

Lone Huntress

AP Miller

Published by HeatWave Romance
A Division of Awe-Struck E-Books

Copyright © 2005

ISBN: 1-58749-508-2

Electronic rights reserved by HeatWave Romance, all other rights reserved by author. The reproduction or other use of any part of this publication without the prior written consent of the rights holder is an infringement of the copyright law.

This is a work of fiction. People and locations, even those with real names, have been fictionalized for the purposes of this story.

Book II

Lone Huntress

The multimeter's LED screen flickered as the probes connected with delicate circuitry. As the device detected abnormalities, hand tools were applied, cleaning, replacing, restoring. Making the functional--the exceptional. Finally, the probes were withdrawn; the tool put away, the cover plate reinserted. I admired its streamlined form, its promise of swift justice, my lips curved in a slight smile of appreciation. Then, as the smile faded, I popped off my right hand and snapped the gun into its place.

Being a cyborg has its advantages.

But sometimes the price seems a little high.

I rose from my workbench, in my armory, where I kept my tools, and the tools that kept those tools functioning. My guns. My missiles. My armor. Oh, my armor. My lovely, lonely suit of armor. My refuge, against all that would hurt me. Few have ever seen me without it.

I paid a high price for the armor, too.

I traced one finger along the contours of the suit, the rounded, almost organic curves of the surface, designed to deflect attacks by denying them an even striking plane, running my fingertip over the sealed joints, which retained flexibility while ensuring a maximum of protection against not only weapons, but hostile environments as well. My finger reached the button to open the suit, to raise its visored helm and bulky breastplate. Then I climbed in, relishing the smell of sweat, excitement, and fear, soaked in too deeply to ever be washed clean, and the feeling of being surrounded by the metal, plastic, and energy. The feeling of being wrapped in the protective embrace of a cherished friend, one who had never let me down, and never would.

Once my suit had finished its automated warm up sequence, I made my way down to the holding pen. Although I usually preferred my prey killed rather than captured, the bounty on this one was just too good to pass up. I passed through the portal to the bare room, its center dominated by a few cages, one of bars of the hardest metal ever to be used for the purpose, one of delicate circuitry that would form an energy barrier around my quarry rather than metal, and one of flexible, airtight polymers. No matter what my bounty's abilities, I had a cage that could hold it, at least long enough to reach the proper authorities.

My prey huddled in the metal cage, his arms and legs shackled to the center.

Just enough chain to give him the freedom to stretch his limbs. Not enough to so much as touch the bars of his cage. I wasn't about to take any chances with this scum.

Call me paranoid.

He glanced up as I entered the pen, and his teeth shone in a dazzling smile. His eyes danced with delight at my approach. Every inch of him screamed delight at my presence.

Jerk.

"Feeding time, scum," I told him, as I tossed him a couple of ration bars through the cage, along with a liter squeeze packet of water. He caught the water deftly, despite his chains, and raised his drink in a toast. "Thank you, fair lady," he said, with the voice of a dear friend, a lover, a father...

I raised my gun. "Knock it off," I told him. His smile froze momentarily, before he nodded cheerfully, his good vibes toned down a notch.

"You'll forgive me if I maintain a LITTLE charm..." he cocked one eyebrow. "Simply in the interest of providing good company, oh hostess." I regarded him warily.

"Be pleasant if you wish," I retorted, "but I'll forfeit the bonus for a live bounty before I let you charm me into freeing you."

Call me forthright.

He nodded pleasantly. "No need to worry, fair huntress. I shall save my powers for those who'd put such a price on my head. Which would be...?"

I smiled behind my helmet. "Francine desDesmonde."

Madame desDesmonde is one of the ruling heads of the plutocracy of Signus IV. Her wealth is beyond imagining, as vast as the galaxy her planet inhabits. Her beauty is the finest money can buy--exquisite, that is. Her gorgeous face, accentuated by the finest cosmetics, her lithe, slender body, garbed in clothes that rival my suit for sheer monetary value. And her soul, as hard and unforgiving as the cold floor Romeo lay on.

Romeo, my bounty. His face and form may have been less than perfect at one time. Now they were the perfection of a surgeon's art. Paid for by Francine. She'd loved him for his mind. Literally. Romeo was a projective telepath, able to influence the thoughts of others. Everyone he met fell in love with him. And was used by him. He'd lived his life in one bed after another, leaving shattered lives

and broken hearts in his wake, grieving men and women who pined away ever after, even knowing what he was.

Only now, he'd abandoned the wrong woman. A woman utterly ruthless, and wealthy enough to afford my services. Romeo's face paled at the name. I grinned openly. Too bad he couldn't see it through my faceplate. "She REALLY wants to see you again," I taunted him. "When I talked to her, she couldn't seem to decide whether to let you live through your reunion."

"Oh, no," he moaned. "You don't know what she's LIKE!"

"Rich, beautiful, and pliable. What more could a con man have wanted?"

He turned imploring eyes on me. "She killed a man. Right in front of me. Killed him herself. Then she made me make love to her, because the killing aroused her!" He shuddered. "She takes pleasure in hurting people. It took everything I had to keep her satisfied with normal sex, without the whips and chains!"

"Surely the rewards were worth the effort?"

He shivered again. "She's bound to whip those things out, this time." He shook his head sadly.

"Shouldn't have run," I suggested. "Hell hath no fury..." I turned, and walked out.

* * *

Gentle hands ran across my slick flesh, slippery with sweat. I moaned quietly, my body arching towards those skilled hands, desperate for more. A tongue lashed my nipples, painfully hardened, before teeth nipped at them playfully. I gasped and whimpered, caressing a muscular back. The mouth made its way upward, slowly, lingering at each square inch of flesh to plant a loving kiss, until it reached my mouth, where...it claimed me. Lips that seared my own like a brand, parting them to spear my mouth with a tongue like molten iron. I responded in kind, laying claim to my lover with everything I had.

The hands drifted about, finding all my most sensitive places, and making them scream for more. My legs spread, wider and wider, in abject submission. A shaft, iron hard, touched the opening to my dripping pussy. I moaned, my hands grabbing my lover's tight ass to pull him in. But that shaft refused to be forced, instead entering slowly, agonizingly slowly...for less than an inch. Then it slowly retracted.

I cried out in frustration. My voice called out without my volition, its tones grown husky and hoarse with desperate desire. I begged for more, the humiliation of surrender only heightening my arousal.

The shaft entered again, slower than before. This time, it reached an inch and a half. Then retracted again. I moaned loudly, like a wounded beast, my anguished bellow more eloquent than any words. The shaft entered again, aching slowly. Two inches. And retracted. I jabbered incoherently, offering everything I had to my tormentor. My heart. My soul. My life. I would have gladly died, if only I could have reached completion first.

Slowly, aching slowly, it entered. Two and a half inches. I was in heaven, Paradise was mine.

Slowly, treacherously, it withdrew. I was in hell, Perdition was my lot.

In... Three inches... Out...

Whimper.

In... Three and a half... OUT...

Howl.

In... Four inches... OUT...

Scream.

My lover held that devastating weapon over my quivering cunt, as I cried and thrashed my head from side to side. My arms were pinned to my side by strong hands. Those exquisite lips whispered in my ear. A demand. Surrender...

Yes.

Possession...

YES.

Love...

YES!

That evil, awful, wonderful rod slammed home, with one smooth motion. As my legs wrapped around a trim waist in a vice grip, and my arms wrapped around a strong neck, those lips claimed me for their own. Strong arms wrapped me in a tight embrace. And my body exploded, in a conflagration of love and ecstasy...

* * *

I jerked awake with a start. For a moment, I just lay there, rigid, my bed sheets soaked with sweat. I could feel the juices dripping down my legs from my unconscious orgasm. Then my body went limp, before curling up into a ball, as the tears started. I grabbed my pillow and sobbed bitter tears into the pillowcase, as my chest began to heave with the effort of my weeping.

By no means the first erotic dream I'd ever had, this one had truly come at a bad time. I made disgusting little squealing noises, as fluids dripped from my eyes and nose. So alone. I was so alone...

When I'd cried enough that I could stand up, I went to the bathroom. A full-length mirror adorned one wall. I'd put it there on purpose, so I could stare at my body, and revel in the feelings of inadequacy.

Call me a masochist.

My breasts were large, firm, and topped with enormous nipples. Hardly the small cones that were required to be counted beautiful by sophisticated society. They gave way to a waist corded with hard muscle, rippling and bulging through the skin, where an attractive woman would have had a tiny little waist, with nary a trace of masculine muscular definition. My arms and legs were equally well muscled, more muscular than even those of the pretty boy in the holding pen. Not the slim, rounded limbs of the fair flowers that men doted on. And long. No dainty, petite thing, was I. I towered six feet above the floor while still in my teens, still growing. My hair was green, its natural color, perfectly normal on my home world. Not the delicate blondes and reds of the beautiful people.

I was a freak. An oversized behemoth...

I looked down at my right hand and my despair intensified. A metal hand. Not mine by choice. My reminder of my decision to hunt pirates, the scourge of the universe, to make them pay for what had been done to me.

Other reminders of past battles marked my body, old scars, each a reminder of a fight just barely won, of impossible odds somehow overcome.

No fashion model working for Kelvin Rheine ever had a cybernetic limb. Or had a scarred body.

After staring in revulsion at my freakishly large body for an uncounted time, I finally turned away in despair. I walked back to my bed, reached into my nightstand and withdrew the cure for such feelings. It glistened with dried fluids, its knobbed surface promising to punish my cunt beyond endurance for the sin of belonging to such a hideous woman. I flicked the switch to the low setting, and it buzzed angrily. I'm going to fuck you, it seemed to whine. I'm going to blow your mind, make you forget your troubles.

I pushed it in, sighing as the pleasurable torture began. Then I gritted my teeth, working up the nerve, then flicked the switch all the way to the highest setting. And went into spasms, my limbs jerking spasmodically, jabbering incoherent cries to an unknown lover, as my cunt, still sensitive from my dream, surrendered without a struggle to being raped by an inanimate object, my clit screaming in orgasm.

I climaxed again and again, until my mind was melted, and I forgot how lonely I was, and I could finally fall asleep.

* * *

"Breakfast, scum," I greeted Romeo cheerfully, as I chucked the rations and water at him. He opened his eyes and smiled in greeting. "Don't even start," I added, holding my gun up for him to see. "I've got the ice beam activated. It won't kill you--unless you tip over--but it sure won't feel good."

"At least stay to talk with me," he implored, raising up one ration. "Share my meal with me."

"I've eaten, thanks. The rat bars are for the scum in the cages." I sneered at him through my mask.

"I'm lonely." He said it quietly, without pretense.

I shivered in sudden empathy. Loneliness is a feeling I know all too well.

"Join the club," I snarled.

He peered through my visor, trying to see into my eyes. I knew he must be trying to touch my mind as well. Good luck. My helmet's proofed against telepathic attacks. Comes in mighty handy against telepaths, like the Fay.

Call me well prepared.

"You know," he said slowly, "I get so used to being around people, it's hard being alone. Do you ever get used to it?"

I stood there a moment, staring at nothing in particular, before I aimed my gun straight between his eyes. I snarled with sudden rage. He stepped back in sudden alarm. "What?" he stammered, "I just asked a question!"

My gun held rock steady, despite my inner turmoil. The rest of my body trembled, but my aim held true.

Call me a pro.

Romeo swallowed, choosing his words carefully, before he spoke. "I'm not the only one on this ship who's lonely. Am I?"

I continued to point my gun at him, switching the beam to the laser, to slice him to ribbons. Then I slowly lowered my arm, until it hung at my side.

"No. You're not."

"I can't read your mind through that suit," he said. "Will you at least stay here and talk to me?"

I considered it. I honestly did. I wouldn't be in any danger. He couldn't get into my head. We could just talk...

I turned away with effort. "Maybe after my workout."

* * *

My breathing was slow and deep, the relaxed rhythm of a deep sleeper. This in stark contrast to my body, which rested upon the palms of my hands, arms supporting my full weight. My torso was bent in a curve, my legs curling behind my back to dangle next to my head. Another in a series of ancient exercises that combined stretching, breathing, and strength training, mental and physical conditioning, all in one. I held the modified Scorpion pose, for twenty deep breaths, before uncoiling my spine to stand perfectly erect on my hands. Hold the pose. Lower myself into a headstand. Hold. Lower myself into a shoulder stand, resting on my neck and shoulder blades, wedging my arms into my back, for added support. Hold. And lower myself to the Corpse pose, lying sedately on the floor, breathing deeply. A quiet cool down period.

When I rose to my feet, my body felt enervated, relaxed. I smiled. Time for the technical stuff. I made my way over to my simulator, removed my hand, and strapped myself into the suit, with it's virtual reality helmet, suspended to allow the freedom to move freely without moving an inch. I chose a simulation for the day. The desert mountains of Hades.

Hades? What made me think of that place?

The desolate landscape appeared before my eyes. I began to run, the suit's synthetic muscles providing resistance to simulate perfectly the feel of hard rocky terrain underneath my feet. The BEM space pirates began to appear on my screen. Their armored bodies clacked their claws menacingly, as they swooped in, shooting their energy weapons with inhuman precision.

I dodged, twisted, leapt, spun. For this simulation I'd removed the programming for hand to hand attacks. Only my beam guns and missiles were available to me.

Of course, I kept the full power of my gun. A devastating blast of awful energies shot forth from my hand, vaporized a Bug Eyed Monster in a spray of exploding tissues. I so love my hand gun.

Call me an old-fashioned kind of girl.

As I slammed yet another pirate, it suddenly hit me, why I'd chosen to fight on Hades. Where I'd had my encounters, not only with the BEMs and their awful Queen. It was where I'd lost the Tiger kitten.

I twisted and dodged as the memories played back in my head. How the genetically engineered humanoid feline had leapt onto the Queen, and died in the pounce. How it had sacrificed itself for me. Because it had imprinted me as it's mother. It had loved me.

One of the few creatures to ever love me.

When the simulation had ended, I climbed out of the simulation suit, and grabbed my hand. I made my way over to the bathroom, removed my leotard, and turned on the shower. I gave myself over to the sybaritic bliss of hot water and sensual soaps...

When I was fully cleaned, I dried myself with a big, fluffy towel, soft and comfy. Even with all the money I spend on ordnance, I still have plenty left over for a few luxuries. I patted myself dry, and climbed into my armor.

* * * "Food, scum," I informed Romeo pleasantly, as I tossed the food at him.

He looked down at what I'd given him, looked up at me. "Will you join me?" he asked.

"I'll stay and watch you eat," I answered, tapping my helmet. "This stays on."

He tore open a bar, took a big bite, and chewed meditatively. "So," he finally asked, "what made you decide to become a Bounty Hunter?"

I stiffened. "That's my secret."

He glanced at me, then at my gun hand. "Did it have anything to do with that?" he gestured.

I looked down at it, glared at him. "Yes."

He took another bite, washed it down with a long swallow of water. Then he looked down at the squeeze packet, studying the material. "I'm not like that," he said. "I never hurt anyone."

"You left a lot of broken hearts behind you."

Romeo shook his head in denial. "All I did to anyone was show them a better world, a better life than they'd dreamed they could have. I never hurt them when I left. They just...couldn't handle going back to the way things were, before."

I shook my head. "You lived on their wealth until they couldn't support you anymore."

"No." He was firm. "I never left anyone destitute. They might have quit their jobs or squandered their wealth afterwards, but I never left them in need."

"You left them addicts."

He glanced up, and smiled slyly. "Thank you for that." He sipped his water, thoughtfully. "They could have tried drugs, or even current stimulation. Their lives were their own. I never forced myself into their beds. I pleased them because they wanted it. I left them when I wanted to."

"With nary a care for your lovers."

"What?" He glared at me. "I should have let myself be kept by them? Am I a person or a possession?"

I thought about that one, while he ate his rat bar. Finally, I answered.

"If you're in love...you're both."

He jerked up. "What?"

"If you're in love, you're still a person. But you still belong to another." I bit my lip to keep from crying, as tears suddenly began to form. "And they belong to you. You betrayed them by leaving."

"They didn't have to let my departure upset them," he stubbornly insisted.

"Then my leaving won't upset you." I turned and stalked away.

* * *

I whimpered in pleasure, my hands caressing my lover's head, as it nestled deeper between my thighs, lips and tongue exploring my inner folds. I murmured

quiet endearments, telling my beloved of my feelings. That artful mouth murmured reciprocal expressions of adoration, the vibrations causing my legs to tremble spasmodically.

The mouth lifted from my slit, began nuzzling my green pubic hairs. I smiled lazily, stroked that wonderful head and those strong shoulders. The mouth reached my belly, began to slowly kiss its way in a spiral pattern. Finally, it centered on my navel, began to lick and suck.

I moaned, the inarticulate sound saying more than words ever could. And again I moaned, louder. Unable to speak, I let my soft vocalizations tell my darling how much I loved, LOVED...

The kisses began to climb again, before the mouth finally reached the cleft between my breasts. As I sighed happily, strong hands raised my breasts up, so the tongue could lick the sweat from underneath. Even my excretions were ambrosia to my lover...

The mouth fastened on my nipple, first one, then the other, sucking gently, licking like a baby feeding. If I could have, I'd have slaked his thirst with lactating fluids, let him savor the milk from my body. The mouth rose higher. It sucked and nibbled on the side of my throat like a vampire searching for the jugular. I clasped it close, offering myself as a vampire's victim offers herself in surrender to a sublime end.

As the mouth finally reached my mouth for a final, passionate kiss, my legs wrapped around one of my lover's. I slowly humped myself against a muscular thigh, until...

* * *

This time I gave a soft cry as I awoke. I actually climaxed as I woke up. As the throbbing sensations began to fade, my hands snaked between my thighs, jammed them inside in a frantic attempt to prolong the sensation. As my body curled up into the familiar fetal position, and my eyes began to stream tears of frustrated loneliness, my fingers clawed my vaginal walls, pinched my clitoris HARD, forced me into another orgasm, even harder, intensified by the feelings of despair. For the first time, I masturbated even as I cried, in an anguished experience that was certainly not pleasurable. Only...release.

Finally, I stopped my violent self-stimulation. I leapt for the bathroom, and the medicine cabinet. I withdrew several bottles. I kept it fully stocked, for every possible emergency. The painkillers that came in so handy after a particularly grueling workout or difficult job went down easily, burying the awful black depression beneath a euphoric haze. Not the same as true peace of mind, but it'd do for a start. I settled onto the floor in a Lotus pose.

My abdomen slowly expanded, then forcefully contracted, as I began breathing exercises. By the time the painkillers had worn off, my despair had settled into a dull ache. I chased them down with a couple of sleeping pills, and climbed into bed. I rested my head on one pillow, clutched another to my chest, and settled into a troubled sleep.

* * *

"Hail, Lisa Huntress."

Francine's rich, aristocratic tones modulated pleasantly through the speakers of my comconsole. Despite her supreme status within her society, her voice held no trace of snobbery, only the respect granted an equal. A wise thing, given my value to her as a contracted employee. And my status as the greatest bounty hunter in the Federation.

Call me a girl with a reputation.

"Hail, Madame desDesmonde," I replied, with equal courtesy. The paying customer always gets respect. Especially for what she was paying me. "My ETA is forty-nine hours, approximately."

Her lips tightened. "How is...Romeo?" Her neck muscles tightened as she clenched her jaw.

"Alive and unharmed." I let her try to read my expression through the view screen, and my helmet. "Oh! You mean, what's his state of mind? Your reunion is foremost on his mind."

"I bet." She twisted her lips in a feral expression. I suppressed a shudder. The last thing to give me that expression came very close to killing me moments later. Gave me a scar to remember the incident by, too.

"It won't be much longer, Madame," I replied carefully, making an effort not to upset her. "I'll have him there as soon as possible."

"Good." Her face grimaced in an expression approaching triumph, then twisted into an expression of longing that I knew all too well. I'd seen it in the mirror too many times.

"How...how have you managed to guard against his powers?" she suddenly asked, thoughtfully.

I rapped my helmet with my good hand. "Shielded against any telepathic attack you can think of."

"You even wear it while you sleep?" she wondered, amazed.

"What?!" I half-rose from my seat, then settled down.

"What...didn't you know? His powers...they...they can reach your sleeping mind as well..." She closed her eyes and shivered, as her expression became one of remembering some dear experience.

"You mean he can affect a sleeping person's mind?"

"Oh, yes. Didn't you know? He can even make your dreams pleasant..."

I sat there a moment, as my brain threatened to soil my helmet by exploding out the top of my skull. I could hear my heartbeat pounding, a drumbeat pounding in my skull. Finally, I managed to utter, "You've no need to worry, Madame. He'll be in your arms soon enough." I swallowed against the bile rising in my throat. "Huntress out." I cut the transmission.

The path to the holding pen was a blur. A red blur. As I entered the cage, I greeted Romeo with a blast from my charge beam. Not enough to do any real damage, but more than sufficient to scare the piss out of him.

"You...JERK!" I roared, as my left hand reached out in a clawing motion. "You scum! You've been manipulating me in my sleep!"

Romeo gibbered with terror, as he cowered in the cage. "I...I don't know what you're talking about-"

"Don't you DARE LIE TO ME!" I screamed, as I reached through the bars of the cage, grabbed the scruff of his neck, and yanked him close. He screamed from pain, as his chains snapped short, and from terror.

"I talked to Francine. You can touch my mind, even when I'm sleeping. YOU'RE the reason why I've been having those dreams."

"Please..." he sobbed. I heard the gush of fluid, as his sphincter voided itself from terror.

"Louder!" I roared, as I jammed the gun into his face.

"PLEE-EASE!" he sobbed. I dropped him in disgust, and he curled up into a fetal position, whimpering brokenly.

"Stay out of my head, scum." I turned and stalked off.

* * *

Strong arms clasped me from behind. A firm torso welded to my back, stuck with our sweat. We lay there in the quiet afterglow of lovemaking, and I sighed happily. That wonderful mouth that had given me so much pleasure whispered into my ear, telling me how much I was loved. I was loved. And we'd be together forever. I'd never be alone again...

I jerked out of bed and on my feet before I was fully awake. My vision was clouded beneath a haze of red. For a moment, all I could do was force myself to breathe normally. When I could finally see straight, I grabbed for the things I needed.

"You...you...you..." I muttered, as I stalked into the holding pen, gun aimed on target. Romeo shook himself awake, caught sight of me, and leapt back with a startled yelp. Then he just stared, jaws agape.

"I warned you," I snarled.

"I didn't! I swear! I-I'd have been awake right now, if I'd been scanning your mind. I can't do it while I'm sleeping!"

"Oh?" I snarled. My gun lowered...to aim at his groin. "Care to give me more proof than that?"

"I..." he swallowed. And a zap of light entered my mind. I staggered a moment, then shook my head and snarled. "See? I can control it. But only if I'm awake."

"YOU..." I suddenly realized that he'd touched my mind. I wasn't wearing my helmet.

I wasn't wearing anything else, either.

THAT'S why his eyes were bugging out.

I clenched my jaw. "Yeah. I know. Repulsive."

His fear was overridden by surprise. He stared at me in wonder.

"You actually believe that," he wondered quietly. He shook his head, then stared me straight in the eye. "You're beautiful."

I stared at him a moment. Then I aimed and fired.

And missed.

Missed!

He jerked anyway, as though I'd intended to fire a mere warning shot. "I'm telling you the truth! You're gorgeous!"

"Shut up!" I snarled. "I know what I look like. Kelvin Rheine wouldn't touch me with a ten-foot pole."

"Kelvin...Rheine?" He stared at me a moment. Then he actually began to snicker. "I've met the man. He fucks young girls. REALLY young girls." He smirked at me. "He's a pedophile, Lisa. His current mistress is only seventeen. She's been with him for nine years. She takes powerful recreational narcotics to stunt her growth, so she'll keep looking like a child."

"Wha...what?" I stammered. "Petite...thin..."

"Try prepubescent, and half-starved. Among those in the know, Kelvin's just something to gossip about, when there's no one else to mock." His eyes gleamed. "Check my records. I never touched a woman--or a man--who looked like the Rheine ideal."

I studied him suspiciously. "And I suppose I am your ideal?"

"Um..." he swallowed. "I see on your outside what I saw on Francine's inside. You're both strong women. All my lovers were strong."

"You loved their strength?" I felt my muscles flexing, posing for him, and forced myself to stop.

"And I left them because they became weak." He shook his head. "They let their need for me become stronger than themselves."

"Isn't that what love's supposed to be about?" I retorted. "Mutual surrender?"

He glanced at me sharply. Then his gaze shifted inward. "...perhaps..." he looked down at his feet. "Maybe it wasn't weakness I was running from. Maybe...it was fear. I don't know if I'm as strong as they were."

"Shouldn't that have been for them to decide?" I asked quietly.

He looked up, and his eyes met mine. His chains rustled as he raised one hand, slowly. He reached out, tentatively, imploringly.

"Maybe this time I won't be the one to choose." His voice was husky with need. Not just physical desire. He wanted my strength. My heart. My soul.

All I had to do was take his hand, and I'd have my unknown lover. Known, at last...

I jerked back with a snarl of pure rage, switched over to needle missiles, and took CAREFUL aim. And fired.

He stared, aghast, at the miniature projectile embedded in his torso. I wasn't about to try for a trick shot, so I'd just aimed for the center of mass. It still hit near his shoulder. He shivered in terror, thinking it was about to explode. A reasonable expectation, since my needle missiles are notorious for their lethal effects. In fact, my gun hand was the most famous weapon in the Federation. And my helmet one of the most legendary visages.

My own face was another story.

"Don't worry," I half smirked, half snarled, "I made it especially for you. You're spending the rest of the voyage under sedation." As he slumped to the floor under the influence of the powerful drug, I added, "Good night. Scum."

* * *

I lay back in my bed, my head clutching a pillow. I made a mental note to get myself a stuffed animal. A large one. Something I could snuggle with. While I waited.

My unknown lover was out there, somewhere. I knew it. Him, her, it, I neither knew nor cared. All I cared about was an end to the aching loneliness.

"Where are you?" I whispered.

I need you.

Find me.

Book II

Genesis of the Huntress

She's my baby girl. Sweetest thing you ever met. Pretty, too, even if it took her a long time to realize it. Smart, beautiful, tough. I suppose every father says the same things about their daughters, even when they're adopted. But it's true, nonetheless. She's a chip off the old block--taught her everything I know about the business. Her old family--her Tribe--taught her a bit, too.

Lisa was born on a planet called Gaia. Never heard of it? No surprise there--it's not exactly known for much of anything besides a few botanical exports. The settlers who first came there wanted to get away from technology, to get back to nature, and all that shit. You can imagine how well that worked. Eighty percent of the first generation died in the first decade, before they learned that living a hunter-gatherer existence wasn't as fun as they'd thought it'd be. Especially when it's on an unsettled planet with native fauna that hadn't yet learned that humans taste terrible and carry a grudge.

But they adapted, as humans always do. They'd not only achieved a relatively comfortable level of existence, but they eventually even managed to turn the entire ecosystem into a cornucopia of useful things. And if they had to do without labor-saving gadgets, it only made them tougher for the lack. They evolved.

The Gaians lived in villages in the trees. Gaia's climate--very little tectonic activity, and relatively gentle weather patterns--allowed for an enormous ring around the planet of old growth forest, centering around the enormous trees--and I do mean enormous. Over two hundred feet high apiece, thousands of years old, these things reached high into the sky, providing the symbiotic backbone for the entire ecosystem. Countless species of vines connected them, including several varieties that grew wide, flat, and firm--living bridges that could support the weight of as many humans as could stand on them. The branches of the trees themselves were large and sturdy, to boot, forming the supports upon which floors of wooden planks were built. Walls and a roof made from skinned animal hides kept off the worst of the admittedly mild weather.

The real problems for Gaians weren't from the weather, or the native flora. It was from the native fauna, with all the teeth and the claws and the digestive acids. They'd originally made the shift to dwelling in the trees when they encountered the dominant land predator, which they eventually named a Guzzle. Similar to an Earth bear--similar conditions create similar evolutionary paths. But while a grizzly bear won't bother humans unless they do something remarkably stupid--feeding them and treating them like city folk with fur comes to mind--Guzzles

evolved with an instinctive strategy of attacking anything in their path that moved. If it turned out to be another Guzzle, they mated--and they weren't picky about the gender of their partner. It was a fairly successful strategy, until they met humans.

So the Gaians moved to the trees, during that awful first generation experience, before they shook off their romantic notions and remembered their heritage as the dominant predator of OUR homeworld. There, they discovered a whole new ball game. Despite the superficial appearance of the planet as having but a single land ecosystem, the forest was in fact several large systems, separated not by vertical boundaries but by horizontal ones. And the dominant predator of the understory, the layer composed of branches and vines and a three-dimensional terrain, was a large feline adapted for tree climbing, which earned the name of Thugee for its love of attacking from behind, and its habit of killing without eating the corpse--of killing for no obvious reason other than pleasure. It was the Thugee that forever laid to rest the settler's notions of the essential goodness of animals as compared to humans.

It was also the Thugee that reawakened them to their predatory nature, made them into hunters of the finest order. The twenty percent of the settlers who survived relearned the ancient skills of hunting, tracking, alertness, of traps and weapons, and slaying dangerous beasts by outwitting them. The second generation had already formed a relatively safe existence, and soon they had devised a fully functioning society, happy and prosperous in their environment. As generations passed, their genes drifted to suit their new environment.

Lisa was born with the green hair that was so highly coveted among her own people, well suited for blending in with the shades of the forest. Born into a communal "family" unit, she considered every adult a parent, every child a sibling. Had she remained, she would have left her tribe to seek a mate in another Tribe, or taken a mate that had left his own. The tribal leader's name represented the Tribe as a whole. John Tribe. The members of the Tribe used their professions as their surnames. John Chief had committed his life to caring for a Tribe that included Jerry Healer, who used native herbs and limited surgical skills to keep the others healthy; Rebecca Scholar, who taught the children the equivalent of a galactic education, with an emphasis on reading, math, and sciences--skills easily applicable in their daily lives; and Louie Trader, whose task it was to journey to the spaceport, the only industrialized location on the planet, and trade native herbs and "primitive jewelry" for the few pieces of technology they permitted themselves--portable computers and medical supplies, mostly. But there was never any doubt as to what surname Lisa would bear.

She told me about some of the happy memories she has from her childhood. They were nice to listen to, and sometimes it made her happy to think about them. Other times, though... but let's not get into that, shall we?

When she was about six, she was learning to travel the understory and emergent layers of the forest, the two enormous layers between the floor, with its Gruzzles on their perpetual and instinctual search and destroy missions, and the canopy, with its Rocs, avians built something like a vulture, only with twenty-foot wingspans--more than large enough to carry off a human in its claws. The other children had been let out of class, and now were hard at play, swinging and climbing, with their youngest sibling trying hard to keep up.

Of course, children being children, a game of "keep away" was inevitable. Lisa struggled fiercely to keep up with the others, her little legs trying to match the pace of the others as they roamed the branches and vine bridges, her stubby little fingers groping for vines to match their swings. Still, she assured me that the siblings cared for each other, and they made sure that she remained within sight and had a vine handy to swing from--even if that meant throwing a vine to her before skipping out of range again.

It was this attention to their littlest sibling that allowed them to notice the Thugee before it pounced. Lisa noticed the look in their eyes, and so caught the motion in her peripheral vision in time to start running. But not time enough to get away completely. The Thugee caught her leg, tripping her and knocking her down. She rolled over to behold the hideous thing giving her its "what a lovely dinner companion you're going to make" smile that it reserved for helpless prey. She raised her hands wardingly--not as though that would do her much good.

Just then, an older boy displayed one of the fighting techniques devised by the Gaians for arboreal combat, with a vine clutched in one hand and a spear in the other. Swinging back across the gap, he put the weight of his body and the power of his arm behind the spearhead--a good monomolecular blade, imported from off-planet. It slammed into the Thugee's side, knocking it back with a deep wound. An excellent tactic, I should say--you don't often see much call for it in most environments, but it works really well when conditions are right...

Anyway, the spear stuck in the Thugee's side, with some nice sturdy crosspieces to keep it stuck on the end of the spear, at a safe distance. The Thugee tried to break free, of course, making that guttural "Thu-gee!" sound that helped give it its name, and almost pushing the boy off the tree in the process. He managed to hold fast, though, and the Thugee simply ended up twisting the blade inside the wound, tearing up its body even further. The Thugee lost its footing and collapsed to its belly, moving feebly. The boy kept the spear inside the brute, of course--it's not over until the enemy doesn't have any fight left. Even at that point, the Thugee could have still delivered one last swipe--or just have been faking its infirmities to enable an escape and revenge.

Which is why what Lisa did then was both extremely brave and phenomenally foolish. But understandable, for a six year old. Drawing her knife--what? Yes, of

COURSE she was armed. Didn't I make that clear? This was not a culture with even a passing notice for hiding the harshness of reality from the kids. They watched the adults fucking openly, in pairs or in groups, they learned about death from a very young age, and they learned very quickly to rely on themselves. I've sometimes thought about going there myself, just to get to know the culture. Sounds like my kind of people...

Anyway, the kid drew her knife, and charged in, stabbing the Thugee right in the eye. The Thugee reared back, lashing out, of course, but Lisa managed to avoid the claws, and stabbed it in the other eye. The Thugee was a frenzy of pain-filled rage for a few moments, before subsiding, and Lisa jumped on it, screaming in her high pitched child's voice, crying tears of terror and rage, and stabbing every inch of flesh her blade could find. When she finally stopped, the Thugee didn't look even remotely like it had in life--another negative for a Hunter, who'd have been expected to keep the hide intact, but acceptable and justifiable in her case. The boy gently pried her fingers off her knife--they were swollen from gripping the knife so hard in her hysterical response--then hugged her tightly.

I'll always be grateful to that poor boy for helping her. I'll always be grateful to all of them, those people that gave me my darling little girl.

That night, at the campfire--yes, of course they had one. No, you're right to wonder how they got a fire into a tree without burning the forest down. The centerpiece of the Tribe's home--the centerpiece of every Tribe's home, in fact--was an enormous hearth, a fire pit formed of sturdy pottery, with an enormous lip many feet wide from outer edge to inner, to keep the flames from reaching the wood. One of the first things they'd had to relearn was how to make fire with primitive means--Lisa showed me, using a wooden bow to spin a stick to generate the heat--and one of the first things they'd quickly learned about their new home was that fire was foreign to the forest--with no moon and no high mountains, the weather patterns never varying sufficiently for lightning or excessive drought. It wasn't the weather that was dangerous, it was the neighbors--and they were TERRIFIED of the dancing yellow creature that served the newcomers. Keeping the home fires burning took on a whole new meaning--that bonfire served many purposes, from cooking food, warming the hearth's lip to lay on, keeping critters at bay, displaying their location to travelers from other Tribes, be they lost Hunters or wanderers seeking a new Tribe or Traders with good things to offer. A very hospitable people... my kind of people...

The conversation that night centered around Lisa, and her accomplishments. There was much ribbing of her spoiling the hide--that she could have gotten a new monomolecular blade for a spear of her own from it--but on the whole, her courage was lauded. It was predicted that she'd make a fine Huntress some day. If they only knew...

What's another happy memory she told me? Ah... yes, when she was eight. She

told me about when Rebecca Scholar taught her the value of a good education. She was in the home with the other children, working on her math homework on a portable computer, growing more and more frustrated. "This is stupid," she grumbled.

"No, you're stupid," a sibling retorted. "Hush," Rebecca ordered, then turned to Lisa. "What's wrong, Lisa?" Lisa started to toss the computer to the floor--before remembering it's value and gently placing it down. "Why do I have to learn this stuff? I'm going to be a Huntress!"

Rebecca shook her head, an amused smile flirting about her lips. "Lisa... a Huntress needs to know math, too." She tousled her hair affectionately. "Everything that any of us do is based on math."

Lisa stomped her foot and tossed her head, jerking away from Rebecca's hand. "No it's not! All I need to know is how to track and fight!"

Rebecca seemed especially amused at that. "Observe, child, and learn your error," she mildly rebuked, turning away. She made her way to the rack of spears kept ready for fighting at a moment's notice, and selected a spear. Glancing down it's length, she replaced it, before selecting another that matched her standards. "Do you see that water fruit?" she asked, pointing at a tiny little speck on another tree, hanging from a plant that grew on the branch. "Let's see... wind..." she licked her finger and held it up to the air, gauging the wind speed and direction, "...that tree is fifty feet away; I know that from what Jamal told me...a thirty-four... no. Thirty-two degree initial angle, remember to use the proper amount of thrust..."

She cast. The spear flew in a graceful curve, and landed square in the center of the fruit. Being a water fruit--the source of their potable drinking water--it exploded in a gush of fresh liquid and seeds. "See?" Rebecca smiled triumphantly. "Math is important for all sorts of things. How to throw a spear along a ballistic path, how to mix the proper amount of reagents for medical salves, how to properly skin an animal you've never seen before..." she trailed off, raising her eyebrows to indicate that the list was by no means limited to those she'd named.

Lisa told me that she acquired a new love of learning in that moment. She still had trouble with math, of course--only a few rare talents don't--but she stuck to it, and she still loves to read and study today. Not that she admitted it then, of course. Of course not. She grumbled and pouted and went back to work...and no doubt looked adorable the whole time.

But the story she told me about her wrestling match always made me so proud to think of classic Lisa, at her finest. She was ten years old, and looking like a spry little monkey. She was wrestling, as I'd mentioned--with a sixteen-year-old girl.

She and the others were on the floor of the forest, surrounded by a circle of the others, all of them carrying spears and watching for Guzzleds. Despite her slighter stature, she was doing well enough. Winning, in fact...

She pulled away, and started to scream. "You're letting me win!" she raged, furious at the indignity.

The other girl, Jenny, smiled, "You're right I'm letting you win. You're half my size. It wouldn't be fair of me to come at you with everything I have."

Lisa only became angrier. "I want to win for real!" she shrieked. "Either you let me win for real, or make me lose fair and square!" She dropped into her fiercest looking crouch. Jenny looked at her, then tackled her to the ground and sat on her.

She chuckled as she batted Lisa about the head with light flicks of her hand. "Still want me to beat you fair and square?" she taunted. Then she felt Lisa's feet finding their way to her torso. With a grunt, Lisa shoved the girl off of her with all her might, sending her flying. She landed on her back, bumping her head on the hard ground, leaving her dazed for a moment. Lisa pounced on top of her, pinning her down.

Jenny took a moment to recover. Then she grinned, and began to roll with Lisa, holding nothing back now. That's my little girl--she never gives up, and she never shrinks from a challenge. Ever.

The last memory, though...that's not a happy memory. But it's important to understanding her, so...let me take another drink first. And pour me another, because I'm going to need it afterward, too. She was eleven-years-old. The end of innocence. She was in the canopy at the time. The highest tops of the trees, where the Rocs and other large avians lived, preying on each other and anything that emerged from the leafy protection that the trees offered. The Gaians had no choice but to climb that high, however, if they wanted to watch the stars. Yes, stars--they didn't have much else to do that didn't involve physical exertion. She said the stars were always beautiful to her...

She was with Ted, a boy near her own age--only two years older, and closer to her than the older children. They watched the constellations of their planet--none of them named, however. The Gaians would allow each person who looked to interpret the groupings of visible stars in their own way, according to their own imaginations. Lisa had a constellation called the Thugee, and pretended that it was the Thugee that had attacked her, and that she could look in to the sky whenever she wanted to see her "trophy." Ted also had a Thugee constellation...but a different grouping of stars, and a different story.

There was a new star in the Thugee constellation that night. Lisa watched it, until

it began to grow. "It's a ship," she whispered excitedly. "What's it doing?" Ted peered at the dot in the sky for a time. "It's coming towards us," he replied, puzzled. "Why isn't it headed for the spaceport?" He shifted his posture, beginning to climb down from the canopy. "You stay here and keep an eye on it," he told her. "I'm going home to tell the Tribe." He scampered down the tree, and Lisa kept an eye on that ship.

It didn't land gently, of course--not with all the vegetation in the way. It slammed through the canopy, breaking branches that had taken centuries to grow, narrowly avoiding the trunks, and finally landing roughly near the village proper. John Tribe immediately came out to help, no doubt assuming that the ship had landed as it did due to damage of some sort. Looking down, Lisa watched the hatch open, and the men emerge. They came out shooting.

The Gaians had never seen laser rifles before. Firing their invisible beams, they sliced through vegetation, gouged deep cuts in the trunks...and murdered everyone they touched. Lisa watched Rebecca Scholar fall in two pieces, her torso bisected just below her breasts. John Chief went with his head opened like a watermelon, as other beams converged on his limbs and abdomen. Jerry Healer could have done nothing to help, even if he hadn't been sliced by a ragged vertical cut. The children, the adults...all of them, killed by those monsters disguised in the form of fellow human beings. And people wonder why I always preferred "Dead or Alive" contracts...

Lisa watched the whole thing, watched the death of her family, and cried silently. Then she received yet another lesson in the inhumanity of the worst of mankind, as the pirates climbed to the home, and began stealing everything that had once belonged to their victims. She heard their words. "No way they could have told the Feds about us, anyway," one of them chuckled. "No commo gear in the whole place."

"What the fuck did these savages do without commos?" another sneered. "All they've got are a few computers--and educational software!" He laughed derisively. "What the hell are savages gonna do with calculus, anyway?" "What are YOU gonna do with calculus?" another mocked him. "You don't even know algebra." The mocked pirate growled. "At least I know how to make a clean cut with a laser rifle," he muttered.

They took the computers, all the software, the things they had an immediate use for. All else...was destroyed. They tore down the hides that sheltered against the wind, laughed as they gorged on the food and pissed on the rest, cast the spears with inept tosses. The hearth, the center of John Tribe's home, was fed with their possessions, priceless to them, worthless to the pirates. Then they smashed the hearth itself, symbolizing their end in a spray of cracked pottery...

Thanks for the drink. Now pour me another.

The pirates began to make their way back to the ship, to stay the night in the safety of their vessel, save for one especially disgusting member, who drew a foot long rod from his belt. "I wish I could have used my baby on those villagers," he pouted, looking like a whiny little brat.

"You'd have gotten diced by our beams, if you'd have charged in," his shipmate pointed out.

"Ah, well," the first one sighed, then activated his blade.

A lightsabre is a charged field of atomic scale cross section, superconducting and rotating at near lightspeed. But that's just the fancy description. What a lightsabre actually is, is a glowing blade that cuts whatever it touches.

As the fiend began to practice his cuts with his "baby," Lisa made her way into position. Gripping a vine, she readied her spear, and mimicked the swinging attack that her sibling had used to save her, five years prior. She swooped down, a blur of motion, prepared to run him through...Ah. A light swordsman, even an undisciplined psycho, learns to detect hostile intent. Pivoting smartly, the pirate sliced her spear in half, grabbed her with his off hand, and slammed her down to the floor and sat on her. He smiled, an incongruously tender expression. "Why, hello there," he cooed. "Girlfriend."

Her world went black.

She... she woke up on the ship, after they'd already lifted off. She heard them...commenting about the takeoff, and that's when...she knew she'd left her home world. She heard them talking about escaping their pursuers. About...celebrating. The first one dropped his pants...and...and that's when the innocence began to die in her eyes...

I'm better now, thanks. Pour me another.

I took the contract to hunt the Fallen Angels gang the next year, not knowing any of this. All I knew about were their publicly known crimes--bad enough, those. Kidnapping, extortion, murder. Rape, child rape. Theft, piracy, destruction of Federal property, destruction of Planetary property, destruction of private property. Environmental pollution, even, what with their reckless regard for what their actions did to anyone or anything other than themselves. This was going to be fun...

I'd used the radiation from the sun to shield me from their sensors. Yes, just like I did with you. And just like then, by the time they noticed me, I was already in range. I could have ripped them apart then and there, but I wanted to draw it out. Not because I didn't think there were any hostages to watch out for--I prefer

missions with "Me vs. Them" parameters--but because I wanted to finish them where I could see their faces contort with the same expressions of terror and helplessness they'd mocked when their own victims bore them.

The gravitic lance spurted out, scoring a direct hit on the pirate ship's engines. The tightly focused beam of artificial gravity subjected the engines to a thousand Gs for almost a full second, swiftly compressing the precision machinery into a small, imperfectly shaped sphere of junk. They were dead in space, without the power to divert to shields, weapons, or even life support. They were sweating good, then. I moved in for the kill, launching my grapple to the hull of their ship at a likely location. It stuck fast, connecting my ship to theirs by a line of monowire. The boarding tube followed, making its way past the others, and sealing itself to form an airtight bond. I gave my armor a last check, and went in.

Since I had no interest in salvaging their ship personally, I didn't bother with a neat hole. My particle cannon blasted a hole big enough for me, armor and all. The pirates met me as best they could--disorganized, panicked, firing wildly with their laser rifles. They weren't used to people who fought back, and who were any good at it. Their beams occasionally made contact with my armor, heating the surface for a moment, before they veered off and scorched the hull instead. I, on the other hand, knew how to keep a cool head under pressure. I used the cannon, small spurts, and each spurt dropped a pirate in a spray of stuff best not to dwell on. Silence.

I made my way through the ship, looking for any surviving pirates to kill. There was only one left, as it turned out. The psycho with the lightsabre. He jumped at me from hiding, his blade held in the Kenjutsu two-handed slashing style of swordsmanship, in the Jodan No Kamae--the proper name for holding his sword over his head to chop me in two with a powerful downward chop. A light swordsman learns such things, even an undisciplined psycho. Or a crude and unrefined Bounty Hunter.

Yes, I HAVE studied the lightsabre. A fun weapon, but there's no way it can compare to a distance weapon. Still, I knew how to detect threats. And about the concept of rhythms and timing. As he moved in, I shifted my own position rapidly, stepping forward in the boxing technique called shifting, until my left leg was in forward and my free hand in position for a long shovel hook. I LIKE lightsabres, mind you--but I always found boxing to be more useful in day-to-day hunting. Especially when my fist was wrapped in monomolecular aluminum and propelled with the assistance of artificial musculature. A war cry caught short, and the psycho flew back into the wall, his chest crushed.

No more threats. And yet, my helmet's sensors picked up one more life form. I ventured into the next room, gun at the ready. And stopped. A child. A young girl, maybe twelve-years-old, strapped to a torture device by three and a half limbs. The stump of her right arm sealed over in the characteristic instantly cauterized

wound of a lightsabre cut. Looking down, I saw bits and pieces. Chunks of flesh, pieces of hand and fingers and arm, each of them measuring precisely one inch in width. The remaining stump twitched in accordance with the rest of her, as she moaned mindlessly, her mind withdrawn in futile defense.

If I could have, I'd have killed that psycho a lot slower. I'd have killed him a thousand times over, for what he did to my baby girl.

I got her back to my ship, and put her in my bed. She wasn't exactly smelling overly fresh, but I've never really been concerned about things being clean and shiny. Yes, I thought you had noticed, at that. You don't like it, clean it yourself. I meant later, bitch--I'm not done with the story, yet! Come back here and sit down like a good little parolee. That's better...

I gave her a sedative and painkiller, and waited for her to fall asleep before I contacted the Feds. The charming visage of the Federation Space Patrol Chief appeared on my view screen, and I popped open my helmet to give him my most charming smile. "Masterson," he growled, drawing back as if I had bad breath...or as if he could smell it through the screen. "Mission accomplished, Chief," I informed him, punching in the location of the ship. "Send a crew to retrieve their ship--it's dead in space, along with the rest of them. Standard salvage percentages, of course."

"Of course." I looked at him for a while, then my smile faded. "There was a bonus on this one," I told him. "Do you know what breeds of human have green hair?" He blinked, then frowned, waiting for an explanation. "They had a hostage. A child." I waited for him to get over his knee jerk reaction, before continuing. "Yeah. Me too. I want to know where she came from, get her home safe." The Chief paused.

"She'd have to be a Gaian. But there are only a handful of Gaians who've left their home planet, and none of them are children." The chief paused. "If they took her off planet...it's not likely that she has any surviving relatives to take her in." He sighed. "We'll see what can be done for her, Brock."

I nodded. "Thanks, Chief. Masterson out." I turned back to the girl in my bed, sighing unhappily. "What do I do about you, my little sawed off?" I shook my head sadly. Then I turned to get out of my armor, and get it properly stowed.

When the kid finally woke up, I was back in the bedroom, in a chair next to her. Clothed, of course, since it didn't take a genius to figure out what she'd been doing on that ship. My favorite shirt, underwear...and in the interests of preventing further trauma, pants. She turned her head to stare at me, hearing the noises coming out of my mouth. What can I say--I'm not known for proper etiquette at classy dinner parties.

I looked down at her, gave her a grin, and no doubt showed her something stuck between my teeth. "Hey, kid." I held up a second plate. She looked at the plate, and nodded cautiously. I handed it to her, as she sat up in the bed. "It's okay," I told her, "I'm eating the same thing." She took the plate, then looked at me again, waiting for the other shoe to drop. "It's okay," I told her again, "no one's going to hurt you anymore."

She turned to begin eating, then stopped. And her eyes shifted to her right arm. To the stump that ended just below the elbow. She stared at it, her eyes empty. I wish that psycho were still alive. I'd keep him in agony for years--give him transfusions and transplants, just to prolong the payback...

I didn't know what to tell her--I'm not good with words. I just grunted, and she looked back at me. Casting for something to tell her, I tried to think of something that she'd like to hear. What would make her feel better? Candy? Teddy bears? A hug? "All of the bad men are dead," I blurted. You can see why most people wouldn't trust me with their children...

She didn't say anything. She just nodded, her mouth setting in a hard line. Then she started to eat with her left hand, balancing the plate in her lap. I watched her for a bit, before resuming my own gorging.

When I spoke with the Chief next, he had some bad news for me. "We sent a patrol over to Gaia," he told me, shaking his head. "The natives told us about an entire Tribe being wiped out a year ago under mysterious circumstances. Whatever did it smashed everything, including the 'hearth,' whatever that is." The Chief shrugged. "Apparently it had some significance in their culture--they emphasized the fact that it was destroyed." He shook his head. "They described wounds made by laser rifles." Shit. "If you take her back to Gaia, they might be able to adopt her into another tribe."

I sighed. "She lost an arm to those sickos. She wouldn't make it back home, anymore." I squared my shoulders. "I'll jump through the legal hurdles for adoption when I make it to port, Chief. She'll be as well off with me as with anyone else."

The Chief blinked. "Since when do you care so much about women and children?" he harrumphed.

I growled. "If I weren't a nice guy, I'd be a pirate, not a bounty hunter."

The Chief paused, then nodded. "A tow ship is on it's way to the coordinates. Any chances of the ship being relatively intact?" he asked.

I guffawed. "There's a hole in the side and no breathable atmosphere. As long as the crew wears pressure suits, though, they can fly it under its own power."

The Chief nodded. "Fair enough. I'll let you know when we have more work for you, Masterson." He popped out without another word.

I turned away, and made my way back to the bedroom. Lisa was sitting there at a terminal, wrapped in a blanket, trying to play a game. I'd loaded up one that didn't require two quick hands to play, and she was playing with passing interest. "We'll be docking at New Vegas in another day or so," I told her. "Enjoying the game?"

She looked at it, and shrugged. "Well, let's see about clothes for you," I mused, and went into my drawer. "Here we go..." I held up my cleanest shirt. "We'll put a belt around your waist, and it'll make for a dress until we can get you something decent." I handed it to her, then followed that with a one-size-fits-all belt of braided cords. "I'll go see about food." And drink, I thought. I needed a drink something awful...

New Vegas. My kind of planet. Kind of why I retired here, come to think of it. A planet devoted to the healthy pursuit of vice, to the wholesome seeking of pleasure. Drink it, inject it, smoke it, fuck it, bet on it. If it doesn't hurt someone else, it can be enjoyed here. Cops stick with the enforcing of only a few laws--theft, murder, and rape. And when it comes to those laws, they don't hesitate to get rough in the enforcing. The safest place in the Federation...

Lisa pushed against my leg when we left the ship, intimidated by all the people around her--more, in fact, than she'd ever seen in her entire life before. "It's okay," I told her, patting her head. "New Vegas is the safest place in the Federation. You can get so drunk you black out for hours, and not worry about getting rolled. Or rent a beautiful woman--or be one," I smiled at her, "and not worry about your health." She looked up at me, then resumed pressing into my leg. I sighed and took her hand, leading her along.

We took a cab down to the courthouse, to meet with Judge Fielding. An imposing woman, with graying hair belying her bodacious body. No, I never had her--she didn't care for my sort. Yes, I asked. Shut up. Fielding met us in her chambers, and managed to smile for the benefit of Lisa, before turning to me. After the proper greeting rituals had been observed, she wiped her hand as if I'd somehow defiled it, and looked down at Lisa. "You're sure about this?" she asked me.

I nodded.

"And what about you, young lady?" she turned to Lisa, again deforming her face for the kid's benefit.

Lisa looked at me, questioningly. I knelt down in front of her, and looked into her eyes. "The judge is going to make you legally my adopted daughter. If that's what you want," I added hastily. "You'll be my responsibility. I'll raise you, care for you,

and protect you. I'll...I'll do my best," I finished lamely.

Lisa didn't say anything. She simply stared at me, her eyes looking into mine. Then she lunged forward, wrapping an arm and a half around me, as she started to cry for the first time since I'd found her. I froze for a moment--I never could handle affection like that. No, I'm not talking about sex. I mean showing someone you care like that. Fishing for compliments, are we? Listen. I managed to pat her on the back, but otherwise, didn't really know what to do, or how to touch her.

Anyway. The judge finalized it easily enough--you know how simple the paperwork is here, and we went to see a doctor. Baby's first prosthetic. And then we went shopping for clothes...and feminine products...and food...and a new bed for her...I put her bed in the hanger. No, I wasn't going to put her in my room. That's all she needed--waking up to the sight of her daddy masturbating. No, I never came to her when she had nightmares. I...I couldn't have done something like that.

We stayed here in New Vegas for a month, and I got to experience Lisa during her period. It was...it was bad. She continued to be timid, and started getting nasty at the same time. I couldn't handle that. We both knew I couldn't deal with her doing that three days a month or more, so I went to a doctor and got some contraceptive drugs. They stopped her cycles, and kept her mood nice and stable. I could deal with her...and if she was hurting, she didn't show it. I...I just didn't know...

One day, she was making breakfast in the kitchen. Lisa's not much of a cook, but she's better than I am. She started doing those sorts of chores--cleaning, cooking. My room became a lot neater, because she was cleaning it. Anyway, she made breakfast--scrambled eggs, as I remember it. Good powdered eggs. Strawberry juice from concentrate, breakfast meat strips, and hot cakes with syrup. I loved that breakfast. Once she learned how, she learned to enjoy it, too. She had everything ready by the time I'd finished giving my armor the once over, checking everything out for that afternoon.

I wolfed her cooking down with gusto, while she ate with somewhat more restraint. Her little arm of bare metal--her first one, sized for a young girl still growing--worked with her flesh arm to feed herself. After finishing the hot cakes, I told her the news. "We'll be tackling another gang this afternoon, kid," I told her. "When it happens, you need to hold on tight. Do it just like I drilled you, understand?"

Lisa nodded. "Yes, sir." Her voice was still quiet, unsure of herself after her year of captivity, but she was slowly coming out of her shell. She might have been tolerable even during her PMSing, if she had done so more quickly. I can't stand people who stay in hiding except to make sneak attacks. Lisa couldn't stand herself during those periods, either. Which is why she gobbled those pills without

a qualm...

"Why do you chase pirate gangs?" she asked me.

I looked at her thoughtfully. Then I shrugged, going with the simplest explanation. "I enjoy going after people who hurt other people." I grinned. "I like thinking that I make sure no one else will ever get hurt by them." Lisa absorbed that a moment, before nodding, then pushed her chair back from the table, rising to clean up.

She was still finishing the cleaning when I gave her the heads up, I think--still in the kitchen. "Red Alert!" I called out, the traditional call to warn of battle conditions. She did exactly as I'd drilled her--made sure that nothing in the room could be turned into a projectile, then dropped to the floor as swiftly as she could, then spreading her arms and legs out, so she couldn't be knocked down when the ship began to shake. Which it did, between the recoil from my guns, and the impact from theirs--they'd caught me coming, that time. But I holed them anyway, then boarded and killed the ones that had managed to get to their pressure suits before the air got too thin.

When I got back, Lisa met me in the hangar, as I was stowing away my armor. "Damn, girl, get out of here!" I protested. "I haven't even thrown on a robe yet!" She didn't leave, but she did hand me a robe, and waited for me to wrap it around myself before she asked her fateful question. "Will you teach me to be a bounty hunter?"

How could I say no? I could never refuse that girl anything...

The next important event...she was fourteen. Yes. We were in the gym...no, not on a planet. I put an exercise room in my ship--well, her ship now. Even a non-combat crew needs to fight flab during a space flight--sitting in a chair pushing buttons doesn't do much for you. And a bounty hunter...well. She was lifting weights, while I spotted her. Using...a barbell, yes. She was over two hundred...three hundred? Can't remember how much weight she was lifting with the clean and jerk by that point. No, two hundred--she didn't lift three hundred pounds until she was fifteen. Anyway, after the fifth set, she stopped and looked at me. "Is my development normal?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Muscle growth depends on genetics, Lisa," I told her. "You're a mesomorph. So am I. So what?" I touched her arm gingerly, felt around her bicep and triceps. "They're filling out nicely." I withdrew my hand. "Spot for me, then we'll move on and work the abs."

Lisa shook her head. "I meant...I meant my cleavage." Which confused me. "What cleavage?" I asked. She stomped her foot. "That's what I mean! They still haven't shown yet..." She looked down at her chest, as flat as a board.

I sighed, shrugged. "Girls develop at different rates. They'll come in eventually..." I pushed her aside, and reached for some plates. "A couple more disks on that side, kiddo," I told her, and she balanced the other side with a pout.

She was fifteen when I finally agreed that something might be wrong. She was wielding a lightsabre at that point. She was as tall as I was by that age, and looking very tough and fit. She was working the epee style of lightfencing, which emphasizes thrusts with the tip, followed by dragging cuts on the way out. A good defensive style. Advance, advance, retreat, advance, extend, lunge, drag cut, recover. And back to attention, as she saluted and shut the blade. "Why haven't my breasts and hips come in?" she demanded.

I started to dismiss her again...and stopped. She was fifteen... there should have been at least a little development. She had a boy's build. I sighed. "Get back to training," I told her, "and I'll take you to a doctor, next time we dock." She nodded, mollified, and went back to her training, stabbing the target gel...never heard of that stuff? It's got the consistency of flesh, but closes any holes you put in it in a matter of minutes. You put a big jiggling block of it in front of a sturdy backstop, and you can shoot it, stab it, punch it, whatever you like. A nice multipurpose training target.

I was in the doctor's office, in his examining room, when he told her the news. "I'm very sorry," he began, in the tones that a good doctor always uses when he's about to give bad news to a patient. Like it's hurting them even worse. As if. "The pills you were taking stopped your cycles. That's the problem."

Lisa looked at him, waiting for an explanation, while my guts began to twist themselves into a knot.

"An adolescent body produces a balance of hormones as it develops. And these pills that you were taking stopped your cycles by reducing the production of estrogen. It's not a problem for mature females...but..." he shook his head. "You've been producing too much testosterone and growth hormones, and not nearly enough estrogen."

He pulled out another bottle, and our eyes fastened on the sight. "I'm giving you a prescription for estrogen replacement," he told her. "Inject it twice a day, and you'll have to keep it up for the next few years. We'll see what happens, then." He shook his head. Lisa stared at the bottle, and I looked at her.

You don't need a lightsabre to cut someone's heart out, you know. You just have to be hurting, when they love you...

No, I didn't tell her that. Not then. I couldn't even cry. Never was any good at telling people how I felt. I couldn't tell her how horrified I was at the consequences of my selfishness...and it wasn't over yet. "There's...more," the

doctor said, looking away for a moment, before screwing up the courage to continue. "You'll achieve a woman's physical profile, with regular treatment. But menstruation is a dead issue. You'll...you'll be able to have kids...but only through artificial means." He bit his lip, then forced a smile. "But, hey, it's not like anyone grows a kid in their own wombs anymore, anyway?" he joked.

It fell flat as her chest.

She was very nicely developed by the time she was sixteen, though. Her curves were coming in VERY nicely. Something about the mix of growth hormones and the extra heavy dosage of estrogen was giving her proportions any man would love. And I had picked up something from the last planet we'd been on. New Athens--planet of a thousand party colleges. A dress. Silk...virginal white, but not even remotely virginal in cut. Low in the front, with a built in support for her chest, backless, and a slit to show off those legs of hers. She has gorgeous legs, you know--I suggested that she laser depilate them, keep them smooth for life. With the pelvic development from the estrogen and muscular development from the training, she had a walk that I made a point of never looking at. What do you mean, why not--she's my daughter!

So I brought her the dress. She was in her room, and I knocked on the door before entering. She didn't respond, so I pushed it open and looked in on her. She was sitting on her bed, looking down at a magazine. A fashion magazine. One of those magazines covered with women with stick figures, short and half starved, looking like refugees from a prison camp run by a cosmetic corporation. And her, taller than I was, voluptuous and muscular, "unfashionably" healthy. I saw her expression. It didn't take a genius to figure out what she was thinking...

She looked up at me, saw the dress...and started to cry. I dropped the dress to the floor, and walked away.

She found me later, in my chair. Empty beer cans all over the floor. I was finally crying by then, silent tears in solitude. I sensed her come in, of course, felt her behind me. "I'm sorry..." I told her. "I tried to be a good father to you. I...tried to do the right thing. And I ended up hurting you even more." I shook from my sobbing. "I'm sorry, baby..."

Lisa walked around my chair, bent down over me. "Tell me one thing," she implored, looking me in the eye. "Will being like this make me a better hunter?"

I looked at her, swallowed. Then I nodded. She nodded in turn. "Then I forgive you..." she took a breath. "...Daddy."

We hugged. First time ever. Not the last, though. Not often enough, I suppose, but she's not the only one with problems. I really should have hugged her more often. I will when she gets here, though.

"I love you, baby girl," I told her then, also for the first time. I'll tell her that again, when she gets here, too...

Her first combat mission as a bounty hunter was when she was nineteen. In another outfit I'd bought her--baby's first armor. She still wears it, in fact. It's been upgraded and modified countless times, but it's still hers. An Ares Power Armor suit, like mine. Same model, in fact--so it was cheap, being a used model and all. She looked adorable...clutching a portable gravitic lance in her metal shod fists. That's a big gun, even for an armored trooper--they still haven't been able to minimize it enough for her to fit it into her gun hand, not to mention the power drain--so she carried it in both arms, while I had a lightsabre and a particle cannon. I took the lead, let her provide the suppression fire as needed.

It was the BEMs. The Bug Eyed Monsters. Evolved on an unknown world when dinosaurs were just getting started on ours, with an alien intelligence governed by pure instinct, to consume, breed, and spread. They're bred with a variety of castes to handle different functions. Including their bug ships--BEMs grow a subcaste as large as most ships, shrugging off vacuum and cosmic radiation and even minor asteroid collisions. Flies through jet propulsion, a slower than light craft, forming a floating colony lost in space, unless it touched down on a world and released it's inhabitants to spread and breed. A Queen would climb in with her progeny, and live inside it's belly, with some workers tending gardens to feed the colony, and others being sacrificed to the ship as food or fuel, however you want to look at it.

They'd landed on a new colony--second generation, even, and I was called in to clean it out, while the colonists barricaded themselves in their homes and set up defensive systems to keep the BEMs away from the village. We went in the hatch of the bug ship...fine. We climbed in its opened mouth, you happy? She followed my lead, as I paved the way with cannon and sword. Now and again, we'd reach a straight path, and I'd duck to one side and let her clear the way with the gravitic lance--only a hundred Gs, those hand lances, but that's enough to crush living tissue--and gravity doesn't care if you're wearing armor or not.

Bug ships, like human ships, have the same layouts, form following function. Just follow the layout, and you'll get where you need to go. Which, in this case, was the Royal chamber, where the Queen laid her eggs and controlled her colony through an elemental form of telepathy. Kill the Queen, and all the other BEMs go insane--they kill each other, wander off cliffs, head butt walls, and if all else fails, they simply starve to death. The Queen is the only one with a real intelligence--and even then, it's not human intelligence. No ability to grasp symbols. She can only handle things that exist in reality--but a lot of them, at that. BEMs fight with the discipline that only robot troops can achieve, coupled with the morale of human fanatics.

Naturally, BEM is the name we gave them. They don't have names for themselves--no language. Language is about symbols, ditto math--so no artificial inventions, no tool use, no culture. Just eat, breed, and conquer. My kind of enemies--tough, stupid, and no wondering if they might have had a good person who made the mistake of loving them. A BEM hunt is Us vs. Them--nice and clean, and requiring the skills that were always my specialty.

We made our way to the Royal chamber, and I kept the warrior BEMs at bay with the sword and cannon--though by that point the cannon was basically a bludgeon, after expending the charges on all the BEMs. That's why you always aim straight for the Queen--you'll run out of ammo before they run out of BEMs, and she'll breed more while you're getting fresh supplies. Lisa finished the Queen herself, with a blast from her gravitic lance--perfect for the job. Stabbed into her and crushed her guts to a pulp. We charged our way out while the BEM warriors killed everything that moved, and the rest turned into asylum patients.

The colonists were praising me to the skies, when I came out--they knew I'd succeeded when the BEMs on the perimeter all went nuts. That's another great thing about BEM hunts--instant results for success. Dinner was held at their town hall--freshly slaughtered meat, fresh veggies, and fresh baked bread. I took the opportunity to make my momentous announcement. "Friends," I told them, rising from my seat and raising my drink in salutation, "you have the honor of being the beneficiaries of my final mission. I am now officially retiring." Then I waited for the response to die down. "But I know that the Federation is in good hands. The hands of my daughter..." I nudged her with my knee. "Lisa, that's your cue to stand up and say something," I stage whispered.

She rose somewhat awkwardly--she's brave in battle, but timid with people. She blushed and looked down at the responses from the colonists--cheers and whistles...some propositions from the braver and drunker ones...someone asked her, "how long do you think it'll be before the name Lisa Masterson is as famous as Brock Masterson?"

She stiffened for a moment, turning to me. Fortunately, I had one of my rare flashes of insight. I smiled at her, nodding, giving her my permission. She turned to face the questioner. "My birth family--my Tribe--had the custom of using the titles of our professions as our surnames. And my profession is honored and respected on Gaia." She stiffened her spine, squared her shoulders, and faced them directly. And then, her eyes began to glow.

"I am Lisa Huntress."

...So, that's how she got started. We came straight here to New Vegas, and I got this apartment. While I was setting it up, turning it into something I could be comfortable in, Lisa went to see Moddy, our weapons dealer. We'd agreed to sell my armor, and trade it in for some modifications for hers. Plus the ship was hers,

too--my bank account was plenty large enough to live on, without needing to make Lisa pay the expense of a ship. You know how expensive those things are...

Moddy's a greasy little prick, but he's an honest one. Can't keep his hands off the ladies--unless they threaten him with bodily harm--but you can depend on him to deliver the goods. After the usual preliminaries--fond greetings to and from "Uncle Moddy," forcefully removing his hands from her butt, etc. she showed him my armor. "Well..." Moddy began, giving it a practiced eye. "It's kind of old...obsolete, scarred..."

Lisa says that she began to pout, and Uncle Moddy immediately switched gears. She should have realized how sexy she was then and there. But she attributed his cooperation to being "Uncle Moddy," and mistook his lust for the nondiscriminatory tastes of a dirty old man. "Well, it IS Brock Masterson's armor. Tell you what. You get me Brock's gene signed assurance of authenticity, and I can probably get a good amount from a collector...say..." he named a figure, and Lisa squealed with delight, throwing her arms around him and showering his face with kisses. He'd have started groping her then, if he hadn't lost his breath from being squeezed tightly and lifted up to her face level. When she dropped him, he was more than willing to bend over backwards for her. "So what modifications do you want?" he asked her, as he brought up a list of the latest upgrades.

Lisa nodded, bouncing like an excited schoolgirl. After Moddy took one look at the bouncing of her assorted parts, he'd have been ready to give her anything she wanted, free of charge. I'd still be beating the crap out of him, if he hadn't been so nice to her. Father's privilege. But then again, I suppose it's understandable--though whomever she brings home when she's ready to commit had better be deserving of the privilege. "I want all of those...and something else," she said, lowering her eyes shyly. "Something special."

Moddy raised his brow, suddenly curious. Nothing an engineering type loves more than a chance to do something...special. That's when she told him her idea. He nodded in agreement with her idea, and with every word she spoke, his smile got bigger and bigger. You guessed it, baby--Uncle Moddy is the guy who designed Lisa's gun hand. The most famous weapon in the Federation. Lisa had the inspiration, but Moddy is the one who did the dirty work, who figured out how to make the dream reality. Then he threw in a new paint job, to go with it--shiny chrome. Hell of a sight to see, bearing down on you with gun hand blasting away...

We celebrated the completion of the newly modified armor at the same time that we had a housewarming party for my new apartment. Moddy was there, and Lisa put the instant casts on his fingers after I "removed" them from her butt, after which I mollified him with the contents of an unopened bottle of his favorite brand of poison. Father's privilege. Had Judge Fielding there, too, smiling beneficently

upon the newest bounty hunter for officious government types like her to hire as needed. And to give us the heads up on my new job, to help wile away the hours. "So what are you going to do now, Daddy?" Lisa asked, as she sipped her milk.

Judge Fielding harrumphed. "Your...father, has already signed up for work as a parole officer. It's good work for a retiree from the law enforcement professions." Her lips quirked into the small smile that she got whenever she was passing a particularly fitting sentence upon someone--the parolees had some very interesting names for her on that account. "And I've seen to it that every parolee he oversees is one that he helped capture in the first place." Her eyes gleamed--not glowing, Lisa is the only one I know who can do that, but they glinted with wicked intent, "They'll spend the rest of their lives knowing that they can never escape your father."

Moddy laughed, and patted Fielding's fanny. "You're one hell of a lady, Judge," he grinned. "Good thing you're on our side."

Fielding looked at him, brow quirking. "Didn't Masterson just break the fingers of that hand?" she wondered idly, threat implicit.

"That was the other hand," I told her, grinning, "and you're not my daughter."

Fielding nodded, then turned to Moddy. "I suppose I'll have to settle for having you cited for assault charges, then," she mused. Moddy chuckled again, undeterred.

Moddy was always persistent. The source of much of the misery in his life... "Do you always imprison your lovers?" he grinned.

She sniffed, "I don't have a lover, not that it's any of your business."

"Shouldn't have said that," I chuckled. "He'll take that as an invitation." We all laughed. And drank...and ate...and drank some more...

Well, now you know why Lisa Huntress is coming here tonight. Just as soon as she can get clearance to land. I trust dinner is going to be ready by then? So don't worry about her--you two haven't violated parole, so she's not going to take you back to prison or anything. No, she probably doesn't even care that I'm living with two parolees under my charge--hey, I'm supposed to be keeping an eye on you, right? I'm doing just that. No, I don't think we need to make an issue of it. Yes, Fielding knows--she'll be here to join us for dinner, in fact. Her and Moddy. He's getting used to the chip in his head, I understand, and he says he doesn't really mind that Fielding can make him do anything she wants, as long as her wants include daily fuckings. Yes, he was her type. No, I'm not--she turned me down because I'm tough, not because I'm crude. She wanted a pet that she could abuse for a lover. What? Hey, she wouldn't have become a judge in the

first place if she didn't love that sort of thing.

Yes, we are a fairly perverted bunch...what? You don't like it? Would you rather have another parole officer? Get your own damned apartment and a steady job?

That's better. Now watch the teeth, and...oooh! Yes, I love it when you do that... make it a quickie. Don't want Lisa to walk in with my pants down...

Book III

Love and Hate

I was in a library when I met Sara. I like libraries--they're filled with knowledge, and short of people. For a girl raised in a forest, large crowds can be very uncomfortable. And Rebecca Scholar taught me the value of a good book and a comfortable place to sit in. An e-book, this one--few books were in non-digital format, and those were of durable plastic with pages that wouldn't let the text fade nor accept marks or soiling. E-books were cheaper and more compact--the little tablet in my hand had the equivalent of fifty large books, with three-dimensional illustrations to flesh them out.

I sensed her approach long before she spoke up. Another reason I don't like large crowds--so many people, so many intentions, so many sensations, it's not easy to deal with. One person not trying to conceal her approach? Piece of cake. I looked up as she approached. She was very pretty--whether you think that Kelvin Rheine's standards of beauty are too rigid and narrow--as my father and friends keep telling me--or not. Brown hair, down to her back. Slender body, minimal curves. And a pair of cosmetic glasses.

Nobody wears glasses anymore--not with corrective procedures so routine; for over two millennia now. Some people still wore them, though--with non--corrective lenses, for decorative purposes. Especially here on New Athens, where an appearance of intelligence was as desirable as physical health. These glasses, with their black frames and thick but useless lenses, were straight out of an early twentieth century movie with a stereotyped bookworm--for that matter, one of the sexually explicit and poorly written and acted movies they marketed as "porn" in those days, with a stereotyped bookworm who "finds her true purpose in life" precisely two minutes after making her appearance on screen. This girl was dressed exactly like such a stereotype--no kidding. Tan sweater, shirt collar over the neck, short pleated skirt; she genuinely looked like her two favorite things were good books and forced orgasms. Of course, maybe her shy little smile had something to do with it. Or maybe I'm just coloring my memories of my first impression of her with the ones that came after...

"Hi," she said, just as shyly as she looked. "What are you reading?"

I looked up at her, surprised at the interest, and lowered the book. "It's a book on synthetic muscles," I told her, giving her a friendly smile of my own. Her own smiled broadened in response.

"So what interested you in cybernetics?" she asked, reaching for a chair and sitting next to me. I thought for a moment--most people tend to be wary of people

who blurt out "I'm a bounty hunter--wanna see my precision cuts with a laser rifle?"

I clenched my fists in momentary consternation... "My right hand is artificial," I told her, raising it up for her inspection.

She looked at it. "They did a good job--it looks so real." She narrowed her eyes. "Does it have the tactile augmentation?"

I blinked. "Tactile augmentation?"

She nodded. "You know, the simulation of tactile nerve endings in the epidermal layer?"

I shook my head wonderingly, telling her, "I had no idea that they'd developed such a thing."

She nodded. "Right here in New Athens," she grinned. "Courtesy of Dr. O'Reilly."

I nodded, then shook my head. "Even if I knew about it," I declined, "I don't think I could use it, what with all the other gimmicks I've packed into this thing." I grinned again.

"Kind of an emergency kit--storage compartment, tools, a few blades," granted, those blades were a foot long and with serrations on their leading edges, but as long as I don't mention that, people assume I'm talking about a little penknife under the fingernails. "You know, the essentials." I winked. She giggled.

"I'm Sara," she suddenly introduced herself.

"Lisa," I returned.

"So, what kind of tools do you carry? Are you into electronics repair?"

I found myself drawn into a conversation with this captivating woman. Before I knew it, the library's speakers began to gently chime, alerting us to its closing.

"I guess it's time to be seeing about dinner," Sara smiled. "Care to join me? Continue the conversation?" she offered hopefully. I nodded. I didn't understand the significance of her offer. How could I? Raised on a ship, no chances to date... even if I hadn't been somewhat less than physically ideal.

We took her car, since I hadn't even had a chance to rent one, what with landing there just that morning. We ended up at an apartment complex in one of the nicer parts of town. Then again, this was New Athens--the whole planet was a "nicer part of town."

"Where are we?" I asked.

Sara smiled. "I'm going to treat you to a home cooked dinner," she told me. "This is where I live." I grinned, nodding at the compliment. She led me through the halls to the drop tube, thence to her floor, through the door, and into her apartment. I gaped at the sight.

"It's lovely," I told her, and meant it.

New Athenian tastes tended towards the academic, and her walls were adorned with bookshelves and intellectually appealing decorations--the suspended metal balls that have traditionally been used to demonstrate Newtonian laws, a cylinder of water with spheres filled half with liquids and half with air, suspended naturally at different levels from their buoyancy, and a small pendulum on a circular base with roman numerals circling the perimeters, that told the time through it's minute shifts in central velocity.

Sara pointed towards the couch. "Have a seat and wait for me," she smiled. "I'll just set the kitchen to start the meal, and be right with you."

A few quick voice commands got the automated kitchen to work, and she sat down next to me, taking a position just a little closer than I preferred to have anyone other than my father be in.

"So... we were talking about the Frankenstein myth, right?" Sara said, resuming our conversation, which had drifted into philosophy--the subject of the book she'd been reading--and combined with the original topic to discuss the ancient fears of inanimate machinery replacing humanity.

"I still think that the real danger isn't machines becoming human," I countered her original thrust. "That'd be a wonder--a machine with a soul. The real danger is humans becoming machines. Like they kept trying to do in the twentieth century."

Sara nodded, then challenged me. "But don't humans have to sublimate themselves within their society?"

I grinned. "Not where I came from. Every one was an individual, and proud of it. We had no privacy from each other, sure... but we were never lonely, either."

Sara touched my face. "Are you lonely now?" I jerked back, and shivered. She recoiled, her hand moving back to a safer distance. "I'm sorry--I probably shouldn't have touched you," she apologized.

I shook my head, forcing another smile to replace the one that had fallen away. "No, it's okay. You just startled me, is all."

The kitchen dinged, and Sara rose to fetch the meal. Two steaks, delicately seasoned. I ate mine with gusto, and Sara watched me with laughing eyes as she ate hers with a little more restraint.

"Shall I cook another?" she half joked, and I nodded enthusiastically. Her jaw dropped, but she brought me another in short order.

"I have a high metabolism," I explained to her, as we finished with dessert--fresh fruits, a bit of a rarity on most civilized worlds, and one that brought back nostalgic memories of Gaia. Then we sipped wine on the couch. Wine... Never had alcohol before. Pretty soon I was feeling no pain. So when Sara kissed me, I didn't resist. If I'd known then what I know now... I still would have gone along with it. The happiness was worth the pain...

She took me by the hand, led me into the bedroom. She kissed me on my body, through my shirt. I was in a T-shirt and pants, at the time. She kissed my bare skin, when she pulled the shirt off, and began to touch my breasts with loving caresses.

I stood there, weaving back and forth unsteadily, allowing myself to be seduced by this innocent looking temptress. She pushed me to the bed, and I lay there, unable to stand. My head lolled about unsteadily as I moaned helplessly, the Huntress undone by the Scholar. She slid off my shoes, then slipped my pants off. I found myself growing hotter and hotter...burning...and oh, so wet...

She trailed a line of kisses from my belly, up to my mouth. We kissed again, her tongue raping my mouth so deliciously. Her fingers probed my sopping wet cunt...oh...the blissful torture...the orgasm was forced from me, and I spasmed with fulfillment, before collapsing, helpless before her. I looked up at her as many a victim had stared into a predator's eyes, knowing that no mercy would be granted. She drew back, stripped before me...my mouth went dry. She reached for the drawer of her nightstand...

I'd never seen such a device. She inserted one end inside her, shoving at the thing with a determined expression on her face, as she overcame her own body's resistance to the penetration. She sighed as it finally made it to the hilt, then fastened the straps. She smiled down at me, and flicked a little knob on the side of the phallic projection. And it began to gently vibrate. I was motionless before her, as she pushed her way into me.

"Ahhh..." I sobbed, as she lovingly violated me. The vibrations pounded away at my vaginal walls, my g-spot...my clit! "How does it do that?" I whined.

Sara grinned. "Batteries, slut," she half sneered, trying to look cruel and failing to hide the affection. "And this is just the first level."

I gasped. "How high does it go?" I moaned.

She pointed at the dial, and chuckled, "level ten...but I never go past four. I doubt either of us would survive the maximum setting." She continued to pump away, using my body for mutual pleasure.

I snarled, "never... challenge...me..." and reached for the dial.

"No!" she screamed, even as I twisted the dial to ten.

Oh!

My world exploded in a haze of sensation. Sara started to scream wildly, her hips pistoning at full speed. No, she didn't want to fuck me hard..."want" being the operative word. She had no choice in the matter. Nor did I. The awful, wonderful, demonic device forced us to respond, and my body exploded into action, moving my hips in enthusiastic--if unwilling--response.

She slammed into me in turn, her throat continuing to erupt in wild wailing. An orgasm ripped from my body, but was barely noticeable in the grip of the sensations. Then another. Until I was indulged in a single continuous climax, my cunt being shredded deliciously by the horrific weapon that I'd foolishly unleashed upon us both.

"NO! NO! NO!" Sara screamed in accompaniment to each thrust, her own orgasms ripping through her. Her hands clutched my arms desperately, needing to hold something for support. My own hands clawed the bed sheets, as I responded in my own way--no screams, only ragged breathing and occasional guttural moans. Our vaginal fluids were drenching the bed, as our vaginal walls clenched and spasmed around the double-headed dildo...which only increased the sensations and heightened our pleasure, in a vicious cycle.

"GONNA DIE!" Sara wailed, and I was inclined to agree. The sensations were too extreme to bear. Our vaginas were already rubbed raw, and would probably start to bleed soon. My hand inched it's way along...to our bellies...to the knob...click! I shut it off. And shut us both off. Sara collapsed on top of me, the dildo still buried inside us. I lay there, senseless, thighs trembling, limbs occasionally jolted by spasms, merciful unconsciousness stealing over me...

The light of day slowly pierced my senses, as I was reluctantly pulled from the grip of sweet oblivion, to waking hours and the consequences of my actions. Sara was still on top of me, her face buried in my chest, drooling slightly into my cleavage. I smiled at the sight of the line of liquid running between my breasts. She was snuggled up to me like a child hugging an enormous stuffed animal, and I enfolded her in my arms, smiling happily. So good...

I couldn't believe that someone would ever want to fuck me without being paid. Perhaps Kevin, my therapist, was right. I still didn't believe it, not down at the subconscious level, but I was at least opening up the possibility. Sara awoke. Then she started to cry.

"It hurts..." she moaned, gingerly touching the dildo that still joined us. That still joins us, in a sense..."Pull it out," she whimpered, then gasped, "no, don't! Sore..." As was her voice--hoarse from the screaming. Thankfully, I'm not a screamer in bed.

"Have...to...do it..." I grunted, and shoved her hips apart from mine. Sara wailed with the pain, but I had endured far worse during my professional routine. Then I unstrapped the dildo and gripped the sticky yet slick end that had just been pulled from my aching, violated, sated pussy. Sara shrieked again as I ripped it out of her own tender cunt. Then she collapsed on top of me, clutching herself and sobbing.

I sighed. "Personally," I told her, "even the pain feels good right now, when I think of how I got that way."

Sara looked up at me with red eyes, then grinned in agreement. She pulled herself up to my face, and kissed me.

"No more," I begged, drawing back. "I couldn't possibly continue."

Sara smiled. "I know. Just kisses, this morning."

She kissed me again, her tongue sliding past mine. And with that, she completed her conquest of my heart. I loved her. I will always love her. And I knew that she felt the same.

"Sara..." I started, as soon as she let me draw in a breath.

"I know," she interrupted. "No need for words. We're beyond words." She kissed me again. Then she rose up before me, and limped her way to the bathroom. I lay there, savoring the feeling.

I had previously read tales of women being sexually conquered, used and penetrated over their protests until their will was broken, and of their savoring of the feelings of being "defiled," and dismissed them as nonsense--as a girl who'd been truly used and defiled, I had thought them mere fiction, sick fantasies.

I believed them now. Every word. I savored the words in my mind. Used. Defiled. Penetrated. Violated. Fucked... Oh, yes. A sex toy, a plaything for the lusts of my demanding Mistress. And yes, I know that I could have snapped her lithe little

body like a twig. I'm a Mistress in battle--I shed my self-confidence with my "working clothes."

Sara had the confidence in interpersonal relations that I had when Hunting--she could control my body with words, with a look, a flash in her eyes. A sharp tone from my Mistress' lips would hurt far worse than a whip wielded by an interrogation specialist my own size; if she had asked me to lick her boots I would have. And experienced a rush of sick pleasure, overjoyed at the chance to please her.

Did I? No--she would never have asked such a thing, even in jest. I was her Mistress, too.

I rolled over, falling from the bed, and rose on shaky legs to limp my own way into the bathroom. Sara was in the shower, letting the hot water cascade down her body, turning her from violated Mistress and Slave into a mermaid, beckoning me, calling me forth.

"No..." Sara whispered hoarsely, as I opened the door and joined her.

"I know," I told her, even as I hugged her. "No playing--but we both need to wash off the stink." She nodded, and reached for the soap.

Every inch of my body was lathered lovingly. Sara gazed up at me adoringly, her eyes shining with devotion. She smiled with a little fear in her expression, concerned about displeasing me.

"Don't stop," I moaned. "It's not fucking...but it feels so good." I smiled at her. "I need to be touched. Always touch me." Sara nodded, and rubbed her cheek against my leg as she continued to lather me like a servant bathing her Queen.

Then I knelt down, and closed my eyes blissfully, as she finished my pampering with scented shampoo, working it into my hair. Then she rinsed me off, and in my abandonment I forgot my doubts, assuming an imperious expression, becoming the Mistress she needed me to be.

Then I bestowed upon My slave a beneficent smile, as she worked the conditioner into My hair, and refrained from reprimanding her when she dared to touch My lips with hers, telling Me with her lips how much she loved Me, while she waited for the conditioner to work it's magic before the final rinse.

And then, after she had finished paying homage...we switched roles. Remaining on my knees, I lathered Her body, starting at the tops of Her feet. I worked my way up to Her ankles, occasionally glancing up at her, feeling a rush of relief to see the approval in her expression. I soaped those calves, lean and toned. I kissed Her knees before I soaped them, and began a pattern, kissing every body

part with my unworthy lips before I cleansed Her skin of the filth I'd shamefully caused to accumulate during our lovemaking of the night before. She sighed with happiness, stroking my hair with Her wonderful hands, as I made my way to Her pert little ass, then carefully lathered her crotch.

"After you finish, we'll douche," She commanded me in a hoarse whisper, and I nodded mutely, moving up to her slender torso.

After I'd risen to my feet to wash her face, I scrubbed her hair, eliminating the dried sweat from her majestic locks. Then the conditioner, and she pulled me down for another kiss, gracing this unworthy slut with her divine kisses. Then the moment ended, and we were both reduced to slaves, tenderly holding each other and staring at each other with unadulterated need.

The douche was a little uncomfortable, but it felt good to be nice and clean. I forced the nozzle into Sara's cunt, and grinned at the expression on her face.

"Hold that pose," I grinned, and squirted the contents of the bag into her. She whimpered, held it, then let the cleansing fluid gush out, leaving her clean and fresh. Then she sniffled, burying her head into my chest, pretending to be a child in pain, that she might seize the excuse to hug me again.

I played the part of doting mother, going so far as to stroke her hair and mutter, "there, there." Any excuse to touch a loved one is a good excuse. Even planets know this--only with the might of a spacecraft can we hope to escape their desperate embrace, their loving pull that scientists term gravity for the sake of their equations, lest their own emotions interfere with their logic.

We ate a quick breakfast of biscuits and honey--lots of carbohydrates to fuel us during the day, then dressed. I slipped back into my shirt and jeans, and turned to see her donning another outfit--again, almost fetishistic in appearance.

White shirt, striped necktie, skirt...wow. She was pulling her hair into a ponytail even as I watched, before applying a layer of lip balm and very little else. She was older than I was, I knew--but once she'd finished, she looked much younger--like a teenager. She donned her glasses, and gave me a shy smile.

"Oh, you little liar," I grinned. "Pretending to be innocent." She shifted to an innocent expression, looking at me with surprise.

"You're going to get it tonight, you little brat." She assumed a fearful, helpless look, shaking her head and clutching her fists to her mouth in trepidation.

"That's right..." I chuckled, then turned away. "But later. We have to go earn money, or we'll be doing our fucking on the streets."

And we both made our way out the door. "Where do you live?" she whispered, as she locked the door behind me.

"I...I have a spaceship. I just touched down yesterday, so I didn't rent a hotel room." She clutched me for another hug.

"You're moving in with me. Pick up some things from the ship before you come back to my door--you won't be leaving anytime soon."

I looked at her a moment. Then I thrust my hands into her armpits, picked her up to face level, and kissed her thoroughly. Then I lowered my darling gently to the ground.

"We have to get going," I told her, and turned, and savored her touch, as she groped my large, powerfully muscled butt, the entire distance to the elevator. And in the elevator.

And until we left the front door and I climbed into the cab I had called for.

"Do you know who I am?" I asked the cabbie. He looked at me, giving me the once over.

"I'm Lisa Huntress," I told him, and his eyes widened with recognition of the name.

"I've been called here by the President for a job. Would you take me to him, please?"

He grinned. "You got it, Huntress," he chuckled. "I don't want to be whoever you're going after, but--Parthenon it is."

We took off with barely a sound, the gentle hum of the engine testifying to the quality of New Athenian engineering. But the cabbie made up for it with a running dialogue, occasionally obtaining a response from me. That's what cabbies do--give rides to people and entertain them with discussions of the topics of their choice.

And on New Athens, where even the basest of laborers had first-rate educations, this made for cab rides worth having.

"So where'd you get that amazing gun of yours?" he began, as the car soared into the sky. New Athens liked it's technology kept behind the scenes--no street cars meant no paved streets, only garden paths separating lovely buildings that testified to the architectural genius of a people who studied all things with equal gusto.

"Uncle Moddy," I grinned. "Lives on New Vegas--he's my weapons dealer. I gave him the idea, he made it work." He nodded.

"He should come to New Athens, some time," he told me. "He could get a scholarship--and tenure--after making something like that."

I giggled. "I doubt Judge Fielding would let Uncle Moddy leave the planet, but I'm sure he'd love the acclaim."

The cabbie raised his brows. "He's a convict?"

I giggled again. "It was a bogus charge. He made the mistake of flirting with the judge, and she had him arrested and processed before he thought to hire a lawyer."

The cabbie looked at me, shocked. "I thought New Vegas was free of corruption?"

I shook my head. "That wasn't corruption--that was Judge Fielding's idea of a marital proposal. He's stuck as her sex slave, now--and he's not complaining." I shrugged. "She likes giving orders and abusing men, and he likes fucking her. It's a good match." The cabbie laughed.

"Then they should both come. She can keep her tenured professor on a short leash."

We shared our mirth, before he continued, "So how did he pack so much firepower into such a small area?" he wondered.

The Parthenon was named after the ancient Earth ruin, originally built to honor Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, who had been the patron deity of the original city state of Athens. This Parthenon had the pillars and marble construction of the original, but there the resemblance ended. The Parthenon was the office of the President of New Athens, and his staff, who kept the planet functioning. And like everything else in New Athens, their government emphasized intelligence over all else.

While other leaders titled Presidents were chosen by election, the President of New Athens was chosen via an intellectual competition. Each candidate had to take written tests in economics, mathematics, biological science, physical science, political science, history, and philosophy--all the subjects a leader should know. The highest score earned the candidate a point, and the candidate who earned the most points won the election, and a ten year term in office. And without the need for winning votes, and the complete autocratic power of the President (held in check solely by tradition and his own moral scruples), there was no need for political parties. There was only the President, and a retinue of

hand-picked men of varying beliefs, yet united in their loyalty to the President and to New Athenian ideals.

President Theseus was an older man--like most Presidents, he could only hope to win the competition after a lifetime of study--with grey hair, a toga over a tunic, (later I would learn that New Athenian styles in clothing were largely based on the garments worn by educational centers from history. Thus, Sara had been wearing the outfits of a twentieth century finishing school student, not merely a fetishistic outfit--though, given the history of that century...I would also see New Athenians wearing "sailor" outfits, tasseled caps, tweed jackets, pointed hats, hooded robes, and even a few agricultural and biological science experts wearing the minimalist garb of Amerindian medicine men, complete to headdresses and peace pipe. Oh, yes--when a faculty meeting broke up, corn cob pipes and prince pipes and peace pipes would spew the smoke from the leaves of a variety of species), with a muscular, trim body underneath--an obvious attempt to emulate his revered namesake of Greek mythology.

He waved me to a chair as I entered his office, then looked back to the console on his desk.

"Lisa Huntress," he began, and I nodded, expecting a greeting.

"Born on the planet Gaia, forcibly removed at the age of eleven, rescued at twelve. Adopted by Brock Masterson, apprenticed to same. First mission a joint venture with said guardian, eradicating a BEM infestation."

I stiffened, as the man reduced me to bare statistics as I sat there, not even deigning to address me.

"Majority of missions of a search and destroy nature, against BEMs, F'ey, and human pirates. Eventual branching out into more specialized and demanding efforts, including assignments given by the Federation Intelligence Service, details of several classified highest level of secrecy by direct order Gunther von Richthoven himself." He finally deigned to look me in the eye.

"Richthoven refused to grant me clearance on the matter, but gave you glowing praise--for him." He smiled. "How did he put it? Oh, yes: "the only way that girl can fuck up is with the aid of a good dildo." Classic Richthoven." He chuckled. "At any rate, you are the perfect investigator for the job."

"Investigator?" I asked, arching a brow. And making a mental note to inflict severe physical pain upon Gunther, the next time I saw him.

"What am I supposed to be investigating?" Theseus held out a tablet, and I took it from him, as he continued.

"We have a rarity for New Athens. Indeed, for the Federation in general. A terrorist organization." I nodded, impressed.

Such groups were formed entirely of severely disturbed individuals--a rarity in civilized society--and suppressed with a strong response and lack of popular support.

"We don't know their cause or objectives, only that all the members arrested--thefts and assaults, mostly--were female." He looked at me steadily. "It is my studied opinion that your reputation over and above your skills themselves, make you the perfect candidate for this job."

I nodded. "Make me an offer." He nodded in turn, and quoted a figure.

And I controlled my reactions with an effort. Semantics are relative to one's perspective--what constitutes a large sum for one can be considered a low sum for another. Still, regardless of income, being offered approximately ten times the bounty for any previous job is a wonderful sensation, regardless of the actual amount.

Daddy's little girl was moving up in the business.

"What about expenses?" I asked.

Theseus handed me a piece of paper, with an I.D. code upon it. I looked at it, and my nervous system sent the message through the nerves in my arm, down to my prosthetic, and stored the data onto the personal notebook within my forearm.

Theseus nodded as I crumpled up the paper and dropped it onto his desk. "That code will permit you to access any records, enter any location, and enlist the full assistance of any official in the New Athenian government. The majority of citizens will also volunteer assistance, if shown the code and an appeal made to their patriotism. It will also access a government account with an unlimited balance. I trust you will not bring us into a deficit for frivolous reasons."

I nodded, smiling. "The captured terrorists are presently being detained at the New Athenian detention center," he finished.

I wondered if he meant a single prison for the entire colony, then realized belatedly that he'd meant the capital's prison--said capital having the same name as the planet. I nodded one last time, and stood up.

"My Hunt begins," I told him. "I will not rest until I have caught my prey." He nodded, understanding the significance of my words, and rose before me to shake my hand. Then I turned and returned to the waiting cab.

"How much to rent your services for the day?" I asked, as I removed a cable from my hand and plugged into the meter.

"Five creds a minute," he shrugged, "regardless of distance. I'll give you the day for eighteen thousand, if you can pay that kind of dough." Then he saw the balance being transferred--twenty thousand, and whistled. "Thanks for the tip," he wondered.

"I'll expect you at my beck and call, until my Hunt is at an end," I told him.

"Lady, you got it," he agreed, smiling. "So where does the Huntress want her steed to take her?"

I smiled. "The New Athenian Detention Center." And we zipped away.

The New Athenian Detention Center showed a surprising sense of humor, as the cabbie explained. While the rest of the architecture exhibited the finest elements of the buildings of history in which knowledge had been accumulated and stored, the center showed the lowest. The appearance of a twentieth century public school, with its roots in the nineteenth century Prussian model, designed to stunt the mind and retard the creativity, to fill young minds with the skills required to be a hard working and obedient member of the working class, and then close them. The inside was more of the same--the cells were reminiscent of the classrooms in which countless children had had their minds ruined by the horrors of twentieth century intellectual concepts. New Athenian police did not torture prisoners...but after being forced to stay in a room with only a simple bed, a toilet... and a "chair desk" straight out of the worst of such schools, a suspect might want to put in a call to the FIA...

Sitting at a desk in such a room was a girl who would have been rather pretty, if she weren't intentionally refusing to bathe or groom during her captivity. Her clothing, formerly a sailor suit, now made her look like the starring heroine of some of the more disgusting media of the twentieth century, and her hair and face were left intentionally mussed, attempting to give the impression of physical mistreatment at the hands of the prison guards.

"Pathetic," I muttered, as I entered the room. "I've seen real abuse victims." Like in the mirror. "You just look stupid."

She whirled on me. "Sellout!"

I blinked. "Have we met?" I wondered. She rose up.

"You're working with the Man!"

"Well, considering the pay scale the President offers...yes," I agreed. She shook her head.

"I mean the Man! The males, keeping us Womyn in submission!"

I burst out laughing. Couldn't help it. "You're kidding," I chuckled.

"Do I look submissive to you?" Well, I was...but I wasn't going to tell her that.

"So what is your organization called, anyway?" I wondered. She puffed herself up, pushing her chest out at me.

"I am a member of the Sisterhood of Womyn," she announced.

I nodded. "S.O.W.?" I asked, amused. She lunged at me, enraged by the insult. I caught her by the throat with one hand, and held her at the length of one of my long arms, before giving her neck a squeeze. She subsided rapidly. I loosened my grip, but kept my hand on her throat.

"What is your objective?" I demanded. When she'd stopped choking, she answered.

"...An end to the oppression of Womyn!" I jerked back, astonished. "What can you possibly mean?"

And she told me. Womyn being forced to choose between careers and bearing children. Men being chosen for promotion over womyn who put families ahead of professional pursuits, less respect for womyn vs. men, men "always" winning competitions despite the obvious intellectual superiority of womyn in every way...I squeezed her throat again to shut her up.

"Those charges haven't been accurate since the twentieth century," I sneered.

"Before the century ended, in fact, those charges were essentially obsolete." I shook my head.

"You want to gauge the level of prejudice in a society? Check the amount of personal space granted to members of various sub groups. And in New Athenian society, both men and women get the same amount of personal space."

I relaxed my grip, and let her choke for a bit. "Who are S.O.W.'s leaders? Tell me!"

She managed a sneer. "I don't have to say anything. You shouldn't even be squeezing me like this," she added.

I smiled. "I'm not an official cop, sweetie. I don't have to follow the rules."

I held up my other hand, and extended my blades.

"Tell me now, or tell me after."

She began to tremble. "I... I...gua-!"

I squeezed her throat as she called for the guard. Then I released her.

"I won't give you another chance," I told her, my voice flat. And then my eyes glowed for her benefit.

"I only know the names of three other members!" She whimpered. I nodded. "Classic organization, that," I grudgingly approved. "Name them." She did. I dropped her and walked away.

The guard at the door stepped out to confront me.

"Ms. Huntress, I really must object to your actions..." he trailed off, as I gave him a dose of my Huntress gaze, eyes glowing. He backed away.

"Find the women she named," I told him.

"We--we already have two of them in custody," he stammered.

"Then find the other one," I ordered. "Let me know when you track her down. If you need authorization from someone, route them to me." He nodded, and I left that facility with a glad heart--the décor was making me nauseous...

I decided to call Sara, after I'd gotten into the cab. Flipping open my forearm and exposing the monitor for my notebook and my phone, I sent the call.

"Hi, baby," I greeted her. "Are you available?" Sara smiled.

"I've done all I can, for the day--I make a few decisions in a day, then make sure nothing goes wrong. Let's meet up," she told me, her voice recovered from the screaming of the previous evening.

"Yes," I whispered. "Where do I find you?"

She thought for a moment, then said, "Princetonian Park," she decided. I looked up at the cabbie, but he was already lifting off.

"I'll be there as soon as I can," I told her. She nodded, and signed off, while I sighed. And felt my heart pounding. I needed to see her again. Needed to touch her...

"How is she involved in your Hunt, if you don't mind my asking?" the cabbie inquired. I blushed.

"You could say I'm Hunting her..." I managed. He grinned at me.

"I can take you to a florist and a jeweler, anytime you want me to," he offered. I grinned back, delighted at the offer.

"Another time, thank you." I closed my eyes, leaned back in the car, and sighed.

The cab touched down in the parking field, and I saw her leaning against her car. I waved to her, then we ran into each other's arms. I bent down and kissed her, savoring her taste, her feel.

"I missed you," I moaned.

"Missed you more..." she responded.

"I don't want to go back to work--I don't want to leave you," I confessed, "I need you."

"I know," she smiled, snuggling into my shirt. "Why don't you retire, and be my sex slave?"

"Oh..." I moaned, sincerely wishing I could.

"Keep you on a leash," she whispered. "Never wear clothes. Take you everywhere I go, and let you hold me while I do business."

"Ooooooooooh..." I shook my head, vivid fantasies running through my head. "I'm hungry," I managed, trying to change the subject.

"Over there," she nodded, and I saw the vendor. A hot dog stand. I'd never had such a delicacy before. I pushed in front of Sara and plugged into the register.

"I'm on an expense account," I told her. "My treat." Then I looked at the vendor. "I'll have three," I told him.

He paused. "Are you sure?" he asked, taken aback.

"Are you selling me those foot long ones?"

He nodded.

"Then I'll have three. Sara?"

She held up her index finger. "And one for my Mistress," I grinned at her. She giggled, the vendor chuckled, and fitted the sausages to the freshly baked brown buns.

"Ketchup, relish... onions," I told him.

"Everything on mine," Sara said, waving at the stand.

We sat down at a bench, and laid our food out on the picnic table. I began to take large bits from my sausages, chewing with gusto. "You have quite the appetite," Sara noted, as she munched away at her dog.

"I have many large appetites," I told her, and she shuddered in response.

"Don't tell me that when you're not prepared to rape me," she begged.

"When we get home, then," I grinned, and she moaned.

I turned to see a young boy, about twelve or so, playing with his dog. I nudged Sara and nodded at the kid, having all the fun in the world with his best friend and a flying disk that he tossed for the dog to catch.

She sniffed. "I don't see what's so great about it," she mumbled, swallowing her bite of hot dog.

"It's wonderful to see a little boy like that," I told her. "So innocent, so full of joy."

"That'll change," she retorted. I paused, and looked at her, puzzled by her comment. She took another bite of her sausage, and didn't elaborate.

After we'd finished, I asked if she was free for the rest of the afternoon.

"My people can take care of things for one afternoon without me," she assured me. I smiled and nodded.

"Let's go watch the games, okay? I've heard about them, but I've never seen one."

She grinned, and squeezed me.

"I'll meet you there--I have my own ride, now," I told her. She nodded, and we hurried off.

* * *

The Tri-competitions were the New Athenian concept of sports--even here, intellect was prized above all else. Each Tri-competition consisted of three events, picked randomly. First, a physical challenge. Then, an intellectual trial. Finally, an artistic endeavor. Thus, each Tri-athlete had to be versed in the three primary fields of excellence. Not nearly as action packed a sport as those of other worlds, but nevertheless very exciting, to a devotee.

This one promised to be especially interesting--the first event was a lightsabre competition. Simulated lightsabres formed from electric blades of similar heft--that is, a thin but strong wire, plus full body uniforms with masks, which registered the strikes of the sabers and left body parts frozen into rigidity for less than fatal strikes. Every lightsabre practitioner had their own style, and those styles were, in turn, based on the ancient systems of combat with steel swords.

The Princetonians based their styles on the epee fencing system--almost entirely thrusts, with a great deal of subtlety involved in driving the point home. The New Harvard athletes, on the other hand, resorted to the kenjutsu system of Japan--wide two-handed strikes possessed of extreme force and arc.

I cheered enthusiastically at the fighting, relishing the impressive techniques presented by the athletes.

"Are you a fan?" Sara wondered. I shook my head.

"A duelist," I corrected her.

"Where do you fight?" she asked me.

I chuckled. "Um...I don't compete in tournaments." Sara looked at me, then we both turned as the crowd roared--a New Harvard competitor had just scored with a particularly impressive display, leaping over the blade of his lunging opponent and striking at his neck in the same movement. The overhead monitor showed an instant replay.

"Impressive tumbling skills," I remarked.

Sara turned back to me. "Surely you're good enough," she insisted.

I squirmed in my seat. "I don't train for competitions," I said. Her eyes widened, and she nodded, then turned away, dropping the matter as swiftly as I'd hoped. And I felt rotten for wanting to do so. There shouldn't have had to be any secrets between us...

The final competition was between the New Harvard athlete who'd shown such skill previously, and the Princetonian champion, a slim woman with lean musculature to contrast with her opponent's impressive build. Both were older competitors, seasoned veterans, and I later learned that they'd privately resumed their fencing after the competition.

Without the blades. Or the uniforms, for that matter. She adopted a defensive outfighting posture, to complement the fact that she was both taller and weaker than her opponent--using repeated blade movements to draw him out of line, before attempting the thrust. No fleches or ballestras--too risky at this point. The New Harvard man was similarly restrained, using powerful, but simple attacks, hoping to win through direct offense.

Her blade shifted to sixte--outside line, high--providing an opening. He took the bait and slashed at her sword, hoping to knock it out of line for a follow up attack. She disengaged, dipping her blade under his, and extending, following automatically with a lunge. He continued the sideways slashing motion, turning it into a pivot and twisting out of the path of her point. He released his blade with his right hand, lashing out with a swift left-handed slash as his spin brought her back into his killing field. Too late--she simply collapsed, dropping to the ground as if fainting, then rolled to her feet and a defensive crouch. Rising to her guard, they resumed.

I was on the edge of my seat now--as a duelist, I knew better than the fans did, the intricacies being engaged in that untrained eyes could not hope to fathom. Their eyes, behind their masks, focused not on any particular body party, but rather diffused, paying equal attention to everything, seeing tiny shifts in movement, altered posture, changes in balance. The gaze presented, beneath the masks, were dead eyes. Eyes, that were flat and cold.

Meanwhile, their bodies, seemingly motionless, were in fact engaged in furious activity--shifting their balances slightly, as they measured, gauged, changed guards to match the changes of their opponents. Jodan no Kamae--blade meant for downward cleaving attacks. Sevente--blade low and inside. Gedan No Kamae--blade lowered to point at the knees, a defensive posture meant for counters against attacks. Prime--blade held downward, low and inside, to bind and envelop.

It happened too quick for the conscious mind to follow--only the subconscious reflexes of a trained fighter, accustomed to letting body and senses move without interference from the conscious mind, could cope, or see. She whipped her blade in a wide arc to push him back, then extended and lunged. And he responded with a powerful two--handed strike, connecting just at the right point to knock the blade from her hand. Before the blade could hit the ground and signal a time out, he followed up with a second slash, cutting her across the torso. Match end.

I cheered as loudly as anyone, impressed by the sheer virtuosity of the pair. Sara sniffed.

"Of course the man won," she muttered. I paused, and glanced at her. Then I turned back to the competition, determined to put it out of my mind. I probably shouldn't have...

The next event, the intellectual event, was a debate--each team working together, acting through a representative. The subject: whether the Federation, or any part thereof, should have any sort of dealings with the F'ey. The F'ey, a hive-minded insectoid race, but unlike the BEMs in every way.

Their humanoid castes included drones that were short little things with hands for tool use, F'ey the size of a human and with telepathic powers, and the dreaded F'ey Lords, taller than I was, more insectoid in appearance than the others, with powerful telepathic abilities. The mingled abilities of the F'ey combined to form the Over One, a collective intelligence that controlled the actions of all F'ey, everywhere, and continually worked towards an ultimate goal of universal domination. The F'ey were noted for clever schemes, double dealings, and agreements broken at the first convenience.

The winner was Princetonian, when the girl speaking for the team raised the historical analogy of ancient warlords forming temporary alliances for mutual gain, with the unspoken but fully understood agreement that such alliances would be broken at the first opportunity by the first party to see profit in such a move. Thus, she argued, a skilled negotiator could achieve short term gain without compromising long term goals, as long as they maintained suspicious skepticism of any actions on the part of the F'ey--and to constantly maintain the capability of enforcing the agreements through violence. Which is true--and the reason that I've been hired by a few such negotiators, for just that purpose.

The final event was improvised performance art--a comedy routine. Each team was given a scenario, and required to stage a comedy play through improvisation, nary a moment allowed to plan. The scenario for each was a funeral, held for a hated but wealthy relative. The identity of the relative, as well as that of the other characters, was part of the improvisation.

Again, male and females alternated as playing the dead relatives, lying down on the stage floor and pretending to be in a coffin, as the other actors bickered and connived and hypocritically pretended to mourn before the others. The girl was turned into a prop by her team--as they began to move her about during the course of the act, spinning jokes as several characters actually pretended she was still alive, in the hopes of maintaining the fiction long enough to have Granny Dear "sign" the will making them her heirs. Finally, the team ended their act by tossing the girl off stage like a sack of garbage, to the actors playing the "defeated" characters, who caught her safely.

The New Harvard won the event, and the contest, with their own affair. The coffin was portrayed as being on a funeral pyre, to be burned--and the mourners showed no hypocrisy in their speeches. They described Uncle Alvin as a horrific beast of a man, who could never stop complaining of the aches caused by laser burns and lightsabre cuts, yet still managed to beat grown men to death with his bare hands.

How he loved a good steak--he would cut what he wanted from the steer, and ride the rest home. How he was once kicked by a mule, then punched the mule in response, knocking it unconscious. The finale was when they prepared to light the funeral pyre--making joking comments about how he might rise from the grave as the undead if they didn't burn the corpse...whereupon Uncle Alvin sat up straight and screamed, "YE GODS! Can't a man take a little nap!"

Afterward, we went straight back to her place--me pausing at the spaceport to grab some clothes and toiletries, she to pick up some food from a diner. I tossed the case in the bedroom, and we ate on the couch again. And after she finished, I continued to eat, grateful that she'd remembered my appetite. Soon, I was reclining on the couch, and she was spoon feeding the couscous into my mouth. When I'd finished the last of it, she kissed me tenderly, and we each tasted the spices on the other's breath. I picked her up in my arms, and carried her to the bed.

As I began to strip my delicious, wonderful lover of her semi-fetishistic raiment, she looked up at me.

"You're Lisa Huntress, aren't you?" she asked. I froze. Most people don't like the thought of loving walking death. I nodded, expecting rejection.

But Sara...grinned. "I knew it," she crowed triumphantly, "you're as amazing as I thought you'd be."

I blushed, but didn't feel uncomfortable in the slightest. I finished stripping her, then discarded my own outfit. Which needed a good cleaning, after being worn for two hectic days in a row.

Then I reached for the nightstand, and removed the strap-on. Sara's eyes widened, as I shoved it inside me with one powerful thrust, dismissing the discomfort with nary a change in expression. As I fastened the straps, I looked down upon her. And my eyes began to glow. That's when Sara finally realized what she had unleashed, knew the truth of my lust, the power of my love. Knew it even as I pushed my way into her, my eyes glowing with the Huntress gaze, the low buzz of the vibrator blending nicely with the sweet tones of her moaning.

"I'm glad you set it to low, tonight," she smiled, savoring the thought of a gentle lovemaking session.

I grinned. And flicked the dial to ten.

The next morning, I was hugging her tightly, licking her neck, while she moaned in a combination of satiation and soreness.

"Let me go, please," she begged. "We both have work today." I continued to fondle her. I never wanted to let go.

"Please, Lisa," she implored. "I don't want to...go...but we have to...mmmmmm..." I released her momentarily, and unfastened the strap-on, holding it up to her.

"Kiss it," I told her. "Thank it for fucking you like the little slut you are."

She moaned, and kissed the sticky tip. "Thank you for fucking me like the little slut I am," she sighed, then kissed the dildo again, lovingly.

I grinned, and began to stimulate her again, my hands reaching for her cunt, her breasts, fondling her delightful body. She moaned, begging me, "Please stop! No, Lisa...can't take anymore..." her words belied her actions, as her body undulated in response, pushing at my demanding fingers.

"Please, Lisa...it hurts..." she whined. "Don't...make...me...cu-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-hhhh!" She contorted in spasms, riddled by yet another orgasm, squealing pitifully. I shoved her away contemptuously, and stood up, looming over her.

Sara lay there and cried, sobbing pitifully for a few minutes. Then she rolled over, looking like a properly used slut should, staring up at the sight of Lisa Huntress, naked, juices running down her powerful thighs, staring down at her as though she were freshly slaughtered kill. She worked her mouth, striving for breath, before managing to make the words.

"I love you."

I smiled down at her. "Love you too..." I murmured.

Then I went to take my shower, as Sara lay there, her thighs shaking, unable to move. A beautiful sight. One to take pride in--a delicious little fuck toy, violated and used and defiled...and loved. Everyone should be so lucky as to have such a fuck toy. Or to be one.

After dressing in a jumpsuit with the necessities in the pockets--credstick, deodorant, cleanser, tissues, med kit, needle gun--I called the cabby's number,

only to find that he was waiting outside the building, ready to leave the moment I stepped into the cab. Good man. I gave him even more money for the day, for his thoughtfulness and the fact that we were starting from the beginning of the day, then told him to wait a moment. I brought up my notebook, checking for mail. And rapidly located the message I'd been hoping for.

Transferring the address contained onto the cab's computer, I nodded to the cabby. "Let's go catch us a bad guy," I said, and he nodded, grinning. A lot of people love the idea of helping me with my Hunts. As long as they don't have to stick around when the shooting starts, of course...

The girl in question lived in an apartment complex not far from where Sara lived. Where I lived, now. I made my way to her apartment door, and pushed the buzzer. After a moment, the young lady opened the door, and her eyes widened. She was a plump thing--not fat, ever since the Recivilization of the twenty-first century, people had been taught to moderate their diets and exercise properly, bulimia and anorexia were as dead as the plague or polio--but with large hips and breasts and a waist that would have seemed narrower, if she hadn't been carrying so many pronounced curves on such a short body. In the few days of my new life with Sara, I had begun to appreciate the female form even as I admired a good looking male. If I weren't on business--and she weren't almost certainly a terrorist, that most vile and odious of criminals--I'd have loved to take her home and wrap her around the strap-on.

She smiled nervously, yet charmingly--she liked what she saw, too, apparently. I suppose it was inevitable that I would meet at least one or two people whose tastes were unusual enough that they'd be attracted to a freakishly large woman with pronounced musculature. She was wearing yet another education outfit...and once again, the attire worn by females seemed almost fetishistic. I began to wonder if New Athens might not be a more sexually active culture than their outward appearance of intellectual development above emotional reactions might suggest. Yet another sailor suit, in fact...her hair was black, drawn into a series of braids, her thick little legs jutting from a short skirt.

I had a sudden vision flash before my eyes, of the girl screaming with forced orgasms as I quasi-raped her with the dildo, while Sara held her down and sucked on those breasts--as big as mine, but on a body almost two feet shorter. Then I shook my head to dispel the vision.

"I'm Lisa," I told her, and she shivered delicately.

"Come in," she invited--no, that's not right. She practically begged me to come in. I entered, and wondered about New Athens laws concerning crime and punishment. Maybe I really could end up having this girl--Sara would find her so yummy...

"I'm Candy," she told me, and I grinned.

"Of course you are," I replied, and she shuddered at the double entendre. I walked in, and she stepped back, her eyes smoldering with expectation of imminent violation. I kept an eye on her as I entered, and with our mutual attraction, it didn't occur to her that I was unwilling to let her get behind me. She took my hand--my prosthetic hand, but it looks and feels so natural that most people can't tell unless I tell them or make use of its features--and pushed it onto her bosom, making her desires very plain.

"Sara sent you, didn't she..." Candy whispered, while my hand groped her...

And then shot upwards, and the girl found herself pinned to the wall by her throat. She stared at me with bulging eyes in a shocked and terrified expression, as I snarled at her. I didn't want to be subtle anymore. Not after hearing that...

"Which Sara do you mean?" I growled. "And WHAT is your connection with S.O.W.!?"

She struggled for a moment, then her jaw chomped strangely. Then she went limp.

"What?" I gasped, before the light of comprehension dawned. Hollow tooth, filled with poison. The old methods are still quite often the best. I called for immediate emergency medical assistance. Forensics. I couldn't let this girl go into brain death. She had the secrets I needed in her mind.... I opened her throat, extracted a mini breath pump from my med kit, shoved it into her throat until it sealed itself over her windpipe. I began to pump steadily, forcing air into her lungs, taking over for her interrupted breathing process.

"Come on, Candy," I muttered. "Don't you die on me, you little criminal. I need what's in your head..."

The med team arrived swiftly--Theseus kept his government efficient. They rushed in, and quickly pulled out the pressurized oxygen tank. Hooking up the tubes, they sent a stream of air containing 99 percent oxygen into her lungs, doing whatever they could to keep her brain alive until her body's systems naturally filtered the poison out through her pores and digestive tract. The cops came in--they arrived at the same time, but allowed the medics to enter first, understanding the priorities required.

"Search the apartment," I ordered. "Forget subtle. Forget privacy. If you can't open it, tear it apart. A messy apartment is the least of her worries," I jerked a thumb at Candy, who was trying as hard as she could to die, while the medics worked to deny her the chance.

"What about the computer?" one of the cops asked, looking at her desk. He tapped a few buttons. "Oy vey," he swore softly. "It's password protected, and probably encrypted, too."

I rushed over to the desk, and ripped it out of the ground, broken cables trailing.

"Get this to the department," I told him, carrying it out to the hall before setting it down, "and have a cryptographer and a hacker try to crack it. Better yet, make it a team of cryptos and hackers." He nodded, as the other cop swore by his own religion at my offhand demonstration of my strength. "Athena's titties..."

I shrugged, and took a seat on the couch, as the forensics team and cops searched the apartment. The robot sniffers looked for the DNA of anyone who had ever been in the room, the cops looked for hardcopy or tablets, the medics took Candy off to the hospital. And...nothing. The only DNA in the apartment besides our own was Candy's, as well as that of a few other terrorists--ones already in custody. The whole cell was in custody, now, and only Candy knew the secrets. It wasn't hard to guess her role.

Cell leader. She knew all the cell sub leaders personally, and they each knew only two other members--three member sub cells, reporting to Candy. She probably stayed in her apartment when not studying--she was a student with a part time job as a software technician, working out of the home. She must have been very lonely, I guessed, and figured that a woman coming to her apartment meant another terrorist sub leader, and a little respite.

"Take me in your arms, brave freedom fighter, and let us forget the cause for a time." Shit.

I went home after a fruitless day--long, unproductive, and exhausting. Candy would be unconscious for a few days, before she could talk. Sara had cooked me another excellent meal arising from the Mediterranean culture of ancient Earth. Hoummus paste, sliced onions, pita bread, candied dates, a variety of simple foods. I looked at Sara, so beautiful, in her outfit--nude. And suddenly wondered if it might be poisoned. She dipped her finger into the hoummus, licking it clean suggestively, and told me to dig in. I took a chunk of pita bread, and bit off a mouthful of spiced flatbread, feeling ashamed of myself.

Sara quickly had another one of her wonderful ideas after a moment. She had me rise from the couch, then set down plastic sheeting over the fabric. Laying down, she nodded at the platter containing the food, and I took the hoummus and a spoon, slowly covering her body in the rich bean paste.

"Oooooohhh..." she moaned, as I covered her little nipples with onion, before beginning to feed. I took chunks of bread, dipped them into the paste, and popped them into her mouth or mine.

"That's right," she sighed, as I dipped an onion into her wet pussy, and used her own juices as a flavoring.

"Yummy," I smiled, then offered my fingers to her lips, and let her suck them clean.

The dates were sweet, but not as sweet as our love. The onions, the hoummus, the bread... She'd cooked for me, labored to make the meal as tasty as possible, to show her affection. It's the little things we do for each other that show our love. Cooking their favorite meal, respecting their tastes in music, listening when they need a friendly ear. She showed her love by preparing such a meal, and I showed my love by feeding the both of us, paying attention to her.

After we'd finished the food, I licked her belly clean, and her breasts, up to her mouth. I kissed her, and she sat up, cuddling with me. I hesitated, then forced myself to ask.

"How...how did you feel about the competition?"

I asked. I felt dirty, ashamed. But I had to know.

Sara sniffed. "Of course the MALE led team won in the end," she said.

I stopped her, "The teams had no official leaders. Only temporary forerunners based on the event in question."

She nodded. "And that's what clinched it," I said.

"But at least the girl won the debate," she added, "Though that was hardly surprising."

I sat there, unable to move or speak. Then I managed to force air past my voice box. "I don't like this conversation," I got out.

Sara stiffened, sensing that I didn't want to hear such things. "Ok," she said, and stood up. She took my hands, and we went to bed.

Each of us sensed that we may have been sleeping with the enemy. That made it more passionate, more desperate. More painful. Our lovemaking was dildo free, no artificial aids...well, other than my hand. But we were passionate...no, savage. As if we each knew in our hearts that this could very well be our last time together. We ate each other's cunts with ravenous hunger, groped each other desperately, as if trying to fuck the other into going to the other side. As if, by fucking each other hard enough, long enough, well enough, the other would renounce their beliefs in the name of our love.

Dammit, Sara! Why didn't you? Was hate more important than our love?

Afterward, I held her tightly, certain that when I let go, I'd never get the chance to hold her again.

"I'm afraid of losing you," I whispered, trembling. She hugged me back, with all the strength in her petite frame.

"You won't," she whispered back.

I sniffled. "I'm...worried, about your views of men," I managed, still afraid to be direct, to face the truth. If I had...if I only had...

"Then I won't discuss them," she promised. I sighed, relaxing, seizing the unlikely possibility that I'd ended it. Then she added, in a still lower tone, no doubt thinking that I shared the senses of a city bred person, that I wouldn't hear, "it won't matter after tomorrow, anyway..."

My eyes shot open, and I spent the rest of the night holding her tight, terrified of what the morning might bring. I felt so cold...

When I woke up, after finally succumbing to sleep, I was alone. I knew I would never be with her again, cast the prescient thought from my mind with the anger of one faced with the most painful of truths, and answered my arm, which had awoken me from the refuge from reality that was my dreams. Dreams of living with Sara...dreams that I forgot rapidly as I awoke, the way dreams always disappear with the coming of the morn.

"Lisa, here," I told them, letting them see me first thing in the morning, not caring.

"Um..." the male cop said, guessing where I was, and blushing. "We've almost cracked the last of the codes protecting the file. If you can get here in twenty minutes, you can watch Lester break the last one."

I nodded, suddenly excited. No matter the outcome, this was still a Hunt. When I Hunt something--or someone--they don't get away. Ever.

"I'll be there," I assured him, and shut my phone, reaching for an outfit. One that...one that Sara had provided. One that she'd bought for me, and left out for me to wear. Blouse, skirt, pearls...the outfit of a schoolteacher from the same period as many of her own outfits. I was crying openly by the time I got into the cab, and the cabbie let me alone as he rushed me to the department.

"You're not the one, Sara," I whispered, a mantra to keep despair at bay. "Candy didn't mean you. You're not the one..."

I made my way to the computer forensics room in a hurry, wiping my eyes and face with the cleanser and shoving it back into my arm before I reached the door.

"What do we have?" I demanded as I rushed in. The cops looked at me, save for Lester--an older man sitting before the terminal, seducing it as one might seduce a shy young virgin. I wondered if his skills transferred to his personal life.

"He's almost done," a cop told me, as she exhaled a plume of smoke. I identified the weed by scent. Marijuana. And tobacco fumes were coming from the pipe of a male detective dressed like a certain nineteenth century fictional detective. I wrinkled my nose, and ignored it.

"That's it, baby," Lester crooned, his hands moving in a blur as they danced over the keyboard. "Don't be shy. Let Daddy in..." I gaped. Then I turned to a policeman, looking for clarification.

"Isn't this planet devoted entirely to intellectual pursuits?" I asked.

He nodded, agreeing, "not entirely, but mostly."

"Then what's with the constant overt sexuality?" I demanded, "the outfits, the innuendo, the casual--um..."

He grinned. "Because we're so smart," he joked, then, in the New Athenian way, turned it into a lesson. "Releasing our sexual tensions keeps us mellow. Part of the reason the middle ages and the twentieth century were so horrific was the sexual repression that twisted sexual drives into sadistic and destructive purposes. You'd be surprised at how many of the criminals we catch turn out to be celibate."

I chuckled. "So what do you do to treat them? Gangbang them until they stop committing felonies?"

He laughed, then opened his mouth to respond, just as Lester groaned like a man finding release. "Oooooohhh yeah!" he groaned, reaching out to caress the terminal. "Another notch on the keyboard, for the Lester man!"

I rushed to his side, clutched his shoulders, and bent over his shoulder, begging him, "show me the files, Lester. Show them to me!" He winced at the strength of my grip, and I relaxed with an effort. "Sorry. Now show me!"

He nodded, and I added, "the latest messages in her inbox. I need to know what's going to happen TODAY."

He checked her mail, and nodded. "Something about the Lillith project," he told me.

"Look for the details on the Lillith project," I ordered him, and he quickly brought it up.

Then his cocky grin began to fade. "It's...it's a biowarfare project," he gasped. Then he ran through the details. "An engineered virus, released into the atmosphere by rocket delivery. Highly contagious. Lethal in...hours. Targets the Y chromosome, causing death at the cellular level, ripping the body apart, slowly. XX bearers are carriers, but unaffected."

I stared at the monitor in horror. She wouldn't dare! Would she?

"My husband..." a female cop whimpered. "My son..." Lester moaned, "Hell-- ME." Other officers, both male and female, whispered the relations that suddenly appeared before their eyes...being slowly torn apart from the inside out...

I didn't hear their names. I was already out the door.

"We're taking off as soon as I get into the cab!" I ordered the cabbie over my phone. "To the spaceport!" Then as soon as we were on our way, I called the department. "Find out where the rocket is going to launch from!" I ordered Lester. "I'm picking up my armor. Call me and tell me where to go!"

The trip to the spaceport was a blur... I ripped off my arm and crawled into my armor, then raced back to the cab, just as the phone call tried to reach my arm phone and was routed to my helmet, instead.

I relayed the message to the cabbie, and then added, "seconds count. Get me there on time, or half the population dies."

He didn't ask for clarification, just sped up and began taking dangerous and illegal shortcuts, weaving through the buildings like a slalom course. I heard the beeping of a police signal, plugged into the cab and transmitted the code from Theseus. The signal shut off, and the police cruiser shot ahead of us with signals flashing and sirens blasting, clearing a path for us.

When we reached the building where the rocket was being kept, I told the cabbie, "send me a bill for damages. Include a fat tip."

Then I punched the door, ripping it from the frame, and jumped out. The cab veered away from an emergency landing, as I cut in my jets to cushion my landing on the roof. And saw the roof begin to open.

No, you don't.

I aimed my freeze gun at the little figures below me, taking my time for accurate shot placement as I drifted down on pillars of jet exhaust. The balls of frost that accumulated as the wave passed through the air and froze the moisture in the air struck them, just before the beam flash froze their entire bodies, as well as a portion of the solid matter in contact with their bodies. One of them fell over, shattering into a thousand tiny pieces that would eventually thaw into gobbets of flesh, beyond the possibility of revival...

That wasn't her. That wasn't her. That wasn't her...

I landed, all the terrorists in sight standing in frozen positions, expressions of surprise on some of their faces. Someone was still moving, though. Thermal imaging showed the heat signature of an unfrozen human, radar detected a moving body, my audio pickups detected the sounds of feet shifting on the floor. I looked around, glancing at the frozen women around me. "Sara?" And waited...

"Lisa?"

Ancient religions and legends of Earth spoke of words of power, that could kill a warrior by speaking them. Words that could stop a heart, turn it to stone in their chest. Anyone who doubted that such things were possible...is a fool.

I leapt over the machinery in one controlled jump, landing to face Sara with gun at the ready. She stared at me, her eyes streaming tears behind her glasses. Tears to match mine, behind my visor.

"Surrender, Sara," my voice breaking like my heart. But my gun hand remained steady.

"It's over."

"No!" she screamed. "The men have to be stopped!"

My gun hand never wavered, even as my insides clenched, my heart stabbed with pain, my vision shimmered with tears.

"You can't blame an entire class for the actions of a few members," I told her.

"How can you say that?" she demanded, "after what happened to YOU?"

Still no waver in my hand, even as everything else trembled.

"I know all about your history, Lisa," she bore in. "I know what those men did to you."

Her lips paled, the blood draining from them, and she licked her lips.

"We're going to make sure that no man ever hurts a womyn," she promised, "ever again."

"Don't do this." I pleaded, one last time.

Her hand had slowly drifted towards the console, trying to hide the motion during our exchange. I fired the blast, froze her cold. Stopped her, cold and ended. Like her plans. Like our future together...

I was in the hospital when she woke up, sitting in a chair next to her bed.

"Where...where am I?" she asked, blinking her eyes, fuzzy with the sleep she'd been in after being thawed out. That's a routine but tricky process, easy to do with modern medicine. The only real danger is chunks of frozen blood wandering the vessels, jamming a ventricle and causing the heart to stop. Still, the freeze gun wasn't in my gun hand because it was a common weapon--usually they were tools for med teams. Freeze the patient solid, thaw them out in the hospital, let them be worked on in sterile conditions with proper surgical tools.

"You're in a hospital," I told her, then reassured her, "you were thawed out with no serious side effects."

She slowly turned her head, gradually focusing on me. "No...no serious...?" she asked, worry suddenly creeping into her voice.

"There will be a few wrinkles developing from cellular damage," I elaborated. "And...some of your hair broke off."

She heard that, and started to chuckle at the absurdity. Then the laughter turned to tears.

"How could you do this?" she demanded, looking up at me pitifully.

"I was trying to protect all womyn. I thought you were a protector, too." Her gaze burned into mine, accusing. "You're a Huntress of men."

I looked away, unable to face that gaze. I thought of all we had shared. The dinners. The Tri-competition. The lovemaking. The park...

The boy.

"You're wrong," I told her, turning back, facing her accusatory gaze with one of my own. "I don't hunt men."

I rose from the chair, looming over her. "I Hunt those who would prey on the innocent." My voice was strong, though my eyes were red from the tears that still streamed once more.

"I Hunt people like you."

I walked away, and left her to her hate. Taking only the ragged shreds of my love with me...

Book IV

Therapy

Kevin's office was rather unusual, by the standards of most professions. His desk was off to one side, in the corner, rather than dominating the room, and served mostly as a place to keep his computer terminal, where he kept records and communicated with clients. A bar took up even more room, which he kept fully stocked with his clients' preferred beverages. The chairs and couch were far more comfortable than one might expect. But the predominant feature of the room was a large bed, with soft pillows and satin sheets.

Hardly unusual. After all, Kevin's profession was anything but typical.

Kevin was skimming through his e-mail when the call arrived. The view screen opened to an image of Janet, one of his most loyal clients. "Janet," he smiled with real pleasure. Kevin loved to see his clients. But then again, you had to like people, in order to be a sex therapist. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Hi, Kevin," Janet blushed at his gaze, lowering her eyes demurely. "I...I have a friend, who needs your help."

"Oh?" Kevin's brow arched. "Is she simply looking for a good time, or does she have issues she needs to work out?"

"Mmmm...a little of both." Janet tapped a few buttons, sending the pertinent data. "Childhood sexual and physical trauma, plus issues with self-confidence." Kevin glanced down at the data. Then he took a closer look. "I...see. I'll do what I can for her, Janet."

"Thank you!" Janet smiled with utter confidence in Kevin. No surprise there, given his successes with herself. "When can we schedule an appointment?"

"Actually, I'm free tonight. It's either help out...Lisa, or watch a movie." He shrugged. "How about six o'clock? I should be ready for her by then."

"Ok, Kevin." Janet smiled. "Are we still on for this Saturday?" Kevin grinned in turn, and Janet squealed. "Goody! I'll see you then..." She logged off.

Kevin shook his head and banished the memory of Janet, sweet as she was. He had to concentrate on his new client. He began to read the files. An interesting woman, Lisa. Lisa Huntress...

Born on an arboreal world, named Gaia in the official registry, low tech by native decision. No major cities, aside from the spaceport...people living a hunter-

gatherer existence, by willful decision. Kevin smiled. That explained the surname. He read on, and his smile faded. Kidnapped by pirates at the age of eleven...

Kevin ran a quick search on the incident, calling up any pertinent data. A particularly nasty crew of pirates, known as the Fallen Angels band. Long history of crimes--not very successful as pirates, due to their sadistic compulsions, but with a long record of violent crimes rather than property crimes. Landed on Gaia to escape pursuit by authorities, encountered family unit, referred to as "Tribe." The Tribe was exterminated, save for Lisa. Kevin swallowed his bile, knowing what he'd be reading next...

Severe sexual abuse for the next year, finalized in an abortive "execution" that left her with an amputated right forearm. Kevin ran a search for her medical records, hoping to get the particulars. Records found. Accessible only by authorized medical personnel. Kevin plugged in his license number, and the records unsealed themselves for the licensed sex therapist. Kevin scanned them quickly. Then he closed the file, stood up, and made his way to his bar. Pouring a quick shot of a particularly nasty and powerful rotgut favored only by a few of his "rougher" clients, he quaffed it down in one gulp, eager to wash the foul taste of Lisa's abuse from his mouth. He shuddered as the alcohol burned its way down, the slow poison taking off the edge.

When he felt better, he returned to the files. Rescued by bounty hunter Brock Masterson during execution. Adopted by same when he found no surviving relatives. He called up the pertinent history of Brock Masterson. Famous bounty hunter of his day, Masterson was known for being rather crude in both personal and professional dealings--favoring the simplest approach to any situation. Rarely dealt with hostage situations (his inadvertent rescue of Lisa being rather a surprise to him), but quite legendary for charging into fierce battles head on, relying on firepower, and more importantly, on personal courage and fire discipline to see him through. No spouse, a record of appointments with female sex therapists...he called up Brock's medical records. No sexual disorders; the man was simply too unsavory to attract a lover, aside from a few brief affairs with women of a shady nature and criminal background encountered during the course of his career. Currently retired, living on New Vegas, cohabitating with both former lovers presently released on parole, serving as parole officer of same.

Kevin's eyes widened. THIS guy was her adoptive father? This Brock Masterson had raised her through her adolescent years? He shivered. He was amazed that Lisa was out of prison or a mental hospital herself, given what she'd gone through...What was this? Contraceptives implanted at an early age, altering her hormonal levels during her developing years. Excess testosterone and growth hormones, followed by corrective dosages of estrogen supplementation, resulting in excessive proportions. Kevin checked her statistics, then did a double take.

Six-feet nine-inches? Heavily muscled, and...goodness, her chest was...VERY, well developed. Green hair? Well, why not? No doubt a useful trait for a hunter-gatherer on an aboriginal world.

Reading on, he noted that Lisa had followed in Brock's footsteps, becoming a bounty hunter herself. He checked her professional website, reading her list of successful bounties. Quite a long list, given her young age...well, given her apprenticeship to Brock, it wasn't hard to credit. Well! This would certainly be a challenge, even for a therapist of his talents. Standing up, he began to pull off the comfortable yet natty robe that he wore in his off hours, and began to dress into something more suitable. Something a best friend might wear...a friend you could tell anything to.

A t-shirt fashioned of fine cloth went over his hard, lithe body, something nice, yet casual--not the garb of a predator on the prowl, but of a nice guy who wants to hug. The black leather pants, on the other hand, showed off his tight ass and the bulge of his enhanced genitals to excellent effect. When she was ready to see him in a more carnal perspective, she need only to lower her gaze.

Next, a quick matter of hygiene. His teeth were quickly scrubbed with mint flavored toothpaste, followed by a strong mouthwash, to remove the smell of the rotgut. Followed by a mouthful of parsley, to prevent any possible odors emanating from the digestive tract. The hair took the longest amount of time...it took much care to make it seem natural and wind tousled. Finally, deodorant and just a whiff of cologne. Mostly, though, he smelled of clean male. Kevin returned to the console and resumed checking his e-mail until Lisa arrived.

At the sound of Lisa's arrival, Kevin opened the door with a voice command, rather than present her with a standing man at close proximity. He'd encountered a few similar cases--they tended to be skittish. His professional smile, always containing more than a hint of sincere pleasure in the client's company, became more so at her appearance. For an insecure woman, Lisa certainly didn't mind wearing rather daring outfits. Though, had he been more knowledgeable of her craft, he'd have realized the utility of wearing such garb, as opposed to bulky garments that concealed more but hindered movement.

Lisa was a tall drink of water, sheathed in a red leather jumpsuit that left nothing of her figure to the imagination. Allowing complete freedom of movement, yet covering most of her skin--not only light armor against minor cuts and abrasions, but also psychological coverage. Pockets at the thighs held her essentials, though Kevin's glance didn't register any weapons within them. Then he realized that would be superfluous--he'd only understood some of the details concerning her prosthetic hand, but that was enough. She stepped into the room, quickly taking in the whole room at a glance, then focused on Kevin. And stopped.

"...Hi," she breathed. Suddenly, she didn't seem so dangerous. As her husky

voice managed the basic greeting, her body posture subtly shifted, showing definite nervousness. Her hands clutched themselves in front of her midsection; then she forced them back to her sides, clutching them into fists.

Kevin smiled, and slowly rose, holding out a hand to welcome her, without touching her. "Hello, Lisa," His voice had just the right amount of warmth. Lisa looked at him cautiously.

"So...what are we supposed to do?"

Kevin's smile turned sympathetic. "Why don't you sit down?"

Lisa glanced around. "Where?"

"Anywhere you like."

Lisa chose the couch, sitting down with her knees close together and feet flat on the floor, hands folded in her lap. For all her size and power and sheer sensuality, she seemed like nothing so much as a scared little girl. Kevin made his way to the bar. "Would you like something to drink, Lisa?" he asked.

"Um...I don't drink alcohol."

Kevin nodded. "Many of my client's don't, Lisa." He reached for a specific bottle, then opened the fridge. "Would you like something chocolate?" She nodded, a shy smile blossoming on her face. Kevin quickly mixed a chocolate shake, with milk and chocolate syrup and chocolate ice cream, and poured it into two glasses. Handing one to Lisa, he sat down on the chair across from her, and they sipped the shakes, paying no heed to the caloric or glycemic effects on their bodies. ...Because there was none--the syrup and ice cream were both artificially sweetened, providing the chemical releases of chocolate and the nutrition of milk with no insulin dump to pour fat onto their trim bodies.

Kevin smiled at the sight of Lisa with her shake. She really did seem like a little girl, despite her height and formidable list of accomplishments. "So how did you meet Janet?" he asked, looking to break the ice through a common link. Lisa perked up.

"Business."

Kevin nodded. Janet was a mid-level official for the government of Valarius, involved in the regulation of interplanetary commerce with other worlds. "I worked in pretty close proximity with her when I was Hunting the Moby Dick Gang of pirates," she continued.

Kevin nodded, not missing her capitalization of the word Hunting, "and after a

few days into the case, she invited me to talk business during her lunch break rather than wait until after." Lisa shrugged. "We became pretty good friends."

Kevin nodded, listening attentively.

"So...when we started talking about relationships...and I told that I hadn't...well..." She stopped.

"...Since your captivity?" He finished the sentence for her.

Lisa's head jerked up, and she glared daggers at him.

"How did you know about that?" she demanded. "Did she tell you?"

Kevin put up his hands inoffensively, trying to placate her. "Unnecessary. I'm a licensed sex therapist. I have authorization to read your pertinent medical history, same as any other health care professional." He swallowed. "I had to take a drink of some very nasty stuff I keep with the rest of the drinks to wash the taste out, let me tell you."

Lisa nodded, warily. "I got over it."

Kevin cocked his head. "Then why haven't you had sex since then?"

Lisa shrugged. "I dunno. I just...haven't been interested. Janet said I should come see you, though."

Kevin nodded. "That's why she said it. You're a healthy young woman, Lisa. You should have a healthy interest in sex. Since you don't, and you're physically healthy, that's why you're here."

"But..." Lisa shut up and hunched down.

Kevin smiled sympathetically. "You DO know this will be different from what you experienced, right?" he asked.

"I...I guess so."

Kevin's smile became more open, more inviting. "I'm going to be very gentle, and make sure you enjoy it." A sudden thought occurred to him. "Do you know what foreplay is?"

Lisa frowned. "Sort of..."

"If you let me, I'll show you." Kevin stood up, and slowly moved towards Lisa, who reflexively shrank away from him. He sat down next to her, and her body

became rigid. "It's okay, Lisa..." he soothed. "Turn your back to me, just for a second."

Lisa turned away from him, asking, "Why?" Then she felt his hands on her shoulders and immediately began to pivot to counterattack, twisting while one of Kevin's arms began to move in a circle to trap both of hers. Then she stopped almost as quickly. To Kevin, she seemed to have merely flinched at his touch, before resuming her rigidity. He smiled, and slowly rubbed her back and shoulders. His touch ran over the leather over her skin and rock hard muscles...then the muscles slowly began to soften, loosening, relaxing.

Lisa sighed at the feeling of being TOUCHED...of positive physical contact with another living being. It was a feeling she'd not known since her early childhood...she started to cry. She shook her head, not understanding why the tears fell, yet unable to stop them. Kevin continued to stroke her, his hands dissipating her tenseness, and causing the release of emotions kept locked up for years. Eventually, he began to move closer, gently guiding her into leaning back, resting her powerful back on his chest. His hands slid down her arms, then wrapped around her waist.

Now Kevin began to switch from gentle friend to gentle lover. He slowly bent his head, kissing her neck, gently. Lisa gasped slightly. He continued to hold her there, occasionally kissing her neck and shoulders, as Lisa relaxed still further, beginning to feel very comfortable in his presence. Kevin continued to kiss and hold her, giving her all the time in the world.

When Kevin felt she was ready, his hands slowly stroked her hard belly...gradually making their way upwards, until...until Lisa suddenly realized that he was touching the bottom of her breasts...and it felt GOOD. He moved upwards, until he was fondling her breasts. She couldn't believe how GOOD it felt, and she whimpered quietly, her head lolling back to expose her throat to further kisses. Kevin reached up to the fastener at her neckline, opening her garment up to her groin, relishing this triumph, as his hand touched her bare skin. She grunted, jerking at the touch, and her nipples began to harden. Kevin's hands continued to rub, then began to gently fondle her nipples. "Oh!" she cried. "That feels so good..."

"I enjoy doing this..." Kevin murmured. "I like what I'm doing to you."

Lisa gently murmured, her drooping lids fluttering. "Hmm?"

Kevin kissed her throat again. "THIS is your first time...your REAL first time."

His left hand drifted down, as the right continued to fondle her breasts. She felt his hand brushing her pubic hairs, gasping at the feeling. His fingers hovered there for a time, before moving lower, to find her pussy dripping wet. His finger

slipped inside, and Lisa started to whimper.

He found her g-spot, and she began to tense up again...

"Relax..."

"Kevin...!" Lisa cried out.

"Hush, Lisa...just relax..."

"I'm...I'm scared..." she gasped, feeling unaccountably ashamed and frightened. She felt an unbearable sensation inside of her, terrifying her with the intensity. Though being intellectually aware of the concept, her complete inexperience and traumatic past had left her with an inability to comprehend what was happening...and THERE! The first orgasm of her life, as her mouth opened in a silent scream, her face twisted in horror...not understanding what was happening to her...

Kevin continued to stimulate her throughout, whispering, "It's okay...I'm here...just relax..." Lisa finally managed a faint squeak, then fell back, limply, as her orgasm finally released her from its terrible grasp.

"What...what WAS that?" she gasped.

"Your first orgasm." Kevin's fond amusement was plain in his voice.

Lisa's breaths continued to come in desperate gasps, as she forced herself to a normal breathing rhythm. When she'd succeeded at this, she responded.

"I want another."

"Let's go to the bed," Kevin suggested. Lisa nodded, rising to her feet with an agility that testified to her boundless stamina. She half dragged him to the bed, before reluctantly releasing her death grip on him to pull off her leather jumpsuit, while he removed his pants and shirt. Turning to face him, Lisa moaned at the sight of his tight, lithe body. She pulled him close, burying his face between her breasts. He savored the warmth of her pectoral muscles and large, well-formed breasts. He rolled his eyes up to look at her face.

She was crying.

"Will...will you still be gentle?" She sounded scared.

"Oh, yes."

He gently lowered her to the bed, and she lay there, staring up at him with wide

eyes, her thighs unconsciously parting to receive him. She caught sight of his hard cock, and momentarily thought of the...OTHER, cocks, that had violated her. But THIS one was clean, healthy looking, shining with the promise of pleasure, not pain. She banished the thought, spreading herself even further, consciously preparing for him...

The head was inside! Oh...his HEAD was inside! She groaned in her deep, husky voice, sounding like a panther in heat. Kevin smiled as he slowly pushed his way in. His cock had been surgically enhanced to a length of eight inches, large enough to look big, but tapered a bit at the tip so as not to look scary or inflict pain just through insertion. Not to mention the enhancements gave it far greater rigidity than an unenhanced penis, feeling more like a wooden dildo than a flesh member. These enhancements--as well as training--allowed him to attain an erection or release through conscious will rather than reflex, a useful trick when the client's problem is being too repulsive to obtain a consenting partner for sex.

Finally, Kevin was completely engulfed by her tight (rejuvenated by modern medicine after her horrific experiences) pussy, and he looked up into her eyes, feeling not unlike a mountain climber, clinging to a sacred peak. Lisa stared back down into him, and blurted out, "That's the first time a cock's been in me and I enjoyed it!"

Kevin smiled, nodding. "This is the first time a COCK..." and he made it twitch inside her.

"has ever REALLY..." another twitch...

"been INSIDE..." yet another twitch...

"your HOT..." another twitch...

"SWEET..." twitch...

"CUNT!" twitch.

Lisa wailed and came again, her limbs jerking about spastically. She didn't know what to do...confused by the ecstasy and novelty, her body laying there, helpless, as he began to pump inside of her, slowly...gently...his hands cupped her generous breasts, and she moaned. Her legs wrapped around his waist without her thinking. She only knew that she HAD to keep him inside her, no matter what. She pulled him in, terribly afraid that he might pull out of her. She didn't want that to EVER happen. She wanted it...needed it...to go on forever...

Kevin continued his gentle penetration of her sopping pussy, fucking her into several more orgasms, each one washing over her like a cleansing shower. Just as she reached the point where she began to feel sore, he permitted himself to

climax. His long self-denial and great pleasure attained from fucking such a beautiful woman resulted in a truly awesome amount of sperm and a very satisfying orgasm. She groaned as she felt the sperm jets slamming into her, the cum boiling out of her well-fucked vagina. He pulled out, leaving her with an empty, used, yet sated feeling. She stared at the dripping cock that had so pleased her, feeling a strange urge to kiss it...to clean it...to show it how much she adored it.

But she didn't.

He moved down now, cleaning her pussy out with his tongue, eating his own cream-pie. He soothed her slight soreness with his tongue, and she came once more, before he'd finished cleaning her properly. Then he climbed back up her, and reached for the covers of his wonderful bed, his "workbench," as the ancient joke went. He covered them both up, and cuddled her, holding her tight.

Lisa held him close, then shifted slightly. Uncomfortable, to be lying on her side. She rolled over onto her back.

Then he climbed back up her, pulling him with her, until he lay on top of her, his hard body feeling so good on her powerful and voluptuous one. She felt tired...her lips curved into a gentle, relaxed smile...and she surrendered once more, for the last time that evening. A surrender to the power of gentle, healing sleep.

Three months later

Kevin's next encounter with Lisa was as surprising as it was memorable. He'd been moving through his daily exercise regimen--dancing to the beat of sensual music, his hips moving in sync with the powerful rhythm. Beat, beat, *beat*; beat, beat, *beat*. His body swayed in a manner designed to arouse lust in anyone who beheld his performance, male or female. Yet no audience had the privilege, no lustful person had the joy of watching his hips and thighs and torso moving in patterns as old as binary procreation itself. He danced for his own enjoyment, danced to feel the joy of being alive.

And then the phone rang.

Kevin slowed his spinning kick to a gradual halt, then cursed bitterly at the interruption of his art. Then he took a deep breath, held it, and released his frustrations along with the CO₂, lest he risk taking out his frustrations upon the unknowing transgressor. Making his way to his console, he opened the view-screen, and he gaped in shock. Shock turned to happy recognition, and his lips parted in a very real smile. "Lisa," he said with surprise and pleasure. "You're back on Valarius."

Lisa's expression was impossible to detect beneath the mirrored lenses and alloy of her helmet. Still, her fond amusement was evident in her voice. "Actually, I'm calling from orbit. I'll be docked at the spaceport in a half hour." She paused. "Can you meet me?"

Kevin nodded. "Of course. Where would you like to meet? Dinner?"

Lisa hesitated. "I...I don't know enough about Valarius. I don't know of a suitable restaurant." Kevin noted how, despite her uncertainty, she remained confident and sure of herself. "Why don't you pick the place, Kevin?" she added. Kevin nodded. "Where can a girl get a good cut of meat?"

Kevin smiled. "I know just the place," he told her. "It's called the Carnivore. I'll send you the coordinates...there." He smiled. "Shall I see you there in an hour?" Lisa's helmet dipped in a nod of assent. "Excellent! I can't wait. Until then, Lisa..." he ended the conversation with a fond look into her concealed visage. Then he turned to finish his dancing, inspired to resume by the prospects of an evening with a much-improved Lisa Huntress.

An hour later, he was sitting at a table in the Carnivore restaurant, waiting eagerly for his date to arrive, glancing around at the surroundings. The Carnivore's interior was fashioned from imitation wood, with tables resembling wooden benches, in a very pseudo-primitive fashion. The walls were adorned with carvings of notorious predators from every known world--creatures known for their taste for flesh and their ability to acquire it. Between the dining hall from the kitchen lay the meat locker, where the cuts of meat hung from shining hooks, waiting to be carved up into individual portions. Kevin lost himself in admiring one particularly impressive specimen, a ferocious looking insectoid, whose razor-edged front claws were held in an almost prayerful posture, as it stared at its prey...

"You'd make a lousy Hunter, you know."

Kevin jerked in surprise, then felt Lisa's hands holding him down. "One of the first things I ever learned was how to keep aware of my surroundings."

Kevin gripped her left hand and kissed it, before releasing her. "I thought a predator at the top of the food chain feared nothing."

Lisa bent down and licked his ear tenderly. "Every predator knows better. There's ALWAYS something waiting...to EAT..." she bit gently, "YOU." Kevin sighed at the sensation. "Everything that lives is both predator and prey. You have to be aware of everything around you."

"Isn't that difficult? Constantly having to watch for any possible attack?"

Lisa kissed his ear. "It's more than that. You simply stay aware of everything around you, rather than be lost inside your thoughts. That way you can enjoy everything that goes on around you, all the wonderful sights and smells and sounds." She stepped around him to sit down, and he grinned.

"I see what you mean," he enthused, admiring her outfit. She wore a cream-colored silk robe that hugged her delightful curves, with her legs sheathed in white tights. The cream and white colors made her seem rather sweet and innocent. She blushed under his gaze, and looked down.

"I know you're just saying that because you're paid to," she mumbled, "but thanks for saying it." She sat down quietly, then looked up into Kevin's astonished glare.

"I'm the top Sex Therapist on Valarius for a number of reasons, not least of which is my integrity, Lisa." Kevin's mouth firmed. "I never say anything I don't mean." He leaned forward. "And you DO look sexy as hell, Lisa." Lisa blushed more deeply, and stared fixedly at her plate. "What happened to the confidence you had when you called me?"

Lisa stared at her plate for some time before answering. "I...I was wearing my armor. I feel different when I'm in my armor." She looked back up at him and reached for something to hurl back at him. "And that predator you were admiring is a Praying Mantis, from old Earth. It never got much bigger than six inches long. YOU could have killed one, by squishing it with your shoe."

Kevin looked amused. "But very deadly for it's size, yes?"

Lisa continued to glare at him for a moment, before reluctantly breaking into an embarrassed grin of her own. "The only things that ate them were things they sometimes ate as well--spiders, birds, bats. They were the champs of their weight class." She glanced down at her plate again, then looked back up at him through batted eyelids. "So what are we eating?"

Kevin laughed. "When the waiter gets here, and I'll order for us both."

The waiter turned out to be a large, beefy man, jovial and boisterous, grinning at the sight of his attractive customers. "Welcome back, Kevin!" he half bellowed, in a voice that projected straight from the depths of his massive torso. "So what'll it be tonight?"

Kevin nodded to the waiter. "Larry, meet Lisa." His lips curled in a little smile. "Lisa Huntress."

Larry's eyes widened. "A true predator!" he exclaimed, his face wreathing in admiration. "We've got just the thing for the two of you." He paused for dramatic

effect. "The Backyard Cookout!"

Lisa blinked, regarding this loud man warily. "The Backyard Cookout?" she repeated dumbly.

Larry nodded enthusiastically. "From ancient Earth itself--from America, the land of the great warriors of democracy! We start you off with greens--fresh baked bread and our oversized tossed salad, served in a bowl as big as your head with traditional Ranch dressing."

"A bowl that big for two of us?" Lisa blinked.

Larry laughed. "A bowl for EACH of you! And then, you'll get our fried onion flower--an enormous onion sliced and deep fried, to look like a flower in bloom, served with our special dipping sauce."

"Um, we'll want to share that..." Kevin began. Lisa just moaned, her appetite aroused.

"You'll get one apiece, and take home what you don't finish, with our compliments!" Larry overrode her protests. "And then you'll get our soup of the day--Athenian chowder, just like they make on the planet of knowledge."

"Um...we do get meat, though?" Lisa asked. "Right?"

"Oh, you're getting meat all right!" Larry spread his hands to suit his words. "Because then we bring in a piece of genuine Terran Bovine, vat grown, hung in our meat locker to age for a year, seasoned, cooked over an open fire, and brought to YOU, on a platter with baked tubers." Lisa's eyes widened as Larry halted his hands at the approximate size of her portion. "So what'll you have to drink?" he queried as an afterthought.

The next half hour or so was an education, for Kevin. As they enjoyed each course in turn, Lisa regaled him with her latest adventure.

"The F'ey are a cowardly bunch," she explained. "Bullies. It's one of the things Brock taught me. If you charge a bully head on, and keep a cool head under fire, they buckle under the assault, no matter the odds." She took a bite of her salad. "They're expecting you to cower under their superior power. When you don't, they fall apart--they need to be in a position of certain victory before they can fight. They're like most natural predators, in that regard--they prefer their prey scared and helpless." She took another bite. "Prey that has a fighting chance is more trouble than it's worth, if you don't want to be crippled on your next hunt."

Lisa took a bite of her salad before continuing.

"The F'ey were holding beauty pageants...you heard about the Miss Galaxy contests?" Kevin blinked in surprised, then nodded in comprehension. They'd been all over the Net, contests that revived an ancient Earth fad by pitting beautiful women against each other to select a superior one on the basis of personal beauty. Such fads that perpetuated Earth nostalgia were a common occurrence throughout the Federation--fond memories for the birthplace of mankind. "The whole thing was orchestrated by the F'ey. The winners...disappeared."

Kevin blinked. "What do you mean? Every Miss Galaxy winner went on to great things."

Lisa shook her head. "No. They were replaced with Changelings--clones, under the control of the Oberon--the hive mentality that commands the F'ey. Each of those women who ended up a mistress or wife of a Governor or a Senator or a General who was working to undermine the Federation from within."

Kevin looked at her in amazement. Then he took a bite of bread. "So how did you get involved?"

Lisa smiled. Kevin braced himself upon seeing the feral expression. "Gunther Von Richthoven." And Kevin shuddered. The head of the Federation Intelligence Bureau. The terrifying guardian of freedom. The Crimson Baron. "He suspected something, and I was already in the area. So he hired me to interrogate one of the pageant winners." Kevin opened his mouth, and Lisa raised her fork to stop him. "Don't ask who she was. Classified." She stabbed downward and shoveled the veggies into her mouth.

Kevin nodded, and took another bite of salad. "So what tipped you off?"

Lisa took another bite of her own salad before continuing. "I had already talked to her sister over the phone." She stopped to wolf down her salad, to make room for the soup, which the waiter placed on the table. Kevin finished his own salad at a somewhat more sedate pace. "When I talked to the Changeling, I knew something was wrong."

Kevin let the waiter replace his empty bowl with the fresh soup. "How?"

"She told me that she and her husband NEVER fought. Ever." Lisa grinned like a wolf eying a deer's throat. "Gunther made a quick call to her husband, and confirmed."

Kevin swallowed the first spoonful of creamy soup. "How did that tip you off?"

Lisa chuckled. "The sister had told me how headstrong she was. And the husband is VERY well known for being obstinate. There's no way she could

have been THAT submissive, unless she was up to something." Lisa chuckled again, darkly. "When I confronted her, she attacked me."

"Did she survive?" Kevin asked mildly. Lisa laughed openly at the compliment, then dipped a piece of bread into the chowder, before popping the saturated chunk into her mouth.

"Not after Gunther's people were finished with her. But once they confirmed that she was a Changeling, they worked overtime, finding the probable location where the women were being held--an asteroid base in a mining belt. And I went in to get them out." She dipped more bread and ate it with gusto.

Kevin looked at her, nodding, his face wreathed with awe. "How did you get them out?" He took another spoonful of soup.

Lisa's expression closed. Suddenly, the confident Huntress seemed to shrink within herself, becoming once more the shy and withdrawn girl he'd first met. "I...it's not something I want to think about right now." She looked down at the soup, then took another chunk of bread and stabbed at it viciously. Kevin watched her chew the bread, a disturbed expression on his face.

An hour later, Kevin leaned back in his chair and groaned. "I still can't believe it," he sighed, looking at Lisa through lidded eyes.

Lisa paused in her mouth wiping to blush. "I...I guess I was just hungry."

Kevin nodded, gently rubbing his belly. "I can't believe...you ate everything they served you." Lisa blushed more furiously.

"Plus dessert," she added, in an embarrassed tone.

Kevin nodded. "Plus dessert." He looked at his own side of the table. "There's enough left here for my breakfast tomorrow." He sighed, letting the food settle in his stomach. Then he smiled. "Let's work some of this off, shall we?" Lisa looked up at him, her eyes inquisitive and somewhat suspicious. Kevin stood up, offering her his hand. "Shall we dance?"

Lisa shook her head furiously, even as her hand moved to take his, seemingly of its own accord. "I couldn't!" she insisted, as she rose to meet him. "No...it's too embarrassing..."

Kevin smiled and gently tugged her to the register. "That's okay. They don't have a dance floor at the Carnivore. But I'm sure we can dance..." he raised her hand to his lips, kissing it, "...somewhere else." Lisa blushed, and nodded, grinning in embarrassed pleasure.

"You know, I didn't feel that." Kevin blinked, and she extended one of the wire I/O plugs from her index finger.

"That's the mechanical hand," she replied.

He nodded, suddenly embarrassed himself.

"It's ok," she assured him. "It's...nice that you forgot. It lets me know it's not as noticeable as I sometimes fear."

After paying for their meals (cost automatically added to the bill for therapy, professionally discrete and courteous), Kevin asked Lisa, "where do you stay when you come to Valarius?"

Lisa shrugged. "Normally I'd rent a hotel room until I took another job. But I've already got one, and usually I just sleep in my ship." She smiled. "It's my home."

Kevin turned and gently folded her into his arms. Looking up into her eyes, he asked her, "Would you like to stay the night with me?"

Lisa's expression turned puzzled. "I thought we were already going to do that?"

Kevin squeezed her gently. "I meant, would you like to stay the *whole* night? Share my breakfast with me?" He relaxed his grip with one arm, and held up the bag containing the remnants of his meal.

Lisa glanced at the bag with a bemused expression, then began to giggle. "It'd take more than that to satisfy my appetite in the morning."

"Oh?" Kevin grinned in turn. "So what do you usually have for breakfast when you're in port?"

Lisa looked down at him. And then Kevin beheld something he'd never seen before. Something he'd not known any breed of human had evolved the capacity for. Lisa's golden eyes stared down at them...and began to glow. He found himself transfixed by that terrible gaze, and his body stiffened, unable to move. He knew himself for prey, then. Prey for the Huntress.

"I think you'd make a tasty snack," she murmured, and Kevin knew then, that he'd succeeded in his objective during their last session.

The trip to his apartment was a blur. Secure in the auto-cab, hands and lips roaming each other's bodies, Kevin feeling more like a willing victim than a lover. "I never thought your awakened sexuality would be this...intense," he moaned at one point, before plunging his mouth back onto the silky steel of her flesh.

"Isn't everyone's?" Lisa murmured, before sucking on his throat like a lamprey.

Kevin cried out, then recovered himself sufficiently to respond. "Not by half. Most women...need to be warmed up first. A lot of...cases arise from...from...impatient partners...first time..." He pulled her up for another hungry kiss. "Few women respond this quickly," he added, when she released him. "It's rare in a lover...and prized." He kissed her again.

When they made it in the door to his apartment/office, he straightened his arm to hold her at bay. "First things first, Lisa. You promised me a dance." Lisa growled, and charged him. When he finally managed to once again pry his lips away from hers, he gasped, "dance first."

Lisa shook her head stubbornly. "No dance. Bed."

Kevin touched her cheek. "We have all night, Lisa. Let me dance with you." He smiled tenderly, before gently prodding, "Please put me down." Lisa's glowed brighter, before she reluctantly lowered him to the ground. She started to remove her hands from his armpits, but he stopped her. "No, don't let go. Just move your hands, like so," he took each hand in one of his own, and guided her. "Put that hand right here on my shoulder. Good..." his hand caressed her, tracing a long path along her arm, to her shoulder, then down to her back. "Now this other hand stays in mine, and we hold it out here. Now you push gently on me with both hands, while I push with this hand and pull," he gently tugged her a little closer with the hand on her back, "with this one."

Lisa hummed encouragingly. "So what do my feet do?"

"You have to keep to a rhythm. The rhythm for this dance is slow, slow, slow, slow. That means you'll move your feet in patterns of four, and each step will be nice and slow. Nice and easy." Lisa nodded, smiling slightly. "Now because we're holding each other like this, I'll lead, and you just have to move in response to the steps I take. As long as we take the same sized steps, we won't step on each other's toes. Ok?" An encouraging hum came from her mouth. "The basic pattern is like so. Step backwards, step to the left, step forward, step to the right. And just one more thing, before we start." Lisa made an inquisitive noise. "Stereo, on. Play." And Lisa found Kevin, and the music, sweeping her away.

Lisa's smile broadened a little more as they danced, into a shy grin of exquisite happiness. "I never thought I could dance," she murmured, looking down into his eyes. "I never thought I was graceful enough."

Kevin chuckled. "You're kidding. You move like a cat--even your walk is incredibly graceful."

"Yes, but...dancing is different."

"Not at all." Kevin led her into a new pattern, forward and backward, then left and right, in an L shaped pattern. "See? It's simple enough to learn. Especially considering how athletic you already are."

Lisa sighed. "And you don't mind dancing with such a tall woman?"

Kevin chuckled. "Not at all. Though I am used to keeping my hand lower. Right about...there..." Lisa gasped, then pushed her ass further into his hot hand. "I am disappointed, though. You should have found a lover by now."

Lisa pushed away from him, and moved to a distance. Staring at the wall, she muttered, "First I have to find someone willing to overlook my flaws."

Kevin looked at her with a measuring eye, then stepped up behind her. Clasp his arms around her waist, he hugged her gently and kissed her shoulder blades. "We'll keep up our therapy until you realize your worth, Lisa."

Lisa did not relax, though she did clasp her hands over his arms, reaffirming her need to be touched. "It's...hard to believe," she half whispered. "I think you're only saying those things because you're paid to."

Kevin squeezed her gently, giving her a pulse of affection. "Trust me, Lisa," he pleaded with her.

"I already do," she moaned. Then she added, with a somewhat sharper, wry note, "that's why I let you come up behind me." Kevin froze; the implications of that running through his head, before chuckling. *Dear Bast*, he thought to himself. *This woman really is a Huntress.*

He found himself voicing a logical extension of that concept. "I'm surprised you haven't simply kept someone in your ship to service you."

She sighed. "That's illegal."

He squeezed her again. "Not if they stay willingly."

She sighed again, shaking her head. "I doubt anybody would."

Kevin bit his lip, knowing he couldn't convince her with words. "Would you please lie down on the bed, Lisa?"

Lisa half turned. "Why?"

"I want to drink your juices again. I can't do that until I undress you." He kissed her back again.

Lisa smiled bitterly. "At least I taste good." She turned and gracefully dropped herself to the bed, giving him an incredible view of her shapely ass. Kevin suddenly found his mouth dry, as Lisa rolled over, spreading her legs encouragingly. She let him remove her tights, then sighed as he slowly kissed her left foot. Then her right foot. Then the left ankle. Then the right. Lisa looked down at her artful lover, as he moved his way up, an inch at a time. Now he was at her calves. Past her knees. Under them, to the sensitive inside of the joint. Her inner thighs...when he finally reached her cunt, he found it dripping wet, as she felt herself submitting to her therapist. Her skin felt as though it were burning. So hot...She screamed, a bellowing sound like a tiger's roar, as he ate her into a screaming orgasm. "Do it!" she roared. "More!"

Kevin pulled himself up her body, removing her silk top. His hands reached hungrily for her breasts, as his mouth suctioned to her nipple with obvious need. While Kevin prided himself on his self-control, he knew that Lisa needed obvious indications of his desire for her. Hence, controlling his reactions by letting them show. His hands fondled her breasts like a baker working dough, as his mouth fairly ravaged her breasts with unrestrained lust. He looked up into her face...

He was shocked by her expression. Her face was contorted with the ecstasy he'd meant to arouse, and yet she was crying. "What's wrong?" He begged her, horrified by her tears. She whimpered, shaking her head. "Lisa..." he reached down, rubbing her g-spot. "Tell me what's wrong, so I can make it better."

Lisa's lips trembled with her pain. "The...the F'ey..." she whispered. "They...they got me with my helmet off." Kevin looked at her uncomprehendingly, confused by the explanation. Then he realized the implications of confronting hostile telepathic beings without the security of a helmet designed for protection against such threats. He looked at her, waiting for her to tell him. "They told me how ugly I am." Kevin's eyes widened. "That no one will love me unless I pay them." His eyes began to water in sympathy. "They...they showed me what a FREAK I am..."

Kevin bit his lip, not knowing what to say. Then his attention shifted, to the movements on his hand. He looked down, and saw the horrifying truth. Lisa was jerking her hips, cooperating fully with his continued stroking. *She makes a habit out of this*, he realized in abject horror. *She pleasures herself and thinks these things*. He stopped, withdrawing his hand. And felt something unusual for a member of a properly civilized and technologically luxurious planet such as Valarius. Pain. "Don't you dare stop!" Lisa snarled, as her left hand--the FLESH hand, he noted, with the part of his brain not shocked by the feeling of bones and flesh and the nerves throughout being compressed beyond their tolerances--seized him in an iron grip. "I'm paying you for this!" she bared her teeth at him.

With no choice, he continued to stimulate her, feeling pain in his heart to match

the ache in his wrist, as he brought her to orgasm. And further reinforced her negative association of orgasm with self-disgust. When she finally relaxed, he removed his hand. He moved up further along her incredible body, looking her straight in the eye. "They lied to you, Lisa," he told her, looking into her eyes, trying to WILL her into believing him.

She turned her head away. "I wish I could believe that." She continued to cry, the tears flowing freely now. With a grunt of exertion, he managed to roll her over to her side, then pulled her head to his shoulder. With an anguished moan, Lisa rolled on top of him, crying bitter tears into his chest. He held her there, as his client cried herself to sleep. He continued to lie there, wondering what to do. How to help her overcome this problem with her self-image?

Sleep came to him eventually, and consciousness returned to him with the feeling of another's skin rubbing against his own. Looking down, he beheld Lisa, smothering his legs with her body as she stroked his lower torso insistently, a determined expression on her face. Sensing by his posture that he'd awakened, she looked up at him. "How do I get this damned thing to stiffen?" she demanded.

Despite himself, he smiled. "It's cybernetically enhanced," he explained. "And I have years of practice controlling my body's reflexive actions, as part of my training as a therapist. It only stiffens, ejaculates, or relaxes, when I so choose."

Lisa looked up at him, and her mouth suddenly shifted to a pout. Kevin grinned at the sight. Adorable--like a schoolgirl. Then her right hand formed into a fist, and his grin faded, as serrated blades shot out from the gaps between her knuckles, to a length of over a foot apiece. "Either stiffen it," Lisa ordered, "or I'll take it apart and figure out how to do it manually."

He stiffened, then said with forced humor, "You know, that wouldn't work for most other men."

She looked up at him again. "Men usually do whatever I tell them to when I threaten them like that."

He nodded, chuckling despite himself. "Yes. But most men can't control their responses the way I can. And if you threatened a man like that, the natural reflex is for the genitals to shrink and hide."

She nodded. "So what enhancements does this cock have, that other men's don't?" Then she bent down to kiss the tip.

Kevin smiled lazily. "For starters, I had it enlarged, to be visually impressive without actually being intimidating." Lisa smiled and sucked on the head like a lollipop. "Ah...there are synthetic tubes running through it, supplying excess

rigidity when it hardens. As well as--ah! Giving the appearance of veins...and the feeling of same, when I put it inside..."

Lisa sucked as much of him into her mouth as she could, before pulling out, then began to lavish the length of him with passionate kisses and licks. "The...the ball sac is also enhanced...um. Supplying additional fluid to my ejaculations..." Polysyllables were an effort now. "When I desire, I can drench a lover's face...or...cunt...with my cum."

Lisa was now sucking him with eager adoration, looking up at him with puppy dog eyes. "Do you want me to demonstrate?" he asked hopefully. She hummed encouragingly, nodding her head. Then she continued to hum, stimulating him further. As his cock swelled further with imminent explosion, her mouth drew back to just the head, that she might taste his fluid when it erupted. Still, the first torrential blast was enough that the head popped out despite her hunger, the next spurt hitting her face. She held the shaft in her hands, letting his cum drench her.

When his orgasm finally subsided, she swallowed the tasty cream in her mouth, then moaned her joy at the experience. Kevin stared down at the incredible sight, Lisa Huntress, wearing his cum-shot. "Where did you learn to do that?" he gasped.

Lisa smiled, somewhat bitterly. "I picked it up when I was eleven." He paused, then nodded in sympathetic understanding. "I wanted a memory of sucking a cock that I could remember with joy," she added. She began to wipe off her face with her hands, licking her fingers clean, relishing the taste with obvious enjoyment. "Besides," she mumbled between mouthfuls, "I never let you orgasm last night. I owed you."

Kevin smiled, glad to see that Lisa showed consideration for her lovers. She continued to lick herself clean, musing thoughtfully, "This stuff tastes so good. I never enjoyed it, before."

He chuckled. "I have good hygiene. And I'm in good health." Lisa giggled in agreement, continuing to clean herself. When she'd finished, she began to kiss his wonderful tool, paying it the homage she felt it deserved.

"I could spend all morning sucking the cum out you," she informed him lovingly.

He smiled down at her. Then his smile turned sad. "I was offended last night, but not by the lack of an orgasm, Lisa." She looked up at him, suddenly unsure of herself. He stroked her hair with a caring hand. "You said I was being paid to give you an orgasm. That's not true." His face set in sad lines. "I'm a therapist. My job is to help you."

He sighed. "You've begun to associate physical pleasure with feelings of self-loathing. And last night, you made me reinforce that association." Her gaze shot to his hand, the guilt showing on her face. She grabbed his hand, kissing the wrist in abject apology. "You can't kiss it better, Lisa," Kevin said, shaking his head. "It's not the wrist that hurts the most. What hurts is that I was forced to help you harm yourself, when what I want to do is help you."

Lisa began to cry again, stricken with shame. "No, don't cry," Kevin gently commanded her. "Let me help you. That's all I want."

She shook her head. "That won't make me feel less guilty."

Kevin sighed. "All right, then." His cock hardened again, rising from total flaccidity to rock rigidity in less than two seconds. "Atone."

Lisa's gaze fastened upon the shaft, and she smiled, her tears drying. "Now THAT will make me feel better," she cooed. She took him in her mouth again, sucking him in all the way, overriding her gag reflex in her need to pleasure him, as she sucked with her mouth and throat, almost desperate in her efforts to coax another load of sperm. This time, she managed to swallow it all. Her body lurched at the feeling of his cum streaming into her esophagus, and Kevin realized that she had climaxed as he did. She stared up at him with an abandoned look in her eyes, just before they began to glow. "I can't believe how much I'm enjoying this!" she gasped.

He smiled. "See?" he told her. "Another virtue to boast of. You take pleasure in your partner's pleasure."

She smiled, her expression seeming almost crazed with her intense desire. "How long before I can suck it again?" she pleaded.

"Right now, if you like," Kevin smiled. "It's designed for continuous use."

"How much will come out this time?" she moaned, as she kissed and licked him, rubbing her cheek against it affectionately.

He chuckled. "The fluid replenishes itself automatically. It'll be the same amount each time." He paused. "Though I WILL need to rehydrate after we're done."

Her smile was crazed, feral, demonic. "I'll give you water when you need it," her voice sounding almost possessed. "I want you to DRENCH me in cum!" She sucked him in again, then pulled away to add, "I want to be covered in it from head to toe!" She took him into her mouth, as her finger reached for his ass. Kevin gaped in surprised delight as she pushed her way into his rectum, locating his prostate. Then her fingertip shifted inside him, as a smooth metal plug meant for interfacing with electronic and computer systems extended forth, beginning to

extend and retract at speeds unattainable by the finger itself.

Kevin screamed.

His cock exploded, and his eyes rolled back in his head, as he found himself forced to ejaculate without his permission, for the first time since completing his training. Lisa pulled her mouth off of him, smiling blissfully with closed eyes and ecstatic expression as it drenched her face. He stared at the sight. *How can such a woman think herself undesirable?*...His last coherent thought, as she resumed sucking him, her finger plug stimulating his prostate. His body abandoned the shackles of his discipline, the orgasms coming and going without his permission, the sac in his scrotum automatically replenishing itself to meet her demands. His world disappeared in blinding ecstasy.

When it was over, he found a cup being pressed to his lips. He drank, then waited for the cup to be refilled, before drinking again. After a third drink, he tested his body, and found himself able to move again. He opened his eyes, looking down upon Lisa. He gaped at the sight. Her entire body was literally covered in sticky white cream, from head to toe. He stared in awe, then had a delightful thought. "Lay down on the bed," he told her, rolling off the bed to his feet. As she lay down on the bed, splaying herself for his viewing pleasure, he reached for a camera. "I want to remember this," he groaned, as he began to snap off pictures of her, from every conceivable angle. Lisa smiled and undulated for him, striking subtle variations in pose for additional shots.

"This will go in my personal archive," he told her, as he put the camera down on his console. "They'll be along side pictures of my most cherished moments, with my favorite clients and friends." She moaned. Later, Lisa would decide that he was simply being kind, but for the moment, she truly believed that she was that desirable. "Now get up, Lisa," he demanded, "so we can shower together." She grinned and jumped up, eager for more.

"I get to scrub whatever I want, right?" she asked hopefully. He grinned and took her hand, leading the way.

Two months later

Kevin was having lunch with a client the next time he heard from Lisa. Daniel Richmond, CEO of Richmond Secure Systems, sat across the table of a cozy bistro. Richmond's business, charging customers to store data files in his highly secure data storage system. Each data file was transferred to a portable storage disk through a triple encryption filter, which was then removed to a computer completely unconnected to the Net. There, it was placed under additional encryption and locked with a password composed of random characters, said passwords being stored solely within Daniel Richmond's photographic memory. The storage disk was then physically destroyed, eliminating the possibility of

stealing the secrets via same.

Daniel was a brilliant man, and a savvy businessman. And very unhappy with his marriage. "She's just not interested, Kevin," he mourned into his drink. "No matter what I do, it's never enough. I give her everything she wants, and it's never enough."

Kevin took a bite of his salad. "What sorts of things do you think she wants?" Daniel sighed, taking a vicious bite of his sandwich before responding. "Just last week I gave her money to buy new clothes." Kevin looked at him curiously. "Why do you think she'd need new clothes?" he asked Daniel. His client looked at him in surprise, as Kevin pressed in. "Perhaps the reason is that she wants you to notice her? Give her attention? Spend time with her?" He took another bite of salad before continuing. "Perhaps you should buy her more clothes...and go to the tailor with her."

At that moment, his phone rang. "Excuse me," he told Daniel, and whipped out his phone. "Hello?" he gently greeted the phone, just as the tiny screen blinked to life and showed the face of Lisa. "Hi, Kevin," she said softly. Kevin smiled at the sight of her image. "Hi, Lisa. Listen, I'm with another client now, and I owe him the same attention I give you. But I'll call you back as soon as I can, ok?"

Lisa nodded. "Ok." She hesitated a moment. "Why don't you meet me at the spaceport?" Kevin blinked, then nodded. "Of course--I'd love to see your ship." "Ok," Lisa said, smiling, "I'll see you soon." "Yes you will," Kevin returned her smile. "Goodbye, Lisa." He waited until she'd disconnected at her end, before turning back to Daniel.

"This was actually pretty timely, you know," Kevin mused. "What I just did with Lisa is what Mai needs, Daniel. I paid attention to her. Even though I can't drop everything and cater to her whims, I can at least make an accommodation so that I can meet her needs without compromising my other responsibilities."

"Like your responsibilities to me." Daniel pursed his lips, and Kevin nodded encouragingly. "Or my responsibilities to MY clients." Kevin nodded, grinning openly. "I have to pay attention to the business," the light was beginning to dawn in Daniel's eyes, "but I need to make time for my family, too."

"You must always make time enough for love," Kevin quoted, as he popped the last bite of his salad into his mouth. Daniel nodded, then turned to finishing off his sandwich with gusto. The rest of their discussion was more inconsequential, discussing whether further therapy would be needed--"I'd like a follow up session in about six months, but I'm fairly certain that it'll be only to verify that you two are back on the right track," Kevin assured him--before Daniel picked up the check and gave Kevin a hug goodbye. Kevin smiled as he made his way out of the bistro--not all of his male clients had homosexual tastes, but they still had the

universal need to be touched by someone who cared.

The spaceport, like all land based spaceports, was based on a universal theme, to match its function. Function: permit the take off and landing of multiple spacecraft, utilizing a variety of propulsion and take off/landing methods. The ground surrounding the building making up the spaceport proper was paved over with thick supracrete, the perimeter built up into sloping curves. This created plenty of space for craft that took off and landed with the aid of runways. That part of the field not marked out as runway was marked with enormous circles, indicating landing positions for craft that took off or landed vertically, through rockets or antigravity generators. Within the building itself, a room stored bricks of artificial materials that expanded into enormous foam pads to cushion craft incapable of landing gently--the so--called "asteroid craft."

Within the spaceport's building complex, a series of offices for the personnel occupied but a small portion at the very epicenter of the complex. The rest of the building had been given over to mammoth hangers wherein ships were stored, checked out before being cleared for launch, refueled, maintained, repaired, and in extreme cases, overhauled; using heavy machinery to move massive chunks of ship, remove them, reshape them, and replace them. A few quick inquiries brought him to her ship--and to Lisa herself.

Lisa's form was recognizable enough, her large frame bent over a monitor, peering down intently as she raked her gaze over the rows of numbers and reams of data that summed up as the condition of her ship. Kevin smiled at the sight--she looked adorable in her greasy, loose fitting coveralls, like a sexy tomboy.

"I'm glad you finally got here, Kevin," she said, as Kevin approached. He paused. "I could hear your footsteps. And smell your cologne," she added. He laughed and approached her for a fond embrace. "Don't touch me!" she snapped, then apologetically added, "I'm all gunky. I don't want to get your nice clothes soiled."

Kevin nodded. "May I at least have a tour of your ship?" Lisa opened her mouth, then curved it into a smile, nodding happily.

She pointed to the exterior hull. "It's airfoil shaped, despite being designed for non-atmospheric conditions, because it improves its defensibility in combat." She gestured with her hands, pretending to strike one hand with the other at an angle and bouncing off. "The curves deny an even striking plane to an attacker. That plus the shields, and I'm pretty well covered as far as protection goes. Most of my defense is based on a good offense anyway--this ship is fast and packs a whollop."

He nodded. "So where's the cockpit? I don't see any windows..." Lisa chuckled. "There are none. View ports are fragile, prone to breakage and explosive

decompression. All my sensors are electronic--I can "see" in any direction, or see the hull of my ship if I need to. If those sensors all go offline, I'll be in too much trouble to be helped by a direct view of space anyway," She gestured imploringly. "It's even more impressive from the inside. Come on."

Kevin followed her, thrilled at the prospect of seeing the inside of a privately-owned combat ship. "This is the galley, but it's not much to speak of," she waved her hand in the direction of the room. "It's mostly a microwave, a flash heater, and a hot plate, with a lot of instant meals in storage." She grimaced. "I enjoy good food when I make planet-fall, but otherwise, the instant meals are enough. I don't really get hungry for food when I'm on a Hunt, anyway. Sort of a holdover from my childhood--we didn't eat until the Hunt was over."

They made their way on to a good sized room, festooned with tools and work benches...and a singular object of incredible notoriety, resting securely on its rack. "This is the hanger. This is where I keep my armor, and keep it in working order. I also do maintenance on my arm here, too." Kevin nodded, approaching the armor hesitantly. Lisa saw his awe, and giggled. "It's quite a piece of work, isn't it? A customized Ares Power Armor, with the right hand switched with my gun hand." She touched the back of the neck, then trailed down to the arm. "The prosthetic socket in my arm allows an additional point to connect with my neural system, over and above the standard interface needles at the brain stem. That gives me even greater control over the suit."

Kevin touched the suit wonderingly. "So you really have needles shoved into your spine when you wear one of these things?" He shook his head wonderingly, and Lisa giggled again.

"They're not shoved, exactly," she responded. "They're so thin that you can't even feel them. They lodge into place and can't be jarred loose, so no problems there. And you don't need a huge conductor to transmit brain waves, anyway."

As she traced her finger down to the armor's back, she elaborated on the backpack shaped protrusion. "The armor is powered by nuclear carbon power--nuclear power fueled by carbon. It not only draws from coal shoved into the power cell, but also by my digestive tract. That's why my gun can work even when I'm not wearing the rest of the armor." She smiled with a sudden joke. "I can shoot until I starve."

Kevin tapped the surface, and Lisa explained. "The armor is made from monomolecular aluminum," referring to a metal altered on the atomic level, wherein each plate was actually a single enormous molecule. This was an extension of an advancement in knife making technology dating back to the twenty-first century, when molecular manipulation created blades where the entire edge was a single molecule--very sharp, that never needed honing. "This metal is just as light as the natural stuff, but virtually impenetrable," she smiled.

"What about the gun?" he asked. Lisa pointed at the gun. "The bulkiest part of any weapon is the ammunition or power source. A laser rifle is mostly power cell. Since my power source is on the back or in my guts, I can pack lots of weapons into the hand. They're only about an inch in diameter, and they rotate around a central hub."

"So what kind of weapons are in the gun hand?" Kevin touched the gun wonderingly. She licked her lips and began to tick them off on her fingers. "First, of course, is the laser." Kevin nodded silently. "It fires white light, with every color of the rainbow in it, but can of course be set to discharge only a specific frequency of the spectrum." Kevin opened his mouth in wonder, and Lisa elaborated. "Firing a green light laser on a green target doesn't work very well."

"Second, we have the relative particle cannon. It accelerates neutrons to relativistic speeds, giving them tremendous impact. Then we have the charge gun--it fires electrons. A lightning bolt, really. Good for targeting electronics, like combat robots or vehicles. It's not as effective on people, though--the human body can withstand very heavy electrical currents for short periods without injury. Sometimes it can stun them...sometimes not."

She grimaced, as if suddenly remembering something distasteful. "The freeze gun fires off a wave that reduces or halts the motion of all atomic particles it encounters, reducing their temperature."

Kevin's eyes widened in recognition. "Is that the gun that shoots balls of ice?"

Lisa giggled reflexively at his misconception. "The ball isn't the actual blast. That's just the moisture in the air condensing as the blast passes through it."

She smiled when she came to the next one. "I love the light-saber for close combat. It's a charged field of atomic scale cross section, superconducting and rotating at near light-speed." She caressed the gun hand fondly. "It trails a field of light in its wake, even in a vacuum, and it strips away the electrons within a substance's molecules, creating microscopically thin cuts."

Kevin nodded. "I've seen them used in demonstrations. But I thought you had to have considerable wrist control. How can you use one properly without a wrist?" Lisa bit her lip. "That's...that's only for some styles, not all of them. Many of them frown on a bent wrist--my style uses wide slashes, but it emphasizes the thrust." Kevin looked at her. "Wouldn't a thrust with a light-saber give a wound as thin as a pinprick?" Lisa's smile turned nasty. "Not if you rip your way out," she chuckled.

Kevin swallowed.

"The missile launcher is the last toy in my arsenal. Miniature, but high explosive--

for those times when energy based weaponry just won't do the job." She drifted off for a moment, before touching the other arm. "This one has some weaponry, too. A blade extends from the forearm, kind of like a fin. It's a monomolecular blade--very low tech, but if I throw an elbow strike, I'll lay the target open."

She pointed down at the legs. "The boots have thruster jets in them, for added maneuverability."

"Does that mean you can fly?" he asked.

Lisa bit her lip again, before saying, "Yes...but only to a point. Jet based flight would be a wasteful expenditure of fuel. Mostly I get to where I need to go by jumping." She smiled again. "I can pretty much jump as high as I want."

She touched the helmet, caressing it affectionately. "There's a lot of sensors in there. Radar, thermal vision, audio amplifiers, you name it. I can 'see' anything going on around me. That's important during a Hunt. If you can't find it, you can't catch it." She sighed. "Well, that's it for the hangar. Let's move on."

The gym was mostly a large, padded floor, with equipment lining the walls. Free weights, practice swords, two racks of simulated and functional weapons. Kevin pointed at a strange device quizzically, and Lisa explained. "It's a training armor--it uses virtual reality to simulate training scenarios. It also lets me move around freely, without actually physically moving anywhere. Very important for skills training." She pointed to the far corner. "That's my target gel. I can cut it, punch it, shoot it with whatever I like. It heals up automatically."

Kevin looked at her. "So why doesn't anyone use it as armor?" he wondered.

Lisa giggled again. "Because it's only got the consistency of human flesh," she laughed.

Kevin smiled at a sudden thought. "Could I watch you exercise some time?"

She blushed. "I..." she stumbled, "I don't think you'd enjoy it."

Kevin shook his head. "You're wrong. I'd love to watch you work out...before making love." She blushed even more deeply. "Let's move on," he suggested.

She nodded, blushing furiously, and by happy coincidence, the next room turned out to be the bedroom. He smiled approvingly at the bed, judging it with a professional eye and finding it worthy. "This is where I sleep," Lisa managed, the pointed out to the bathroom. "That's where I bathe, keep my med-kit, that sort of thing."

"Med-kit?" Kevin raised an eyebrow.

"I'm fully certified as an emergency medic," she proudly informed him, "and I'm fully versed in the pharmacology of the drugs in my kit. For example," she opened up the cabinet, pulling out a painkiller, "this one comes in handy after a particularly difficult job, or a really heavy workout, when I'm sore and in pain." She pursed her lips meditatively, adding, "sometimes it comes in handy when I can't sleep."

Kevin froze. "What. Did. You. Just. Say." Lisa looked up at him in surprise. "I..." she hesitated, before continuing. "I use it when things...when it hurts too much." Kevin stared at her, aghast. "Do you mean to tell me," he asked her in horrified tones, "that you self-medicate yourself with painkillers?"

"I'm not addicted to them!" Lisa protested. "I only use them when it's too much. Maybe...maybe once a month, if that."

Kevin stared at her sadly, shaking his head. Taking her hand, he corrected her. "Lisa, you shouldn't be using them for that reason, EVER."

Lisa shook her head. "They're meant to kill pain..."

Kevin reached up, caressing her cheek. "They can't help with that kind of pain," he said.

Lisa's lips began to tremble, before she firmed them into a snarl. "And I suppose YOU can?" Kevin's response was simple, direct.

"That's what I'm trying to do."

Lisa threw herself on the bed, starting to cry. Kevin knelt over her, rubbing her back, as she vented her emotions through her leaking eyes. She rolled over, and took him into her arms, and they hugged each other tightly. Lisa continued to cry, as she kissed him. Putting everything he had into it, he kissed her as thoroughly as possible, leaving no doubt as to his feelings. She moved in for more, and he pulled away. "Not now," he told her. "I don't want to make love to you when you're in this state. It'd cause further negative reinforcement." He nuzzled her throat. "I'm going to make you happy again, first." He kissed her throat. "Then we can."

Lisa began to cry even harder. Kevin moved back for another kiss on the lips, followed by a kiss on her forehead, stroking whatever he could reach in a nonsexual manner. "It's not a rejection," he assured her. "It's just a delay." Lisa nodded.

"Could..." she took a breath, then began again. "Could you step out for a moment? I need to get ready for our date."

He shook his head, smiling. "I like to see you naked."

Lisa hesitated. "I...I have to do a quick cleaning job on my hand, too. That means removing it."

Kevin shook his head again. "I don't care. Besides...I need to clean up too, now, since I hugged you while you were wearing these coveralls." She pushed him away, looking at his good clothes, now smeared with grime, and burst into giggles. They both laughed, in a far better mood now, and then began to strip. She pointed out the clothes cleaning machine, and Kevin tossed his garments in to be cleaned while they bathed. Then he turned, to see Lisa looking at him, with a half-shy, half-embarrassed smile.

Then she removed her hand.

Kevin approached her, as she held up the prosthetic, now looking stiff and artificial without her neural commands to bring it to life. He took a hold of the stump, looked down at the socket. Then kissed it. She gasped at his action, before smiling at his behavior. As he kept a grip on her stump, she led the way to her shower.

As the shower poured hot water down their hot bodies, Lisa and Kevin passed the soap bar back and forth, scrubbing each other thoroughly. After the essentials had been given a superficial scrubbing, Lisa began to focus on Kevin's erect cock, scrubbing and stroking with plenty of foamy soap. "The idea is to get clean, you know," Kevin chuckled, as he began to pay similar attention to Lisa's magnificent cleavage.

"But it just doesn't seem clean," Lisa pouted, continuing to wash his cock with loving attention. "I'll just have to keep scrubbing until I'm satisfied." Kevin groaned, and continued to lather up her breasts. "Um, I like that," she moaned, then shifted the motions of her hand until it could no longer even jokingly be described as washing, until it could only be described as a hand-job. "Cum for me," Lisa implored him. "I love to make you cum." Kevin smiled down at her, and surrendered without regret, his seed spraying out onto Lisa's face. She waved the cock back and forth lovingly, letting it spray every square inch of her face. "Um..." she moaned happily, her eyes closed, a blissful expression on her frosted face.

"Now we'll have to rinse your face off again," Kevin chided her, as she stood up, letting the stream of water clean her face, while Kevin returned his now undivided attention to her breasts. "And it looks like you need some washing down here, too..." he chuckled, as he slipped a soapy hand into her sopping cunt. Lisa grunted explosively, then clutched him for support, as Kevin's gentle hands worked their magic on her breasts and pussy and her aching, throbbing clit.

Lisa remained silent during her orgasm, staring down at him with eyes wide and blank. When it ended, she would have fallen, if Kevin had not caught her. Her face moved towards his, and they kissed each other, lovingly, happily.

"Mmmm...I feel so much better, now," she hummed. "You always make me feel better."

"That's my job," Kevin grinned.

After drying each other with soft fluffy towels, Kevin trespassed into her closet, picking out a particularly delightful number. "This one," he insisted, holding up the skintight jumpsuit.

Lisa shook her head. "That one has no pockets," she pointed out.

"So carry a purse with you," he winked.

She paused. "I don't have one...but I DO have a compartment in my arm that can hold the essentials." She nodded, and slipped into the outfit, before pausing.

"This thing is see through," she complained.

"So why did you have it in your closet in the first place?" Kevin asked.

Lisa blushed. "I bought it on an impulse, once. I never had the courage to wear it."

Kevin grinned. "You'll wear it tonight, then." She nodded, and sealed it up, until she wore skintight blue cloth from the neck down, every inch of her skin showing beneath. Kevin whistled encouragingly. Lisa blushed, then impulsively struck a glamorous pose, thrusting her muscular ass out at him. Then she blushed even more deeply and jumped out of her pose.

As they made their way out of the space port, Lisa smiled and half-joked, "I'm glad to be spending so much time with your cock. I've been a little starved for man meat of late." She winked. Kevin arched a brow. "Does that mean you finally took a lover of your own?" He smiled. "A female lover?" She blushed...then her gaze lowered to the ground, and Kevin realized that he'd just touched yet another wound. A fresh one.

The air cab whisked them away, as they made their journey to the restaurant. Lisa began to spin her sad tale. "Her name was Sara. She was very pretty, and very smart and capable. And I had to arrest her for terrorism and attempted genocide." Kevin drew back in momentary surprise, before pulling Lisa close and squeezing her gently, to comfort her into elaboration. "She...she hated all men. I still don't understand why. The reasons they gave haven't been accurate since the early twentieth century." She shook her head. "Nobody oppresses women

the way they suggested anymore. Why would she think that?"

Kevin sighed. "I don't know. People sometimes think a lot of strange things." He thought about it. "Maybe she'd been hurt by a man, and associated his actions with the entire gender?"

She shrugged. "I don't know," she echoed. She squeezed him more tightly.

"What did she try to do?" he asked her.

She was silent for a time, before replying. "She bioengineered a virus that would only target humans with a Y-chromosome. Fatal in mere hours."

"And highly infectious," Kevin nodded. They continued the ride in silence.

Just before they landed, however, Kevin had one last thing to ask her. "Who made the first move in your relationship?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

Lisa stumbled for a moment, before answering. "She did--she approached me in a library."

Kevin nodded triumphantly. "That's proof that you truly are desirable," he nodded, "And the terrorist was NOT the only one drawn to you," he caressed her cheek, "Merely the only one brave enough to act on it."

"Brave enough?" Lisa echoed.

"Your physique and sensuality would be intimidating taken separately." Kevin kissed her. "But put them together, and anyone who sees you feels unworthy to approach." He kissed her again. "You need to learn to make the first move yourself. No one's going to say no, Lisa."

Lisa smiled.

Then they both climbed out of the cab, and went in to eat.

One month later

Kevin was in the middle of a shower, when Lisa called again. "Voice command, phone, answer," he called out. "I'm in the shower, who is it?" No answer. "Hello?"

"Uh...Kevin!" Lisa said, as if shaking herself out of sudden reverie. "I need to see you."

Kevin nodded, and lathered up for another scrub of his armpits. "How does breakfast sound?" he asked.

"No!" Lisa emphatically spurned the notion. "I...need to see you now. Right now. No dinner, no dancing. I need to ask you something." Kevin paused, his hands buried in his pits. "Double the normal fee," Lisa continued. "Please. I need to talk to you."

Kevin contemplated the need in her voice--paying no consideration to her offer of payment--before nodding cautiously. "If it's that important, then ok."

Kevin had barely had time to dry himself and dress in a comfortable robe before Lisa showed at his door. His eyes widened in appreciation of the sight of her. Her muscular legs jutted out of a pair of short shorts, showing off the bulging musculature of her smooth legs and ass to incredible effect. Her breasts were barely contained by a shirt tied in the middle, rather than properly buttoned, baring her ripped abdomen and cleavage. "Uh..." Kevin stammered, momentarily taken aback by the spectacle.

Lisa slipped the strap of a purse from her shoulder, lowering it to the floor, and looked up at him with searing eyes. Then she opened the purse, revealing a host of items that most women would not have thought to include in their purses, of which her gun hand was about the only thing he recognized. She removed a strange device, holding it up for him to behold. "This is the latest offering from the Federation Intelligence Service," she informed him, in a tone of voice comparable to a supply officer briefing a soldier on the equipment being checked out. "It is a truth detector, based on technology developed from prizes of war seized in battle with the F'ey, including but not limited to their dissected corpses. There is no presently known way to trick it." She stared at him, her eyes burning. "Now tell me the truth."

She took a deep breath, mustering her courage for the fateful question. "Do you think I'm beautiful?"

Kevin looked down at the device, momentarily wondering how she could have acquired cutting edge espionage technology that was almost certainly classified. Then he looked up at her face, into those eyes, that vulnerable expression. "Yes," he said, simply. Lisa looked down at the device. Down at the beeping green light. Then she looked up at him, as he approached her. "Give me your credstick," he demanded. Fumbling with her purse, she removed the financial treasure in question, and handed it to him wordlessly. Turning to his desk, he removed his own credstick and touched it to hers, transferring the funds for the session back to her account.

"What are you doing?" she wondered aloud, as she stared at the returned credstick, the glowing balance.

Kevin looked up at her eyes. "This isn't therapy anymore," he told her. "We're

going to do this because I want to." He smiled slightly. "And we'll do it my way."

Lisa shifted her attention from the credstick to him. "What is--"

Kevin tackled her around the waist, driving her to the bed with a furious motion. Lisa managed--barely--to restrain her reflexive counter, and instead pulled his head into her bosom. "Oh..." she moaned, understanding. "Rough. I see."

He lifted his head, and grinned. "Yes." He pulled open her top, and began to suckle at her breast. Not a gentle touch like before, but with the forcefulness of a vacuum pump. His hands kneaded her breasts hard, hard enough to bruise a softer woman.

Lisa gasped, moaned, and pulled his head, encouraging him to do more. "This is wild," she groaned. "I can't believe how good it is this way..."

She yelped as he bit down on her nipple. Then her eyes glowed, as she pleaded, "Do that again!" Chomp. "Ah! Yes!" She pulled him up to her face, and kissed him hard, shoving her tongue into his mouth. They kissed furiously, as if they were fighting with their tongues.

Every time their lips parted to permit the intake of fresh breath, she gasped out crude endearments. "You want to play rough with ME, pretty boy?" she growled. "Come on, show me what you've got." He kissed her again, pulling on her breasts like a farmer milking a cow. Her hands caressed his back hard enough to leave marks.

Finally, he managed to pull away from her insistent grasp, and gripped her shorts. He pulled them off with a look of furious intensity, and she lay before him, spread eagled, staring up at him expectantly. The Huntress waiting to be serviced. Kevin shoved her over to her stomach, and pulled her up to her hands and knees. His throbbing cock found its way to her cunt, and without further ado, he shoved it home. She groaned, a guttural growl like a Gaian gruzzled. Her hips began to work with him, desperate to milk him, to drain him of his seed, obeying the primal urges that called for her to accept his child, regardless of physical impossibilities. "That's it, pretty boy," she snarled. "Give me that hot cum." Her eyes glowed like some primordial demon, risen from the depths of hell for the express purpose of lustful abandon. "I'm going to suck the cum right out of you."

Her latter day exorcist grinned, and seized a fistful of her long green hair, yanking her head back. "You forgot who you're talking to, slut," he chuckled. His hips pistoned away, as his free hand began to slap her ass. "Oh!" she groaned. "Slap my ass again!" SMACK! "Yes! More!" SMACK! SMACK! "Yes! Yes, harder! That's it!" He was fucking her hard, giving her a rough consensual session for the first time in her life, and she was loving every moment of it. She came for him, surprised at the intensity of it. He continued to pump away at her, his cock

violating her so wonderfully. "Cum with me," she moaned. He chuckled. "I'll cum when I'm ready to," another smack of her ass.

He fucked her into another orgasm. And then another...his hand alternating between slapping her glowing ass, and pinching her clit roughly, while his other hand clutched a fistful of her long green hair like a handle. She was being violated, penetrated, used, sexually abused as she had not been since her nightmare year, and for the first time, she enjoyed it. She cried with the wonder of it. The joy of being used roughly, and without any negative flashbacks--just pure pleasure.

The clock showed the time, heedless of the fact that neither were paying attention. Their world was timeless, everything existing in that moment and nowhere else. A detached observer could have noted that he had fucked her for over an hour, longer than any unenhanced human possibly could, leaving her pussy sore and abraded, even as it continued to spasm and clutch his equally chafed cock, desperate for more. When Kevin finally began to tire, Lisa had long since abandoned any feelings of inferiority, of physical undesirability, and had finally come to accept herself for the sexual being she truly was.

Kevin finally permitted himself his climax, and Lisa screamed at the feel of his cum slamming into her, overflowing her cunt, far more than he'd ever given her before, built up from the denial of his trained discipline and cybernetic enhancements. She felt his teeth bite down on her back in possession, unable to reach her neck, and with that, she collapsed, spent, fucked into happy submission. Kevin collapsed on top of her, his body covering her like a blanket.

As Lisa's vision began to dim, her brain shutting down with fatigue and sensory overload. She felt Kevin lying on top of her, of her beneath him...and feeling as if that was where she belonged. An epiphany. She needed to be a sex toy for someone she loved, or at least cared for. To be the sexual slave of someone wonderful, to have her body used for pleasure. She needed it as badly as she needed to be a Huntress, as she needed oxygen. And with that thought searing into her soul, she slipped into oblivion.

The next morning

When Kevin awoke, he was beneath the sheets of his bed, tucked in like a well cared for child. Alone. Casting about with sudden panic, his eyes came to rest on the note, laying where Lisa would have been--SHOULD have been. Reaching for the note with trembling hands, he swallowed with a dry mouth, before reading:

Kevin,

I know now that you truly love me, and I love you as well. But I know that you love your other clients as well. I can't give up Hunting, so if we were to be

together, you'd have to live on my ship, and go where I go. You would have to give up your home, your world, and all your other clientele, to share my life. To share my dangers, to share my experiences, to share my bed. I can't demand that of you now. Any decision you made now, so soon, you would be certain to regret. I'll see you again, someday, and you can think over your decision until then.

Love, Lisa.

The End

~ ~ ~

HeatWave Romance: sexy, compelling, erotic romance novels, novellas, and short stories. When you want to warm up your life, experience a HeatWave.
www.heatwaveromance.com.