



**Laura
Bacchi**

**The
Andumi
Effect**

THE ANDUMI EFFECT

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His cock flexed at those words as he entertained the idea of getting blown by a man. He'd been too busy to get laid during the last two months. Hell, he hadn't even had time to jack-off while running from moon to moon in search of the Hybri Codex. If he closed his eyes, he could imagine the man huffing on his dick being someone like him. Someone with a desire to taste firm flesh like his own. His full lips would be soft. His mouth warm...

But the man didn't lean any further in. Minot grew flustered and impatient. “Is this part of the inspection? You wanna make sure all my parts are in working order or something?”

“Think of it however you like.” Then, suddenly, silver lips wrapped around his cock, and a slippery tongue helped work it in even deeper. When his captor's nose hit the fuzzy outcropping of hair framing his prick, a groan rumbled in his chest. One agonizingly slow suck later, his penis was free—and harder than it had ever been in his entire life...

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THE ANDUMI EFFECT

BY

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THE ANDUMI EFFECT

AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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*As always, thanks to Stephen
for giving me encouragement, time, and space to write.
You're one in a million.
And to Jasmine Rowe, for her sharp eyes
and sharp wit.*

CHAPTER 1

So close. So fucking close...

Minot leaned against the alley entrance and watched Calia as she continued down the rain-slicked street. Blood thundered in his temples, but not from fear. Not yet, anyway. This was the part of the job he loved. The chase. The game. The catch-me-if-you-can.

He stared at the sway of his partner's ass. Every bit of Calia was an enticing package, but he didn't gawk because he wanted to fuck her like most men did. He simply waited for her lush bottom to attract the right man. Or woman. Then he'd wait some more until she'd gotten the information he needed to "retrieve" the object his government had ordered him to find.

Minot followed from a distance now, and twenty microns later, a couple dressed in bright Guarbisian silks ambled down the sidewalk ready for an encounter. They blended in with all the others pairing off in the street, each body eager and willing. Ready and wet and horny as

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hell. The air in this quarter was tainted with an aphrodisiac, and people were as likely to do it on the street as to slip into one of the seedy hotels that lined every corridor.

He was careful not to look at the men. The women he could resist, but the men... The Unias Government would drop his ass in a heartbeat if they ever found out. For some reason “flexible” women were valued by the Unias, but men who swung that way were a liability. An embarrassment. And Minot was embarrassed enough as it was that he even had these thoughts. They said being a spy meant a lonely life. Whoever “they” were had no idea...

He walked faster. The couple whispered with Calia, their negotiations punctuated with lip-licking and hasty caresses. They wanted her. The deal was sealed, and as he reached the trio, he noted Calia’s next screw would be with a man *and* a woman. He laughed bitterly to himself. *Lucky bitch*. At least someone would be having fun today with a member of their own sex. His dick twitched at the thought. It’d been ages since his last screw. And it had been lousy. Uninspired.

It had been het.

Minot shook these thoughts from his head as Calia slipped her hand deep inside the silky robe. When her arm came back out, he was passing her, palming it, and cheering silently in triumph.

He headed down another alleyway and willed himself not to break into a run. The Hybri Codex was almost theirs, well, their government’s. And it was about damn time. He needed a little R & R. Maybe a cruise to Demeta where the moons were thick with men like him. Or perhaps he could lose himself in the metropolis of an inner ring planet to indulge in his first-ever tryst with another male. The sex would be worth the wait, and if the Codex wasn’t there as promised, Minot might just have to blow someone’s head off.

Adrenaline and lust carried him swiftly through the City-Plex where he dodged in and out of seedy thoroughways, ever alert for someone

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tracking him. But no one was there. The key worked like a charm in Dwelling 34-J. He entered. He found. He took.

And then he ran like hell.

* * *

After an hour, he reached the rendezvous.

Calia, still sweaty and dazed from her recent encounter, grabbed him as he came through the door. He kicked off his boots as she pushed him into the next room.

“Did you get it?” she asked, her voice a rushed whisper.

He held it out to her. “Like I’d come here empty-handed after you fucked half of Guarbis to get it.”

She grabbed it from him and stuffed it in a capsule. Then she unfastened his fly. He stumbled back onto the bed, leaving her with his pants and underwear in her hands. *Must be some of that aphrodisiac still in her system.*

“Whoa, Calia. I’m ready to celebrate as much as you are, but I’m not... I don’t think—”

“We’ve been tracked and tagged. Turn around and spread your legs.”

He saw the lube in her hand. “You can’t be serious.”

She rolled him over onto his stomach and spread his ass cheeks wide. The lube was cold. He glanced at the encapsulated Codex. That sucker was at least thirty microts long.

He turned around. “There’s gotta be another way.”

“You got a better idea?”

“Your pussy?”

She chuckled. “Too slick after all I’ve been through. It’d slide right out.”

He hopped up and headed for the bathroom where he kept a medic-laser for emergency removal of bullets and speedy tissue repairs. Calia stood at the door, Codex in hand.

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“How steady are your hands right about now?” he asked.

She took the device and pressed it into his left side. The scent of burning flesh didn’t bother him as much as the river of blood. But she was quick and the incision she’d made allowed the glass tube easy entrance into his guts. After swabbing his side with a towel, she melded the incision. Seconds later, it was a barely noticeable pink.

“Feel okay?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

Once his pants and boots were on, they were out the door. She squeezed his hand and let go, then sped away through the sea of bodies in the center of the city.

And something squeezed Minot. On the shoulder. Hard. He never got a chance to see his enemy before darkness overtook him and he crumpled to the filthy steel below.

CHAPTER 2

“Being a spy is great work, isn’t it, Minot?”

He didn’t answer his captor for a few long moments, but when he did, it wasn’t to answer the question.

“Fuck you.” *Fuck you, you Damurian slaver. If I ever get my ass out of this sling, I’ll show you. I’ll...*

Hell, he didn’t really know what he’d do. Once a spy was caught, once your face was known all over this galaxy, the game was up. You either ended up selling contraband on the outer ring or you worked in some sleazy outpost salvage shop with no civilized humanoids in sight. Sure, there was always the option of chromosomal regeneration, but he liked his face and didn’t care to have his features rearranged, molded into someone—and often times, *something*—he wasn’t. He wasn’t that desperate. At least not yet.

The slaver laughed and bent low to check the locks on the young spy’s wrist cuffs. The Damurian was a tall man, an imposing man. And,

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with his thick-heeled leather boots, he towered over Minot like a giant from the colony of Nege at the outer reaches.

Silver-flecked skin shimmered like the stars whizzing by outside as the slaver moved. “Spying must be fun, Minot. There’s the thrill of the chase, the rush you feel when you seize the nugget of information you need. Or your government needs. All of it good stuff—until your ass gets caught.”

Warm hands unbuckled his pants. His shirt was already gone. Minot willed himself not to shiver when the slaver came to stand behind him. “Is that really necessary?” he asked.

“The cuffs? Of course. You’ve already tried to escape twice—”

“No. I meant taking off my pants.”

The Damurian laughed. “Timid, are you?”

“Nope. Just cold.”

“You don’t feel cold to me.” The slaver trailed his fingertips over Minot’s shoulder blades, then lower to rest on his hips. “I need to examine you,” he whispered. The heated breath was like a thermal engine exhaust blast against Minot’s neck. “If I put you up on the block and a buyer wants to see all of you, I don’t want any surprises. Scars, bruises, fresh wounds—all these things could lower your price. And that’s not good for business.”

Fresh wounds... He glanced down at his side and sighed with relief at the lack of scarring.

After a gentle tug, Minot’s pants dropped to his ankles, leaving him bare-assed and more than a little uncomfortable.

“You travel light,” said the slaver with a chuckle.

“When my partner told me we’d been tagged, I didn’t have time for the luxury of underpants.”

Poor Calia. Minot wondered what had become of his partner once they’d separated in the busy streets of Guarbis. “Where is she?”

“The female you ran with?”

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“Yes. Is she on this ship? She’s young. I’m worried about her.”

The slaver leaned in close. Too close. More hot breath teased the inner ring of Minot’s ear. “I wouldn’t worry about that one.”

“She’s not on this ship? Or on any others?”

“No.”

Minot hated to ask the next question, but he needed to know. “Is she...safe?”

“Yes.”

This news unburdened his heart. Now he could focus solely on *his* escape. The slave ship would planet-hop throughout the ring looking to drop off merchandise of the flesh—he merely needed to bide his time. When the opportunity came to bolt, he’d be ready.

Lost in his thoughts, he didn’t notice the slaver kneel in front of him at first. His muscles tensed when the bigger man’s hands ran down the outside of his thighs.

That’s it. Keep going, big guy. As soon as the slaver unfastened his gov-issued boots, Minot would kick him as best he could with bare feet and pants still around his ankles.

But the man merely opened a drawer on his console and pulled out more cuffs. His captor locked each ankle in frigid metal above the bunched-up pants, then joined the cuffs with a hobble chain.

Minot sighed. *So much for that idea. Time for Plan B.*

“Can I buy myself?”

The slaver leaned him against the console and grinned. “No, my spy. That rather defeats the purpose, doesn’t it?” He removed both boots and Minot’s pants.

“Then mark my sale Unias Primary. One of my own will bail me out,” he said, but the slaver shrugged, unconvinced. “It’s happened before, you know. The Unias Government sends someone in to pose as a buyer and get their people back from guys like you. Hell, I’ve done it myself.”

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The Damurian grinned. “Really?”

Minot rolled his eyes. The slaver had to realize this little game was played all the time. “Yep. Of course, you don’t care as long as you get paid.”

The slaver considered Minot’s words. “This is true, but I’m sorry to tell you that won’t be the case for you.”

He didn’t seem sorry. A wicked gleam in the slaver’s eyes made Minot’s heart work twice as hard. Blood roared through his pulse points, and chill bumps scattered over his flesh.

“Why not?”

“Two reasons.” The man bent down between Minot’s legs and unhooked the length of chain hobbling him, then added a set of longer links. At least this gave him more freedom to move if another opportunity to escape presented itself. But the slaver didn’t stand when he was done. He stayed there, mouth at the same level as Minot’s prick, hot air teasing his swelling purple head with every breath. His balls grew tight. Not good.

“Spread your legs for me.”

His cock flexed at those words as he entertained the idea of getting blown by a man. He’d been too busy to get laid during the last two months. Hell, he hadn’t even had time to jack-off while running from moon to moon in search of the Hybri Codex. If he closed his eyes, he could imagine the man huffing on his dick being someone like him. Someone with a desire to taste firm flesh like his own. His full lips would be soft. His mouth warm...

But the man didn’t lean any further in. Minot grew flustered and impatient. “Is this part of the inspection? You wanna make sure all my parts are in working order or something?”

“Think of it however you like.” Then, suddenly, silver lips wrapped around his cock, and a slippery tongue helped work it in even deeper. When his captor’s nose hit the fuzzy outcropping of hair framing his

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prick, a groan rumbled in his chest. One agonizingly slow suck later, his penis was free—and harder than it had ever been in his entire life.

I knew I should've whored around back on Talus.

But there was more. The man's fingers reached around behind Minot's balls to explore the cleft of his ass. Then he pushed against Minot's asshole. *Holy fuck...*

Some of the lube Calia had greased him with earlier remained, and it offered the finger easy passage. The digit filled him. Probed him. Made him want more. He caught himself on the verge of pushing down on the finger, and tried to pulled away. The slaver's hand retreated with a liquid squelch.

He knew the lube was condemning, and he saw the question in his captor's eyes.

"It's not what you think," he said weakly.

The finger grazed his asshole once more. "That's too bad, slave."

Minot gave a hoarse chuckle and tried to redirect the man's focus. "So, do I pass?"

The slaver laughed. "The first two tests, yes. But there are many others. For now, though, it is enough."

"You didn't answer my question."

"Sorry, Minot. You distracted me." He rose and looked down into his prey's eyes. "Your government won't be buying you because I've decided to keep you for my own personal slave."

Shit. Without the chance to be sold on another planet, escape would be tough, if not downright impossible. The man might as well have socked him in the stomach. And the so-called inspection? Rage muddled with lust and threatened to constrict every blood vessel in his head.

"No fucking way." He stretched out to throttle the silver neck in front of him, but the chains linking his wrists were behind his back and stopped him short.

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The Damurian caught Minot's forearms and pressed him back onto the console. "Don't worry. You'll enjoy yourself."

"Oh, I don't think so, asshole. I'm not here to be someone's fuck-toy, some goddamn—"

The man's hand smothered his next words.

Why was he so afraid? *Wasn't this what you wanted? Like the saying goes, be careful what you wish for...*

"Ready for the second reason why your government won't be coming to your rescue?"

Like I have a fucking choice. He reluctantly nodded. It was the only thing he could do, and frankly he was too curious not to know.

"Because, my dear Minot," said the shimmering bastard with a grin, "they're the ones who sold you to me."

CHAPTER 3

Of all the luck.

Minot went limp against his chains and shook his head. No, luck had absolutely no part in this.

Every event leading up to his capture played out in his mind over and over, as if the scenes would reveal where he'd screwed up. As if they'd give him just an inkling of how the Unias government was involved. Nothing. Not a goddamn thing came to him. Was it something about the Codex?

The Codex was a delicate thing. He could tell from the few precious moments he'd held it in his hands before fleeing the collector's apartment. The edges of the parchment were brittle, and flecks of ink dotting the surface of the manuscript refused to coalesce into any discernable pattern. Minot had studied the ancient Ramistrian language for a whole year—a whole wasted year—to perhaps quickly make some sense of its meaning should a fleeting glance be all he got. But

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missing chunks of the ink had made doing so impossible.

What about the Codex was so valuable, or dangerous, that his own boss—hell, his own country—would want to get rid of him because of its discovery? And why had Calia not been caught although they were mere paces apart. The whole situation stank.

“Ready to eat, Minot?”

Minot jumped. He’d been so deep in thought that he hadn’t heard the slaver enter the dark chamber. The man held a tin of steamy... protein pellets. He groaned.

“Sorry to disappoint,” said the slaver. He sat down on the metal bench and scooped up a spoonful of the lumpy brown mess, then offered it to Minot. He was too hungry to pass it up. After a few greedy bites, he slowed his chewing.

“So, do you always feed the slaves yourself?” he asked. He’d seen plenty of other people in chains earlier today. All wearing the same stupid loin cloth he wore, too. Maybe the guy took care of feeding the slaves for security reasons. Or maybe he wanted to make sure Minot hadn’t disappeared again.

“I told you, *sava*, you are my property now. And I take good care of my property.”

“What the hell does ‘*sava*’ mean?”

The slaver smiled. “It means ‘piece of mine’ in my native tongue.”

“More property-speak, eh?” *Whatever*. He could deal with it. Temporarily. Best to pretend he’d go along with the present circumstances than to buck the man. Damurians weren’t a brutal lot, but he was sure they had their limits.

“Actually, it’s a term of endearment. You’re not a work slave. You now exist solely for my personal pleasure.”

The man’s raspy whisper forced Minot to lick his lips in reply. The action wasn’t lost on the man. Down went the spoon, past the tin and onto the floor with a clatter.

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“It’s hard to please you, Damurian, when I’m bound in chain.”

The slaver smiled. “I rather like you in chains.” He bent nearer, his voice low and husky. “And I could take my pleasure very easily with you in them.”

His heartbeat went wild beneath his bare chest. “But I could touch you. I...I could rub you down.” *Or do whatever crazy shit you want me to. Just get me out of these fucking restraints.* He needed to be free, to find out why he’d been captured in the first place. Sure, he’d like to experiment with this man for a bit, but in the end all that mattered was getting to the bottom of his unforeseen demise.

“Patience, *sava*. I’ve roamed the stars in search of a man like you. Breaking you quickly would give me pleasure.” The slaver’s lips curled into a sexy grin, and Minot’s toes scrunched into curls of their own. “But there is more pleasure in the waiting. In the hoping that you’ll accept me as your lover, and in the promise that you’ll want me—really want me—when I’m ready to share my cock with you.”

The man whose name he didn’t even know had him breathless with his little speech. And when he left the chamber, Minot faced a new question. A question more troubling than anything involving the Codex, his capture, or his gov’s double-crossing ways.

He looked down at his fully erect prick.

“What the hell’s gotten into you?”

The ruddy throbbing cock didn’t answer with words, of course, but the bubbles of pre-cum streaming from the tip like a pearl-shine necklace were damning. There was something about this silver man who apparently loved men that turned him on more than Minot had thought a male could. And finding someone who turned you on with mere words couldn’t be such a bad thing...could it?

Probably not, he mused, and began to chuckle. But laughing was painful. He clutched his side and worried how long he could handle the twinge of agony building inside now that his stomach was full of food.

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He chuckled again in spite of himself. *Too bad you didn't let Calia tuck it away in the traditional hidey-hole. It'd be out by now, discovered during the "inspection."*

His asshole pulsed at the memory of being touched in that taboo place. He'd had fingers up there before, sometimes his own and once while enjoying a particularly memorable blowjob from an ex-girlfriend. But the Damurian had taken pleasure in the finger-fuck, and he had done it just right. The thought alone was almost enough to make him come.

Down, buddy. Down.

His erection bobbed, and he laughed again. But his mirth didn't last long—and neither would he—if he didn't get the damn Codex out soon.

CHAPTER 4

By the time Ky reached his chamber, he was covered with sweat and shaking with need. Damn the man in the holding room. Damn his smooth skin and intelligent brown eyes.

Damn your own self, Ky.

He stepped into the hydro bar and let the frigid water try to wash away his desire, but his *tarva* didn't wane. It fought against the steady stream of water until he was forced to cup the head of it, to coat it with sudsy cleanser from tip to base. He surrendered to the quickening strokes of his hand while leaning back against the stone wall. What would the lithe man taste like when he came? How tight would his ass be, how talented his fingers?

He imagined Minot on his knees before him and pictured the soft parting of those full, sensuous lips. He could feel the tongue wrap round his shaft again and again. He could feel the supple fleshy insides of cheek and the teasing graze of teeth. Ky squeezed his hand into a fist

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and forced his prick through the narrow opening. His palm strangled him, punished him for not having the patience he spoke of just moments ago.

But the punishment became a reward, an exquisite torture he loved to endure. Soon creamy spurts of cum joined the cascade of water, and he watched it disappear, panting and ashamed, as it swirled into the drain. He didn't stay in the bar long; he needed to wash up and towel off. The sooner he was dry, the sooner he could reapply the silver pigment covering every square din-meter of his body. *Waterproof, my ass.* If he ever found the bastard who'd sold it to him back on Joria, he'd shove the paint down the guy's throat.

As if on cue, a beep sounded at his door. He sprinted over to his mattress, lifted it up, and grabbed the jar of paint. "Hang on. Just stepped out of the bar," he yelled.

Ky jerked on his pants and smeared the silver over his torso. Then he grabbed a shirt, afraid to touch its fasteners with his sticky fingers. The paint needed ten microns to dry so he slammed his intercom button with his elbow.

Maybe I should tell him I'm busy. Busy fucking Minot or something. He wished...but he didn't want to get caught in a lie. He couldn't risk that, not when he was so damn close.

Vankos yelled from the other side of the panel. "Listen. I don't have time to wait for your wet ass to dry off. I'm shuttling down to Jargus for a few hours since we sold off all the slaves this morning. Keep the ship in drift until I get my dick dipped, okay?"

Ky froze. This was the break he needed. "Sure thing, Vankos."

Oh, he'd keep *The Ember* in drift all right. Until he found what he was looking for. Then Vankos could kiss his silvery ass—and this ship—good-bye.

CHAPTER 5

“Wake up, Minot. I need you.”

Minot looked up at the slaver through heavy-lidded eyes. *Come on, buddy. Perk up. Ignore the pain inside your gut and perk the hell up.* If he could talk the man into unlocking him, he might have a shot at removing the lump in his side. He sure as hell hadn’t expected an infection to set in this soon, and the feeling in his stomach intensified with each passing micron.

He gave the Damurian his sexiest grin. He needed to say anything, do anything, to get this thing out.

“I think I need you, too.” He pulled aside the pointless loin covering and willed his cock to grow. It managed a tiny spasm, but nothing more. He gave it a feeble shake. They both stared down at his penis as it softened against its furry base.

The slaver laughed and tucked the poor thing back into the garment. “I think you need some sleep.” Then he unlocked Minot’s cuffs.

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“Actually, I need you for something else right now. Come with me.”

Minot stood on shaky legs and tried to follow the silver flash up ahead, but the ship swayed something fierce. His skin grew clammy with every tentative step, and he clutched at the wall to maintain his balance. The slaver noticed and double-backed to grab him by the waist, and a hand pressed against his slick forehead.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“You got a medic’s laser onboard?”

“Yeah.”

“Know how to use it?”

The slaver lifted him gently and carried him to a room, then placed him on the small bed.

“I know how to use one, but I gotta tell you this comes at a most inopportune time.”

“You can fuck me later. Promise.” *Just get this damn thing out of me.*

“Like I said, I didn’t exactly have fucking on my mind at the moment, Minot.”

“Oh. That’s cool. Any chance you got a little invasive surgery on your agenda?”

The slaver sighed, then smiled. “I guess I do now, eh?”

Minot nodded. “You got a name, Doctor?”

* * *

How the hell do I answer that? Ky wanted to tell him the truth. Wanted to trust him. By all accounts—and he’d been thorough in checking Minot out—the spy now lying in Vankos’s bed was one of the good guys. The fact that the Unias wanted him gone was enough evidence in Ky’s eyes. Too bad Minot hadn’t found the Codex. One of those two-faced gov bastards probably had it now. He pushed aside the history of his own relationship with the Unias and focused on the present. Working alone to find the Codex was going nowhere. He

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needed a partner. He needed someone to trust.

Here goes nothing...

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

Minot studied him through narrow slits. His pupils were huge. Was something poisoning him? Had he taken a suicide tab before his capture? He could’ve gotten a dud, one that would make him linger instead of finishing the job quickly and without a lot of mess.

“Tell me,” Minot said weakly.

Ky leaned over the bed, nose to nose, lips almost touching. “Ky Andumi.”

The man beneath him laughed. “Now I know I’m hallucinating. Ky Andumi’s a legend. A dead legend.”

He lifted Minot’s hand to his racing heart. “Does this feel dead to you?” he asked.

“When I was in the Academy, you got caught. Got killed. Can’t be...”

Ky snorted, but he kept the palm in his pressed to his chest. “That’s what the Unias wanted you to believe, wanted everyone to believe.” He lowered his voice to a whisper even though they were the only two onboard. “I went underground.”

He could see the wheels turning in his *sava*’s head.

“And now I’m trying to find what you were on the hunt for. I need to keep it out of the reach of anyone remotely loyal to the Unias. I think my shipmate Vankos may have found it when he helped me capture you, and I’m praying he didn’t take it off-ship when he left to party down on Jargus.”

“I’m pretty sure he doesn’t have it.” Minot’s eyelids fluttered. Or maybe he was trying to wink.

“Well, I can’t be sure until I search all his shit. I was hoping you’d help me, but you’re in no shape for that.” He fired up his retriever and did a quick calibration. If the Codex was in here, the piece of

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technology in his hand would sniff it out. “Can you hang on until I sweep his room?”

“Probably. Just what is the deal with that piece of paper? Why is it so fucking important?”

“The Codex is an energy source. Not only is it scripted in pure heldonium—drop that sucker in an engine burner, and you’ll have enough power to thrust for centuries.”

“Heldonium?”

“Yep. Highly toxic—which is part of the reason I want to find it. It needs to burn to break down. For all I know, Vankos is killing us slowly even as we speak. The collector wisely kept it under a titan barrier while he shopped the Codex around to find a high enough bidder. Without that protection, the Codex deteriorates with air. Not a good thing in a closed-ventilation system like this ship, as you can imagine. In fact, I’m expecting *The Ember’s* toxin sensors to go off any micron now.”

Minot let out a muffled groan, then whispered, “Um, you know what you asked me earlier?”

“Huh?” Ky ran his retriever over more porn than he’d ever seen in his life. Vankos must be one horny fucker. “Which question?”

“The one about waiting until you’re done sweeping to slice me open?”

“Oh, yeah. What about it?”

Minot sat up and clutched his side. “Waiting doesn’t sound like such a good idea anymore.”

Ky turned to Minot with the retriever outstretched. He stepped closer. Closer. The alarm on the device grew louder, its light flickered brighter and faster, and when he held it directly over Minot’s abs, the alarm turned into an unbroken drone. The light stopped wavering. Ky’s hand, however, started.

He switched the machine off. “All right then. Let’s get you to the

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engine room.”

“I’d prefer a medic lab...”

“Nope. That thing is going directly from you to the burner. I don’t want to touch it any longer than I have to. And I sure as hell don’t want to drop it.”

“Ah. Gotcha.”

Ky pulled Minot to standing and carried him downstairs as if he held a newborn in his arms. When he saw the ladder leading down to the engine, uncertainty overtook him. Maybe he should just do the surgery here? He placed Minot on the floor, then he studied his hands. They shook hard, so hard he wasn’t sure he could even do the extraction. No, he’d need to get Minot down there. But how?

“I’ll be back.” He raced to the lab and grabbed sheets and the laser and anything else he could think of. After securing Minot in the bedding with knots, he worked a rope through them.

“You think you can help by hanging onto the rungs. We want a slow drop here. In fact, let’s not mention the word ‘drop’ at all.”

“Yeah, I can grip ’em. Let’s do this thing.”

True to his word, Minot managed to slow the descent, and when he rested on the floor, Ky hauled his gear down to join him.

After releasing Minot from the sheet, he rolled on a pair of gloves, swabbed the spy’s side with surgi-prep, and powered up the laser. Under the tool’s red glare, he could make out a faint line where Minot had sliced himself. The opening was easy, the extraction a bit tougher.

“You numb enough?”

Minot nodded.

“Here we go.” He fought through the pus and blood with tongs to get a grip on the clear capsule. When it was out, he set it carefully onto a bed of gauze in the medical kit. “This is gonna sting.”

“Bring it on.”

Ky hosed down the gash with antiseptic and watched the pus bubble

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and evaporate. Then he sprayed a few nicks he'd made in the intestines with healing fluid. "Looking good. You feeling okay?"

"Yep. Close that fucker up."

Ky tucked the flap of skin back into place and began the melding. The seam he left in Minot's flesh faded from red to pink a few microns later. Then it vanished from view.

"All better, doc?" Minot tried to sit up, but Ky eased him back to the floor.

"Yes, but don't move." He grinned. "Doctor's orders."

Minot grinned back. "Whatever you say."

Whatever I say. He liked the sound of that. Maybe when this was done, he'd test how true Minot's words were.

"Can you hold on, or should I tie you up before I throw this thing into the burner?" The thought of his *sava* tied up in the sheets again made blood rush to his cock, but there was no time for that. Later, however...

"I'll hold on." His patient reached back and grabbed the rungs, then added, "You sure you want to get rid of it? We could sell it. Find another barrier and auction it off to the highest bidder like the guy I stole it from planned to do."

"I'm sure." Ky exchanged his bloody gloves for a thicker pair and turned away. Then he popped the capsule. His command of the ancient version of his native tongue was rough, but he quickly translated as much as he could.

After bracing himself between the ladder and the wall, he unhinged the main burner and prayed the ship's inner thrust absorber could handle the jolt he was about to give it. "Ready, Minot?"

"Yeah."

He tossed the paper inside, slammed the burner hatch shut, and bolted it tight. The roar was deafening, and *The Ember* barreled through the galaxy, making dust out of any asteroids they hit, each crash jerking

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the craft back and forth. Once Ky got his bearings, he crawled over to the control panel to contain the burn in a single chamber. The vessel slowed, and Ky checked the readings on the navigation screen.

It was hot in the room, but a chill quivered through him regardless of the heat. Where the hell were they? Maybe the thrust had screwed up the nav system. He took a closer look and scrolled out for a wider zoom. And another.

Oh, fuck.

The single star called Reamus sparkled onscreen. Not a good sign. Seeing that one little dot of light meant they were light-years away from anything, and he could only pray that any remaining burst left from the Codex would be enough to return them to their home system. He began to calculate their rations, air filters, and water supply, but Minot interrupted his thoughts.

“So all this is an act? The silver on you, all the ‘sava’ shit, too?”

Ouch. He wasn’t sure how to answer, but the more he thought about it, the more he hated to lie. Minot either wanted him or he didn’t. He’d have to live with whatever happened next... Probably for the rest of his life.

“I spent years pretending to be someone else, and I was damned good at it. Lying to get what the Unias wanted on their enemies. Sneaking around in disguises. You know the drill.” He returned to Minot, crouched over him, then inhaled his scent. “I don’t play those games anymore. Not when it comes to the important stuff. That part about you being connected to me in some way was true. There’s just something about you, Minot. I want you. I want you bad.”

Silence.

He hated silence. He couldn’t tell if it was, “Hey, I’m thinking about this...” silence or the, “Are you out of your fucking mind?” kind that meant repulsion and rejection. Then again, it could be the pitying type. The, “I’m trying to think of something to say that’ll let you down

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easy, while making it abundantly clear I don't roll that way."

When Minot finally did speak, the words were barely audible.

"I've never fucked a man before."

It was the thinking-about-it kind. Ky's heart rattled like crazy beneath his sternum. He leaned closer.

"You don't know what you're missing." Then he bent down to kiss him, but stopped when their noses bumped. He wanted to make sure he was reading him right. He wanted to make sure Minot wanted this. "Does that mean you're willing to try it?"

Minot pulled aside the cloth hiding his cock. He was hard. And hot. The naked erection burned through Ky's pants and seared his thigh.

He unsnapped his fly and brought out his own prick, then dragged it across Minot's soft balls and taut shaft. His hands gripped the metal ladder behind them and he pulled himself up, one rung at a time, until the seeping tip of his *tarva* kissed Minot's own slick cockhead.

Whoa, buddy. The guy just had surgery. Are you out of your mind?

"We probably shouldn't be doing this, not after what you've been through today."

Minot's crotch lifted off the engine room floor, and his prick nosed into Ky's unruly black pubes. "Medical technology is amazing these days," he said with a grin. "I feel fine."

"You sure? I don't want to hurt you."

"Well...I don't want you to hurt me either. I guess we should talk about exactly what it is you want to do."

Ky laughed. "You worried about little ol' me fucking you in the ass?"

Minot glanced down and lifted his eyebrows. "There's nothing little about what you've got between your legs. I'm not worried—I'm scared shitless."

"We'll save that for later," Ky said, then grinned at Minot's audible gulp. "I was thinking maybe I'd suck you, you'd suck me. That kind of

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thing.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Ky bent down to kiss his lips, but Minot turned away.

“What are you waiting for?” he asked. “You talked about sucking, not kissing.”

Damn. He’d been dying to kiss Minot since he’d first seen his file. None of this was going according to plan.

“Not much for the sentimental stuff, eh?”

Minot shook his head.

Maybe this was a bad idea. Or maybe a good, hot suck would bring out the romantic in him. Either way, Ky needed to taste the luscious cock throbbing against his own. Now.

He licked his way down to Minot’s wiry thatch of pubic hair and kissed the satiny pouch drawn tight below the base of the smooth dick. It flexed against his cheek. The smell of man and salt roused his senses, made him eager to inhale the velvety flesh. Made his mouth water. He gathered the saliva pooling in his mouth and coated Minot’s shiny purple head with the fluid, then worked it down with his tongue. The man beneath him groaned.

“Hurry, Ky. Do me.”

Oh, I’ll do you, all right. He removed his mouth. “I don’t want to rush this,” he whispered. “I want to give it to you so good and slow you’ll never forget it for the rest of your days.”

Minot caught Ky’s face in his hands. Their eyes met, and he waited for some sign of tenderness.

“Are you gonna talk me to orgasm, or are you gonna suck?”

Minot must like it rough. He could deal with that, as long as there was some measure of tenderness afterward. But he felt like he was losing control of the situation. Losing control of himself.

“Suck, I guess.”

Minot glanced away. “Good.”

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Then the man of his dreams guided him down onto his cock. Ky loved him with his tongue and teeth and fingers. He loved him hard. It didn't take long before Minot began bucking up into his face, harder and faster until he shot. Ky barely tasted the cum before it trailed down his throat.

"That was over too fast," he said with a grin, then rolled over onto his back. "Feel free to take your time with me. I prefer it slow."

Minot stood up. "Thanks for the quick release."

"My pleasure." He watched his *sava* hold onto the ladder with obvious hesitance. "Don't be shy, Minot. Just show me what you like. And if you don't want me to come in your mouth, I'll give you fair warning and you can finish with your hand."

"I'm sorry, Ky." He looked away. "I don't want to swallow you. At all."

It took a moment for his meaning to sink in, and when it did, Ky jumped up. "Wait. That's not fair..."

But Minot was already climbing the ladder. "Like I said, I'm sorry, man. I just can't bring myself to do this." He looked down from the top of the chute. "Hell, you don't even know me."

He lingered as if he expected Ky to try and coax him back down. Ky practically ran up the narrow rungs and stared him down.

And here I just saved your fucking life. Anger welled up inside him, white-hot and blistering. "Did you enjoy yourself?" he asked.

"It was very nice. And again, I thank you."

"Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it, because it's the last time I'll ever do that for you." He stepped nearer and enjoyed the effect his height and bulk seemed to have on the smaller man. Minot retreated to the far wall. "I don't care if you're the only man I ever see for the rest of my life out here in space, I will *never* do that again. Not unless you beg and plead and—"

"Okay, okay. I got your point. But I won't be the only guy you ever

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see. You'll drop me off soon, we'll say our good-byes, then you'll find your real *sava*—'cause I ain't him."

Ky grinned. "Do you have any clue how powerful that heldonium burst was?"

Minot shook his head.

"We're in the middle of fucking nowhere, barely even on the star map." He pushed his forehead into Minot's and pinned him to the wall. "Mark my words. You'll regret what you just did. Because when I said, 'if you're the only man I ever see,' it wasn't a figure of speech."

The drop of Minot's jaw gave him some satisfaction. But the rest of him was still hurting. The cock part. The heart part. He couldn't do much to alleviate the latter, but his dick was a different story. He left Minot there in the cramped corridor to reflect on his stupidity.

And to take care of the ache in his own balls.

CHAPTER 6

Great job, asshole. You handled that brilliantly.

Minot claimed the chamber Ky had torn apart while searching for the Codex, locked the door behind him, and fell back onto the bed to bury his head under a stale pillow. He hadn't wanted to like it. To like *him*.

Ky Andumi *was* a legend; Minot had studied the master spy's tactics while training at the Academy, wishing he could be exactly like him. Well, except for the dying part. But Agent Andumi hadn't died. He'd done worse—he'd gone underground. And underground was for spies on the take, the ones who crossed the line for their own benefit.

At least that's what Minot used to think. Ky didn't seem to be gaining anything from crossing the line. And he certainly hadn't kept the Codex for his own personal gain.

Distance was good, Minot thought. Everything since the heist had been a blur, and perhaps a little sleep would help him sort out this

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mess. The dull throb pumping through his head and his side agreed. He thrashed his way under the covers and ignored the other throb in his body.

Ky's lips had done a fine job on his neglected prick, and the memory of the blowjob kept him from drifting off to sleep. He hadn't expected to come so quickly. So furiously. When Ky's mouth worked its magic, it was as if every bit of him had caught fire. And whatever his dick had felt, the rest of him felt. The orgasm had connected to each part of his body, every cell, every pore.

The sheets shifted over him. Caressed the growing length of his cock. He threw back the covers and headed for the commode. Fortunately more porn lay stacked on the floor, and he sorted through the digitals, passing over Nufurian chicks with double pussies and four-titted Kamian sluts who took it in the ass.

"Ah, here's what I want."

He pressed *play* and held the digital with his left hand. The people came to life onscreen, and a woman in between two men was soon probed by two massive pricks, one in her mouth, the other from behind as she moaned and cooed on all fours.

His right hand fumbled for his own piece, and he positioned his fingers in his favorite spots, then jerked.

"Oh, yeah. Give it to her good."

The woman glanced his way and smiled, dislodging the prick in her mouth. "Oh, yeah," she groaned. "Give it to me good!"

Holy shit. Minot nearly dropped the device into the toilet. He'd heard of empath digi-porn but had never watched any. The piece of plastic he held was worth more than his combined salary for the last ten years.

The woman nodded. "And we'll do anything you want. Anything."

His right hand stopped moving. "Anything, eh?"

The two men whose heads had been cropped out of view suddenly

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bent down to nod and smile. They had nice pricks. The guy on the right ran his fingers over his and gave it a slow pump. “And I think I know what you want, Minot.”

“Really?”

The guy gave the woman a playful swat on the bottom, and, after an exaggerated pout, she hopped off the bed and walked off-screen. He motioned to the remaining player who mounted the bed, his cock jutting out proudly and ready for fun.

“Why don’t you zoom in?” said the first man. He winked as Minot’s sweat-slicked fingers scrolled over the zoom to do just that. “You wouldn’t want to miss anything. Like when I do this...”

His tongue swirled over the other guy’s dickhead and dove into the tight slit at the very tip. His hands cupped the man’s sac, then squeezed the thick cock’s base. Minot let loose a moan and fell back against the closest wall. His own cock was glistening now—he could tell from the slick sounds it made as he stroked. Light strokes. Easy strokes. Here in the privacy of a berth he wanted this to last. He wanted to savor it.

The man swallowed the whole cock and the recipient of this attention threaded his fingers through the brown curls on the bobbing head at his crotch. Then the fingers twisted inside the curves of an ear and slid almost lovingly along cheekbones and jaw. Minot had wanted to do that to Ky, truly he had. But spies had no room for tenderness or love, relationships or families. What had they said that first day back at the Academy?

Got a guy or girl back home? Pack your shit up now, because spies fuck only to talk people out of their secrets. Your dick belongs to Unias now. As do your balls. And that goes for the ladies, too. If your ovaries are in working condition, you’d better arrange to have all that fixed right now.

The cocksucker turned to him. “Stop thinking, man, and enjoy.”

I’m trying, mister.

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The man laughed. “Well, try harder. My jaw’s starting to ache.”

Minot released his cock to fiddle with the controls. “Wanna suck each other at the same time?”

“Anything you say.”

The men reconfigured themselves on the bed, and Minot panned right and left to take in all the action. Then he turned up the volume to hear the slurping noises and muffled moans from cock-filled throats. The man he’d been talking to kneaded the tight ass over his head and dipped his fingers into the crevice. Minot panned around for a close-up of what would happen next.

And he knew what would happen next. Strong hands teased the tawny inner flesh open wider and the man above wiggled in anticipation. Fingertips trailed over the crack and zeroed in on the pulsing brown hole while Minot sucked on the middle finger of his left hand. His back slipped down the wall until he squatted. He parted his legs. Reached behind his balls. Then he set the digital on the floor in front of him and found his own asshole. He pressed into the pucker tentatively, slowly. The hole clenched tight in response, so using his right hand, he played with his dick to relax. It worked, and he fed the finger in microt by microt until the final knuckle met his ass.

He felt full. It felt sweet.

Okay, so a finger will work. But a cock in there?

It had to hurt. The man dislodged the prick from this throat. “It’ll be fine. Want us to show you?”

“Sure.”

Someone off-screen tossed in a bottle. It landed on the bed as the men untangled themselves. “The key is to use plenty of lube. In fact, there’s no such thing as too much lube.”

The narrator dumped half the bottle on his cock, and the other guy helped massage it in, then turned around to offer his ass. The narrator dripped lube between the muscular ass cheeks and worked it into the

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crinkled opening. Minot cranked the finger in his own compact tunnel to the same lazy tempo.

“So how do you want me to fuck him, Minot? Slow and easy, or hard and fast?”

“Start out easy.”

The man on all-fours peeked over his shoulder to mouth, “Thank you.”

Minot laughed and watched while the well-greased cock kissed the wrinkly core of the other actor. The damn thing slipped right in, and the pumping began. He did some pumping of his own.

Feels so good... He imagined Ky’s cock in place of his finger. Not that this would ever happen given the shitty thing he’d just done, but, hey, a guy could dream. So he dreamed of Ky riding the tight, sensitive channel. Dreamed of his breath on his neck while he fucked him good and long and slow.

He yanked his cock harder, and it pulsed in his grip. Any micron now. Any moment...

The door slid open with a dull, metallic clunk. Ky clomped into the room with an armload of boxes piled so high he couldn’t see past them. Minot could’ve popped up and pretended to piss—well, if he removed the finger from his ass—but he was too close to coming to budge.

“Here’s your share of the rations—” Ky dropped the boxes.

“You could’ve knocked.”

“Yeah, well, I figured you’d be asleep.”

“Not after you dumped those boxes on the floor.”

“You deserve whatever you get after what you did.”

“Get out.”

Ky crossed his arms over his chest and sauntered over to him. “*The Ember* is mine. And I’ll go wherever I want to on her. Whenever I want to.”

He grinned and returned to stroking his stick. “Fine.”

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“Whatcha watching?”

Shit! The digital... Minot let go of his drippy cock to hit *stop* but the juice on his fingers moistened the buttons and the screen buzzed.

“Careful there,” said Ky as he picked it up. “That thing cost a bundle.” He crouched down beside Minot, and they both watched as the ass-reaming continued.

Minot willed the woman to return to the scene, and she bounced in with a smile, then glanced back and forth from him to Ky with a confused look on her face.

Ky pointed to Minot. “It’s his show.”

She leaned in and whispered, “But he doesn’t really want me in the scene.”

“Interesting.” Ky turned to him. “So now you want a little guy-on-guy action?”

“Maybe.”

Ky smiled and replaced the digital on the floor. “Good thing you found this, because you won’t be getting any from me.”

“You already made that clear.”

“Just making sure you understood.”

“I do, but I’m starting to wonder if you’re having second thoughts. You keep bringing it up and all.”

“Nope.”

Liar. Minot met his eyes and tried not to laugh. “So, are you gonna watch me or get the hell out.”

The bobbing knob along Ky’s throat gave away his longing. Minot grinned. Ky moved in closer. “Maybe I should give you a hand.”

“That’d be nice.”

Ky placed a hand on Minot’s leg, and he nearly blew his wad when the smooth fingers ran over the curly hairs of his thigh. But Ky used it to return to standing.

“I’ll be glad to.”

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But apparently not with his dick. Instead, he went over to the boxes and began to unpack them, so Minot returned to the task at hand. But he noticed that Ky kept stealing glances his way, and the cool reserve Minot wanted to maintain evaporated.

Screw the digital. He worked his way onto his back to give Ky the full view, cock aiming for the ceiling and legs splayed apart and up for his finger to burrow deeper inside his ass. The spectacle wasn't lost on his audience, and by the time Minot was ready to burst, Ky stood panting and sweaty, dropping protein packets to the floor.

He shot. Ropy strands of white flew from his cock like a fountain of lust and returned to his body with a *smack*.

"Wow," he said in between gasps. "That was great."

Ky hadn't moved from when he last saw him. "You're a real asshole. You know that?"

Minot withdrew his finger from said body part and played in the puddle flowing into his belly button. "Hey, I'm just following Unias rules. Fuck to get what you need, what you want."

"You're not one of them anymore. Hopefully you'll learn that most of what they taught you was wrong. Until then, stay clear of me and my parts of the ship."

"And which parts would those be?"

"Every part except this room. I don't care if you masturbate until your dick falls off or choke on a chunk of protein. Don't come looking for me for any reason."

Ky left. Minot rolled off the floor, cleaned himself off, and didn't bother to clear the food from his bed as he got under the covers.

Silence hung over the room like a pall, heavy and thick. His emotions were in a jumble. Ky had been gentle and kind. He'd given him the best damn blowjob he'd ever had. Saved his life even, probably twice. So why was he being such an asshole to him?

'Cause you want him, you jerk. You want him and you're ashamed

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of it. He rolled over and crunched several packs of protein pellets in the process. Dehydrated chunks of meat spewed out over the bedding. He knocked them to the floor.

He wondered then, what Ky's story was. So wrapped up in his own angst, he hadn't really thought to learn more about the man. Here he was on a ship in the middle of nowhere with his hero, the best fucking resource he was ever going to have if he wanted to find out why the Unias had sold him out, and all he could do was alienate the man. The second thing they'd taught in the Academy? Be flexible. You get what you need, what you want, by being flexible. Ky wanted him, that was obvious, so he could use that desire... God, he was such an asshole.

He shoved any thoughts of Ky, both the practical and the emotional, out of his head. He'd deal with them—and hopefully Ky—tomorrow. Then he forced himself to count ventilation tiles in the chamber ceiling until he fell asleep.

CHAPTER 7

The first day was fine.

Minot entertained himself by snooping through each possession belonging to the prior owner of his chamber. The second day and the next few after that, he kept himself occupied with the guy's porn collection and lots of showers in the hydro bar—until Ky fussed at him for wasting water.

Week two was a different story, and at the end of it, when he couldn't stand the boredom any longer, he gave in and paged Ky.

"Hey, Ky?"

He didn't answer right away, and when he did, he was out of breath. Rapid, ragged panting crackled over the intercom.

"I'm busy. What is it?"

Minot laughed. "You sound, um, busy. Wanna borrow my digi-porn?"

"No. I'm running through the ship, getting some exercise. You got

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something to say?"

"I'm bored."

"Tough shit."

Minot smiled against the wall speaker. "Bet I could outpace you."

"No doubt. I'm older, I'm bigger, and I haven't had a decent meal in eons. Now do you have something of..." He huffed into the speaker. "...of importance to tell me or not?"

"Let me out. Please?"

The pounding of Ky's footfalls slowed. "Are you lonely, Minot?"

"Well... Yeah."

"Awww." A mocking *tsk tsk* hissed out from the metal at Minot's ear.

"I'm sorry, Ky. I was a jerk."

"What did you say? I couldn't hear you."

"I said, 'I'm sorry. I was a jerk.'"

"Still couldn't catch it all. Hang on. Something must be screwy with the volume. Try again?"

He heard the laughter in Ky's voice. So he wanted a little groveling. Minot could grovel.

"I was a total prick. Please forgive me... Ow. Shit!" His words blared back at him and nearly shook the ship.

Ky laughed in earnest now. "Oops. Sorry about that."

"Guess I deserved it."

The door slid open. "Yes, you did. Good thing I'm a forgiving kinda guy," Ky said as he jogged past, tapping Minot's arm as he ran. "You're it."

"But I don't have any boots!"

"Didn't the Unias teach you to improvise?" Ky yelled as he headed deeper into the ship. Minot took off, his pursuit fueled by his competitive spirit and the need for contact with another person. The balls of his feet slammed into the metal floor of the corridor, but he

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ignored the pain. When he rounded a dark corner of *The Ember*, Ky was nowhere in sight. Then Ky's chuckle echoed off the walls as he emerged from a hiding place and headed back down the hallway toward Minot's chamber.

He sprinted, arches aching, lungs burning until his target was in reach. "Gotcha!"

Ky froze and raised his hands. "I give up. Too tired." His grin was infectious. "I hope you have mercy on an old man like me."

"You're not old."

Ky ignored him and turned toward a makeshift dining area. "Want some tevi juice?"

"Sure."

A jug sailed through the room. Minot caught it and sucked the fruity liquid down in three swallows, its taste like candy after two weeks of the tepid pipe water in his chamber.

"I am sorry, you know."

* * *

Oh, I bet you are. "What do you want now, Minot?"

"To talk."

"Talking's good." Talking was safe. Ky pulled out a chair and sank into it, and he was relieved when Minot flopped into the seat farthest from him. That way he wouldn't be tempted to lick the sweat from the leaner man's chest or run a hand down Vankos's saggy hand-me-down pants. The bones of his hips begged to be held onto. He wanted them in his hands as he filled Minot's ass from behind...

He looked away.

Minot fiddled with his empty jug. "I have a lot of questions."

"Ask away."

"I've always been loyal to the Unias. You have no idea how much I've given up to follow every last policy and procedure. Why'd they fuck me over? I mean, why didn't they just kill me if they wanted me

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gone?”

Ky drained his jug and thought about this. Hell, he'd been thinking about it ever since he got the payment to nab Minot. “You never pissed anyone off?” he asked.

“Not that I know of.”

“Maybe they needed you out of the picture once you'd found the Codex.”

“Perhaps,” said Minot. “But they didn't actually get the Codex.”

“True. Vankos was supposed to meet up with a covert after I got you onboard.” He turned the situation around in his head some more while they sat in silence. Finally a thought struck him.

“Maybe they figured you knew too much about the Codex...”

“Well, I did study Ramistrian to be able to read the damn thing—”

Bad move. “Did they tell you to learn Ramistrian?”

“No. I wanted to show some initiative. You know, if I saw it for just a few moments before an alarm went off or something, I thought it best to be able to translate at least part of it.”

Dread filled Ky as he absorbed this new bit of information. He stood and tossed his jug into a waste bucket. “That was stupid. You see, Unias doesn't want its spies too smart. Who knew you'd taken that up as a hobby?”

“My partner, Calia.”

“Well, there you go. So, how much did you read of it?”

Minot stood as well, and stretched. Ky marveled at the hint of dark hair that appeared above the droopy waistband and felt himself growing hard.

“Not much. Apparently my Ramistrian sucks.”

They both laughed, but Minot grew quiet then added, “When they realize your partner doesn't have the goods, they'll come after you. Will they find us?”

“Not if I can pilot the burn properly. I've been doing some research,

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and with heldonium in the tank, we're pretty much invincible."

"But chances are the Unias have their own stash." Minot thankfully pulled up his pants. "And I've been wondering why the govs didn't send their own man in to get me. Hasn't that struck you as curious?"

You bet. Ky nodded.

Minot rounded the table to trash his own jug, and he leaned against Ky's back as he did. "They know you're not dead, don't they? They killed you off in the Academy textbooks because you went underground. Hell, maybe they were the ones who sent you there in the first place."

He shivered as the voice in his ear grew huskier, lower, as if sharing secrets with a lover.

"I think they were going for a two-for-one," said Minot. "It's an election year, you know. Finding new deposits of a valuable energy source and a rogue spy at the same time? I'd say that's quite a coup."

"If they catch me, they'll kill me. That is, after they torture me to find out what the Codex says."

Minot laughed. "I thought you looked at it awfully hard before tossing it into the flames. How'd you do? I mean, Ramistrian is one crazy-ass language."

"I did okay. Ramistrian is easy, for a Ramistrian."

Minot turned him around and pressed him into the table. "Ky Andumi, man of mystery. Will the surprises ever stop with you?"

"If they stop, I'll no longer be an enigma to you." He leaned back onto the table, half hoping Minot would press harder. "In truth, I'm just a son of simple moon colony miner. The Unias found heldonium there first. Worked my people to the death extracting that stuff for generations and sent them to harsh new worlds in search of more. That's why I did whatever it took to get into the Academy. I wanted to know everything about my enemy. I wanted revenge."

The expression on Minot's face told him he was piecing together

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the past. Minot backed away slightly.

"You 'died' the same year as the Ramistrian Resistance came into play."

"Yep. And what a year that was." A surge of pride welled up inside him. "We were the first colony to become independent of Unias rule."

"The govs gave other reasons for the revolt. I never questioned it. Or them. I never gave it a second thought."

"Unias propaganda is really potent stuff. You fell for it just like everyone else did."

"Geez. How much other crap have I taken in without questioning it? I'm such a sucker."

Ky grinned at Minot's last words. He arched away from the table and locked his gaze on the remorseful brown eyes facing his. "No, Minot. You're definitely not a sucker."

"Thanks for saying it, but I still feel—"

Ky poked him lightly in the stomach. "That's not what I meant."

"Oh." Minot's cheeks flushed quite nicely.

He laughed and circled Minot's open lips with a finger. "Yeah, making an *O* with your mouth is a good start."

The other man didn't move. He simply stood there slack-jawed and silent.

Finally, Ky broke the quiet. "I'm only joking with you." He slapped him on the shoulder and brushed by him. Lighten up. I know it's not your thing."

"What if it was my thing?" asked Minot.

He stopped and turned around. "Then you sure have a funny way of showing it. You're one of those conflicted types, aren't you?"

"Huh?"

"Either be man enough to go after what you want, or go back to pretending. Living a lie with pussy isn't so bad, right? You can deal with that for the rest of your days."

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“But you can’t?”

“Life’s too short to not find the love you want, Minot.”

Let him stew. Don’t press him, don’t sway him. He’s gotta decide on his own. Ky shut his mouth and headed for his chamber. “After a quick shower, I’m going play with the burners. See what that heldonium can do. Wanna help?”

“Me help you with thrusting? I dunno...” Minot’s laugh echoed down the hallway. “I’m not very experienced.”

Ky laughed back. “I’m sure you’ll do just fine.”

Just fine, indeed.

CHAPTER 8

After a brisk dunk in the hydro-bar, Minot towed off and found some clean shorts. The peek he took at himself in the mirror was brief but he'd seen it. How could he not?

He was hungry, and not for a crappy wad of protein. He took a second, longer look.

The run could account for some of the color in his cheeks, but the glimmer in his eyes? The wide pupils? That was something purely carnal. Something needing satiating.

He grabbed the crusty tube of teeth wash and peeled away the layers of white around the opening. Then he washed the tip of it with hot water and opened wide. The influx of cleanser filled his mouth, and he swished it over tongue and through teeth until a slow burn permeated his gums. He spat and rinsed. He messed with his hair.

Stop primping and get down there. He gave his features a final nod of approval and headed deep into the bowels of the ship.

THE ANDUMI EFFECT

Ky had beat him there by at least ten minutes—he could tell by the sweat-soaked shirt clinging to the hard body underneath.

“Come here.”

Minot came, but he kept his distance.

“I’m gonna open up the thrusters and burn while you figure out where we end up,” Ky said. “Auxiliary steering is to your right. Hit the third button to your left to get 3-D navigation.”

He did, and the star system spread out before him in a web of planets, constellations, and space trash. After spotting Reamus, he identified the steady blink of a spec of dust. “Here we are now.”

“Magnify?”

Minot panned in and locked the settings. “I’m ready when you are.”

Ky put his hand on the lever and grinned. “Then hold onto something and pray we don’t crash.” He raised the lever, and the ship lurched to the right.

Not too bad. Ky’s control of the burn and Minot’s miniscule part in steering had transported them from Reamus to the top of the star map. “Looks like we’re near the junk territories. Nastar, Glege. If you need any drugs, now’s your chance.”

Ky laughed. “No thanks. Let’s try again before some pirate runner attacks us. Ready?”

“Go for it.”

The burn was shorter but didn’t have the desired effect, and the blinking light representing their place in the universe flashed faintly on the other side of the room.

They faced each other and frowned. “Temperature problem?” Minot asked.

“Yep. Let’s cool her down.” Ky flipped some switches and billows of steam seeped from the edges of the burner hatch.

“So the hotter it gets in the burner, the more power the heldonium has?”

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Ky shrugged. “Maybe. Or perhaps it has to do with where it’s at in the breakdown of the element. Who knows?”

Both possibilities made sense. But how the hell did one control it? He pointed at the middle of the star-laced cube in front of him. “When the temp stabilizes, give the lever a quick pump and I’ll pilot to that quad. Are you a betting man?”

Ky chuckled. “Sure—we’ll never make that. What’s up for grabs?”

Your ass. Your tight, tough ass. Minot swallowed, but it didn’t help the dry heat raging in his throat. “A sexual favor.”

“You’re on. But...”

Minot grinned. “Yeah, I was thinking of your butt.”

A muscle twitched in Ky’s lean face, and if Minot looked lower, he had a feeling something else was twitching, too.

“Very funny. What I wanted to say is that there needs to be some...mutual pleasure.”

“Agreed.”

Ky studied the star map and tightened his grip on the lever. Minot could almost see the prayer forming on the Ramistrian’s lips.

“Ready?” Minot asked. “And no goofing around with the burn.”

“I promise. And I’m ready.”

A fraction of a moment went by. The ship jerked. Ky left the burner to determine their success.

It wasn’t perfect, but it was damn close. “I’ll give it to you, Ky. We’re a considerable distance away.”

“We could be there in a flash. I say you’re the winner. Or maybe should call it a tie.”

A tie could be fun, each taking turns. For hours—or better yet, days—as they drifted through the tranquil dust clouds of Oherian. Minot powered down the map and watched the galaxy compress into a flat haze of stardust and planetary flecks. He spread open his arms.

“No, Ky. I owe you. Name your favor.”

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The expression on Ky's face was endearing. Ky Andumi, seasoned spy. Legend or perhaps ghost, depending on who you believed. Standing there in an obvious fit of uncontrollable lust.

His cheek flexed and relaxed as the muscle gave away his secrets. Minot could do anything at this point. Make him suckle his cock again or take *him* in the ass. Or even walk away like his brain told him to.

But his cock had a say in the matter as well, and it wanted to be free of the confines of clothes. He gave in and unfastened the shorts. His swollen prick stuck its head out as if coming out for a breath of air, and in a way it was. It was free, truly free, for the first time. Free to love. Or like, or maybe just fuck for the moment.

No, he thought. Deep inside he knew this would be more than a casual thing for Ky. He had to respect that if he intended to press on.

"What do you want," he asked.

Ky gave him his back and started up the stairs.

Shit. He deserved this. Deserved worse than this. But he wanted to hear words, not guess what Ky was thinking. "Ky?"

He followed each rung upward with his eyes and stared at the clenching and unclenching of Ky's fists.

"Minot?"

"Yes?"

"I want you. In my bed. Now."

He shot up the stairs like a thirsty canine in need of quenching, dashed past Ky, dick bobbing and balls bouncing, and kept going until he thought his lungs would implode. Steady footfalls grew closer. The door to Ky's chamber slid open. Minot dove onto the neatly made bed, and turned onto his back.

"As you were."

The whispered words filled him with both dread and desire. He rolled back over onto his stomach. Ky's weight pressed into the bed. Moist lips covered his neck and spine.

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“Do you want to fuck me there first, Minot?”

He shook his head into the pillow. Ky slid off the bed. Sounds of clothing wisping to the floor and drawers opening filled the room. Ky came back.

“On your knees.”

He complied and waited for the icy lube to coat his cleft, but it didn't come. Instead, a pointed tongue painted him warm. Coated his sac and dabbed at the stretch of skin between balls and anus. His cock strained against his abdomen hoping to go higher and wept along his stomach in anticipation. He wanted to clutch it. To wrench it and twist it until he'd choked out all the fluids. Until he was spent. But there was fun in the waiting and in the giving. Ky deserved this.

Strong hands pried his ass cheeks wider apart where Ky's breath singed his flesh. “You're going to be so tight, babe. I bet I won't last three strokes.” A finger tickled the entrance to his virgin hole. “Maybe I should fuck it with my tongue first.”

The slick spear fought its way into his asshole and squirmed against his rectum's pulsing walls. “Heaven,” was the only appropriate thing to say. So he said it. Over and over and over... The tongue forced itself deeper, probing as far as possible. Minot caught his own slippery dickhead and powered up his arm. The tongue retreated.

Ky's fingers caught his wrist. “No, babe. Right now this is all about me.” His tongue went back for more, but it aimed lower. A steady lapping stroked his balls with playful licks, and when Ky sucked in his right nut, Minot moaned into the pillow. Warmth surrounded the sensitive nugget. Brought him close to the edge.

After a go at the left ball, Ky returned to exploring his ass again. Swirling round it and flicking back and forth. Minot grunted now and gripped the bed covers, writhing in bliss with every wet lash. Ky's hands left his ass, but the tongue remained. He heard the soft scrape of a metal tube along the sheet, the barely audible unscrewing of a cap.

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Here we go.

He expected the lube to be cold, but Ky had warmed it with his hands before making contact. And he used a lot of it. The thin, slippery oil wandered from his asshole in a tickly trickle down to the end of his balls. More lube came, and Ky worked it over Minot's pucker with gentle whirls. Fingers trailed down to his drawn-up sac and coated that, too.

"Spread for me, *sava*."

Minot's legs splayed wider and his ass tilted higher toward the ceiling. After another squish of lube sounded behind him, he felt a slick palm spin over his cock from base to seeping tip.

The tease was slow, the pleasure exquisite. Ky built inside him a fire, roaring hot and steady, that kept the carnal flames inside his loins right at the brink of climax.

"I can't take much more..."

"Sure you can." Ky's whisper was feather-soft against his ass. "I could do this for weeks and not let you come. Just tease you. Keep you in agony 'til you cried for release."

"Please don't. I just might die."

The hand on his shaft trailed away. A fingertip grazed the crinkled skin between his cheeks once more, this time insistent and needy to seek entrance as the tongue had.

Minot willed his muscles to relax and let it in, then savored the wet slide of the well-oiled finger pressing deeply and deliberately into the tight channel. After a subtle wiggle, the finger made an unhurried retreat until just the very end of a fingertip maintained its hold inside him.

"Back inside. Please?"

Ky fed it back in as he'd asked. They played this game over and over, Ky taunting him with an unrushed fuck of fingers, Minot begging. Pleading. Pushing back into Ky's hand demanding more.

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“Say it, *sava*.”

“Say what?” he asked.

Ky chuckled. “Say you want another finger. Tell me how you want to be stretched and filled.”

Minot groaned at these words. “I want more.” *Much more. I want it all—you into me to the balls...*

“Hmm. Maybe just a finger more. You’re so tight.”

The second digit joined the first. It was uncomfortable at first, but his muscles eventually gave way and softened with each stroke. Soon Minot braced his hands against the metal headboard and pumped against Ky’s hand. Impaling himself with an anxious rhythm until his senses melded. The smell of their sweat merged with the muted noise of lovers, the groans and tender laughter. And although he kept his eyes shut, he could picture Ky behind him, watching the fingers disappear and the sway of his sac with every thrust. Minot’s mind processed each of these things as one delicious experience, and he didn’t want it to end.

“I’m going to fuck you now. I think you’re ready.”

I am, he wanted to scream, but he was too busy gasping for breath to answer.

The fingers rode him one last time and slipped away. The spongy tip of Ky’s cock nudged his asshole. *Finally...* But the cockhead was thick. Too thick.

“Yield to me.” Ky reached around Minot’s thigh and caught his cum-covered prick. A few strokes later, he relaxed. Surrendered. Gave in to his darkest desires and the want that had ravaged him since his years as a youth.

“Damn, you’re tight. And so fucking hot.” Ky’s whisper was hoarse and laced with need. He grabbed Minot’s hips and pumped.

Then he was rolling, shifting in the sheets to his side as Ky rolled with him, still inside him, still pumping away. A hand grabbed his right knee and shoved it toward his chest to give Ky better access. His cock

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plunged deeper, and his hand loosened its grip on the knee to find Minot's cock.

A steady friction rubbed a sweet spot in his ass. Rubbed it just right. The fingers on his dick strangled his shaft before sluicing up to the head. A thumb pressed against the weeping slit. Ky's lips sought his neck and cheek with steamy, delirious pecks, then a frenzied tongue fucked his ear. Senses overwhelmed, he gripped the edge of the mattress for purchase against the powerful thrusts into his ass, and to answer them with thrusts of his own. And when the spasms in his cock signaled his release, he felt Ky grasp his skull with his free hand. He turned him. They kissed. He came. Semen blasted through him and arced over the bed to splatter on the floor. He whimpered into Ky's hot mouth.

Ky made his own sounds; deep roars became murmurs of contentment as his penis contracted inside Minot's ass and emptied the molten syrup of his balls there, filling him, making them one.

He didn't want to move. Couldn't move. Ky eventually slid out, slithered out really. It made him laugh.

"What's so funny?" Ky asked.

"Sorry. For a sec, I was back at the Academy. Remember that course about using your body to get what you want, to escape or fight back? Or to wring the info from your victim one word at a time?"

Ky nuzzled his shoulder. "Yeah..."

"There's the Tysovi Effect where you put thumbs in a guy's throat and bring him to his knees. And the Rusko Effect. Fingers in the ears. Very painful. Now we have the Andumi Effect." He met Ky's eyes. "I would've told you anything while you fucked me. All of my secrets. Everything you wanted to hear."

He watched the grin grow on Ky's lips. "That's good to know. I'll keep this in mind for future reference."

"But you know everything about me. You on the other hand..."

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Ky got to his knees and pulled Minot along with him as he stood and tugged him toward the hydro-bar. “Maybe the Andumi Effect works on me as well.”

“Hmm. Guess we’ll have to see about that. I’ll torture you for hours and hours until you give it all up. Every last story.”

Ky’s smiling eyes told him he’d spill anything Minot wanted to know, and after a long, hot session in the bar to wash away the sex, they tumbled back into bed.

CHAPTER 9

They stayed like that for days, tangled in the sheets and twisted up with one another. Telling their tales. But Ky had held back one story.

Now, with Minot laid out across his chest breathing with the same languid pace, he was ready.

“What do you know about Ramistriians?”

Minot glanced up and anchored his chin in the space between Ky’s nipples. “Well, prior to meeting you I would’ve said they’re a simple people who got lucky with their revolt against the Unias. But since you’re one, I’m betting they’re anything but simple.”

Ky smiled at the compliment, but it faded as he thought of his people. “We were a simple race, content with a simple life—until the govs discovered us. Do you know why we were sent to mine heldonium?”

“Sent? I figured the Unias lured you there with the promise of profit-sharing.”

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“Trust me, we had no choice in the matter. Heldonium is elusive. You know this because you had to be very resourceful to find it. The mineral can be tracked only at close range.”

Minot nodded. “Right. Otherwise my partner and I wouldn’t have been called in for the job.”

“Planets containing heldonium are huge. Massive even. You’d need people with a special talent to find the deposits. Empathic people.” He brought Minot closer until their foreheads touched. “Many Ramistrians have the talent for finding it. They can find the ore deep inside a planet. And some of us can tell if people are lying or know what their intentions are. Why do you think I made such a great spy?”

“I never knew any of this.”

“I believe you, Minot.”

He grinned. “You don’t have to believe me. You can sense whether I’m telling the truth.”

“Not exactly.”

They didn’t speak for a few microns. Finally, Minot broke the silence. “So that day you removed the Codex from me, you had no idea I was going to renege on my end of the deal to suck you?”

“Not a clue.” Ky turned to his side, rolling Minot from his body, and left the bed to find Minot’s file. “Which may be why the govs wanted you out of the picture.” He returned to the bed and handed over the papers. “Empath spies, good. Shielders, bad. You didn’t know that about yourself?”

“No...” Minot sat up and studied the pages. “So when the Unias wanted me out of the picture, they gave you my whole life story, eh?”

“Well, let’s just say I still have a few friends in high places. The govs gave me and the partner I left behind on Jargus enough facts to find you.” He caught Minot at the waist and pulled him back to the pillows. “Maybe they wanted you gone once they learned you might be able to translate the Codex. Since it told where the known deposits

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were located throughout the universe, you could've used that information. Sold it. Used it for your personal gain. No one—not even the strongest empath around—could extract that from you.

“And you're a strong shielder. I can't get a hint of your thoughts, no matter how hard I try.” He held Minot tighter. “But I do know this... you were meant for me. I took one glimpse of your photo and *knew*.”

Minot smiled. It was a strange smile, a mix of happiness and uncertainty.

“What are you thinking?” Ky asked.

“Can we stay out here forever?”

“No. We'll eventually need more food, and water.”

His *sava* sighed. “When we return—wherever we end up—will we have a normal life? You know, living the way we want, where we want?”

He shrugged. “One can hope for some kind of normalcy, but I have a feeling we'll be on the run. Can you live with that?”

Minot cupped Ky's cheek. “I think so.”

That's what I wanted to hear. But he could see him hesitate and draw back into his own thoughts. *Time to lighten things up.*

“Ready to practice some more thrusting tomorrow?”

Minot grinned. “Hell, yeah.”

“Not that kind, silly. The kind in the engine room.”

A hot lash of tongue whipped up his neck. “That kind, too.” His cock stirred as Minot added, “Now turn over...”

CHAPTER 10

They got to work early the next morning, and after a few rough patches, they found the right combination of burning and steering. Then they zipped to the farthest reaches and admired the light storms of Katarsis. No movement, no words. They simply stared at the ship's largest monitor watching the colored flashes burst onscreen.

Ky moved eventually—to kiss the smooth neck beside him, to touch the kaleidoscope of star-flames reflected on Minot's hairless chest. The storms painted the landscape of his strong flesh, and Ky's fingers traced the shapes leisurely while Minot leaned his weight against him.

It was as if he were part of the universe for once. *Does Minot feel it, too? That elusive sense of belonging.* Ky had been on the run so long that this unfamiliar feeling made him want to cry. His sense of self, his sense of place, had been almost forgotten. Tucked away to keep him safe.

He'd been off-planet, studying at University, when the Unias took

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his people. A cryptic letter from his father was all that remained of his family, and he'd pretended to be of another race when he joined the Academy. There, he learned to hide his sexuality as well. He remembered nights in his dorm berth thinking of revenge, and men, while praying he could keep up the deceit for however long it took him to free his people.

It was hell.

But standing here now was heaven. The realization that they were meant to be together overwhelmed him. Ky didn't want the feeling to ever end.

After a few hours of awed silence, Minot spoke. "It's amazing," he whispered.

Ky held him tighter as they stood. "You're amazing."

Minot turned and kissed him. He kissed back, mouth opening until the corners of his lips stung. Until his tongue traced every tooth. He wanted to reach in and touch his soul. Bind them together forever.

They would stay together forever, Ky was sure of that. But a sensor on the air tanks had gone off this morning. It was time to return to civilization.

* * *

It would be easy to dock on any of the outer moons, and Ky checked for news on Louvia. Everyone seemed to be at peace there for the present time; no gov shake-downs were posted, no colonial revolts. They'd dock and stock, as it were, and maybe even take a day to see the sights or shop for frivolous things. Minot sure as hell could use some clothes that fit. Tighter clothes. The kind that showed his ass and cock and the soft outline of his balls.

Ky quit his daydreaming and concentrated on easing *The Ember* into Louvia's wharf zone. They'd been warned that it would be a tight fit. "Tight" was right, and not just because of the lack of space. He groaned as they passed window after window of a Class-5 Unias

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warship to reach their airlock.

Fuck me. No, fuck us. Fuck, fuck, fuck...

“Um, Minot? Check out our neighbor here.”

Minot looked up from his readings on their water supply. “Oh, shit!” His calculator dropped to the floor. “We gotta get out of here. Just turn tail and get the hell out.”

“Yeah, right. They’d be right behind us, netting our ass in a heartbeat if we did something that obvious. Nothing says, ‘I’ve got something to hide!’ more than a move like that. Any other suggestions?”

Minot sighed. “Maybe com-call a concierge service? We could let them make all our arrangements while we stay onboard. It’ll cost you, but it might be safer.”

“Does this outpost even have a concierge?”

“I dunno, but it’s worth a try.”

Minot might be right. They found a freelancer and made the arrangements. The guy’s docu-card looked a little shady, but they didn’t have a choice. They paid.

And they paid dearly.

CHAPTER 11

Within minutes after the man's departure, the Class-5 hailed them.

"They'll kill us both." Minot turned to Ky. "Get off or hide. I'll take the fall."

"I'm not leaving you. Not now. Let me get the silver paint—"

"There's no time. I have to answer before they hail us again." He gave Ky the briefest of kisses, then shoved him back. "I'm going to open the hatch. If I turn around, you'd better be gone. Legends shouldn't get caught. Ghosts don't get caught. Now leave."

Ky stood there frozen, so he pushed him again. Then he slammed his fist into the console and watched Louvia's pale pink light seep into *The Ember*. He didn't hear Ky move behind him, but he willed himself not to look back.

Soon, men in dark gray stormed the ship and pointed their weapons at Minot.

You'd better be gone. The prospect of facing the govs alone—of

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losing Ky—almost brought him to his knees. But he refused to look back. *Not a hint that he's here. Not a fucking hint.*

“Hands in the air!”

He raised them and grinned. “Not much of a rescue party.”

The sea of men and metal parted as the captain of the Class-5 stepped forward.

“We haven’t come for you,” he said. “We’ve come for the Codex. Or what’s left of it.” The fucker held out his gloved hand as if Minot had it on his person or something. “Unias Central noticed an anomaly in the star map. Rapid movement with blue afterburn. Please retrieve the fragments you haven’t wasted and bring them to me. Escorts?”

Four heavily armed men stepped forward. Minot stayed put.

“And here I thought you were saving my ass. You know, making sure I was okay. I’m hurt, guys. Truly hurt.”

“You’re going to be hurt—badly—if we don’t get the Codex soon. Where are the Damurian slavers?”

His grin vanished. “One’s gone. One’s dead.”

The captain stepped closer and lifted Minot’s chin with the butt of a very expensive DX-480, the most powerful handheld weapon ever made. If the captain got a tremble in his fingers, they’d never find all the pieces of Minot’s brain. His gray matter would be nestled in the floor beams and ceiling tiles no matter how many washings the ship’s interior went through.

“For some reason I don’t believe you, Agent Tvargot.”

“That would be *ex*-Agent Tvargot. I stopped working for Unias the day you guys tried to get rid of my ass.”

The gun pressed deeper into his flesh. *Shut up, you idiot. You’re only making things worse.*

“So a bound man with no weapon took care of a Damurian? Amazing. Perhaps we should take you back...”

I wouldn’t work for you again if my life depended on it. “It’s the

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truth. I killed the one when his partner went off-ship. It wasn't that hard."

The captain smiled. "Possible, but I still don't believe you—"

Another man stepped forward. "Want us to read him, sir?"

"No point. He's a shielder." The captain thankfully removed his gun and faced the group of Stavian empath's, the best in the biz. They lifted their brows or frowned. The captain turned back to Minot. "And when we found out about his extracurricular activity, we wanted him gone. You did figure that out, didn't you, Minot?"

He nodded. "But I would never have betrayed you like you betrayed me," he whispered.

"So how much did translate? And please say all of it. If you dumped it all into your burners without doing so, I'll kill you right now. Slowly."

So long, Ky. Wherever you are onboard.

Minot swallowed, but it did little to soothe his dry throat. "Ancient Ramistrian is a pretty tough language. I could maybe recreate some of the symbols, but I couldn't figure out much of anything."

The captain's leather-sheathed palm cracked across Minot's cheekbone. "You're lying. Because if you hadn't read it, you wouldn't know it in itself could be used as fuel. Care to try again?"

Think, buddy. Think.

"The ship's sensors went off, said it was toxic. Volatile. I was afraid to shoot it off the ship. It might explode and take me with it. So I threw it in the burner since it could handle whatever happened. Boy, was that a surprise..."

The captain laughed. Or maybe cackled. He didn't care as long as it saved his ass. "Minot, your sense of humor is endearing. In fact, it might be the only thing keeping you alive. It will be interesting to see you lose your levity as we torture the information out of you. Today, you will regret being born with the gift of shielding." His gleaming

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black boot heels spun on the floorboards with a scrape.

“Take him to the warbird.”

* * *

Ky heard every word from his hiding place in the steel rafters, but he didn't dare think. Not with the Stavians in range. They could pick up a stray thought better than any breed of empath.

Once they shut down *The Ember* and began the tow, he moved slowly through the ship and gathered his weapons. They'd be no match for whatever the Class-5 had on board. But they were Minot's only chance.

CHAPTER 12

How many bones had they crushed today? Minot wondered, his brain half-drugged, half-dazed. If memory served him well, there were two hundred eighteen bones beneath his skin. Skin now covered in dried bloody gashes or mottled with huge splotches of green, blue, and purple.

He smiled. Not because he was delirious, but because his torso reminded him of that one day of heaven when the light storms had glowed across his chest. He pretended each point of pain was a gentle caress from Ky. It helped. Every time his mind wandered to Ky, he knew he was still sane. Still capable of feeling and healing. Then he chuckled, even though it hurt like hell.

The Andumi Effect. They hadn't used that one on him yet. He'd been on the receiving end of all the other methods of torture: The Tysovi, the Rusko, the Dwesie—that one had been a royal bitch—and a few others that had been developed since his graduation. Had the govs

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known about the Andumi Effect, he would've spilled within microns. To feel Ky's dick sliding into his ass... He laughed again. A Unias torture victim with a rock-hard erection? It didn't get any more surreal than that.

Might as well find some pleasure in this hell. He curled to his side, away from the cameras, and ignored the pull of the wires piercing his shaved skull. They'd hoped to get a reading from him this way, but lately it'd become just another way to keep him in agony. When his brain showed hunger, they'd taunt him with food. When it craved sleep, the light came on and the floor pulsed with vibration. He pulled away the rag covering his crotch and wondered what would happen when his muddled mind registered pleasure. There was only one way to find out...

He spat into his trembling palm and rubbed the slickness over his cock. A spasm rippled over the neglected organ as it grew to full size. His sore balls contracted, drew up into little puffs of heat against his thighs. It didn't take long, just a few strokes. Just a vision of him in Ky's mouth and Ky in his. The long, languid sucks. The playful licks and the frantic bucking of hips at the end. Ky's hot breath escaping as he suckled, like a vent of pure carnal heat against the base of him. His limp, misshapen hand tried to form a circle around his cockhead and failed, so he fingered himself to climax, pressing along his glans. Propelling himself into release with thoughts and memories.

He wanted—no, needed—to say that name when he came. To cling to some piece of humanity in this, his darkest of days. But to speak would be to betray, so the muffled words caressed his shoulder.

"You undo me." *You, Andumi.* Cum erupted from his tip.

Please be alive, he thought. He'd give up completely if he ever found out they'd caught Ky and hurt him. Or worse.

Because life wouldn't be worth anything without Ky in the universe.

CHAPTER 13

“Minot Tvargot, please stand.”

He stood slowly. The breaks in his legs had been healed yesterday afternoon, but things still weren't quite right. All cuts gone, every bruise a memory.

What the hell is going on? He faced the council of twelve before him and waited in what appeared to be an official courtroom. The judge cleared his throat.

“Since you have been disloyal to your government on the issue of heldonium, we see fit to send you to the mines. Perhaps, after a month inhaling the vapors and having them eat away your lungs, you'll change your mind and talk.”

The judge clapped his hands. “Minot Tvargot, former prisoner of State #T-4862 is hereby indentured to the highest bidder from today's Unias Release auction.”

A tall, blond man from across the room came forward and took

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Minot's arm, but he was too stunned to move. Yeah, the mines had to be better than what he'd gone through, but here he was still alive. The mines were a death sentence. Would Ky ever find him out in the colonies?

The hand on his arm gave a gentle squeeze. "Don't worry, Tvargot. I can assure you we have the highest safety standards in the industry. The health reports of all our *savas* surprise even us."

Savas? He spun his face to the man's. He knew that smell. How could he forget it?

"Yes, sir," he said meekly. "Glad to hear it."

He followed the man. Sucked in his scent while his heart trembled with hope and uncertainty. The blond led him through the busy City-Plex streets to a wharf reserved for merchants from the outer reaches. He knew it wouldn't be *The Ember*, but he didn't expect a fleet-class craft as a replacement.

"What do you call her?"

The Ky in disguise didn't answer until the hatch sealed behind them. Then he crushed him in an embrace. "I call her Hel. Just one 'L' even though it's been hell without you."

"You have no idea, Ky. Take off the mask. Let me kiss you."

"The govs must've figured out I was involved. My face is posted all over the galaxy." He pulled away slightly looking unsure of himself. "This isn't a mask."

"Ah. Chromosomal regeneration?"

Ky nodded and a small line of worry creased his brand new forehead. "Do I look okay to you?"

"As long as they didn't change anything on the inside, I couldn't care less." He drew him near again. "How the hell did you afford it?"

"Black market heldonium, baby. If we're going to be on the run, we might as well be rich. I've got robotics set up on all but three of the planets mentioned in the Codex. So far the Unias thinks I'm a start-up

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company, but I don't sell all of the ore to them. I sell to the colonies planning to revolt. They trade it for weapons. It's an exciting time, and I'm sorry you missed it all during the past six months—"

Minot grinned and pressed his fingers to Ky's moving lips. "I'll catch up on all that later. Right now, I only want to hear about you." The curl of his lips straightened as he pushed steadily into Ky's hips. They were both hard. "You keep saving my ass. When are you going to let me save yours?"

Ky smiled through the fingers. "I'm sure there will be plenty of opportunities for that in the future. And I wanted to save you on Louvia. But it would've been suicide for us both. Buying you was easier."

"What's done is done." Minot removed his hand and kissed that smile. Kissed it twice.

Ky's own fingers went straight for Minot's cock. "Everything still in working order?"

"See for yourself. After all, I am your property. Again."

The buttons of his fly came loose, and his cock popped out. Ky grinned, then sank to his knees. "I think another inspection is in order to make sure you were money well spent."

Minot leaned back against the cargo and watched as the unfamiliar pair of lips sucked in his length. The tongue, though, felt the same. "I like the new look."

Ky stopped long enough to smile. "That's not all that's new."

"The face, the hair... What else?"

The man at his crotch stood and removed his own pants. "It cost a little more, but I thought you'd like it."

Minot couldn't answer; his jaw simply wouldn't cooperate. Ky helped him shut his mouth with a kiss. When he regained his senses, he started to protest. "It'll never fit."

"Oh, it'll fit." Ky's husky laugh made his whole body hum and

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tremble. A finger brushed over his lips. "It'll fit here..." Then the finger went south and pulled one ass cheek to the side. "...And here. Want me to prove it?"

"Yes," whispered Minot. "But I'm a pretty skeptical guy. You'll probably have to prove it over and over again."

"I plan to," he said, cupping both pricks in his hand. "Starting tonight."

LAURA BACCHI

Laura Bacchi is an award-winning author of erotic romance who can usually be found at the computer maniacally typing out plots before they evaporate from her brain or bribing the muses to please, please come back so she can finish what she starts. When she's not writing, she's busy coaxing her husband into assisting with any "research" she may need to conduct.

Laura lives in the Metro DC area with a super-supportive husband who is always willing to read her latest work-in-progress and assist with any "research." Readers are always welcome to drop her a line at laura@laurabacchi.com. For more about Laura and her work, please visit her website at <http://www.laurabacchi.com>.

* * *

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