what I need." Including a hot pooling wetness between her thighs she hadn't bargained on. So that's what being with Vandar was like.

"Do you?"

The question startled her. "Yes. My research is in order, thank you."

Penya pursed her lips. "May I ask you a question?"

"Sure..." She braced herself.

"You said you and Vandar were working together. Has there been...anything else?"

"Why would you ask?" She tried to sound neutral. "Did the Commander say something to you?"

"No, he didn't. But he wanted me to do something. Something's he's never asked for."

"What was that?"

"He wanted me to resist him."

Reeva's heart slammed in her chest. "Why would he ask you that? You're an obedient...he's a primale."

"My thoughts exactly."

Reeva managed a smile. "Thank you again for your time. I hope things work out for you."

"I'm an obedient," she said with a level of calm that made Reeva almost envious. "I will endure."

* * * * *

Vandar was in his quarters, practicing his apology on a communication droid. For once he had a use for the blasted thing being feminine in voice. Most of the machines on the base were like that, designed by some fem apparently.

He had raised Cain over it, but no one wanted to listen. "File it in triplicate", went the saying in the Corps, one for your CO, one for your files and one to flush into the nearest black hole because that was going to do you as much good as anything else.

"Reeva," he said to the hovering, sphere. "I want you to know that, since you've arrived, we have had some disagreements. I have been reasonable in everything and haven't asked much in return but you kept pushing me. I know it's not an excuse, but every man has a breaking point, Reeva, and I'd like to see anyone else get as far as I did without shipping your happy ass back on the very next ship out and furthermore —"

The machine cut him off with a sharp buzz. The tenth one in ten attempts. "Response rejected."

"Out of parameters," he grumbled. "I know."

The machine hummed, making its analysis. "Escalation probability in previous response — ninety-seven point three."

Terrific, he was getting worse.

"Can't I just order her to accept an apology?"

"No," the machine told him.

He felt a slight thrill at hearing himself denied. Almost like Reeva taunting him. Stars, he got a kick out of it when she did that.

Not that he would ever admit it.

"Commander your presence is required. Code 453. Yellow."

He stood immediately.

Unauthorized person apprehended in Arrival Area one.

Now what?

Vandar arrived at the landing area moments later. A small squad of security officers were standing in a semicircle. In the center was an all too familiar woman. Red hair, gorgeous figure...and madder than a horde wasp.

"Vandar, tell them to get these cuffs off me, now!"

Releasing the beauty from her bonds was the last thing on Vandar's mind. "Status report?" He ignored her in favor of the senior security officer.

"The female was discovered on a transport ship, returning from the Ark. Transport intell has no authorization for her."

"What do you mean *the female*?" she demanded of Officer Martan. "You know who I am. We had an interview this morning."

"The unauthorized female has been detained," Martan continued his report, "according to procedure."

"Good work," Vandar acknowledged.

"What is wrong with you people?" she cried, struggling in utter futility to remove the energy cuffs holding her wrists behind her back. "Why are you talking about me like I'm not here? And how dare you bind me like a common criminal."

"I will take custody of the prisoner," said Vandar, all thoughts of apology gone from his mind. "Return to duty."

The officer saluted.

Vandar told Reeva to turn around, her back facing him. "Hold still," he said, disengaging the small beams encircling her slim wrists.

Seeing her in bondage like that did something to him, but it wasn't sex on his mind, not now.

"Would you mind explaining to me what you were doing in a transport ship returning from the Pleasure Ark? Have you developed a sudden taste for sex-making with obedient women?"

"I was doing research."

"Research?" He arched a brow. "Is that what you call it?"

"What is your problem?" Reeva's eyes flashed.

"I have no problem."

"You're obsessed with me," she accused. "My clothes, makeup, my sex-making."

"This is a discussion about your behavior, and you not following the rules." He came down hard. "Did you seek permission to leave this base?"

"I don't have to. You don't own me."

His crotch tightened. "I asked a question. Did you seek permission? Did you do anything? Did you notify the officer of the day at bare minimum? Your behavior was childish, Reeva, and irresponsible. We must know where you are at all times. Do you think this is a playground? Fun and games? Some kind of fem and mem free-for-all? What if we had come under attack? What if there had been an alert? A reactor shut down? Any number of emergencies?"

Her face darkened, she pressed her lips together. He could see he had made a direct hit. He prepared himself for the return volley. It was a doozy.

"You think you are so mature and responsible? Taking care of everything like an adult? Why don't we go ask Penya what she thinks of you. I just did and I must say I found it very enlightening."

Resisting the urge to yell and scream, to tell her what a violation of his personal life she had just committed, Vandar fell instead into crisp resolve, final and absolute. No turning back.

"Come with me," he said, guiding her by the arm.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To my quarters," he said. "For your punishment."

She dug in her heels. "Not so fast. We need to talk about this."

Vandar was through arguing. "Reeva, you are going to be spanked for your behavior. Any talking you would like to do will come through the much needed clarity of a red and throbbing posterior."

Her lovely face showed fear...and maybe desire, too. Before his eyes, he saw her veneer of control slip away.

And it made him need her. More than he had ever needed anything in his life.

"Vandar, you can't do that."

"I can and I will. If you like, we can do it right here."

"No..." Her voice was a tight whisper. "I'll go with you."

He kept her close to his side. There was no talking, just the sound of their breathing. In the elevator he could feel her heat, her confusion, a sea of underlying emotion.

Was he about to unearth something better left alone?

Fems were complicated, there was no mistaking. Being annoyed by them from a distance was one thing, but he was about to cross into intimate territory. Still, a rule was a rule. He'd made his decree and he couldn't back down.

He liked to think it was a matter of honor, but there were other possibilities. Stubbornness came to mind. Reeva was good at pointing things like that out to him.

There was also the matter of his sex drive. Which he was supposed to be repressing. Was it burgeoning forth in this new direction, in terms of his desire to discipline Reeva?

He dismissed the possibility even as he watched her ass sway through the elevator doors. Did he say *her* ass? In a few minutes it would be his. And he had never wanted anything so much in his life.

Chapter Four

Reeva found her voice again when they were safely inside his quarters.

"Is this how you deal with every problem in your life? Brute force?"

"I don't have a problem, Reeva. You broke the rules, we agreed on the consequences."

"I didn't agree to anything."

"Your presence here is tacit agreement."

"That makes no sense! You forced me!"

Vandar put a chair in the middle of the room. Gray metal, bare. "You may submit now and come across my knees or I will come and get you. Be warned, if I do, I will strip you naked and let you take your punishment bare-assed."

Her eyes watered. There was heat on her cheeks. "You're a horrible, awful brute. You have no right to do this to anyone, let alone a scientist who is trying to help you."

He felt a knot in his stomach. He hadn't looked at it from that angle. Of course she was trying to help. She was a servant of the Council. He was looking so hard for her disobedience he had overlooked anything good and pleasant and loyal in her. Why was he so afraid to see her for who she really was?

"I'm the one helping you," he insisted as she approached. "This will make you a better person."

She swore under her breath, indicating she had a different opinion. He suppressed a smile.

His heart roared in his chest as her hair brushed his cheek. He could smell her, he remembered all those curls in his hands, what she felt like, what her skin tasted like. He strained to hear her heartbeat—he wanted inside her in every way possible. Punishment was only one doorway. A good start.

Reeva bent, her breasts hung in the air. She was awkward, trying not to touch him. She braced herself on his thighs, moving her body over his lap. He caught the intent. Clever wench. She wanted to make a bridge, palms and feet on the floor holding up her middle so she didn't have to touch crotch to crotch.

A simple smack, unannounced, resolved the problem. "Down," he ordered.

She gasped, the sound of a woman never before disciplined by a man. He relished it in ways he should not, if this was to stay objective.

Reeva's belly fell to his lap. Her pelvis met his, her pussy impacting a cock already half erect.

The blood surged into his shaft. There was no containing it. He touched her behind again, allowing himself full enjoyment as he placed his palm. "I am not going to go easy on you, Reeva."

"Fuck you," she spat.

A mem might react to an insult and be tempted to whale on her—assuming he could get a proud creature like her to bend in the first place. It was time Reeva learned the difference in dealing with primales.

"For every disrespectful remark you, add five more spanks to your sentence," he informed her.

"That's not fair!"

"This is discipline, Reeva, it's not about fairness. Are you ready to begin?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"You can resist and earn more punishment."

"Penya tells me you like girls who resist."

Something flashed through Vandar. Not anger, but something worse.

He grasped her garment at the middle of her back and tore straight down, shredding the super strong fibers. She cried out in shock to be so stripped. He bared her ass, providing the target he needed. Twice he lifted his hand, cracking it down hard on her soft globes.

Reeva whimpered, shaking her curly red head. She sought to move, he held her down, one palm on her bare back.

"The games are over," he informed her. "It is time to submit. Are you ready for the rules of your spanking?"

"Yes," she said, her voice highly strained.

He noted the lack of a clever comeback.

He wanted her on all fours, his cock slamming into her as she begged forgiveness for trying his patience every minute she had been on this base.

"Rule number one, you address me as Sir during punishment. Is that clear?"

"Yes," she hissed. "Sir."

"Rule number two. You are forbidden to hold back your responses."

She did not understand what that meant. She soon would.

"Rule number three. You will count each spank. And you will say thank you."

"Yes, Sir."

The sound of her voice, churlish but husky, was the greatest aphrodisiac. He was going to have a hard time not expanding this to another kind of punishment.

He massaged her ass, just for added humiliation. "Good girl."

"Go to hell," she shot back, unable to resist herself.

"You've just added five, congratulations."

She exhaled in protest.

Vandar lifted his hand, poised, savoring the moment. He hadn't intended to do this skin to skin, this perfect ass completely at his mercy, but why not? She had earned this. And so had he.

She yelped at the impact.

A mild blow. She had no idea.

"You missed the count. That one doesn't count."

"No," she whined. "One, please, one, Sir. Ow," she cried out, struck again. "One. Thank you, Sir."

The testosterone surged in his veins. "See, Doctor, you can be trained."

She moaned, not daring to reply.

He ran his hand over the red spot, reveling. "You have wanted this all along, haven't you?"

"No," she braved. "Sir."

"You mustn't lie." He spanked her again.

"Two, thank you, Sir."

"You pushed me at every turn, argued for no reason at all."

"I defended my rights, Sir."

Her ass was warming nicely. The heat of her moved through his hand.

How hot was the rest of her?

"Move forward," he ordered. "Open your legs."

"You said a spanking, Sir!"

Always the stickler.

"I am concerned with your provocativeness." He pushed a finger into her pussy.

A moan of a different kind escaped her lips.

"You are aroused."

"It isn't for you, Sir."

He delivered a fresh smack, the hardest yet. "You are going to learn to mind, Reeve. I expect you to be cooperative from now on."

"Three," she cried. "Thank you, Sir."

Her breath was quick. "Why don't you do it?" she challenged. "Sir."

"Do what?"

"Fuck me. You know you've wanted it from the moment you saw me."

"You flatter yourself."

"Being wanted by you isn't exactly first prize at the galactic fair, Sir."

He whacked her — one, two, three more times.

"Four, Sir, thank you." She panted. "Five, Sir, thank you. Six, Sir, thank you."

He hooked a finger in her pussy. "How about I fuck you this way?"

She held herself perfectly still.

"Move," he commanded cruelly. "Show me how fems enjoy their sex."

Reeva could not help but obey. She had no choice.

"You are denied permission to orgasm," he said.

She stopped moving. He smacked her twice more.

"S-seven, Sir, thank you...eight, thank you."

"Were you told to stop moving?"

"N-no, Sir."

Vandar pinched her, helping himself to a nice piece of beet red flesh. "You are sorry, aren't you?"

"Yes, Sir...oh, stars, yes."

He did not relent. "You are a willful, disobedient creature. You scream for discipline, don't you, girl?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"Welcome to a new phase of research, Doctor, over a primale's knee. Tell me, what are you going to do from now on?"

"Whatever you tell me to, Sir."

It wasn't true, she would defy him at the first turn as soon as he loosened his iron grip, but that only made the holding of her now, squirming and writhing, all the more delicious.

"Would you like to come?"

"Yes, please, Sir..."

"You can't. You may thank me."

"T-thank you...for not...letting me...come."

Her body was molten contradiction as she moved on his finger. She was trying to get away, yet not to get away. She was desperate in every sense of the word.

The behavior was disturbingly familiar, in a way that spoke directly to his cock.

Obedients acted like this when their passions were unleashed, when they were in heat, waiting to be taken down hard by a man.

It was the behavior of a woman being tortured, with a certain minimal freedom she could no longer bear.

Vandar took his hand from her pussy. She collapsed onto him.

He resumed the spanking. Ten more blows intended. She blubbered the count, stuttering, the breath catching in her throat.

He was well aware of what would happen and it did, just after five more spanks.

His saucy fem reached orgasm. Rubbing on his thigh, humping in a way which was too blatant and animal to be conscious. She whimpered the whole time, knowing she was doing wrong. She moaned her apologies.

Vandar could no longer restrain himself—he had already set her up to fail and now he must reap the dark reward. He pushed her to the floor. “Do you think a primale’s will is to be trifled with?”

Her face had an eerie glow, a pale light as she looked up at him, her eyes a far-off look, and yet he felt her closeness, a proximity that threatened to combust them both. The front of her was still covered, a fact which he found unacceptable.

“Strip,” he ordered.

Her gaze did not leave his and she did not protest. Her motions were fluid, graceful, pure and feminine. She bared herself completely, letting her breasts spill free, shedding shoes and uniform—what was left of it.

She did not rise, before during or after, but stayed at his feet.

Disobedience was not an issue, not at this juncture. Her submission hung in the air, hot as the fire still on his hand, the crimson color still on her ass.

His own response was hard and fixed and male. The words he spoke were his will for her, no more, no less. “On your back, legs apart.”

She inhaled—a quick, tiny stab.

“Yes...it’s going to happen, girl. No stopping what I want...what you want.”

She lowered herself to the floor. The fullness of her beauty took his breath away. She was the most exquisite creature he had ever seen in his life. And he was about to be inside her, possessing her. She would take his semen, she would surrender her most intimate soul...she would come for him.

Vandar opened his uniform and peeled it off his chest. His nipples were hard, his skin felt hot, as if he’d been spanked himself. He couldn’t take his eyes off her, the way her palms moved to a position of natural submission on either side of her head, the way her damp curls fell about her face, the way her breasts rose and fell, the rosy nipples everything he had imagined and more. Her belly quivered ever-so slightly, the gentle valley inviting the sweep of his hot gaze lower to her sex lips, wet from her unauthorized orgasm. She had a fine red fleece to match the hair on her head.

He was going to fuck her so hard.

She slid one foot back, bending her knee, beckoning as he approached.

Vandar went down on one knee, between her calves. He placed his hand on her inner thigh, wanting to see the change in her face, the electric anticipation. “Rule number two,” he reminded. “No holding back responses.”

Still, she could not understand. A primale had never had her before—at least he couldn’t imagine such a possibility.

Vandar would take her body. And her will and her pride...but only after she demanded it.

He toyed with her pussy, making her thrash her head. He studied the motions of her body, assessing her weak spots, the places she was most vulnerable to assault.

A good primale lover was capable of spending hours on his partner's body before getting close to intercourse.

But Vandar was far too hungry. This would not last long. Not in real time. In soul time, however...

He placed his hand on his cock, ordering her to watch. Her eyes widened. He willed his cock to expand as he ran his hand up and down slowly, very slowly. The veins pulsed, pressing against the surface of his skin. His balls tightened, as they always did in response to his call—packed with semen—as much as he would ask for.

"Tell me you want my cock inside you..."

"I want it," she replied without hesitation. "Please, Sir."

"You're not an obedient," he gave proviso.

"I don't care. Please, Sir, take me."

He noticed she was still calling him sir, though the punishment was over.

"Let me hear you beg, Reeva."

"Please," she rasped. "I beg you...use my cunt...Sir."

"Lift yourself," he ordered.

She raised her hips.

"Submit," he said. The word was a formality at best.

He did not stop, as he usually liked, at the entrance to her lips. He sank himself, hard and deep and decisive.

"You will come," he squashed her breasts beneath his chest, "on command."

"Yes, Sir..." Her nipples burned into him. Her body was pinned under him, belly to belly, her curves adhering to his muscular lines. He felt the mingling of sweat. The surging of energy between them. No, this first time would not last long.

He let his breath blow into her mouth. She licked her lips as his hovered, just above hers. She wanted the kiss. He was denying it.

No hiding behind intimacy, false or real. This was sexual surrender—conquest—a bizarre extension of the punishment as admitted in her continuation with the title of sir.

She wasn't lady friend or mate. She was an errant fem, who had left him no option but this. He took her wrists in one hand, a symbolic restraint—where could she go—but potent nonetheless.

"Resist," he commanded.

She blinked, still mesmerized.

"Don't play stupid, Reeva. You know what I want."

His callousness stirred her to action. She strained with every muscle, she gritted her teeth, she called him names. When he merely smiled, she bit his shoulder.

He bit her nipple in retaliation.

"I'll be good," she cried as he continued to clamp down. "I'll be good, I'll be good."

He arched his back. "Lick my nipple," he ordered.

She ran her tongue along his pectoral. He felt a nice zing as the tiny sandpaper surface crossed his flesh.

He was in her pussy to the hilt. He had control. He was in his element. While she could scarcely breathe against his will, let alone determine her immediate future.

"How does the floor feel on your ass, Reeve?"

"My ass hurts. It's sore."

"We can stop if you like."

"You know I don't want that," she said crossly.

"I only know what you beg for," he teased.

"Don't stop fucking my pussy." She squeezed her muscles. "Is that what you want to hear?"

"You're not calling me 'Sir' now."

"Order me to, I will."

He moved his free hand down her side, resting it at her hip. "You're on your way to another spanking."

"It doesn't matter what I do or say. It's up to you."

"I think you want another spanking," he goaded. "That's what I think."

"And I think you have your hands full right here." She managed to land a kiss. He allowed it, just grazing and teasing her lips, playing with her, sensing and tasting the womanliness of her soul.

Then he plunged his tongue inside. To show her what a real kiss was. What would have developed if they had kept on going the first time. Her beautiful eyes slid closed, she gave him full access, allowing him to explore her teeth, her cheeks, but she was no shrinking violet. Her tongue did the same right back to him—pushing and probing until their teeth clicked, until the suction between them became pregnant with possibility.

His hands moved to separate hers. He pinned her wrists apart, all without breaking the kiss. She moaned into his mouth, communicating, acknowledging and anticipating.

It was time. He commenced thrusting. Pulling out halfway, no more, and then back down all the way. She clenched at him. He lifted again and this time he expanded a little bit more, inflaming himself. He would not allow her to hold back. Her entire body bucked underneath him. She wrapped her legs around his hips, pulling him into her greedily. By the time he had her fully impaled again, she was orgasming. He could feel each little minute motion, each impact against the veins of his cock. It took every bit of his primale willpower to hold back but he simply could not cut this moment off.

Moving his lips from hers, he tasted her neck, his lips and teeth working their will—tiny nibbles that made her arch her back and flatten her breasts even more.

He took hold of her hips. Her legs clenched tightly on his ass as she fell from the grace of one orgasm straight into another.

Vandar had reached his breaking point. Too much tension, too much need for his redheaded fem.

His redheaded fem.

Sounded good, but what did it mean? Nothing, in the long term.

Vandar grunted, joining his deeper voice into the more melodious sound of hers. Pouncing tiger and prey, the perfect union.

A straight shot of his thick seed, unbroken, on and on, forcing her to surrender at levels unimaginable in fem circles.

He drew her as close as he could, to get himself deep. He hugged her body and then flipped them over so she was on top. He maintained control, his hands on her hips. He lifted her up and down like a rag doll, doing with her body just as he pleased. She seemed to thrive on the helpless, new paroxysms snapping through her at every turn. She smiled, ecstatic, adrift and for an instant he was slave to her, finding his very existence in those burning green eyes, in those fingertips digging into his chest, those breasts—so full of life.

At last he drew her in, the climaxes passed for both of them, the whole of their beings spent on each other. He wrapped her in his arms, protecting her in her perfect vulnerability, prepared to defend against the whole of the universe should it threaten her.

He rose and gently lifted the now sleeping woman, carried her to the bed and wrapped her in the covering.

He stood over her, watching her sleep. How different from her waking state. Was she dreaming, he wondered. Thinking up more arguments, more debates to begin with him. A smile crossed his lips. She gave him a run for his credits that was for sure.

A part of him ached to crawl into bed with her, to hold her close, side to side or on his back, with her head on his chest, all those bright curls covering him, tickling him. The smile broadened.

He couldn't join her for two reasons. First, he would need to make sex with her again and she needed her rest. Second—he would be increasing the risk of attachment. Not for her—she obviously had little use for him outside of bed—but for himself.

He was primale, and sex was a matter of possession. With Penya he had achieved a détente of sorts. With Reeva there was no telling. He wasn't supposed to bond with fems. Then again, he wasn't supposed to be sexually attracted to them, either.

By the Code, what had he been thinking, spanking her? What else had he thought it would lead to?

His hand went to the sheet covering her. He nearly tore it from her, unable to bear the sight of her covered, her flanks hidden away, those sweet breasts inaccessible to his eyes.

A bit of cord, a pair of energy cuffs and he could bind those hands behind her back and devour her.

His cock raged.

Of its own accord it went to full thickness, his balls aching tight. Like he had not come at all earlier. He wanted inside her, inside every orifice at once.

But he could not.

If he penetrated again now, he would never turn back.

Doctor Reeve, Psychosensologist would no longer be free. She would be his property and he would not be able to let her go. He would dominate her utterly, he would kill any man who sought to have her, he would place her in his steel chains, treasure, and honor and pamper her. She would belong. Her heart would be in his soul.

But it would be a cage.

Fems didn't live in cages.

Only women like Penya, who withered and died without them.

The blood pounded in his shaft. He clenched it in both hands, as if he could cut off the surge.

He had to do something—it hurt too much, he couldn't hold back.

Without thinking, he pulled away the covering, like a starving man craving touch, he fell in against her from behind. He clutched her breasts in his hands, wrapping his arms around her body, molding the pliant flesh as if was made for him. He closed his eyes, memorizing her heartbeat, her breathing, and her soft sighs as she stirred.

Pushing her body against him, offering herself in sleep.

He winced from the pain, his cock at the very gateway to her pussy, he felt the soft lips against his cock head. Why had he not held himself back? Why had he been so weak as to jump into bed? He had to stop himself, he could not—must not—consummate. Must not take her.

Only one thing left to do. Oh, gods, he did not want to, but it was the only way. He must climax without penetration. He must find another space, slip his cock between her thighs and avoid her lovely, deep opening.

Vandar groaned deep and low, a growl of the lonely hunting cat, the jaguar of Earth, which lived its life in isolation, coming together with others of its species only to mate. She felt so good, even like this, her skin so smooth on his cock, giving respite, a momentary home.

No mating here, only desperate relief as Vandar masturbated, sliding his turgid erection between her legs. His breathing became ragged, his chest strained and the sinews in his neck tightened.

She made one more noise, the prettiest little sound and that was it.

Vandar's emission poured out onto the bed, over her thighs. He couldn't hold it back. He was soaking her. But he was not inside her.

He had avoided penetration. He had spared her.

Reeva made new noises. She was waking up and stirring.

"What? Huh?" she mumbled, trying to figure out what was happening.

Vandar climbed out of bed just in time.

"What the fuck?" She sat up holding up her left hand, which was wet. "What did you just do to me?"

Vandar straightened, falling into soldier mode. "It was necessary."

"Necessary?" She laughed but she did not seem particularly amused. "Coming all over me in my sleep? What am I, your new fuck doll?"

She couldn't be farther from the truth. Why was she being so unreasonable?

"I would never treat you in such a manner. I had a situation, a primale situation that I had to deal with in a way which wouldn't disturb you."

She pulled the sheet up over her, denying him any more visual pleasure. "I'll bet you had a situation. You were fucking horny and you didn't want to be bothered getting me off, right? And spare me any more primale bullshit. That's just a big fat excuse for being insensitive and selfish."

"But primale biology *is* different," he said in vain.

She covered her ears with her hands. "Not another word. I want my clothes. And I want out of this tin can you live in."

Vandar cleared his throat. She'd obviously forgotten about the torn uniform. "We'll need to get you another uniform. If you'll recall..."

"Fuck!" she exclaimed. "Just...fuck."

"I will see to it at once."

"Damn straight you will." She tossed her tousled curls.

"Do you want me to go to your quarters and make one from your machine?"

The green eyes combusted, as they so often did in his presence. "And give you free rein to look at my underwear patterns? I don't think so."

Vandar clenched his sweaty palms. Was it wrong to want to spank her all over again for being so insolent?

"In that case, you can use my machine. It's a military version, but you ought to be able to come up with something in your size."

"Fine." She spat the word, indicating anything but.

Should he say more? What was the point? This woman decided everything for herself and acted on it. "I will get dressed and give you some privacy."

"The sooner the better."

He wanted to kiss her again, in some foolish attempt to connect, a brave plunge over the abyss. "We will, of course, continue to maintain our working relationship," he said.

Was she going to mention the spanking?

"Oh, goodie." She rolled her eyes.

Vandar puzzled over the reaction. What was left of her passion? Had he consumed it in one fell swoop, leaving her cold to him, indifferent? He was halfway tempted to provoke her, just to find out.

Sparing himself, he went to the sanitizing chamber, cleaned himself, got dressed and left. He did not speak to her further. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her in the bed, the cover over her head.

Was she all right?

As well as Penny, when you left her.

He made a mental note to check with Sordon as soon as possible.

He'd find a mate for Reeva, too. Though he could hardly wish such a fate on any man.

* * * * *

Reeva held off crying until Vandar had gone. She had no idea where the tears came from or what they represented exactly. She ought to just be angry, furious at how Vandar had used her. He should never have laid a hand on her—and then to make sex with her? The best sex she had ever had in her life. Mind blowing. His body was so incredible—the smooth power, the muscular grace—from his broad shoulders to his lean waist, his perfectly developed pectorals to his massive thighs. Not to mention the way he used that body. So firm and strong, but with an underlying respect and care for her sex.

Strange, considering he had dominated her so completely, spanking her ass red as fire and teasing and taunting her. Forcing her to open her deepest self. Demanding her surrender as though she were an obedient.

And his hands, the way they had worked her—captivating body and soul, arousing and awakening her, making her feel a stranger to her own flesh as he had coaxed from it a level of female desire she had never known.

His sheer presence outweighed that of all the mems put together. They were like bits of straw in the wind compared to him. The audacity of holding her down, ripping her clothes, making her beg—a trained scientist, an accomplished expert in psychosensology, forced to plead with a man for her pleasure.

She, Reeva, *had been owned*.

That was not sex-making, not a mutual project. That was...an assault, an erotic hurricane unleashed on her body.

Of course it couldn't happen again.

But could she live without it?

Could she go back to mem sex? To whiny man-boys, asking if they could do this or that, leaving her never quite sure what she meant to them at all or whether some other fem might do as well or better.

To look in the eyes of a primale like Vandar was to know herself wanted beyond any shadow of a doubt. Her flesh had erupted, her will had deliciously melted in the face of that male onslaught. A whole army could not have kept him from taking her – how could she expect to prevent him herself?

Why would she want to, when what he had to give was the unlocking of her libido, a secret cavern of delight that only he could reach?

Or so it seemed.

How they had gone from that kind of sexual experience – reaching for the heavens together, soaring on the very edges of the universe – to this. Waking up with Vandar using her, and not at all in a noble, passionate, manful way but in the most sneaky, almost cowardly fashion.

She would never tell him, but what really hurt was that he hadn't given her the chance to be involved, to show appreciation for his lust, to give her own back.

He had rejected her in the worst way possible.

Honestly, if he'd just told her it was a mistake or he hated her or...anything. Anything but that. Spoiling everything, ruining her image of him. Her image of herself.

Not that there could have been anything between them. That was crazy. They were way too different and not just in their biological subtype. Name anything about herself and he was opposite.

Vandar was the most pigheaded, unenlightened, rigid character she had ever run across. It was a miracle they hadn't tried to kill each other by now. Sure there was the sexual heat. That came out of the deep enmity. Such things were not impossible among human beings.

She rose from the bed. Her ass was sore.

Her ass.

A man had spanked it. And she had let him.

At the same time he'd played with her pussy, working her into a complete and utter frenzy.

Fuck. Her ass hurt. She touched it. It was warm.

Her pussy tingled. She could feel Vandar inside her. His cock pulsing.

Increasing and decreasing in size, managing to fill her and titillate and overwhelm her, completely dissolving her insides, making her burn and need and beg. For the orgasm, the endless spurting of his semen.

Hot semen...almost enough to burn her.

She made her way to the sanitizing chamber. She was going to be walking crooked for days. Talk about a thorough fucking.

Maybe it was not so bad he hadn't penetrated her again.

Another round might have made her permanently stupid.

Reeva had new respect for obedients that was for sure. Anybody who thought they were weak and flimsy little things ought to try a night in the sack with a male like Vandar.

The sanitizing beams were a rude awakening to her nerve endings, still open and raw. She shuddered briefly...*on the verge of orgasm*.

How was that possible?

Did a primale's power extend that much over the women he slept with? Her fingers trembled. She wanted to touch herself...but she was afraid.

Why?

Of what?

She was hardly a stranger to masturbation. She had been giving herself pleasure since sex-making classes at fem school. That was the whole point of being a fem. But now it felt foreign down there. Like it didn't quite belong to her. A shiver passed down her spine.

Primals marked women. Primales owned women.

Primales don't make sex, they make slaves.

"I'm not anyone's fucking slave," she told the sanitizing chamber.

The machine maintained a polite silence. Not that its functioning allowed speech, let alone intelligent dialogue.

Tearing her mind away from what was going on between her legs, she finished under the beams and turned the machine off.

Vandar's dressing machine was gray—surprise, surprise—and quite a bit stripped down from her model. She accessed the wardrobe monitor, scanning the options.

Just because she could, she checked to see what sort of clothing he manufactured for himself. There were two style uniforms, one dressier with epaulets.

He would look handsome in that, with the gold brocade. There was even a ceremonial sword to hang at the waist. She could imagine him walking into a room, instantly dominating. Even among primales, Vandar was formidable. She sensed that had he wished, he could have risen much higher in the ranks by now. But Vandar was and always would be a front line officer, standing by his troops under the worst conditions. Unable to resist, she punched up the three dimensional graphic.

A tiny image of Vandar, dressed in the uniform, appeared on screen. The image rotated three-hundred-sixty degrees. The uniform was complemented by white gloves and a pair of high black boots. He stood straight as a ramrod, chest full, arms at his sides.

Reeva looked down to see her hand on her belly. She snatched it away as if it were fire. If Vandar was here he would control her. She would touch or not touch herself only as he willed it.

If she disobeyed, he would smack her ass, more than once if he wished. He might also imprison her hands. Cuff her wrists. He wouldn't ask, he would simply do it and if she objected his hand would go to her pussy. The glistening fingers he would hold up to her being the evidence that it turned her on.

Her own body was giving him the right.

That's what it meant...to be possessed.

Reeva deleted the image. She scrolled through the menu, looking for the open template which would allow her to make something custom.

The following category caught her attention. Obedient Appropriate Wear. Reeva licked her lips. The first garment was a halter design, made of woven bits of metal like ancient chain mail. It had a matching bottom—a very tiny skirt which only partially covered the thighs.

She was curious who the graphic model was.

Penya.

Reeva felt something tug at her. She flipped to another costume. This one put butterflies in her stomach. A steel collar, cuffs for the wrists and ankles, connected by delicate chains.

In the image, Penya was kneeling—knees spread, hands behind her head, back straight, eyes straight ahead...anticipating.

Yes. That was the feeling the image captured. Penya was proffering herself. She could not touch her body, only be touched. In whatever way the Master wanted.

Vandar being the Master.

Reeva could never kneel like that.

The next costume was made of leather. A harness that crisscrossed the breasts. The bottom consisted of a leather belt and a strip of very thin leather which passed between the buttock cheeks and connected to the front. Reeva's mouth went dry. The leather was so thin it barely covered the pussy.

There was a whip and a set of clamps that went with the outfit. For the nipples. She quickly passed this by, not daring to imagine herself in it.

Her ass clenched at the sight of the next item. A wooden paddle, about six inches long with a leather handle grip.

Stars, did he really use this on Penya?

And she was actually upset that he was leaving her?

Reeva scanned the rest. More of the same, flimsy costumes to expose the female body, intermixed with outfits of leather and metal that were little more than thinly disguised bondage.

She kept trying to reconcile it all. Penya, Vandar. And her?

Time to get herself a uniform. Before she drove herself crazy.

Impulsively she went back to the leather outfit. The one with the breast harness. She was dying to know what it felt like. Didn't she have a right, as part of her research?

What if she were to try it, just for a second? The machine could make it in her size. She'd feel it on her body a few moments and then destroy it. Easiest thing in the world.

Reeva punched in the request and stepped inside. One scandalous slave girl coming up. She was a good six inches taller than Penya, so obviously the size was different. She had larger breasts, too.

Taking a deep breath, she waited for the machine to do its magic. First the measurements—lasers slicing this way and that. Then the blue encasement beam as final adjustments were made. Now the countdown, about ten seconds on her machine, but this one was more like thirty.

She held her breath as she felt the first part being formed around her, the leather belt cinching her waist. Her pussy responded with a twitch. Then came the connecting strap, threading through her privates, pressing into her anus and sealing snugly over her sex. The pressure made her crave a cock.

Now for the breasts. A light squeezing as each one was isolated. The harness in the back increased the pressure. Her nipples throbbed, frustrated by the lack of touch. She closed her eyes, releasing a moan.

She dropped to her knees. The crotch belt made her spasm. She pushed out her ass and tried to relieve the pressure, but that only made her feel more where she had been spanked.

Reeva crawled from the machine. Her hand knocked against the freshly made paddle lying on the floor. Had she ordered that, too?

Reeva clutched the paddle and moved on all fours onto the floor of Vandar's cabin.

Dressed like an obedient slave girl.

Had Penya ever worn this type outfit for him?

Reeva hoped not. She didn't want Penya modeling for him—she didn't want anyone modeling for him. Why should he enjoy any woman if not her?

Not that she was jealous. Not in a million years.

She just wanted him to suffer.

Her heart was pounding. She closed her eyes. She felt herself drift into that space she had been with Vandar, when he had spanked her and told her he was in control and showed her just how real she was.

It was a feeling of helplessness, but not a bad kind. It was an exhilaration that came from giving in, from feeling his hands, soft and hard, from bearing his will for her.

Reeva placed her hand behind her back, bending her wrist. The angle was a difficult one.

Did she have the guts?

She gasped at the impact.

The answer was yes.

Her ass stung, deep and hard, not like the spanking which was softer and more immediately erotic.

I've just paddled myself, she thought. On my naked ass. I am trussed up in leather and I am...not exactly hating it.

She whacked herself again. The pain was sharper, more focused than the spanking. It humiliated her to be doing this, and it thrilled her, too.

Just one more and then she would put some real clothes on.

"Reeva?"

Reeva froze. *Oh, stars, no, please no.*

"What are you...doing?"

She jumped to her feet. "Research," she chimed.

He was too dumbfounded to pick apart her ridiculous explanation. Seizing the opportunity, she pounced. "You shouldn't be in here," she covered her breasts. "You were supposed to give me privacy."

"It's been an hour, Reeva. I thought you'd be done."

She felt the heat in her cheeks. Enough to match the stinging in her ass. "It can't be an hour."

"The base's chronometers are accurate to one trillionth of a second."

"Never mind the stupid clocks!" She went off on him. "I needed time to myself, and don't gawk at me. I can have my fantasies. I've been tied and up and spanked by mems lots of times."

"I think I should leave again," he decided.

"There's a brainstorm," she blasted. "Nothing gets past you, does it?"

Vandar opened his mouth to reply. "I...I mean...no, I..." Shaking his head he walked out. The automatic doors slid shut behind him.

This time Reeva cracked up, flat out belly laughs, rolling on the floor.

She might have made a complete moron of herself, but she had accomplished one thing.

She had succeeded in shocking the mighty Vandarsaurus Rex into stuttering nonsense.

Chapter Five

A week had passed since the Incident. That was how Reeva referred to it. Unplanned contact of a personal nature between her and the base commander, whose name she preferred not to mention, even in her own thoughts. She had done some analysis of the circumstances of what had happened, the psychosensoral indicators involved. Stress was the major contributing factor, in her case change of environment, in his, the confrontation of his values with a new paradigm of command.

All this happily explained, to her mind's satisfaction if not her body's, she tried to keep her energy on her mission of improving the base as a whole.

Thankfully the base commander seemed as intent on avoiding her as she was on him. They saw each other on three occasions, each time finding a neat method of avoidance, moving down some other corridor or heading into some room or other.

Every time, for a good hour afterward, she was useless, her body so superheated, her very breath barely controllable. The sight of him was too much. It brought too much to the surface. The big, huge question mark that hung in the space between them. Why had they combusted as they had and why did she get the powerful feeling each time she saw him that it wasn't over yet?

And when would she be able to masturbate again? If anything, it was getting worse. She could barely look at her body in the sanitizing chamber. Her flesh felt branded, marked for another in absentia.

The beams were an agony as well. As low as she kept the settings, she still felt it—hands, teeth probing. His hands, his teeth, his will. Her nipples were hard, painful buttons, her pussy dripped and when she tried to touch, she could only whimper, her wrists held in invisible steel.

Yesterday it was so bad, she'd orgasmed—a volcano bubbling over, molten, unstoppable, and red hot—just from the stimulation of the beams. She had tried to hold it back. She'd cried out, feeling like she was committing some terrible crime.

She had no permission...

Afterwards she'd cried. Confusion. Frustration and something she had never known in her life—loneliness. The only way to stop was to smack her own ass until the pain dulled the anguish and the twitching.

In spite of those obvious difficulties, Reeva reported to her little makeshift office and lab each day where, with Betty's amiable assistance, she had managed to catalog considerable data with numerous recommendations. Among them was the introduction of creative arts therapy, drama and a reduction in the number of visits from the Pleasure Ark.

In her estimation, the men's tensions were only increased in the long run by providing temporary sexual relief. Better to train them in techniques of masturbation. And sublimation through sharing of feelings.

The color scheme and overall appearance of the facilities needed work. Security need not be compromised by the introduction of a pastel here or even a textured fabric there. Nothing drastic, just upholstery for the recreation room seats and maybe a little carpet.

The base commander was sure to object to all of it, just on general principle.

She couldn't care less, although she did try to keep in mind his general point of view, the rule of thumb being that anything the base commander *did* approve of would, by definition, be wrong.

On the whole she felt she was being objective, though she did admit to feeling some frustration in her interviews with the men, each of whom reinforced, ad nauseam, what a good man the commander was and how he would die for any of them.

She didn't doubt them, it was just that they didn't know his other side. How could they? They weren't women. They would never be hauled off and put over his knee, their clothing ripped away. Nor would they be fucked into submission and left to twist in the wind.

Burning in their flesh, night and day, unable to sleep without dreams of deepest passion. Unable to take a single breath without thinking of *him*...and what he had done to her...and what he could do again.

No, they were all primales. They probably sat around their gray beverage machine in their gray rec room sipping gray coffee and joking about all the foolish females they had hoodwinked.

In actuality, though, she didn't see much sign of humor. And this was a legitimate concern for the base's efficiency.

One of the important principles of psychosensology was that in any given situation there was a unit of mental and physical energy, consisting of a complex interrelationship of the human and nonhuman elements. There were indexes, complex vectors of emotion. It was her job to read the results. In layman's terms, given the overall seriousness, this base was like a twig waiting to snap.

Balance was lacking.

She couldn't put her finger on it completely. There were intangibles she had yet to figure out.

An unusual offer of help came from Sordon, who was busy doing some sorting of his own. The base commander had advised him—scratch that—ordered him to open himself to a possible mating with Penny. The man was troubled by this and had asked for counseling.

He did not know how to balance his need to obey his superior with his need to have the autonomy to choose his own mate.

The problem was the base commander's lack of boundaries. His inability to distinguish the limits of his power, where his office left off and his personal self was supposed to pick up.

She had sensed this in him all along and it was confusing as hell. Sometimes his inner self, that she read by psychosensology powers, was like a screaming rule book, a compendium of orders so complex and restrictive no one could follow them.

Other times—when he had been touching her—she'd felt an ocean of raw power that felt strong enough to envelop the entire universe if he ever unleashed himself.

Reeva avoided down-talking Sordon's superior officer, but she did affirm his personhood, his need to be at home in his own skin.

Sordon was grateful and in exchange he was trying to aid her in getting to the bottom of primale psychology. She would explain to him principles of her field and he would try to connect them to his own experiences.

One thing she was trying to do was to get him to laugh.

They worked off and on for two days trying to find something that would be funny to a primale.

Puns were a total waste. Sordon would either refuse to acknowledge the duality of the meaning or else attempt to eliminate it by logic. When posed with the old joke about the man surviving in the desert by eating the *sand which* was there, for example, he failed to see how the similarity in sound to *sandwiches* would imply any actually being in the desert.

"Who would have left them there?" he wanted to know. "More than likely it is a trap of some kind."

Riddles were just as useless.

"Why would a man throw a chronometer out a window? To see time fly."

"Who will replace it? Why not toss it in the air and catch it safely?"

Finally they hit on something. Visual humor. She flashed a thousand graphics on screen before hitting on something.

The image of a Narthian Bug squashed against the viewscreen of a star cruiser.

"Freeze on that one." Sordon pinched his brow, studying. She studied him. His lips moved up and down, until finally he smiled and released a tiny, but very real, chuckle.

Reeva was ecstatic. "Good work!"

As luck would have it, the base commander chose that exact moment to make a surprise inspection.

Looking up from the table, Sordon saw him first. "Sir!" He jumped from his seat to attention, his back like a rod of super steel.

Vandar was scowling in disgust.

"Guardian Sordon," he ordered. "Report for reconnaissance duty. Immediately."

A few hours flying at the edge of the demilitarized zone, a breath from the Narthian forward nests would wake him up fast.

"Sir!" Sordon's boot rose and fell on the floor, heel stamping. He pivoted and marched from the room.

"Impressive," said the still seated Reeva as he turned the full force of his glare toward her. "Sorry, but I don't do parades."

"Would you mind explaining to me," he proceeded, his brow furrowed, his blue eyes like a storm, "why you are spending so much time with that man?"

"I am conducting my research and he is actually cooperating. It's a wonderful word. You should look it up in the dictionary."

"I have seen to it all your needs are met. Your responsibility is to study and not interfere."

Her heart was beating wildly. She couldn't keep up with him. This wasn't just his same old resistance and cantankerousness. He was *angry*.

A hurricane – aimed at her.

Reeva tried to right herself. Sarcasm wasn't going to do it. Nor could she summon anything to match him. A strange urge rose in her, an instinct.

Appeasement.

But why? She hadn't done anything, she didn't know what this was about.

"It hasn't been my intent to overstep my boundaries," she said with an eerie softness. "If I have...I am sorry."

What the fuck? Why did you apologize?

His rage turned from dire black to a cool blue – formidable, but reserved.

As for his facial expression, he went through a rapid cycling – shock, surprise, to an eerie calm – all in less than a second. "You must understand, Doctor," he continued in a rasp that was patronizing and protective and sexy as hell all at once, "that your presence, the work you are doing has to be carefully balanced with protocol, discipline. Right or wrong, the base survives as it does, under my regime. Any letting go, any turning away – without being sure what we're unleashing in these men – could prove deadly. You were not instructed previously as to how much contact to have with each man. This was my error. I am correcting it now. You will not interview any man for more than three hours without my permission."

"Yes."

Go on, just say it – yes, Sir...

Her legs were like rubber. Without the chair to support her she would slide to the floor.

To her knees. And why not? He had seen her in black leather, trussed up like a slave girl, complete with paddle. What else could he think but that she wanted it – primale domination. Restraint, even pain.

What had gotten into her anyway? Dressing up like that? And in the man's quarters no less.

Oh, god, she couldn't take her eyes off his crotch, so close to eye level. She knew that cock, she missed it so much. She had been lost since he took it away from her. It wasn't fair, why didn't he make sex with her again?

She forced herself to look back up at his face. She held back a small gasp. His eyes flashed, but it passed quickly. "Do you have anything further to say?"

She shook her head no, in a complete fog. She wanted to do better, felt out of sync with him, with the universe. She was terrified of what his anger did to her.

It wasn't fear of the man—she knew instinctively he would never, ever hurt her.

But he was making her feel dependent. Needy. And it was working on her sex in a major way.

Reeva was wet, primed to respond.

Weak to the core, waiting to yield. He need only give the command.

He pursed his lips, as if weighing his words. "I'm trying to consider everyone's safety, that's all."

She wanted to pull off her clothes, to fall naked at his feet. *Punish me, pleasure me, she thought. Whip me to tears, tease me to the brink of a million orgasms, lock me up, throw away the key, only take this freedom from me, I can no longer bear it.*

"I have nothing further."

She wanted to call to him as he walked away.

Don't ignore me. Don't start what you can't finish. Don't make me half an obedient.

Reeva determined not to cry again. She was going to finish the damn report and get the hell out of here. Never again would she see Vandar or his base. As far as she was concerned, she would never again so much as look at the spot in the sky where this solar system was located.

After a while she calmed down. No more self pity. As for running away with her tail between her legs, that had never been her style. Had she forgotten her resolve the moment she met him? Not to be bested?

This wasn't just about her and him after all—it concerned the whole human race. She was here to prove the validity of her field of study.

Maybe that was the answer.

Stop seeing Vandar as a man who jilted her. He was a subject of her study. The main topic of interest.

What was it about his reaction to Sordon's working with her that bore studying? The anger he'd shown was not befitting his position. He was betraying personal feelings. That needed to be explored further. The situation was going to have to be pushed.

She chided herself for taking so long to come to her senses. The man's presence made her irrational. She had stopped using her brain and reacted only from the level of her anatomy.

She was a scientist and it was time to prove it.

By setting up an experiment. One that might just flush out the base commander's emotions once and for all.

This, in turn, could be the key to learning how to ease the stress he had built into this place.

The fact that she was playing with fire or that there might be something personal in this—an attempt to make him jealous by meeting with Sordon again—did not enter into the equation.

Science outweighed everything.

Unlike Vandar, she could keep her boundaries straight. She was not obsessed, she was not seeking to manipulate and she was not trying to control the universe.

She was night and Vandar was day. Or he was night and she was day.

In any case they were opposites and she was over him.

Damn. She was using his name again.

No matter, she could handle it. She was immune.

She was over him, she was...repeating herself.

Reeva sighed and pressed her thighs together. Time to start planning her revenge. Whoops. Not revenge. Experiment.

Yes, that was it, an experiment...

And maybe if she said the word a few million times in her head she might convince herself.

"Betty, Sordon has been sent on recon duty. When will he be back?"

"In six hours," said Betty, helpful as always.

"Where will he arrive?"

"Landing Pad B."

Now came the more challenging part. "I need to find a way to get together with Sordon when he gets back so that the base commander will see us. Any chance you can plot an interception?"

Betty chirped immediately. "Probability one hundred percent."

"One hundred?" Reeva marveled. "But how can you be so sure?"

"Because," said her floating calendar of base information. "Commander Vandar is flying with him."

"Betty," exclaimed Reeva, the scene crystallizing in her mind in devilish detail. "Have I told you lately that I love you?"

"No."

"Well I do," she proclaimed.

"Humans are very illogical," commented Betty.

"You'll get no argument from me," said Reeva. "None at all."

* * * * *

Vandar told himself the reason he was joining Sordon on recon duty was to observe the man, to make sure his reactions had indeed not been slowed or altered by his sessions with the psychosensologist, whom Vandar preferred not to think of by name any longer.

Truthfully, though, he knew the man was fine. Otherwise he would never have allowed Sordon to suit up and pilot a one-man cruiser all the way out to the edge of the Zone.

There was no more dangerous assignment for base personnel and none more essential, either. Two cruisers were in deep space at all times, keeping a manned watch for Narthian activity. There were scanners, of course, but Vandar believed there was no substitute for the trained primale eye. It was also a way to keep the men keen, battle ready.

The presence of manned ships also served notice to the Bug Hordes. Earth's outer defense was no paper tiger. There were men ready to die for this very bit of space in defense of their homes far away.

So why had Vandar sent Sordon? And why was he taking up a place beside him?

The answer to the first question was a resounding, *I don't know*. Seeing Sordon with Reeva, watching how the two of them interacted, seeing one of his men actually laughing, to the delight of the gorgeous doctor, had filled him with a dark rage.

He'd found it intolerable.

Unacceptable.

In his mind, and all the way down to his cock.

The blood surged into his shaft.

Reeva did not belong with another man. Not with him, no, but not with another, either. Sordon hadn't been doing anything wrong. They were talking, laughing. That was not a crime.

The universe would not stop if a primale laughed. There had been some times of late when he had ached to laugh. If only he could. Some of the things Reeva said deserved laughter. She was clever and so full of life. She didn't take things so seriously all the time. He loved that about her. Her free spirit.

So why was he longing to cage her?

Why couldn't he bear the sight of her? Why did he avoid seeing her, ducking and hiding? What kind of primale hid his face—and from a female no less? Why did he feel so torn up? Why did his heart race? Why couldn't he keep his mind off sex-making?

He was tempted to go back to Penya, but sex-making with her would only make it worse. She didn't have Reeve's fire. She couldn't push him to his limits or show him, in his heart and soul, what it meant to be primale. There weren't the words to describe what it was like to have a fem—a fem like her—surrender to him.

He was quite simply awed and honored.

And quite frankly he didn't deserve it. He had no ability with females. Look at how he had messed things up with Penya. He would sooner have died than hurt her.

The same with Reeve.

So why did he make more of a mess of things every time he talked to her? There was no excuse for what he had done to her. He had been little more than a bully.

Why had she apologized? That surprised him. More than that, it aroused him. Showing submission to a primale was the greatest arouser. He wanted to seize her, pull her to her feet and place his hands where they burned to be, where he dreamed of them night and day—on her body, exploring her curves, learning her deep self, discovering each and every sigh as he brushed her nipples, cupped her breasts, slid his fingers down her back and pressed them into her the soft contours of her buttocks.

"Welcome home," he would whisper into her ear.

And then she would melt and he would probably have to battle some new emotions, feeling a woman like that, the most extraordinary creature in the universe, give herself over to his embrace, wrapping her arms around his neck, exhaling against his chest, allowing herself to truly relax, to truly believe that, yes, he would give home a to her long-suffering spirit.

Why did he think her spirit was suffering? It was not a matter of her being lost or without hope. But he'd seen something in her eyes this last time. A need for companionship. For something that she had found with no mem.

Did a part of her need a primale's brand of loving?

Did a part of him need to place his brand on a fem?

He needed to clear his head in deep space.

He also needed a way to make things right with Sordon. Apologizing was not an option. That would only serve to let the man know that his command decisions were being influenced by his feelings for a woman, which would be a disaster for the entire hierarchy.

Taking his place beside him, sharing in the duty, would serve to send the message, in the most solid way possible, that he did not fault Sordon, that Vandar understood the man to be caught up in something much bigger than him.

Big indeed.

Never had he been confronted in his life by a sight as provocative as Reeve, dressed in slave leather. Her hair wild from their earlier sex-making, her breasts constricted and yet left entirely exposed, her narrow waist cinched, the leather parting her pink pussy lips, glistening sex fluids dripping out, beckoning.

She was punishing herself as well. With a paddle. She had made the thing with his machine and actually applied it to her own flesh.

What had come over her?

Did she want to be thrown to the floor and used? Did she want to have her freedom ripped away...forever? Did she want to end up a sex slave? Did she want him to end up her Master?

Playing around with a primale's dominance urges was like pregnancy. It was all or nothing and once the trigger was tripped the desires took over everything. They had a life all their own. She would have no life but serving him and he would be biologically, instinctively compelled to care for her, to honor and protect and keep her slave to his soul, renouncing his interest in all others.

No woman had ever put him in that position. He had been with Penny many, many times and always kept control. Penny was hardly unattractive, either. She was a true beauty, bred for pleasure.

But Penny never moved under him like Reeva. Penny never looked at him with those emerald eyes, so complicated he wanted to plunge into them, spending his entire lifetime conquering, exploring, knowing he would never get to the bottom of her.

Penny did not exasperate him, infuriate him. She was not a living contradiction, innocent as a lamb and knowing as the most jaded girl of pleasure. She was not saucy and insolent and yet so completely open and naked, completely transparent and naive, like a blank slate to write his will upon.

And so very smart and clever and wise, able to amaze him, to think around him, to make him find delight in his own defeat. All of which only served to make sex with her richer and more fulfilling.

He could so easily have made her his own. But that would have made her unhappy. The novelty of wearing the leather and submitting to the paddle would wear off.

This wasn't mem and fem dress-up. She couldn't change the rules as they went along. He would never force her or be cruel, but he would want her to wear what he wanted, and he would use all his powers of seduction. She would find herself giving in. That would never end. Primales lived for their women to give in. To pleasure, and, yes, at times to pain.

Vandar had enjoyed no relief this past week.

He wanted Reeva's lips on his cock. He wanted to have hold of her ass. He wanted to slake his body's needs on the lushness of her femininity.

"Recon 45 switching to tactical scanners, arming weapons," called Sordon over the small com link on the ship's instrument panel.

"Acknowledged, Recon 45. Recon 33 switching."

Deep space opened in front of them as they powered over the crags of the moon's mountainous surface, the ship's engines whispering them along at star drive speed.

Vandar never tired of seeing the fresh crispness of the stars unencumbered by atmosphere. Space flight to him was the closest his spirit came to the eternal.

The only thing close was orgasming with Reeva. Clutching her body, keeping her from falling over the abyss, exercising the essence of his male power and sexual dominion.

He could still feel her, he could taste her, the sweat he licked from her breast, the way she mewled when he teased her nipple, the way her sex lay open to him like the cosmos itself allowing his penetration of her—'round and 'round, their bodies spinning.

Vandar had a hard-on in his silver suit.

"Recon 33 to Recon 45. Proceed, full speed."

"Roger, Recon 33."

Cruisers did not usually go so fast. Then again, pilots were not generally plagued by sex fantasies and erections more worthy of a first year academy cadet.

How well he remembered his first trip to see a pleasure girl. He had been all of nineteen. Several of his buddies had gone with him. The woman was double his age and had been with thousands of men before him.

She had to help him at first, overcome his shyness, but the moment she'd opened his pants and touched his cock, he'd felt his will spring into action.

His hand had gone to her wrist. He'd smiled—the look of the devil—and she'd known. "What is your will, Master?" she'd whispered her tone totally changed from light and playful to husky and submissive.

He had shown her, helping her down onto her knees where she belonged. "Whenever I come to you," he said, "and I will be here often, you will greet me on your knees and you will kiss my cock."

He had seen her shoulders relax. She knew herself to be in the presence of a true primale. She had been obedient, at home.

Vandar wanted Reeva to know that kind of peace, in whatever way fems found peace. For such peace for her, he would give his own life.

Which was a very strange thing for a primale to feel for anyone other than his sworn, obedient mate.

Strange and well nigh impossible.

Vandar initiated long range guidance and double-checked the alert system. Sordon offered confirmation. The onboard computer chirped accordingly. The readouts changed from red light to blue.

He went on instant alert, a subtle quickening of his heartbeat. Every Guardian in the service knew the significance of the blue lights. It meant they were in forward space, that there was nothing between them and a potential Narthian attack.

Vandar had seen Narthians close up. He knew what they did. He knew there were fates far worse than death and he was one of the few who had survived to see what it was the Bug Hordes planned for all humanity should they ever win the War.

The sight of humans encased in larval sacs... The silent screams locked on the faces of men and women. Suffice it to say it stuck with a man. For Vandar there was no going back, no standing down from the Front. It wasn't a matter of holding them at bay. So long as a race such as the Narthians existed, he would never sleep in a peacetime bed. Never could he allow another to take his place, at the ready, weapons close at hand.

Could he further the cause serving in a higher rank? That was not for him to say. He was not so foolish as to call a man like Theron useless in his position. Vandar lacked that vision, however. He hadn't the patience or the trust to leave the day-to-day operations to others.

With all due respect to Theron, he had not seen with his own eyes. He had not lived under siege, surrounded by the enemy in the thousands. He had not seen a landscape turned to red, brown hell, mountains melted, seas bubbled into toxic waste. He had not felt what it was to be among the last, the sole survivors.

He alone knew the cruelty, the darkness and the absolute total need to win this war. Until victory was achieved, no one could rest, ever.

It was not for himself he fought, but for the race of humans, and most intimately for its women. To his mind, they were what were admirable and truly beautiful. On the siege of Magnus One, what had kept him from giving up the ghost was the image in his mind of the pleasure female, the first he had ever had.

Janishia was her name. With auburn curls, amber eyes and a delicate smile. If not for her, he would not have lived.

In time, that image had changed in his mind to Penny. Her sweetly refined beauty, her absolutely kind and innocent obedient's heart. Not a robot, not a wooden doll or a puppet—oh, how he hated to hear that criticism of obedients—but the very epitome of service and selflessness and love.

She was why it was worth fighting the Narthians to the last breath.

There was a saying on ancient Earth by a philosopher named Nietzsche—*he who fights too long against dragons becomes one*. Was the same true of Narthian fighters? Had his own soul been consumed? Had his heart been abandoned somewhere along the way?

Had the best of him survived Magnus One? The psychosensologists told him it was his natural sense of discipline and solitary strength that allowed him to hold up at all under that pressure but he was not so sure.

He did not know what was left of him, other than duty.

And the will to fight.

He was very thankful to Reeva for one thing. She had given him a new and more powerful incentive to stay the course. It would be her face he would see for the rest of his days and it would be her right to survive and thrive that he would defend, eventually dying, as he must, in battle.

In a very odd way, he belonged to her now.

Face bathed in the blue light, readouts sparkled with color, dots and numbers laid out before him, the control stick gripped in his capable hands, a good soldier beside him in an equally well-equipped craft, he headed into the deep star field. Vandar, the Last Warrior.

Chapter Six

The twin recon ships looked to Reeva like dragonflies as they settled on the bull's-eye landing pad. Artificial ones, heavily mechanized, covered in naked, raw metal, bristling with the finest weaponry the Earth was capable of producing.

She found the insect metaphor ironic given that their purpose was to fight the Bug Menace. As a child she'd had nightmares about the Narthians. Like all the little fems and mems and obedients in her learning center, she had learned about the enemy's physiology and the history of the long and gruesome War between the races.

Some felt children should be sheltered, but the Council's view was that every citizen, even the smallest, must know the reality. Hiding things only made for more fear down the road.

For a solid week, Reeva had not been able to sleep without seeing them. She would break out in a cold sweat, awaking with her copper curls in a damp tangle, her skin cold and clammy. The parents of the cluster house where she'd lived sought to soothe her, assuring that the War was far away and that never, ever, had the Guardians failed in their task.

The Narthians always lost and they always would.

Reeva had needed more assurance. She had wanted to see a Guardian. To hear firsthand what it was they did and why they were so invincible.

Even at the age of eleven, she had been formidable in her will. The other children teased her, but she had persisted. At one point she'd punched a mem and knocked him down for telling her she was a baby.

"Why don't you fight the Bugs?" Reeva had fumed standing over the shocked thirteen-year-old. "Then we will see who is a baby."

They had promptly taken Reeva to meet her Guardian.

The unusual request had filtered all the way to the ears of Marax, the retired Supreme Commander, father of Nyssa. He had Reeva flown to his estate in the remote mountains.

Reeva had been instantly struck by his silver-haired presence, his dignity, his obvious discipline. Above all, she had been amazed at his kindness and his honesty.

That she'd appreciated more than anything.

"How do we know the Narthians will never beat the Guardians and make it to Earth?"

"We don't," he had said without flinching.

"Doesn't that make you afraid?" she had asked in wonder, sitting on his vast balcony as his equally stately wife Dekalia served hot tea and sweet ginger rolls.

"Yes," he told her.

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. "But my teachers all say I should not be afraid, they say we will never lose the War."

He had smiled—there'd been so much behind the expression. "Your teachers all love you and they don't want you to feel any negative emotions. I think they believe what they say too, at least I hope so. We Guardians fight so that the rest of you don't have to live in fear. But those of us who have fought, we can't help but be afraid at times."

"How can you ever be happy living like that?" She had wondered.

He'd reached for Dekalia's hand. She had worn a long, flowing brocaded gown with a diaphanous scarf over her head. Reeva had felt a twinge of jealousy because it was clear as they held hands how much they loved each other.

She'd felt the glow so strongly. It was the first time she had an inkling of her gift of intuition, to see the spirits of others.

It was also the first time she had seen it was possible for humans to stretch beyond their biology. As strong a primale as Marax was, he accepted, thrived on the love of a very strong female. For Dekalia was no mere hostess, she was also Head of the Council.

Together they would create a child. Beautiful Nyssa, her identity once secret and now revealed as part of the Council's new campaign to promote interest in natural genetics.

Reeva had wanted to stretch, too. To find some frontier. Did she dare imagine there would be love waiting? Or would it be only the terror of nightmare?

"To be human is to live with uncertainty. If we have no fear, then we take for granted what we have, we lose the edge to appreciate each new day. Fear is to be managed and controlled, not eliminated. The Narthians do us a favor, you know. They keep the race alive and fighting. Without them humanity would grow soft and weak and cease to love and fight as we should."

"I wish I could grow up to be a Guardian like you," said Reeva. "Yours is the best profession."

"No profession is more than another. We Guardians need to know there are others, the mems and fems and obedients. You should use your brain, Reeva and your heart. You have one of the bravest I have ever seen."

"Me? But I am not a fighter. I'm a schoolgirl."

Marax laughed—a deep and beautiful sound. It surprised her because she had heard that Guardians seldom, if ever, laughed. "You had the courage to come and question me, my dear, and I can assure you, there are few who would do such a thing—not even the most stalwart of Guardians."

"Drink your tea, dear," said Dekalia, "before it gets cold."

She had stayed until sunset. They'd eaten together quietly. Little more had been said. Reeva thought long on the conversation. The nightmares had stopped, though she no longer believed everything the teachers said.

A month later she had announced she would become a psychosensologist.

She had done as much work as she could with primales, but her opportunities had been limited. Occasionally she had interviewed a Guardian.

Little did she realize she would one day be snatched up to go to one of the toughest bases in the galaxy, fighting with all her might to get a single chuckle of humanity.

There certainly weren't any Maraxes here.

The only one who came close was Vandar. He had that potential. To live life on that glorious edge. But he had that wall. And he lived under siege. Yes, that was it. Siege. Why hadn't she thought of it before?

The man's definitive psychosensoral experience was a battle siege, against the very enemy that had given her such nightmares as a child. They had that in common.

The Bugs were more real to both of them, for different reasons.

More than ever, she wanted and needed to reach out.

But that's not why she was standing in this landing bay watching the dragonfly ships, waiting for the two pilots to disembark.

She was here to test the base commander, to see his response as she made fresh contact with Sordon.

Sordon was the first to emerge. He climbed through an opening in the bottom of his ship, by means of a ladder. He walked past the metal legs, each with four joints for flexibility. A pair of hover robots went to work, bathing the ship in a cleansing compound. Sordon pulled off his helmet and gloves.

She waved to him.

He looked startled. He did not approach her. She stayed put at the back of the bay, by the exit elevators.

She gave him a thumbs-up for his safe return. He did not smile. He was obviously worried about the base commander's reaction. Reevea hoped she was not putting him in a difficult position.

Had she really thought this through? As the scientist and professional she was supposed to be? Or was she just desperate for Vandar's attention?

A moment later Vandar emerged. He too took off his helmet and gloves. He too saw her. His expression was far from surprised, nor did he look particularly worried.

He looked angry again. Much more than before.

Reevea ignored him and started walking toward Sordon. Her heart was racing. She felt like prey, like a rabbit about to be pounced on...and it made her hot and wet.

Vandar was on the move. Right toward her. Steadily walking, not running. She kept going. Let him catch her if he wanted.

She tried to brush past him, not even acknowledging. His hand took her arm. Not hurting her, but encasing it with the strength of iron.

"Where do you think you're going, Reevea?"

"To talk to Sordon," she breezed. "I want to do an interview after his mission. Examine his responses. In a more detailed way."

She deliberately left it open-ended.

His eyes darkened, his lips curled downward. She had touched something, all right...only now she would have to live with the results.

"I gave you orders, Reeva, not to have contact with my men in excess of three hours without permission. Your time with Sordon has exceeded that limit by a good many hours."

Was he jealous? Could it be?

"I happen to find his company enjoyable," she said, taunting ever-so slightly. "I didn't realize enjoying one's self was a crime on Star Base 117."

For the briefest second the usual cloud over Vandar's persona cleared. What she saw was intense power and a mental force that was almost palpable.

Not to mention agonizingly sexual.

The cloud reformed, but not before the damage was done.

Reeva stood wilted, drained, penetrated.

"You are confined to quarters," he said.

"W-why," she stuttered, entirely out of character.

"No more questions, girl. You either go now on your own or I will have security take you. Which will it be?"

She licked her very dry lips. Coming from anyone else it would insult her to the heavens to be called "girl". "I'll go on my own."

He released her. "We will address your behavior later."

"You...you will be coming to me?" she asked, stunned by her own need for reassurance.

"Go," he pointed, giving her none.

She began to walk. To her quarters. Under command. Under discipline.

She had done it now. Some experiment.

Reeva barely remembered the walk back. The sound of the doors closing behind her jolted her, sending her body into a tailspin. She slid to the floor, back against the metal surface of the doors. For all intents and purposes she was in a prison. She could not leave, she could not touch herself, she could not rest, could not think of anything beyond Vandar. What was on his mind? How did he really feel? What would he do to her?

The real question was – whose will contained her?

His? Or her own?

And how long would he keep her waiting?

The answer came quickly enough, in a pneumatic hiss. The door was sliding behind her. He was here, already. She leaped to her feet and ran to the middle of the room. Poised. Nowhere to take flight. That left one option.

Fight.

* * * * *

Vandar knew the instant he saw her she was in wildcat mode. Her hair curled like fire, her eyes focused, her body tense, her tongue ready to cut loose.

If only they could direct this kind of energy against the Bugs, they would be destroyed forever.

"You are jealous of Sordon!" She took the offensive. "Admit it."

"Jealous. What on Earth would I have to be jealous of?"

"You don't want me enjoying another man's company. You can't stand it."

"I am concerned with my men. I am concerned with obedience and discipline. That is all."

She snorted. "Perfect segue to spanking me and fucking me again, I'd say."

"Is that an invitation?"

"Hardly." She turned up her nose. So damn cute. How could he possibly stay angry?

"If I may turn psychosensologist for a minute," he decided to have a little fun, "I would say that your motivation is to make me jealous. You're prodding me in every way you know how."

She rolled her eyes. "Don't quit your day job."

"Then you tell me – what were you doing in that bay? And don't tell me about your work, tell me where your head was at. Really."

She swallowed. Was he actually cornering her? For once?

"I wanted to know what makes primales tick."

"You wanted to know what makes *me* tick," he corrected.

"So? You're the base commander. Your mental state is a prime factor of this base's psychosensoral energy."

"Why haven't you ever interviewed me, then?"

That one got her.

"You've had feelings for me." He took the plunge into unknown waters. "You have since the moment you saw me."

"I felt you were going to be a huge obstacle, if that's what you mean."

"But you haven't interviewed me. You haven't sought to connect with me. You're afraid."

Her red lips flattened, her eyes narrowed. "Fuck you."

Not very scientific, he thought.

"Then interview me. Prove I'm the complete emotional and human wreck you think I am."

"It's too late." She tried to beg off. "We've made sex together. I'm not objective."

"So you aren't that good a scientist. You're too overwhelmed to keep on top of your emotions."

That should do the trick...

"You want me to interview you?" She cocked her head. "Fine, I'll interview you."

She pulled up a plain metal chair and faced it toward the bed. "If you would sit there, please."

"You like seeing me in bed, eh?"

"You will refrain from speech except in direct answer to my questions," she said haughtily. "Doctor's rules."

"Very well." He sat down with ease, genuinely enjoying this.

She sat down and crossed her long, lovely legs. She clipped back the riot of curls—the raising of her arms making his heart and loins ache. To see her was to want to bind her, to love her.

"Question one." She punched a button on a mechanical pad, which sat on her lap. "Why is it you can relate to women only through sex-making?"

"I'm a primale."

She shook her head and pushed back a few errant hairs from the front of her face. "That won't do. Rule two—no generic answers. You tell me your feelings and nothing else. No falling back on your gender subtype."

"Fine. I relate to women through sex-making because that is what they are made for. Their bodies belong in a man's hands. I've studied a little. The breasts, for example. Isn't it true they are shaped as they are to catch the male eye and not for practical reasons?"

"Leave my breasts out of this," she flushed.

"I never mentioned yours in particular." He smiled slyly.

"Question two—why does independence in a woman threaten you so much?"

"It means she can deny me what I want. Her body. Her mind. Now tell me, why does a strong man threaten you?"

"I'm asking the questions." She brought him up short. "The answer, in any case, is that I'm not threatened at all. You only wish I was."

"No, I don't want you to feel threatened, though I do wish you were an obedient," he admitted. "At least part of me does." He could see her chest rising and falling a little more rapidly.

"What would you do with me?" She tried to keep her eyes on the electronic pad.

"There's no point in answering that."

"Why?"

"Because it's not what you are."

"It's hypothetical," she pressed.

"In that case," he said, his own breathing rate increasing. "I would be highly tempted to make a pet of you."

"A...pet?"

"I would collar you, Reeva, dress you as I please or not at all. I would train you to attend to my pleasure. I would keep you chained. I would reward and punish you, and I would use you with abandon. I would call you my kitten and I would make you purr and moan. I would dominate you until you knew nothing but my cock, my body, my skin...my will."

She shifted in her seat. He didn't need to be a psychosensologist to see she was reacting. "And you think this urge is...healthy?"

"You tell me. You said it was hypothetical."

"I couldn't live in a cage."

"I know that."

"I wouldn't want that kind of domination."

"That is why I haven't conquered you."

"Conquered me?" She raised a brow. "Are you so sure you could?"

"In a heartbeat, Reeva." He wasn't bragging.

"But my mind...it will always be free."

"If I were to lay my mark on you, if I were to put my claim on you, it wouldn't matter. I would own you. You would not have a say."

"That isn't the primale way." She shifted again. Just how aroused was she? "Obedients are won over by possessive love, not by brute force."

"I thought we weren't speaking about primales in general."

"Fine, you in particular would never use brute force."

"I would compel your love, Reeva. And that you could not understand. You aren't obedient. You could never truly submit your own ego to that of another. You could never truly humble yourself."

"And you are some kind of expert in humility because...?"

"Because I have been taught by obedients to see through their eyes."

Reeva frowned, punching some buttons. "We are getting off track."

"I'm not in charge here," he reminded. "You are."

"I want you to react to the following," she proceeded, ignoring him. "I, Reeva, am attracted to Sordon. I wish to make sex with him."

It was his turn to frown. "I would tell you that further contact is prohibited, for security reasons."

"How would it damage security for me to make sex with him? Is his cock a secret weapon?"

He knew she was trying to goad him. "I don't have to tell you how inappropriate your thoughts are."

"Why? You fucked me? Aren't I good enough for your men?"

"Reeva, this won't work."

"What won't work?"

"Trying to agitate me, pick a fight like you are hell-bent on doing every time I see you."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm just interviewing. If Sordon and I fucked, I want to know how you would feel."

"I told you, it isn't happening."

"If I walk out that door now and offer myself, I don't think he'll refuse. Especially if I offer oral pleasure."

Vandar was very close to the edge. She was insane to push things this far. "Reeva, you will cease this line of conversation."

"It's a line of questioning. And it's hypothetical. This is how fems are. We are free to think of sex with anyone we want."

"On Earth, perhaps, but not on this base."

"Why not?"

He rose to his feet. "Because."

"Because why?"

"Because I will be forced to deal with you if you say another word."

"You seem agitated. Should I not tell you which others among your men I would like to perform oral sex on?"

Vandar could no longer restrain himself. He took her by her glorious curls. "Are you so anxious to serve a cock, Reeva?"

He pushed her to her knees and opened his pants. "Take it," he commanded. "Get your fill."

Reeva moaned, licking her lips. "Yesss..." she breathed, allowing her lips to slide along his turgid shaft.

Vandar felt his male will surging. He put his hands on her shoulders, massaging them, urging her. "Deeper," he ordered. "Open wider."

She moaned, acknowledging his power over her. The semen pumped into his balls, rendering them tight and hard. He was going to come in Reeva's mouth.

She encircled the base of his cock with both of her hands, covering the part that would not fit in her mouth.

He intertwined his fingers in her hair, luxuriating in the curls as he helped her to move, in and out, her sweet body focused on his pleasure. Her teeth dragging lightly, her tongue running along the vein at the underside of his cock, her lips suctioning, tiny little sounds of joy emanating from the back of her throat which was about to be flooded.

"Reeva," he whispered fiercely. "Oh, god..."

His semen erupted into her willing mouth. She swallowed greedily, with all the eagerness of an obedient.

She did not balk at swallowing.

He gave her a lot—thick and warm—several degrees warmer than she would be used to with her mem lovers.

Reeva did not spill a drop. She licked him afterwards, kissing with her perfect mouth, tickling with her disheveled hair. He rubbed his hand over the so very dazzling coppery surface.

"It isn't getting any smaller," she noted in wonder, her voice a soft rasp.

Indeed, his imposing purplish shaft, covered in her glistening spittle was as hard and thick as before she had swallowed his cum.

"No. My erection won't go down, Reeva. Not while I am this close to you."

She rose to her feet. "What do we have to do about that?"

"We need to separate," he said. "Before this goes too far."

She wrapped her fingers about him, lightly stroking from the middle all the way up to his rounded tip. Fresh cum oozed from the little opening. His nipples throbbed, craving the attention of her mouth. "Define too far."

His head swam, competing images racing through his mind. Reeva, fire-haired and fire-willed, submitting to him in a hundred different ways, a hundred different positions.

"You," he said bluntly, "chained to your bed. My sex toy for the next two hours or so."

She drew a sharp breath and pushed her belly against his. "Twist my arm..."

"This isn't a game, Reeva. This would not be like any two hours you have ever experienced. I don't know how it would affect you."

He wasn't completely sure how it would affect him either. Though if he avoided coming inside her pussy again, consummating the act of intercourse, he should be able to keep himself at bay.

Otherwise her slavery would go a lot longer than two hours.

"That's the chance I'll have to take." Her pelvis drove against his cock. He responded, on the verge of tearing off her clothes.

"I won't let you take it."

She reached for the electronic button to open her uniform. "You can't stop me."

Reeva backed up, letting her clothes fall at her feet.

He seized her nipple. "Is this what you want?"

She whimpered from the pain. He did not go easy on her. "I have to have it." She winced. "I have to know."

He brought her to her knees, controlling her like a puppet. "I will give you one more chance. When I let go of you, you may rise and walk away. Tell me to leave, make one of your speeches, anything you like. But if you stay here at my feet, than I will do to you as I wish."

"Do it," she challenged. "Let me make the choice."

He let go of her nipple. She cried out as the blood flowed back into the sensitive nub. She touched the spot. She squirmed. But she did not rise.

"Last chance..."

Reeva looked up at him, every bit as defiant as she'd been the first time she had seen him.

Except now she had no clothes to protect her, no rank. Even her status as a fem was gone.

"Rule one," he declared. "Your eyes are down unless I say otherwise."

Reeva lowered her beautiful lashes.

This initial act of submission was all it took to put him in motion. As Dominant. As primale. As Master. "Rule two. You will obey instantly or face punishment. Rule three. I am Master. You are slave. It will not be enough to call me Sir. I will have more from you. I will have everything. Acknowledge, now."

"You are Master," she said, addressing his feet, the energy pooling in her loins. "And I am slave."

"You will now beg me to use your body as I see fit—for both pain and pleasure."

Reeva exhaled.

The moment's delay cost her. He bent back her head, her hair twisted in his fist. "Were you given an order, slave?"

"Yes," she cried.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, Master."

"Would you like to obey that order?"

"Yes, Master, please."

"I'm waiting." The testosterone was flooding him, mixed with his primale genes. He wanted this to be permanent, it was his instinct.

"Please," her lips trembled. "Use my body as you see fit for...for pain...and pleasure."

He pulled her to her feet. Grasping her left breast, he kissed her. "Pleasure," he nibbled at her mouth, "and pain."

She cried out as he squeezed her breast.

"After a while the two will blur in your mind," he said. "You will not know whether to beg me to stop, or keep going."

"Mmm," she sighed.

He ordered her to kiss him, while he maintained the pressure. She whined softly, her lips seeking to appease.

"You had your chance, Reeva."

Her breathing was shallow.

"Look into my eyes," he ordered. "Keep them open, focused."

Another delay. This time he punished her inner thigh, slapping it hard.

Her eyes, emerald green, wide with wonder, melted his soul. He yearned to pour himself into her. She smelled of jasmine and honey and a million scents of Earth. She was all the play and wonder of his childhood, chasing imaginary Narthians, climbing the highest trees. She was...magic.

It was time to conduct a little interview of his own.

"Tell me," he brushed back the curls from her face. "Have you been thinking of me?"

Reeva's eyes darted away for an instant. She forced them back. "Yes...Master."

"What have you been thinking?"

"About your hands, Master." Her voice was husky, intimate and not at all like the cool scientist he had come to know so well.

"What about them?"

"I-I think of you touching me."

He waited for her to fix the omission.

"Oh," she gasped. "I forgot, Master. I forgot to call you Master."

Vandar frowned. He could not excuse her error a second time. He took his girl by the waist, lifted her over his shoulder so she was dangling in the air, her ass facing upward. Ten times he smacked her as she squirmed, entirely helpless.

He put her back down, directly in front of him, close enough to touch. She rubbed her bottom. She had tears in her eyes, but her will was anything but broken. "That hurt me, Master."

"You gave me carte blanche," he reminded. "In any case, you broke a rule. And you are breaking another one right now."

She lowered her head. "Forgive me, Master."

"You've been avoiding me this past week," he asked. "Why?"

"I was afraid, Master, of what was happening in my body."

"And what is happening?"

She shivered. "Must I share this, Master?"

"Yes."

"I can not pleasure myself."

"You can't climax, you mean?"

"No, I can't touch my pussy at all. When I try, it feels...wrong."

"Wrong?"

Her cheeks were red, glowing like her eyes. "Like I don't have the right, Master."

"Indeed," he said throatily. Vandar had not expected anything so drastic. This was classic obedient behavior. "And yet you think of my hands on you."

"Constantly. Sometimes hard, sometimes soft. Do you know what that means, Master?"

"It might mean everything or nothing," he deflected. "We must try one of your experiments. Using your left hand, touch your nipple."

She was able to obey.

"Slide your fingers down your belly," he continued. His mouth watered as she followed his direction, tantalizing her own flesh. Her flat belly quivered, her skin amazingly smooth and glorious.

"Touch your pussy," he commanded.

She bit her lip.

"I command you, slave."

Reeva moaned. She was doing it, grazing her fingertips over the juncture of her sex lips. The fluids oozed in response.

"Enough," he said. "Remove your hand."

She curled her toes, frustrated, denied.

"Eyes up."

No hesitation as they snapped into place, limpid green pools.

He was training her.

"You will come for me," he said. "Without my touching your sex."

Her mouth fell open.

She didn't think it possible.

"Listen to my voice," he said. "Feel it. You're a psychosensologist. This is right up your alley."

Reeva's eyes snapped shut.

He slapped her cheek lightly, stinging her pride more than her skin. "Bad girl. Open your eyes."

They were moist, filled with her need...along with that delicious sense of subjugation obedients were so famous for coveting.

"Are you going to come for me, girl?" He spoke sternly.

"I will try," she said, quickly adding, "I mean, I will try, Master."

She was bracing herself for punishment. He caressed her cheek, she relaxed.

"You want to be a good slave girl, don't you?"

"Yes, Master."

"You want to be pleasing."

"Oh, yes, Master."

"Then you must do more than try."

"I know, Master. But how?"

"By concentrating on my voice. By surrendering to your core. You must let me in. Open that intuitive mind."

She nodded dreamily.

"Bare yourself Reeva, let it happen. Put your hands behind your head. Submit. Absorb everything I say."

"Yes, Master..."

And then he began.

Chapter Seven

"Breathe, Reeve and close your eyes. See no more the outer world. Assess where you are. Take stock of your reality."

He spoke those words and then he gave her time.

To Reeve, that reality was being shackled in place, just as he wanted her, exposed, hands behind her head. Her breasts, her pussy and belly were there for his viewing pleasure. Even her tongue was to arouse him, softly surrendering and whispering words of wonder, letting him know what he was doing to her, the power he had over her.

The opening of a door. Two hours in servitude and bondage. And that might be just the beginning. She acted tough but her bravado was just a front. She was desperate for sexual satisfaction and this was the only way to get it. She couldn't go on with the game of cat and mouse, so she had ended it.

On his terms, naked on her knees.

Though he claimed it wasn't what he wanted. He acted as if she had pushed him into it. The most peculiar of men, this one.

Making her responsible for her own domination. She was surprised he hadn't made her sign a release waiving any claim to a possible relationship to him as his submissive mate.

Not that one was necessary. As emotionally unavailable as he was, she couldn't imagine him making that kind of day-to-day commitment to a woman.

A man like that didn't own a goldfish, let alone possess a creature as complex as a human female for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

No time to muse on her fate now, though. He wanted her to open to his words, to his will.

"You are surrounded, Reeve. You cannot run, you cannot hide. I know deep inside you, you wrestle with things. I sense contradictions. You are fascinated, mesmerized by Guardians, and yet you do not wish to draw too close. Because you are not fire like the Guardians are fire. You are the moth, whose wings can burn. The flames lick at your flesh even now. They burn but do not quench. You are thirstier and must draw closer, your body ignites, you swirl, you are being consumed, you are the dancer and the dance."

Reeve's body began to move in time to invisible music.

Her hips slowly rotated, her breasts pushed outward.

"You are surrounded," he repeated. "Surrounded by men. You want to please them. You must please them. They are primales and you are the object of their lust."

How many are there, Reeva? You are imagining them. Are they my men? Is Sordon among them? Go on, dance for him. Don't try to hold back now. He is going to have you, Reeva, they all will. Isn't that what you secretly want? For me to give you to them all? To be their pleasure girl? You were jealous of Penny when you saw her. You wanted to know what she felt. To have to satisfy under penalty of the whip?"

Reeva sought to deny it. She tried to break her position.

"Don't move, slave!"

His voice lashed out at her. She froze, sweat beading on her forehead.

"You wanted to taste fire? Here it is. Cock after cock, lining up for you. You will suck them all and then you will open your legs, wench that you are and take them all, my fiery fem. But you do so as my slave, at my command. This is how I own you—I preempt your power of fantasy. I watch as you whimper, needing to come. Feel it, feel my cock penetrating like a hot beam of energy."

She cried out, penetrated by invisible flesh. Her pussy clenched at the open air, she fell into spasms. She sank to her knees, and then down onto her hands.

"Now," he commanded, towering over her, her head and hair hanging down. "Come, Reeva, come for Master. While Master watches, calm and in control, enjoying the sight of his naked girl."

Her body was overcome, her muscles tensed and released and tensed again, rapid fire, millions of tiny explosions, every one of them for Master.

"See?" he said as one orgasm overran the banks of another, like oceans crashing. "I make my pussy do what it wants. It's not yours to command."

Reeva groaned, just trying to stay together. "M-Master, what did you do to me?"

"On your belly," he ordered, not deigning to answer. "Slave girl."

Reeva dropped to the floor, the metal cool against her breasts and pussy. She was so horny still, she could fuck the very floor. How could that be after back-to-back climaxes?

"You look fetching at my feet."

"Thank you, Master."

"You have no idea do you, what I will do to you?"

"No, Master."

"Lift your ass."

She did so, tucking up her knees.

He walked around behind her. She could not see him. She got scared. "Master?"

The leather snake cracked in the air, exploding across her ass.

"Owww!" Where had he gotten that whip?

"Did anyone say you could speak?"

"No, Master." She winced pointedly.

"You've been begging for this, Reeve, all along. The minute I saw your ass I knew it had two uses. Know what they are?"

She could take a wild guess.

"Whipping, Master and...fucking?"

"That's right. For *me* to whip and for *me* to fuck. Think you'll be dreaming of Sordon? Think again. You'll get aroused when *I* say. You'll be turned on by what *I* say."

He whipped her again, raining unholy fire.

"Master, please..."

"You will speak only with permission."

She paid for her outburst with another strike.

"Whipping," he reiterated. "And fucking."

She moaned.

"I decide which. And when. Understood?"

"Yes, Master."

"Would you like me to stop whipping you?"

"Yes...Master."

"Then what must you ask for?"

"Fuck me Master, use your slave's ass."

"Have any of your mem lovers taken you anally?"

"I have made anal sex, yes, Master."

"That's not what I asked you."

She caught his meaning. "No, Master, I have not been taken that way."

Primals did not make sex. They made slaves.

"In that case, prepare yourself. As best you can."

"Yes, Master."

"Onto the bed," he ordered. "I think I have had my fill of using you on the floor."

"Thank you, Master."

He smacked her ass as she tried to rise. "You may crawl."

She felt a hot twist of the erotic knife. "Yes, Master," she acknowledged, having been deprived of the right to walk.

She could sense him behind her as she moved. Never had she felt so naked in her life. And so desired.

Vandar waited until she was positioned on all fours on her own bed. The one she endured in isolation, twisting and turning in her sheets, sometimes waking from her sex dreams with wrists crossed overhead or legs wide, as if secured that way by some real force. Subconscious bondage. Wrestling, just as he had said.

He knew her.

He intuited her.

That was scarier and more arousing than the sex.

Vandar took his place as he knelt behind her. He was naked now, his skin hot on hers. She could smell his scent, musk mixed with pure testosterone. Her breath, her essence hung in the balance as he took the liquid from her pussy, swathing with his fingers. He applied it to the tinier hole. She sought to relax, to receive him but she was afraid. And her bottom was sore, too.

He began to massage her. His hand was healing and also exciting. She moaned, wanting to be fucked in her pussy.

He inserted his cock inside her, but it was only a prelude. To wet his shaft, to soften her resistance. "A primale cannot consider a sex act complete without taking a woman in all orifices," he explained. "His control must be complete, coming inside her and on her. Before this night is through I will fill each orifice and I will cover your body, my coppery angel. I will come on you everywhere, greedily."

She smiled in the darkest of ways as he slid in and out, in and out and then...just out. She pushed herself back against him, picturing in her mind what his cock looked like, trying to memorize the feel of it, the exact contours inside her body. How was she ever supposed to feel right without that anymore?

"Mmmaster..."

He slapped her stinging ass. She cried out, halfway between pain and pleasure, just as he had predicted. He was maneuvering her into this strange land, hot and cold wind, liquid and solid, gas and ice, a wasteland as far as the eye could see—burning desert and biting cold.

Bites everywhere, across her flesh and into her mind.

For an instant she hovered in deep space, in that place between the stars she used to wonder about as a child. What was out there and who was looking back? Were we seeing anything real or only projecting?

"You must not resist this, girl, this is going to happen," he coaxed. "It's what I've seen all along, the result of the fighting, the debates, all of it. The underlying attraction. It is...a storm we both must ride."

The tip of his shaft—hard molded flesh—was at the entrance to her ass. She held her breath. Vandar moved inside her. The sensation was alien, but familiar at the same time. In her gut, she'd had rumblings of this, in dreams, in secret yearnings she did not admit to herself.

Open, she must open. He had barely begun his erotic assault.

His hands went to her hips. He claimed another inch and then another. Her pussy yawned, the fluids drenching her, dripping down her inner thigh. She wanted to touch herself, to push her finger down on her clitoris, matching the pressure with more detonations.

But she wasn't in control. Her role was to receive.

To be dealt with, as he had put it in the landing bay.

Reeva concentrated on the sound of his breathing. She could hear his low grunts of pleasure. Her ears pricked, her heart warmed. Having him be pleased, happy was as important as what she felt herself.

Maybe even more important.

Never had she known this with a mem.

Something gave way and Reeva was able to take another inch of his cock. How far in was he? She felt like she might split wide open. She didn't dare take a breath. She was ragged, frayed and torn...and soaring. It was like he was enveloping her in a blanket of primale eroticism.

And then he touched her—the simplest thing in the world and the most devastating.

His finger on her clit. She dissolved for him. She melted completely, like a candle blown in the wind, the wax trickling away.

She collapsed onto her elbows, gritted her teeth and flattened her palms, her chin rubbing on the bed.

"That's it," he crooned. "That's my wildcat."

A wildcat, yes, that was it. A creature neither slave nor free, but untamed, in the throes of capture, struggling for its life, its sex. On the floor of the jungle...brought down by the bigger cat. The male.

Her entire body lit up, she was filled with his cock, swallowing it through every pore, crying out his name, "Master, Master, Master."

Vandar reached around to take hold of her breast and she started to buck, writhing in his grip, thrusting up against his back, trying to turn herself inside out to get to him, to be closer, more connected. Sweat to sweat, heat against heat, limb to limb, her woman's flesh against sleek primale muscle, all that power, carefully contained.

This man could bend metal in his bare hands and yet he was here, applying precisely the energy it took—a mere fraction—to be with her, to teach her.

Vandar increased his speed, utilizing his primale control to allow for maximum penetration. Contracting his size one minute, to penetrate more deeply and then expanding, breaking her resistance, only to repeat the motion. Cajoling, tricking her body, overcoming every defense she put up and making her glad of it. Making her his greatest ally in her own conquest.

He is going to come in my ass, she thought. This incredible specimen of a man, whom I can't put from my mind, whom I hate and love, whom I am, by any standard, obsessed with.

"Reeva, my girl..." His voice was the most intimate human sound she had ever heard. And this from a primale.

"Yes..." She coaxed, delighting in the rolling of her name off his lips, as much or more tantalizing to her than what his cock or his hands were doing.

"My angel..."

She reached around to touch his cheek. *Come inside me, my darling. Find your peace with me.*

He reared back his head, releasing his cry.

That of the tiger, the jaguar, or the giant magcat of Torent Three.

She cried out, too, the sound of a female, a fem, overcome, pounced on, preyed upon...and set free.

They came together, his seed spilling deep inside her as she reacted under the work of his finger, hooked inside her, manipulating her into exactly the kind of orgasm he wanted her to have.

Reeva accepted, knowing there was nothing better she could ask for. She basked, she plunged into the neon, electric waters. She felt her pores filled with the overflow of his testosterone and in this one moment, with his body over hers, securing and safekeeping, she knew what it was long ago that had drawn her to the Guardians.

That secret, relaxed, mysterious smile on Dekalia's face – now Reeva understood its meaning. Dekalia shared a bed with a creature of absolute will and devastating might. A primate. No fem could ever feel that level of security with a mem.

For in the same way he took her, he took care of her, too.

Her limbs had no more strength. She fell facedown.

Vandar covered her, lying on top of her, pressing into but not crushing her. He kissed her body, he breathed her skin, he inhaled her. She moaned, getting worked up all over again. He suckled at her neck a few more minutes and played his hand over the small of her back.

"Master..."

His hand so sensitive, but formidable, communicating everything at once.

"Master," she sighed again.

That was his cue to turn over. "Spread your arms and legs," he ordered.

She sought to move herself into position. She was too weak. "Forgive me," she muttered.

He smiled, helping her.

There were cuffs for her wrists, old-fashioned leather. Where did he keep coming up with this stuff? Then she remembered. Her wardrobe machine. It was also an objectifier. He had programmed them from raw matter, the elements combined by high technology to fulfill his wish list.

To think her innocent little dress maker could come up with whips and chains. Traitorous piece of equipment that it was.

Vandar's tenderness surprised and touched her. Made her hotter, too, as she tasted the keen contrast of a man who could so skillfully play her, seducing her mind while ruthlessly binding her body.

He tickled her palm as he bound her first wrist in the strap. She arched her back, reaching with her other hand, finding her strength.

"Hand down," he ordered, attaching the first cuff to a chain leading to the bed frame.

Her hand fell of its own weight under the power of that blue-eyed gaze. Was she getting any closer to solving the mystery of their depths?

Vandar moved to her second wrist, stopping on the way over to tease her nipples. He chained this arm as well, leaving her upper body defenseless.

Her nipples burned under his hot gaze. She was practically panting. She tried to hold still but she couldn't resist lifting, offering.

His smile said it all.

I have you, girl, right where I want you and it doesn't take bondage to do it. Ignoring her breasts for the time being, he slid his palm down her belly and over her thigh. She sighed at his touch, mewling slightly, her pussy pulsing in futility as he pulled his hand away.

Nothing he ever gave her felt like enough. She was forever being worked to higher and higher levels of arousal, places of physical tension so great that even her orgasms barely took the edge off.

It was time for her ankle cuffs.

He wrapped each one tightly, engaging the tiny electronic locks built into the leather and then connected them to chains fitting into the metal frame at the bottom of the bed.

The sound of the locks made her pulse race. She rotated her ankles. He responded by running his fingers over the bottom of her foot. She leaped in her bonds, laughing.

"I'm...ticklish."

He moved to the bottom of the bed so he could get both feet at once. She was awestruck by his nude body, as she had been before. There was no fat on it. It was a marvel of human engineering, better than any statue, and best of all it was alive. "What did you say?"

"I'm ticklish Master!"

He stopped. She clenched her fist, muttering a mild curse. "You really are obnoxious," she declared. "Master."

Vandar laughed. The sound of a man in charge, who could afford to be amused.

Fuck. I'll pay for that.

"Before you begged me to stop whipping you and fuck you," he reminded her. "You recall that?"

"Yes, Master." She braced herself.

"Soon you will beg me to stop the sex and return to the whip. Do you believe me?"

She grinned sweetly, feeling playful. "If I say yes, can we skip the whole thing, oh wonderful Master?"

"No."

"In that case, I will go for broke, Master. Gee, I don't think you can do *that*. Not to me."

"Sarcasm in a slave is not appreciated."

"What is, Master?"

"Any sort of display of wheedling or self-pity."

"Oh. I think I might have run out of those, Master."

"Indeed. I shouldn't have tickled you, is that it?"

"Something like that."

"Tell me, do your mems use their tongues on you?"

Oh, shit. It was teasing time. Reeva tried to shut her legs by instinct, painfully reminding herself of her bonds. Her pussy burned all the more for being so vulnerable. "Yes, but it doesn't work on me," she lied.

"Doesn't work?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Yep. Just makes me laugh, like the tickling."

"You wouldn't lie to your Master, would you?"

"Never."

Vandar rose and went into the other room to step beneath the cleansing beams. When he returned he went straight to her objectifer. To make something new and diabolical.

"What are you doing? Betty, stop him."

Betty clucked in the corner, hovering with disgusting neutrality.

"Fine, join the traitors."

He returned with gleaming silver clamps. Two sets of them. She tried not to cringe openly.

I will be dignified. I will not make a spectacle of myself.

"These," he held up the first set. "Are your punishment for disobedience. And these," he showed her the second. "Are incentive for you to be a good girl the rest of your time here."

"I will be good, Master. I promise, I'll be such a good girl, please," she whined. "Don't put those on me."

So much for dignified.

"It's too late, little flame. My mind is made up."

He stroked her hair, she looked into his eyes. "Will it hurt?"

"Yes," he soothed, "but you can take it for Master."

"I'll do anything," she pleaded. "I'll obey, whatever you tell me. Every rule. I won't fight you, Master."

"You'd say anything now," he ran his finger over her lips, parting them, "wouldn't you?"

She suckled, eager, desperate. She would crawl to him morning, noon and night, she would take his cock and swallow his come, she would even point her ass up for the whip. But not the fucking clamps – not where he was going to put them.

"I won't even look at Sordon. I'll...I'll..." She was about to say she would change her report to please him, but that was a line she couldn't cross.

Guess she'd have to tolerate some pain.

"Take a breath, angel, it will go on easier." The first clamp was for her left nipple. It was metal, had a flat end and a spring. He applied it slowly, pulling her nipple out first so as not to catch some sensitive little bit of skin.

"I'm releasing it," he said. "Slowly."

She felt the pressure mount. He was making it sound reasonable but she didn't want it at all.

The pressure changed to heat which changed to a sting and then a throb.

"Good girl," he caressed her cheek.

"T-thank you, Master," she said, hating herself for being so damn submissive.

"One more nipple to go. I'm going to do this one faster. You will have less time to absorb it."

She bit her lip, concentrating on the features of his face – his gaze so very intent on her. If she didn't know better she would think, from that look, that it was some act of kindness he was bestowing and not a fresh torture.

The clamp tightened down on her nipple, making her see stars. She bucked against her bondage, but he calmed her easily.

"Settle down."

Reeva wrapped the pain, coating it in obedience. "Yes, Master," she breathed. "I'll be good."

As if to test her, he bent to kiss and fondle her nipples one after the other.

Her cries were soft and piteous, confused. Her toes curled, her body coiled and uncoiled – his plaything. "Oh, Master."

The metal was claiming her at the same time as his lips, she wanted only to surrender, to be good, but what should she feel, how should her body respond?

"Master," she gasped. "Use me...have me."

"I have you now, my red-haired angel." She moaned, spasming as he worked her nipples. "You know what comes next?"

She clenched and unclenched her fists. There was only one other logical place for the other clamps – at least for a man as infernally sadistic as Vandarsaurus Rex.

"Master...do we have to?"

He kissed her forehead. "We can't back down now."

Why the hell not? She wanted to scream. "Just tell me they are for my big toes." She said. "And not my pussy."

"Not your pussy," he agreed. "My pussy."

Her heart sank, her worst fears confirmed.

It might be his pussy, but he damn well wasn't going to be taking any of the pain.

* * * * *

Vandar hung in the moment, not wanting to put the labial clamps on quite yet. The sight of her was so spectacular. Reeve's sex lips bulged, poised for pincering. Her fluids oozed. Soon he would taste them. Soon he would drive her out of her mind with sexual agony. But first the clamps had to go on.

He ran his finger over her slit, eliciting a helpless cry. To have a woman like this in bondage made his blood surge, his heart swell. He could never tire of this, nor could his cock.

Reeve was soaking the bed beneath her with the trickling fluids. She was the most passionate woman he had ever encountered. Had Penya sensed that when the two females met? Reeve could be a pleasure girl. He could collar her and put her aboard the Ark.

Day and night she would serve with her body, a dream of passion, to be taken again and again. The idea certainly intrigued him, to the extent it represented the overcoming of her fem freedom, the constricting of her will, the conversion of her being to that of slave. But he could not really envision such a sharing.

Reeve wasn't the kind of beauty to enjoy and let go. Were he one of those mems she had known, he would have been sorely tempted to snatch her up long ago. Then again, mems were not built the same as he.

Vandar took one of the labial restraints and touched it to her inner thigh, just for a moment. She began once more to beg. "Master, I'll be good, please don't punish me..."

Were she an obedient she would not be permitted to carry on like this. As it was, he liked to hear her beg, liked to hear her formidable will, not crushed, but forced along this quite different path.

As a primale, he most definitely got off on the power. The control over a fem—a rare thing, indeed.

"The nipple clamps were punishment," he reminded. "These are your incentive to do better."

Not that it made any difference. Pretty Red Reeve was in pain. Pretty Reeve was in heat. *His* pretty Red Reeve—at least while she moaned in his restraints.

Two hours. Was that how long he had promised—threatened—to taunt her and play with her mind and body? Not enough, not nearly enough, and yet way too long. At the end of that time, she would not be the only one in anguish.

Was he going to go through with actual intercourse? Was he going to take that risk, or just enjoy these peripheral games?

Her face scrunched up, she arched her back, finely displaying the pinched, swollen nipples. “No!”

The sudden baring of her wildcat fangs brought out his own teeth. “You will not speak to Master in that tone of voice.”

“Sorry...” Her eyes were wide.

He bent forward with deceptive sweetness. Kissing her, pressing his chest to hers, mixing the wine of his kiss with the bitter vinegar of the pain to her squashed, clamped nipples.

“This will not be pleasant,” he breathed hotly in her ear. “You will feel it only a second. You will thank me afterwards.”

Her body clenched in preparation for the unknown. He had the labial clamp in his hand. He grazed her clit, just to jolt her and then he applied it to the soft, vulnerable skin of her inner thigh. He pinched just a little, just enough to send the sensations racing to her brain.

She could not cry out through the restraint of his mouth, sealed over hers. A second later, he removed the clamp.

“T-thank you, Master,” she remembered to say.

“Good girl,” he kissed her forehead.

She looked at him, in awe.

She wanted to be good. There was no mistaking the expression.

There was no faking that kind of obedient urge.

Reeva said it again. “Thank you, Master.” A hot whisper, the release almost sexual between her lips.

He could wait no longer. He moved down between her thighs and delicately pulled her labia open. His hand ever-so steady, he put the clamp over her skin and released it very, very carefully.

Reeva’s response was all the reward he needed for his efforts. She drew a breath and held it, her body contorted as if she were being whipped. The sensation seemed new to her, she was absorbing, exploring and reacting all at once. He placed his hand on her belly, fingers spread, centering her, giving her his own cool Master’s energy.

One more to go.

She inhaled again and again, small stabs, her whole body trying to acclimate to what must have felt an overwhelming sexual invasion. Before anything more could register, he pulled out her other sex lip and clamped it as well.

They were spread now, unfolded to reveal the deeper wonders of her pussy. "You are fully exposed, girl. You can no longer hide. Is this what you dreamed of?"

"I-I don't know, Master."

"Fair enough. Realities can never be the same as dreams, not completely." He lowered his head and touched his tongue precisely, delicately to her clitoris.

She made a new sound, that of a woman transported.

Obedients didn't sound like that, not even Penya, whose heart he had pierced. Vandar savored it, allowing the flavor of her to permeate his tongue, running it right down the middle and then around the edges, touching cold metal and soft flesh. Rolling, pressing, teasing, making his tongue into a miniature cock.

"Oh, gods," she was screaming. "Oh...oh...oh."

He stopped before she could come.

"Master! Fuck!"

He kept his hand on her thigh, so her descent would not be a crash. But descend she must. For she was tethered by his will. She would not climax, not for a long time.

When her breathing had settled enough, he went back to work on her, first stimulating her clitoris, and then lapping at her thirsty sex. She cried and whimpered. It took barely a minute to reach the edge.

"Please, Master, please," she cried.

"No."

She cursed much more vigorously.

He slapped the inside of her thigh.

"Master, I'm sorry...so sorry..." Her green eyes were haunted, fixated, entirely captive.

"You asked for this." He brought her back to the place of her choosing yet again. "You wanted to taste the slavery of an obedient."

"I...I didn't know..."

"You must follow the path."

"Use my body," she said, lifting her pelvis. "Please, have your slave, she is useless without you. You have broken me, Master."

Indeed, Reeva looked shattered. She had never been to this place.

But she had far to go.

"This is my body. You are mine," he corrected.

His finger went to her lips. She sucked it like before, only twice as vigorously, twice as placatingly. This time she was cleaning her own sex fluids off him.

"Orgasms are earned, girl. They are mine to give you."

"Yes, Master, forgive me, Master."

"Tell me," he could not resist probing, "are your thoughts still on Sordon?"

"They never were, Master. Never. Only you. Since the moment I saw you. No other male has existed."

The admission was heartfelt. Its depth surprised him. "You say that to get your way."

"Yes, Master," she did not deny. "But it is true. I hid it from you, from myself."

"So you did push at me, trying to arouse my feelings?"

"I...I wanted to see how strong you were."

"Do you have doubts?"

Her eyes watered. "You took me over your knee, Master, you said no to me, you rode me. Hard."

"And do you understand that I was reasonable in doing so?"

She laughed through the mist. "Hell, no, Master."

He cocked his head.

"You did it because you wanted this," she said. "Little Reeva at your beck and call, chained down in bed."

He fought to keep down a smile. Bad for discipline. "Impudent creature."

"Yes, Master."

He returned to her pussy. In moments she exploded into a fiery blaze. But still she was not allowed to come.

"I think perhaps I will not let you orgasm today."

"I'm tired of begging," she spat. "So there."

Vandar sat up beside her. "You know that I am letting you sass me just because I want to?"

"And I am holding back from breaking these chains with my super powers just for the fuck of it."

"You really don't think I can conquer you?"

"Me? No. You could mess with me enough, probably, try and turn me into someone else. But in my heart this is who I am, a mixture."

"Obedient and fem," he mused. "Together."

"Master?"

"Yes?"

"The clamps are really hurting."

"You think I will do something about it?"

"Please?"

His heart clenched. She didn't say it like an obedient, but her eyes were sincere. Respectful.

Emotion welled up in him. He had never felt this for another human. A combination of lust and irritation, fixation and consumption. A desire to be with her, a fear of separation.

Like what Penny felt for him?

"Master, what's wrong?"

The blood pounded in his ears. "I am going to take the clamps off," he said, hearing his own voice like some kind of mechanical device. "It will hurt a moment, as the blood returns." He undid her wrist strap. "Hold my hand, it will help."

"I don't care about that," she protested. "Tell me what's happening, you just...you totally changed. It's like a steel curtain just shut down between us."

I think I might love you, Reeve. "Nothing has changed. I told you, I was thinking of not letting you come. And that is my decision."

"So you're just going to leave me? Like this? Do you know how screwed up that is? How wrong?"

He took advantage of her distraction to take the nipple clamps off, one by one.

"Are you listening to me?" she demanded.

She didn't even feel what he was doing to her, the pain was not registering. He was glad for that. He didn't want her hurt anymore. He had done enough damage.

"Take a deep breath, Reeve, I am going to release the labial clamps."

"Don't ignore me, damn it. You checked out on me again. You can't do that. Why are you pushing me away? That's what you did the last time. Things got too heavy so you did something you knew would piss me off, coming all over me while I was asleep."

One, two, the clamps were off.

He released her ankles.

"I am returning to duty," he announced.

"No, you aren't. Mr. Calls-All-The-Shots. You're so good at telling me I'm running. How about you take a look in the mirror?"

He was in the process of putting his uniform on when she grabbed at him. "I'm not letting you go. Not until we work this out."

Vandar held her at bay—she was naked, squirming, and sexy as hell. "Reeve, you're acting like a child."

"No, I am acting like a grown woman. A fem, and you can't handle it."

He took her by the shoulders. "Damn it, Reeve, lay off me. You don't know me and you don't know what you are getting into."

He was trembling.

"Wow," she exhaled. "Congratulations. You just had an emotional outburst."

"This isn't a joke, Reeve. Not one of your experiments, either. This is my life."

"You think I don't know that? You think I don't care? Why else would I do the stupid things I do where you are concerned? A sane person—a person who didn't like you would not touch you with a ten-foot pole. Speaking of which, yours seems to be growing."

His erection had expanded of its own accord. He scowled at it in utter frustration. "You see what this situation is doing to me? I don't want to hate you or hurt you, but this is beyond what I can handle."

"Why do you limit yourself? A man like you can do anything."

"The universe is based on limits, Reeve. A scientist like you should know that."

"It's also based on saying 'What the fuck' sometimes." Her hand wrapped around his cock. "Put this bad boy inside me. Come in my pussy. You know it's what you want."

"Impossible."

"Why? We did it once."

"Another time could run the risk of bonding. I'm too involved with you, I can't keep objective. I might end up —"

He stopped. The look on her face told him he had already said too much. "That's why you didn't come inside me that last time. You were afraid it would make you need to possess me forever. You didn't want me to end up a slave."

"There is no point in guessing my motives," he said as icily as he could manage. "You would be best off thinking me a monster. Vandarsaurus Rex. That is how we both need to function."

"According to what? One of your stupid rules?"

"Nature's rules."

"Nature doesn't know everything. Look at Nyssa and Theron. He's a primale but he took a wife who wasn't obedient. The same with Marax and Dekalia."

"I am not Marax or Theron."

"You could be. You are their equal."

"I am only a commander."

"Your choice, no one else's."

"Let go of my cock, Reeve. It's over."

"Make me."

He pulled her wrist away and spun her around, pinning her arm behind her back. "Do you need a spanking?"

"I don't know. Is there a man here to give me one?"

Vandar thrust them both toward the bed without thinking. Pushing her facedown, holding her arm up high on her back he administered a dozen whacks—efficient, punitive.

"Had enough?" He asked his red-assed victim.

Reeva's ass was hot to the touch, she was twitching and her pussy lips peeked out at him, engorged, inviting. Never had a woman been so tempting. And so off limits.

"You call that a spanking? Why don't you get Sordon in here? He can do the job."

Vandar clenched his teeth. She was bluffing. She was obviously smarting. He could not spank her anymore. "By the Code, Reeva, why are you so blasted irrational?"

"I don't know," she spat over her shoulder. "Maybe I'm tired of a mealy-mouthed hypocrite of a Guardian who talks all tough but is afraid of his own shadow."

"You are spouting nonsense. I won't listen —"

"That's right, stop your ears, run and hide. Let the Narthians keep beating you down. What did they do to you anyway, to make you stop living? How did they come to own your soul during that siege?"

Vandar plunged his cock to the hilt, hot and fierce. "You should not have said that...female."

She groaned. "Why? Does the truth hurt?"

He grasped her hips. Grinding hard. He pulled back and slammed back in, impacting his balls against her. "You speak of what you do not know. You are a woman. You belong on your knees or bent over. You exist for us to fuck, Reeva. You are pets."

"Nnnn..." She groaned, releasing a deep sigh, her body giving over to him, the tension draining in favor of a new energy. "Omifuckingod, I need this...please, don't stop."

Vandar growled. "Woman, do you know how tired I am of taking responsibility for you and everyone else? You want to be a Guardian slave? Be my guest. After I'm through fucking the daylights out of you, you can sign up for duty on the Pleasure Ark. At least you'll be out of my hair."

He slammed her again. And again. Driving her forward into the mattress, fucking her whole body, fucking her into oblivion, to the very core of creation.

She was crying out. She was coming.

He didn't bother to stop, didn't bother with control. The wench was on her own.

"You know what else I am sick of?" He pumped into her. "People telling me what to feel and think, who haven't seen the things I have."

"You...have to...share," she pointed out, the words coming in short stabs.

Reeva had a point.

"A woman like you...shouldn't be so sexy *and* smart. So...beautiful."

He reached for her breasts. She went off again like a rocket. He sank his teeth into her shoulder and then erupted.

His semen blasted like a high energy beam—super-heated, super-pressurized—to fill her waiting canal. So tight, so sweet.

So raw...primale raw.

What did I do?

Vandar couldn't let go. He held her close. As if he had lost some of his own strength for a moment, as if he too had plunged over the edge of a cliff.

Now would be a good time to say something. But what?

Reeva wanted to kiss him, she turned herself around so they were face-to-face, she took his head in her hands and planted her lips. Fearless and sweet.

She's still not conquered. She's stronger, he thought.

This was outside the range of his experience.

He took her in his arms and let his lips linger against hers for a while.

The next thing he knew he was hard again and she was soft and warm and ready, the perfect center for his thrusting desire. He lifted her onto him, holding her close, supporting her by her bottom, which was still warm to the touch. Their chests were molded, the kiss spread across their bodies, communicating things words would never do, making up for lost time—all the years they had never known each other. Their lives so very different and yet running along parallel tracks. So much in common underneath.

Both were fighters. Both were lovers.

And they were having a devil of a time keeping their hands off each other.

Vandar rocked her. Her rhythm was perfect against him, she felt so comfortable, a perfect fit and yet the charge—the sense of energy merging and firing—was greater than ever. He closed his eyes. There was a whole world in this. In her.

He was about to come again when the alert sounded.

Red for imminent attack.

What in blazes? Where were the early warning sensors? The recon ships?

His senses went into overdrive. First he had to put Reeva down safely, and then he needed to find out what the hell was going on.

"Vandar, what is it?" She clutched at him.

He read her fear, enough for his protective urges to kick in. "It's all right, angel. Nothing we can't handle." Vandar set her down. She stayed close by his side as he went to the com link on the wall.

"Status report," he demanded.

"It's an automatic triggering, Sir. We don't know what caused it. It must be a malfunction in a sensor."

Vandar knew better. The hair on the back of his neck was up. "Go to maximum alert, scramble all interceptors. Seal the bulkheads."

"Yes, Sir."

"Get me my uniform," he told Reeva.

She ran to fetch it. He took the blaster off the wall.

"What's happening, Vandar?"

"Probably nothing." He smiled, kissing her cheek. "Stay here, I'll check it out."

She helped him with his uniform. A little lump formed in her throat.

"Please be careful, Vandar."

Once again it hit him — there was something he should say. But what?

"Commander," said the voice through the link, the tone not at all indicative of a mere malfunction. "We have an enemy ship on the screen. Three units and closing."

Three units? Impossible.

"Double-check."

"We have, Sir, and triple-checked."

The guns began to fire.

A second later the lights were flickering.

What the hell was going on? An attack, but from whom? The Narthians didn't have the technology to sneak through their defenses.

Or did they?

The lights went off again and then there was a flash of green and glowing light. A sizzling sound filled the air. The lights came back on.

Vandar blinked, eyes scanning the empty room.

He ran out into the corridor, calling her name. Nothing.

Impossible, but real.

Reeva was gone.

Chapter Eight

"Commander, alien ship in range!"

Vandar acknowledged the message on his wrist link. No point in asking how anymore, obviously the worst had happened. The Narthians had figured out how to penetrate their defenses. "Can you get a readout?"

"It doesn't match anything we've ever seen. Armor plating is definitely Bug technology but the engines are new. It also appears to have some kind of cloaking device. And there's something else, too."

"Don't make me ask," the Commander barked.

"They seemed to have been operating some kind of a beam."

"A weapon?"

"Negative. More like a tractor beam. With an atom scrambler built in."

Reeva.

"Prepare my ship," he ordered, already on the run back to his quarters. "I'm going out there."

He checked the ceiling. No sign of entry, no blast marks. He scanned the floor, turning his eyes to high energy detection mode.

There, a residue in a circular pattern. He knelt on one knee. Radiation of an unknown kind. Did the Narthians have a transporter ray? Had they kidnapped Reeva?

No time to think now. He took off for the landing bay.

His ship was waiting. Not a recon but a two-man battle cruiser.

The real deal. Hyper-light, enough firepower to punch a hole in the side of a Mother Ship if he should run into one.

"Commander."

It was Sordon.

"What is it?" Vandar glanced over, pulling on his suit and helmet.

"Permission to accompany you, Sir."

He frowned. "For what purpose?"

"Permission to speak freely?"

Vandar clenched his fists. "Does it concern your relationship with Doctor Reeva?"

"It does, Sir. I owe a debt to her. She has helped me to understand things about myself. I cannot stand by and see her in danger."

Vandar nearly said no. But he could not afford to allow petty jealousy to override Reeva's safety. "I'd be glad of the support," he nodded.

"Thank you, Sir. I'll suit up."

"Sordon."

"Yes, Sir?"

He cleared his throat. "In case we do not return, I wish to say this now. I was wrong to pressure you to involve yourself with Penya. That was not honorable. The problem was mine."

"It's all right, Sir," he smiled. "I'm getting to be rather fond of the little wench."

Vandar attempted to smile back, unsuccessfully.

Not until I have Reeve back, he thought, will I ever be able to even consider being happy.

* * * * *

Reeve felt her insides spilling out. She was spinning in a vortex, screaming out Vandar's name, pleading with him to please wake her up from this nightmare.

But it wasn't a nightmare. She had somehow been plucked from the safety of her quarters, drawn molecule by molecule through the ceiling only to be put back together in some kind of glass cylinder, floating high above a smoky labyrinth of colored lights and strange pulsing noises.

She wanted to vomit but there was nothing in her stomach. She banged on the cylinder. The surface was clear and smooth but when she touched it a kind of gel stuck to her hand. The gel gave off a noxious odor. The most putrid thing she had ever smelled. Like sulfur mixed with rotten meat.

She wanted to shrivel up, she wanted to die, the little girl in her with all the bad dreams was so scared. She'd had too much.

But Reeve was a grown woman. She had to go on.

She tried to focus on the ceiling above her. Was she still on the base?

The surface was not gray metal, just a kind of colorless ooze with pink bubbles trapped inside—no, more like the color of blood. Small creatures were swimming inside the bubbles. Like tadpoles.

Reeve realized her nakedness, suddenly aware of her erect nipples.

Vandar, oh, god, where was he when she needed him most?

The cylinder was very cold. Her feet were like ice on the flat bottom.

She curled up her toes and hugged herself tightly, trying to keep warm. Where was she? Who had done this to her? She had her fears, but she did not yet want to admit them. First of all, it wasn't possible. The Narthians didn't have the technology to kidnap people by teleportation. Secondly, why would they want her? She wasn't anyone important.

Thirdly...it was simply incomprehensible. She had not been taken prisoner by the Bugs.

A hissing sound came from behind her.

She froze. *I will not look. I will not look.*

A tapping on the cylinder, more hissing above her. And then something black, a tendril just to the right, in and out of her peripheral vision.

Just like my nightmares.

The Bug jumped onto the cylinder, suctioning itself to the surface. Hundreds of pink, sickening suckers helped it hold on with its multiple legs. An eye stared at her – hundreds of tiny lenses, cold and black and horribly alien.

That was the worst thing about the Narthians. To them, humans were the insects, senseless, unintelligent and of no value except to gawk at.

There was the food element, too. Bugs encased humans in sacs and eventually ate them.

Another Bug joined the first. It scraped its mandibles along the surface of the cylinder.

Oh, stars...the creature was eating through the protective wall. The only barrier between her and them.

The other Bug joined in the feast, running its multiple spiked, black tongues along the cylinder surface. The material began to cloud over. Liquid dripped from the outside.

Acid.

No longer cold, she started feeling hot.

I'm going to die, she thought. And I never got to tell Vandar I love him.

* * * * *

"Commander we have something on the forward readout."

"Project it on the screen," Vandar said, acknowledging Sordon's information.

"Yes, Sir." Sordon put the image up. "It's foggy, but we should be able to make it out."

There it was, a small blip at first, but it grew clearer as Sordon increased the resolution. Truly, Vandar was grateful to have a man this capable sitting next to him as copilot. He could have done it alone, but his chances of success were now doubled.

The enemy ship was amber gold, roughly round, though with various spikes and crusted protrusions. "It looks like a Nest Stinger, Commander."

"Stingers don't go that fast," Vandar stated the obvious. "And they don't kidnap humans off star bases."

Not just any human, the human female he had given himself to, the one who drove him mad and made him furious. The one he was not sure he could live without.

He could still feel her skin, the scent of her, sweet and fresh. The way she laughed and that look in her eyes when she was especially miffed at him. And the way she cried out as he had his way with her.

How could a female have seduced him like that? A primale should never have succumbed. She got him worked up, made him lose his cool.

What did that say about his judgment? What else had he slipped up on? Had there been signs of this impending attack?

Hard to tell. Perhaps if he had not been engaged in sex-making instead of doing his duty.

This was entirely his fault. He knew this sort of thing was always a possibility. He warned her and then didn't take his own advice.

"They are increasing speed," said Sordon. "Heading straight for the demilitarized zone. What are your orders?"

"Increase to full speed. Catch the sons of bitches before they get to the other side."

"Yes, Sir. Do we call for backup?"

This was a hard one. Much as he wanted the support on his rescue mission he could not put the base in jeopardy. "Negative. All other ships to remain in defense posture. It's up to us, Sordon."

He nodded. "Sir, we won't fail."

Vandar wished he could be so certain. Sordon hadn't been in the service long enough. He hadn't seen just how wrong things could go, how quickly you could lose anything and everything you cared about.

In the wink of an eye, that's how fast.

I never said anything to her, he cursed himself. I never found the words to tell her, thank her, for waking something in me, for giving color to my world.

And now it could well be too late.

The two men settled back in their seats, gripping the controls with gloved hands. The star field around them began to blur as they picked up speed.

"There it is," said Sordon.

Vandar could see it with the naked eye. "They've dropped their cloaking device. They must be getting ready to make the jump into the wormhole."

"What do we do? Do we dare fire on them?"

"Too risky. We'll have to intercept."

"Direct contact?"

"Affirmative. We will lock onto the hull. I will go out there, find my way into the enemy ship, you'll stay on board. If I'm not back in ten minutes, leave without me."

"Sir —"

"That's an order."

"Yes, Sir." The discussion was ended.

Vandar pushed the throttle forward. The unknown Narthian ship filled the viewscreen. They were about to crash. He deftly maneuvered them over the top,

applying immediate retro thrusters. The Guardian ship strained, the metal heaving under the pressure. Sordon and Vandar absorbed the pressure, showing no reaction as the ship set itself down on the much larger alien ship.

They were nestled between two of the raised bumps. Vandar could not be certain of their function. It might be for additional energy storage or some kind of weapons battery.

What mattered now was finding his way in.

So far there had been no shots fired. This was not a warship. In that case, what was it?

Vandar gave Sordon the nod, slid the visor down over his helmet and left his seat. He sealed himself in the rear compartment and opened the outer hatch. A moment later he was stepped down onto the surface of the Narthian ship. His feet stuck to the surface. Narthian structures, buildings, ships, and weapons, tended to have the tactile nature of ancient flypaper. As a primale he was able to extricate himself and keep moving though an ordinary human would stand no chance.

Again he thought of Reevea, trapped inside this monstrosity of a vehicle, brought here for who knew what purpose. The possibilities were all too terrible to entertain. He could not delay.

Thanks to the stickiness, he did not have to worry about flying off into space. He just kept walking until he reached something that looked like a hatchway. It was oval in shape with raised ridges. Reaching down with a gloved hand, he took hold of the lip.

For a second he hesitated. His head pounded inside the helmet. Narthians were in there. Disgusting, nesting Narthians. He was going to trap himself, just like before. They would have him surrounded.

The slowest of deaths, digested over decades within a storage sac, aged like some preserved wine...that's what would be in store for him.

Then he saw Reevea's beautiful, expressive face—all that life to be lived. It could not—would not—be cut short. These motherfucking, creepy-crawling, blood-sucking Bugheads would not get her!

He exclaimed inside his helmet, a low roar.

The Narthian metal tore in his hands. He dropped down inside. No more thinking. No more delaying. He would destroy every alien on this ship. And he would take Reevea home. Alive.

* * * * *

Reevea was totally at their mercy. The Bugs had eaten through the cylinder and forced her to jump down onto a platform made out of some kind of weblike material, thin and wet to the touch. She bounced on it like a trampoline.

The Bugs jumped down with her. She lost her footing and landed on her bottom. They loomed above her, she was helpless at their feet—or rather the claws that passed for feet.

"Please, let me go," she cried.

One of the Bugs, about ten feet high, with thick segments like a grasshopper, striped red and black, hissed at her and she shut up fast.

The two of them clicked claws above her and rattled antennae. A long, stringy substance dribbled from their mouths. It landed on her belly in gobs. She feared they might be planning to encase her in one of their infamous larvae sacs, but when she touched the material she realized it was some kind of foam, apparently harmless. Not that it made her feel any better.

"Please," she repeated. "Just let me go."

The Bug didn't hiss this time.

It just looked at her. Both Bugs stopped their moving, stopped everything. It was in this eerie stillness that she made a discovery.

Under the hissing sound, under her fear, under the hum of the alien machinery on the slime-covered walls, was something else. A beating, a pulsing, below normal range.

It was psychosensoral!

She was reading the Bugs.

Reading the Nest they came from. Most of it was too fast, incomprehensible. No obvious motives. Nor could she put enough pieces together from this strange environment. But she was sensing one thing—an overwhelming drive, a burning need to survive. To thrive and breed, perpetuating themselves and eliminating all other species. Unless they were edible, of course.

There was another thing, too, more subtle. She focused on the antennae of one of the Bugs. The way it kept getting close to her and vibrating, but never touching, never hurting. They had her here for a special reason. She wasn't lunch. Or dinner. They wanted something from her. What could she have that they needed?

It was almost like she was some kind of celebrity.

Or a hostage?

One thing was clear, she was in a position few if any humans had ever faced before. This close to the Bugs and still breathing. And going toe-to-toe with them. Using her brain, trying to outthink them.

Do you hear that? She called to her inner child. You don't have to live with those nightmares, anymore. We've bested them. Gone, way, way beyond.

She wanted that for Vandar, too—to be able to come face-to-face with whatever fears lurked in his own heart. What horrors had he seen in combat to harden him so against any peace? What anguish had come to him in his long career?

Vandar.

He was here. His being had entered the psychosensoral grid. She drew instant courage, trying not to project any fear for him in the process. He would be all right. He was a primale. He was her hero.

The man she had dreamed of finding since she was a little girl. Her own personal Guardian, with a wounded heart. And she would be Dekalia and hold down her important job, but also make tea and hold her husband's hand. Marax, fighter of Bugs extraordinaire, the only man she knew willing to admit his fears.

She thought of his words. "To be human is to live with uncertainty. If we have no fear, then we take for granted what we have, we lose the edge to appreciate each new day. Fear is to be managed and controlled, not eliminated. The Narthians do us a favor, you know. They keep the race alive and fighting. Without them humanity would grow soft and weak and cease to love and fight as we should."

Something dawned on Reeva. Something Nyssa had said when she had first arrived, to the effect that her mission here was more important than she realized.

First the High Councilor and now the Narthians expecting something from her, seeing something in her.

And she hadn't a clue what it was.

All she knew was Vandar was on the way to rescue her and she needed to distract these creatures from detecting him.

Time for something unorthodox.

Steeling herself, Reeva put out her hand, most certainly the first in her race to ever do so. "My name is Reeva," she said to the creature leaning in most closely over her horizontal body. "What's yours?"

The Bug's antennae froze for a moment. Then they started to bristle, catching the attention of the other Bug. They turned to each other, letting their long black tendrils intertwine. Were they communicating? She knew they were only low level Drones of some kind. Were they talking to their Queen? Where was the Nest? It couldn't be too far away, maybe on a nearby ship?

What if they were taking her back across the Zone? She would never see home again. She pushed away the thought. Negativity would accomplish nothing. She was a scientist, she must think as one. She must observe. They wanted to experiment on her? Why not continue to experiment on them?

How would they react to her behavior? She had them off guard, time to go to the next step. Biting down on her lip, she used her fingertips, one from each hand, to touch her nipples.

The glow came hot and quick. Sexual desire, all the more ticklishly delicious for the forbidden, frankly horrible environment.

At once she saw a double purpose to arousing herself.

I'm here Vandar, come to me. Take me...take your woman.

The Bugs were looking down, enraptured, if that was the right word. The antennae were moving in the air in slow circles. The Bugs no longer touched each other.

If anything they looked like they wanted to touch her...caress her.

* * * * *

Vandar landed on a much softer surface—and slicker, too. He kept balanced, even though it was quite dark. The temperature was extraordinarily cold. He pulled the blaster from his waist. The weapon would get him only so far, of course. Depending on the kind of Bugs he met. Drones, Soldiers, Nest Killers, all were susceptible to energy beams, but if there were a Queen aboard or even a winged Stinger or two he would need something stronger. He would have to improvise on that.

The darkness was unusual. Generally Narthians preferred low level phosphorescent light. There was always the possibility he had walked into a trap. He had the sensation of an invisible hand slipping into his. Reeve.

Keep going, don't look back. You'll find me, he felt her saying to him.

He tried to concentrate on the direction the thought was coming from. Not exactly a primale power, but he did get a sense of the direction. His body burned, his heart leapt, knowing she was alive. He wanted to touch her soft flesh so desperately. He needed her humanity, her physicality. He needed to make sex with her. His cock was actually hardening.

Talk about bad timing. He willed it down.

It didn't work. He was actually getting an erection in the middle of a combat operation. Reeve was on his mind. He was entering her from behind, pushing her against a soft wall, like this one, in the middle of this bizarre Narthian environment. She was naked, her skin hot to the touch. He had his body so hard against hers, he was growling in her ear, so low and intense. *Whose are you?*

Yours, Master.

Come for Master. Come now.

His cock buried, not moving, just occupying, filling and controlling her. He held onto her through the spasms, the writhing, the laughter...the tears. The strangest orgasm in the history of the world, but the best. And when it was over he took her hair in his hand and pushed her down to her knees, so she could suck him. She took the fullness of his cock between her lips, his hot, throbbing shaft pressed to the back of her throat. He pumped in and out and then, just before release he pulled out, so he could come on her face.

Yes, she sighed. Oh, Master, thank you. His semen covered her face, a reminder of their common bond, their common race, and it made him feel so proud, to see how she adored and loved this, reveled in his manful taking of her. Branding her soul, marking her body.

By The Code, why was his mind so wildly out of control? Was it his emotions or something about the ship itself?

He fell back hard on training. The long nights and days of hellish isolation that Guardian cadets were compelled to endure. Under all conditions. Naked, with no food or water. A mem would break down in a few short hours.

There was an opening ahead. A dim light, not quite yellow, flickered like a candle. A smell like sulfur emanated from the opening. It was an odd mix, putrid, but also sweet. The opening was round, several feet across. A tunnel. He knew he must crawl through it to the other side. He also knew he would be entirely vulnerable, on his hands and knees, surrounded by soft Bug walls, deep in the belly of a Bug ship.

Encased. Entombed. He pushed the images of those faces he had seen long ago—men and women locked in larvae sacs—from his mind. Images of a planet's environment changing, oozing and dripping with alien scum. Of Bugs circling, hovering, hissing and clicking, night and day, all around him as he waited out the siege.

Vandar crawled into the opening. Like a woman's sex, he mused. As his palms and knees impacted, the ground beneath him shifted color to blue and red and purple. He kept the blaster activated on his belt. Though strangely, the idea was coming into his mind that he would not need it.

The tunnel seemed to go on forever. He kept his body temperature high to offset the cold, though there again the unexpected was happening. He was feeling a kind of warmth, like hands touching him.

The thought came to him that he was being drugged, perhaps a chemical in the air to lull him, knock him out, making him easier prey?

Could he even be sure the thoughts in his head reflected Reeva's real voice? What if it was a trick?

Must press on...find the truth. Meet whatever is on the other side.

No siege this time. It was life or death.

Attack.

And rescue.

The light was growing brighter. The smell was overpowering. His muscles screamed as he pushed himself ahead, faster and faster on all fours. Reeva was in the next room, he was sure of it. With all his will, he sent out a call to her, knowing she would hear in her mind, knowing she would answer.

I'm coming, angel, hang tight...I'm coming.

* * * * *

Reeva held her breath as the single antenna came closer and closer. It was going to make contact. She was going to feel a Narthian on her naked skin. How many humans had ever survived such a thing? She was so alone. Or was she.

Vandar's voice, in the back of her head.

And in the front of her head.

I'm coming, angel, hang on tight...I'm coming.

The signal was much stronger than before. He was near. He was going to rescue her. He knew what was happening to her and he was coming to help. In the meantime, she had to continue the experiment. Her experiment.

To study the effects on a human female of being naked and captive to Bugs.

Not exactly what she'd had in mind when she'd signed on at the Institute.

The antenna made it to her forehead. She was shocked at the lightness of the touch. Almost gentle as it moved down to her eyebrows, along the bridge of her nose. Reeva quivered. Emotions surged. These Bugs were curious...and not just about her brain.

The second Bug joined in. He didn't use his antennae but a set of long black arms that ended in suction cups. These were green, the color of plants.

The Bug wasted no time suctioning her bellybutton.

Reeva gasped and tried to sit up. The Bugs hissed and arms and tentacles came flying out of every part of them.

They pinned her down. Wrapping her wrists and ankles, holding her spread-eagle.

The Bug with the green suction cups moved in very close, dripping more of the foam as it eyed her rapidly rising chest.

The other Bug was sliding its black arms over her belly, examining her hips.

Oh, god, I am going to become that ridiculous stereotype of ancient movies, she thought. The heroine, raped by space monsters.

But the Bugs weren't interested in her sexually. They weren't human, after all. She was as alien to them as they were to her.

The Bugs kept putting different antennae to their heads, switching them over and over, licking them and then putting them back on her skin.

She shivered. Icy cold and hot at the same time. "Vandar..." she cried, her voice barely audible.

The Bug with the suction cups took things to the next step. It touched her forehead, massaging. Was it going to read her mind? That seemed logical, but something told her there was more to it.

The Bug wants to communicate.

Her thoughts drifted, dissolved, refocused. At one point she was back with Vandar, during sex when he was thrusting hard, the last time from behind, telling her he was giving up, that he wouldn't try and protect her anymore. What pressure he must put himself under. Holding back so much fear, trying so hard not to get attached. Was he that afraid of losing someone?

He refuses to be human anymore. He wants to be the perfect warrior. Loving nothing...but death.

Where had that come from?

Now she saw something else.

A dome on a planet. No, not a dome, but a Nest. A Narthian Nest. In her mind, she flew through the outer crust, deep through the tunnels, the dark labyrinth, all the way to the inner core. The cavern of the Queen. A million Bugs covered the surface, a living layer above and below her. They crawled over one another, they hissed, they clicked, dozens of different kinds—long-segmented Workers, sharp-tentacled warriors with multiple killing jaws, potbellied Nurses, blue and red-winged Stingers, almost beautiful.

Hovering in the center was a white mass, two or three globes fused together. The globe beat like a human heart. It was rotating slowly.

Six Attendants—the special guard of the Queen—flapped their large wasp wings. They bristled with poison fangs.

At the center was the old Queen.

She had a bulbous body and a black, brown and orange speckled back. She had dangling legs and a crown of black antennae. Two Attendants held her aloft on a kind of litter made of the same white web as the platform Reeva was on—her body at any rate.

The sounds of the insects rose to a piercing shrill.

It was the birthing time. The new Queen was to emerge.

The white mass gurgled and cracked and split. A tiny thing fell down, an Attendant caught it—the new infant Queen covered in sticky, dripping gel. She was held up in the air, acknowledged by all.

A second baby emerged. An Attendant grasped it as it fell. This one was grasped harshly. Reeva understood as the Attendants gathered about it, baring their fangs. There could be only one Queen. This one was unlucky enough to emerge second. It would be killed.

She didn't know how she knew all this, but she did. This was normal. The second, and any after it, must die.

But something was going wrong. The Attendants shifted their focus. Nest Stingers were flying from the walls by the hundreds, the thousands. They were intending to attack.

A Nest War was about to begin.

The rival Queen was snatched away from the Attendants and the clash began. The air was full of Bugs, striking, biting and hissing, louder and louder. Ripped pieces of bodies fell like rain, Bugs dive bombed, Bugs wrenched at each other, Bugs slammed into walls, acid burned at wings, shriveling them and carcasses piled up.

Then, just as quickly as it had started, the frenzy died down.

Reeva tried to see what was happening at the center of the action. Which Queen, if either, had survived?

All fell silent as the rebel Stingers held up the prize. The second Queen lived. Immediately the Attendants of the Old Queen were put to death. The new Queen, the first to emerge, was also killed and summarily eaten by the largest of the Stingers.

Reeva was dying to know what would happen next but she was snatched away, her mind taken elsewhere.

Back to her past, lying in bed with Evantius after one of their inevitably unsatisfying experiences of sex-making.

For all his bluster, Evantius could not make her come. None of them could, unless Reeva stimulated herself in the process. And that time she had been too tired.

"I think you should see a sex-making counselor," he concluded, rolling off her and sitting up to pop a mind zap pill. Not exactly a drug, more of a neuron opening thing, but still an annoyance to her nonetheless.

"Maybe if you didn't live in your own head all the time," she grumbled back, pulling the sheet over her naked body.

"Where else should I live?"

She sighed in utter frustration. "I just want someone to pay more attention to me, to want me more, to just take over, you know?"

He laughed with typical condescension. "Immaturity is your problem. You have to take responsibility for your own pleasure. You can't lay that on another. You're much too selfish, Reeva."

"Fuck you, Evantius, and your super brain, too."

"Whatever," he shrugged, padding off.

Part of her wanted him to get mad, to tell her she couldn't talk to him like that, to knock it off, to lie down, spread her legs and get ready to be taken.

The images in her brain shifted again and she was back with the Narthian Bugs, her new best friends, trying to figure out why they had shown her the events in the Nest—their Nest—mixing their experiences with her own into some common pool, a cloud of reality.

A living cloud, crackling with lightning, roaring with thunder. And at the heart of it was a super core, a nucleus, far denser than Evantius and his super brain. She sought to poke it, prod it...like a hornet's nest. Something buzzed inside.

She was warm and curious. She wanted to get at it, she lusted for it, like she did for the body of Vandar, smooth as marble, every inch a delight to the tongue. How she loved to awaken his body, to move him into loving and touching her.

Deeper and deeper he wrapped her.

It's all right, angel, you're safe...don't be scared.

Don't be scared...the nightmares...of course.

The nightmares—the heart of her connection to these creatures. She had first seen them in her dreams long ago. But how?

No more time to think. It was happening again. The ripping apart, the scrambling deep inside. She was about to disappear. And reappear...somewhere else.

“Not yet,” she pleaded with her strange hosts. “Not now.”

Not when she could sense him so very close. Vandar was about to enter this very chamber.

* * * * *

Vandar saw the flash of green light around her almost as soon as he saw it was Reeva lying naked on the platform, two Bugs stooping over her.

He knew at once what it was. The teleportation beam. They were taking her somewhere else.

“No!” he shouted, his voice echoing like doom in the hollow chamber. “Leave her alone!”

He was too late. The green light enveloped her and everything went black. Just like before, things came back to normal in a moment.

Minus Reeva.

Vandar charged the two Bugs, blaster at the ready. Whatever they had done to her, they would pay with their lives. He sliced the first in half with a killing beam. In his rage it did not occur to him that neither of them were attacking. He was inches from the second one, ready to destroy it, when it spoke to him.

Not exactly spoke, but definitely employed intelligible sound.

He stood dumbfounded. Listening again and again for the repeating syllables. It did not take a linguist to put them together, to understand the meaning.

“Fre-end.”

The Narthian wanted to make friends.

Vandar tried to open his mouth but everything went dark. He had the sensation of being picked apart, a piece at a time. There was a rushing noise in his ears like the wind. His flesh heated and then...it was gone.

I'm being beamed, he thought. By the Narthians. My new friends. If that's what they are.

There was a hiss mixed in with the rush. Other thoughts collided with his. Images flashed in his mind—confused buzzing, stinging and soaring. A reality utterly alien, deep in a honeycomb of dripping walls, buried egg sacks and crawling, teeming life, millions, billions of creatures.

It was then he realized. The Narthian was in here with him. They were being beamed together.

* * * * *

Reeva came to in the sickbay of a Guardian ship. She was wearing a light cotton jumper and a pair of slippers. She was reclining on a narrow bed, machines bleeping all around her.

"I am Doctor Entwar." The serious looking dark-haired man in the white uniform introduced himself. "I know you have many questions, but we need to check your vitals first. It should only take a moment. If you would not attempt to speak until then."

She had the wherewithal to nod. A few questions was an understatement.

Once the medical droids had finished the scans to the doctor's satisfaction, he gave her clearance.

The mystery had deepened by then, given the fact that Nyssa and Theron were standing behind the doctor, their faces remarkably calm.

Her first question was telling. "Where is Vandar?"

Nyssa smiled. "Funny, that was his first question, too. At the moment he is debriefing. With his new friend."

"What friend?" she wanted to know.

"The translation would be difficult. You met him on the Narthian ship."

"One of the Bugs?" She sat up. "Vandar made friends? With a Bug?"

"Sounds impossible," said Theron. "I know. If you are strong enough to walk, we have things to show you."

"I'll find the strength, trust me."

"They are in here." Theron motioned toward a door at the end of a long white corridor. "You will find the environment has been altered slightly."

Slightly was an understatement. It was like stepping into a moldy antique freezer, badly in need of defrosting. At the same time that it was cold, it was also humid and nothing was remotely white like ice. Plants grew from the floor, vaguely like mushrooms with blue caps. They dripped a yellowish ooze. The light was very dim but she could see two figures, one was the Bug and the other was...

"Vandar!" She ran straight to him, no longer caring who else was in this bizarre room or why.

"Angel!" Vandar opened his arms, folding her into his strong embrace. "Wow you are a sight for sore eyes."

"You, too, Vandarsaurus Rex." She grinned, eyes watering.

He covered her face with kisses. "I thought I had lost you. When you disappeared, I was ready to hunt down every Narthian in the universe."

"Well apparently they found you." Reeva nodded her head in the direction of the Bug, standing—or was he sitting patiently on a pillow made of yellow foam.

"Reeva, this is my friend. I can't tell you a name, but he is a soldier like me. He has been fighting his entire lifetime. Only two years by Earth standards. But his memory

contains the entire history of his Nest. He was born with it as are all of his kind. Isn't that amazing?"

"Yes," she agreed, equally amazed at Vandar's sudden conversion from tight-lipped Guardian to effusive scientist.

How long had she been knocked out, anyway?

"Vandar, I think we should back up a few steps," suggested Nyssa gently. "She is probably feeling a little overwhelmed. You've had the advantage of several hours to absorb all this while Reeva was still unconscious."

Reeva was grateful for the intervention of the other female. "Thank you, that would help."

"I think you will find," said Theron, resplendent in his blue and gold uniform, "that you already hold most of the answers. It was your psychosensorial ability which opened the door in the first place."

"You were the key," said Nyssa. "For communication between two species."

"Part of them, at least," said Vandar, taking her hand. "My friend here is part of a rebellion, a breakaway Nest from the main cluster. You saw visions of the battle, did you not?"

"The Nest War, the flying insects tearing at each other, the two queens," she remembered. "Yes. So this Bug, this NARTHIAN, I mean, put that in my brain?"

The realization hit her like a robot sledge hammer. "My nightmares," she whispered. The visions clicked into place, overlapping. "That's what I was seeing as a child?"

"My friend's—I call him Abe Lincoln—colleagues beamed that to you, teleported the images. I know it sounds incredible, but the technology was developed in his home Nest about that time. The main cluster intended to make new weapons, to start a new type of war with the Earth—beaming attack swarms right into our midst while beaming away our own generals or paralyzing them with horrible dreams and visions. Abe and some of the others in his Nest saw that while this would bring short term gains it would only widen the conflict. Sooner or later the other side would gain the technology and then there would be a conflict that might destroy both races. So they determined that the weapons must not be used. They waited for an opportunity, for the old Queen to die, and then staged a coup. They knew they didn't have much time. They had to make contact with our side. They sent out a kind of message beam. Apparently you, Reeva, were the only one to receive it, at least that anyone knew of."

Nyssa picked up from there. "If you hadn't gone to my father, we would never have understood what was happening. You remember he asked you about your dreams? In detail?"

She recalled sitting on the patio, telling him about all the types of insects, the way the cavern looked. "Yes, I thought he was just trying to help me process it all."

"He was analyzing," said Nyssa. "You were relaying things only a few had ever seen, Guardians at close range combat. A secret program was initiated, to try to locate the exact Nest you saw, to discover the real meaning of your dream. It took years, but finally the particular planet where the Nest resided, was located. Unfortunately, we found it destroyed. At the time we did not know what we were looking for—friend or foe. We now know the potentially friendly Bugs there were destroyed by attack swarms from the main cluster which is spread out across the thousands of Narthian occupied planets. They had succeeded in eliminating the rebellious Nest. But they did not find the weapon or any record of the research. Abe had escaped, with one colleague, in a specially designed ship, able to beam itself and to capture objects over a distance."

"We saw traces of that ship," explained Theron, "on our scanners. We still didn't know exactly what was happening, how much of a risk we were taking. Straying across the demilitarized zone could have unleashed a major conflict, but we felt it had to be explored."

"Ultimately it all led back to you." This came from Theron, eyes fixed on Reevea. "Your dreams started it all. We wanted you back in the area. Star Base 117 was the closest installation to the destroyed Nest. Without Vandar's knowledge, a large element of the fleet was moved just out of his scanner range, making every effort to protect all involved. Your kidnapping caught us off guard. That was the first time we realized exactly what the new technology was. Vandar pursued you at once, learning the truth for himself. Now it is all known. We have common interests. Your time with the two Bugs, your dream linking, as it were, has given us a basis for communication."

"I killed Abe's colleague," said Vandar. "I am sorry for that. I did not know he was an ally."

"We have the technology now," said Theron. "The Narthians will be unlikely to reproduce it. Not for a long time. And if they do, we will be ready. In the meantime, both races live on. In balance."

As they were meant to, thought Reevea.

Fear...a natural part of life.

"You must have questions," said Nyssa.

"Only one. For Vandar. Why do you call him Abe Lincoln?"

Vandar smiled, proud of himself. "I was hoping you would ask. Lincoln freed the slaves, didn't he? Well Abe here helped to free me—from slavery to my past."

"Vandar has agreed to accept promotion," explained Theron. "You are looking at the newest General in the Corps."

"I would rather do more than look." She planted a kiss on his lips.

He frowned. "That is not protocol."

She whispered in his ear. "Deal with me later."

"Indeed."

"Reeva," said Nyssa. "You know that the government owes you an incredible debt. We have put you in a position of unprecedented danger. You have our deepest gratitude. What you have done for us is immeasurable."

"The only thing I regret is having overslept," she quipped. "I seemed to have missed out on a lot here."

They all laughed, including Vandar.

"You were not sleeping, angel," he said. "You were very much awake."

"I was?"

"Ever since you were beamed here, you were in communion with Vandar *and* the Narthian envoy. You were helping to forge the link, to develop the communication skills. Sordon was involved, too. He insisted. We have since relieved him of duty so he can go be with Penny, who is very happy to have him alive, I might add."

"I don't remember anything."

"I will refresh your memory," said Vandar with that look on his face.

She blushed at once. Knowing that what had drawn these two creatures together was somehow intimately tied to her sexual self.

"Just so you know," she said sharply. "No offense to Abe, but he is not coming to bed with us."

"That is not a problem, Reeva. No one is coming to bed with us. You are mine and only mine."

Her legs went weak. To have him speak of her with such open desire and care in front of the others made her feel more special than she ever had in her life.

She wanted to reply – alone with him. And naked.

"Theron, Abe," said Nyssa, speaking as female first, head of the Council second. "We should give these two a chance to be alone."

"Agreed," said Theron, his hand moving to Nyssa's slim waist. "I wouldn't mind some alone time with my own little beauty. Vandar, I expect you to represent the Corps...well and fully."

"Sir." Vandar delivered a casual salute, smile in place.

How Reeva loved that on him. She only hoped this wasn't too good to be true. Had everything really been worked out? For her and him both?

Hopefully not. If a little fear was good, maybe a dash of tension and conflict didn't hurt, either.

Just then Abe's tentacles started rattling.

Reeva turned to him. He had been silent up to now, apparently waiting for a chance to speak. The conversation passed by thought, in the new language so far known only to the two of them and Vandar.

Reeva?

Yes...Abe.

Thank you.

You're welcome. But what did I do?

You...trusted. Is that the word?

Not sure. I was just along for the ride.

Good ride...life.

Good indeed. What will happen to you now, Abe?

I must help Earth develop weapons... in case.

It's us who should thank you.

Self interest, that's all. Not see my race die.

Or mine.

Reeva?

Yes, Abe.

You are...warrior.

Don't feel like one.

Is true.

Thank you.

You are also...lover.

Maybe.

Love...Vandar?

Hard one.

Vandar loves you.

Says who?

Both of us.

Then I love you both, too.

Goodbye, Reeva.

Bye, Abe. Abe, wait.

Yes?

What is your real name?

The answer came in a kind of song, shrill but not painful. It was an opening into a new dimension, a new future for the entire universe.

Chapter Nine

Some time later, Reeve lay on Vandar, his fingers lazily laced into her curls, her fingers splayed on his chest, her sex dripping—his fluids and hers. “Tell me again,” she murmured, “how this is going to work out between us, a primale and a fem?”

“I never said it would.”

“Liar.” She squeezed his cock. He took hold of her ass, pinching, putting her back in place. “Ow, I’m sorry,” she squirmed.

He patted the sore spot, made her seethe a few minutes. It was now hours that they had been in his quarters, making sex, sharing their bodies. Only here or there were there hints of the underlying tension that might not be resolved. A moan on her part, like she might hit a wall past which she could not go, a grunt of compliance, that maybe she wouldn’t submit as much as he needed. Interestingly enough, there was no mention of their previous experiences, no bondage, no submission.

“It will work,” he told her. “Because you will follow the rules.”

“Rules?” She looked up at him. “More flipping rules?”

“Rule number one. I am always right,” he recited. “Rule number two, see rule one.”

“Very funny. She sat up. How about I try. Rule one. Reeve is always right. Rule two—”

He took hold of her breast—masterful, casual, so fucking...proprietary that it nearly made her come all over again. “Who makes the rules?” He asked, managing to massage, pressure and pinch all at once.

She tried to break free but he took hold of her nipple like needlenose pliers. “Vandar, don’t,” she whined. “You know I can’t fight you like this.”

“Who makes the rules, Reeve?”

“You do.”

“Much better.” He released her.

Reeve pouted. “It isn’t fair.”

He let her get out of bed—the illusion of freedom.

“You can’t just boss me around with sex.”

He observed her, arms folded over her chest, hip thrust out.

“Did I say you could cover your breasts?”

Her mouth opened. She felt a wave of hot weakness. Utterly dominated, she put her arms at her sides. She still had her tongue, though. “I mean, I have a brain, I frigging developed the Nanthian-Earth dictionary, for star’s sake.”

"You have an incredible brain," he agreed, "though it's your body that interests me at the moment."

"We have to compromise, Vendar. Or else this won't work. And the way you're acting really makes me wonder." She wasn't sure where the outburst came from. A release of all the tension of her recent adventure, perhaps? Or did she want him to set limits?

"Wonder what?"

"If you are committed. No disrespect to Penya, but I won't be a piece on the side. You take all of me or none."

"I already have taken you."

"Then you must honor my whole person."

He folded his hands over his taut belly. "Fine. You want a compromise? How about this. In the bedroom, wherever we find ourselves, you are my slave, outside of it we are equals."

Reeva swallowed, eyes on his half-hard cock. She was aching to ride it. "I think I can live with that. In fact, let me show you how much."

She attempted to climb on top of him. He stopped her. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I am going to make sex with you."

"But we have an agreement, do we not?"

"Yes? What of it?"

"In the bedroom, what are you?"

"Your slave, Vendar, but —"

"Do slaves approach their Masters without permission? Do they initiate sex-making? Do they call their Masters by name?"

"I...well...no, Master."

Her heart raced, her body burned in those wonderful flames.

That was what was missing. That element of control. They had been making sex today, but she wanted more. And that something more was as important to her as her respect and freedom.

He drew her close by her long hair. "Am I your sex toy, girl, to be ridden for your pleasure?"

"No, Master," she lowered her eyes. "Forgive me, Master."

He pulled, just hard enough. "Who is the toy in this relationship?"

"Me, Master. I am the sex toy."

"What happens to naughty sex toys?"

"They are punished." She winced.

"Yes they are," he said commandingly. "Over my lap, girl. Now."

Vandar sat up. Reeve submitted, lying across his erection. He tossed her hair forward over her head. "Hands in front of you."

His cock throbbed against her belly. Having it there was sheer torture. She wanted it inside her—up her ass, in her pussy, or deep in her mouth. She needed to give pleasure, she needed to worship, she needed to be used hard by her man. Her primale.

He alternated spanks with masturbation, his finger making her whimper. He shattered her, making her moan and beg, making her lift her red hot ass for more.

"Please, punish me, Master," she gasped. "Spank your little fem girl." She mewled her "thank-yous" as he caressed and spanked, spanked and caressed.

"Are you ready to be good, girl?"

"Oh, Master," she spasmed, "so good. I'll be so good. I will obey, I will please you, I will be the best sex toy...I...I can't live without it."

It was an orgy of mental submission, a complete release of all the pressure she felt, to be the woman in the know, the one with answers. She relished that, but there was another side to her, the one that just wanted to be Vandar's girl, his pride and joy that he came back to again and again, couldn't keep his hands off.

"I can see I will have to keep you in line."

"Yes, Master."

Oh, god, she hoped so.

"Sex is a privilege for you, little girl. I don't have to let you come. I don't have to let you have anything at all that you want."

"No, Master, I'm only a slave. My body exists to please you."

And yet he would please her like no other man. Already had, in fact.

His hand massaged her bottom. "It will please me to hear you beg to ride my cock."

See? Exactly what she wanted in the first place, but twice as sweet on his terms, in his time. The strange equation between them. Call it nature or just the two of them, but it worked.

"Oh, Master," she gushed. "May I be allowed onto your cock? May I try to please it with my body? My pussy?"

"Will you be good?"

"Soooo good. I'll be a good lay, Master." Little tingly things popped off, all up and down her spine. The dirtier, the better. Amazing.

He took his hand away. "Be quick about it."

"Yes. Yes, Master." She scrambled off his lap. His cock stood proud and tall, purplish red and surging. "Thank you, thank you, Master."

She started a second time to climb on. His hand pushed at her belly, keeping her at bay. "Master, what's wrong?"

"A slave does not approach Master's cock without paying respects."

She understood. "Forgive me, Master." She lowered herself reverently, her hair falling over her head, spilling across his strong body. She pressed her lips ever-so delicately to the tip of his manhood.

The kiss lingered. She felt safe. Loved.

Her eyes were misty as she raised her head again. She looked for confirmation. "Good girl," he said.

She was allowed, at last, to mount him. Master's good girl, Master's buoyant girl, lining up her slit with his glorious erection, letting herself slowly down, swallowing it inside her body. Inch by inch, filled with cock, inside out consumed and owned and centered by cock.

How was this relationship going to work?

One day at a time, like anything else in the universe.

One Vandarsaurus Rex, one redhead firebrand, a little fear, a little tension and enough desire to combust a black hole.

Speaking of black holes, she was taking all of him, her pelvis settling now on his. She exhaled...impaled. Another breath would make her come. Was she permitted? She looked for direction. He smiled at her. Was that water in his eyes? Just a little mist? He reached out to take her breasts lightly in his hands, weighing them.

Her head went back. She still wasn't breathing. Her head pounded, it built and built and built. At last, at long last, knowing exactly how long to wait, he took hold of her hips and lifted her and said the magic word.

The universe was gone, all past and future vanished, and all worries a mere mockery. She was one with her love, orgasming together with him, being filled by his primale semen, hot and thick. Her body was locked by bonds stronger than steel. She was slave to the perfect man, the sort who valued her freedom and who would guard it with his life.

As long as she knew whose bed she belonged in. And who was Master there.

She moaned out the name...Master...a private affirmation, meant only for his ears. No other man or woman. Or alien.

The orgasm rolled into another and melted into a third and plunged into a fourth, and then they switched places and went at it again until it all blended in her mind and the ecstasy was so sharp and so prolonged she thought she might be turning primale herself.

But she wasn't, she had just found a place for herself beside one. The right place, for now, forever.

* * * * *

Sometime later they talked.

"Reeva?" He was behind her. They lay tucked in against each other like spoons in a drawer.

"Hmm?" She trilled, half asleep, delighted at the murmur of his voice.

"I'm not any good with words."

"I've noticed."

"There's a lot I'm not good with," he confessed, kissing her shoulder.

Her heart warmed, loving that he was a strong enough Master to let his guard down.

"Yes?" She needed this, just at this moment, to seal things and make it perfect, so that when she came as his slave, she would truly feel herself slain by his lion's heart.

Her hand reached to caress his hip. She willed him to open those final gates.

"I'm a soldier, stubborn, set in my ways. Honestly, if I could do without you, I would. But it's impossible. I can't go back to what I was. Your beauty, your needling, your challenges, all of it has become the very air I breathe."

"From anyone else," she chuckled. "That would be an insult but not from you."

"I don't know why you come back to me. I wouldn't have," he said. "But soldiers are more pragmatic."

She turned around to face him. "Bullshit. You primales are the most sentimental lot I've ever met. Out with it, just tell me you love me so we can get some sleep."

He laughed, the tension broken. "Fine, I love you, with what passes for my heart. But don't expect any special treatment. I intend to go on being a son of a bitch until the day I die."

"I count on it. Then I won't feel guilty when I'm a bitch."

"You? A bitch?"

She punched his arm.

He took her wrist. "You know I could punish you for that. For not calling me Master as well."

"But you won't because I'm so cute," she predicted.

"No, I won't, because there is something else I have to say."

"Fine. By the way, I love you, too."

"When I was in the Academy, we did these exercises. Isolation rooms, sensory deprivation, you know?"

"I've heard of it, yes. Though it's nothing like doing it."

"No, it isn't. We Guardians don't talk about it, even to each other. There's something that happened to me once, though, that I want you to know about."

"Okay." She tried to hold her enthusiasm, knowing how precious this was.

"It was a restraint situation, limbs bound. Electrodes, total darkness, no natural sensory input. Only the hell the instructors wanted to pump in. And I don't use the

term hell lightly. Let me just say, the machines put you in virtual simulation situations in which there is no possible hope of escape. They can break anyone, Reeva, they can make anyone a traitor, and they can strip us of everything that makes us human. It all comes down to survival. And what you'll do to live – hypothetically speaking. You stay in until you are on the verge of psychic death. The experts know how to pull you just in time. It would make for bragging rights, but like I said, this isn't like target practice – you don't show off. None of us know what the other does. At least we're not supposed to."

"Not supposed to?"

"That's right. They told me, Reeva, and no one else."

She waited for him to go on, his face etched with a pain much too deep for tears or even words. It was in the very fiber of his being. "Apparently my situation was unique. There is a careful debriefing, a lot of decompression time, but no one ever came out of the room like I did. A lot of men are angry, some stop talking, like I said it gets in deep. Me, I was stone calm. Beyond cold, beyond focused. I asked to see the Commandant. I was persistent, Reeva, like you were persistent in wanting to see a Guardian as a child."

She smiled in reply.

"I said my piece. I told him what he could do with the Guardian Corps, I told him to go fuck himself, Reeva."

"That must have gone over well."

"I didn't care how he would react, although I will admit I was surprised when he came back to me the next day. I was still in the decompression chamber. He told me I couldn't resign. I said 'try and stop me'. He said there was a reason. And then he told me the thing no one else got to know. My performance score. Turns out I was in that room longer than any other cadet in my class, or any other class. Ever."

Reeva swelled with pride. "I knew you were something special. Much as I hated to admit it when I met you."

"Well, it didn't seem special. Still doesn't. I told him my score didn't matter, if anything it just proved they were all a bunch of sadists. He laughed at that."

"I will never understand the Guardian sense of humor," she mused.

"I did end up staying, after a pep talk from you know who."

"Marax," she guessed in a whisper.

"Yep. Apparently he asks for those assignments. Whenever there is a young person, especially troubled, but with great potential. I won't tell you what he said. It's a Guardian thing. He didn't exactly give me an answer but he did help me make peace."

"That sounds about right."

"So that is what I really live with, Reeva. I have never known who the real monsters are. Them...or us. Honestly, what the Narthians produced in me, what I saw was horrible, but our own scientists are a hell of a lot more skilled in picking at human agony and terror."

"That's to be expected."

"So," he breathed. "Still want to hook up with me, now that you know I'm the highest scoring monster in the Corps?"

"More than ever," she grinned. "Think of all the ways you will come up with to torture me."

"And vice versa, my love. I have a feeling you would score pretty high on that simulator yourself."

"Maybe I should try one day."

"Over my dead body."

"You're only my Master in the bedroom," she reminded.

"Thanks for reminding me." His hand went to her pussy, massaging.

She began to rock her body against him, all thoughts of simulators quickly gone from her mind. "Master, let me come."

"You wanted torture, remember?"

"Not...like this...Master."

"Okay, we'll try it this way."

This way was her legs splayed, his tongue between them, licking her to agony, riding the thin edge of pleasure, just out of reach. She cursed him a million times, each time secretly loving him more.

Her beast. Her Master. Her primale.

About the Author

Reese Gabriel is a born romantic with a taste for the edgier side of love. Having traveled the world and sampled many of the finer things, Reese now enjoys the greater simplicities; barefoot walks by the ocean, kisses under moonlight and whispers of passion in the darkness with that one special person.

Preferring to remain behind the scenes, cherished by a precious few, Reese hopes to awaken in the lives of many the possibilities of true love through stories of far off places and enchanted lives.

For the sake of love and hope and imagination, these stories are told. May they be enjoyed as much in the reading of them as in the writing.

Reese welcomes comments from readers. You can find Reese's website and email address on the author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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