

Shifting Lust 3: The Bounty Hunter's Prize

Lexxie Couper

All rights reserved.

Copyright ©2006 Lexxie Couper

No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC.

ISBN (10) 1-59596-218-2

ISBN (13) 978-1-59596-218-8

Formats Available:

HTML, Adobe PDF,

MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:

Changeling Press LLC

PO Box 1561

Shepherdstown, WV 25443-1561

www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: Chrissie Henderson

Cover Artist: Bryan Keller



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

Prologue

Bright red blood pooled at Drean Et's feet. Between his toes.

He cast a quick look at the naked man prone on the *Raptor's* floor, his heart twisting.

Raiven a'Tor could be mistaken for sleeping. The piercing grey eyes were closed, the well-defined muscles -- normally coiled and ready to strike -- relaxed. Even his lips gave the impression of someone in slumber, rather than a man who, only minutes earlier, had been shot, point blank, in the chest by a Jaxian blaster.

Cool fingers skipped over the cheeks of Drean's ass and he lifted his head, turning away from the sight of the dead Terran.

"You have done well, my child." Cy's hideously scarred face stretched into a smile. "Ithis thanks you. I thank you. And you shall be duly rewarded." Her fingers slipped to the crevice of his butt, tracing the line with deliberate intent. A shiver of what was once reverent anticipation rippled through Drean's body, into his cock. He had been "rewarded" by the High Priestess on more than one occasion prior to this day. It was a great honor, bestowed on her most favored followers. Her fingers only hinted at what was to come later. The glory of her gratitude.

He swallowed, cold revulsion constricting his throat. "Yes, High Priestess."

"This," Cy whispered, giving a'Tor's limp body a sharp kick to the ribs, "will need to be disposed of."

Drean's heart suddenly gave a savage thump, and he stiffened. "Allow me, High Priestess," he said. "It would be my honor."

Cy met Drean's steady gaze. "Why, thank you, my child." With a regal smile, she shoved her finger between his ass cheeks, one long nail penetrating his sphincter in a sharp little jab. "I shall double your reward when the job is finished."

Drean stood still, the urge to reach forward and tear out the High Priestess's throat eating him up. A cold weight pressed on his heart. Spiritual awakening was meant to be a blissful event, but when one discovered their most Holiest of Holies was in sinful partnership with the Damned, that everything held dear and treasured was a lie...

Bitter bile coated his throat. There was nothing blissful about *this* awakening.

The cruel finger in his ass withdrew. "I shall wait for you aboard *The Way*," Cy informed him, eyes blazing. "My private quarters." She crossed the room, stopping briefly at the doorway. "Do not be long, my child. There is much to..." her eyes dropped to his exposed cock, "...consider."

Drean bowed his head, only lifting it when he heard Cy leave. He stared out the starboard porthole. His High Priestess, his Light of Ithis, was shrouded in the scum of evil. The soulless creature who destroyed his people and defiled his *fei'lia*, Trista.

The same man now in possession of Kyra Issarei.

Mur'dek.

Enraged agony stabbed through him. Agony and consuming shame.

He had been deceived. Deceived *to* deceive. Since the genocide of his race at the hands of the Murukhan, he'd become less the Crown Prince of Lappia and more a servant of despair. Cy had found him in a sex den years back. Found him and saved him. Yet now...

His eyes fell to the body of Raiven a'Tor once more. Blood still seeped from the Terran's chest, the gaping wound raw and savage. Drean shifted the Jaxian blaster in his grip, the weapon growing heavy in his large hands. The bounty hunter had been a man of great strength and skill. If they'd met under different circumstances...

If the man had not held Kyra's heart...

Another wave of shame rolled over him. Cy was correct about one thing. There *was* much to consider. The first being what to do with a'Tor's --

A weak, almost inaudible groan pervaded the silence of the room. Though it was soft, it exploded in Drean's ears like the scream from an imploding quasar.

Filled with terror at what he might see, Drean gazed down at the man -- the *dead* man -- at his feet.

Raiven a'Tor was moving.

Not just moving. Rejuvenating.

The charred and bloody mess that was once his chest seemed to be re-knitting, ribbons of wet flesh and sinew melding, meshing together before his very eyes.

A'Tor's head rolled from one side to the other and another groan filled the room, louder this time. Stronger. His lips parted, barely, and as Drean stared in stunned horror, a word slipped past their dry surface. A name.

"Kyra..."

Chapter 1

Sweat and blood ran down Kyra Issarei's back, following the line of her spine like water follows a trench, trickling between the cheeks of her ass, the lips of her sodden cunt.

Cold steel links cut into her palms as she twisted her wrists, tightening her grip on the chains suspending her from the ground between two massive Jyian marble columns.

"You *will* scream," Mur'dek told her, flicking his whip out to the side in sharp little snaps. "You will scream my name and beg me for mercy."

Kyra curled her lip, raw lust and simmering contempt burning in her soul. "Go fuck yourself."

Mur'dek's chuckle was low, almost soothing. "Ahh, shape-shifter. We've had this conversation already."

"And if I remember correctly," Kyra growled, glaring into his face, "it ended with your ship being blown to pieces."

He took a step forward, snaking clawed fingers against the smooth curve of her cunt. "And yet, here you are," he pointed out, slitted eyes dropping to her naked body. "In my control." With a slow, steady motion, he dragged his nails from her throbbing cunt to her left breast, circling her nipple with a blood-tipped claw. Teasing it into a rock-hard little nub of concentrated want. A smug chortle of satisfaction slipped past his lips and he flicked his gaze from the responsive tip back up to her face. "Again."

Kyra bit back a sharp breath. Ribbons of hungry lust unfurled between her thighs. Xia's lust.

The resurgence of the residual *ids* in her head frightened her beyond all measure. They shouldn't be there. Not at all. The only psyche in her mind should be her own. But

it wasn't. *They* were there. Xia and Nalyx. Screaming, bellowing and fighting for power. Overwhelming her. Controlling her. The battle for supremacy was being fought even as the warlord's whip lashed at her back. Right at that very moment, while Mur'dek dominated her body, Xia's licentious psyche dominated her being.

And the Princess of the Five Moons got off on every sadistic, perverted thing he did to her.

"Scream for me, shape-shifter." With a swift flick of his wrist, Mur'dek cupped the entire swell of Kyra's breast, scaly fingers squeezing and mauling the soft flesh as he stared into her eyes. "Scream."

Kyra bared her teeth, damp pulses fluttering in her cunt. "Make me."

Mur'dek's chuckle was low. "As you wish."

The whip hissed through the air seconds before it sliced into the flesh of her hip. *Gods!* Her body snapped into a stiff arc, burning pain tearing through her body. Feeding the princess's dark hunger.

Hot blood roared through Kyra's veins. *Yes!* Xia cried.

Eyes ablaze, Mur'dek raised the whip again. "Scream."

She lowered her head, meeting that manic inferno with her own flat gaze, Xia's lust heating her blood. *Don't stop*, the princess crooned in her head. "Don't stop." The plea slipped from Kyra's lips on a breath.

Slitted eyes stared at her. Uncertain. A flicker of confusion flared in the flames of depraved desire. Then it was gone. Replaced by cold determination. And potent hunger. "I don't know what game you are playing, shape-shifter," he hissed, so close the blunt line of his nose pressed hers. "But I'm more than happy to join in." His whip clattered to the floor, cruel claws sinking into her hips as he ground his bulging cock against her wet heat. "Let's see who wins, shall we?"

With a savage move, Mur'dek splayed her legs and wrapped them around his body, his cock rubbing at the slick lips of her pussy. Seeking entry. Kyra bucked, recoiling from the repulsive touch. *Gods! Not again!*

Yes! Xia cried back. Jubilant. Voracious.

Tongue as brutal as his whip, Mur'dek lashed at her nipples. First one and then the other. Pulling each one into his mouth, gnawing, sucking and biting until Kyra gasped and whimpered. Her body, under the control of the princess's lust, ached for more. With every razing flick of Mur'dek's tongue, her cunt contracted, clamping around a cock not yet there.

Claws of steel held her hips, points of agony that should have made her scream in pain, but instead made her moan with pleasure. There was nothing about this assault she wanted. But her body -- no longer her own -- wanted it all.

Mur'dek tore his mouth from her breast, yellow eyes burning with fevered greed as he stared into her face. "I've waited a lifetime for this moment, shape-shifter." He gave a savage tug on her hips, driving her cunt harder against his pulsating cock. The pain was blissful torture and Kyra gasped. What would it feel like when he finally entered her? "Since the moment you entered my wife's chamber, the second you stole Trista's life, yours belonged to me."

"I was never yours to have in the first place, *ruk'da*."

The soft voice that slipped through Kyra's lips was not her own. Nor was it Xia's.

Mur'dek reared back, his grip sinking deeper into Kyra's hips even as his eyes grew wide. "Trista?"

Kyra's heart exploded to petrified life.

Gods, surely not the young Lappian girl, too? Drean's sister?

A choking sob burst from Kyra's tight, dry throat. Was she to be haunted by the psyche of every source she'd shifted with?

Be strong, Trista whispered...

... seconds before searing white heat exploded in Kyra's head, blinding and encompassing. Xia was back. More powerful than ever before.

As if her own consciousness was a tangible thing, Kyra felt herself shoved away, pushed to the back of her mind as the insatiable Xia wrested back control of her body. Her lust. "You wish, Mur'dek," the princess goaded, stealing Kyra's voice to taunt the man holding her.

A savage snarl tore from Mur'dek's throat. "You fucking bitch!" He yanked her back against his chest, eyes blazing with insane rage. "I'll teach you to play games with me."

The warlord's cock ground against the soft lips of Kyra's cunt, brutal and punishing, its bulbous head like a fist rubbing at her tender clit. Xia laughed and threw back her head -- Kyra's head -- ramming her hips harder against the Murukhan's, wanting that massive organ inside her. "Yes!" she cried, sounding more like Xia than ever.

Mur'dek's eyes widened. "Who are you?"

Your worst nightmare, Kyra growled silently.

"Your deepest fantasy," Xia answered aloud. "Now shut up and fuck me, you grutt-fucking piece of shit."

With a sudden, body-bending buck, Xia took charge. Impaling Kyra's body on Mur'dek's turgid, pulsating cock.

Kyra cried out, fingers curling tighter around the chains binding her. Rapture flooded through her. Rapture and vile disgust. Mur'dek plunged into her cunt, long, hard and thick. Whatever confusion had startled him was now gone, leaving all consuming lust the only emotion in his eyes -- as powerful as the vile lust ripping through her own blood.

He shoved harder, higher, into her channel, claws gouging deep gashes across her hips with each ramming penetration. His tongue flicked out, tasting the sweat on Kyra's brow before his mouth crushed hers. Jagged teeth cut her lips, but even then, Kyra's body coiled and rolled in dark pleasure. She arched her spine, wanting to feel the full length of the warlord's pumping cock. Hate crashed through her. Hate for the princess's residual *id* controlling her body. Hate for the Murukhan invading her cunt. Hate for her own base response. She needed to regain power. Of herself. Of her body. Before she was lost forever.

Gods of Kaius! Aren't I already?

A raw groan of pain and misery tore at the back of her throat.

Lifting his head, Mur'dek laughed down into her face, eyes glinting with a malicious glee. "Now this is how I want you, shape-shifter. Quivering with submission. Knowing who your master is. Knowing who will fuck you for the rest of your life." His cock pulsed with a triumphant greed Kyra could feel in her cunt.

More, the princess cried.

Cold fury -- murderous and cataclysmic -- erupted inside Kyra.

She pulled at the chains, glaring into his eyes. "The gods damn you to hell."

Mur'dek's leering grin stretched wider, claws slicing her ass as he snatched her closer. "Hell is but a vacation for me, shape-shifter. The gods just my servants."

A bellow of enraged disgust erupted from deep within Kyra as another psyche propelled Xia's away. Kyra's muscles flexed and, with a savage snap, she shattered the chain holding her right arm above her head. Fingers of steel curled around Mur'dek's throat, sinking into his scaly, thick hide. Kyra's fingers. Kyra's fingers controlled by the psychotic *id* of another.

"You want to fuck until the end of a life, Murukhan?" A cold voice cut the air, stealing Kyra's breath just as her fingers stole Mur'dek's air. Nalyx's voice. Coming from Kyra's mouth. Her cunt clamped shut around Mur'dek's cock. "Let's see who finds renewal in the Cavern of Sin."

And with that, the residual *id* of the Lunarian zealot -- through Kyra's hijacked body -- began his "purification" of the Murukhan warlord with Kyra screaming, crying and shouting the whole time.

For Mur'dek's blood. For Drean's.

From the prison of her own psyche.

* * *

Drean walked down the quiet passageway of *The Way*, Cy's personal ship. His gut churned beneath his abdominal muscles, not only because of the upcoming meeting with his High Priestess, but because of the man now living when he should be dead.

Raiven a'Tor.

Drean's throat clamped shut. What type of man survived a death pulse from a Jaxian blaster? The weapon was -- next to a'Tor's own famed gun -- the most powerful and lethal in the six systems.

Rounding a corner, Drean shook his head. A man to destroy when at his weakest, that's what type. A man to fear.

So why did you let him live?

Drean didn't have an answer.

He had every reason to want Raiven a'Tor dead. The only person standing in his way of capturing Kyra Issarei's heart was the Terran. As it was now, Kyra believed her lover no longer living.

Yes, and she will hold you responsible for his death. She saw the gun in your hand.

Drean shook his head again. That was no matter. When she learnt how much he loved her, how much he longed to make her life happy, how he'd been deceived by Cy and the Murukhan piece of filth, she would understand. Understand and return his love. They did, after all, share a unique bond unlike any other.

Not only had they been prisoners of the Ferrellian sex-slave-master Sylt, chained together and subjected to the Ambros Trials, not only had they tasted each other's bodies, but they also shared a link to Trista, his *fei'lia*. He by blood, Kyra by psyche. It was as if Ithis himself had cast the word. They were meant to be as one. The moment he, Drean, saved Kyra from Mur'dek, she would see that. Their life together would begin.

He had every reason to see a'Tor dead.

Yet, he had energized from the *Raptor* with the man still alive.

Why?

Drean's gut rolled, chest suddenly tight. He didn't know.

But he couldn't kill him.

Rebirth in Blood...

The words from Ithis' gospel floated through his mind and a chill rippled his pale, pearlescent skin. *Rebirth in Blood*. Was Ithis trying to tell him something? Was a'Tor more than a man?

Is that what stayed his hand? What stopped him finishing the job the Jaxian blaster had started?

The door to Cy's private quarters loomed before him and he took a long breath, lungs filling with stale artificial air from the ship's enviro pumps. He didn't know why he hadn't been able to dispose of a'Tor, but he *did* know what awaited him on the other side of this door.

Sex. A lot of sex.

Cy was insatiable. And her lust was to be his reward. For disabling the security shield back on the *Raptor* and for killing the Terran. He'd only achieved one, but Cy did not need to know that.

Drean didn't plan on changing that situation, either.

Deception was an ugly game, but one he played very well.

Cy had deceived *him*. He was about to deceive her.

A low, clear bell sounded in the silent passageway. Cy's door slid open with a faint hiss. "I've been waiting, my child." Her slightly husky voice floated through the opening, accompanied by the heady scent of Jyian musk.

Drean's cock gave a lurch. The rare incense was renowned for its aphrodisiac properties and, despite the conflict in his heart and the hate in his soul, it was having its desired effect. He was harder than a Lappian Pole tree. The blood in his veins seemed to boil with a need that had nothing to do with desire and everything to do with submission. He would step through the entryway into Cy's quarters and become her sexual puppet, as he had a hundred times before.

Scowling, Drean paused at the entry. He'd spent more than a cycle aboard the *Succulent Virgin*, in Slave-Master Sylt's hands, being trained and tutored to fulfill a role laid upon him by Ithis himself. Cy's plans for the six systems were beyond the spiritual,

and he -- the Crown Prince of Lappia -- was a part of those plans. A willing part of those plans. Until her deception. Until he watched a dead man come back to life.

"Drean?"

Impatience cut the husky tones of Cy's voice as she called his name, and Drean pulled in a slow breath. His body, tantalized by the potent Jyian musk, thrummed, ready for supplication and release. *Deception*. He placed the word in the forefront of his mind as he stepped into her quarters. *Deception*.

His Light of Ithis sat naked and cross-legged on the bed. Small breasts pointed straight at him, their large nipples rouged and puckered. Awaiting his touch. The perfect alabaster hue of her flesh seemed to glow in the muted light of the room, drawing his eye to the shadowy crux of her thighs. The sight of the dark hair, shaped into a thin crescent moon -- the sign of Ithis -- sent a surge of heat straight into his cock.

Channel that heat. Use it.

"Is the deed done?" Cy asked, gold-brushed fingernails tracing the outline of one blushing areola.

Drean's eyes flicked to her hand, base desire licking through his blood. His mind may have been awakened to the deceptive slut, but that didn't mean his body was willing to listen. Yet. His time aboard the *Succulent Virgin* had turned him into a creature driven by lust and sexual appetites. It was Cy's first demand of Sylt. The Ferrellian's tutelage had been brutal and absolute. Not until being chained to Kyra Issarei did Drean realize raw sex could connect to deeper emotions. The sight of Cy's fingers on her own flesh however, twirling, teasing the tight little tip, resurrected his training. His primal lust.

Use it. Use her. He swallowed. "It is in progress, High Priestess."

A satisfied smirk spread across her lips. "Very good, my child. You have done well. As always." She held out her arms, breasts lifting. "It is time for your reward."

Drean stepped forward, removing the single slave robe -- Kyra's robe -- he'd worn since leaving the *Succulent Virgin* to board a'Tor's ship. Kyra's sweet scent still

lingered on the slip of material, and as he dropped it to the floor, a wrenching stab of pain tore through him.

Nothing was as it should be.

His sister was dead. His people destroyed.

His Light, his Holiest of Holies, was in partnership with the most vile being in the six systems.

The woman he loved and hungered for was in the hands of that very same man.

His body lusted for a woman who'd used and deceived him beyond measure.

And a dead man now lay breathing, his ship soon to be detonated into a million pieces.

Nothing was as it should be. But when Cy's fingers curled around his straining, aching cock, it didn't matter.

Drean closed his eyes as depraved heat rolled through his body. *Use it...*

"Let me show you my eternal gratitude," she murmured, lips pressed against his throbbing length. "My eternal appreciation."

Her tongue flicked out, touching the very tip of his cock to smear a small crystalline drop of pre-cum across its taut, swollen head. He pulled in a long breath, searching for Kyra's faint scent on the air, finding only the muskiness of Cy and heady Jyian incense. Abruptly, without care of the fresh scars knotting half of her face, Drean snarled a fistful of her hair and yanked her head forward, shoving his cock deep into her hot, receptive mouth.

Sharp teeth tore along his erection, but he didn't care. Cy wanted to show him her gratitude? He wanted to show her his pain.

Tightening his grip on her hair, he pulled her head in harder. Her laving tongue pressed the underside of his cock, her back molars abrasive on the sensitive, fevered flesh. He heard her gag, felt the reflex action in the back of her throat. But he didn't stop. She needed to be punished for her deception. For joining forces with the Murukhan *ruk'da*. That he would succumb to her demands was a given, but he needed to make her pay first -- if he didn't, his life would be forfeit. To Cy. To Mur'dek.

His balls mashed against her chin as he thrust deeper into her mouth, the pain almost as unbearable as the one in his soul. He ground his teeth, throwing his head back to stare at the dark ceiling. Redemption was never meant to be easy.

Cy's hands wrapped around the backs of his thighs, talon-like nails sinking into his flesh, his taut hamstrings. Drean winced, stinging heat joining the pulsing fire in his balls. With a savage growl, he shoved her away, his hips propelling her backward. Teeth ripped at his cock as she fell onto the bed. Agony shot up into his spine, cold and blistering hot. Pumping opprobrious pleasure into his swollen balls. He glared down at her stretched out, gasping form. Hating the very sight of her.

Did Ithis know his Highest Worshiper was in partnership with Mur'dek?

Did the God of Renewal even care?

"Come, my child," Cy panted, sliding further up the bed. Wide eyes blazed with a desire that bordered on fear as she spread her thighs apart and dipped one gold-tipped finger into an already glistening cunt. "In the Cavern of Sin shall you find Renewal."

Drean's heart stopped. For half a beat.

Blood scalding in his veins, he threw himself onto the bed, ramming her back into the mattress as he drove his rigid cock into her sopping slit.

Nails of steel raked over his shoulders. Cy hauled her hips higher, harder into his. Her thighs locked around him. Her teeth sank into his neck. With every vicious penetration, his soul screamed. For too many years to count, he'd longed for the touch of this woman. Every time she bestowed her glory upon him, he'd wept tears of love and gratitude to Ithis for bringing him into the fold. For delivering him into the arms of his High Priestess. Yet, here he was, buried up to his balls in her slick, clenching cunt and all he could think of was Kyra Issarei.

And a dead man drawing breath.

Raiven a'Tor.

Rebirth in Blood...

"Harder!" Cy spat in his ear, digging her nails deeper into his shoulders. "Faster."

Drean complied.

"Better." Her hands dragged down his arms and back up again, fingers knotting in his long silver hair until his scalp felt like it was being torn from his skull. He bit back a curse, squeezing his eyes shut just as Cy's mouth latched onto his left nipple. Teeth that only moments ago marked his cock, now bit into the small nub of flesh. Hard.

He hissed in a breath, pain rupturing down his torso and into his pumping shaft. "Rru'c!" he cried, wanting to smash Cy's cruel teeth in with his bare fist. Wanting her teeth to gnaw on his nipple until she suckled on his blood.

Just when he could take no more, Cy jerked her mouth away, replacing her lips with her fingers. "Look at me, my child."

He did, finding her eyes burning with power. She twisted the agonized tip of his nipple between her nails, watching for his reaction. "Tell me you worship me."

Drean's throat slammed shut.

Deception.

He let his lips curl with adoration. Pushed his cock deeper into her gripping cunt. "I worship you."

She returned his smile, fingers tracing the intricate lines of his tattoo as they told their sad tale across his chest. Pinpricks of blood beaded along the path her nail took. Blowing a cool stream of air to the red welts, she fluttered her eyelids. "As it should be."

"As it will be," he followed. "Forever."

"Yes," Cy murmured, squirming one hand between their slapping bodies to squeeze his throbbing balls. "By Ithis' creed." She closed her fingers tight around the heavy sac, giving it a tug so sharp black stars burst before Drean's eyes. "Forever."

Growling low in his throat, Drean glared into her malicious face, finding joy in the hideous scars even as his body found joy in the hideous pain her fingers caused. Her lips stretched into a smile still as her finger found its way to his tight sphincter. She

dragged her nail across the drawn hole, sending shots of riling pleasure into his gut. Her eyes flashed at his sudden gasp. "Do you want me to bless you, Drean Et, Crown Prince of Lappia?" The nail, filed to a point sharper than a dagger, pressed at the very center of his ass. "Ask me to bless you."

Drean bowed his back. It wasn't just the Jyian musk feeding his response. Sylt had spent many hours stimulating his erogenous zones, tying them irrevocably to his senses. Sex was about taste, touch, sight, sound and smell. But for Drean, a student of the most effective Ferrellian Slave-Master, it moved beyond those simple responses to a hyper awareness that boiled his blood and bent his mind.

Sweat trickled down his back, into the crack of his butt. He felt it follow the line of contact between his asshole and Cy's invading finger. It licked along the puckered folds of flesh, seeped into his very entry. Cy might believe it was she doing the blessing, but it was his own sweat that cleansed his flesh -- that slicked the path her finger followed.

"Ask me!" she ordered, her voice a harsh pant in his ear.

Hips bucking, heart hammering, Drean ground his teeth. His cock pumped into her clenching cunt, his balls slapped against her palm.

"Ask me!"

He closed his eyes, drawing in a swift breath. And on that breath was the faintest, most delicate scent of Kyra. Like the disturbance of air from a butterfly's wing. "Bless me, High Priestess!" he cried out, back bowed, pulse frantic.

"My child," she whispered, pushing her cunt into his rhythm and her finger deep into his ass.

The agony was exquisite.

His balls shrank up. Heat erupted in his body, shattering his tenuous control, obliterating all but the connection of cock to cunt, finger to anus. He threw back his head, scalding seed spurting from his driving organ...

...just as, starboard of *The Way*, the *Raptor* detonated in a single explosion. Scattering Raiven a'Tor's ship into a million fragments that shot out into space.

Leaving nothing behind but a few fading embers.

* * *

The lips on his fevered skin were cool. Soft. Kissing away the tiny beads of sweat as they broke out on his flesh. Eyes closed, he pulled in a ragged breath, chest throbbing in agony, cock straining with desire.

Kyra...

The lips moved down his torso. To his ribs, abs, navel. A faint breath feathered the fine hairs trailing to his crotch, chilling the sweat before it could trickle from his writhing body to the icy floor. He rolled his head to the side, trying to drag himself up from the darkness, trying to reach his love before she moved away.

Kyra...

The soft breath played over his thighs. Skirted his throbbing balls. Teased him. He'd need to teach her a lesson. A chuckle sounded deep in his chest, turning into silent screams as the burning agony eating away at his body erupted into new, horrendous life.

Wake up, lover...

The whispered words caressed his ear. Became a wave of heat. A wall of pain.

With another roll of his head, Raiven forced his eyes open. Looking for her. Cold, dank emptiness surrounded him. He frowned. Tried to sit up.

White pain tore through his limbs and he collapsed back to the floor, gasping. God, he felt like he was on fire!

He lay still for a long moment, willing away the torture trying to devour him, trying to remember what had happened. He was naked. Why was he naked? Where the hell was he? The tacky feel of drying liquid under his palm drew his attention and his mind finally registered what his hand felt.

Blood.

Pushing at his chest, he bit back a scream, new agony ripping through him. Something was wrong. Something --

In a flood of torrid images, it hit him. Everything that had happened since he and Kyra fled Jax. The Ferrellian Ten slave ships, the dogfight in space, Cy's entrancement, shooting Ithis, being rescued by Kyra, Drean Et's deception. Mur'dek.

Raiven's pain erupted again, but this time it had nothing to do with his injury.

"Mur'dek," he growled, soft and savage.

Biting back another scream, he staggered to his feet.

He had to find Kyra. Now.

His body, however, had other ideas.

As if a sun had exploded in his chest, pain tore through him and he dropped to his knees, in more agony than he could ever imagine. He pulled in a gasping breath, cold sweat drenching his body. He needed time. Time he didn't have.

Raising a shaking hand, he touched the burning wound that seemed to consume him. A stark image of Drean Et filled his head, a maniacal grin on his pale face, Jaxian blaster in his large hand.

Raiven's eyes fluttered closed and his throat clamped shut. *Thank God. A Jaxian blaster.*

Slumping back to the floor, he held his body still, letting the pain roll over him. Off him. For his whole life, his mixed blood had caused him problems. Nature never intended Terrans to breed with races beyond her design. It was one of the reasons Terra-Earth's population no longer existed. The Darzian blood running through his veins brought with it a world of grief. But it also brought great gifts, binding forever with Kyra the greatest of all.

Yet now, as he waited for the pain in his body to subside, for chest tissue and sinews to regenerate, internal organs to re-knit, he sent out a silent thank you to whatever force put his Terran father and Darzian mother together.

If they hadn't, he'd be dead now.

His Terran blood may be vulnerable, mortal, but his Darzian blood wasn't.

Darzians were impervious to eon-energy pulse weapons.

Like the Jaxian blaster.

It was the reason he kept that specific gun aboard his ship. If -- during a job -- one of his captured bounties managed to escape, they could not kill him with weapons from his armory.

Lifting his head, Raiven looked around the dim, grey room holding him. He had no idea where he was, but that made little difference. Nothing could keep him from tracking Kyra again. As soon as his body would let him, he would find her. Save her.

And this time, he was putting his gun to Mur'dek's ugly, scaly head and pulling the trigger himself.

Chapter 2

Kyra lay curled in a ball on the icy stone floor, hugging her knees to her chest. Trying to stay sane. The prohibita-collar cut into her flesh, its hard edge digging into her collarbones and jaw line, but she didn't notice. Nothing registered except the voices in her head.

Kill him...

Fuck him again. Harder this time...

Rip out his throat...

I want more...

I want more...

More sex...

More blood...

More...

More...

Eyes squeezed shut, Kyra let out a low whimper, ramming her fists to her head. The residual ghosts of Nalyx and Xia would not leave her alone. Since she'd been dragged kicking and screaming from Mur'dek's private chamber, their hideous appetites had assaulted her. Each grew stronger with the passing minutes, each more aggressive in their battle for her mind.

Her body throbbed and ached. Not just from the violent fucking she'd endured *and* forced from the now unconscious warlord, but from the sheer force of the *ids* in her head. Her cunt contracted and pulsed, clit a burning button of flesh craving friction. Twice so far, since being dumped in the dungeon, Xia had seized control of her body, plunging her hand between her thighs to bring about an orgasm that was at once cruel, explosive and shattering.

As if the memory gave Xia's psyche strength, the Princess of the Five Moons surged to the fore, insatiable lust heating Kyra's blood immediately. Wet hunger flooded into her pussy, and her nipples, already rock-hard tips due to the crypt-like chill of the dungeon, pinched harder, aching for contact. A wave of greedy, base desire rolled through her and Kyra moaned, shifting in her fetal position. Her knees brushed the tight nubs of flesh and a strangled gasp fell from her lips as shots of sizzling pleasure tore through her body.

"Gods of Kaius!" The cry was low, almost a hissed breath, but Kyra could not mistake the husky tones of the princess laced through her own. Once again, Xia sought sexual gratification. And there was nothing Kyra could do to stop her.

Of their own free will, her hands slipped from her head, following the curve of her shoulders as her body straightened. Dipping to the pinched tips of her nipples.

Yes...

No matter how hard she tried, Kyra could not pull her hands from her breasts. Xia worked her fingers, tracing the circumference of each areola until she gasped and writhed on the hard floor. Cold stone blocks bit at her ass and shoulder blades as she arched her back, rolling her head from side to side as each breast grew heavy with need. Her body was no longer hers to control, but she still had a tenuous line to her memories.

With an urgent whimper, Kyra's eyes fluttered closed as she pulled upon the only memory, the only image that mattered.

Raiven.

* * *

Mur'dek stood at the two columns of his private chambers, the broken chain that mere hours ago had held Kyra Issarei cutting into his clenched fists.

Across the room, against the far wall, was a life-size holo-image of the naked Chamelyon, fed live from the dungeon. Eyes burning, he watched the slim woman, his cock harder than ever.

Two and a half years he'd stalked her. Two and a half years spent dreaming of the moment he'd have her in his keeping. Two and a half years of planning his total and utter possession of her body, her soul. Her mind.

Yet now he had her, it seemed her mind was still beyond his reach.

Tucked away in the snug confines of his britches, his cock pulsed with demanding need. The light in the dungeon was dim, but the holo-image was as crisp as a clear Jyian dawn. The shape-shifter lay prone on the cold stone floor, breasts straining to the ceiling as her hands roamed her body. If he looked hard enough he could almost see the slick of his own seed still on the inside of her thighs from their last brutal copulation, and, despite the fact she'd almost ended his existence, he wanted to sink into her again.

Curling his fist harder around the broken chain, he sucked in a long breath. The room still smelt of her, a scent he would never forget. Delicate and somehow spicy. It had lingered over Trista's body two and a half years ago, filling his lungs as he held his dead wife, black thoughts of murder in his head.

There was a perverse sense of irony that his murderous rage had turned to consuming lust. Hot lust for his young Lappian bride had turned into cold lust for the very woman who'd killed her.

Unable to turn from the sight of Kyra, Mur'dek stood frozen, balls rising, breath growing short. Since she'd escaped from him the last time, in the arms of the fucking Terran bounty hunter, nothing else existed except her. Rebellions sprang up across the six systems -- pissy little futile efforts to overthrow his crushing dictatorship -- but rather than send a savage and personal message to those responsible as he would normally do, he'd let his generals deal with the situation. Kyra's recapture was paramount.

Yet here she was. In his dungeon. Whipped, beaten and fucked. But still beyond his control.

Her holo-image writhed on the floor, hands cupping breasts, eyes squeezed shut, lips parted in a silent gasp.

"I *will* possess you, shape-shifter," he snarled, balls throbbing rocks of swollen heat between his legs. "Not just that delectable body of yours, but your very soul."

Perhaps then, life could return to normality.

* * *

In her mind, the part not controlled by Xia, Kyra's hands became Raiven's hands. Her teasing, pinching fingers, Raiven's.

No one had been able to propel her to the heights of aching want as Raiven. With just a brush of his thumb, she'd become enflamed beyond thought. With just a smoldering look of his piercing grey eyes, she'd melt into a pool of liquid hunger.

Drawing her hands across her breasts, she cupped and pushed them together, trapping the pebbled peaks of her nipples between her knuckles. It felt so good. Better than good. Whenever Raiven touched her, the world stopped existing. As she drew one aching point between her slender fingers, she imagined them to be Raiven's strong, sure ones -- traversing her sensitive, burning flesh with a skilful knowledge only *he* had of her body. Her palms smoothed over the firm swell of her breasts and she shuddered under their touch.

Under *Raiven's* touch...

...her body felt alive. His palms slid down her ribcage, leaving her breasts aching and heavy from his erotic investigation. Kyra moaned, arching her body harder into his hands, wanting him to possess her completely. Warm flesh pressed her belly, traveling the flat plane with infinite care, fingertips brushing the mound of her mons before returning to her breasts.

Kyra groaned, the smallest smile on her lips as the hands -- her lover's hands -- played with the straining points of her nipples once more. *Tease*, she sent the thought out, enjoying the very accusation she made. With a practiced restraint that drove her wild, Raiven slipped his hands down her ribcage, seeming to caress each bone with idolizing fingers. A wave of wet heat rolled over her and she moaned again, wanting him to move those fingers lower -- to the center of her desire. To the damp folds of her pussy.

"Please..."

The word was barely a whisper, but it felt raw in her throat. The fingers dancing a lazy line along the angles of her hips paused for a moment, and then feathered the swollen lips of her cunt.

Kyra gasped, and faintly, very faintly, she heard Xia gasp too, but it was of no consequence. Raiven's hands, Raiven's touch was for her and her alone. His long fingers traced the sodden lips of her pussy, smearing the creamy juices from clit to anus and back to clit.

Planting her feet firmly on the cold floor, Kyra raised her hips, granting greater access. He was still teasing her, denying the sweet pleasure of penetration, but Kyra didn't mind. He'd always been a master of foreplay, sometimes coaxing her to the very pinnacle of passion and keeping her there for what seemed like eternity with just the play of his fingers on her flesh. Another moan sounded in her throat as the pressure on her clit increased, the pad of Raiven's finger almost abrasive as he rubbed the tiny button in a slow circular motion.

"Gods, Raiven!" She wanted more. She wanted release.

But he held it from her, hands skimming away from her throbbing cunt and back up to her breasts once more. She sucked in a sharp breath, the musky scent of her own pleasure filling her nose. Driving her even closer to the edge.

Slick fingers pinched at her nipples, tweaking each to a rock-hard tip of agonizing want. If only his lips could close around one. If only his tongue could lave the straining...

Abruptly, one hand abandoned her breasts. But before she could cry out in protest a finger plunged past the tight entry of her cunt, and then another.

"Yes!"

He played her like a maestro. He always did. The hand on her breast squeezed in perfect harmony with the plundering fingers in her pussy. Kyra lifted her hips higher, clenching her thighs tighter together, imprisoning the hand at her cunt. The fingers wriggled, grinding against her clit, seeking and finding the sweet spot on the wall of

her pussy with such mastered skill, Kyra's orgasm erupted before she could draw breath. Hot tension crashed over her, a boiling wall that scoured away everything but the explosive pulses wracking her body. "Gods, Raiven! Yes!" she screamed, arching and bucking into his talented hand. "Yes! Yes!"

Raiven's lips curled into a smile as his hand slowly stopped pumping into her cunt. He gazed at her with such rapt desire and love, Kyra's heart almost broke. The fading heat of her orgasm ebbing away, she smiled, letting her body sink flat against the floor, totally sated. "Thank you, my love," she murmured.

You're welcome.

Xia's smug voice sounded in Kyra's head, snapping her eyes open.

The dungeon. She was in the dungeon. With Xia and Nalyx in her head. And Raiven shot dead a lifetime ago.

Brutal reality smashed over her, destroying the warm bliss of his imagined touch. Leaving her chilled to the bone. "Gods of Kaius!" Her whispered cry was hoarse and strangled. "Get out of my head!"

It was Nalyx's residue that responded, his coarse voice a shadow on her psyche. *I like it here, shape-shifter. I like what is happening to you. To us...*

The scream that ripped from Kyra's throat was raw. Furious. She flung herself to her feet, fists clenched, chest heaving. Longing desperately to destroy an enemy untouchable by hand. "Get out of my fucking head!"

There was a moment of still clarity when both Nalyx and Xia seemed to shrink from her explosive rage. She stood, gasping. Despising herself. Hating existence.

Her life was over. After what she'd done -- what *Xia and Nalyx* had done to Mur'dek -- her life was over. She knew the warlord's lust threaded through his desire to destroy her, but there was only so much the Murukhan would take from his concubine, captive or no. This time he would have her killed. Of that she had no doubt. And when everything was said and done, she welcomed it. She could not go on like this, a puppet for depraved *ids* that should no longer control her at all. She couldn't...

Yes you can. The soft words brushed at Kyra's soul. Trista Et. Mur'dek's child bride. *Be strong. All is not lost...*

"Yes it is," Kyra sobbed, collapsing to her knees. "He's gone. Raiven is gone."

And as she shed the first tears since her capture, her heart finally broke.

* * *

Raiven lifted himself from the cold floor, the icy metal burning his fevered flesh at the contact points, his knees, elbows and palms. Even the tips of his fingers seemed to blister, sending ten lines of stripping pain up his arms.

Raiven shut his mind to it.

It was time to go.

Getting slowly to his feet, he straightened, the uncurling action bringing with it a whole new wave of torture. The inferno in his chest roared into furious new life, loud and excruciating, snapping Raiven's jaw shut and breaking his flesh out in sweat that was both chilling and scalding at once. "Don't you stop, a'Tor," he ground out through clenched teeth. "Don't you fucking stop."

Eyes fixed on the door, he began to cross the dim room. Whoever had taken him from the *Raptor* had dumped him in what seemed to be an empty cargo hold of a large ship. The low vibrations thrumming through his aching body told him hyper-flight engines were operating, which meant they were heading somewhere in a hurry. Unless that somewhere was Murukha, he wasn't interested in going.

Fresh, burning pain halted him for a moment and he pressed a hand to his chest. The contact was terrible, but not as bad as the last time he'd touched the wound. He was healing. Quickly.

Almost at the door, Raiven's bare foot brushed against something cold and hard. Something metal. Eyes narrowing, he studied what lay on the floor at his feet. His gun.

Without heed to the pain it would cause, he crouched low, retrieving his weapon from the floor. It felt good in his hand. Solid. Undeniable. An extension of his arm that brought more fear to the six systems than the Murukhan fuck, Mur'dek, could ever hope to achieve. A quick inspection told him it was charged. Ready. Whoever had

removed him from the *Raptor* knew he was alive and wanted him armed. So who was it? And why?

"Doesn't matter." Not right now. Once Kyra was safe, he'd start asking questions.

Just as he started for the door again, a dark bundle to the left of his vision caught his eye. A black jacket and trousers lay in a crumpled heap, as if thrown into the room in a hasty lob. *His* jacket and trousers. Beside them, scattered even further across the floor, were his boots.

Not only armed, it seemed, but dressed as well.

A dark grin played on his lips. He wasn't going to argue.

By the time he'd finished dressing, gun resting in its holster low on his right thigh, the scorching pain in his chest had attenuated to a tickling irritation. By the time he'd crossed to the door, it was a dull heat. Almost gone.

Raiven pulled in a slow breath.

He had no idea what was on the other side, but that made little difference. He was stepping through it. Now.

A muted gold light seeped down the corridor, casting the empty walkway in low shadows that seemed to reach out for Raiven as he moved on silent feet along it. The only sound he could hear was the hyper-flight engines, and that was more a touch of awareness anyway -- a very mild vibration traveling up his legs to tickle his balls and agitating the dull tension in his chest. So far, nothing gave him any clue as to whose ship he was aboard. As soon as he found a com-terminal, however, that would --

A soft hum down the corridor brought him to a halt. With a speed that had saved his life on more than one occasion, Raiven slipped around the closest corner, back pressed to the cushioned wall, chest flaring back into an angry throb. Gun drawn, he focused his senses on the distant sound.

Someone had just stepped onto the walkway from a side room. Someone heavy. Big. Jyian musk wafted down the passageway, heady and alluring. Immediately, Raiven's cock gave a twitch, the aphrodisiac properties of the incense affecting his

libido. An image of Kyra -- naked and ripe for his taking -- flashed into his head but he shoved it aside. It wasn't his lover walking toward him from the now closed door, so his prick could just take a break.

With each step, the approaching person told Raiven more and more information. They favored their left, their gait landing heavier with every second step. They'd trained in physical combat, the rhythm of their movement paced to a beat easily flowing into an attack if needed. They'd just finished fucking, the musky scent of sex lingering on their flesh. Their own juices and that of their partner.

Raiven's eyes narrowed.

He knew that scent.

Night after night, day after day, he'd been suffocated by it. As his body and mind were raped. Rotting flesh and sweet elixir.

Cy.

Whoever moved down the corridor had recently been fucked by the High Priestess.

And someone else... So faint he almost missed it. Another scent. This one soft, delicate.

"Kyra." The name slipped from Raiven's lips on a silent breath.

Now he knew exactly who approached him.

The only man apart from himself who would have Kyra's *and* Cy's scent on his flesh.

The former Crown Prince of Lappia. Drean Et. Deceiver.

Mouth stretching into a chilling smile that didn't reach his eyes, Raiven raised his gun.

Dead man.

"My child!"

Cy's breathless shout shattered the silence, halting Raiven's arm as he raised his gun.

Drean's footfalls stopped, and in Raiven's mind he could see the once mighty warrior, tall and imposing, turn to the scar-faced bitch pursuing him.

"There is one last thing I need you to do, my child," Cy continued, putrid pheromones rolling from her in choking waves.

"With honor, High Priestess," Drean's rumbling voice responded, submissive and reverent.

Raiven cocked an eyebrow. His life's work involved the pursuit of those not wanting to be caught. He knew deception when he heard it. Drean Et was good -- very good -- but Raiven detected something apart from adoration in the Lappian's voice all the same. Hate. Contempt.

Closing his grip tighter on his gun, Raiven tuned in deeper to Drean's presence, ignoring the dull ache still throbbing in his chest. Things were not what they seemed here.

"The warlord is completely pre-occupied with the shape-shifting whore." Cy's voice turned bitter and icy rage licked through Raiven. "But we cannot rely on that as a diversion for too long. Mur'dek *will* break her eventually. And when he does, his interest will return to the control of the six systems."

"I understand, High Priestess."

"We need to stop that from happening. *You* need to stop that from happening. I don't care how, but Mur'dek cannot lose interest in the Chamelyon. It is your duty to keep the Murukhan from discovering my actions. It *this* commands this of you."

"I understand, High Priestess. I am humbled by my god's faith."

Raiven's jaw clenched. The urge to step out, press the muzzle of his gun to Cy's forehead and blow her away smashed over him like a wave. There was no hint the Lunarian God of Renewal shrouded her at that very moment. Which made Cy vulnerable. All it would take was one shot.

His finger squeezed the trigger of his gun. His heart hammered, his chest ached.

One shot and the bitch that had imprisoned him, abused him, would be dead. One shot.

But he didn't take it.

Because he needed to get to Kyra somehow.

"The SRIPT is prepared." The High Priestess's voice floated around the corner, arrogant and commanding. "You will depart for Murukha immediately."

"I understand, High Priestess."

There was a throaty chuckle and Raiven heard the rustle of clothes, the soft rasp of flesh on flesh. "Well, perhaps not immediately." A sudden thump shook the corridor wall, as if something large was thrown against it. The metallic chink of a belt dropping to the floor preceded a sharp intake of breath Raiven knew to be the Lappian's. "Of course, High Priestess," he heard Drean reply, voice an octave higher than normal.

For a short moment, Raiven considered staying put. His cock was twitching again. The fragile, lingering scent of Kyra on Drean's flesh and his own, coupled with the potent smoke drifting in the corridor from the Jyian musk, ignited a base response in his loins that would be easy to succumb to. All he'd need would be to bring Kyra's image to his mind...

"Tell me you worship me."

Cy's panted demand was ice to his growing ardor.

With a silent snarl, Raiven stepped back, deeper into the shadows of the empty corridor. Somewhere aboard the ship, a short-range interplanetary transport vessel awaited Drean's arrival. A ship soon heading toward Murukha.

He needed to be on it.

* * *

The Murukhan soldier, Corporal Kuj, pulled at his collar. Why did it always seem to be his job to report to the lord when the news was less than wonderful?

Pausing at Mur'dek private chamber door, Kuj listened. He could hear nothing from within.

Since the shape-shifter's attempted assassination and Mur'dek's return to his chamber, no one had seen him. Three days without word or orders. It was as if the Murukhan leader didn't exist any more. At least, that was the grumbling of his soldiers.

Perhaps, Kuj considered, the news he was about to deliver would bring his lord out? Throat tight, he knocked on the massive door before him. "My Lord?"

A still second passed, followed by a dull clunk as the door swung open before him. With another tug at his collar, he entered.

The warlord stood between the two giant columns of the room, blood-stained whip in one hand, broken chain in the other, staring at the moving holo-image near the far wall.

Kuj hissed in a breath. *The shape-shifter.*

"Yes?"

Mur'dek's guttural voice snapped his body to attention, even as his prick began to do the same thing. Turning his eyes from the image of the Chamelyon stretched naked on a dungeon floor, Kuj forced down a sudden lump threatening to choke him. "A rebellion has erupted on Delekia, My Lord. The Murukhan base has been destroyed."

Mur'dek didn't move. Didn't turn from the wall.

Kuj stood. What in the name of Mirsch'r was he to do now?

On the far wall, the shape-shifter arched her back, hands skimming over a slim body free of scales and scars, finding breasts unlike any Kuj had seen before. A very low, very strained moan fell in the stretching silence and Kuj noticed his lord's butt-cheeks clench tight under the hide of his trousers. "Over three hundred soldiers have been killed, My Lord."

The whip twitched. A little. That was it.

Kuj flicked his eyes back to the screen. Slender fingers played with erect nipples the duskiest shade of pink. "The Delekian insurgents are holding hostages. Seventy of our soldiers. They demand the complete withdrawal of Murukhan forces from their planet."

Still no response. At least not to his report. "What are your orders, My Lord?"

Finally his lord moved, steely back muscles stiffening as Mur'dek's grip on his whip tightened. "Bring the shape-shifter."

Kuj frowned. "My Lord?"

Blazing yellow eyes turned to him, and Kuj shrank back, certain he'd just drawn his last breath.

"Bring the shape-shifter to my chambers, Corporal," Mur'dek stated, each word sharper than a blade. "Now."

Chapter 3

So, here she was. Again.

In Dek's chamber.

This time, however, Kyra's arms and legs were free of chains.

Mur'dek's back was to her, the warlord facing the far wall of his chamber now where a holo-image of Kyra in the dungeon writhed. Every time her eyes flicked to the screen, her heart squeezed. Not because she'd been caught pleasuring herself, but because it brought back every bittersweet memory of the moment. Every imagined caress of Raiven's hands on her body.

As the seconds ticked past, Kyra felt her nerves stretch tighter. She knew Mur'dek was taunting her. Why else the hologram? Why else the lack of chains? Xia and Nalyx hung in the back of her mind, assessing the situation. Kyra could feel Xia's hot and insatiable lust stirring, charged into life by the erotic image, could sense Nalyx's psychotic fervor burning for release at the sight of her own fingers delving between her sweat-slicked thighs, but neither took charge. Like her, they didn't know what to make of Mur'dek's actions. The warlord thrived on dominance, yet here she was, unshackled, unguarded.

Her heart gave a lurching thud. She didn't like it. And neither did the marauding *ids*.

"That's twice you've tried to kill me while we've been fucking, shape-shifter." The statement came at her from over Mur'dek's shoulder, coarse and guttural. "I'm beginning to think you don't like me."

Kyra curled her lip. "However did you get that idea?"

Mur'dek chuckled, trailing the leather length of his whip through his claws as he turned to face her. "Do you like the entertainment? It's one of my favorite programs."

Meeting the yellow blaze of his stare, Kyra narrowed her own, ignoring her writhing, arching holo-image behind him. "No chains today, Dek? You're not going soft on me, are you?"

"Not at all." He gave a slight nod, so small Kyra could have missed it if she wasn't watching him closely. "Just thought we'd try something different today."

With a dull clunk, the door behind her swung open, and Kyra turned to see a fully armed Murukhan soldier enter the room, pushing a fully loaded Jaxian fuck-table.

Kyra's blood turned to ice. *Gods, no!*

"Different..." Mur'dek's low voice reverberated with smug glee, "...but entertaining."

With Xia's cries of greedy lust in her head, Kyra burst into a sprint. Straight at the gaping Murukhan grunt.

Planting her palms square in the middle of the fuck-table, she pushed off the floor, arcing through the air and over the head of the soldier.

"Stop her!" screamed Mur'dek.

There was a loud *crack*, and blistering pain ripped along her right arm, as the warlord's long whip made contact.

Holy fuck!

Kyra had no idea whose *id* screamed in her head. Coming down hard, she threw herself into a roll, hoping to avoid the biting lash of Mur'dek's whip again before it could wrap around her wrist or thigh. Or waist.

"Corporal!"

Springing to her feet, Kyra bolted, the cool air chilling her flushed flesh as she ran for the door. The closing door.

"Corporal Kuj! Stun her! Stun her!"

Mur'dek's shout shook the walls. Behind her, Kyra heard the Murukhan soldier draw his weapon.

Faster! For Trayza's sake, faster!

And then a long strip of leather bit into her hip, and she went down.

The soldier was on her before she could move, pulse blaster rammed into the back of her neck as one hand snared a fistful of her hair. "Get up!"

Hot anger -- hers and Nalyx's -- tore through her. "How can I if you're sitting on me, you stupid fuck!"

Kuj's bony ass jerked off the base of her spine two seconds before Mur'dek's whip wrapped around her left ankle and she was yanked across the floor.

No! Gods of Kaius, no!

Cruel claws tore into her skin. Mur'dek grabbed at the prohibita-collar around her neck and jerked her off the floor. Burning yellow eyes bored into hers. "You still owe me a scream, shifter." Ignoring her wild thrashing about, he shot a look at Kuj. "Get the table ready."

"Let me go!" Kyra ground out, the collar cutting deeper into her throat with every futile flail of her feet.

Mur'dek's responding chuckle made her stomach churn. Jerking her into the hard wall of his torso, he pressed his face to her cheek. "I'm *never* letting you go, Kyra," he rasped into her ear, tongue flicking into the shallow cavity. "You are mine now. Forever."

Dread rushed at her.

Inside her head, Nalyx gibbered, the zealot's residue so incensed he seemed to have forgotten how to control her. Xia, however, had no such problems. Heat pooling between her thighs, Kyra's body reacted, fed by the lust leeches into her psyche from Xia's. When Mur'dek threw her onto the fuck-table, she cried out, the sound undeniably excited.

Hunger flared in the warlord's eyes and he grabbed at her ankle, pinning it to the stirrup with just one clawed hand. "Mine," he murmured, pushing the stirrup wide, spreading her legs further apart. That greedy yellow gaze drilled into the damp slit of her exposed pussy. "Forever."

Xia's lust roared through Kyra, stronger than ever. A fevered wave of the princess's memories crashed over her, dark and deliberate. Xia naked and bound to a

different Jaxian fuck-table, cunt dripping in eager anticipation as an equally naked man approached her, lean body hard with steely muscles, a tattoo of a mysterious black bird in flight on his left biceps...

"NO!" Kyra screamed, the hideous image of Raiven and the princess spearing torturous agony into her heart. "*Gods of Kaius! NO!*"

Mur'dek's laugh rose above her cries. As did Xia's taunting voice. *Stop fighting it, Chamelyon. You know you want it as much as I do.*

Another memory invaded her head, whipped into a fever by Xia's cruel hunger. Raiven, on his knees before the naked princess, his strong hands cupping the smooth curve of her inner thighs, his tongue lapping the glistening pink lips of her --

Kyra bucked, heartache driving her closer to edge. "*Get out of my fucking head!*"

Behind her, Kuj shoved her back down to the table, struggling to fasten her wrists to the table.

Yes! Xia crowed.

"No!" Kyra screamed back, arching and writhing on the table, desperate to be free. *Gods, no...*

Mur'dek's claws scored her flesh as he gripped her thighs, shoving her legs further apart. He stepped deeper into the V he'd created. "Shall we set the mood a little more, shape-shifter?" Slitted eyes blazed with triumph as, behind him, the holo-image of Kyra masturbating on the dungeon floor flicked once, and then disappeared. Replaced immediately by one of Raiven. Dead on the *Raptor's* floor.

Kyra's heart stopped.

Then burst into ice-cold, savage rage. At Mur'dek. At the unwanted *ids* in her head. At Xia's consuming lust and hateful memories. But most of all, at the Lappian Crown Prince, Drean Et.

Drean Et had killed her lover. It was time for the deceiving fuck to die.

"You see, Kyra?" Mur'dek smirked. "A'Tor isn't going to save you this time." One blunt claw dragged across her throbbing clit, scratched at the lips of her cunt. "We left him dead on the floor of his ship, remember."

Mind devoid of anything except still, silent hate, Kyra glared up at the grinning warlord. "I don't need to be saved, Dek." She twisted her wrists, sinking her nails into the soft flesh of Kuj's arms. "You do."

With a sudden thrust, she flung her legs up over her torso, locked her thighs around the soldier's neck and then whip-lashed straight again, hurling him through the air above her. And down onto the still smirking Mur'dek, knocking him to the floor.

Yanking her wrists free of the partly closed shackles, Kyra leapt to her feet. Just as both Mur'dek and Kuj leapt to theirs.

From the corner of her eye, Kyra saw Kuj pull his blaster. There was no time to think. With a violent flip, she threw herself over their heads, bare feet planting on the floor immediately behind Mur'dek.

Snatching out, she whipped her arms around the Murukhan warlord's head and hips and smashed him back. Into her body. Harsh armor sliced at her flesh, but she ignored it. Because right at that very second, Kuj did exactly what she hoped he would. Weapon drawn, he turned toward her and fired.

Straight into Mur'dek's chest.

There was a crack. The room filled with blinding white light. And the warlord dropped to the floor.

Unauthorized Detonation Detected. Lock-Down Commencing. Unauthorized Detonation Detected. Lock-Down Commencing.

Alarms started screaming, a claxon screech that made Kyra's ears ache. She jerked around, watching the large solid door begin to swing shut. "Shit!"

Turning back to the gaping, clearly horrified Kuj, Kyra leapt across Mur'dek's body toward him. "Thanks," she said, yanking the blaster from the stunned soldier's loose grip and smashing the butt up under his chin, sending him crashing to the floor.

Unauthorized Detonation Detected. Lock-Down Commencing. Unauthorized Detonation Detected. Lock-Down Commencing.

For a second she hesitated. Now was her chance to rid the six systems of Mur'dek's brutality. All she needed to do was change the setting on Kuj's gun and --

Unauthorized Detonation Detected. Lock-Down Commencing. Ten, Nine...

"Shit!" She turned and bolted, Kuj's gun in hand. If she didn't slip through the massive door before it closed she may as well kiss her ass goodbye.

Eight, Seven...

No, no, no! Xia cried, denied lust ricocheting through Kyra's body in search of release.

"Deal with it, Princess," Kyra snarled, eyes fixed on the rapidly shrinking gap between door and jamb. Fuck, she wasn't going to make it.

Yes, you fucking are.

A surge of adrenaline raced through her.

Six, Five...

Bare feet slapping against the cold marble floor, she sprinted faster.

Four...

The gap was closing... closing... closing.

Hurry, Kyra! Faster, faster!

Three...

Closing.

Through the diminishing gap, Kyra spied a soldier, charging for the door from the other side, weapon pointed straight at her. *Shit!* She raised Kuj's gun, aimed and fired.

The iridescent bolt of proton-energy sliced through the decreasing gap and hit the soldier square in the chest, stunning him instantly.

Two...

Sucking in a charred-flesh tasting breath, Kyra flung herself at the thin opening.

One...

And through it.

Yes!

She spun around, raising Kuj's gun to fix the still body of Mur'dek in her sights.

Just as the door slammed shut.

"Shit!"

Breath ragged, she stared at the closed door for a still second. Then, scooping up the disintegrated soldier's weapon, blood roaring in her ears, she turned and sprinted down the corridor. Deeper into Mur'dek's fortress.

* * *

The SRIPT's internal lights hummed into life as Drean ducked through the hatch, casting the compact ship into muted shadows. He headed toward the cockpit, head barely missing the ship's low ceiling. If he'd been any taller, he'd be forced to walk the short distance in a crouch.

Entering the cockpit, he removed the Jaxian blaster from his shoulder and dropped it into the empty co-pilot seat before strapping himself into the flight chair. The flight to Murukha would take approximately forty-eight hours. Long enough for him to consider his next move.

Seek out Breath.

The words of Ithis were so ingrained in his soul he no longer had to think about them. But thinking about them was exactly what he needed to do. Cy had betrayed him, deceived him, but did that mean his god had too? And if so, what did that now mean for him?

Seek out Blood.

Whose blood? His own? Cy's? Mur'dek's?

The blood spilt from Raiven a'Tor's veins?

Pushing the confusion from his mind, Drean centered his being. Getting off *The Way*, putting as much distance as possible between him and Cy, was the first priority. Once he was in hyper-flight he could turn his mind to the spir --

The muzzle of a gun pressed to the back of his head cut the thought dead.

"Give me an excuse --" Raiven a'Tor's deep voice sounded colder than death, "-- any excuse, to blow you to the fucking heavens."

Drean froze. "A'Tor."

"Where's my ship?"

"I detonated it. Cy needed to believe your body destroyed."

There was a beat of cold silence as a'Tor digested this information. Just a beat, but Drean wondered if it was the last beat of his life. *Ithis, forgive me...*

The lethal Terran gun pushed harder into the back of Drean's head. "You have exactly ten seconds to get this SRIPT out of the bay and into deep space, or I'll do it for you." A pause. "And it won't be because I'm feeling friendly."

Reaching forward -- sure not to make any move a'Tor might misconstrue -- Drean activated the engines. The small craft vibrated into life, and with but a second to spare, shot into space, leaving *The Way* behind.

Making a minor propulsion correction, Drean navigated the ship toward the Murukhan system, back ramrod straight. A'Tor's gun still dug into his skull, and something about the silent presence of the Terran told him that wasn't about to change any time soon. "How are you alive?"

"You can't shoot for shit."

The words were low. Not inviting discussion.

Drean frowned, wanting to turn. Wanting to see a'Tor's chest wound with his own eyes. The wound that should have killed him but didn't. "Yes I can." He risked a slight tilt of his head. "How are you alive?"

"Why didn't you kill me?"

A'Tor's blunt question caught Drean off guard. "I don't know --"

"Cut the bullshit, Lappian." The muzzle against his head didn't move. "I don't have time for it. I know it was you who took me from my ship and left my gun and clothes in the cargo hold. Why?"

Drean pulled in a slow breath, staring at the blurred lines of stars through the cockpit's screen. He could play the situation two ways. Try and bluff his way out, or tell a'Tor the truth. Either could see him dead. "My order to kill you came from someone who deceived me. That deception changed my point of view."

"About what?"

A tight pressure seemed to fold itself around Drean's chest. "Everything."

"You're not what you want Cy to believe."

"True."

"So what are you?"

Rebirth in Blood... Drean clenched his jaw. "What are *you*?"

For a still moment, nothing. Then, with silent speed, a'Tor spun the flight chair around until it faced him, ramming the famous Terran gun into the middle of Drean's forehead. Grey eyes, colder than ice, drilled into his. "Kyra's one and only." The expressionless face somehow grew colder. "Understand?"

A sharp pain stabbed at Drean's being. He understood. Clearly. Raiven a'Tor knew *exactly* what he -- Drean -- felt for Kyra. Of the love that made Drean's heart heavy. How he answered a'Tor's question would decide whether he lived... or died. "I understand."

The gun left his forehead. Just. "Good." Piercing grey eyes studied him for a long second, and then a'Tor holstered his weapon. "Keep it that way."

"How are you alive?" Drean asked for the third time. He needed to know. The rumors that followed the bounty hunter across the six systems had a'Tor something akin to Death.

Rebirth in Blood...

The icy stare didn't flicker. "If you live through the next forty-eight hours, I'll tell you."

"If I live?" A cold weight settled on Drean's chest. "Do you mean to kill me?"

A'Tor's eyes narrowed. Slightly. "That depends. Are you going to do anything stupid?"

There was no need for the bounty hunter to elaborate. Drean's judgment may have once been clouded, but cold clarity now filled him. He was a warrior of the Ri Order, once the mightiest soldier of the Lappian Guard, a trained killer. But if he were to try to go against Raiven a'Tor again, he'd lose.

The battle for Kyra was over. For the moment.

"No," Drean answered, risking death to rise to his feet, "I will not."

Still grey eyes studied him. Then, lips curling into a humorless smile, a'Tor turned and walked from the cockpit without so much as a backward glance. "Good. Tell me when we're in Murukhan space."

* * *

Turning his back on Drean was one of the hardest things Raiven had ever done. Not because he feared being shot -- the massive Lappian was once a warrior of the Ri Order. Nothing could break the bonded honor of their word. No, what surged through Raiven's blood as he walked from the SRIPT's confining cockpit was not fear for *his* life, but for Drean Et's.

Cold rage roared in his ears.

Because of the pale-skinned bastard, Kyra was in Mur'dek's hands. Drean deserved to feel the icy embrace of death for no other reason than that. But Raiven sensed a regret reaching all the way to the soul in the Lappian that hadn't been there the last time they met. Deep and bitter, it filled Drean's every word with pain. If there was something Raiven understood more than pain, it was regret. He didn't trust the man, not by a long shot, but he empathized with him.

Raiven was not a spiritual man, but he remembered all too well the look of fevered worship in Drean's eyes as he'd looked upon Cy, seconds after shooting him in the chest. To lose one's love was to lose one's reason for living. But to lose one's spiritual focus...

For the moment, the crown prince would live.

Almost stalking down the passageway, Raiven stepped into the one and only crew quarters of the small ship, waving his hand over the door mechanism to close it. Drean would not let anyone know of his unexpected passenger. It would be counter-productive. What Raiven needed now was for the next forty-eight hours to pass quickly. His body was still recovering. Forty-eight hours of meditation would help it heal. Completely.

Completely?

A dark scowl fell across Raiven's face. Until he had Kyra in his arms, until he knew she was safe, being completely healed was unattainable.

Dropping to the narrow bunk, Raiven pulled a slow breath, wincing at the sharp stab of hot pain in his chest. What was going through his lover's mind at that very moment? She would think him dead. How was she dealing with that?

Eyes closed, the tension flowing from his body, he drew an image of Kyra into his mind. Mischievous black gaze, full, kissable lips, smooth limbs. He traced the line of her jaw with his mind's eye, following its intoxicating path down her neck, across her shoulder, down her arm to the swell of her breast...

God, he wanted to hold her. To tell her he was safe. Alive. To *show* her in the most elemental way known. Skin on skin. Warm flesh to warm flesh.

The image of Kyra smiled at him, and his cock responded.

Lying back on the hard bunk mattress, Raiven let his hand move to the stiffening organ. It pushed against the leather of his trousers, straining for Kyra's touch. A groan sounded low in his throat as his fingers pressed against the hard length. Even through the leather he could feel the heat in his cock. Tension returned to his body -- fast and undeniable. He needed to meditate, to recuperate, but there wasn't a hope in hell of that happening until he purged his body of its hunger. Until he released it of its need.

Mouth dry, throat tight, he spoke a single word. "Lock."

A soft click followed as the door to the SRIPT's quarters locked.

Kyra's lips curled into a playful grin, as if her memory knew what he planned to do, and was more than happy about it. The second he unclasped his belt and fly, Raiven's rigid cock sprang free. The cold artificial air wrapped around it, replaced immediately by warm fingers as he folded his hand around the throbbing length. Even that simple contact sent licks of fire into his balls and gut. The healing wound of his chest seemed to pulse as hot blood roared through his veins, scouring away the physical pain of his injury. Replacing it with the emotional pain of separation and the even deeper pain of desire. He ached. For release. For Kyra. With a sharp motion, he pumped his cock. Once. Twice.

Liquid heat rushed to his loins, scalding and pure.

He caught the groan in his chest before it could slip from his lips, redirecting the carnal energy to his hand. Fingers that knew how to handle a gun now handled a weapon mastered only by Kyra.

In a grip both soft yet constricting, he drew his hand up and down, from the bulbous swell of his cock-head down to the hot sac of his swollen balls. Again. A small bead of pre-cum squeezed from his cock's tip and he caught it with the pad of his thumb, slicking it over his flesh. Its slightly tacky texture added a new sensation that drove Raiven mad. All too easily he could remember Kyra doing the exact same thing, painting his rigid cock with each pearl drop she coaxed free, tasting her artistry with a tongue that felt like velvet on his straining length.

The memory hit him hard. His balls rose up, seeking attention. He gave it, shoving his other hand past the V of his fly to cup the heavy sac in a hold that was almost savage.

Another groan sounded in his chest, raw and hoarse. He didn't suppress it.

Wherever Kyra was, she would hear it. Would know his heart beat. Would feel his love and hunger for her. He *believed* that. He had to. The Darzian blood in his veins hadn't just saved his life, it had joined them together forever. A link that could never be broken. Once, her words had saved him, had pulled him to the surface during the nightmare that was Cy's sexual enslavement. Now he prayed he could do the same. Wherever she was, whoever held her, his desire would be her beacon across the cosmos. "God, Kyra..." His voice filled the silent room.

The fire in his cock began to spread. Down his thighs. Up his spine.

His heart hammered, in perfect rhythm with his pumping fist. With each fierce stroke his cock grew longer, harder, becoming a rod of steel that scalded his palm with its furious energy. His mind's eye drew the image of Kyra closer. He could almost feel her breath on his neck, his jaw. Gentle fingers joined his around his aching hard-on. Encouraged him. Increased the building pace. Molten lava surged into his balls, and for a moment he was rendered breathless, only to have the air punched from his lungs as

that liquid heat contracted into an explosive force, erupting from his cock in a powerful spurt of cum. "Ah, holy fuck!"

His cry shook the room. In a distant part of his mind, he wondered if Drean heard him.

Cum continued to pump from his cock, coating his driving fist, his squeezing fingers. He drew a ragged breath, nostrils flaring at the musky scent of his released pleasure. Soon that scent would be mingled with the delicate fragrance of Kyra's. When she was safe in his arms instead of Mur'dek's.

The thought, both dark and wonderful, sent the last surge of cum through his cock. Gasping, hands dropping to the mattress, Raiven focused on the image of Kyra in his mind. Drew every fibre of his soul to it. "Hold on, lover," he whispered. "I'm coming."

Chapter 4

"What do you mean she's not on the planet?"

Mur'dek glared at the general standing -- cowering -- before him, the throbbing agony in his chest immediately forgotten. Beside him stood his private physician, trying in vain to run a med-detronal scanner across the raw expanse of weltd scales that ate up his upper torso.

General Ril blinked rapidly, looking less a decorated warmonger and more a blubbering hatchling. Mur'dek could smell the fear oozing from between the general's mottled scales. Fear and piss. He snarled. First the incompetent Kuj stuns him with a fucking shot meant for Kyra, now one of his own generals stood before him with piss running down his leg! Since when had his men become fucking shit-scared neonates?

Since you became obsessed with the --

"Where the fuck is she?" he shouted, cutting his own answer short.

"Please, My Lord," his doctor chided. "You need to --"

"She... she took a Star-Skimmer," the general almost yelled back, the stench of piss growing more ripe with each word.

Mur'dek pushed himself from the edge of the bed, ignoring the restraining hand his doctor tried to wrap around his arm. "Tell me how she got away from my fortress, General Ril. Tell me how incompetent my men are that a *fucking* slip of a woman can get out of my *fucking* fortress and off the *fucking* planet in one of my *own fucking ships*!"

The general stood, quivering.

"Tell me!"

"Lord Mur'dek," his doctor cut in, fingers curling around his biceps. "You shouldn't be --"

Mur'dek spun around, sank his claws into the annoying medico's throat and tore out his trachea.

"Now," he growled, turning back to the cowering general as the doctor fell to the infirmary floor in a blood-spurting heap. "Tell me how the Chamelyon got away... *General*." He let the veiled threat hang in the air for a moment, his teeth bared in a cold grin. "And if you don't want to end up like the good doctor here, I suggest you also tell me *where* she's gone. Do you understand?"

General Ril nodded, face scales paling.

"Good," Mur'dek snarled, shoving the doctor's dripping trachea against Ril's chest. "Let's start with where she is."

Ril stared at him, yellow eyes dilated. "We've tracked her to Lappia, My Lord."

"Lappia?"

"Yes, My Lord. A direct route. Straight through the Delekian Vortex."

For a moment Mur'dek was too stunned to speak. "The Delekian Vortex? And she survived?"

"The energy reading on the stolen skimmer indicates she did."

Mur'dek narrowed his eyes. Only madmen attempted to navigate the dangerous sub-space eddy. He knew the Chamelyon's mind was unhinged, but was she really that insane? "I want her returned, General Ril."

"It will take two weeks to circumnavigate --"

"It will take less than a day through the vortex, General."

Ril hissed, eyes wide with shock. "But Lord Mur'dek!" he protested, the doctor's bloody trachea dropping to his feet. "The chance of surviving --"

"Is zero if you question my orders again." Mur'dek took a step closer to his subordinate, drilling him with a furious glare. "Send a Sky-Destroyer after the shape-shifter immediately, General Ril. I want her back in my private chamber before the suns sink tomorrow."

The air burning with the stench of urine, General Ril snapped to attention. "Yes, My Lord."

Throwing a disgruntled look at the dead physician on the infirmary floor, Mur'dek curled his lip. "And have *Private* Kuj clean up this mess."

* * *

"A'Tor, I think you better get up here." Drean's voice sounded over the SRIPT's com-link, shattering the thick silence surrounding Raiven like a shroud. With the exception of a brief interchange some hours back -- an argument about how to enter Mur'dek's fortress that had ended with Raiven's hand going to his gun -- the Lappian had left him alone for the duration of the trip, letting him recuperate in solitude. The tone of his voice now, however, set Raiven's senses on alert. Something was wrong. "I've intercepted an out-going message on a Murukhan military frequency." There was a silent beat, and then, "It's about Kyra."

Rising from his cross-legged position in a single, fluid move, Raiven exited the small room, a faint throb in his chest the only reminder that three days ago he'd been shot by the very man waiting for him in the cockpit. Ducking through the hatch, he shot Drean a dark look. "What is it?"

The Lappian's pale green eyes shone with agitation and the hard muscles of his shoulders bunched under almost white skin as he turned back to the control panel and punched a button on the deck. "Listen."

"...through the Delekian Vortex. Lord Mur'dek has commanded the return of the shape-shifter within twenty-four clicks. Failure will result in the execution of every crewmember. The last registered energy reading on the stolen skimmer was located on the dark side of Lap..."

Drean flicked his gaze to Raiven. "That's all I could capture."

Raiven's chest ignited in a surge of pain. *Fuck! So close, so fucking close.* Pulling in a silent breath, he stared out at the black space flying past the SRIPT. Less than an hour from Murukha. He could practically taste Kyra's lips on his, could feel her warmth seep into his bones...

"Kyra's escaped, a'Tor," Drean stated, his deep voice rising with an excitement Raiven couldn't miss. "She's escaped and fled to Lappia. My home." Excitement gave way to triumph. "My home, a'Tor."

Raiven's eyes narrowed. Whatever was going on in Drean Et's head, it was going to get the Lappian in a lot of trouble. Jaw clenched, he turned to Drean. "I'll energize you directly into Mur'dek's fortress and then take the SRIPT through the vor --"

With a sudden snarl, Drean leapt to his feet, glaring down at Raiven with blazing green eyes. "I think you missed the point here, Terran." Large fists bunched as Drean took a step forward. "*Your* lover has fled to *my* home world. Not yours."

Motionless, Raiven met the Lappian's triumphant stare. "And? Your point being?"

"My point," Drean snarled, a smug smile on his lips, "is she went looking for me." The smile stretched wider. "*Me*."

Raiven cocked an eyebrow. "The man who killed her lover? Her life-mate? I wonder why that is?" He gave Drean his own smile. Cold and utterly calm. "If I were you I'd be staying as far from Lappia as the six systems will allow. You don't want to deal with Kyra when she's pissed. Trust me." He placed his hand on the butt of his gun. "Now sit down, shut up and get us as close to Murukha as you can so I can energize your ass down to the surface."

For a still moment, Drean didn't move. His massive chest heaved with each breath he took, his eyes boring into Raiven's with fury and jealousy.

"She's not yours, Lappian," Raiven growled, holding the urge to shoot the man there and then in check. Just. "She never will be."

Green eyes paler than Jyian mist held his, pained, angry, determined, before, without a word, Drean returned to the flight chair. Raiven suppressed a sigh. The Lappian was not stupid. Warriors of the Ri Order never were. But he was stubborn. It wasn't over yet.

"We'll reach Murukha in less than sixty," Drean's voice rumbled.

"Good." Raiven removed his hand from his gun. "Lord Mur'dek is expecting you, Crown Prince. I'll energize you directly to the greeting chamber." He paused. "I know what he did to your *fei'lia*, Drean. I know what he did to your people. All I ask is you don't kill him."

The Lappian reached forward, adjusting the propulsion engines. "All I ask is you find her."

Raiven's smile turned genuine for the first time since his resurrection. "Agreed."

* * *

The voices wouldn't leave her alone.

Moving through the abandoned royal residence, Kyra bit back a scream, the sound of Nalyx and Xia scrambling for control in her mind like a million Palon fire-wasps attacking their single prey.

Only rage kept her focused. Rage and the consuming thirst for blood.

Once she had Drean Et in her hands, once she tore the lying, deceiving bastard's throat to shreds, then she would let the *ids* have their way.

Until then...

Until then, nothing else mattered.

Nothing.

* * *

"Drean Et." Mur'dek's smirk was smug. Condescending. "Crown Prince of a subjugated conquered race. My once own cherished Brother-In-Marriage. Welcome to my humble home."

Drean stood in the center of Mur'dek's opulent private chamber, watched by several of the warlord's generals. Red hate roared through his veins. Behind him, two large columns stretched from floor to ceiling, chains hanging limp from each. Everything his eyes touched pulled memories of his sister to his mind. Trista had once been here, an imprisoned bride raped in her childhood, robbed of her life. He turned his stare to the Murukhan warlord, picturing the *ruk'da's* scaly throat beneath his hands. "My Lord." He bowed, bitter bile filling his mouth on the title. "I bring greetings from the High Priestess Cy, the Light of Ithis."

Mur'dek gave a short snort, trailing the plaited ends of a long whip through claws that seemed stained with old blood. "There is no need for artifice here, Lappian. I am fully aware of your witch's spiritual inclination."

Drean's stomach churned, but he held his deception. "Then the Light of Ithis sends her greetings, as well."

"You know, I never expected a Lappian royal brat to end up a walking cock for a Lunarian god-botherer. I must check on the royal offspring of all the other planets I've conquered." Mur'dek's yellow eyes gleamed with malicious glee. "Or are you just a weak-willed whelp who needs a cunt to survive?"

Drean's blood turned to rivers of scalding rage. He ground his teeth, control threatening to desert him. "The chains are empty, My Lord." He forced humble submission to his voice, flicking a surreptitious glance at the generals off to the side. Not one wore an expression other than guarded unease. "I hope, from my heart and the heart of my Light, that all is well with your latest concubine. Is the shape-shifter to your satisfaction?"

Before Drean could move, Mur'dek's whip lashed around his neck and he was yanked forward, the warlord's pointed face ramming against his nose. "*You do not speak of her!*" A snarling hiss tearing from his throat, Mur'dek shoved Drean away. "Get out. Everyone." The watching generals shuffled, uncomfortable looks passing amongst them. Mur'dek spun around, spittle flying from his lips, yellow eyes bulging. "*Everyone get the fuck out now!*"

Disgust and impatience darkened the wary faces of his generals as they filed from the room and Drean suppressed a cold smile.

He'd found it. The weapon he needed to bring down the Murukhan piece of filth. And Cy with him.

Head bowed, throat a burning strip of angry flesh, he watched Mur'dek storm across the large room. "I'll take my leave, My Lord."

The warlord didn't respond. Instead, he stalked across the room, whip lashing behind him like an angry snake. A slight flicker of the lights made Drean blink, and suddenly a holo-image of Kyra appeared before the far wall. A naked Kyra. Writhing in pleasure on what looked like a cold stone floor. Drean's heart stilled as he stared at the intoxicating vision.

"I will get you back, shape-shifter."

Mur'dek's guttural murmur floated back to Drean across the room, dragging his hungry gaze from Kyra to the warlord's tense back.

"You can't escape me. I will get you back..."

Drean finally let his small smile slip to the surface. A weapon indeed.

He backed from the luxurious chamber, the disgruntled mutters of generals filling his head, striding through corridors until he reached a small room in the far wing of the fortress. Dark and bare, it appeared unused. Forgotten. The perfect base.

Pulling a sub-space com from his satchel, Drean sent an encrypted missive through the blackness of space. Short, blunt, but so very important. *High Priestess. Come immediately. It is time.*

* * *

Raiven yanked the SRIPT out of hyper-flight, hot pain ricocheting through his body as the flight seat's harness snapped against his chest. The small ship shuddered as its propulsion engines readjusted to still space. The Delekian Vortex was never kind, no matter what size the craft traversing it. To fling a small SRIPT-class through its existence-folding force was to defy the gods.

Dark memories rushed at Raiven at the thought of vengeful deities, memories of Ithis raping his mind as Cy raped his body.

He curled his lip in a silent snarl and gripped the flight yoke harder. *Fuck the gods.*

Throwing the SRIPT into a sharp bank, he activated the energy scanner.

Lappian space began at the ass of the vortex. He had no idea why Kyra had headed here but his gut told him she was on the cold side of the planet. If she was, as he suspected, out for Drean Et's blood, the royal residence would be her target. Whether she believed the crown prince there or not, she would seek the source of his life. *In tracking a prey, begin with their roots.* It was a lesson he'd taught her before Mur'dek turned his forces to finding them. It also explained why she'd come here after escaping the warlord.

Pelithium Signature Detected. Six Metrons.

Muscles wound to the snapping point, Raiven shot a look at the energy scanner's screen. A Murukhan skimmer. His heart thumped a savage beat in his still tender chest and he clenched his jaw. He'd either just located Kyra...

... or a Murukhan ship that beat him to her.

* * *

Jagged chunks of Lappian marble littered the chilly black slate floor, cutting into the soft arches of Kyra's bare feet as she stalked along the abandoned corridor. Faded portraits of the once mighty Et family, silent and still, watched her as she went. Her Royal Highness, Petalia Et, Man-At-Arms Takian, a young and innocent Trista... Drean.

A chill shot up Kyra's spine as she stared at Drean Et's portrait, pinching her nipples into tight peaks of icy rage.

"Where are you?" Her question was a low growl of hate.

Go back! Nalyx hissed in her head. *Go back to Murukha and finish the blasphemous grutt-fucker!*

Go back now! Xia demanded. *The grutt-fucker's cock awaits you.*

Kyra shoved away the princess's greedy lust. "Not until I find Drean Et."

My brother, Trista's soft, sad *id* sighed in her head. *My ja'kurr.*

Kyra glared up at the massive portrait of the crown prince, the Murukhan blaster in her hand trained on Drean's smiling face. "Raiven's murderer."

Like soft fingers of mist, the young Lappian girl's residual psyche tried to reach Kyra's soul. *No. You don't under --*

Kyra fired, disintegrating the painting and most of the wall behind it.

She was done listening to the residual *ids* in her mind. The old Kyra was as dead as her heart.

"You know, I think that's taking art criticism to a whole new level."

Spinning around, Kyra leveled the blaster on the man in black leather standing behind her. The man with a mysterious black bird tattooed on his hard left biceps.

Kyra's heart stopped. *Raiven?*

He's dead, shape-shifter, Xia snarled. You've finally gone insane.

The man with the shaggy black hair and piercing grey eyes cocked one dark eyebrow. "Am I going to get a hello?"

The blaster unwavering, Kyra stared into his face. "Raiven?"

Don't be so fucking stupid! Xia screeched, contempt cutting her words. The Terran's dead, shape-shifter! Dead! You've fucking flipped out. You're seeing things!

Intense grey eyes met hers and a small grin played over lips Kyra knew better than her own.

"You didn't think a little blaster shot would get rid of me, did you?"

He's dead! Nalyx roared. Ithis's own disciple shot him!

Lowering her weapon -- slightly -- Kyra frowned. "Is it really you?" She shook her head. "How can that be?"

Oh, for Trayza's sake! Kyra's own voice snarled in her head. Exasperated. Elated. Who cares how? It's Raiven! Kiss him!

So she did.

In three steps, she threw herself into his body, crushing his mouth with hers as she tangled her fingers in the silken black strands of his hair. And the second their lips touched, Xia and Nalyx fell silent. "Oh, gods, Raiven," she cried, pulling away for a torturous moment. Gazing deep into his eyes. "That's twice I've thought you dead. Don't *ever* do that to me again."

Raiven gave her a very soft smile. "If you insist." His hands smoothed up and down the line of her back under the loose Murukhan vest, a languid path that set her flesh on fire and made her pussy flutter. "Now let's get off this cold hunk of rock. We have some catching up to do."

* * *

Before the energized molecules in their bodies finished rejoining, Kyra's lips pressed to Raiven's, her hands knotting in the hair at his nape with fierce force.

As the stinging pain of reenergizing subsided to a tingle in his chest, Kyra's heat seeped into his body. Curled around his stiffening cock like soft fingers.

"Kyra," he said reluctantly, tasting her on every breath he pulled. "I need to get the SRIPT into hyper-flight." He touched the prohibita-collar locked around her neck. "And we need to get this off."

Her hips moved over his, her mons rubbing the growing length of his erection. "There are too many memories in my head, Raiven a'Tor." The whispered words caressed his mouth. "I need you to erase them." Nails scored his neck as her hands dragged from his head to the collar of his jacket, yanking it from his shoulders with a swift tug. "Silence them."

He looked down at her, watching the final seconds of reenergization. Tiny pinpricks of coloured lights dance over her skin. The first time he'd met her he had no idea she was a shape-shifter. The second time she'd been trapped in another form, released only for the duration of her orgasm. It was his love for her that released them both from a cold and tortured existence. Now here she was. Trapped again. But this time by the residual psyches who wouldn't leave her alone.

And he wanted nothing more than to help set her free.

One kiss. Just one. And then he'd get the ship moving.

Taking her mouth with his, he plunged his tongue past her lips, meeting hers in glorious battle. Their teeth clicked together as he invaded the wet cavity, plundering and seeking more.

Kyra groaned, pushing her pussy harder against his cock. "Please, Raiven. I ache so much."

Fire shot through him, from his heavy balls to his thumping heart. To hell with hyper-flight. His lover was back in his arms. Exactly where she should be.

Grabbing her ass, he jerked her bodily from the floor, never letting their lips separate as he yanked her crotch against his now turgid cock. Her legs wrapped around his hips, bare heels pressing into the cheeks of his ass, hot cunt grinding into his hungry sex.

God! He pulled in a savage breath. With just one touch he was ready to explode.

The loose Palon leather of the Murukhan uniform she wore did nothing to hide the damp desire spreading between her thighs. A desire Raiven knew was for him and him alone. Almost stumbling from the energizer pad, he covered the short distance to the door in two steps, agitated impatience flaring in his gut when the fucking thing didn't open.

Christ! The safety delay! Kyra's tongue flicked at the edge of his mouth and her cunt rolled over his straining length. Raiven bit back a raw groan. *Fuck, I can't wait!*

Ramming Kyra's back to the cold sheet of steel, he spread his legs wide, supporting her slight weight with the tops of his thighs as his hands moved from her back to the fasteners of her stolen vest. With the same wild energy Kyra had used to remove his jacket, Raiven tore open the baggy garment, revealing breasts that his hands and mouth knew -- and wanted -- like no other. He cupped them both, marvelling, as always, the perfect way the heavy swells of flesh filled his hands.

The growling moan in Kyra's throat told him he wasn't alone. She arched her back, shoving her breasts harder into his squeezing grasp. "Don't stop."

Raiven grinned down into her flushed face. "Wasn't planning to, lover."

She arched her body more, lifting her chest to meet his seeking mouth. "Good."

He pulled one dusky nipple past his lips, the tight peak pinching to a rock-hard nub under his tongue as he rolled the other between the knuckles of his fingers.

"Good," Kyra repeated, her groan low and husky. Her hands grasped his shoulders, nails sinking into his flesh as she writhed against his mouth. "So very good."

Hot blood surged through Raiven's veins and into his already throbbing cock, at her drawn-out words. He lifted his head and gazed down into her smouldering black eyes. Wild desire burned there. Naked and almost frenzied. He'd seen that very want in his lover's eyes before. When the Lunarian zealot, Nalyx, controlled her mind. Raiven's blood licked with scalding lust, scorching hunger, but an icy chill still stabbed at his heart. Was it Kyra he now held? Or the psychopath too insane to fade away?

As if she sensed his hesitation, Kyra tightened her legs around his hips and stared deep into his eyes. "Burn them away, Raiven." She tangled her fingers into his

hair. "All I want to remember is you." Tugging his head down to hers, she placed her lips to his. "Us."

He didn't need to be asked again.

With a savage thrust, he lifted Kyra's weight from his thighs, yanked her torso to his and kicked the control panel of the door.

Fuck the safety delay. He wanted his woman. Now.

* * *

"How is his state of mind?"

Drean's eyes followed Cy as she paced around the small, forgotten room he'd set himself up in. Excitement rolled from her in hyperactive waves. She almost seemed to sizzle with eager energy. If it weren't for the cold gleam of cruel triumph shining in her eyes she could almost be mistaken for a young girl in love for the very first time.

Drean hid a small smile. This was going to be much easier than he'd hoped. "It is as you spoke, High Priestess. The warlord is obsessed with the shape-shifter. Since her escape, he has not left his chambers. All he does is stare at a hologram of her masturbating."

Cy's excited stride halted and she frowned. "Escape?"

"Yes, My Light." Drean gave a slight nod. "Two days past. Mur'dek was injured in the process."

Calculating eyes narrowed. "Even better."

"His men are dissatisfied, High Priestess," Drean added, doing his best to sound like a subservient slave wanting only to please his mistress -- a creature he'd once been. "Very dissatisfied. If ears trained to listen move through the corridors they will hear grumblings of mutiny."

Blood-red lips pulled into a gleeful smile. "This is excellent news, my child." She crossed the room to where Drean stood, placing her palm to his tattooed chest. "You were right to summon me here." She slid her fingers down his abdomen, tracing the line of his trouser-waist. With a smile curling into a sultry smirk, she pulled at the tight band, chuckling when it slapped back against his stomach with a stinging snap. "The

good generals of Murukha need some spiritual guidance." Talon-like nails slipped past the line of his waistband and she raked at the thatch of his pubic hair just above the base of his twitching cock. "You have, as always, done well, Crown Prince."

Drean dropped his eyes and sucked in a sharp breath as her fingers closed around his traitorous dick. "You honour me, High Priestess."

A low chuckle sounded in the small, dim room. "No, Drean Et, favoured child of Ithis. It is *you* who will be honouring *me*. With your tongue. After I speak to Mur'dek's generals." She gave his cock a painful squeeze and hot, eager blood pumped into its growing length. "Very nice, my child. I see your training has not been forgotten."

Hungry eyes flicked to his, but Drean could not tell what Cy starved for more. The sin of his flesh. Or the power of domination.

"I knew I was right to choose you as my future consort," she continued, massaging his treacherous cock. "Together we shall rule the six systems." With a brutal tug of his erection, she yanked him closer. "Now undress. I want to fuck you before I take control of the known universe."

Chapter 5

Raiven's tongue plunged into her pussy, flooded her cunt with wet heat even as the shard of ice he'd placed there moments earlier melted between her constricting lips.

Kyra arched, feet planted on the narrow bunk beside Raiven's hips, cunt pressed to his face. She fisted the sheets under her head, liquid fire and ice threading to her core as his tongue delved deeper into her pussy. Gods, what a way to prove he was alive!

Hands that were large and strong cupped her ass, careful of the gashes left from Mur'dek's claws even as they kneaded the clenching muscles in a massage that made her head spin. The tips of his fingers played close to the tight hole of her sphincter. Teasing her.

"Gods, Raiven!" She tossed her head from side to side as his wicked tongue lathered the creamy juices of her cunt from clit to ass to clit again, the rigid prohibita-collar around her neck a distant pressure her mind barely registered. "Don't stop!"

But he did.

Lifting his head, Raiven blew a fine stream of cool air at her sopping pussy. "You're so very hot, Kyra." The statement was a low growl, hoarse with hungry desire. "I think I need to cool you down."

One hand left her butt, the soft chink to Kyra's right sending waves of shivering anticipation through her. Waves that turned into crashing tsunamis of pleasure when Raiven's hand and mouth returned to her body -- both holding a new shard of ice. "*Gods of Kaius!*"

He pressed his cool mouth to the throbbing centre of her cunt. An icy cold tongue dipped into the tight folds the very instant he circled her left nipple with the other ice shard. The twin contact of extreme temperature flooded Kyra's cunt with

liquid rapture. She bucked, lifting her ass higher off the bunk, harder to his devilish mouth.

Tiny trickles of water scored lines over the swell of her breast as the ice Raiven traced around her aching nipple slowly melted on the fevered flush of her flesh. Each chilly dribble drove Kyra wild. She bucked again, the pressure building in her cunt a force she could not control. "Fuck, Raiven!" She clamped her eyes shut as her cunt clenched and fluttered around his wriggling, icy tongue. "If you don't stop, I'm going to come on your face!"

The fingers holding the rapidly shrinking ice shard to her nipple stilled for a moment before they slipped from her breast, blazing a trail down her torso to circle the shallow dip of her belly button. Chilled teeth nipped at her burning, swollen clit.

Kyra's breath turned to gasping pants. Raiven, it seemed, had no intention of stopping. And she didn't want him to.

Strong hands -- one cold and wet, the other warm and dry -- returned to their worship of her ass, kneading and squeezing and fondling. Once again, Raiven's fingers skimmed torturously, wonderfully close to her tight hole, slicked sodden by his masterful tongue. With each stab and flick in her cunt, with each nip of his teeth on her clit, her orgasm grew closer. She could feel it scalding a path from her very being, up her spine, to her breasts, erasing all memory of Mur'dek's hideous touch from her flesh.

Yes! Yes!

Thrusting her cunt harder into his mouth, she lifted her feet from the narrow mattress and wrapped her legs around Raiven's neck, locking his head against her wet, pulsing heat. A squirming tension rolled through Kyra's pussy and she grabbed at his shoulders. Gods, she was so close.

Hands on her thighs, Raiven spread her legs further apart. He dragged his mouth to her ass, tongue lashing at her clenching hole, painting it with his saliva and her own creamy juice. "More, Raiven!"

The first wave of her climax crashed over her just as Raiven's thumb pushed into the puckered opening of her sphincter. The second hit as his tongue delved into her cunt once more, and the third as his teeth bit down on her clit.

"Gods alive! Fuck me!"

Her cunt flowed with cream. Her hips bucked in rhythm with her savage orgasm, which rolled through her in perfect unison with Raiven's plundering tongue and thumb.

"Oh, fuck me, yes!" Consumed by pleasure, she tossed her head from side to side, devoured by heat, purged clean of haunting ghosts.

Raiven lifted his head and gazed down at her from between her thighs with smouldering grey eyes. "You don't think it's over yet, do you?"

And before Kyra could respond, his free arm curled over and around her hips and he shoved them down his torso, his thumb never leaving her butt as he lined his solid, rigid cock up with her still undulating cunt and plunged in.

God All-fucking Mighty! Kyra's cunt was icy cold and blistering hot as it wrapped around Raiven's driving cock. It folded around his engorged shaft, a sheath of wet velvet. Balls aching for sweet release, he pumped into her, the sucking slurp of each penetration heating his blood until he felt ready to scream.

Her smooth, firm ass smacked against his heavy sac, punishing and brutal with every deep thrust, yet when a man cheated death as he had, pain didn't register any more. Only divine pleasure.

Long legs locked around his hips and he gazed down the length of Kyra's magnificent body, watching the undulating waves of her orgasm possess her. The moment he'd found her in the abandoned royal residence, he'd known she was in torturous agony. Her normally laughing eyes had shone with a haunted grief that made his heart still, and a ravenous rage that scared him beyond measure.

Now however, with their bodies joined in sublime alignment, the grief had left her face. All he could see in those ink-black eyes was sheer ecstasy -- *Kyra's* ecstasy -- and its smouldering glow made his own pleasure a million times more powerful.

Slick pussy muscles clamped around his length, contracting in pulses that fed his own rapidly approaching release. He'd planned to make their reunion last forever, to show her how much he loved her, but the sight of his lover consumed by rapturous bliss was almost too much.

Yet he wasn't ready to erupt. She'd asked him -- begged him -- to erase the voices from her consciousness, and he was going to do just that. He wanted to scour away any hideous memory of Mur'dek's touch that might terrorise her. If he could, he'd kiss away the marks marring her back from the scaly-faced bastard's whip, the horrendous claw marks on her hips. He wanted her to feel as gloriously alive as he did. And free of any pain.

Grabbing another jagged chunk of ice from the bowl beside him, Raiven slipped it into his mouth, crunching it between his molars. With gentle aggression, he rammed Kyra's back to the bunk's mattress, cock deep in her gripping cunt, and captured her right nipple between his now chilled lips.

"No!" Kyra cried, belying the raw shout by knotting her fingers in his hair and jerking his head harder to her breast. He nipped at the rock-hard tip of flesh, rolling it between his teeth and the tiny chunks of ice melting in his mouth. She arched further into him, her constricting pussy squeezing his cock with pulse after delicious pulse. "I can't take any more!"

Raiven lifted his head. "Yes you can." And to prove his point, he reached between their grinding hips and slid another thick sliver of ice into her hot, sodden cunt.

"*Oh, gods!*" Fresh cream gushed over his cock, soaking his balls and the insides of their thighs. He sucked in a sharp breath and the air tasted of their lust.

A tension he could no longer control erupted into forceful life. His powerful strokes lost their rhythm and he pounded into Kyra, her legs holding him close, her nails scoring lines of exquisite pain across his shoulders.

Yes! Yes! Yes!

Cum burst through his cock, pumping into her tight, wet pussy, a reaffirmation to the heavens who she belonged to, who loved her more than life itself. Who would destroy anyone -- *anyone* -- who dared touch her again.

His seed spurted strong and his resolve grew stronger.

Yes! Holy fuck, yes!

* * *

Drean watched Cy stride across the expansive floor of Mur'dek's greeting room, her spiritual robes billowing behind her in a flaring cloud of black diaphanous silk. The woman exuded undeniable presence. Even the hideous scars marring half her beautiful face lent power none could ignore.

She swept through the throng of generals waiting for her. Silent, they gazed with a reverence Drean knew all too well. He'd once felt that way for the High Priestess, before his eyes were opened to her true nature.

A dark swathe, like living smoke, seemed to shimmer over her commanding form, there for a brief second and then gone. Drean hissed in a swift breath.

Ithis.

Gut churning, Drean stared at Cy as, without hesitation, she mounted the main dais, eyes glowing with smug glory. Once Cy had been satisfied with lording it over the souls of Ithis' worshippers. Now she wanted more.

And the Lunarian God of Renewal seemed to be joining her.

"My humble greetings, generals of Murukha." Her voice boomed throughout the cavernous room. As one, every general and soldier turned to face her. Drean knew they could not see the dark deity shrouding her, but they could feel His presence. Who *could* dismiss a god? "I see the rumours are true," she continued, sublime body caressed by the flowing folds of her robes. Power rolled from her in waves -- power and sex. A lethal combination that Cy used oh, so well. "Your lord, your leader Mur'dek, has deserted you."

A low grumble of agreement sounded from the floor. The generals were listening.

"What is to become of the once mighty Murukha race if its leader is pussy-whipped by a Chamelyon cunt who can take any form she wishes?"

The grumble grew louder. Fifty pairs of angry yellow eyes followed Cy's every move, drank in every nuance of her body and words.

"How can Murukha continue to rule the six systems when her leader stays locked in his chamber, salivating over that very cunt even when she escapes him *again*?" Cy lifted her chin, eyes blazing with righteous indignation as she surveyed the armoured men below her. "Who will stop the Jaxians taking back control of their home world now Mur'dek's cock rules his head?"

The grumble from the floor turned into a roar of rage.

"Who will stop the Delekians in their battle for self-rule?" Cy threw back her arms, pushing her glorious breasts forward. "Who will protect you from the King of the Five Moons, who eyes the Murukhan system for his own, if your leader cannot even protect himself from a pathetic shape-shifter?"

Somewhere on the floor, a voice rose. "Cy!"

Cy did not acknowledge the enthralled general's cry, but Drean knew she heard it. He could see it in the subtle shift of her hips, the ever so slight thrust forward, as if she offered her pussy to the men. Drean stared, his prick hard even as hate boiled through him.

"Who will lead you in the defeat of the troublesome Darzians, an orphic race so rich in arrogance they refuse to bow to Murukhan law, if Mur'dek cannot defeat his own consuming lust?"

"Cy!"

The corner of her lips curled into a tiny smile and she lifted her arms in triumph, the very light around her seeming to intensify and burn with victory. "Who will lead Murukha as she regains her rightful place as supreme ruler of the six systems?"

"Cy!"

"Who?"

"Cy!"

There was a flicker around Cy and Drean swore he saw Ithis reel back. Then the dark writhing shroud vanished, leaving Cy free of his form. Yet Cy didn't seem to notice. Panting, lips parted as if she hung on the edge of an orgasm, she raised her face and arms to the heavens. "*Who will lead Murukha in total victory?*"

"I will."

The deep guttural voice cut across the stupendous roar from the generals... seconds before a battle-dressed Mur'dek stepped through the far rear doors and shot Cy in the chest with a Ferrellian Ten de-atomizer.

The High Priestess snapped into a spine-breaking arc. A scream of infinite agony tore from her throat. In a blaze of neo-fire, her body disintegrated into a cloud of charred dust.

"Like I told you already, Cy," he snarled, "*I rule the six systems. And I don't need a Lunarian god-botherer to help me.*"

* * *

"Do they still haunt you? The residual *ids*?"

Raiven's chest rumbled under Kyra's ear as his murmured words slipped from his lips. She lay curled on her side atop the narrow bunk bed of Raiven's SRIPT, legs entwined with his, her arm stretched lazily across his chest as her fingers traced the outline of his tattoo she didn't need to see to follow. Outside, the twined lights of the Delekian Vortex's tail blurred by, a luminous strand of ultra-violet. "No," she answered, drawing comfort from the heat of his body. "Not since you found me on Lappia."

"Are they gone for good?"

The question was light, almost off-hand, but Kyra could sense the edge in Raiven's voice.

Pushing herself up onto her elbow, she gazed down at him. "I don't know." Eyes fluttering closed, she let her mind open. Nothing. Not a stir of anything but her own psyche. Perhaps Xia's and Nalyx's ghosts *had* finally evaporated. With a soft smile, she opened her eyes again. "But I think so."

She danced her fingertips from his biceps, over the firm curve of his shoulder and across the smooth expanse of his chest. There was nothing on his perfect body to indicate he'd been shot, but that didn't stop Kyra's simmering hate for Drean Et flaring anew. "Do you know where the Lappian crown prince is?"

The hand on Kyra's back that had been drawing lazy circles across her flesh stilled and an unreadable light suddenly flickered in Raiven's grey eyes. "Why?"

"Because I want to kill him."

Raiven shook his head. "No you don't, Kyra."

"Yes I do." Kyra clenched her jaw and gave her lover a dark glare. "He shot you, Raiven. He tried to *kill* you. He deceived *us*."

"And he in turn was deceived. He didn't know Cy was in partnership with Mur'dek, nor how depraved *I* this really is."

Kyra stared at Raiven for a still moment. Was he really supporting the bastard who had tried to end his life? Confused anger turned her blood cold and she shoved herself further off Raiven's body, sitting up to swing her legs over the side of the bunk. "I don't believe that. He is a warrior of the Ri Order. They don't make mistakes like that." She could feel Raiven's eyes on her back as she rose to her feet and crossed the room, snatching up her discarded Murukhan vest.

"They do if their people have been slaughtered. Life is not as black and white as you want it to be, Kyra."

Kyra spun around, her snort both amazed and contemptuous. "This from the man who wanted to storm into Mur'dek's fortress and shoot him dead for fucking his woman." She yanked the vest on, glaring at him. "Have you forgotten Drean Et fucked her too? Have you forgotten the oh-so-forgivable Lappian had his cock buried up to the balls in my cunt almost every second I was aboard the *Succulent Virgin*?"

Raiven snapped to his feet, eyes flashing grey ice. "I have not forgotten. Every breath I pull I smell his essence on your skin. It destroys me."

"Then prove it. Let me kill him."

Shaking his head, Raiven walked toward her. "Killing him will achieve nothing, Kyra. Except self-hate."

Kyra curled her lip. "You're not the only killer on this ship, Raiven a'Tor." She crossed her arms, eyes narrowed. "Now tell me where he is!"

Raiven's chest moved with a barely suppressed sigh. "If you wish. He is on Murukha, sent there by Cy to prevent Mur'dek realizing the six systems are slipping through his fingers."

No! The word sliced through Kyra's mind, high and sharp... and terrorised. Trista. *No*, the young girl's *id* cried. *Mur'dek will kill him! Please save him!*

Heart hammering, Kyra shook her head. "No."

Across the small room, Raiven studied her, piercing grey eyes intent. He stood naked, but where any other man would appear almost vulnerable in the situation, he seemed to thrum with a deadly energy. Waiting to attack -- or defend.

Please, Kyra, Trista's *id* begged. Unlike the powerful residues of Nalyx and Xia, the Lappian princess had never tried to take control of Kyra's body or mind. Even now, when her anguish rolled through Kyra's psyche like a black cloud, her *id* hung to the back. A voice of misery. And sibling love. *Please, Kyra*, she whispered. *He's my ja'kurr.*

Before her, intense gaze missing nothing, Raiven waited. "Kyra?"

Please, Kyra!

An image filled Kyra's head, a memory... Drean and Trista under a large, blossom filled tree... a promise of protection... the declaration of love.

Revenge is not who you are. Your life has been spent saving those who can't save themselves.

Another image flooded into Kyra's distraught mind... Drean snapping her prohibita-collar aboard the *Succulent Virgin*. Snapping Slave-Master Sylt's neck.

Save him in the same way he saved you. Save him from Mur'dek. From himself.

"Kyra?"

Kyra raised a trembling hand to the hideous collar still locked around her neck, its hard surface icy under her fingertips. Raiven had been unable to remove it and while

it clamped her neck, she was a prisoner of her own body, unable to shift. Unable to be herself.

Save my brother, Kyra, and he will save you.

Torn confusion churned in her stomach, her heart. The cold hatred and consuming anger that had driven her since escaping Mur'dek spluttered, feeble and fading. She looked at Raiven, saw the concern in his eyes.

He would face death for her over and over again. She had no doubt of that. Their connection was more than sexual, more than spiritual. If she asked him to storm the entire Murukhan force unarmed, he would. Crossing the room in two steps, she slid her arms around his waist and gazed up into his face. Hips to hips. Heart to heart.

"What do you want to do, Kyra?" His voice was low, calm.

"Take us back to Murukha," she answered, smoothing her hands up his back as she gave him a soft smile. "Someone very special has asked for help. We need to save Drean's life. I think, in doing so, all the ghosts in my head will finally go away."

Raiven's lips curled and he dropped his forehead to hers. "Are you sure?"

Reaching up on tiptoe, Kyra placed her lips on his, a gentle kiss that spoke volumes. "Hey, a woman's allowed to change her mind, isn't she?" She touched the tip of her tongue to his bottom lip. "It's time we rid the six systems once and for all of Mur'dek's evil." Her tongue traced the edge of his bottom teeth. "Besides, I have someone who won't let anything happen --"

A blinding kaleidoscope of lights suddenly filled Kyra's head. Pain ripped through her very being. Every molecule of her body instantly tore apart...

...as someone energized her out of Raiven's arms and off the Lunarian SRIPT.

Chapter 6

The generals parted in a single wave, terror on their faces and in their darting yellow eyes. Mur'dek strode through the shuffling throng, de-atomizer gripped in one clawed hand, long, blood-stained whip in the other. He didn't utter a sound as he climbed the dais so recently occupied by Cy. Not even a snort of disgust as his booted feet stepped onto the still smouldering pile of the High Priestess's burning ash.

Drean's gut clenched. This was not good. He had to get out of the greeting room before Mur'dek turned his vengeful rage on Cy's chosen consort. He shot a look over his shoulder, biting back a curse when his eyes fell on the massive main doors swinging closed behind him. *Rru'c!* He was trapped.

"General Goh."

Mur'dek's voice reverberated throughout the cavernous room, cold and commanding. As one, the generals turned their heads to stare at a lone Murukhan standing frozen at the back of the hall -- the first general to call Cy's name.

Drean released a silent sigh. Even in death, the High Priestess caused pain.

"General Goh." Mur'dek's cold, slitted eyes drilled a hole straight into the man's fretful stare. "Consider yourself demoted." The de-atomizer spat out a stream of neo-fire and Goh disintegrated.

The generals gasped. Feet shuffled as dawning fear punched them all in the gut. Blood roaring in his ears, Drean stared at the snarling warlord. The de-atomizer still pointed at the empty air where Goh had stood, but Mur'dek's eyes now roamed the frozen faces of his squirming subordinates, as if deciding which to "demote" next.

Drean took a step back. This was *not* the place to be at the moment. He would retreat to his base and rethink --

A blast of neo-fire shattered the floor just in front of his feet. "Where do you think you are going, Brother-In-Marriage?" Mur'dek glared down at Drean from the dais, de-atomizer trained squarely on Drean's chest.

Lifting his chin, Drean met Mur'dek's burning yellow gaze. "I go nowhere, *ruk'da*."

Mur'dek chuckled, the hollow sound squeezing Drean's heart. "Defiant to the end. A warrior of the Ri Order's defining trait." Jagged teeth bared, Mur'dek gave Drean a smug smirk. "You chose your spiritual guidance poorly, Lappian. We shall have to discuss that." Yellow eyes flicked over the horror-struck generals. "After I deal with my mutinous men."

Feet shuffled again and Drean could see the fear on the generals' faces. Fear and anger.

"General Ril." A Murukhan to Drean's left snapped to attention, gaze locked on Mur'dek. "See that these traitors are locked in the sub-dungeon. I want to know they are under my feet -- where they should be." Mur'dek's stare turned to a glower of barely suppressed rage. "I will *not* tolerate treason from my men. I will flay each personally."

Stunned, and grudgingly impressed, Drean watched as Ril frowned. "My Lord, let me --"

The de-atomizer swung from Drean's chest to Ril's. "Do I have to repeat myself, Ril?"

The general's throat worked, the rasping sound of his scales louder than a screaming Frak snake in the aghast silence of the hall. "No, My Lord."

"Good, because I'd hate for you to join --"

"My Lord!"

Mur'dek's slitted gaze widened as a loud voice cut through his words. Everyone, Drean included, stared in shocked amazement as a soldier came running into the room from a far corridor, chest heaving.

"This better be good, Private Kuj," Mur'dek growled. "Or you'll --"

"The shape-shifter!" Kuj gushed out, stumbling to a hasty attention. "We have her!"

* * *

Raiven glared at the SRIPT's control deck. The drillithian signature was fading. If he didn't act fast it would be too weak to track. Scanning sub-space, he detected a concentration of neo-drillithian eight parcepts away.

Fuck. The Sky-Destroyer had gone into hyper-flight, straight into the Delekian Vortex.

Why wouldn't it? It's carrying a precious item Mur'dek wants more than anything else.

Snapping the flight-chair's harness into lock, Raiven punched in a sequence code. Two seconds after Kyra was energized from his arms the SRIPT had been fired on, leaving the small craft dead in empty space. Scowling, Raiven flicked a glance at the control deck again. The signature was almost gone. "Fuck!"

It had taken him too long to get the fucking propulsion engines back on line. Too long to reactivate the SRIPT's nav computer. Every minute that passed took Kyra further away from him -- and closer to Mur'dek.

A silent snarl curled Raiven's lip. If he'd controlled his fucking libido and got moving the moment he and Kyra reenergized onto the SRIPT none of this would be happening.

Focus, a'Tor. You have to catch that Sky-Destroyer!

"Okay." Leaning forward, he kicked in the engines. The small craft flung into hyper-flight. Crushing pain erupted in his chest at the savage jolt, but Raiven ignored it.

He was getting Kyra back.

Fuck anyone who tried to stop him.

* * *

"Welcome back, Kyra." Mur'dek's grin stretched wide as he watched her enter the empty greeting hall. "We're going to have to have a chat about our last little adventure, aren't we?"

Heart pounding, mouth dry, Kyra walked toward him, keeping her shoulders straight and her glare hot, despite the ion-cuffs clamped around her wrists. The captain of the Sky-Destroyer followed behind, blaster rammed into the small of her back, keeping her moving.

Mur'dek cocked his head, eyes flicking over her body. "Nice vest, shape-shifter. Which one of my men did you kill to get it?"

"None." Kyra gave him a cold smile, coming to a halt a whip's length away. "I just asked one nicely and he handed it over. Such lovely manners. You've trained them well, Dek."

Mur'dek studied her for a moment, the same crazed, depraved hunger in his eyes Kyra knew all too well. But this time there was more. A yellow fire danced in the slitted pupils that made her shiver. Psychotic rage. She recognized it all too easily. That same fire had danced in Nalyx's eyes when she'd first shifted with him, had burned in her own gaze whenever Nalyx controlled her.

The warlord stepped closer, filling her line of sight. "I'm a master at training, Kyra," he growled, dragging a claw along her jaw before digging its tip under her chin. "You should know that by now." He gave her a cruel grin. "Or at least, Trista should."

"Do you really think you'll hold me?" Kyra shook her head, shoving down the wave of frightened panic rolling through her body. "Seriously, how many times have I escaped before? Three times, if I remember rightly."

"Ah, you see, I have a different training method in mind, this time, Kyra." His hand skimmed past the prohibita-collar around her throat to dip beneath the loose leather vest. His calloused fingers closed around her right breast and Kyra's flesh crawled. "One learnt from your old slave-master."

With a smug smirk, Mur'dek stepped aside -- to reveal Drean Et, standing next to a Jaxian fuck-table, and beaten almost to a bloody pulp.

Drean! Trista burst out. *Brother, no!*

"You have a choice," Mur'dek whispered into her face, sour breath curling into her nose and mouth. "Kill Cy's lap-dog and I'll let you live." He jerked her body against

his, rock-hard cock smashing against her crotch. "Don't kill him, and I'll fuck you to death on that table while the crown prince watches."

No! Trista cried.

"Kill me," Drean rasped, swollen eyes barely open. "Kill me, Kyra. And then kill him!"

Kyra turned to Mur'dek. "Why should I care about a man who deceived me?"

Mur'dek gave a snort of surprise. "You didn't know?"

"Know what?"

With a chuckle, Mur'dek ran his hand up Kyra's back, tracing the welts criss-crossing her back left by his whip. "It's remarkable what a little torture will reveal, shape-shifter. He loves you. He will die for you. And when a warrior of the Ri Order swears their heart away there is no turning back." Mur'dek's cold, scaly lips pressed against the shell of Kyra's ear. "It's why he killed a'Tor."

As if she were caught in a cold, thick fog, Kyra turned and stared at Drean. "Raiven told me you were deceived," she whispered, the words barely more than a breath.

Drean looked back at her, bruised face etched in agony, eyes swimming with grief. "I was."

Cold, sharp claws sank into the back of Kyra's neck, just above the rim of the prohibita-collar. "What do you mean, 'told,' shape-shifter?" Mur'dek growled.

But Kyra couldn't tear her gaze from Drean. "You shot him because of me?" Her knuckles popped as she clenched her fists. "Does he know?"

Beside her, Mur'dek's growl turned into a savage hiss and he spun her around to stare into her face. "Don't you mean *knew*?"

Metal clinked as Drean pushed himself straighter from the fuck-table. "Yes, Kyra. He does." His answer was a groan of pain.

Cut by Mur'dek's furious scream. "What do you mean 'does'?"

"My Lord!" Another voice joined Mur'dek's. Louder. Wilder. "My Lord!" Kuj ran into the room, pale yellow eyes wide. Terrified. Scales almost bleached white. "The bounty hunter! He's here! He's alive!"

* * *

Raiven walked through Mur'dek's fortress. A surreal sense of déjà vu filled him. Only two months ago he'd done this very thing, although it had been the Princess of the Five Moons he sought then, not his soul mate.

Hand resting on the butt of his gun he moved closer to the centre of the building. He could almost believe the same scaly-assed officials ran screaming at the sight of him. Yet this time, the look of terror on their ugly faces seemed to go beyond that of a simple Terran man. Now they gaped, gibbered and screeched, as if they'd seen a ghost.

A dark grin curled at the corner of his lips. In some parts of the six systems he was known as Death. So be it then. Death he was.

His gun felt alive under his palm, and the deeper he strode toward the greeting room, the quieter it became. Fewer and fewer Murukhans ran from him, and as he walked, he noticed none of them were soldiers. Or armed. His fingers twitched and he narrowed his eyes. Something wasn't right.

Pausing for a moment, he drew a deep breath, tasting the air. The SRIPT's scanners had detected a pyon-emission in the centre of the fortress, almost identical to that emitted by Kyra's prohibita-collar. Mur'dek's defences prevented him from energizing straight to the source, but that wouldn't stop him finding her. Nothing could stop him.

There.

Sweet but incredibly delicate. To his right.

Close. She's close.

He broke into a sprint, following a scent he'd never forgotten, until, rounding a corner, he faced two massive doors. Pulling his gun from its holster, Raiven let his dark grin return. "I'm here, Dek. Death has arrived."

The doors swung open, barely pushed by his hand. The stench of sweat, piss and blood invaded his nose, snapping his nerves tight and his muscles tighter. He sucked in a breath, and tasted Kyra.

Stepping through the widening gap, he saw her, wrists bound in ion-cuffs, alone in the center of the room. Black eyes stared at him across the distance, wide and clear with meaning.

Don't come in here.

But he did. Because, just to the left of his vision, cowering behind the massive, yet bruised and bleeding frame of Dreaan Et, was Mur'dek, Ferrellian Ten de-atomizer in one clawed fist, levelled straight at Kyra's heart. "Take another step and you kill her."

Raiven stopped. For a second.

Whipping around, his gaze locked on the soldier standing directly behind him, Murukhan blaster drawn and charged.

"Good-bye, Terran," he heard Mur'dek say -- just as the soldier fired.

There was a sharp crack. And another. A pulse of white electricity cut through the air, millimetres from Raiven's ear at the exact moment the Murukhan's chest tore apart.

"I'm not going anywhere yet, Dek," Raiven stated, turning back to Kyra. Disgusted contempt rolled through him. The warlord now stood behind her, using her as a shield, his gnarled, talon-tipped fingers wrapped around her left arm, charged de-atomizer pressed to her right temple. Raiven gave him a flat look. "I see your men still aren't the best shots in the six systems," he said.

"How can you be alive, Terran?" Mur'dek gripped Kyra harder, uneasy fear threading through his voice.

Raiven refused to look into his lover's eyes. If he did, it might be his undoing. He needed to keep control. Cold, detached control. Instead, he focused his stare on the tiny beads of blood on her arm where the warlord's claws sank into her flesh. "Just lucky, I guess." Fury roared through him. He raised his gun, leveling it on Mur'dek's forehead. "Let her go." He flicked a glance at Dreaan, standing silent and tense to Mur'dek's left,

wrists bound in two thick steel manacles connected to a Ferrellian Ten slave collar. "Let them both go. Now."

Mur'dek's crazed eyes slitted. "I'll make you a deal, a'Tor. The Lappian's yours. I understand you two are best friends. Leave now and I will let you both live." He pushed the de-atomizer harder to Kyra's temple. "But Kyra stays here. With me."

"No, she doesn't."

Mur'dek smirked, fangs glinting in the harsh lights of the greeting room, all sign of his early apprehension gone. "Do you really think you're going to walk out of here, Terran? You're in *my* fortress. Surrounded by *my* men. If you want to live, I suggest you turn around and leave."

Raiven cocked an eyebrow. "Funny, I don't seem to be surrounded by anyone." He gave Mur'dek a level look. "If you don't count the half-dead captain on the floor. And I didn't pass anyone looking all overcome with furious loyalty on my way here. It seems to me your men have deserted you, Dek." A guttural hiss ripped from Mur'dek's throat, but Raiven continued. "Besides, I've walked out of your fortress before. With Kyra. Just as I'm about to now."

Another hiss filled the air and Mur'dek's eyes flashed psychotic rage. "I'll kill her first."

"Nooooo!"

The cry shook the walls. Face distorted in fury, Drean yanked his arms apart, shattering the manacles to pieces seconds before he leapt at Mur'dek, crashing his solid fist into the warlord's jaw.

Mur'dek stumbled backward, arm wrapped harder around Kyra's chest, refusing to let her go. The ion-cuffs on her wrists flared white light with each jerking move, and Raiven watched her face twist in pain.

Snapping his eyes back to Mur'dek, he leveled his gun at the bastard's forehead... a heartbeat before Drean smashed into him.

It all happened in a split second.

Mur'dek dropped to his knees, dragging Kyra with him, blocking Raiven's shot. Drean's hands curled around Mur'dek's thick, scaly neck. "You killed my sister!"

"I killed your whole fucking race," Mur'dek snarled back, smashing the de-atomizer's butt up into Drean's neck with a savage blow, sending the Lappian flying across the room in a high, lurching arc.

"Drean!"

The scream that tore from Kyra's throat was not hers. But that didn't matter to Raiven.

Desperate for the shot, he stared down the barrel of his gun, watching as the warlord leapt to his feet, Kyra writhing in the ugly bastard's grasp the whole time.

"Let me go!" she snarled, sounding like Kyra again. "Let me go, you grutt-fucking piece of shit!"

"Let her go, Dek," Raiven ordered, a still calm falling over him. "You're defeated. And deserted."

"She's mine, Terran," Mur'dek shouted, ramming the de-atomizer's barrel into Kyra's temple once more. A maniacal grin split his face and he laughed wildly. "Mine." He closed his finger tighter around the trigger of his gun. Tighter... Tighter... "Or dead."

A cold smile curled Raiven's lips. "Your call, Dek."

With a quick wink at Kyra, he fired -- just as Kyra dropped to her knees, out of Mur'dek's grasp.

The blast from the lethal Terran gun struck the warlord in the chest, and the top half of his body disintegrated.

Raiven lowered his gun, giving Kyra a lopsided grin. "Dead then."

"For Trayza's sake, a'Tor!" Kyra jumped to her feet, storming toward Raiven with a scowl on her face. "Since when did you have a flair for dramatics?"

Sliding his gun into its holster, Raiven grabbed the spreader-bar of the ion-cuffs and yanked her to his body. "Since I met you, Kyra Issarei." He snared her ass in his hands. "Now shut up and kiss me. I just saved your life."

Epilogue

Sinking to her knees, Kyra ran her hands up Drean Et's chest, gazing deep into his eyes. The bruises left by Mur'dek's interrogation were fading, the broken bones beginning to re-knit, but those pale green eyes remained tortured. Perhaps they always would. Even after what was going to happen next. She gave him a soft smile as a delicate warmth fluttered low in her stomach. "This will feel... a little strange."

"I understand." His deep voice rumbled in the silence of the room, the dusty portraits of the once great Et family the only witnesses to the act Kyra was about to perform.

Well, almost the only witnesses. Two other hearts beat in the Royal Court apart from hers and Drean's. One strong. One growing stronger with every day.

She trailed her fingertips along the intricate lines of the Lappian's tattoo, the horrifying tale of Lappia's destruction it told etched in her mind as indelibly as it was etched in his skin. Catching a sad sigh, she continued the preparation for what was to come. The "gift" was a special thing, rarely performed. But oh, so wonderful when it was.

Her fingertips traveled the line of Drean's collarbone, up the smooth, thick column of his neck and then into the thick, silver curtain of his hair.

His tortured eyes stared into hers, trusting and sad. "Will she stay with me forever?"

Kyra shook her head gently. "The gift can only be for a stolen moment." She let the soft smile return to her lips. "But it will create memories you'll never forget."

For a moment, Drean didn't respond. Then he gave her a silent nod.

Pressing her fingers harder to his scalp, Kyra closed her eyes... and opened her mind.

The fluttering warmth in the pit of her stomach bloomed into pulsating fire. Her skin rippled and her blood turned to liquid heat. Her heart hammered as, beckoned by Drean's love, Trista's residual *id* unfurled itself from Kyra's psyche.

And touched Drean's.

My Ja'kurr, Kyra heard the young Lappian girl murmur to her brother.

My Fei'lia, Drean replied.

There was a blinding flash of colours, as every thought and dream Trista Et ever held passed to her brother, a smouldering warmth as every emotion and sensation threaded through his.

Then, like tendrils of mist fading from the day, the gift came to an end.

"No," Drean whispered as Trista faded from his mind.

Thank you, Kyra, Trista said softly as she faded from Kyra's.

You're welcome. Kyra sent out the thought, even though she knew the Lappian girl's residual was finally no longer in her head.

She opened her eyes, slipping her hands from Drean's head as a single tear slipped down his cheek and fell to his chest where the tale of Lappia's defeat spoke of a warrior's failure.

Misery swam in Drean's eyes when he opened them, misery and profound joy. "She is happy," he murmured, gazing at Kyra in wonder.

"Yes, she is." Kyra nodded, more aware of the twin heartbeats in the room than ever before. Leaning forward, she placed a gentle kiss on his lips and then stood. "Now it's time for you to be."

With one last look at the Crown Prince of Lappia, mighty Warrior of the Ri Order, Kyra crossed the room and slipped her hand into Raiven's.

Her lover looked down at her, clear grey eyes shadowed in worry. "Are you okay?" He licked his lips, an apprehensive frown pulling at his dark eyebrows. "Is..."

Kyra gave him a little grin. "I am fine." She lifted his hand to her lips, kissed his palm and then placed it to the slight bulge of her stomach. "And so is *she*."

The worry vanished from Raiven's face faster than he could draw his gun. "Come on, lover," he growled, voice choked and hoarse. "Let's go home."

Kyra lifted her head, smiling up at him as she stepped into his warm, safe and wonderful embrace. "Home. To Darzia."

The End

Lexxie Couper

Lexxie Couper couldn't exist without her husband's *Playboy* collection, her Sci-fi DVD collection, her Stephen King library, and her dog. If it's raunchy and set in space, she's either there or on her way! That is, after she takes the dog for a run along the local beach on the east coast of Australia. Feel like joining Lexxie on one of her sizzling, out-of-this-world adventures? Contact her on lexxie@lexxiecouper.com or catch the next flight at www.lexxiecouper.com.