



**SASKIA
WALKER**

**AGAINST THE
GRAIN**

AGAINST THE GRAIN

By

Saskia Walker

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Against the Grain

Copyright © 2007 by Saskia Walker

ISBN: 1-55410-784-9

Cover art and design by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books

www.extasybooks.com

Dear Reader,

AGAINST THE GRAIN is an expansion of DELFIDIAN, a short story I wrote for Circlet Press in the late 1990s. The story is set in a future world that has lived in my head for many years, a world that was born of the eternal question: "what will gender and sexuality be like in the distant future?" I was introduced to this question through my own reading of authors such as Margaret Atwood, (THE HANDMAID'S TALE,) Marge Piercy, (WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME,) and Storm Constantine, (the WRAETHTHU novels.) AGAINST THE GRAIN is my own voyage into a future world where sexuality has evolved, and is controlled by a society that governs whom its citizens should be attracted to. Sexual desire is a powerful force, one that will make us break down boundaries and flout norms when we are in its grip, so you've got to know to that trying to control it spells trouble....

I hope you enjoy the story. Let me know!

Saskia Walker

saskiawalker@gmail.com

www.saskiawalker.co.uk

A short story version of this novella was originally published in the SEXTOPIA anthology under the title 'Delfidian,' Circlet Press, Boston, 2001.

For Mark...

Chapter One

“Thus it was found that human beings, in their most impassioned sexual encounters, reverted to their animal origins, indulging in uninhibited acts of lust and degeneracy, often with members of the opposite gender. Whilst this may seem strange to our more advanced species, who would never choose to mate outside our own gender, it also indicates the way in which one’s ancient origins can reveal themselves in the sex act, the most basic function of any species.”

DR MIRANDA K AZEKIAL
Research seminar 87
Central Space Station
Delfidian Timezone 3824.

Aurora clenched her thighs together, crushing her pounding clit between them. Lust was running her ragged, her skin alert to every sensation, a nagging ache at her core demanding action and soon. To keep from touching herself, she reached

for her viewcom, running her fingers along its polished chrome frame, wishing she could reach out and touch him instead. Sullivan's image flickered and then came back into focus. Her hand automatically went to her keypad. "Oh, I thought the connection had broken."

He shook his head. "Still here, and I'll be back on planet in just few days."

Heat welled again between her thighs in response to that promise. She wanted him here. She was desperate to see him. Females weren't expected to develop strong feelings of attachment to males, but she had. Just looking at his ruggedly handsome face on the viewcom had her desire running rampant. He looked so human, so darkly attractive with his mane of thick hair hanging to his shoulders and his deep brown eyes.

He smiled. "You look well."

His words flattered her. At first she had taken his manner toward her to be respect for his status as a procreator. They had been brought together to mate in the ancient human way, and they respected the roles they shared. Then it occurred to her that his attitude might indicate something else. Right now, there was a sexual edge to his expression. It did strange things to her. She felt as if he had touched her, stroking her pussy in preparation for their joining. Her body was buzzing with need. *Did he want it? Did he enjoy it as*

well? She knew that he missed the male lover he'd had to leave behind when he'd been assigned to her, but could it be that he felt an attachment to her, too? She chastised herself when she realized her thoughts were wandering. It was unexpectedly good sex; that was all. "Yes, I am well. Thank you. And you?" Unable to resist any longer, she clasped one hand over her pussy through the fabric of her gown.

"Good, the off planet crop trials are going well, I'm pleased with the results. And you, how is your work?"

"Busy, with the centenary celebrations coming up." Her hand moved against her pussy through the soft material of her gown as she watched him answer. What would he think if he knew she was masturbating under her desk, that she was that hot for him?

He nodded. "I think we should talk about what's happening between us, when I get back to Delfidian."

Concern hit her, her hand stopped moving. "Is there a problem with the coupling?"

He shook his head, without hesitation. "No, not at all." He glanced over his shoulder, as if afraid he'd be overheard. "I just want to talk about it. About us." His beautiful cheekbones were accentuated as he leaned into the viewcom. "Don't look so worried, Aurora." He put his hand on the

screen, a strangely intimate gesture. "I have to get back to work," he added, and she saw movement behind him.

Compelled to return his gesture, she put her free hand against his on the screen, and kept it there until he closed the connection and his image faded. Her other hand was still crushed over her mons and, as his image faded, she pulled her gown up and slipped her fingers into the damp folds of her sex, rubbing hard until relief came. *Sullivan*. She called to him inside her mind as she masturbated. Her eyes shut, and she imagined he was there, his cock hard inside her as he bore down on her, kissing her neck while they mated. *Sullivan*. Her fingers grew slick with her juices, her clit locked between two knuckles as she rode it hard, thinking of his mouth, his cock and his glorious male body. As she climaxed, her clit buzzing and her sex in spasm, another thought echoed through her mind: *this is wrong*.

Slumping back in the chair, she sighed aloud, her thighs trembling in the aftermath. She stared at the blank screen and pushed her doubts away. It wasn't wrong exactly; it was a task she had been set by their government, The System. She had to mate with him. She just wasn't supposed to be enjoying it quite so much.

Only a few days until he was back on Delfidian, thank The System. The hormones the medics were

building into her body didn't seem to co-ordinate very well with his absences. At least, that was how she explained away her lust for him. It had to be down to the induced hormones, surely? She shook her head. "You're just in need of sex, you stupid female."

Deep down, she couldn't deny it. She wanted him badly. More than that, she cared for him, for his welfare and his safety. She longed to touch him, to be touched by him. It was quite a bizarre state of mind to have. Delfidian was a predominantly female society. The males of their species had become less necessary over the last millennium, and fewer in number. As a result, females had built up a natural resistance to them. They were exclusively sexually attracted to their own kind. Males were seen as necessary to their society but not essential. Many of the females didn't even find them likeable creatures. Some believed that it was all down to the battle against hormones, that they had necessarily become resistant to the weaknesses females had suffered in previous species, from previous societies. Forming relationships with males was seen as regressive, a heinous crime to evolution. She couldn't imagine why she was experiencing a need to know how Sullivan was, to hear his voice and masturbate just because he'd spoken to her. It didn't compute for her, a slave to her logical

Creslet genes.

Logic was core to the Creslet mind, but it did have the annoying side effect compulsion to analyze everything. She shook her head and gave a wry smile, because the ironic part of her situation with Sullivan was that selected females were given hormones and assigned a male lover, in order to encourage them to bear children. She was one of these women. That was why Sullivan had been introduced into her life. It wasn't often necessary, due to longevity, direct insemination and the ability to cross-fertilize with other species outside their own. It was more like a token gesture, establishing some notion of heritage into their inter-galactically mongrel species. The planet of Delfidian was colonized centuries before, the population made up of various mixed species: predominantly Humans, but also Creslet, Roganza, and other, lesser races.

The Human genes were what they were most proud of, and Delfidian females were only selected if they were fertile to begin with, thus selecting the best and most economic recipients. In her public role as cultural knowledge supplier in the governing body, it was also appropriate for her to be a birther, to set a good example to other females who rejected the task of coupling with males. Sullivan's predominately human genes made him a good candidate to be a procreator.

Coupling with Sullivan had turned out to be so much more interesting than she thought, though.

The first time they mated, she'd climaxed before he'd even entered her — it had been rather embarrassing at the time. But he'd prepared her so thoroughly — presumably a talent learned in training for his role as a procreator — and when she watched him and experienced his touches, her reaction to the sight of his strong male body had been overwhelming. Was it freakishness, nerves, or sheer arousal? His male body, so different from her own, so different to what she was used to, had not disturbed her as she thought it might. Instead, it had compelled her to take on the task with more willingness and enthusiasm than she had ever imagined possible. Whatever it was, she had begun to dream of him nightly when he was away at his workzone and he was never far from her mind during her waking hours either.

She shook off her curious line of thought and began to prepare for the day ahead, glancing at the day spacer. It was almost time for her to attend her image session, before heading to her own workzone. She was a supplier of knowledge in the arts, ensuring each and every member of their society had access to information on their origins in Human society, through *Cultura*, a history journal she prepared for consumption each month. Such knowledge was essential. They were no

longer purely human, but it was the prime ingredient in their genetic make up. She was part of a team, each member focusing on different fields. Between them they ensured selected knowledge reached every member of their society, from birthing to darkening.

The image session was a chore she wasn't looking forward to, having her image co-formed with the other governors was bad enough, but the theme of the forthcoming milestone celebrations was historic — they were all to appear as some ancient race of Human warrior women. *How ridiculous.* It was the furthest thing from what they had become, and had she, the cultural historian, been consulted, she would have advised against such a nonsensical idea.

The image-maker, on the other hand, was not such a chore to think about. Aurora was looking forward to seeing this particular female at work. She crossed to the mirror, stroked her pelt down at the nape of her neck, where it always defied her will, and plucked some color into her lips with her fingers. She smiled at her reflection. Her flame colored fuzz suited her today. Often she was unhappy with her Creslet genes. Her pale skin was much admired, as were her emerald eyes, but there wasn't a lot you could do with a half body covering of vivid red fur, extending from hairline to tailbone. She tweaked a few strands into spikes

on her head, then called the transport controller and alerted them to her readiness.

She stepped outside, eyeing the sky. The outer atmosphere was laden with floating particles, light from the distant suns breaking through here and there, creating a shimmering haze. It made a pleasant image and put her in good spirits. In moments the shuttle arrived, and she was coursing the electronic rails to the other side of the station where Diva, the image-maker, worked. The journey gave her time to let her excess hormones flow in the direction of Diva, which brought about a sense of relief. It was much more normal for her to focus her sexual needs on another female, so she could relax and enjoy it.

Diva was a tall creature, primarily a Roganza by genes but also human-looking, with an excessively long black mane and a jeweled visage, a sign of her role as a Delfidian creator of beauty and strength, embedded in the skin of her face. Tiny jewels and filaments of fine fibers, chosen and given by her teachers to reflect her personal qualities, outlined her exotic purple Roganza eyes and her full mouth, in glistening decorative coils. Roganzans had no whites to their eyes, only color, like cats. With her exotic looks and human hair the effect was particularly stunning. She exuded the kind of beauty and serenity that Aurora had previously only read about in her work with

historical documents. Everything about Diva personified a bygone age, and Aurora's love of ancient beauty meant that she responded immediately to her. Whenever she saw her, a kind of transfixion overcame Aurora, and Diva never flinched under the gaze of those that admired her.

Aurora had met her formally, in The System, and she'd had her image manipulated for government use before. But she hadn't yet had a personal session to make an image from scratch. When she got to the image-makers zone the door swished open and Aurora looked at the female that walked towards her in amazement. She usually saw Diva dressed in the smooth, draped gowns of formal wear for the publiczone, with her hair trailing down her back loosely. Today, all her hair was tied up and it looked like some wild and ancient human headdress, where it sprung from her head. She wore molded boots and skintight, black leggings, flexible and provocative, a tight purple vest stretched over her breasts.

Aurora bowed her head. "Greetings and blessings of The System, Image-maker."

"Come in, come in." Diva gestured, clearly intending to be informal. A mystery bodygraph wavered with movement beneath the skin of her chest, a coiled shape that peeped out from beneath the purple vest and disappeared under it in a cascade of glittering scale-shapes. Aurora could

barely drag her eyes from the outline of the other female's breast, wondering what the bodygraph depicted. Following her hostess, she was immediately confronted by a projectory of the Knowledge suppliers, a moving Imagegram of their last public duty. A massive picture of herself, smiling happily at the comment of one of her co-workers forced Aurora to glance away.

"I've been looking over some previous footage, to get a feel for you." Diva smiled, one hand plucking at the strap of her vest on her shoulder.

There was a naughty suggestion in her words. Aurora wondered if she always sounded like that. "I'm not used to seeing myself that way," she explained, aware that she was blushing to the roots of her pelt. *Those cursed hormones, making me even more self-aware than usual.*

"Ah, well don't worry, you'll get used to it. I imagine we'll be working together for quite a time." She gave a mischievous smile. "Make yourself at home." She turned and went over to her control desk, switching the projectory off.

Aurora watched the image on the wall shimmer and disappear, then glanced around. The place was comfortable, seating interspersed with the technical equipment. "Very tranquil for a workzone," she murmured to herself.

Diva caught her words and nodded. "It has to be. When I get going I need home comforts.

Luckily, as an artisan I am allowed them." Her comment was tinged with sarcasm and she gave a chuckle. "I often end up sleeping here. I have a bed upstairs." She gestured with her hand and then disappeared through a far door.

Aurora took a deep breath and glanced over at the wall of images that were on display. Some were familiar, portraits of Government envoys. Some were more intimate, as if taken purely for personal pleasure. She noticed a naked Creslet, full-furred body turned away from the image eye, her face looking back towards the viewer, coyly. She smiled. Perhaps Diva had a taste for fur.

Diva came back and returned the smile when she saw Aurora looking at the Creslet. "A lover," she said, then began shifting the lights around, focusing her equipment on the spread of material on the floor. She pushed a datareel eye into the center of the space.

Aurora stared at the electronic eye of the datareel. It was housed in a transparent globe fixed on slim mounts, giving it extensive flexibility and range. The globe could spin in every direction, seizing images from all around. Its mounts could unfold up to fifty feet high, or collapse and run at floor level. As it was, at about ten foot extension, it seemed huge, the clever probe that Diva would use to select her image overwhelming the space.

"The aim is to draw on each supplier's individual characteristics, and colorings, but with a theme of strength. With you I thought we'd go for a relaxed, but subtly strong mood." She'd obviously been planning ahead. As she spoke, she arranged several mounds of fabric in the center of the floor.

"You're the expert, whatever you decide is fine by me."

Diva smiled slowly and walked over. "I'm looking forward to working with you. I've created a lot of images of overtly powerful females. You have something else, Aurora, a real femininity with an underlying suggestion of control and subtle power."

Aurora was stunned by her comments. They hardly knew each other; it was flattering that Diva had taken such notice of her.

Diva seemed to sense her surprise, and moved closer, her eyes sparkling. "It's very interesting. I hope we can catch it." She ran her fingers over Aurora's pelt, from forehead to shoulder, connecting with her in a deliberate way.

The sudden intimacy lit Aurora's sex-hungry bones like liquid fire. *I need this*, she thought. *I need to mate with a female. It will bring me peace.* Her Creslet logic liked that. Her pulse was beating fast, arousal heightening with every moment she spent in Diva's company, all that frustration unleashed.

"It'll get pretty hot in here." She switched on a large fan on a stand and directed it at her.

The air moved the damp fur on Aurora's neck. She felt it fluttering in the breeze.

Diva paused, looking at the wavering strands of red. Aurora reached automatically to smooth her pelt and Diva's gaze lifted. Her pupils were dark, the cat-like Roganza spheres of purple shifting wide to accommodate her dilated pupils.

"Let's get started." She indicated Aurora should move into position in front of the data eye. "We'll choose colors first."

The eye spun in its globe, awaiting instructions.

Aurora sat cross-legged in the center of the material while Diva clambered about on her knees, testing the different clutches of material for the effect she wanted. Diva sat back on her rubber boots and rocked, her mouth pursed as she squinted and sought the appropriate props. After a moment her eyes flashed and she stood up. She handed her a robe. "Here. You get undressed and put this on and I'll get us something to drink."

Aurora stood up and took the red and black robe from Diva's hand. *Undressed. That's news.* She began to shed her clothes.

When Diva came back she paused as she looked over at Aurora. She set their drinks down, then pulled the longer parts of Aurora's fur out over the red pattern on the gown. "Yes, reds, lots of

reds. Obvious, but dramatic, looks good, with a dash of something else, maybe." She handed Aurora her glass and headed off towards the mezzanine.

Aurora glanced up and saw that she was stripping red satin sheets off her bed and when she came down she had them bundled in her arms.

"Oh yes." She arranged the satin over Aurora's bare shoulders. "We'll make a fiery warrior of you. An ancient fiery warrior, at rest in her Bedouin tent." She laughed when she saw Aurora's expression. "It is a bit of a joke, isn't it? Still, we can make something of it."

Aurora was amazed. Diva was intuitive, sensing what she herself felt about the centenary event. Was she psychic, perhaps? Psychic ability was a dangerous talent, one that had been outlawed centuries before, in the name of security. As Diva began to plump the red and purple cushions she chose for the background, Aurora moved the satin on her skin. It gave off the heavy aroma of Diva's chosen scent. A hint of sex also emerged from its folds.

When Diva paused to stroke her pelt over the material, the contact made Aurora's blood roar.

Diva glanced at her with dark eyes. There was definitely something there, passing between them. They both felt it that time. "Sit down," Diva

whispered. She paused for a drink and then looked at her with curiosity. "You've been assigned a male lover, haven't you?"

Aurora was startled. It wasn't the sort of thing she expected her to say, especially not at that moment.

"Don't worry, I read that in your dossier, I'm not psychic." Diva winked, and Aurora began to feel her tension melt away. She was so easy to be with, as well as being incredibly attractive.

"Yes, I have. His name is Sullivan. He's an agricultural programmer. But he's off-station, unfortunately. I find I miss him." She blushed at her confession. "It's the hormones they give me," she added quickly, in explanation. "They make me feel this way."

Diva gave her a sidelong glance as she stepped behind the datareel control panel, flicking switches. The music Diva had switched on was accompanied then by the regular sound of the electronic eye zooming into the scene, taking away a frozen moment in its memory. "Tell me about males."

Aurora frowned, confused. "Why the curiosity? You can't be a birther yourself, otherwise you'd have been assigned a lover."

"Your logic is so endearing." Diva smiled, taking the sting out of the remark. "The formal demands of The System aren't the only reason to

be curious about life. I want to know about it; I want to know about everything. Call it my insatiable inquisitiveness...or call it rebellion, if you must."

She seemed genuine, but her curiosity made Aurora feel uncomfortable, not least because of her mixed emotions about her relationship with Sullivan. "But you shouldn't need to know." The words came out defensively. "We don't need men, only the throwbacks or the insane mate with them out of choice."

Diva smiled. It made Aurora's defenses start to crumble.

"That may or may not be true, who can really say, but my curiosity knows few bounds. I want to know what it would feel like." She paused, her intelligent eyes glowing, reflecting her fast-moving thoughts. "Let me put it another way, do you always think of procreation when you have sex with Sullivan?" She threw her a direct, questioning glance.

Aurora didn't answer. She was too shocked at Diva's words.

Diva continued. "I would like to feel a male ejaculate inside me, not for birthing, but simply because he wants me, because he wants to let rip and fuck me."

Aurora swallowed. That was exactly what she had been wondering about with Sullivan, but

she'd never admitted it, even to herself, and this situation totally unnerved her. It was alien to her Creslet reasoning. "I should keep that desire quiet, lest they label you a throwback. That's an outdated concept. Sex with males was recognized as purely functional eons since."

Diva was unfazed. "Simply because of the clitoris and belief in gender kinship, as I recall. But that's not everything is it? It's the physical bond of bodies, the mental bond that comes from physical desire. Females have suppressed that need, but some maybe haven't forgotten...some might be jealous of your position as a birther." She arched an eyebrow. "Admit it, Aurora, you're not just lying back and thinking of The System, are you?"

Aurora floundered, fear riddling through her. She glanced up at the electronic eye of the datareel, then back at Diva. "Why are you asking me this?" She swallowed. "Are you checking up on me?"

Diva gave her a warm smile. "Rest easy, it's genuine interest not official business. The eye only captures images and I have control over their manipulation. I am the Image-maker, nothing else. I ask only because I am curious. Trust me." She turned her attention to her equipment, giving Aurora a moment to settle down.

Oddly, Aurora believed her statement about curiosity. Perhaps she could sense her attachment

to Sullivan, and that was why she felt safe talking about it. *Would it do any harm to discuss it?* She cared about Sullivan; she wanted him. Logic told her that if Diva had sensed it there was no point in pretending otherwise.

"You okay?"

Aurora nodded. "Yes, thank you, and....you're right. I do feel something, a reaction to him, not entirely familiar, but comfortable...it makes the sex function more attractive."

Diva nodded.

"In the ancient human societies they lived in male and female couples, as well as same gender relationships," Aurora added, quickly, offering some sort of excuse for her attachment to the procreator she had been assigned.

Diva shook her head, licking her lips and smiling darkly, "I don't want to hear about history." She rested her hands on her hips, flashing her eyes suggestively. "Tell me what it's like. Tell me what it feels like when you have intercourse with *him*."

Aurora blushed. Her questioning was so intimate, and aside from anything those dark-eyed looks were making her hotter by the moment. Diva was a sexy female to be around and sharing outlandish thoughts about her strange coupling with a male was arousing.

"Do you mean how his cock feels?"

Diva shrugged. "There are adequate replacements for that in itself. I mean the male, his being, the whole being of a male connecting with you in that way."

She really had thought about this a great deal, Aurora realized.

"Your Creslet logic will demand you answer my direct questions, Aurora. It makes you a slave to the truth."

Aurora snatched at her drink, swallowing it fast, then put her glass down and focused on the floor. The truth rose inside her. *She wants to know.* She tried to blink it back, but failed. *And I want to tell her.* Lifting her head, she met Diva's gaze. "I must tell you what happened from the beginning."

Diva nodded, knowingly, and flicked a switch on her control panel. Low, ambient sound waves filtered up around them. The sounds were soothing, encouraging.

"When we met, formally, I was impressed by the breadth of his knowledge, his physique, his strength and his aura of curiosity about me. I admit I was flattered by his attention, which I hadn't expected. He had been trained well, prepared for his role...I assumed."

Diva glanced up from her control panel. "Do they do that?"

Aurora shrugged. "I looked into it. There is

some rudimentary preparation, but nothing that would explain his intimacy towards me." Looking at Diva, she gave a wary smile. "I think it's in his nature to be that way, but I was surprised he wasn't put off by my gender."

"It wasn't just official duty?"

"I'm not sure, but I don't think so. The first time we mated, I was rattled by the strange situation and the expectations of The System. He smiled and kissed me gently, an action that contradicted his sheer male strength. When he took me into his arms, I wasn't afraid any more. I was too aroused. I forgot that it was freakish, unknown. I forgot everything, when he..." She shut her eyes tightly, denying it, but she could not. When he had *claimed* her, something more than a physical barrier had been transgressed, and it was good. Really good.

"Go on," Diva urged.

Aurora nodded. Shifting the fabric draped over her, she let her mind travel back through the treasured memories of her few times with Sullivan. The datamachine clicked again, but Aurora barely noticed it anymore. In thinking of him, she almost made him real — it sent the universe spinning away, making her less self-conscious. "It's incredible, because I sense he really wants me, not just to fulfill his role as procreator. I abandon myself to him, to his lust; I cannot deny that."

"Is he a good lover?" Diva asked quietly.

"Oh, yes." Her lips parted as she went through her favorite images, and her hands trailed up against the short pelt on the sides of her head. She was feeling his, his tousled mane of hair, very human hair, like Diva's. "At times he is like one of those ancient priests of love that I wrote about in the last edition of *Cultura*. He is strong, powerful, asking me to show myself to him, to offer myself." She paused, blushing as she realized Diva would know where her inspiration for that article had come from. Not simply textbooks. "It's probably just the hormones." She breathed deeply. His presence was near, she had reached out for him — she had conjured him there. "He sometimes adores me. That is almost too much to bear..." Her voice descended to a whisper. "When his lust is fiercest, he is like a demon spirit that sweeps over me, leaving me hungry for more when he's gone."

She turned as if to look for his shadow and, as she moved on the cushions, the satin slid across her skin. It felt as if it was his hand on her. Her eyes closed as it slid from its place on her shoulder brushing a satin kiss on her nipple before it fell away. Her hands went to her pelt, pushing it up and back. The breeze from the fan suggested his touch on her neck. She twined in its path and let it brush over her.

"Tell me more." Diva's voice was low and

husky.

Aurora lay back on the cushions. Her body arched up at their touch; it was unbearable. Her body was pounding with desire. "I want him, now," she whispered, and her voice was pained.

"Poor Aurora, you have got it bad."

Aurora opened her eyes. Diva crawled across the cushions, her eyes shining, her lips parted in a suggestive smile. Her breasts swelled up from her vest as she reached to kiss Aurora on the mouth, crouching over her like a wild cat scenting its prey. Their bodies rolled together, pressing Aurora back into the cushions. Diva followed, and ate the flavor of desire from her mouth. Her hands moved over Aurora's body and captured the movement of desire on her flesh. Aurora gasped with pleasure; Diva was soft and warm, waves of heat coming off her, her scent high in the air. Aurora responded and shared that desire, offering Diva its delectable flavor, its succulent body. They tasted its strange male stimulant together.

When Diva pulled the satin sheet free, baring Aurora's body, Aurora gave a low cry, her breasts tightening, yearning to be touched. Diva took the trembling flesh into her mouth, hungrily, and Aurora moaned, her breasts burning, needles of sensation traveling from her erect nipples deep into her womb. Her eyes closed and her arms covered her face.

Diva's hands roamed, stroking down across Auroras' abdomen, before she followed with her mouth, her tongue leading a trail of fire into Aurora's groin.

Aurora bit the back of her wrist, when Diva's tongue moved into her slit. It went deeper, opening her up, and Aurora moaned when a pang of longing climbed through her pelvis. Diva spread her tongue wide and hard against her clit, and then slowly and firmly ringed it with the tip of her tongue. Her hands caressed the soft skin of Aurora's inner thighs, gently teasing the surface of her skin. She drew the sensations back and forth, with her hands and her mouth.

Aurora felt herself slipping away, her awareness of everything else disintegrated, only pleasure existed. Diva lapped hungrily, her tongue demanding, bringing her to her peak fast. Aurora's body rippled.

"I am going to come, Diva, oh dear Jupiter, I'm coming!"

Diva sat back and watched with a gleam in her eye. "Come, Aurora, I want you to, I want to feel you tighten on my fingers." She stroked Aurora's belly gently and moved her other hand between her open legs, dipped into her moist sex, and then placed a knowing thumb on her swollen clit. Her full lips were damp with Aurora's juices, her eyes sparkling with sexual power.

Aurora groaned. No other female had been that direct. It sent her flying closer to the edge of her orgasm. As Diva's finger rocked, gently, a network of nerves sprang up across Aurora's body, thrilling her, wiring her whole body into her climax. Aurora struggled, but she was caught in the net, trapped in the bliss of her own orgasm.

As the last spasms ebbed away, the sound of the datareel opening its eye to take one last look at the scene echoed through her awareness. Diva was squatting between her open legs, rocking back and forth on her boots. Her chin rested on her folded arms across her knees as she watched. She had an amused smile on her face and a glint in her eye. Aurora sat up and pulled her close, to kiss her mouth.

Diva took the offering then laughed. "You are a sensual creature, aren't you, Aurora?"

"And you?" Aurora was still heavily aroused, she wanted more.

"I'm weird. I get off on making other creatures come." There was a dare in her expression.

Aurora ran her hand over Diva's hair and down to her breasts, which strained near her own. She pulled at the purple vest and lifted the tight material to reveal her breast and see the elusive bodygraph. As her nipple finally bounced free Aurora looked down and saw that the artwork was some strange mythological creature, covered

in scales, with a tail equal to the length of its body. It was chasing itself around Diva's breast. Its long, fiery tongue licked at her nipple with a darting touch.

Diva laughed quietly. Aurora's touched the creature's head with one curious finger, stroking its body around the line of Diva's breast. "It's lovely." She rolled Diva back onto the cushions and descended to the creature with her mouth, following its path with her tongue. She hummed when she felt the nipple grow erect. Her hands began to explore Diva's body, but after a moment there was a distant chime as the door signaled the approach of another visitor. Aurora dropped the nipple from her mouth and gave a growl of disapproval.

Diva looked at her and chuckled. "That will be my next client." When she saw the disappointment on Aurora's face she added, "Don't worry, Aurora, you'll be with your *male* lover soon." There was both a tease and a taunt in her words.

As she got up she threw the dressing gown to Aurora. She stood over her, smiling, and dragged her vest back into place, watching Aurora with those sexy eyes. Before she opened the door she turned back and spoke again, her eyes flashing. "I'd like to know what it's like to make a male come. I'd like to do it, like you do with your lover.

I bet you make him come good and proper, and I'd love to see that."

Aurora stared at her, her body and mind ricocheting with feelings of shame, confusion and — above all — red-hot desire.

Chapter Two

Sullivan stormed into his sleep cell, cursing when the door slammed closed behind him. He strode across the small, regulatory space and rested his forehead on the cool metal surface of the locker that stood beside the narrow bunk. The males he worked with were starting to notice his behavior. They joked about his status as procreator, making lewd comments about the sordid task he had to undergo with the female. But he wasn't responding appropriately. He wasn't saying he'd rather be fucking his male lover and wanted the task over with. No, and why? Because he *was* enjoying it.

He didn't want her pregnant yet, because then it would be over and he wanted more of her first. He had to be more careful or his workmates would see he was enjoying his task far too much to be considered normal, and alert the authorities. Aurora, his trusting, innocent government envoy, had no clue of the danger they were courting. She

was a propaganda mouthpiece, but she didn't know what went on behind the scenes. If it were to come out, both of them would be arrested and treated for insanity, their minds scanned and cleaned.

They had to talk about it, and soon. But to top it all the off-planet work was taking longer than expected. They'd had to add another day to the schedule, another day added to their time apart. He wanted to tell her he was sorry for the delay. Before Aurora, he wouldn't have cared. Yes, he'd have missed Proteus, his male lover, for whom he cared deeply, but it wouldn't have been like this gnawing feeling he was experiencing now. With Aurora it was different, he was being consumed by forbidden lust that spelt danger at every turn. *I'll be insane before this is done and over with.*

Despite his best efforts, his self-control was slipping away. Delfidian was a society built on order. Anyone who showed a lack of it was singled out, realigned. But it was the effect Aurora had on him, though. She'd looked so damned inviting on the viewcom the day before. *So aroused.* His cock hardened instantly as his mind ran over their last exchange, every word and nuance in her expression committed to his memory. She looked ripe for sex, as if her clit were heavy, her cunt slick, and her thighs damp.

More than that, awareness of what was

happening between them was edging into her consciousness; he could almost see it happening. When she looked at him with that seemingly innocent and eternal question in her emerald eyes, images of her body writhing beneath his sprang into his mind. He smashed his fist against the locker door. "Aurora." The taste and sound of her name on his tongue wired him into a moment captured in time, a moment that was entirely theirs — the first time they came, together, their bodies locked, her cunt melting while she begged him to come just as he did so, the relief in her eyes as he breathed her name and spilled.

The memory left him unbearably hard. He reached for his zipper and eased out his distended cock, stroking it in one fist, the other still resting against the door of his locker. With practiced movements, he sought relief. The head of his cock was dark with blood, frustration manifesting itself in raw need. His fist was no replacement for the feel of her soft warmth, though, the maddening grip of her cunt. It sent him close to release every time she clenched onto his cock. He wanted to be wedged inside her; he wanted to hear the sound of her pleased moans as he shot his load into her womb.

Jacking harder, faster, he came in his fist, groaning, deep and fraught. As he steadied himself, he cursed The System for matching them,

even though it was the furthest thing from the truth in his heart. Their connection was forbidden, abnormal. It was so wrong, but so undeniably *right*.

* * * *

"More footage, in action." Diva paused, then broke into laughter and tapped the screen. "Aurora, are you listening?"

Aurora blushed. "Sorry, go on."

"I need more footage, so I thought I'd come down to the centenary rehearsals. You're over there today, according to your dossier."

"Yes, that's right, at the Jupiterzone. I'm just observing the rehearsals for historical accuracy, but please do come down. It would be good to see you. I've been thinking about you."

Diva nodded. "I'll see you there at time space ten. I've been thinking about you too, Aurora." She leaned towards the viewcom, filling the screen with her face. "You, and your male lover." She laughed and closed down the connection.

Aurora stared at the blank screen. Diva was the strangest female she'd ever met, but so intriguing. And she was glad to have someone she could confide in about her odd attachment to Sullivan. Her logic had determined that the thing with Sullivan was hormonal. But with Diva it was

rebellion, had to be, in the face of Delfidian norms. She didn't like contemplating that either or both of them were abnormal. She tried to dismiss the idea. Its strangeness disconcerted her, but despite that, the thrill of the situation was getting hold of Aurora. What would Sullivan make of it, she wondered?

What would he think of her sharing details of their intercourse with another female, a female who wanted to know all about it? The whole thing smacked of perversity, and yet...by the stars it felt good! She was high on some kind of weird hormone trip, her body was buzzing and her heart pounded every time she thought about mating with her male lover. Even talking about it with Diva had been wild and passionate, drawing them both away from their work and into sexual games.

She stood up and was about to walk away when her screen blipped back into life and, as if she had called to him, Sullivan appeared on the viewcom. The sight of his deep brown eyes and strong features drew a smile from her.

"Aurora, I'm glad I caught you. I thought I'd better let you know, we're going to be a day late back to the station."

Her heart sank, her spirits leveling. "Oh, I'm sorry."

"So am I, and I'm afraid I can't talk now. I shouldn't be contacting you so often. It's

not...necessary." He moved closer to the screen. "But I wanted you to know I'm counting every time space until we're together." Then he was gone.

Her heart pounded in her ears, filling the void of silence. She paced her restzone in frustration. She wanted him; she wanted him here. *Now*. What was happening to her? Her hormones were all over the place, making her think crazy, freakish thoughts. She thanked The System she was seeing Diva that day. Diva would level her. Diva made her feel less like she was losing her mind, ironic though that was.

* * * *

When she got to the Jupiterzone, thankfully Diva was already there, waiting for her. She gave an inner sigh, focusing her rampant desires on the beautiful female in front of her.

Her gems glittered under the strong lights of the entrance to the auditorium. She gave Aurora a big smile as she walked into the zone, and then walked over to give her a light kiss on the cheek. She had a portable datareel in her hand. Dressed in a flowing robe of black, her hair merged into its dark silkiness. "Lovely, Aurora," she murmured as she looked over the dark green robe that hugged her body then flowed to the floor.

Aurora clasped Diva's arm for strength. Sullivan would be home soon. Meanwhile she was with Diva, who understood.

The Jupiterzone was a large complex of government meeting rooms and public performance spaces. A uniformed security official pointed them in the direction of one of the larger auditoriums, telling them to look out for space 32. They followed her instructions and walked along the connecting corridors, counting the rooms off. As they grew closer, they heard sounds emerging from the auditorium marked 32, music that stopped then started again. Voices sprang up, shouting instructions.

"We're in the right place," Aurora said, as she looked down at the stage set.

The seating area was in darkness. A few dim lights on the stage gently illuminated two male figures that moved across the space in ritualized steps. As they grew accustomed to the limited light they saw a row of five figures sitting near the front and Irenie, the Centenary Director, leaning on the stage, a sheaf of papers in her hand.

Diva squeezed Aurora's arm. She began to walk down the nearest aisle, drawing Aurora along one side of the auditorium. They drew to a halt near the front and the dancers glanced over at them.

Irenie turned when she saw the two women and beckoned them over. "Aurora." She put out

her hands; taking both Aurora's in her own, giving the customary greeting of the workspace, "Greetings and blessings of The System. It's so good to see you, but you've come at an unfortunate moment. I'm afraid we aren't really ready for you yet. We're still working with the preliminary dance team." She nodded her head at the two males on stage.

"We're just running through the male dancers' routine. I'm sure it will be very dull for you, but it was necessary to include the males in some way, given their greater role in historic times." Her face was set in a disapproving grimace.

Aurora gave a tight smile. She disliked some Delfidian's tendency to be elitist and hierarchical. Irenie's remark about the males was both unnecessary and rude.

Diva eyed the males on stage. "How intriguing."

Aurora tensed, sensing her interest and knowing its nature. She quickly attempted to gauge Irenie's response. Irenie had noticed the glitter of lust that flickered in Diva's eyes and smiled at her invitingly. She had blushed; her eyes grew bright with sexual interest. So, Irenie must have thought she was the focus of Diva's attention. Aurora felt Diva's body heat rising, but it wasn't Irenie that had brought it about. It was the males. She glanced at Diva and saw the

glimmer in her eye darkening. She really was intrigued. Doubt, fear and unbidden arousal entwined in Aurora's blood, a dangerous combination that sent her pulse racing.

"Oh, it seemed necessary to have males in equal numbers," Irenie explained, as if in apology to Diva, "because they were such an important part of ancient human society." She paused. "You're quite welcome to stay and watch me at work."

Diva chuckled and flashed Irenie a core-melting smile. "That would be wonderful, thank you. I'm always interested in new imagery."

Irenie didn't seem to notice anything was amiss. She turned back to the males on the stage and clapped her hands over her head.

Aurora breathed. "Do you always flout the norm so obviously?" She hissed the question under her breath, her grip on Diva's arm tightening. "It's dangerous to play games with a female like Irenie, she's powerful, uncompromising."

Diva's smile remained. "Life without danger is akin to death."

"I fear for you my friend, non-conformity is close to insanity."

"Don't fear for me. The rules of a society have to be questioned."

"Do they?" The idea was truly strange to Aurora. They were taught truths; logic told her

they didn't need to be questioned.

"You should know it, in ancient times they used to say rules were made to be broken."

"*Bent*, the saying was rules were meant to be bent. Not broken."

Diva rolled her cat-like eyes. "Okay, *bent*. Besides, you can talk."

"Don't remind me." Aurora shook her head and drew Diva off to one side of the center aisle, trying to look as if she was seeking a good vantage point. In reality, she was worried one of Irenie's team might overhear their whispers.

Diva squeezed her arm as they came to a pause, just outside the fall of light from the stage. "Look, the pretty one has noticed us."

"He's probably wondering what madness has taken you," Aurora retorted.

"Oh, I don't know," Diva murmured, her gaze on the stage.

Aurora glanced back. It was the sleeker of the two males that had indeed noticed them. He seemed very aware of Diva's watchful gaze.

As the dance routine began again, they were close enough to see everything, including the intent expression on the face of the sleek male. He began to trace a pattern across the empty stage. He was pacing, yet with a deliberate rhythm, a kind of exotic dance movement contained in his steps. He was barefoot, his blond hair sleeked back from

his face into a tight knot at the back of his head, giving him a feline grace. He was stripped to the waist, loose black pants hanging on his hips, exaggerating his slim frame. The other male on the stage was dressed the same way. He was even taller, though, well built, with muscles that glinted in the stage lights. His head was completely shaved, his face heavily boned. He looked powerful, like a warrior from the Viking age. That was obviously why he had been chosen for the Centenary show.

"Astonishing," murmured Diva, when his body captured the light as it moved. "I have never seen males perform dance before." She looked at Aurora. "They are beautiful."

Aurora nodded. She felt a little unsure, but they were indeed attractive creatures. What would Sullivan make of them, she wondered, the rather odd thought crossing her mind unbidden. Diva was infecting her with rebellious thoughts, but it felt so good. Aurora was acutely aware that her resistance to this freakish line of behavior was breaking down.

They edged away from the light and Diva found them a hidden spot to watch from, nestled in the heavy drapes at the side of the stage. "No one can see us here," Diva whispered. "We can relax and enjoy them."

Aurora nodded. The sound was muted, but

they had a good, close view of the two male figures as they worked through the choreographed steps. The portable datareel Diva carried was set down and forgotten as they watched.

The dancers paced apart in perfect timing, then rose towards one another, each time their pattern ended with them standing closer together, until they were almost touching the naked skin of their chests together. Aurora's body began to pound in response, but her mind still flickered with doubts. She'd never looked at a male that way before, but now that the idea had planted itself in her mind, it was very sexy indeed. She turned to Diva and saw that she was enthralled by the vision of male beauty before her. She was pressed up against a low barrier, her fingers locked over its metal edge. Her eyes sparkled, her lips were parted, her breasts rising and falling with quick intakes of breath. She was heavily aroused.

Aurora closed in behind her. "Your desire, your arousal, it's making me so hot, Diva it's got to me."

"I can't stop it."

Aurora nestled behind her. "I wouldn't want you to, I'm just warning you." She looked over Diva's shoulder at the stage. The dancers were rising, doing the scene from the top again. As they paced in and out towards each other, Aurora drew

Diva's hair back and kissed the back of her neck lightly, tracing a pattern up and down her skin. Diva's head sank back in response and she gasped quietly. Aurora curved her hands over Diva's breasts, moving close against her back.

"They look so good, don't they?" Diva murmured. She was leaning into Aurora's body, pushing back from the barrier. She was so hot.

Aurora could feel it growing inside them both. "Would you like to have them?" Aurora asked against her ear. "Both of them ... together?"

Diva murmured another response in agreement. Aurora wondered where her own outrageous words were coming from, but reassured herself that there was no harm in toying with a little warped fantasy for her friend's pleasure. She spoke again. "Two of them, lovers at your command. Think of it, their beautiful male bodies serving yours, in perfect unison as they are now, but with you as their subject."

Diva groaned. Aurora began to lift the other female's skirts and slid her hands beneath the material. Diva was naked beneath the robe and the discovery drove Aurora's fingers on in their exploration. She followed the curve of Diva's thigh into the warm groove of her sex. It melted in response to the questing fingers, sending warm juices out in invitation to come closer. Aurora was molded against her back, her eyes on the males

before them. She breathed against Diva's neck, one hand caressing her full breasts through her robes, the other nestling deep between her thighs. Her finger settled against the pulse point in her clit, the spot that throbbed and swelled between the silky lips of Diva's sex. Aurora's hand stirred, searching out a rhythm. Her mouth watered for a taste of her. It felt so good; she was dripping herself.

As the two males closed on one another again, she moved her fingers quicker. Diva's breasts heaved in response. As the two male figures reached up and their fingers meshed together, Diva took a quick intake of breath. Her thighs crushed together over Aurora's hand and liquid heat spilled down her inner thighs. Aurora pressed close against her back and rocked her body gently. Diva crumpled silently against the barrier. Aurora focused on the dancers just as their male bodies met once again.

After a minute Diva rose up and Aurora took her hand away, reluctantly. Diva turned, her shoulders lifting up as she sucked the power back into her body. She looked at Aurora. "You took me unawares." She gave a low laugh.

Aurora responded by sucking her fingers gently, tasting Diva's juices. Diva's mouth fell open, and then she grabbed Aurora's hand, pushed deeper into the curtains and drew Aurora behind her.

"No, Irenie will wonder where we've gone."

Diva shook her head. "She'll just assume you got bored with the males." She gave a hollow laugh and then found a path through to the backstage area. They came to a doorway and she reached for the handle but found it locked. Aurora laughed it off, but Diva turned to her.

"Oh no, you're not getting away with it that easily." Her eyes were filled with humor but also with lust. She was still hot for more.

So was Aurora. Her body rippled, physically, straining on the hand that held her.

Diva absorbed the ripple and then hurriedly pulled her on again. She found a door that opened. It was a props room, lined with shelves of strange objects and mounds of scenery cloths piled up on the floor. "Perfect." She shut the door behind them, then grabbed Aurora and pushed her down onto the mound of material.

Aurora gave a cry of delight and Diva was soon chasing after her, tearing her robe up as soon as she got to it. Feeling Diva's hands move like lightning, homing in on the heat of her sex, Aurora wanted her own release badly and her legs opened.

"Take your robe off, quickly. We must hurry, they might find us." Diva gave her a warning glance, as if she knew the threat would make Aurora hotter.

Aurora acted on the order, pulling the material over her head. Diva stroked her hand over the red fur that coiled around her ribcage from her back, and then her eager fingers were at work and her head dipped down, taking her clit in her mouth, nursing its fullness and sucking deeply. She moved over her pussy lips in smooth strokes, always ending back on her clitoris with the tip of her tongue circling it firmly.

Aurora felt as if a comet was about to explode inside her. "Oh sweet Jupiter."

Diva lifted her head. "You're so swollen. Your clit looks like a red berry." She licked her lips. Her fingers replaced her mouth and she plowed inside Aurora's sex, sweeping in and out and along the folds of her sex, in deep probing movements. "Creamy." Her free hand crept up to Aurora's breasts and she pulled on one hard nipple then the other, making them stick out.

Aurora bucked against her. "You're driving me insane."

"You're desperate for it, aren't you? Admit it."

"Yes, yes, yes!" Aurora cried.

Diva smiled and stretched up, lifted her own robe and slid her body down with her hot dripping sex lying over Aurora's bare thigh.

"Oh Jupiter!" Aurora murmured again, as she felt the beautiful wet slide of Diva's pussy on her leg, and there was a note of desperation in her

voice. Her cunt clenched and Diva growled when she felt the warm, moist, sex flesh embraced her hand. A look of total mutual appreciation passed between them.

Diva began to move faster. "You cheated, you took advantage of me by the stage." Her eyes were aflame. She began to move her hips, pressing her pussy along Aurora's thigh, rubbing frantically. "I'm going to come again you devious creature."

They were both moving desperately, climbing over the threshold. "You and me both."

Aurora's hands closed tightly on Diva's breasts; her head fell back and her cunt liquefied. When the climax hit, she pressed her leg up into the hot wet valley of flesh that rode her. Diva's lips parted, and her eyes closed. She ground her hips and pressed home. With a blissful cry and a long sigh, she came. She slumped next to Aurora and gave another great sigh of relief, followed by a chuckle. Then she rolled panting, into Aurora's arms. "Got you back."

Aurora nodded. "Yes, you win, Diva, darling." She tried for mock disappointment.

Diva nodded in approval and Aurora pulled her close and kissed her beautiful soft mouth. Her body felt so warm and voluptuous that Aurora savored it. "What's your bodygraph creature called?" Her hand closed over its hidden shape.

"Narcissus," Diva replied. "Someone else

named it for me though. My Creslet lover."

Aurora traced the outline of her nipple with a gentle finger.

"She said it was the name of an ancient creature that fell in love with itself." She chuckled. "She also told me that if you don't love yourself, you're not capable of loving anyone else." Diva kissed her again, teasing her slim tongue against Aurora's. "I've got plenty of love for everybody, even the males."

"So I see. Did you want them more than me?"

"Not right at the moment."

Aurora harrumphed.

"Are you jealous?"

"No, I...well, maybe a little."

"I could handle you all." Her eyes flashed. "Besides, it's easy for you, you have a male."

"I don't 'have a male.' I am matched with him. That's different."

"Have you talked to him about how he feels yet?"

"No, I can't. It's only a duty, to both of us."

Diva shook her head. "Doesn't sound that way to me. You should ask him."

Aurora sat up, suddenly uncomfortable. "You're putting questions in my head that shouldn't be there."

Diva frowned. "No, you'd have walked away when I first asked you about it, if you really

thought that."

Aurora's thoughts were in chaos. "I think going against The System is wrong — no, dangerous."

Diva touched her arm. "You see, you're not even sure. But like I said before, danger isn't all bad."

"You're a reckless female, Diva."

"You're right."

"So you admit it's not sensible to go around being blatant?"

"Ha. You don't know the half of it." She gave a wry smile, looking at Aurora with pity in her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, Aurora, my innocent Creslet borne. You follow the rules, and you don't even know why, do you?"

Aurora frowned. "I don't see what you're getting at. I follow rules because Delfidian society is based on a proven, working structure." Even as she said it, a heavy feeling stole into her heart.

Diva shook her head. "You think it's about being labeled degenerate, you think that is what I risk by taking unofficial interest in males. It's more than that. If they knew what really went on between you and Sullivan, you would lose your status, your restzone, your work, and you'd be banished from the city zone. *If you were lucky.*"

Aurora stared at her, her heart hammering, her breath caught in her lungs. Surely it couldn't be

true. It was wrong, it was against The System, but was it really so bad?

Diva stood up. "I've said enough." She began to dress. "Besides, it doesn't mean I'm about to change what or who I am. What makes me an artist and what makes me *me*, is my curiosity. No one can take that away from me." She stared at Aurora, seeking understanding.

Aurora nodded, silently, beginning to see that her knowledge of their society was narrow, blinkered.

When they eventually emerged Jupiterzone had gone quiet. They walk along the corridors, trying to find a way out, until a voice halted them.

"I saw you watching." It was the sleeker of the two male dancers. He was standing in the shadows, waiting for them to pass by. "You should have asked for our company."

Diva stared at the male with desire, her eyes sparkling. "You knew that I was aroused by the sight of you?"

He nodded, unsure but eager. He must have seen them as they watched.

Aurora felt a protective urge. This was dangerous. Fantasizing about males was one thing, doing such a thing outside of a procreation arrangement was another. It would be frowned upon, for Delfidians of their status. She didn't know how far Diva's words about banishment

rang true, but she knew that Diva was far too ready to bypass the system to seek out the things she wanted to know about males. It was dangerous; she needed protection.

She drew Diva's body closer to hers, protective of her friend. "It is not permitted, as you must know. Unless the birthing administration permits it." She looked at the male. He was hiding in the corner, his eyes darting from her back to Diva. As far as she knew, it was unheard of for males who weren't selected to approach a female, although there were rumors about the occasional rebel, a throwback from different times. *Is it so wrong? Should they not have the right to taste each other too, as Sullivan and I have?*

Her heart thudded in her chest, her mind in chaos. A sound in the distance made her take action. "We will try to find you. What's your name?" she hissed, already beginning to pull Diva away.

The male looked surprised, and then moved as if to follow them.

She put her hand up to caution him. "Your name?"

"Fyre, my name is Fyre."

Chapter Three

One jerk, two, the final vibrant leap of his cock. Aurora clutched her hands around Sullivan's head as he freed his seed inside her. His face was buried against her throat, his lips wet against her skin. She stroked his hair, her legs locking him against her. She had been concentrating on his experience of the sex act, but her own orgasm had been building. Her inner flesh contracted, in a long, luxurious orgasm that drew her on and on. Each time she thought she had reached a peak, it drew her on to the next plateau, a series of hot ripples melting her flesh to his.

"Aurora, oh, Precious." He whispered words of affection against her cheek when she came. He had never said anything so intimate before, but then she had never held him so close, nor let herself go so fully. Her body was suffused with heat, the warm wet evidence of her pleasure seeping out across the bed, her breath rasping.

"Do you think we might have created, tonight?" he asked.

Aurora smoothed his hair back from his face and looked at his enquiring eyes, so intent on her. "I wasn't thinking about that," she confessed. It was Diva's influence. Her desire to explore sexuality was leading Aurora to deeper and more intimate questions, as well as wider and wilder experiences.

Sullivan's expression grew curious, and he levered his body so that he rested on one elbow, looking down at her, his fingers stroking her breastbone. "What were you thinking about?"

"Just us. I...I enjoy this more than I thought I would." She swallowed hard. She needed him to meet her part way, before she could really open up.

His expression relaxed, and he smiled, his handsome mouth drawing her fingertips to it. He kissed them, then her mouth. "And I enjoy you, Aurora. I could do this forever." He gave a hoarse laugh and relief poured between them, tangible and humbling.

When his lips touched against hers, she felt as if she opened her whole self to him, beyond her physical self, her soul, her heart, her spiritual being. A profound sense of happiness fluttered within her. He seemed to draw on it, offering her his entire being in return, stroking her with his

hands, calling to her with his body. They moved as one, touching one another with newfound reverence.

"You've surprised me, Aurora, and you've made me very happy. In fear of my life, but happy."

She gripped his shoulders, steadying herself. "Don't say that."

"We're not supposed to feel this way."

"I know. But I can't help it."

"Neither can I."

He looked so happy; she could no longer deny that this was right and just. "I met a female, Diva, when you were off planet. She talked to me about our match and it made me face what I truly felt. She made me want to discuss it with you."

His expression turned serious. "I wanted to talk about it too, the need was becoming pressing...but are you sure of this female, can you trust her?"

She nodded, her breath caught in her chest. "She tells me I am naive about The System, of what might happen if I were to broadcast my reaction to you publicly." She paused and looked at him to see what he thought.

He nodded. "We're breaking the fundamental rules of the society we live in, but it doesn't feel wrong to me."

"Nor me, and Diva questions it too. I fear for her, she is outspoken." The whole story about

their meeting with Fyre came out, and Sullivan listened carefully. "I care for her, we have been lovers." She paused and watched for his reaction.

He didn't seem surprised; he nodded and encouraged her to continue.

"I realized that I wanted Diva to experience this too, this intimacy between a male and female." His expression was intelligent, calm, and she smiled inwardly at his nature. It anchored her in what had become a world of doubt.

"It was commonplace in the distant past," he said, "when societies were more chaotic and less structured. Everyone should have the freedom to find out for themselves if it is right, not be told what is normal. I would not trade this time with you for anything, but the nature of our connection puts us in danger."

"Is it so wrong to want this? Why does it have to be like this?" she asked.

"Rules, norms. A society cannot function without them. They are tight and restrictive, yet it is us who will be broken if we disobey them."

She frowned. "I know, and yet fighting this desire I have for you is rather like fighting the pull of the moons."

He gave a gentle laugh, cupping one breast and kissing it. "You're so sweet when your logic is confounded."

She looked at him, astonished.

"Proteus, my male mate, he is Creslet and I understand how this works." He touched her head, teasingly.

No wonder he seemed to know her so well. She wrestled him into a hug, her emotions in such a tangle she didn't trust herself to respond to his reference to his male mate. She tried to focus on Diva to level her head. "Is there a way for Diva? Could you help her meet this male, the one called Fyre?"

A frown gathered on his forehead.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't ask you to get involved."

"No. I'm glad. If there are others, it helps us." He leaned over to kiss her, their growing connection traveling back and forth openly between them now. "I'll find a way," he said, "but first I want to know more about you and I, about us."

She nodded and reached for him.

His breath caught when he felt her hand on the shaft of his growing erection.

She stroked it, possessively, reveling in its hardness. "It's a deal."

He groaned softly, his eyes almost closing. "By the stars, your hand on me feels good."

Juice oozed from the tip and fell onto her wrist. Her sex clenched with need to feel it inside her again. "I want you, Sullivan. I want you now." She opened her legs to him as he loomed over her.

"And me you." His voice was hoarse, his movements urgent. Stroking his fingers down into her moist slit, he opened her up, sighing as he touched her. His cock followed and he thrust inside her, claiming her to the very core.

* * * *

"Are you serious?" Diva's eyebrows were raised. She moved closer to the viewcom. "He agreed?"

"Yes, although we'll have to wait and see if he can arrange anything. Sullivan wants to check out the male called Fyre, in case it's a trap. He feels that he needs to warn him, too. It wouldn't be fair otherwise."

Diva nodded. "Yes, I can see that. But...oh, do you think he will say yes?"

Aurora smiled, touched by Diva's sudden misgivings. For someone so forthright and brave, it was endearing to see her vulnerable side emerging. "I think so, but we will know soon enough."

"You did this for me."

"I did. You are my friend, and I care about you." *And please, let it be the right thing to do*, she thought to herself, as she closed down the connection. .

* * * *

The path to the checkpoint was one that Sullivan always approached with a mixture of familiarity and dread. The female guards at the threshold watched him. They were there to check the males that passed in and out of femalezone. Only females became guards; only females reached any position of power in Delfidian. It had been that way for centuries.

One of the guards reached out and hit the laser barrier switch, casting up an instant deadly shield in his path and halting him in his steps. The other guard walked over to him, weapon trained, a frozen look of mistrust on her face. "What was your business in femalezone?" she quizzed.

He couldn't help wondering what manner of training they underwent; they all had this same cold demeanor. Pulling out his identity card, he did the necessary to show he was a male who could pass between the female and male zones for an agreed period of time.

The guard nodded at her sidekick, who reached for the control panel. She gestured him on with her weapon. The laser barrier vanished and he passed across the checkpoint and into the malezone. *Same society, different world.* What would Aurora make of it, he wondered. The femalezone stood behind him, serene, efficient. Ahead of him, something more gritty, harsher, yet something that related to what lay beyond the cityzone too —

Delfidian wilderness. Wilderness. A place without rules. Without a System. They were taught as children that societies with no Systems were corrupt and failed to survive. They knew little about the place outside the cityzone, other than it was a dark barren place, an unforgiving, bleak landscape where few could survive. He listened to the official line with one ear, and rumors and gossip with the other, while he moved between the female and malezones. He was learning all the time but he was on a limited timespace and it was ticking away fast.

When his job was done, when Aurora's body meshed his seed with hers, it would be over. His gut churned. Would he ever be able to settle in the malezone again, after Aurora? The thought of walking away from her was too hard; it left him raw. Instead he focused on the task at hand — the male known as Fyre. He smiled to himself as he negotiated the narrow crowded walkways. Fyre did want to know, he'd been pleased when Sullivan had tracked him down and spoken with him via viewcom. It wasn't as unheard of as Aurora assumed. Her Creslet reasoning couldn't accept it without seeing it, perhaps, but going against the grain was a real if subtle undertow, a forbidden trait that called to untold numbers amongst their ranks.

The buildings rose up, shoulder to shoulder

around him. The small population of males was crammed into crowded living spaces, spilling out onto the pavements, the spaces they lived in so minimal they filled it and more. Noise, sights and smells marauded his senses, street vendors in his face, selling food, drink, goods of all denominations. The atmosphere was filled with raw energy. It assailed his senses and at first he found it rude and intrusive after his time in the femalezone, but there was a more familiar reality for him here, nonetheless. He breathed deep, taking it on, grounding himself with its certainty.

The eatery where Fyre had suggested they meet was on the west side of malezone, a busy dive with a cheap menu. When he opened the door the smell of smoke, bodies and steaming noodles hit him. He scanned the place, seeking out the image he'd been sent. He was just about to give up and seek out a seat, when he caught sight of Fyre's white hair, sleek features, and the charcoal body jacket he'd said he'd be wearing. Wending his way over, he passed between the booths, approaching Fyre with caution.

Fyre was nervous, watchful. Sullivan slid into the booth, all his senses on high alert. This could be a trap; he couldn't take the male at face value until he'd been convinced. Glancing down at the empty glass Fyre clutched in his hand, he nodded in greeting.

"Can I get you another?"

Fyre nodded.

Sullivan signaled for the server and ordered them two more blues.

"How do I know I can trust you?" Fyre asked, when the server had gone.

Sullivan shrugged. "How do *I* know I can trust *you*?"

Fyre took the hand that Sullivan offered. "Fair enough." He had a quirky smile. It gave him an impish look that made Sullivan warm to him.

The drinks arrived; they both took a swig and eyed each other. Fyre leaned forward, speaking quietly. "You said you are a procreator, and that you are matched to the red pelt Creslet?"

"Yes, I am."

"Have you come here because you were asked to?"

"Yes, and because I think we shouldn't be told who we can mate with." It was a cautious icebreaker.

"But you have been told to mate with a female."

"I have, but that's not the only reason why I do it."

"You are lucky, to have been matched." There was genuine admiration in his eyes. If he was setting a trap, he was a damn fine actor.

"I'm in a privileged position." He gave a wry grimace, finding it difficult to remain distant and

non-committal. "If one can call it that. I resent the stop: start power of The System, but I've broken into a different world and I've discovered that it feels right to me. I'm not about to deny anyone else a taste of the forbidden. I do not relish our so-called norms. I wouldn't presume to make such decisions on behalf of others, that would be wrong of me, but it's a dangerous path we tread. You have to be aware of that. I'm covered for as long as it lasts, or as long as I can make it last. After that, who knows what will happen to me?"

Fyre's glance was questioning.

Sullivan smiled; he'd scared him enough. "You might hate it, have you thought of that?"

"If I hate it, I get over it." Fyre leaned towards him. "I have to know. I've always wanted to be with a female, to know that experience. I can't sleep at night, wanting to know what it would be like. It's like there's something inside me, some...need." He hit his chest. "When I saw her, the need became a hunger that I can't ignore."

Sullivan nodded.

Fyre threw back the rest of his drink. "I would be living a lie if I didn't try to make it happen. When she looked at me with interest, I knew she was the one that I would be with. Her image is always in my mind now." He darted an uncomfortable look around. "My blood won't let go of the need."

If Sullivan had wanted proof of his earnestness, he'd surely got it. "How long can you travel within the femalezone?"

"Twelve more days. After the centenary celebrations are over my pass will be revoked."

"We must move quickly."

Fyre went to respond and then paused, his glance moving over Sullivan's shoulder. A shadow fell over their booth.

Sullivan lifted his head, and looked.

"It is you," the tall, shadowed figure said accusingly.

Sullivan blinked, looked again at the lean beautiful face and rich pelt of blue-black Creslet fur. *Proteus*. His male mate, the lover he'd had to leave to take his role as a procreator. Not who he'd expected to see here and now.

Proteus was staring at Fyre, and then looked back at Sullivan with smarting eyes. "You've taken another lover behind my back, while you're supposed to be doing The System's bidding over in femalezone?"

"It's not what you think, Proteus."

"There I am, keeping your bed warm, praying to the stars that bitch would fall pregnant so I could have you back in our bed." His voice had risen, attracting attention from the males around them and the staff at the bar. "I'll pack your bags. I've waited for you long enough." A murmur ran

around the onlookers, they were both intrigued and yet shying from the odd scene, the lack of order and the very nature of the comments spelling trouble.

Sullivan shook his head. Standing, he reached out for his mate. Proteus believed that there was another male. *Was it easier that way?* His Creslet logic wouldn't accept that Sullivan had fallen for the female he was forced to procreate with, nor that he was risking his meager status in Delfidian society for her.

Proteus backed away shaking his head, when Sullivan rested one hand on his arm. "Don't touch me, don't touch me." He was clutching his chest, his self-righteous, dramatic streak showing itself. Behind him, Sullivan could see the servers had rallied the owner. Figures moved in the doorway.

Fyre remained silent, his expression guarded as he watched the wave of concern and attention sweep through the eatery. Any sign of trouble and the guards would be down on them like a pack of vultures, they'd all have to say who they were and why they were there. Sullivan cursed silently. The last thing they needed was to draw attention. He had to take action. "Proteus, I'm sorry, I will explain, but not now."

Guards were moving through the eatery, alerted to trouble by the owner's call for order. Proteus gave him one last pained glance and then

turned away. Around them, figures were moving, many leaving the eatery as the female guards moved in to take names. Fyre was on his feet, looking around for the quickest way out. His reactions were good, Sullivan noted, then reached out and gripped his arm. "Be ready tomorrow night," he whispered, hurriedly. "I will come for you. Now go, disappear into the crowd, I will do the same."

As Sullivan hurried away from the place, he caught sight of Proteus watching him across the crowd, his glance accusing, his expression betrayed. Sullivan's heart ached. He felt wretched; Proteus had known about Aurora and said he'd wait. Now he thought he'd gone behind his back. He wanted to talk to him, to explain the truth of the matter, but Proteus was engrained in the ways of The System. Confiding in him was a step he wasn't prepared to take right now, no matter how badly Proteus thought of him.

It didn't happen as a betrayal, it just happened. He longed to right things between them though, and he would, soon. I owe you that much, and more.

Chapter Four

Sexual tension and a sense of expectation were high in the atmosphere. When Sullivan entered Aurora's spacezone accompanied by the male dancer, it multiplied. Aurora was convinced that if the level of male to female hormones were measured, the result of the forbidden rendezvous would have been off the charts.

"It'll be okay, just be yourself," Aurora whispered to Diva. She couldn't quite believe she was giving her more confident friend advice. Life had a funny way of turning the tables. She was glad of her more experienced role in mating with a male though, and believed that Diva would love it too.

Diva rubbed her arms and fiddled with her hair, restless as a cat. "I know, it's just so...strange, exciting." She smiled hopefully.

Aurora nodded and led her forward to greet the two males. The four of them were wired with sexual tension, the atmosphere humming. Fyre was dressed in dark colors, his hair loose around

his face, hanging forward as if he wanted to hide in it, but his willing glances and impish smiles for Diva showed her he was ready for her. The four of them spoke quietly about the meeting, the forbidden path they had chosen to take. Diva quickly blossomed into her luscious, extrovert self. Sensual and confident, she eyed Fyre openly, and he returned her hunger with blatant eyes, pacing in front of her as they spoke, twisting and turning his lithe body beneath her eager gaze. With no false barriers to surmount, they were going straight into the territory they wanted to explore.

Diva gave an open mouthed smile, a guttural sound akin to a purr, and then forced herself to turn away from him for a moment. It was Sullivan that she sought out. "Before I forget, I have a gift for you." She collected a small package that she'd brought with her. "Thank you for arranging this." He nodded, in response. This was so utterly strange to them all. "I have a gift for you, I made it small so you could keep it." She presented him a smooth plasma disc, small enough to fit into his palm, imprinted through with an image from Aurora's first datareel session.

Aurora blushed when she realized, but watched Sullivan as he took it. He stared down at it, transfixed, then ran one finger over the surface, smiling to himself.

"She was thinking of you, when I grabbed the

image. She was telling me what it was like to be with a male." Diva smiled to herself as if satisfied, when she observed Sullivan staring intently at the object she had placed in his hand.

"Thank you, I will treasure it always," Sullivan said.

Aurora moved closer to take a look at the image. It was striking. She was in profile against the red cushions. Her pelt was thrown back and merged into the textures and colors around her. It made her look as if she was growing out of the surroundings. Her arms were bent over her face and chest at different stages and the pointing elbows suggested movement over her still body. One hand trailed in her pelt, the other against her arched neck. Her lips were parted, her eyes closed.

"I know that look, intimately." Sullivan spoke with reverence, as he looked from the plasma disc to Aurora and back. "I know it from sight and from all the other senses in my body." Pocketing the disc, he closed on her, one arm around her back, joining with her.

Yearning fluttered inside Aurora, impatient, desperate. He kissed her, his hungry mouth seeking hers. She opened to him, returning his kisses without fear, knowing that he wanted them as much as she did. Her hands went to his shoulders, always with the need to reassure herself he was there.

"I want you, Aurora, I crave to be inside you."

His mouth whispering against her throat made her dizzy, her thighs trembled and she clutched at him. "Yes, Sullivan, yes I want it, too." Beyond his shoulder, she saw that Fyre was talking quietly to Diva, close against her too. Diva grabbed him suddenly, around the neck, and pulled his mouth to hers, kissing him. Aurora watched as their bodies merged. The contrast was so startling, so beautiful. Their gender opposite, their physical forms at odds, yet their bodies were molding together as one, as if meant to be.

"Do we look that beautiful together, that right and true?" She wavered in Sullivan's arms, drawn to the compelling image of male on female.

Sullivan glanced over. "At least as much, if not more." His eyes had grown darker than ever, and she felt the hard thrust of his cock against her hip. He caught her mouth with his in another slow lingering kiss, arresting her movement, turning her body to face him, his tongue teasing into her mouth as it opened to him. It was an exquisite kiss – their more open intimacy made every touch passionate, and precious too. She molded her body to his, his upright cock a totem between them, the promise of pleasure it brought racing round her veins, a stimulant like no other she had ever experienced.

When they heard laughter, they drew apart and

turned to look. Diva had pinned Fyre to the floor, straddling his hips and holding his shoulders down. He bucked under her; his head flung back, his white-blond hair strewn across the floor. Rampant lust was tangible in the atmosphere surrounding them. Aurora glanced at Sullivan whose gaze moved back and forth, watching the other couple and Aurora's reactions to them.

Diva pulled the black shirt from Fyre's belted waist, all the time chuckling. Each slow, revealing tug aroused Aurora more. Fyre cast his arms out to the sides and closed his eyes. He looked beautiful, like some human saint, vanquished by a dark force. Aurora was riveted. Diva pulled the shirt slowly undone, revealing the smooth, luminescent white skin of his slim chest. His body had an adolescent sexuality, nubile. Diva descended to his chest and teased his nipples with her tongue. He arched exquisitely, his expression pained. He truly was an angel, a beautiful white angel, tortured by his desires. As Diva pulled the shirt off him, Aurora let her eyes run over the slim, naked, male torso that was revealed.

She felt Sullivan's hands on her, but Diva and Fyre also held her attention. Diva was taking her hands over Fyre's body in deliberate, knowing movements, her hips shifting on his as she explored him. Aurora wondered if she should feel as if she was intruding, but didn't. She felt part of

the scene, part of the arousal.

"Aurora," Diva called in a low voice as she lifted her mouth from Fyre's. She turned and looked at Aurora with sparkling eyes. "Help me with Fyre." Then she leaned forward and pinned his arms by the wrists above his head. An almost visible thrill tugged at Aurora and drew her forward. Sullivan nodded, encouraging her, when she looked at him with enquiry.

She knelt, facing Diva, taking Fyre's wrists into her control. He was like a streak of white on the dark floor, pinned at wrist and hip by the two females. His lashes flew up suddenly and he looked into Aurora's eyes. His expression showed her he was willing to be theirs. She smiled and he gently lowered his lids, a smile teasing at the corners of his mouth.

Diva fell over his chest, kissing and nipping his skin with her teeth, her hands roaming around his body. He moaned and his arms twisted in Aurora's grip. Diva was moving down his body, her hands undoing his pants. She freed his cock, taking it in her hands with curiosity, stroking it. Fyre's arms flexed then stilled. Diva dropped down to take him in her mouth. His body arched in response to Diva's mouth on him. She was teasing the stem of his erection with nipping kisses, and he writhed, enjoyment obvious in his expression.

Aurora held his wrists tighter. The feeling of his transported body working against her while she held him captive was deeply arousing. She felt movement at her back and realized that Sullivan was standing behind her. He knelt down, climbing his knees around the outside of hers, enclosing her body with his, his hands caressing her breasts as she leaned over the prone male on the floor. Her heart beat faster. She leaned into his caress, her hips swaying back to nestle in the cradle of his.

Diva had taken Fyre's erect cock in her mouth. She drew him off with deep plunges. Her black mane was splayed out across his white skin, like a wave of dark shadows creeping across a dazzling bright sky. Fyre's arms lifted and struggled beneath Aurora's hands, his head moving from side to side as his body went with the rhythm of Diva's mouth.

Sexual power surged up in Aurora. She was aware of Sullivan at her back, but was focused on Fyre. She wanted to touch him too and held his wrists with one hand, while the other went to his face. She stroked his cheek and slid her fingers into his mouth as his lips parted. Her fingers ran along the inside of his lower lip and he moaned and looked up at her pleadingly. His teeth grazed her finger lightly and, as she glanced up, she saw that Diva was blowing him fast, her fingers clawing at his hips. He was about to come.

Aurora fell on his mouth, plunging her tongue into it and kissing him deep. Sullivan was stroking her hips and buttocks from behind, massaging them deeply, sending her into overdrive. She moaned against Fyre's mouth, her hips swaying into Sullivan's hands. He moved his fingers to the crease between her buttocks, stroking the fabric of her gown into the groove, making her sex clench and her hips roll. Each time he stroked her, she plunged her tongue deeper against Fyre's. When Fyre's body flexed and he came, his mouth reached up to Aurora, meeting her kiss and holding her, until she finally let his wrists go and slid away from him.

Diva sat up, semen dripping from her lips. She licked it clean with her tongue and then moved up his chest with a line of sticky kisses. Fyre reached for her as she came up to his mouth. He turned her over and she laughed in delight as she rolled onto her back to the floor.

Aurora sat, moving back into Sullivan's lap, against the hard column of his cock through his clothes. She watched as they kissed but was intently aware of Sullivan, caressing the lines of her body, claiming her. She glanced back. He was waiting for her attention, an amused smile apparent on his face as he observed her with the others. His mouth was too inviting.

"They must have so many human genes," she

whispered.

Sullivan brushed his hand against her cheek, observing her with affection. "Let us be human too, Aurora." The bow of his erection strained against her. It had aroused him too, this strange inter-gender experiment, for the sake of pleasure, pure pleasure. She wanted him. *Was this human? Was this what they were meant to be?* The question went unanswered and forgotten, as Sullivan lifted her hips, unzipped his cock and pulled her robe high around her waist. The swish of the fabric over her skin seemed to release her from her eternal search for reason. She snaked in his grip, raising her arms to let him lift the gown off her, leaving her naked in front of them all.

Diva glanced over at her and smiled her cat-like smile, licking her lips. Fyre was enthralled, watching Aurora with Sullivan as he moved over Diva's body, pushing her gown up and tasting her, kissing her. Aurora didn't feel ashamed that they watched; she felt empowered, like a goddess, truly released from the burdens of norms and reasons. Sullivan held her body around the waist, and she wavered in his grasp, dizzy with longing. She felt his erection pressed between her buttocks. He massaged her breasts, stroking them and reaching for her nipples, tweaking them sharply. She moaned, limp with lust in his hands. His cock was hard between her thighs, brushing against

her. When he nudged the swollen head into the damp folds of her pussy and clit, she squirmed. Lust drove her on, and she lurched forward, bending over and resting on her hands and knees, inviting him to enter her and ride her from behind.

In front of her she could see Diva sprawled on the floor, moaning in ecstasy. Fyre was kneeling between her open legs, his face moving over her pussy, his tongue exploring her. Diva's gown was up around her armpits, her hands squeezing her breasts as Fyre ate her. With one hand he held her folds open to tongue her, the other rubbing his cock as it stiffened again. He crawled nearer, readying to mount her.

Aurora wriggled her hips, the sight driving her mad. Sullivan snatched at her buttocks, holding her still, his thumbs dipping in the groove of her sex to open her up. She glanced back at him. "Take me, Sullivan." He eased the swollen head inside, and she reached her hips to snatch at him, her channel melting hot juices onto his cock. "Please Sullivan," she uttered.

He thrust deeper, leaning over her back, his arms around her waist, holding her locked into place. He moved his face into the curve of her neck, kissing her. They moved in time, each thrust rolling into the next. She'd never felt so hot, so out of control, and it was good.

In front of her Fyre was fucking Diva. Her legs locked him in against her, her hands on his chest. He rose up onto his arms, burying himself deep, cursing and groaning, as if his nirvana was there in her hot cunt. Aurora began to shudder. Sullivan called her name and his body went taut as he spurted inside her. Her body arched and she moaned, her hips moving of their own accord when she came, her body clutching at his, over and over.

* * * *

The last thing Sullivan wanted to do was leave her side, but he had to get Fyre back to the malezone before the light of the distant suns began to break through the atmosphere. He kissed Aurora, stroking her pelt. "We will have to leave soon. I need to be sure he gets back."

She nodded, glancing over to where Diva and Fyre rested, curled up in one of her seats together. "They are content." She turned back to him. "Thank you," she whispered, looking at him fondly.

He wasn't sure thanking him was the right thing to do. If Diva and Fyre wanted to meet again, things might get complicated. He nodded across at Fyre, who caught the signal, stirred and took one last kiss from Diva.

Unfurling from his arms, Aurora stood and pulled on her robe. Sullivan dressed and then held her again, briefly looking into her eyes. "Take care, Aurora. I will see you at dusk." It felt as if time was short; it felt wrong to leave her.

As soon as they got outside and the door whooshed shut behind them, he nodded at Fyre. "We move away at speed, we need to be at least two quadrants of restzones away from here before we join the commuter shuttle."

Fyre nodded.

As they set off, Sullivan glanced back at him. "Well?"

"No, I didn't hate it," Fyre replied, with a grin.

"I thought not." Somehow, it didn't bode well. But the pull was too big, for all of them, despite the danger. Sullivan shook his hand and smiled wryly as they moved to a jog down the dark alleyways between the uniform rows of restzones.

Chapter Five

Aurora stepped out of the body scanner cubicle and walked to the dressing chamber, where she'd left her robe. Her hands were shaking, her hairline damp. She had a bad feeling. The medic who had scanned her had treated her with suspicion, she was sure of it. She'd also commented that it was too long, that she should have been impregnated by now. The last few times they mated, Sullivan had pulled out, giving up part of their pleasure in an attempt to make the relationship last. If the medic had sensed trouble, the multitude of implications about what would happen next marched unrelentingly into view. Their world seemed suddenly cruel, intolerable.

She dressed as quickly as her hands would allow her. Haste was required if she were to warn Sullivan, but everything was against her. Stepping out from the dressing chamber, she walked over to where the medic was keying data into her viewcom.

The medic didn't look up, typing as she spoke. "I've requested you a new procreator. This one hasn't done the job. It's a waste of time."

Aurora's heart missed a beat. She bit her lip to stop herself denying that, saying it wasn't so. "I see," she managed. "Are there any other changes I should be aware of?" She asked the question in order to stop the medic typing. As soon as the result was logged, Aurora's world would begin to fall apart.

The medic glanced over, nodding. "Your body has responded well to the hormones and you are in a good state to be fertilized. As soon as we find the right match for you, it will be over with quicker. You will have served The System well."

The right match? Sullivan was the right match for her, every part of her want to scream that aloud. But fear about what would happen next halted her, and tortured her. Sullivan had not done what he had been brought into her life to do. She loved him, and yet their time was over. *Keep it together*, she told herself.

"A new female life," the medic continued, wistfully. "A cause for celebration for us all."

Female? Aurora felt a chill descending. How did they know it would be female when she hadn't even been impregnated yet? As she wondered, she realized the two births she had heard of recently were both female. Could they control that,

something in the hormone supplements she'd been given? Were they trying to obliterate males altogether?

"Don't worry, this won't reflect on you, you have completed the first phase of the birthing task assigned to you by The System," the medic added, as if trying to reassure her.

Task? Aurora looked at her in wonder, unable to believe that cold, distant statement referred to the intimate, rapturous thing that had happened between her and Sullivan. She waited for more information but none seemed to be forthcoming. The cold medic wasn't the sort of person Aurora expected to be working for the birthing administration. But what would she truly know about it? The more her eyes were opened to the realities of her society, the more she felt ignorant of The System she was part of. The only thing she did know was that the tide of her life was about to turn and she might drown.

The medic shuffled her printouts and glanced at Aurora as if she expected her to be gone already.

Prompt her for more, play for time. "What happens now?"

"You will receive a memo with instructions about the new procreator when a match is made."

"And Sullivan?" She couldn't withhold the question.

"That part is over and done with. You must be relieved." She gave some semblance of a smile at that point, as if she truly believed that was the most comforting thing she'd said. She returned to her viewcom and then glanced back. "I've alerted the transport controller for you. The rail shuttle will be here to take you to your next appointment directly."

"Thank you." Aurora forced the platitude out. It was hard — gratitude was not one of the many varying emotions she was currently experiencing. Bedsides, she didn't want to be reminded that she was due elsewhere. She had to go straight to Jupiterzone for the centenary performance. What she wanted to do was find Sullivan, to tell him, to warn him before the news made its way through the network.

She left the medicalzone just as the rail shuttle hurtled in, the laser tracks flashing beneath it as it screeched to a halt. She climbed aboard and took her seat. Her innards were shaking, her emotions tumbling from one end of the spectrum to the other. She could barely think straight. Above all her heart ached for Sullivan — her forbidden love. She knotted her fingers together in her lap, trying to ground herself.

Glancing across the small, solitary carriage she noticed that the other two occupants were Delfidian guards. They stared back at her with

blank expressions. She looked away, focusing on the blurred images of the cityzone outside the shuttle. The speed made it hard to see anything, but the presence of the guards made her uncomfortable enough to try, just to focus on something other than them. How strange it was. A few weeks ago their presence wouldn't have even bothered her. Now they made her feel self-conscious, so aware of what she was doing and what she was thinking. She felt like a criminal. *Why? Why is it so wrong?* Her logic hated the fact she couldn't make sense of it.

Guilt riddled through her; she resented it. She didn't even know how much more time she would have with Sullivan, if any. The medic would have logged his failure to impregnate her into The System. Any control she felt over her life was being tugged away. She couldn't even contact him to warn him, because she was due to be seated with the other Government envoys at the centenary performance in less than one time space. Her absence would be noted; she would be brought to order.

Diva will be there, she remembered with relief. Her friend would hold her, share her emotion and comfort her about Sullivan. Logical thought automatically presented itself, bringing the harsh truth. Diva — who had found her own happiness with Fyre over the past ten days — didn't want to

hear that it would be over for them. *Ever*. Aurora had tried to talk to her about it the night before; because once the centenary performance was done Fyre's pass to femalezone would be revoked. It would be harder for them to see each other. Diva hadn't wanted to hear it.

She'd showed a side of herself that Aurora hadn't seen before, hotheaded, irrational. It was as if her sense of self-protection had vanished at the thought of being deprived of her new lover. Her rebellious streak threatened to turn into outright disobedience. Aurora could only hope that she'd had the time to think about it more clearly to calm down. *Please, let her be more rational today.*

The shuttle began to slow down. The guards got to their feet, readying to disembark. She noticed with disappointment that they were going to the same venue as she was, Jupiterzone. Glancing outside as the vehicle drew to a halt, she noticed other guards, counting them. *Were there always that many? Maybe.* As she turned the thoughts over in her mind she realized that they had made her feel safe and secure in Delfidian, before.

She had viewed their function as a positive thing. They were there to protect her from off-planet invasion, the danger of unknown external threat. With a sick feeling, she realized that they might also be there to keep the Delfidian order,

that which she had imagined natural. Was part of their job to quell internal problems? Problems like her? She'd never been aware of it before, because she believed everything she had been taught, and trusted The System to know best. Now she'd been introduced to new truths. Her mind was opening, but that very fact meant she could also sense that The System was about to rip her life apart.

She alighted and hurried through the massive entrance portal of Jupiterzone, making her way through the crowded reception. The building was humming with activity. She didn't have long, she had to take a place amongst the other government envoys shortly, but she had to speak with Diva first. Heading straight for the performance arena she negotiated the corridors, wishing the place were not so complex and maze-like. When she arrived, she found the auditorium was also busy; many of the seats were taken and there was a hum of expectancy in the air. Heavy curtains closed the stage off from view. She scanned the crowd, looking for Diva's distinctive hair. Eventually, she caught sight of her standing on the far aisle, a portable data reel in her hand. Nestled in her palm, it was barely obtrusive to the onlookers as she scanned them for the records.

Aurora hurried to her side, hoping that the government envoys she was due to join had not spotted her. The last thing she needed now was to

arouse suspicion. She needed to see Sullivan, to talk to him. More than that, she craved one last time with him, something she could treasure forever.

Diva's smile faded, as she grew closer. "Aurora, are you okay? You look upset."

"Let's go somewhere, I have to speak to you privately before the performance."

"This way." Diva took her hand and led her along the path that they had taken on the previous visit.

Glancing across the expanse of the empty stage, Aurora could see the activity on the far side. Irenie and her staff were busy with last-minute preparations for the performance.

Diva peered at her with concern. "You look very pale. Are you unwell?"

Aurora shook her head and embraced her friend. "Diva, I'm so afraid. The medics have dismissed Sullivan because he hasn't impregnated me. We've been trying to avoid it so they would not part us, but they're going to replace him."

Diva pulled back, her beautiful Roganza eyes flashing with concern and love. "Does Sullivan know?"

"I don't know. As I left the medical zone the medic was relaying information over her viewcom. It's only a matter of time." She clasped her friend's hands, her eyes filling with tears. "His

time in my life is over."

"But surely..." Diva shook her head, her expression once again one of denial. "Surely they will let you talk to him?"

"It is not...necessary. Our society functions on what *it* deems *necessary* between the male and female zones. He has failed to serve his purpose, so he'll be taken from my life." She paused to hold her friend's gaze. "I think my heart is breaking."

Diva took her into her arms and stroked her back, nursing her gently. "Hush."

Aurora savored the moment, taking strength from it. "Thank you, I needed that hug so much."

"You're my friend and I love you, Aurora. I feel your hurt too."

Aurora nodded, not daring to open up any more just then. "I'm going to have to take my seat for the performance, but I had to let you know." She wiped her face and rubbed her hand over her pelt in an attempt to restore order to her appearance. "It will be over soon, for all of us, we have to face it."

Diva shook her head. "There must be a way. We will find a way."

Diva might be confident, but for once Aurora knew her logic was serving her well. The System was all-powerful. The reason why there appeared to be no one questioning its norms had to be because anyone who did was silenced.

She was about to press her message home with that thought when music struck up in the auditorium. There was movement on the far side of the stage. The performance was imminent. She glanced across, trying to gauge how long she had to get back into the auditorium and take her seat. As she did, she caught sight of a sudden scuffle of bodies on the far side of the stage. Voices were raised but the words were drowned out by the music. She could see Irenie shouting instructions, and her expression was filled with annoyance.

Diva followed her gaze and, as they watched, they saw that the subject of her annoyance was Fyre's dance partner — the tall, Viking-like male. Irenie gestured him on stage and he followed her instructions, carrying an armful of objects to one side. He set them up where she directed, his expression resigned as she stood next to him, barking orders.

"She is a Shebitch that female, an ugly-hearted elitist," Diva hissed under her breath.

"She must be wound up about the performance." Aurora was about to add that they should leave, then Diva clutched Aurora's arm. Fyre had emerged onto the stage, also carrying what looked like props. Irenie turned on him, pushing him forward, cruelly venting her frustration on him. Something fell from his arms because of her action. He bent to retrieve it and, as

he did, Irenie raised her hand and delivered a cruel blow on the back of his shoulder.

Aurora's breath caught in her throat and she froze to the spot, watching in amazement. Fyre turned to look at the female who had attacked him. A slender elegant male, his spirit shone, despite the situation. Before he could speak, she delivered a string of verbal abuse. In the background one of the team signaled to another and the music level was raised to cover the disturbance. Beside her, Aurora felt Diva's indignity growing, manifesting itself in a dark, angry force. Meanwhile, the other male dancer dropped the goods in his arms and walked off stage, his expression lit through with anger. He was clearly disgusted, but to challenge a female would be an offence of the highest order. He took the only action available to him.

Aurora turned to Diva in time to catch sight of the depth of her emotion. Her eyes had gone black, narrowing, her lips drawing back. Anger poured out of her, red hot and dangerous.

"Diva, no!" She snatched at her robe.

It was too late. Diva had pulled away and was darting across the stage. She lunged at Irenie, holding her in a vice-like grip around her upper arms. Aurora followed, stepping out from the hiding place. Panic swamped her. They were on stage in front of crowds of females, shielded only

by the curtain between them and the onlookers, a crowd that included so many figures from the governing body. Fear had her in its grip, fear for the four of them, one and all.

"What in Jupiter's name are you doing?" Irenie shouted angrily, struggling in Diva's grasp.

Aurora rested her hand between them, attempting peace. "She's just upset, she's afraid you might do something you regret."

"The only one who should know regret is her." Diva nodded her head at Irenie, eyes flashing.

"No, Diva, don't do this," Fyre urged, wild-eyed. He pushed himself between the two women. "This is my problem."

Aurora's heart sank. Any hope of resolving the situation had disappeared.

Diva clutched him to her, one hand on his shoulder, glaring at Irenie over it. "Don't you touch him again." Her voice was filled with warning. Beyond them Aurora could see that Irenie's team had raised the alarm.

Irenie looked from Diva to Fyre, her expression shocked.

Diva gave a hollow laugh. "Yes, I'd rather fuck him than you. A male. And you know what, a thousand of you wouldn't measure up to one of him. You're a fool. The elitist gender segregation you subscribe to is built on a pack of lies fed to you by The System."

Irenie jerked back, horrified and insulted too. "How dare you! You're nothing but a filthy degenerate, a... a throwback." She spat the word, recoiling in horror. Members of her team gathered around her and she drew herself up to her full height within their circle. "You'll regret this, image-maker. You'll rot in confinement, I'll see to it myself."

Aurora was pushed aside as the stage filled with bodies. Guards swarmed from everywhere — buffeting her as they passed — like insects, made faceless by their uniforms and actions.

"They are throwbacks, seize them." Irene pointed at Diva and Fyre.

The guards moved in, surrounding them. Aurora was alone and helpless, her throat strangled with grief. Her hands clenched and unclenched. She clamped one over her mouth, holding back the pleading cry that threatened to break free when she saw Diva's black hair and Fyre's white mane moving inside the crowd. There were signs of struggle, a cry. Then they were gone into a moving pack of guards.

Irenie marched over to her. "You will be called upon as witness to this." Her voice lowered to a hiss. "And I warn you, if you knew anything about this, The System will find out." Her expression was filled with deadly certainty. She jerked her head, glancing around the stage,

gathering her faculties. She waved her team over, pointing to the scattered props. "Look at this place. I will not have my performance ruined by the disgusting behavior of a couple of degenerate throwbacks."

Stunned, Aurora watched for a moment as Irenie supervised the team, then she drew back and darted away. She ran down the corridors beyond the stage area, but found them empty. The guards had dispersed, Diva and Fyre were both gone. Where to? Irenie had mentioned something called 'confinement,' an unfamiliar word. She had to find out, but the only way to do that was to behave as normal and investigate as soon as possible. Any other move would have her under scrutiny too, if she weren't already.

As she made her way to the auditorium, despair threatened to overwhelm her, but through strength of will she pushed it back. If she hadn't already started to learn the truth, she realized how hideous and stifling life in Delfidian really was. Now that she knew, could she really continue to live the lie?

* * * *

Somehow she made it back to her restzone. Self-preservation, or the instinctive ability to keep putting one foot in front of the other, no matter

what's going around you. A combination of those forces got her through the performance and home. She'd weathered the disapproving comments of the other government representatives at her late arrival, while her heart thudded erratically. She tried to rationalize what she had seen, imagining what was happening to Diva and where. For Diva, Fyre and Sullivan, every second that past spelt more danger. The centenary show unfolded before her, unseen, while silent tears streamed down her face. She blinked them away, determined no one would know.

She alighted outside her restzone and staggered from the rail shuttle, barely noticing the back draft as it sped off again. To left and right the regulation housing for her level of government official lined up, identical and anonymous. Staring at the door to her designated space, she dreaded finding that Sullivan was not there, nor ever would be again. He had brought her joy; he had changed her world. Looking up to the stars she noticed that the sky above was leaden, the atmosphere over Delfidian grim, as it turned to night.

She approached her restzone and was about to put her hand on the identity plate to unlock the door when she heard a sound. Her name? Glancing around, she couldn't see anything, and then she heard the voice again. *Sullivan*. He was hidden in the shadows down the narrow alleyway

between her restzone and the next. He gestured her over, one finger on his lips.

Relief washed over her. She kissed him hurriedly. "Quickly, come inside."

He held her still, fastening her to the spot with his gaze. The fading light that reached them cast strange shadows over his face. "No. It is too dangerous. I am no longer official. If I am seen, it will bring trouble to your door."

Through the shadows she searched his face for the truth, and found it. He knew it was over. They moved, clinging to each other. Words were not necessary. She felt his heart beat hard and sure through his garments, and her own beat wildly in response. Her hands trembled when she reached up to stroke his hair, nestling close to him, absorbing the closeness of his body, the presence that she had wanted so much.

"I don't know what to feel," he whispered against her ear, his voice hoarse. "I'm angry and sad. I love you, and I must not. This life is too cruel."

"I know, my love. It is the same for me." She took a deep breath, drawing back. Her fingers locked around his head. She didn't want to be parted from him. She saw the emotion welling inside him.

He shook his head, his withheld rage flickering in his eyes. "It is wrong."

"I would do anything to be with you, Sullivan."

He lifted her chin, searching her eyes. "Would you? Would you really?"

She nodded.

"There is a way. If you are willing to give up this life, to walk away from Delfidian and into the distance zones, we can be together."

"But it's not possible to survive. It's a wasteland."

He shook his head. "That is what we've been told by The System. Don't you see?"

She nodded, seeing his point. "Do you think it's possible to survive?"

"I've seen evidence of distant crop sources, in my work. They are only visible from off-planet, but they are of measurable size."

"Grown by our species, or invaders?"

"Ours. I've heard tell of people who broke away from our society, who went to the far outposts of our planet to start new communities. There they can live in mixed gender relationships, their children can grow in a world where they are not told who they can love. It would be hard, it's a long way."

Hope flickered inside her, her mind and heart locking to the promise of light in a dark future. "Is it really true?"

"I believe it. In the malezone we hear more about such things." He drew her in against him,

stroking her pelt.

His touch was soothing through her fur. He knew that it would calm her. Was it because of his Creslet lover, she wondered? "I would do it, to be with you. But what about you, you would have to leave your male lover forever."

He gave a soft chuckle. "Proteus is very dear to me, Aurora, but I don't think you know how much I need you. I would take on every individual from the inter-galactic mongrel species in hand-to-hand combat, just to be with you."

She broke into a smile, her heart aching with pleasure.

"Perhaps Diva and Fyre would come with us," he added.

Her smile faded. "The guards have taken them. There was an incident at Jupiterzone. A female of power attacked Fyre. Diva stepped in; there was nothing I could do to stop it. They were declared throwbacks, taken by the guards."

Sullivan stared at her, then threw back his head and bared his teeth, cursing. Stepping away, the tension and rage he exuded magnified. "By the stars, why now?" He paced up and down the narrow alleyway. He was distraught too. Rightly so, beyond their mutual friendship, the kinship with another mixed-gender couple had given them all strength.

"They were taken to somewhere called

'confinement.' I don't know what this means, do you?"

He stopped pacing. "In the ancient world they would call it prison. Delfidian's shadiest secret. I only know of it by chance."

Shocked, Aurora rested back against the molded wall of her prefabricated restzone. Her body was weak, her legs felt as if they would give way beneath her. "I thought the need for prison had been eradicated?"

"Yes, they'd love us *all* to believe that." His tone was filled with growing bitterness.

She watched him, marveling at how much easier it was for her to accept these new truths. Her logic and reasoning no longer battled within her. So much of what she had trusted had been undone and exposed as lies, that she had grown; she had changed. "Sullivan, there is no going back to my old life now, not only because of what's happened between us, but my knowledge has changed me in ways that are unmanageable."

He nodded, stroking her pelt once again. "We have to try to find a new world."

She hardly dared ask the question that kept presenting itself in her mind. "What will happen to Diva and Fyre?"

"There will be a hearing in the courts. Mostly there is little point because once individuals have gone there they are deemed guilty. Confinement

can be permanent. If an individual is worth reclaiming, brain cleansing is an option."

She felt chilled to the bone by his words. When Diva had spoken of it, she'd thought these things subtle threats, not realities. *Would Diva even want to be alive after that?*

He looked at her, but his eyes were narrowed with thought. "There may be a way to get news of them. Proteus works in the court service of the confinement administration, that's why I know of it. It's a long shot, and he may refuse to help me, but I'm willing to try." There was doubt in his eyes.

Would it endanger him even more, she wondered? Fear hit her, hard and real. Instinctively, she clung to him, her body rubbing against his, her hands suddenly unable to grasp enough of him. He responded, thrusting his tongue into her mouth as if his life depended on her, his hands clutching her to him, his cock hardening. In the darkness of the alleyway they sought each other out, passionate, fevered kisses born of love and fear. Raw need barreled through her and she reached for his belt, freeing his cock and marveling as it grew in her hand. This part of him joined them together; it fused them physically and emotionally. She knew instinctively that the channel of her sex was made for this. Forbidden or not, she wanted it.

He groaned as she started to work the shaft.
"Aurora..."

"I need this." She wanted to keep her hands on him, always. To see his desire for her manifest melted her. She stroked his cock hard, her other hand lifting his balls, already high and tight against his body. One hand went to the wall behind her; the other held her shoulder, anchoring them both. His cock was rock hard and wet. He gave another groan and she felt him rising in her hand. He lifted her chin and looked into her eyes.

She wanted him, she needed him and she loved him.

"Aurora," he whispered. His cock leapt, spurted.

A rail shuttle hurtled by, flashing light into the alleyway. It stopped further along the block. The sound of people alighting reached them. Sullivan pulled his clothes into order. "We must part before we are seen."

She knew it was true, but she couldn't stand it. "Try to find out what you can about Diva and Fyre, but if it's too dangerous, promise me you will walk away."

"Don't worry about me. You must do your duties, act as normal. I'll try to find out what I can about the distant zones." He kissed her on the forehead, before pulling away. "Hurry now, go inside. I'll return here in exactly one dayspace."

He gestured her back the way she had come, turning to go in the opposite direction.

Her heartbeat in her ears amplified in the void after he'd gone. Her hands, still sticky with his essence, went to her face. "Be careful, my love." She whispered the plea as he disappeared down the dark alley and into the blocks beyond.

Chapter Six

“Let me get this straight.” Proteus stared at Sullivan in amazement. “Not only do you want me to help you make contact with those two throwbacks, you want me to condone what they do together?”

Sullivan knew he was going to have a hard time convincing Proteus. He also knew that certain aspects of his former lover’s nature might work in their favor. The truth was that Proteus wasn’t born to work. At that very moment — and even though he was annoyed — he was reclining languorously on the cushions in his small restzone, as if he were some ancient human king who needed pampered. Sullivan loved that about him, it had attracted him. He was as sexual as the legendary creature known as the panther, darkly attractive, and he knew it. He’d been a passionate lover but demanding too, with his taste for the dramatic and his love of luxury items. That’s why he’d applied for the job in the courts. It was menial, beneath

him, but the rewards were good. He secretly detested the place and longed to cause disruption there.

"You're largely a Creslet and your logic commands you to believe the majority. But don't you think those people who are considered throwbacks might deserve to be considered seriously, that they should have some sort of choice in who they love and mate with?"

Proteus sighed and waved one elegant hand dismissively. "Surely you don't believe those rumors about mixed gender relationships being possible, they were ruled out as primitive centuries ago. Insanity has taken hold of them and you know it."

Sullivan braced himself. "I not only believe the rumors, I subscribe to them."

Proteus didn't register his meaning for several moments, and then he gave a harsh, disbelieving laugh. "Don't tell me you enjoyed fucking her?"

Sullivan nodded. "I want to stay with her."

Proteus' eyes flashed. "I loved you," he declared, vehemently.

Sullivan reached for his hand. "And I loved you, I still do."

Proteus pulled away, but glanced at him from under his lashes, his ego still needing to hear those words.

Sullivan sighed. "I'll always love you. You are

part of my life, part of my heart. But I love Aurora too. I don't expect you to understand it, but just consider it possible, as it was in ancient human times."

Proteus shook his head, but his expression grew sad.

"I want to be with her, but The System has ended it. They want to match her with another male, to procreate, but she wants to be with me. Even if I had impregnated her, she'd be expected to rear the child alone or with another high-ranking female." He paused. "If it were you and I that were in the situation, imagine how you might feel now."

Proteus flashed him a warning glance. "Enough with the empathy, Sullivan. You know I would have stayed with you forever. That's a cruel thing to make me think about."

"I'm sorry." Sullivan grew quiet for a moment as he considered Proteus. He sensed an underlying fascination developing. He wanted to know. His interest in the dramatic had been stirred, perhaps. "I care about you deeply, Proteus, and I hate to ask this of you, but you are my only hope. We are going to leave the cityzone. If we make it through to the distant zones we can build a community. Alone, Aurora and I will struggle. If there are more of us, we would be stronger. I feel sure Diva and Fyre would take this

opportunity for a new life, if they had the chance."

"Enough." Proteus put up his hands in a signal to stop, and then pounced to his feet, pacing back and forth like a caged creature.

Sullivan gave him a moment and then stood up, walked over and put one hand on his shoulder.

Slowly, Proteus turned back. His eyes were filled with emotion. "Damn you, Sullivan."

"Will you help me, for old times sake?"

"I'll do what I can...for old times sake." He looked wounded, his mouth down-turned.

"Thank you."

"I know the couple. I confess there is some morbid fascination in me." He shrugged when Sullivan raised his eyebrows. "Blatant curiosity, nothing more...the hearing takes place tomorrow. I'll be taking them from their cells to the court at timespace 10, so if you're going to do it you'll have to make your move then. Once they go into the hearing, they'll go straight from there to permanent confinement." His gaze dropped then rose, slowly. "They've already been deemed unworthy of brain cleansing. There's really no hope for them."

Sullivan nodded. This was their only chance.

* * * *

The following day, Aurora glanced at her

timespacer. It was nearing timespace 10. She was stiff with tension, her mind running through the plan over and again, listing the details to be sure she hadn't forgotten anything. He'd had so little time to lay out the plan the night before, and she was so afraid something would go wrong. Her heart beat for Sullivan, willing him safe passage and success. She tried to concentrate on her part in it; one tiny mistake could ruin their chances, forever. Fixing a calm smile on her face, she did her best to exude efficiency despite the trepidation she felt. The male in front of her was clearly confused by both her presence and her request.

"I am the government official responsible for the Cultura data produced for Delfidian consumption. I will be doing a feature on the cropzones and how they differ from farming and harvesting in past worlds." *Please, please let him believe.* Sullivan had assured her that her status would gain her access to the outer crop zone. She needed to pull this off and get to the rendezvous point at the same time as Sullivan, whether he was alone, or with the others.

The male frowned. "I haven't had any instructions from the administration."

She flashed him her governing body identification badge. "Between us," she said conspiratorially, "The article is a surprise for my supervisor. She is fascinated with your superb

crop work here."

"Ah, I understand." The male nodded, proudly. He glanced at the day spacer. "I have to log on to the network in one-time space, but there should be enough time to give you a tour of the crop zone before then."

This was her telling moment. She had to push him even harder now. "You know what I'd really like to do. I'd like to explore on my own, get a feeling for the place, you know, for that first impact of something new. I've never seen crops growing before. If I have you there I will channel your words, and it will harm the integrity of my article." Her heart thumped in her chest. If anyone had said it to her she'd have called them pretentious, but Sullivan had reasoned with her, telling her she had the status to get away with it.

The male frowned, shuffling his feet. He glanced out of the building and over at the motorized shuttle used for traversing the cropzones. Aurora followed his gaze. The motorized shuttle was her target. She'd been willing to walk out of Cityzone, but Sullivan had convinced her to attempt this. The vehicle's power would run out within a few days, but it would put them that far ahead. She agreed because she had no idea what state they would all be in, if Sullivan was even able to action the escape plan. Her nerves were shot to Jupiter.

She smiled again, encouragingly, not wanting to lose the headway she'd made with the male. Time was short. If she were to get to the designated rendezvous point in the shuttle, she had to hurry. Her absence would have already been noted. She was supposed to be at the court to provide a witness statement. The guards would already be looking for her. Timing was essential. "If you show me how to operate the shuttle, then I can just have a wander, I won't take up any more of your time. You've been very helpful and I will recommend you to The System for promotion." She watched his expression; using the bait Sullivan had given her from his knowledge of the male.

The male pondered some more, his thoughtful silence stretching her nerves to breaking point. Then he nodded. "I would appreciate that. I'd like to be involved in the off planet crop trials." He gave her a hopeful smile.

She nodded. *So far so good.* This part of Sullivan's plan had worked. Once she secured the vehicle she had to follow the perimeter track where it traveled along the edge of the cityzone, until she reached the spot where Sullivan planned to emerge. The simple map he had drawn her was etched inside her mind. She could only pray to the stars that he was safe and he would be there to meet her.

* * * *

“Hey, you there.”

Sullivan stood bolt upright. His head snapped around.

A female guard stood behind him, arms folded across the chest. “You missed a bit.” She gave a smarmy smile.

He looked at where she pointed on the wall and nodded. It was a wonder anyone could see anything. The walls of the court buildings were shit-colored, the same dull brown as the boiler suit staff uniform that Proteus had given him to wear. Backing up, he ran the electronic wall swiper back over the spot again, lifting the film of atmospheric dust that gathered on the walls in the cityzone. He waited for her to nod her approval, and then moved on down the corridor. The guard stomped on past him a moment later. He breathed a sigh of relief and pushed the machine faster along the corridor towards his destination.

Moments later, he reached it. Urinal Seventeen. He pushed the door open and stepped inside. Abandoning his cleaning equipment, he leaned his back against the door and glanced at his timespacer. Not bad. He’d covered the majority of the court building in eight minutes. Wearing the shit-brown uniform of the lower staff, he’d cleaned the walls across two floors and sixteen

corridors, to get to the place where Proteus would pass by with Diva and Fyre.

He glanced around. Three cubicles; one was locked. He walked into the middle cubicle, stood on the toilet seat and glanced over the wall into the next cubicle. He could see that Proteus had left a bag of clothing for Diva and Fyre, as he said he would. He mounted the wall and dropped onto the other side. Opening up the bags he discovered two more shit-brown uniforms.

He opened up the cubicle and walked out. Pacing over to the narrow window, he glanced down. It was a sheer drop, but as Proteus had described, it dropped into an alleyway, a narrow gloomy corridor that opened out onto a service road. He glanced into the bags, making sure that everything was there.

Then the door behind him swung open and he shoved the bag behind his cleaner.

A similarly uniformed staff member walked in and headed for a urinal. Sullivan reached for his wall cleaner and worked. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that the male was done and was peering at himself analytically in the mirror. He busied himself, trying to look as if he was meant to be there, but the male barely signaled to him on the way out. Proteus had assured him that there was no love lost between the employees here, and he was right. Another thing that annoyed Proteus,

no doubt. He craved attention, but they were all just doing what they had to, for a comfortable life.

By the stars, had he really been that willing to tow the male line, before he met Aurora? It disgusted him. He was ready to damn The System for what it did to them all. He had his doubts — doubt that they would survive this, doubt that they would reach a safe haven. But he was beyond that now; he was compelled to act on this. He had to see it through because it was about the truth, recognizing his true nature. He and Aurora had teamed up with Diva and Fyre for safety in numbers. It might be a fatal error, but they had been in it together since he'd first contacted Fyre.

Reaching inside the bag he found the length of cable and tested its strength. He latched it around a pipe and rested the coiled cable on the sill. He was about to open the window when the door behind him sprang open. Proteus walked in. He looked at Sullivan with a stern glance and shook his head, hand raised against his chest in silent warning. Behind him Diva and Fyre shuffled into the urinal, heads lowered, their bodies in matching black uniforms. They were tethered together by a metal bar that kept them at arms length, but locked together. A second male in uniform was behind them. Sullivan froze to the spot. He expected only Proteus.

Proteus stepped behind the door and, once they

were all into room, he shut the door, then landed the second uniformed male a crippling blow on the back of the neck with his baton. The male crumpled, eyeballs turned up, mouth open. Proteus watched as he hit the floor, then glanced at Sullivan. "I always hated the bastard anyway, he got promotion and a better wage over me." There was a maniacal look in his eye. He pushed Diva and Fyre toward Sullivan.

Diva lifted her head. Dazed, her eyes stared at him blankly for several moments, then she blinked and recognition hit. "Sullivan?"

He reached to touch them both. Fyre raised his head. Bruises covered his face. Proteus grabbed the metal bar between them and entered a code into the center panel. It snapped it open, freeing them. He threw the bar onto the floor. Diva rubbed her wrists distractedly, scanning the room with waking eyes. Fyre touched her and held her as if he couldn't believe she were real.

Sullivan gave them only a moment, they could not spare more, then urged them towards the bags of clothing. "There are two staff uniforms, get them on as quickly as you can." They were both moving like robots, barely able to function. Three days with The System had done this to them? When he felt sure they were able to grasp the task, he looked again at Proteus who stood with his back to the door, barring it. He tapped the baton

he had used on the other male in his hand.

Sullivan held his gaze, aware that any moment Proteus could change his mind, and began to unravel the cable. He dared not take his gaze off Proteus, whose beautiful eyes were narrowed as he observed the three of them, a mixture of pain and envy shining there.

"I will never forget that you did this for us."

"What good is that to me?" He flashed him a look that chilled Sullivan. His beauty was harsh, his animosity deadly.

"Proteus, come with us."

Proteus shook his head, smiling sadly. "There is nothing for me out there."

"How do you know? It might be hard, but wouldn't it better to be in a place where individual choice meant something?" Glancing back, he saw that Fyre had donned the boiler suit and was helping Diva with hers. They were almost ready to go.

Proteus shook his head.

"What about him?" Sullivan nodded at the body of the floor.

"I've thought about it. You'll have to give me a dose of the same." He smiled then, no small amount of masochism in his expression. "Just watch the kisser, lover, it's my best asset." His voice was heavy with sarcasm, and he mouthed a kiss. "A nice jaw shot will do the job." He held out

the baton.

Sullivan stared at him, then at the baton. There was no use arguing. Either he came with them or he had to have a good alibi. "You're sure you won't come instead."

"In the game of love someone always has to lose out, let's face it." He sidled closer. "Hey, don't feel too bad. I'll get compensation and time off for a work-related injury, and if you hit me hard enough I'll be able to hate you that much easier." He gave a dark laugh, reached out one long, elegant hand, grasped Sullivan behind the neck and pulled him into a passionate kiss.

Sullivan was shocked, but his mouth, so familiar, crushed against his own so desperately, he returned the kiss, stroking the pelt on his neck lovingly, the good memories flashing through his mind.

Proteus traced the outline of his body, fleetingly, then he pulled away. "I wish you well, Sullivan. Now do it quickly, the guards will be here at any moment."

Sullivan glanced round. Fyre was watching, the cable ready in his hands. "Drop the cable out of the window," he instructed. Turning back, he blinked, and then landed a right hook on Proteus' outer jaw, catching him in his arms as he crumpled under the blow.

His eyes shut then flickered open, a faint smile

still on his face.

Sullivan lowered him gently beside the other male on the floor and reached to place a tender kiss on the place he just hit. He felt wretched. "I'm sorry, lover."

"Go now," Proteus whispered, and then he nodded his understanding, one finger on his lips.

"I'll never forget you." Sullivan squeezed his shoulder and then forced himself to turn away.

He jerked the cable, making sure it was anchored. He glanced out the window. The alleyway below was quiet. "Diva, you follow behind me, stay close and I will watch out for you. Fyre, you take up the rear. When we hit the ground, we turn left and we run as fast as we can to the city perimeter. It's maybe twenty minutes at a jog." He looked at them with doubt; they were already weak after what they had been through. "We'll go as fast as *you* can, okay."

Diva nodded. "We'll be with you."

"All being well, Aurora will be there with a motorized shuttle. I've stashed supplies near to the meeting point. We have to get them into the vehicle as quickly as possible, and then we are gone. We're leaving the cityzone forever." He made sure they understood. "Are you ready?"

They both nodded.

"Thank you Sullivan," Fyre said.

"Don't thank me, we're not done yet." He

climbed onto the sill. As he lowered himself down the cable and watched Diva make a shaky start behind him, he clenched his jaw and prayed to the stars they all made it.

"Go," Fyre said, as he brought up the rear, dropping to the ground with a whack, his body crumpling. He waved them on, clambering to his feet.

Sullivan urged Diva to start, pointing the route and leading. He could tell they were weak and stiff from confinement. He set a jogging pace, glancing back to be sure they were with him. The map he had memorized took them down the darkest alleyways, the most unfrequented routes through this outer part of the cityzone. The area was unpopulated, the streets grim and the air rank. Confinement had been built far from anything other than manufacturing and storage buildings, but there were always passing workers who might spot them.

When they paused to cross the main thoroughfare, he held his hand up and stopped the others, waiting for a couple of passers-by to go out of sight. "How you doing?"

The two of them nodded, but he could see that they were flagging already.

"It's not far now." *Far enough*, he thought to himself, fearing the worst. He was about to step out and wave them on, when he spotted two

armed guards approaching. He flattened against the wall, his heart thundering in his chest. It looked like a regular patrol, and mercifully they didn't catch sight of them hiding in the shadows. They were dawdling, chatting as they went. They weren't looking for anyone yet.

After the guards had gone, they made it across the thoroughfare. The most dangerous part was over. Then he heard Diva cry out. Drawing to a halt, he saw that she'd tripped and Fyre was helping her to her feet. He went back.

"I'm okay," she murmured. She put weight on her leg. "Ankle feels a bit sore, but I can walk on it."

"No time." He lifted her into his arms. They'd move quicker this way. "Fyre, it's straight on to the perimeter now. You go ahead of us, watch out for passers-by." As they moved, Diva rolled against his shoulder, her face pale.

Got to make it.

Eventually the buildings thinned out and he saw the perimeter of the cropzone. He swallowed hard, his heart beating fast, when he realized he couldn't see Aurora or the vehicle at the designated meeting point. "Wait here," he instructed Fyre, lowering Diva to the ground. "Stay with Diva, I'll be back."

He ran into the crops, following the perimeter fence. He could see the supplies he'd hidden

amongst the crops earlier that morning, but the track looked untouched. He squatted, ran his hand over the ground. No vehicle had driven down here for days. Then he caught a sound. A vibration ran through his palm. A moment later a motorized shuttle reared around the corner and hurtled towards him. The vehicle slammed to a halt in front of him and Aurora scrambled out, running into his arms.

He clutched her to him, looking down at her face. "Are you all right?"

She nodded. "Fine, but...please tell me you'll drive that thing from now on."

He nodded and gave a hoarse laugh, hugging her to him, aching with relief. "You start loading the supplies, I'll get the others."

"You found them?" Her eyes lit.

"I found them." He glanced around, watchful and uneasy. "Now, let's get the hell out of here."

Chapter Seven

Aurora stirred in her sleep. Her body sensed the warmth of another. *Sullivan*. His arm around her shoulders as she nestled against his chest was bliss. She smiled as she opened her eyes. She couldn't wish for a better way to wake than in his arms, whatever happened to them now, it was worth it for this. His breathing was deep and even, and she moved carefully, trying not to wake him as she glanced around. The ruined building where they had taken shelter had given them cover, but the doors and windows had long since gone and the night had been cold. Dawn was breaking through the atmosphere, spilling pale light into the old house. Shivering, she counted her blessings, waking to one more day alive and being together in this faraway place. She felt relief, as well as fear.

The shuttle had served them well, carrying them for three full days before the power had drained. The last two days they had been on foot.

Sullivan estimated that they were more than halfway to the land where crops were being harvested, the place he had seen from off-planet, the place he had heard rumors of in the males zone. A fabled community of Delfidian rebels, people like them.

"Mm, feels good," Sullivan whispered, drawing her back in against him.

"I was trying not to wake you. You need your rest."

"I've been awake for a while, just enjoying the feeling."

She rolled her head back and looked at him. His darkly handsome face was lit through with concern. He pressed closer and she felt his erection against her thigh. "What a glorious way to wake up," she said, and reached for his belt, undoing it and stroking his cock in her hand, reveling at its girth, its rigidity as it hardened for her. "It was worth everything, every risk we faced and still face, for this feeling of rightness."

"It may not be over yet."

The seriousness in his expression made her heart ache and her body crave his, in real physical terms. She crawled over him, her legs splaying, her body eager for him. "I know. Whatever happens, I'm glad we tried to be together." She lifted onto her knees on either side of his hips and opened her folds with her fingers, a sudden

urgency to have him inside her directing her actions.

He lay on his back, holding her hips loosely, watching her with shining eyes.

She mounted his cock and eased down onto it slowly, savoring every moment, every sensation. As she settled on him, he filled her to capacity, stretching the walls of her sex, squashing her cervix with the head of his cock. Bliss, heady bliss swamped her groin as she lifted and thrust, taking him deep and rising up until his hands gripped her hips tighter and he moaned aloud.

It was a fast, sleep-laden fuck, the glorious union of the dawn, and yet it was also filled with the desperate, overwhelming need they had to be together. When she tightened and spilled, he called her name and his hips lifted from the floor, his cock spurting inside her.

She rested over him, letting him hold her against his chest; until their juices spilled down onto his belly and her thighs were slick. Lifting her chin she glanced at him, "Shall we see what today brings?" It was a difficult question. Their supplies were low. They were all exhausted and had no idea how far they had to go, and what faced them. Diva in particular was close to collapse. Deep down they each wrestled with doubts. Did the rebel communities even exist?

He nodded.

She rolled off him, rubbed her shoulders and glanced at the sky through the crumbling window frame. She stood, straightening her robe, and stretched.

"This place has been used by others," Sullivan commented, pointing over into the corner where a worn blanket laid alongside empty food canisters.

Aurora nodded. "Yes, last night it felt like no one had been here in centuries, but it's obvious now, in the daylight."

"Others made it this far," he added, as if to himself.

She knew he felt responsible for leading them, and that his doubts and hopes were greatest of all. Glancing through the doorway she saw that Diva and Fyre were nestled together in the next room. She wondered again about the bruises on Fyre's face. Diva looked drawn even in sleep, and she held Fyre close against her. Aurora's heart swelled with pride for them, having survived what they did, facing up to The System for what was truth to them.

She walked to the window and looked across the strange new landscape. The ruin was set against an outcrop of craggy rocks. The horizon was obscured with the scurries of dust that moved across their planet at dawn. Ahead of her, and as far as she could see in the shifting dawn atmosphere, a barren landscape filled her vision.

Sullivan rose and joined her by the window. She felt him at her back and they stared at the view together. His hand roved from her breast down to her belly. He bent and rested a kiss against her neck.

Staring at the dust on the horizon and the barren plain, all her fears and doubts rose up inside her. She turned in his arms. "There's something I must ask. Sullivan. Your lover got us here, do you feel badly, leaving him behind?"

He gave a wry smile. "I asked him to come. He wouldn't bend."

"He's a Creslet."

"No, he's a Delfidian."

She returned his smile. "I like your distinction."

"You're a Creslet but your strength overcame what you had been taught."

"You're sure no one will come after us?"

He shook his head. "It's all about resources. They will fight to keep you within their control, but once you've gone, you've gone. There is no going back, though."

"I don't care, as long as I'm with you."

Stroking her back, he held her in his arms and sighed happily when they drew apart. A moment later she felt his attention shift. "Look," he whispered, and turned her back towards the window. "Perhaps we are nearer than I thought."

The atmosphere was lifting. There on the

distant, shimmering horizon, the landscape had changed, and before them they saw the distant outline of trees. Signs of a new community? A new life? Hope welled inside her.

“Come on, let’s go see.” They passed into the other room. Diva and Fyre stirred, joining them as they went outside. Sullivan covered his eyes, squinting into the distance. “Looks like established orchards, established in the old ways though, not in regulated zones and environments like we had adjacent to the cityzone.”

“Look,” hissed Diva, nudging them and pointing off at a right angle.

Aurora stared, at first in fear, then in disbelief. Three figures were approaching, on foot. They were swathed in strange garments and seemed to be heading directly for them, as if they had seen them across the barren plains or knew they were there and were coming after them. Her heart thudded precariously in her chest, doubt riddling through her.

Diva glanced at Sullivan. “What do we do?”

“Wait,” he replied, staring at the figures, his jaw set hard and determined.

Aurora snatched Diva’s hand into her own, taking Sullivan’s in the other. Diva linked to Fyre, and they waited. Whatever they faced, they faced it together.

Slowly, as they grew closer, the figures came

into focus. They lowered the hoods on their garments. It was a male, and two females. They spoke to one another, and the male nodded. He stopped, lifted a hand, and waved in greeting.

Diva gasped aloud and broke free, her hands lifting to her face. Fyre started to wave.

As they got nearer, Aurora could see that the strangers were smiling. She felt tears welling in her eyes. Sullivan grabbed her against him. She kissed him hurriedly, waving back and watching as the figures walked on towards the four of them.

"You come in search of a safe haven?" the male said, when they reached them.

"We are seeking the fabled mixed gender communities," Sullivan replied.

"You have found us, and we are no fable. Welcome." He shook Sullivan by the hands and the two females greeted them, each in turn, offering water and food.

"Happy to be a throwback?" Sullivan whispered to Aurora, while the two females fussed over Fyre's bruises and Diva's strapped ankle, and the male signaled to base for help.

"Happy to be a throwback," she agreed, looking at him fondly.

He ran a finger across her smiling mouth. "When I started to fall in love with you, I imagined this moment, and I began to wonder if we were throwbacks to a happier, better time."

She could see sense in his words. "Yes, perhaps the old world wasn't such a bad place...and this new world too, if it's more like the old one than what our society became?"

"Yes, the new world too. We will be together, together we are strong." His voice turned husky, and he held her tighter still.

She nodded. "Together we are strong." Her heart brimmed with emotion, her mind filled with hope and expectation. She pulled him against her and welcomed the desires that had grown inside her, wanting to be the essential thing that her heart knew was right and true.

Gender would not keep them apart. No rules or laws could quash the force of desire and love. They had beaten The System.

About the Author

Saskia Walker is a British author who writes across genres: erotica, erotic romance, and fantasy. Her fiction has been published in over thirty anthologies, and her novel-length work spans from contemporary erotic romance to ancient fantasy. Saskia lives in the north of England on the windswept Yorkshire moors, where she happily spends her days spinning yarns. She has lots more stories to tell! Please visit:

www.saskiawalker.co.uk for more information.