



ARIES RISING

SYRELL STARR

Airies Rising
by Syrell Starr

Champagne Books

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Airies Rising
by Syrell Starr

Carnal Passions Presents

Aries Rising

By

Syrell Starr

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Airies Rising
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Other Books By Syrell Starr

Truth Or Dare

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Dedication

This one goes to my loving husband for all the wonderful years we've been blessed with.

I'd also like to thank the many hands that shaped this story from beginning to end, the numerous critique partners (you know who you are), my wonderful editor, Mindy and last but not least, Carnal Passions for giving me the opportunity to write passionate stories.

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Prologue

Santran Dec La stormed into Erickson's office and threw down the latest issue of *Wild Thing*. The girly rag landed on its spine, opening to reveal the luscious bare curves of the current centerfold. "Hartman paid you well to provide the necessary merchandise. He doesn't like it when you hold out on him."

Erickson T'skra leaned back in his black leather chair and steepled his fingers. "Hartman pays me for the *right* merchandise."

Santran narrowed beady eyes and tapped a bejeweled finger on a well-endowed breast displayed in vivid color. "He paid you for this."

Erickson's eyes never left Santran's, but even without glancing at the image, he knew what Santran meant. "Hartman will receive the required shipment as per specifications, but ... Sierra Madison does not fit the parameters I was given."

"He wants this one."

Erickson pushed the chair away from the desk and stood. He rounded the corner to confront Santran. The man straightened, his upper lip curled with derision. Erickson picked up the magazine, closed it and slapped it against his thigh. "I'm one of the best readers in the business. When I finally find the right woman, Hartman will be most satisfied with the result, or he can have his precious money back."

"He wants Sierra."

"I'm the matchmaker here. Sierra doesn't have the emotional stamina to withstand Hartman's ardent attentions."

Santran started to say more, but Erickson held up a hand. "I promise. Hartman will be satisfied with the choice I make."

Santran snapped his thin mouth closed and stalked away. The door slammed behind him. Erickson shook his head, frustrated by the greed some men possessed. Hartman had no business owning a prize like Sierra. His gaze drifted to the magazine still gripped between tense fingers.

He sauntered back to his chair and plopped down as if the weight of Crausus sat on his shoulder. Oh, what he wouldn't give to be back on his home planet away from the corruption of the Nebexa Tricorn. But his unusual talent had put him on a primitive planet. If only these Earthlings knew the service they provided for beings galaxies away.

He laid the magazine on the desk and flipped to the centerfold.

Sierra Madison.

Her image whetted more than his appetite. Draped across the steps of a child's slide, her long tanned limbs glistened in the bright sun. The playground hinted at the woman's innate innocence, a rare treasure amidst the jaded pages of male literature. A single pearl nestled between full breasts. Each nipple stood erect against dark, rose-tinted areolas. Her bent legs gave him a full view of her sweet pussy and the thin line of curls that tempted his touch. Unlike most of the women on display, Sierra wore no high heels, no garters, no fishnet hoses, nothing to detract from her natural beauty. While

slightly parted lips invited men to sample her delights, her silver blue eyes hinted at deep sadness.

Sierra had not posed for this picture without soul-gripping reservation.

Visual beauty alone never enticed him, but this one...

He ran a practiced finger along her silky thigh, stroking the image with a slow, measured caress. Images flashed. A sick brother, deceased parents, a college scholarship, a raw talent for cooking. The woman pictured didn't belong among the other models. She lacked the brazen attitude of a seasoned stripper. No—this woman was innocent, a victim of circumstance.

He slammed his palm flat against her body.

Hartman would never own this flower. Never.

No, he had someone more deserving in mind. He trailed his finger, again, along her gentle curves and smiled. This piece of merchandise would know the full meaning of love and desire.

The *matchmaker* deemed it so.

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One

Gondar Lem tweaked the setting of Vi Twelve's air capacitor. The ancient equipment needed replacing, but funds being what they were, he'd have to nurse this one a little longer. He ducked under cooling pipes and made his way back to his land yacht. He smiled. Some Earth terms were quite quaint, and he used them frequently, land yacht being one of his favorites.

By Jupiter, he missed that planet. But—this secluded spot in the galaxy afforded a certain anonymity that soothed him. He climbed inside the PT30 and set the hover speed to forty leagues per hour. At this rate, he'd be inside the compound in less than thirty minutes. Fine sand nestled into every crease and crevice of his body. What he wouldn't do for a cold mist shower and a tall glass of grostel, a local substitute for beer.

He was halfway home when a landing bubble appeared on the horizon. His eyes strained to make out details. Whoever visited this desolate planet did so with purpose. He frowned. Only a handful of ex-Skynets knew of his location, and those men would never breach his sanctum.

Had someone come looking for the Farenate Trasale after all these years? He shook his head, unwilling to believe the location for the top-secret technology had been discovered.

He drew closer to the bubble, his curiosity peaked. One league from his visitor, he drew his Delta 380, standard issue for Skynet employees. Caution kept him from stealing any

closer. He waited. On a planet where time was man's best friend, patience was a honed skill.

The bubble dissolved, and Gondar blinked several times, sure he hallucinated.

"Erickson?"

The matchmaker nodded. "How long has it been? Ten? Eleven cycles?"

"I thought never to see your ugly mug again."

Erickson laughed and strode forward. "No such luck, my friend."

He sheathed his weapon and clasped Erickson's hand. The sudden human contact struck a chord deep within Gondar's chest. He withdrew his hand, chagrined by the sudden surge of emotion. He turned his head toward the compound to hide the vulnerability he felt.

"You're looking well. Solitude agrees with you."

Gondar grunted.

"Offer me a ride to the compound," Erickson commanded.

"Climb on."

The short ride home afforded him time to come to grips with Erickson's sudden appearance. The matchmaker never made social visits. Direct and to the point, Erickson's arrival could mean only one thing. His heart accelerated at the thought.

Nine cycles he'd waited. The man held no scruples when it came to dealing in dreams.

Gondar guided his PT30 into the hangar and set the brake. Behind him, Erickson's knee pumped into his back, and Gondar jumped.

Erickson chuckled. "Nine cycles on this outpost has made you edgy."

"You'd be edgy too, if there was a price on your head."

"Hartman still gunning for you, then?"

"Last I heard. He still hasn't forgiven me."

"How often do travelers seek refuge here?"

"Too often." If once every eight to ten months could be considered often.

"Still a man of few words, I see."

Gondar rounded on the man. "Look, tell me what you came to say and leave."

"Edgy. Very edgy."

Gondar growled and headed for the galley. He yanked open the cold compartment and pulled out a bottle of grostel. Popping the top, he guzzled a healthy swig, not bothering to offer any refreshment to his guest.

"Mind if I join you?"

Gondar shrugged. "Sure."

"Look, the cold treatment is wearing thin."

"Implying I should welcome you with open arms and pleasant conversation?"

"For starters."

He leaned against the counter and studied the man he had once called friend. "So where is she? Where's my merchandise?"

"Edgy and blunt." Erickson cradled a bottle of cold brew and swept the room with a practiced eye.

"You won't find any photos if that's what you're searching for. I've no use for captured images of myself."

"Edgy, blunt, and astute. You've grown hard, Gondar. I need to read your image before I deliver the package."

"Hope you brought a camera."

"A fresh picture isn't the same as one that's aged."

"Take it or leave it. I've got no albums in my closet." The lie rolled easy off his lips. He owed Erickson no favors after waiting so long. Even now, he wasn't so sure he wanted the girl. His desires and needs had changed over the years.

Erickson withdrew a small camera and snapped an image without waiting for Gondar to pose. After an adjustment or two, a holographic likeness appeared before him. Gondar shuddered at the likeness. When had his face developed so many hard lines? Would a woman find his dark looks pleasing?

Tapered fingers reached out and stroked the image, poking and prodding. Gondar flinched at the matchmaker's intense scrutiny.

Did he still want a mate? After nine cycles of solitude, what woman would put up with his idiosyncrasies? And stamina? Would a woman chosen for him have the ability to withstand long, intense sessions of lovemaking? For after nine cycles of sporadic sexual episodes, he had a lot to make up for.

"You still harbor fetishes banned by the alliance, my friend."

"Guilty, but I see no harm if we both share the same desires."

"True," Erickson said and continued his exploration. "Your altercation with Hartman causes me some worry, but I see no plans for revenge."

"I won't hesitate to kill him, but I don't actively seek his demise."

"Your conversation skills need work. Communication is a key ingredient to all sound relationships."

"What I have in mind requires little talk."

"Your heart is scarred. Perhaps I've erred in my decision."

Gondar gritted his teeth. He would not beg for something promised to him.

Erickson snapped the image off and sighed. "I traveled a long way to pay an old debt. Whatever happens, don't make me regret this decision."

"Quit the theatrics. Either you have a girl selected for me or not."

"Poor woman. You definitely need work conversing." He fished inside his jacket and pulled out a magazine, the corners worn and bent.

Gondar reached for the rag, anxious to view his chosen bride. Erickson hesitated for only a moment before handing over the seedy material.

Gondar licked his lips, the front cover enough to make his crotch ache for release. Like a man deprived of sweets, he slowly devoured the magazine, page by luscious page. When he reached the centerfold, he stopped. Something about this girl held his attention. He scanned the layout for a name. Sierra Madison.

"You have a connoisseur's eye."

"I can't stop looking at her eyes."

"Good. Your sensitivity is still there. I feared it gone through lack of use." Erickson laid a hand across her belly.

"She aches. She needs a strong, sensitive man, one willing to see past her innocence."

"Is she..."

Erickson nodded.

"Bring her to me. You promised."

"I would, but I can't."

Gondar dropped the magazine and grabbed the lapel of Erickson's jacket. "Why bother coming here if all you planned to do was play games?"

"Ease up. She's still yours. But—you will have to fetch her."

Gondar shoved him away. "When do we leave?"

Erickson knelt and picked up the magazine. "Now, if you like."

"I like."

"Fine, but Gondar?"

"Hmm."

"Just remember. Looks can be deceiving."

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Two

Sierra tore open the large, brown envelope she'd brought in with the mail.

Candy Duvall, her roommate and confidante, glanced over her shoulder. "Another job offer?"

She nodded. "I hate the position I'm in."

"What? The reclining position or the one where you...?"

"Not funny, Candy."

Candy wiggled her eyebrows. "You're such a prude. Admit it. You got a certain rush from posing, a pre-sex tingle that tempted your promiscuous side."

Sierra crossed her legs, uncomfortably aware of the heat rising in her loins. "I hate the notoriety, but yeah, there was a certain thrill to posing."

Candy yanked the letter from her hands and tapped the paper. "*The Dame*. My, my, that's a pretty hefty offer. So—are you going to do it?"

Sierra shrugged. "Aren't you supposed to finish baking cookies or something?" As for accepting the photo shoot, she just didn't know. After the first big job, the offers rolled in, some more demanding than others. All she'd ever wanted to do was earn enough to pay for her brother's heart transplant. She'd done that, but her efforts hadn't been enough. Kyle had died on the table. She'd been left with a stack of bills and a reputation she didn't want. The money had covered the bills, but nothing could repair the damage she'd done to her image.

"The cookies will keep. This discussion won't." Candy dropped the letter on the table and pulled up a chair next to her. "In this day and age, staying a virgin until the right man comes along is noble, but unrealistic. Besides, you have no idea what you're missing."

"I know. I-I looked through the *Wild Thing*. I've been living in a Puritan closet." But when had there been time for sexual relations? She worked all the time, and when she wasn't working, she was studying. She longed to be an archeologist and travel to exotic places, digging for clues to past civilizations.

"Ah. Some of the articles got you aroused."

"More than aroused."

Candy wagged her eyebrows. "What aroused you most?"

Sierra laughed. "You've got flour all over your nose."

She wiped at her nose and grinned. "Quit avoiding the question."

"What arouses you?"

"Hey, no fair. I asked first."

"But you're dying to tell me, and if you do, I'm more likely to reciprocate."

"Ah, so that's how it's to be." Candy smiled and sat forward. "My feet have always been very sensitive."

"Your feet?"

"Yep. There are guys out there who love feet, so my fantasy is to have a man buy me the most expensive pair of stilettos he can find. He'll have them delivered to my door. I won't know who bought them, but there'll be a note attached

asking me to meet him in the park. I'm to wear the shoes and a trench coat and nothing else."

"Red. I picture red patent shoes with three inch heels and pointed toes."

"Oh, yeah. Red's my favorite color. Anyway, he kneels at my feet and tells me all sorts of naughty things he plans to do to me right then and there."

"You let him take you in the park?"

"It's a fantasy, silly, but oh, I get wet each time I let my mind travel that path."

Sierra's skin warmed. Candy had no hang-ups regarding sex. Sierra glanced down at her hands, trying to find the same courage in voicing her own fantasy.

"Okay, chickadee. It's your turn. What gets your pussy juices flowing?"

Her skin warmed at Candy's blunt language. "Ever since that photo layout, guys have been hounding me to go out. But they don't demand, they beg. This might sound odd, but I got most turned on by those articles involving bondage and ... well anyway, my fantasy is to have a man come for me with a determined stride. He won't take no for an answer. He's not mean or cruel, but he knows what he wants, and he wants me. I'm submissive to his strength. I want to please him. He's gentle, but firm. His deep voice stirs me. I want to show him treasures the photo didn't display."

"Whoa, girl. I didn't know you had it in you."

"I haven't even experienced plain sex, and I'm wanting more. Sheesh, what's wrong with me?"

"Not a thing. You just have a lot of pent up passion inside of you. No one knows why we experience certain desires, but I do know if you suppress your natural urges, you'll never be happy."

"It was that stupid picture. If I hadn't needed the money so badly, I would never have posed nude for the entire world to see. The experience woke something in me. Reading those sex laden articles didn't help, either. I enjoyed having the photographer bark orders. When I didn't pose just right, he'd take his hands and move my body the way he wanted." She giggled. "He threatened to spank me once when I balked at a more lewd position. Can you imagine?"

"Oh yeah, and boy, can I imagine." Candy face split in a wide grin. "A spanking by the right man can make you come harder than anything."

Sierra jerked her head back. "You've been spanked?"

"Once, on my birthday. It was just the right blend of caress and smack." She ran her hands along her derrière and wiggled her brows.

"My mother would turn in her grave to hear me talk about such things."

"She'd be even more disappointed if you weren't happy. There's nothing worse than bad sex. So, what are you going to do about it?"

Sierra stood, the chair scraping against the linoleum. "I don't know. It's as if I'm two different personas. I've always dreamed I'd find one special man to spend the rest of my life with. How do I find one that's willing to please me emotionally and sexually?"

Candy got up and went to the kitchen. A few minutes later, she returned to the dining room with a deck of tarot cards. Sierra laughed. Candy didn't do anything without reading her tarot cards.

"Sit back, down. We've got some soul searching to do."

Sierra complied. She knew better than to oppose Candy when it came to a tarot reading. Candy made her shuffle the cards then instructed her to lay the configuration of her choice. "How will you blend both persons into one? How will you find a lifelong mate willing to satisfy all your carnal desires and not abuse the privilege?"

When done, she'd laid out six cards in a dream-goal formation, four in a square and two down. The first card revealed the Pentacle of Seven. "I'm questioning my own physical attributes and my decision to display them."

"We already knew that. Flip the next card."

"Strength." Sierra swallowed. "I must have the courage to be honest with my feelings if I'm to achieve success."

"You can't ignore your inner desires, something I've been telling you all along."

"The Pentacle of Six. I must come to terms with the contradictions I'm experiencing."

Sierra went and got a glass of water before continuing. The cards came far too close to the truth, a truth she'd tried to ignore. She sat and took a sip before flipping the fourth card, the one dealing with her fears. The eight of Wands, a card reflecting her willpower. "I can gain power through my desire to please."

"I've often heard that a submissive has the most power in the relationship, because she controls how much she's willing to give up."

"Well, I have no desire to go that far. I confess to wanting to please my man, but I'm not into pain."

"Wimp." Candy nodded to the fifth card. "Let's see what you most desire."

The two of Swords. "I need to free myself from rigid constraints."

"Meaning you need to get laid and soon."

"Thanks. I think I can attribute my own meanings without help from the audience."

Candy laughed. "And how will you find the secret of your search?"

Sierra's fingers touched the last card. What would it reveal? She turned it over and gasped. The Emperor. "Aries The man will be an Aries."

"You're thinking with your heart. Think with your mind."

She closed her eyes, trying to see past the hazy image of a man who would someday be her greatest love. "I must be open to the future. Fate will run her course."

The doorbell rang, and Candy jumped up. "Oh, and I've gotta be open with my pocketbook. That must be our pizza."

"Make sure they remembered to cut the onions before paying. Last time, I had indigestion for a week."

Sierra continued to run her fingers across The Emperor, a bold figure of a man whose hand rested on the head of a ram. In the background, Candy greeted their caller.

Voices trailed back her way, getting louder. Whoever was at the door must not have been the pizza-delivery man.

Candy entered the room followed by two men. One wore a cape-like jacket, knee length pants that disappeared into oddly shaped boots, and an engaging smile. He stepped forward and extended a hand. "Miss Madison. It's wonderful to meet you in person. I'm Erickson T'skra. We spoke on the phone about an interview."

"Mr.T'skra."

"And this gentleman is Gondar Lem."

She shifted her eyes from Erickson's to Gondar's and froze. The Emperor card fell from her fingers and landed at his feet.

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Three

"Sierra, get a grip. You look like you've seen a ghost."
Candy nudged her.

Sierra shook her head and took a step back. Not a ghost, more like her future. Gondar Lem was the spitting image of the likeness on the Emperor's card. Stern features peered down at her. Dark hair was cropped so short she could almost call him bald. His skin had a warm, golden red tint to it. Deep brown eyes gazed back at her with an intensity that both frightened and exhilarated her. High cheekbones, slanted eyes, and a wide nose gave him an exotic look that made her wonder at his ethnic background. A tan tunic, belted at the waist hung past trim hips, and tight, dark brown pants molded against firm thighs. Over his tunic, he wore a long, brown leather vest decorated with intricately stitched designs.

In no way did he fit her image of a gossip columnist.

He didn't extend his hand as Erickson had done. Instead, he gave her a brief nod and bent to retrieve the fallen tarot card. When he straightened, he studied the image and smiled. The gesture made him look younger, less austere.

"The Emperor."

"We were just playing a game."

"Tarot cards aren't a game, Sierra." The soft rebuke came from a most tempting set of lips.

She blinked. His voice captivated her. Deep, but smooth, his intonation commanded her attention.

"I'm fully aware of that, but most people don't understand their allure." Her voice came out as a raspy whisper, her mouth dry. She cleared her throat, uncomfortable with the sudden flood of desire she felt at the stranger's presence. Her previous discussion with Candy over the lack of sex in her life must be to blame. "It's easier to just tell them it's a game."

Erickson whispered something to Candy, and she scampered off.

Sierra removed a stack of newspapers from the couch and indicated the men should sit. Intimidated by their size, she hoped to even the playing field by sitting. Candy returned with a photo album. "Here, Erickson. I found the one she keeps in the bedroom. Hope you don't mind, Sierra."

Sierra dropped the papers on the floor and grabbed the album before Erickson could open it. "Well, I do mind. First off, if I recall, I declined your offer to interview me. I haven't changed my mind. Sheesh, I haven't the foggiest why I even allowed you to sit like welcome guests." She cradled the album to her chest and tried not to think what it might feel like to kiss Gondar. "Perhaps, you should leave."

"Quit being so fickle." Candy pursed her lips. "An interview would be good for your career."

"Candy, we require time alone with your roommate." Erickson gave a brief nod. "Could you excuse yourself?"

"No—absolutely not. I won't be left alone with two strangers. I want you both to leave." Sierra's spine stiffened. Both men intimidated her with their assertiveness. Candy should have never invited them inside.

"Take a seat, Sierra," Gondar said.

She set the album down on the scarred coffee table, backed away until she was almost inside the adjoining kitchen, and reached for her cell phone. "Leave or I'm calling the cops."

Gondar glanced at Erickson. "You said difficult. You should have said impossible."

"But you have to admit, fire like that only sweetens the prize," he whispered.

"As long as I don't get burned."

"I mean it. I'm calling the police." Her fingers fumbled with the unlock key, trying to get her phone to engage.

Gondar's stood, rounded the low table, and grabbed her phone before she'd entered nine. A flash of light momentarily blinded her. She shielded her face with her arms and squeezed her eyes tight. A sulfuric odor lingered in the air, and she wrinkled her nose.

"Your timing is way off as usual," Gondar said.

"Perhaps, but I wanted a reading of the both of you together."

Sierra opened her eyes and focused on the two men. Erickson held a small item aloft and within minutes a three-dimensional image of her and Gondar appeared. Her eyes widened, and she tilted her head, awed by the holograph.

"This is better than I expected." Erickson beamed and circled the image, studying it up close.

Gondar's expression turned anxious. "Better?"

"What the two of you will share far exceeds my expectation. The relationship will be stormy at first, but the sex..."

Gondar smiled and winked at Sierra. "I look forward to the moment."

Sierra's skin warmed at his mention of sex. She snapped out of her stupor and narrowed her eyes. That his words mirrored her thoughts didn't reassure her. "I have no idea what you two are cooking up, but I can assure you, it won't involve me."

"Erickson, take Candy in the other room. I want a moment alone with Sierra."

Erickson ushered a wide-eyed Candy into the kitchen. Alone with Gondar, Sierra tried not to panic. He set the phone aside and reached for her hand. She shoved her hands behind her back and stepped away from his approach.

"Don't."

She stopped at his command and waited. He reached around her back for her hand.

"You're not a tabloid reporter, are you?"

"No."

He cradled her hands between his. A warm, heady feeling made her breath catch. Gazing into his eyes, she strained to find malice in their dark depths, yet saw nothing but kindness. That frightened her more than his anger. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

"The matchmaker promised me a bride."

Her jaw dropped. A bride?

Before she could gather her wits, the doorbell sounded again.

"Pizza must be here." She tried to pull free.

"Forget the pizza."

"But..."

He dropped her hand and placed both palms upon her shoulders. "Concentrate on me."

She didn't even know this man, yet his hands caressed her inner soul. She brushed the feeling aside, sure she was still aroused from her earlier conversation with Candy. No other reason made sense.

"I saw your photo."

She stiffened. His comment was like a douse of cold water. "Of course you did. Every man within a million mile radius has seen that photo."

"You're not proud of it."

"I'm not ashamed," she lied. "I just never realized how much posing for the *Wild Thing* would change my life."

He tugged her closer. "Like now."

Before she could ask what he meant, Gondar pulled her to him and kissed her full on the lips. The touch of his mouth to hers shocked her but not in an unpleasant way. Never had a man taken such a masterful approach, and while his kiss frightened her, his boldness also excited her. Her stomach muscles clenched, and tingles danced along her spine. A mild, sensual scent clung to him, something between vanilla and musk. How had he captivated her so completely in such a short amount of time? What was wrong with her? Had he put her under a hypnotic spell?

His tongue plunged into her mouth, zapping her strength to resist. She leaned into the heady feelings, absorbing the spiraling emotions his sudden kiss evoked.

She struggled with her conscience, sure she'd burn in Hell for allowing him liberties when she'd allowed no other to get this close. Making an attempt to pull free proved futile. It was a feeble attempt, anyway. She enjoyed the authoritative way he claimed her lips.

Finally, he withdrew his warmth and smiled down with laughing gray eyes. "The matchmaker was right. You exceed expectation."

Her breath caught and held. This man seemed so sure of himself. "Mister, you've got it all wrong. Just because I did that photo spread doesn't mean I plan to hop in bed with everyone who knocks on my door." And yet, allowing him liberties might be just what she needed to fulfill her desires. Why couldn't she just allow the brazen side of her to emerge? What spell did he perform that kept her from fighting against his boldness? He could be a rapist or worse, and here she stood, calmly telling him 'no.' Confusion and the promise of something more exciting than pizza kept her rooted to the spot.

He brushed his thumb against her throbbing lips. "You just kiss them, instead."

"You caught me in a moment of weakness. I don't plan to be so malleable next time."

He laughed.

How dare he make fun of her? She stiffened and snapped out of her odd stupor. "Time for you to leave. Out. I want you and your friend to leave. Now." She pointed to the door. Whatever game he played at her expense had gone on long enough.

Gondar smiled and walked toward the kitchen where his friend entertained Candy. "Erickson, the lady wants us to leave."

Erickson came into the main room. "And we should. Immediately. My sensors indicate the approach of another pod."

Gondar's eyes widened, and he stroked his short-cropped head. "Who?"

Erickson blanched. "I should have told you the reason you needed to fetch your prize instead of allowing me to bring her to you, but—Hartman made his desires known. I think he plans to collect the price on your head. Sources tell me he left his home planet, Faegan, the same time I left to find you. While Faegan is a bit farther from Earth than Vi Twelve, we don't have that much of a lead on him."

Gondar grabbed for Erickson's jacket and brought the man up short. "You should have told me before bringing danger to their door."

"Now, we'll have to take her friend, too."

Sierra waved her hands. "What do you mean—take her friend, too?"

Gondar pushed Erickson away and stepped to the nearest window without answering.

"Look. The theatrics are over." Sierra clapped. "Great performance, but I must insist you leave—and do so without us. I have no idea why Candy allowed you inside in the first place." She swung a heated glance toward Candy.

Candy threw up her hands. "I didn't have much choice. They plowed their way in. Besides, they were both rather sexy."

Gondar leveled his smoky, gray eyes upon Sierra and retraced his steps so he stood toe-to-toe with her. She shivered at his menacing stance but refused to show him fear. He withdrew a strange looking bracelet from his pocket.

"Give me your hand."

"What?"

Erickson tapped his watch. "We need to hurry. I'm getting a reading not to my liking."

Gondar repeated the command. "Give me your hand."

She tucked her arms behind her back. "No way."

Gondar's chest expanded with a huge breath, then he let out a mighty sigh. "Obstinate woman."

So saying, he grabbed her, turned her around, and clapped a metal band around her wrist. She squealed at his highhanded maneuver and brought her arm up to inspect the item. Another bracelet dangled free from a connecting chain. He slipped this part of the armlet around his wrist and grinned.

"Bonding bracelets."

Her eyes widened. "What do you mean by bonding?"

He didn't reply but gripped her hand and tugged her toward the door. "Erickson, bring Candy, and grab the photo album while you're at it. We haven't much time."

He opened the door and froze. Sierra skidded into his back. When she focused on the reason for his sudden halt, she let out a shriek. Standing outside was the largest man

she'd ever seen. Muscles rippled across his chest, and his neck was as thick as a tree stump. Behind him, the pizza delivery man lay on the ground.

Erickson leaned into Gondar. "I forgot to tell you—the bruiser also claimed the merchandise for his own."

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Four

Gondar slid his free hand beneath his jerkin and fingered the hilt of his gun. Hartman would have to claim Sierra over Gondar's dead body. He very much doubted the man would honor the significance of the wide-banded bonding bracelets. Behind him, Santran, the goon's bodyguard and lackey, stood braced for trouble.

"Hand her over," Hartman demanded.

Slowly, Gondar raised his manacled hand, dragging hers upward for Hartman's view. "You're too late."

Hartman lunged for Gondar's throat, but he drew the weapon and shot before the fiend could make his move. The pulse blast caught the fiend in the chest. A surprised look registered on Hartman's face before he crumpled to the ground. Santran went for his gun, but Gondar's pointed weapon stayed his hand.

"I wouldn't try it. Your boss isn't dead, but you will be if you make one stupid move."

Santran dropped his hands to his side and stared.

"See to Hartman."

Santran knelt beside the downed man, but Gondar didn't wait to see how he planned to administer aid.

"Come on. He won't be out for long." Gondar tugged on her arm.

"You didn't kill him?" Erickson asked.

"I should have. Must be getting soft."

Beside him, Sierra stood paralyzed. Shock and fear must have rendered her immobile. Before she could protest, he swept her into his arms and stepped over Hartman's body. Erickson followed, tugging a reluctant Candy along.

Candy dug in her heels. "Wait. Please. My tarot cards."

Erickson frowned but went back and retrieved the cards. He shoved them into Candy's hands before ushering her outside.

While Erickson grappled with Candy, Gondar manhandled Sierra, taking delight in the soft curves of her body. He forced her out the door and toward the pod. At his forceful actions, Sierra came alive and struggled. He tightened his hold and repositioned her so she hung over his right shoulder. Her full breasts pressed into his back, and he sucked in a quick breath. "Keep wiggling that derriere against my cheek, and I'll bare it to satisfy my carnal appetites." He sank his teeth playfully into her softly clad backside.

She went still, and the strange foursome proceeded to the transport bubble without further mishap. The translucent vehicle hummed, its energy source already engaged to facilitate their journey. His left hand began to tingle, buried under her body while the joining chain bit into his skin. Their joined hands reminded him of the path he now traveled. If the manacle still bound them six Earth hours from now, Sierra would be his wife as per Faegan custom.

Once on board, Erickson wasted no time setting course for Vi Twelve. The small cruiser was designed to hold ten people comfortably, but only required one to work the controls. With a course set to enter the Phlestra Space Highway system,

overdrive would see them to their destination in five days. In the meantime, Gondar planned to woo and seduce his new bride. His butt cheeks tightened in anticipation.

"What is this? A fancy airplane?" Candy glanced about the spacious cabin.

Gondar allowed Sierra to slide off his shoulder and sit in a cushioned, bucket chair. She glared at him while he pondered what to do with her friend, Candy.

"Strap in," Erickson commanded. "Unless you want to feel your teeth at the back of your throat."

The moment they all secured their positions, Erickson programmed the coordinate path for the Phlestra Space Highway and hit the control that would send them into overdrive. Gondar fell forward against the restraint then bounced back against the seat. Sierra squealed, and Candy turned deathly white. Once the overdrive engaged, the vessel would build speed and momentum until it slid into a stable flight path. Erickson's TR180 cruiser roared to life before hitting a smooth course.

The matchmaker set a few more gauges then swiveled the chair to face his guests. "She's on auto pilot and destined for Vi Twelve. We should arrive at your home in about five days."

Gondar nodded.

Candy squirmed in her bucket chair. "Oh God, we've been kidnapped. I should have paid greater attention to my last tarot reading, the one that suggested a grand adventure in the stars."

"You're just now figuring that out?" Sierra's knuckles turned white from gripping the chair. "Where are we?"

Erickson grinned. "On a ship headed to another planet."
"You lie."

Candy cradled her head in her hands. "The cards always prove true, but I never dreamed it to be a literal translation."

Erickson shrugged. Gondar frowned. The matchmaker could show a bit more compassion. The two females were from a planet whose general population didn't believe in extraterrestrials.

"How is it you speak English if you're from another planet?" Candy asked.

"I once lived in Washington D.C." Gondar studied Sierra from head to toe. She would never survive on his home planet, Faegan. Not the way she was dressed in a short, thigh-length skirt, a blousy shirt that showed a generous amount of cleavage, and a pair of high heeled red shoes that looked painful to wear. Good thing he no longer lived there.

"So, don't they have women where you're from?" she asked again.

"None that fit my needs as well as Sierra." Gondar shifted his gaze between the two friends. Erickson's chosen bride had better work out. He was tired of being alone and craved the physical and emotional nurturing only a woman could give. "Sorry there wasn't time for one of your human courtship rituals, but better me than Hartman."

His bride shivered. "I could have taken care of Hartman's advances. I didn't need you and Batman over here playing heroes."

He chuckled. "Batman? I guess that black cape-like jacket of his would give that impression."

"Don't placate me." Sierra tugged her hand free. "I want you to turn this ship around and take us both home."

"Come here." He patted his lap, wanting to feel her close. She shook her head.

"It wasn't a request. Come here."

She looked as if she would refuse, but finally did as requested. The bonding bracelet opened a path of influence on both wearers. He pulled her onto his lap and wrapped his arms about her. "I live alone and have for several of your Earth years, but I crave more. I paid the matchmaker to find me a bride."

"That's horse rubbish." Candy unbuckled her belt and stood. "We deserve a better explanation than the one you've been feeding us. Exactly where are we going and why did you take us prisoner? And don't you dare feed us a line about saving us from the big, bad wolf."

Erickson took his camera and snapped a shot of Candy while she stood with arms akimbo. Once her image was captured, he hit play and studied the holograph of her generous curves. "Feet. You have very sensitive feet. I know exactly who to contact. Gondar, do you mind making a side trip?"

"No, not at all." He raised a brow. "Especially if it will see Sierra's friend safely placed—elsewhere."

Erickson went to the computer and plugged in a new path destination.

"Wait. You can't do that, and you still haven't really answered Candy's question." Sierra shook the fog from her brain.

"Did you like my kisses?"

"That's—that's immaterial."

"I think it's very valid." He stroked her bare arm. "You can't ever go back. Hartman knows where you live, and he won't stop until he claims you for his own."

"A stalker. Great. Just what I need. Then ... take me to a different city. I'll change my identity so he can't find me."

He chuckled. "Well, there's a problem with that scenario."

"What?"

He lifted his wrist, and the woven chain rustled. "I, too, won't be satisfied until you're fully mine."

Her eyes grew wide, and she struggled to be free. He clamped his hands on her waist, pinning her on his lap. "Keep that up, and you'll have me so excited, I'll take you here and screw the consequences."

She settled and took a deep breath. "I—you—I don't know you or why you're doing this."

He snaked his hand along her bare thigh until he reached the juncture between her legs. At his seeking fingers, she froze. "You're wet. You like a man who takes control."

"I don't understand any of this." She ignored his observation.

"I know." He nuzzled her neck, loving the way she smelled. A fresh floral scent wafted from her clean hair, tantalizing his senses to a fever pitch. It had been too long since he'd enjoyed the soft curves of a female. That this one was his, to do with as he pleased made him even more excited. "Touch me."

"What?"

"Touch my arousal." He whispered. "Feel how much I want you."

She tried to hop off his lap again, and he growled. He held her in place, unwilling to let her leave. She was like a skittish animal, and yet, Erickson assured him of her desires. She wanted a masterful, confident man, one who could show her all the pleasures of the flesh. Her fear kept her from enjoying her new position, but he could be patient.

He turned his attention to Erickson to settle his growing desire. "Whom do you have in mind for Candy?"

Erickson glanced at the woman. "Terfada. He owns a bar on Faydown."

"I know of him. He's a hard man, but fair to his customers. He'll treat her well."

"Faydown will cost us a day from reaching Vi Twelve."

"But if Hartman is honed in on our signals, it will also lead him astray."

"He'll track the signature tail of this vessel to Faydown and assume we're hiding on the planet. We'll have to find a different vehicle to take us to your home." Erickson inclined his head. "He's a cagey S.O.B. Tracking you has been his mission since you and he tangled on Earth. Now that you have something he thinks is his, he'll make finding you an obsession."

Gondar smiled. "I'm counting on it."

He'd grown soft. Five, even three cycles ago, he would have killed the man when he had the chance. Today, he'd let soft doe eyes sway his reaction, else Hartman would no longer be a threat. The man wouldn't be so lucky next time,

or so Gondar tried to convince himself. At one time, Hartman had been his best friend and co-worker. Betrayal had made them bitter enemies.

* * * *

Sierra swallowed her nervousness and tried to relax, but it wasn't easy. He'd kept her pinned to his lap for almost two hours. The hard evidence of Gondar's interest rubbed against her posterior, making her body respond in ways she hadn't thought possible. Moisture gathered between her legs, and her pussy quivered. She glanced at the bonding bracelet and wondered about its purpose. He claimed she was his bride, that the bracelet would see them legally wed. How?

"I can smell your arousal," he murmured.

She shifted, unwilling to acknowledge his observation. "And I can certainly feel yours, but that doesn't mean I plan to act on it."

"I want a reading of Sierra's album," Gondar said to his friend.

"I can tell you're ready to hear the details and inner workings of her mind, but I doubt she is." Erickson shook his head. "We'll wait. In the meantime, why don't you take the chamber in the rear and spend time getting to know your bride? After all, you only have four hours left to change your mind."

"I won't be changing my mind."

Gondar lifted her easily in his arms and made his way down a long corridor. Sierra wanted to fight him with every breath in her body, but the bonding bracelet made escape

impossible without great injury. Perhaps she could be so unpleasant to the man he would want to let her go.

"What happens at the end of six hours?"

He gave a verbal command and a door opened. He stepped inside, gave another command and the door closed, sealing them inside a spacious room with a large bed and little else. "We discover why beds were invented."

She struggled and succeeded in forcing him to put her down. The moment her heels touched the gray, metal floor, she put as much distance between him as the bracelet would allow. "I want to go home now."

"Scared?"

"How can you expect me not to be frightened? You kidnap me and my friend. Tried to convince us we're in outer space, and then announce you intend to keep me like a pet dog."

"Pets are easier."

"Are you capable of more than one sentence at a time? If not, then we're going to have some serious communication issues." She wobbled on shoes that were beginning to pinch.

He laughed. "I'm not marrying you for conversation."

She scratched at the manacle. "You're not marrying me at all if I have any say."

"Right now, it's a moot point. Sit." He pointed to the bed. "We'll try conversing to put you at ease."

She did as requested. "Getting you to say more than five words in a row might actually be entertaining."

He grunted.

"So ... what is the best dressed alien wearing these days?"

"I'm pleased you aren't like other earthling women. No hysterics."

"I'm making the most of the shock factor. As soon as reality sets in, I'll burst your eardrums screaming."

"I like your wit."

"I wish you didn't like anything about me."

He sat beside her and placed a hand on her knee. "I'll treat you well."

The contact sent a host of shivers along her skin. "But you don't know me, and you certainly don't love me. Earthling women require these emotions for a successful marriage." Why couldn't she reason with the man? No. Not a man, but an alien. Why would he want an uncooperative mate?

"The matchmaker predicted our compatibility." He stared at the bare walls. "That's enough for me."

She tried to wedge a finger beneath the metal encircling her wrist. The area itched and burned, growing more uncomfortable by the minute. "Take it off. It hurts."

He smiled. "In four more hours, it will slip off by itself."

She wouldn't last four more hours attached to this—this stranger. Panic rose in her chest, and she panted, fighting off hyperventilation.

"Secure yourselves. We exit the Phseltra Space Highway in two minutes. Overdrive no longer needed." The loudspeaker broke the silence, Erickson's gruff voice announcing greater cause for worry.

"We—we just engaged overdrive or whatever an hour ago."

"Our pit stop is Faydown, not a main stop on any of the solar highways. Once we exit Phseltra, we have to use normal propulsion speeds to navigate what I would call rustic space. Faydown is more of an outpost, a tiny planet with little to offer in terms of gravitational energy. We should arrive in two days."

"I don't understand."

"You don't need to understand. Just enjoy the ... adventure."

"I didn't sign up for this." She rolled her eyes, seeking answers where only more questions existed.

"Come. We need to strap in." He led her to two seats in the corner. Once there, he pushed a button and restraints fastened about them and not a minute too soon.

Her stomach fell with the sudden jarring sensation that must have meant a reduction in speed. She felt lightheaded and slightly nauseous. Gondar's large hand settled over hers, and the gesture offered some comfort. The aircraft settled into a new speed, and Sierra's body adjusted to odd vibrations.

The restraints released, and Gondar pulled her to her feet. "I want to show you something."

He led her to a solid wall of steel. A small panel of lights attracted his attention, and he pushed one. The wall slid open to reveal a huge window. Her eyes widened. A blanket of twinkling lights flaunted evidence of infinite space in the most spectacular presentation of backdrop she'd ever seen. Either this was the most elaborate hoax anyone ever perpetrated, or she really was traveling to another planet. With proof staring

her in the face, she admitted the latter a more likely scenario, and her head buzzed with the revelation.

"I'm not feeling well."

He wrapped strong arms about her. "I've given you a lot to absorb in a short amount of time. Let's lie down."

She bristled at the suggestion even though her body craved a reclining position and a wet rag for her forehead.

"Let's not."

"You're pale. I don't want you fainting on me." Muscular arms slipped beneath her legs, and he lifted her. Without permission, he placed her on the bed then stretched out beside her. "I suggest a nap. Close your eyes."

She shook her head. "You'll take advantage."

"Probably, but I promise you'll enjoy every minute. Now be a good girl and close your eyes." He reached up with his free hand and stroked her forehead in a soothing, circular pattern. "Kick off those shoes and relax."

Against her skin, the bonding bracelet sent pulses of warmth. Beside her, his presence provided a security she hadn't felt in a long time. Good sense would be to fight against her changing attitude, but something in his gaze, some small ounce of vulnerability made her want to see this adventure to its end. She sensed a kindred spirit, a man just as hungry for companionship as she. She struggled to find the will to resist.

Her eyes drifted closed. "This doesn't mean I capitulate to your bossiness."

"I'd be disappointed if it did." He chuckled.

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Five

Warmth cocooned her body, and she snuggled deeper into a solid mass of sinewy muscle. Rough skin trailed across her belly, traveling along her rib cage and settling on her right breast. She sighed as the fantasy grew more vivid.

"Arise, woman. Your man has a thirst for something more substantial than unconscious moans."

Her eyes flew open. "Where...?"

"Shh. You're in my arms where you belong."

A titillating lethargy enveloped her, making it difficult to untangle bare limbs from this man's possessive explorations. Hot lips claimed an erect nipple while nimble fingers danced along sensitive skin. "Sweet Janus, the matchmaker has blessed me with a most delicious wife."

"Wife?"

Gondar shifted to cover her with his large, half clad body and lifted his left wrist. Within his grasp, the bonding bracelet dangled free. "The restraint snapped loose an hour ago."

She raised her right hand and stared at bare skin. The area throbbed, and she peered more closely. "What's wrong with my wrist?"

"Just a bruise. It'll fade." He grabbed her hand and pushed it to the soft mattress.

"But? It almost looks like some sort of ... tattoo." Desire flooded her system with unexpected fervor. What was wrong with her? She'd never responded to a man like this before and certainly not a stranger. Her gaze settled on the

discarded bracelet, and she wondered if it was somehow responsible for her change in attitude. His warm breath fanned her cheek, and her gaze shifted to his. She tried to protest, but he captured her mouth in a kiss that left little doubt as to what he had in mind. Her pussy throbbed, and her nipples tightened. Her body burned with a need so strong, she hurt.

His lips trailed along her cheek and down her neck. Goosebumps formed on exposed skin, and she shivered. "You have me under a spell."

"Agreed." He captured a taut nipple and sucked.

She tugged at his head. "Please."

He lifted his head. "Ah, the magic word."

"I don't ... mess around on the first date."

"Good, because we haven't even been on a date."

"Can we?"

"Mess around? As much and as often as you please."

She frowned. He was being purposefully obtuse. "Can we go on a date? Somewhere fun where we argue over politics and giggle at other couples nearby? Maybe then I'd feel more comfortable giving into my desires."

"You're only postponing the inevitable, but I can wait." He lifted his upper torso so his knees cradled her body, and he buttoned her shirt.

She watched with a wary eye and wondered how long she'd have before he demanded rights he assumed were his. His knuckles brushed against her heated flesh, and she sucked in air. If he'd pressed just a little harder, she would have given in to his expert seduction. But, why? She hardly

knew the man, could barely wrap her mind around being married.

He withdrew and headed for the exit. "Are you hungry?"

"No." Too much had happened in a short amount of time, sapping her desire for food.

He left her alone. She stared at the closed door. Her predicament all boiled down to cause and effect. If she'd never posed nude, she wouldn't have found herself in this position. If her brother hadn't become ill, she'd never have posed nude. She pressed her back to the cold steel door and slid until her bottom met the floor. All the regrets in the world wouldn't change a thing. If she had to do it all over, she'd make the same decisions. Her last tarot card reading came to mind. Aries had come into her life, and he meant to stay.

A gentle rap made her scramble to her feet. She opened the door, and Candy swept into the room.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Did you finally get laid?"

"Candy." She laughed.

"He thinks you're his property. I just assumed..."

"My body responds to his touch, and I get all sweaty just thinking about what could have happened, but something inside of me just couldn't let loose. He's exactly what I wished for in a man. Confident. Aggressive. Sexy as hell and yet..."

"His raw magnetism intimidates you."

"Something like that."

Candy wrapped an arm around Sierra's shoulder. "Good sex can't be forced."

Why did she have to be a twenty-one-year-old virgin? She shook her head. Her lack of sexual expertise had nothing to do with desire and everything to do with inopportunity. Now that she had the chance, she wanted to hide like a frightened rabbit.

"I just don't trust him and yet, I do. My feelings are so mixed up. He kidnapped us for God's sake, and he's carted us half way across the galaxy for his amusement. Am I wrong for not wanting to give in to my desires?"

"Point taken. What are we going to do? I'm not sure I like the idea of being given to some stranger just because he'll worship my feet."

Sierra laughed hard and long. "You always find the right words to make me crack up and usually at the worst possible times."

"Better laughter than tears. We've gotten ourselves into a real doozy of a pickle this time as my grandmother used to say."

Sierra nodded. "We have to escape."

"Oh yeah, right. We're halfway across the galaxy with no interstellar funds, assuming these aliens use currency, and no friends. But hey, I have no problem hailing the first spaceship we find and hitching a ride home. I'm sure some green creature will take pity on our plight."

Sierra pursed her lips and gave her friend one of those why-do-you-have-to-be-right glares.

The door swung wide, startling them both.

"We've docked."

They had? Why hadn't they felt the tug and pull of landing?

"Let's go." Gondar's gruff voice brooked no resistance.

Sierra stood on shaking limbs and shot Candy a worried glance. Candy returned her wide-eyed stare and shrugged. She wiggled her feet into her high heels and braced herself. Another adventure was about to commence, and they were both powerless to stop fate.

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Six

Sierra stood on an expanse of land unlike anything she'd encountered. A violet dirt-like substance covered the ground, and gray crystalline spikes rose high in the sky. Piloted by creatures that far exceeded the most creative science fiction writer's imagination, triangular shaped conveyances navigated the rutted terrain. She shrank against Gondar, eliciting a chuckle of approval. His earthy male scent gave her a sense of security amidst all the strangeness.

Candy reached out and grasped her hand. "I'm frightened."

Gondar shrugged. "Change is always disconcerting. Your future mate is as human as an alien can be in this part of the galaxy."

"We need to move." Erickson pointed to a small piece of equipment. "My sensors indicate Hartman's arrival."

Without a by-your-leave, the girls were dragged at a harrowing pace toward what looked like a downtown shopping mall. While the architecture boasted no relationship to anything American, the structure did consist of the basic four walls and a ceiling, but the materials used in the construction looked like a cross between petrified wood and quartz crystals. She ogled the semi transparent material with an appreciative though wary eye.

They entered a seedy establishment rife with all sorts of characters. The crowded room buzzed with social activity she equated to a sports bar. Erickson led them to a long counter

surrounded by stools and rough looking aliens cradling glasses of liquid refreshment.

On the other side of the bar, a dark skinned man with nodules crowning his head gave them a curious nod.

"Erickson. Didn't expect to see you again so soon. Have news for me?"

Erickson pushed Candy forward. "I found you the perfect mate."

Candy shrank back. "Whoa. I am not agreeing to this. Nobby head is not my idea of husband material."

The bartender poured green liquid into a glass and handed it to her. "Drink. It'll take the edge off your worries."

She shook her head. "No, thank you."

"I don't recall asking. Now, drink." He shoved the glass into her hand.

"Please." Sierra turned beseeching eyes toward Gondar. "You can't let Erickson do this to my best friend. She doesn't deserve this type of life."

Erickson glanced at the meter he held in his hand. "We're out of time. Terfada, she's all yours."

"What do I owe you?" Terfada leaned his beefy hands on the countertop.

"A fast ship and a diversion from Hartman and his fiends."

Terfada inclined his head. "Follow me out back."

A commotion at the doorway made them all turn and look. Hartman stood framed by the arched entry and bright orange light from outside.

Gondar pushed on Sierra's back. "Get behind the bar and wait for me."

He drew his weapon and headed toward Hartman. Terfada rounded the bar counter and joined him along with Erickson.

Sierra grabbed Candy's hand and tugged her toward the hallway Terfada indicated when he'd said, out back. Not waiting for Gondar or Erickson, she ran, pulling Candy behind her. "Now's our chance at escape."

She had no destination in mind. No plan. Only a burning desire to escape the fate that awaited her.

Behind them, the sounds of a skirmish reached her ears, prompting her to run faster. She stumbled on her left heel and bent to remove both shoes. Red patent leathers in hand, she hurried to the end of the hall where another entry led outside. What she would find was anyone's guess, but supposedly another spaceship sat ready and waiting just beyond the exit.

They swept through the portal and skidded to an abrupt halt.

"Going somewhere?" The man who'd accompanied Hartman stood in front of them with a wicked looking weapon pointed their way.

Sierra swallowed hard, and Candy gasped. This was just not their day. Their captor dangled two pair of handcuffs. "Sierra, you first. Secure your friend's hands behind her back. When you're done, come to me, so I can put the other pair on you."

"Gondar won't like this," she said, slipping her shoes back on and snapping the metal rings around Candy's wrists. "He—he considers us wed."

"He'll get over it." He motioned her to him so he could bind her as well. She approached slowly, trying to think of a way to escape, but nothing safe came to mind. Her legs trembled, and her gut twisted in knots. Cold metal touched her skin, and she grimaced. The click of the mechanism sounded loud and final. There would be no escape this day.

"Sweet heavens, you're beautiful, even more so than the photo. I might have to keep you for myself." He stroked her breasts, slipping a hand between the buttons of her shirt to fondly a nipple.

She jerked from his grasp and shivered. "I'd rather screw a donkey."

"Oh, you'll screw ass all right." He laughed at his lame joke and pinched her nipple hard before pushing her away.

"Head for that cruiser in the corner." He pointed with his weapon, and Sierra fell into step behind Candy.

"You better have a good reason for stealing my wife." Gondar's voice boomed across the vast lot of ships.

Sierra stumbled, falling into Candy's back. The man holding them captive pivoted, his weapon pointed at Gondar. It looked like a standoff to her.

"Drop your weapon, Santran. You have no reason to take these two with you."

Santran. Even the name sounded evil. Sierra cringed, wondering the outcome of this altercation.

Santran held the gun steady. "I take that to mean Hartman is gone. If so, you did me a favor. I was getting rather tired of dancing to his tune."

"He's not dead, just ... incapacitated."

"More's the pity." Santran grabbed Sierra and placed her in front of him like a shield. "I've decided I want the merchandise for myself. Her scent tickles my fancy."

Candy slowly backed away. Sierra applauded her courage. Santran must have his hands too full of trying to keep her under his thumb to worry about her friend. In the meantime, Terfada and Erickson joined Gondar. All three pointed weapons at Santran. Pressed against his chest, she felt the pounding of his heart. How did this oaf plan to escape their wrath?

Gondar sheathed his gun and smiled. "You should have given her up when you had the chance."

He opened his mouth, stretching it wide. No sound erupted from his throat, but a sudden, piercing pain stabbed Sierra's ears. She screamed and sank to her knees. Behind her, Santran must have been afflicted with a similar pain, because he stumbled backward with his hands covering his ears. The weapon fell from his fingers, and he collapsed.

Terfada and Erickson rushed to apprehend the man. She closed her eyes and assumed the two men took care of Santran. Slowly, the pain receded, leaving her numb and powerless to move. When she reopened her eyes, her gaze fell upon a pair of scuffed boots. But oh, she was glad to see those boots.

"Do you prefer that scoundrel's touch to mine?"

She lifted her gaze to Gondar's and cringed at the rage reflected in the deep brown eyes. She rose with his help, turned her back, and lifted her manacled hands as far as she could. "Did you get the key?"

"Yes, but I think I prefer you this way." He propelled her toward the narrow hallway.

"What did you do with Santran?"

"Sent him spiraling into deep space. He'll awaken aboard his own ship bound for the Castronalp Nebula, a rather rough corner of the universe. He should find the company stimulating."

"Terfada went after Candy. Seems she slipped past while we were dealing with Hartman's sidekick." Erickson followed behind.

Once inside the bar, Gondar pushed Sierra into a chair. "Stay."

She had no problem obeying, not when running meant dealing with thugs like Santran.

He then sauntered toward the large brute bound to another chair in the center of the room. The small crowd milling about the prisoner parted upon Gondar's arrival, leaving a clear area in which to approach his catch.

* * * *

Gondar fumed. He didn't want to kill Hartman, but he wouldn't hesitate if pressed. Gondar swung his body into a chair backwards so he could rest his forearms on the top slat.

"Now that I have your rapt attention, I think we best clear the air."

"There's nothing you can say that will make me stop hunting you. The bounty's too high."

The bounty. When had Hartman turned into a greedy Faeganite? As a rule, most could care less for material things,

including money. They lived for adventure, honor, and family. Nothing else mattered, unless one experienced a life-altering situation.

"I could kill you now and be done with it."

"But you won't. You're a coward. Only cowards sell out their country. How does it feel to be Faegan's number one traitor?"

Gondar smiled. "Think what you will. I'm tired of trying to make you see the truth."

"Your stunt cost my sister's life, you bastard." He stretched against his bonds, making the chair scrape against the hard floor.

"I won't argue with you." Gondar narrowed his eyes. "I'm leaving you here to deal with Terfada and his gang. He didn't take kindly to you and Santran trying to kidnap his woman."

"The bitch with Sierra?"

"Erickson promised Candy to Terfada."

"I could care less about Candy. I want Sierra. She's mine."

"Think again. She's bound to me through Faegan custom." He lifted his arm and turned it so Hartman could see his wrist. "You'll note the bonding tattoo. We both wore the chains until the process was completed. She's my wife now."

"You bastard. I claimed her first."

"Think what you want. I'm done here." He stood, toppling over the chair. Behind him, Hartman made scraping noises, trying to loosen himself from the ropes. Gondar really should kill the man and be done with it, but for Seonie's sake, he couldn't do it. He thought he could, but when faced with the opportunity, he no longer felt inclined. Hartman's sister died

uncovering the Farenate Trasale. And all evidence pointed to Gondar as her murderer. He understood Hartman's rage and need for revenge. Even now, remorse gnawed on his heart for Seonie. If only Gondar could discover the real traitor and murderer.

He turned his back on Hartman and headed for Sierra, his mood dark. Who had killed Seonie? And why set him up for the fall? Nine years had gone by without him thinking of that fateful day, and now bitter memories swarmed his mind. Not even Erickson knew the sacrifices he'd made trying to keep the FT project safe.

He squatted in front of his wife and fixed her with a heated glare. "Next time I tell you to do something, I expect you to obey."

Something flickered in her silver blue eyes. "The word obey was removed from Earth's marriage vows decades ago."

He tried to dredge up all he could remember of earthling women and failed. He'd have to resort to memory disks when he returned home. In the meantime, he needed to rein in his anger.

"I bet if we examine your true desires, we'll discover a wanton who enjoys the word obey." He softened his words and trailed a finger along her cheek.

Her deep intake of air gave him his answer.

"Get up," Gondar commanded, still upset with her near escape.

"Say please."

He growled. "Please," he said, right before yanking her to her feet. "Erickson, let's go."

"Not before snapping a shot of Candy with Terfada. I need to know that the relationship will be right."

Gondar swore a few choice words. "Fine, but I'm not taking any chances while we wait." He undid one ring on Sierra's cuffs and slipped it around his wrist. "Looks like we're attached again."

"I-I'm thinking I don't mind this time."

Her softly spoken admission made his breath catch. "Meaning you'd rather I kidnap you than Santran or Hartman?"

"Meaning, you're beginning to look good to me, though I'm not sure why."

Was this some sort of trick? He narrowed his eyes. "And?"

She swallowed, her throat moving perceptively. "I don't want to be separated from my friend. If I must be yours, can't you take her with us?"

Terfada stormed into the room with Candy in tow, which kept Gondar from answering. He wanted to please this woman, but could see no benefit in carting another woman to his lair. No, Candy was better off with Terfada.

"Take your picture, Erickson, so we can be on our way before Hartman loosens his bonds."

Erickson lifted his camera and snapped the shot. Moments later the unsmiling image of Terfada holding Candy by the upper arm took form. Erickson circled the holograph, examining every aspect. "Candy will be as sweet as her name for you, Terfada. One of her erogenous zones is her feet. The other is her derrière. And Candy, Terfada's nobular head will make for one of the best back massages you've ever had."

"Really?" Candy asked, her eyes bright.

"Really."

Terfada shook his head. "I'm not sure I want her if I have to chase her all the time." He dropped his hand from her forearm and folded his arms.

"Well, looks like I won't be getting those back rubs, then." Candy took a few halting steps toward Sierra.

"Not so fast."

Candy stopped and pivoted to look at Terfada. "Yes?"

"Perhaps, I've approached this all wrong. I need a mate, someone who loves hard work, tall tales, and lots of sex."

Candy's skin turned a rosy shade of pink. "Lots of sex?"

"I have an insatiable appetite for exotic females, and you're as exotic as they come. Feel my head."

She hesitated but finally set her hands upon the hard bumps that served as hair. Her eyes widened. "They vibrate?"

"Only when I'm turned on and right now, my body's humming with need. Stay. Be my mate. Help me run this joint."

Candy turned beseeching eyes on Sierra. "I'm sorry, Sierra, but I think I've just discovered what I want to do the rest of my life. The man's only said a few words to me, and my panties are dripping."

"I don't understand. You need more than chemistry to make it work. What about your life back on Earth?"

"What about it? You're my only true friend, and work ... isn't all that gratifying. Just like you, I have no family left. I'm thinking this will be just what I need to complete my life. Wow, just think ... married to an alien."

Erickson smiled. "Just as I thought. You two were made for each other. Terfada, what needs to be done to see your joining legally accomplished?"

"In my country, the ceremony consists of four parts—the arrangement, the declaration, the joining, and the celebration. All four must be witnessed by the groom's selected entourage." He inhaled a deep breath and let it out slowly. "The arrangement was made in front of all of you, and therefore the bonding cannot be completed without your presence."

Gondar cast a quick glance at Hartman. "Let's hope his restraints last the duration."

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Seven

Terfada signaled for two of his underlings to come forward. "Keep your weapons trained on our unwanted guest while I see to a personal matter."

They both nodded.

Sierra took a moment to study the man who would soon be Candy's mate. Oh my, but he was massive. He wasn't so tall as he was stocky with bulging biceps and washboard abs that would put the strongest Earth fighter to shame.

Terfada motioned for the four of them to follow him down the long hallway. A few steps into the corridor, he opened a door and led them into a spacious room.

"Welcome to my home."

Sierra stared in awe. For a seedy establishment, the adjoining apartment sported an opulence she would have thought rare for this outpost of a planet. A soft orange glow blanketed the interior, giving the room a sensual feel. Though different in style than anything she'd seen, the furniture was similar to that on Earth. An ornately carved, cushioned couch and matching chair took up one whole corner while a small platform rested in the other corner.

She tried to peek around the corner into the bedroom, but Terfada stepped in front of her and blocked the view. He smiled. "You'll have an opportunity to see the pleasures my home offers in a moment, but first, I would claim my mate."

"Candy, think this through. Right now, the thought of an alien for husband is a novelty. What happens when the

novelty wears off?" Sierra couldn't fathom being married to a creature that only half resembled a human. The vibrating nodules on his head were a bit much to take. Surely, Candy had more sense.

Another thought took hold, one that made her uneasy. What if Gondar wasn't quite the human he appeared to be? What if he had oddities hiding beneath his tan tunic and coffee-brown pants?

Candy leaned close. "We shared a rather heated, intimate moment before he hauled me back inside," she whispered.

"And?"

"Let's just say his hand caressed my bottom repeatedly for running, but afterwards, the man removed the handcuffs and gave me the best kiss I've ever experienced."

"He spanked you?"

"Hmm." Candy looked as if the act left her burning for more. Sierra's insides warmed as she pictured her friend's naked bottom draped across Terfada's strong thighs.

Gondar hauled her back in place. "Rest assured, I can mete out the same if you so desire." This was said in a low rumble meant to tempt rather than threaten. Goodness, the man had great hearing to have understood Candy's murmured words. The innuendo left her slightly breathless, wondering what it might feel like. She'd had an opportunity to read a lot of erotic material with her modeling career, and of all the various articles and stories, the ones with spanking and light bondage made her insides warm and her pussy pulsate the most.

Erickson tapped Terfada's shoulder. "We need to get on with it, if we're to make our escape."

Terfada turned to Candy. "I'm inclined to force you to follow through with the arrangement, but I understand how strange this must all seem. If you do not wish our bonding, I'll release you from the commitment, but once we proceed, there'll be no backing out. There is no divorce among my people."

"Your English is very good." Candy stared at his lips before responding to his question. "I-I accept the arrangement."

He nodded. "I have a translator chip embedded in my brain. I have to be able to converse in many languages in order to cater to traders."

He pulled her into his arms and cradled her against his thick body. "I, Terfada Mok Sansel, claim the woman—what's your full name?"

"Candace Breanna Sanderson."

"Candace Breanna Sanderson as my mate before these gathered witnesses."

He smiled and bent his head to hers for a heated kiss.

Sierra stiffened, unable to fathom Candy's infatuation.

Gondar bent his head to hers. "Your friend seems happy with her choice, or her toes wouldn't curl."

"Candy loves anything new. She'll tire soon and then what?"

Erickson shook his head. "Not possible. Her image spoke loud and clear. She and Terfada were made for each other."

"I think you're jealous that she was able to accept Terfada so easily," Gondar said, a frown marring his handsome

features. Handsome? When had she come to think of him as handsome?

"Perhaps."

Terfada pulled away and presented his new bride. "Will you accompany us to the bedroom for the joining?"

Sierra's stomach curled into a tight knot. Surely he didn't mean what she thought he meant. Could she watch Candy and Terfada making love? She'd seen the photos of couples engaged in sexual acts, but never a video. Knowing Candy and her promiscuous nature, a view of her wedding night would likely spark ideas for her own deflowering. Her pussy tingled at the image, and she secretly hoped such was the case.

They all filed into the bedroom and awaited instructions. Terfada smiled at the awkwardness of the moment and beckoned them to sit. "Make yourselves comfortable while I ready things for the mating ritual."

"Ritual?" Candy licked her lips.

Terfada dug out several red candles and placed them strategically around the room. Once lighted, they gave off a seductive glow that set the ambience of the room. He then took Candy's hand and pushed her gently onto the bed. He knelt at her feet and removed one slipper at a time. Nimble fingers stroked the instep of her right foot. She inhaled a deep breath and stared at his bent head. Before she could let it out, he'd grasped her foot and placed his mouth around her toes. Candy fell back onto the bed and arched her back. "I think I've gone to heaven."

He smiled around a mouthful of digits. "I've wanted to nibble on your feet since you first came into my bar."

"Don't stop now." She made mewling sounds that clearly indicated her joy of the moment.

Sierra squirmed on the velvet cushion as foreign sensations flooded her system. Gondar's hand settled on her thigh, holding her prisoner, and the manacle glittered in the soft light. Candy's response to Terfada's skilled touch made her long for Gondar's sweet embrace. She watched helpless as her friend enjoyed sinful pleasures.

Terfada licked a trail to Candy's bare knee before reaching for the waistband of her Capri pants. Sierra inhaled a harsh breath when Candy lay bare from the waist down. Five minutes later, her friend lounged on the bed without a stitch while Terfada divested himself of his clothing.

Sierra's eyes bulged at the picture they presented. Terfada's olive complexion contrasted against Candy's creamy paleness.

"Flip over," he said and Candy complied, seemingly oblivious of her audience.

He bent his head and stroked her back and buttocks with his noduled head, and she fairly purred at the vibrations that tantalized her skin. He covered her with his body and nestled his engorged cock against the crevice of her slightly pink bottom while he rained kisses on her neck. "I feel very lucky this day."

"Hmm. Me too."

"So sweet, just like the confection for which you're named."

She lifted slightly, her face full of wonder. "Is it my imagination or is your tallywacker vibrating also?"

He laughed. "Tallywacker? A strange earthling term, I'm sure." He pressed closer. "Yes. A Phaliad's cock is blessed with undulating nodules. We thrive on giving pleasure in our relationships."

She relaxed against the mattress. "Then give me all you got, big boy."

He bent, pressing his enlarged cock against her apex. Sierra sat forward, wanting a closer look. Beside her, Gondar's breath quickened. His warm breath grazed her ear. "Take note, sweet. You will be more pleased than Candy when I make you mine."

His promise made her crotch tingle. How could she want this man so desperately when she barely knew him? Had he cast some sort of "wanting" spell? The sight of Terfada's graceful motions as he slid in and out of Candy's pussy was almost too much. Sierra shifted, uncomfortably aware of a need she couldn't yet satisfy. Candy arched her back and cried out, reaching fulfillment. Gondar wrapped an arm around Sierra, drawing her into his warmth. "I'll enjoy making you orgasm like that."

Terfada collapsed upon his bride and rested a moment before rolling to his side. "You were incredible. The Image Reader knows his business." He shifted his gaze to Erickson. "Thank you."

"My pleasure."

Terfada smiled. "Give us a moment to collect ourselves, and we'll celebrate. Drinks are on the house."

His announcement doused Sierra with cold water and the stark reality that she would have to wait to appease her own desires. Gondar must have sensed her need, for he hefted her to her feet and wrapped her within his strong embrace. Firm lips pressed against hers, teasing her senses with a promise of more to come. Sharing drinks with Candy and Terfada would feel like an eternity, but the sooner they celebrated their nuptials, the sooner Gondar could whisk Sierra away for their own mating ritual.

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Eight

The trio left the bar soon after sharing only one drink. Hartman remained secured to the chair, though he shouted threats as they exited. Sierra hoped they were rid of the man for good, but somehow, she knew differently. Hartman would continue to hunt her new husband, making their lives a trial. She shivered at the thought.

Once they boarded the vessel again, Gondar unlocked the handcuffs. Afterwards, he ignored her, busying himself with the running of the ship and plotting a course for his home. She spent the time wondering what direction her life had taken and if she could live with a man who could make her giddy with just a look. She wasn't used to losing control of her senses where men were concerned.

She was anxious for something to happen between them, but he was adamant about waiting until they arrived at his home. He wanted to initiate her right, he'd said. So she contented herself with stolen glances and chance kisses that drove her to distraction. What was it about this man that had her so intrigued? After all, he'd kidnapped her and married her against her will. And yet...

"We'll dock in just a few minutes." Gondar came up behind her and gazed out the viewing window.

So soon? She continued to stare at the reddish disk that grew larger with each minute. "I'm not ready for this."

"We're never ready for change. Rest your fears. I don't bite ... hard."

"Funny." She sighed. "Two weeks ago, I would have fought you tooth and nail. Today, I'm resigned, but..."

"You still have worries."

"Yes," she said, hoping he would accept the invitation to relieve her mind.

He shrugged. "Most new brides worry, I'm told."

She rolled her eyes, glad her back was to him so he couldn't see. From this point on, she had a new goal, to make the man open up and talk. Surely he could say more than one sentence at a time.

"I have to help Erickson park this thing. Take a seat and strap in."

She did as bid and planted herself in a bucket seat off to the side. From her vantage point, she watched the two men flip switches, set controls, and navigate until they'd brought the vessel safely to port. Immediately, her heart began pumping wildly and butterflies danced in her stomach. They'd reached Gondar's home.

"Come. It's time."

She struggled for breath and tried to smile. *It's time.* Could any two words have greater impact? Standing on trembling legs, she tried to calm her racing nerves. Nothing could be changed now. She was truly married to an alien and was about to find out what it meant by "for better or worse."

Gondar turned toward Erickson. "Thanks for finding my mate, but I think we can take it from here."

Erickson laughed. "Not until I snap a picture of the two of you together. I always require reassurance." He whipped out

the small camera and popped a shot before either could offer a protest.

Almost immediately, the holographic image of them appeared. Sierra cringed at the fear etched on her face and the sheer will reflected on his features. Would her obvious reaction to being here upset her new husband?

Erickson clapped a hand on Gondar's shoulder. "Perfect. The best match I've ever made. Don't forget to look over the info I gave you."

Sierra stared again. Why couldn't she see what Erickson saw? And what info?

Gondar smiled. "You have my gratitude and an invitation to visit two cycles from now."

"I accept. Sierra, doll, you take care of this galoot. He needs a bit of softness in his life." He gave her a brief kiss on the cheek and bid them farewell.

Gondar ushered her from the craft without a backward glance. The first thing she noted was the spongy feel of the ground as they padded slowly toward a medium sized structure about two miles away. The house looked a bit like the old adobe homes from out west but with a more burnt umber color. She'd always admired the simple stucco covered buildings. Circular windows and an arched doorway decorated the single story abode. Very little vegetation obscured the view.

God, she hoped he had a shower. She hadn't been fond of the on-board system for hygiene. And a suitable dress shop would do much to lighten her mood. They'd left in a hurry without packing any personal items, and while Gondar and

Erickson had tried to be accommodating, they hadn't been able to provide a fresh set of clothing. If not for the vapor mist technology for cleansing, she'd have been miserable. After all, it'd been more than a week since she'd changed her garments.

"Let's pick up the pace. I've been away too long and need to make sure things haven't self-destructed in my absence."

"I'll do my best. But it's hard to keep up with your long strides."

He shot a glance at her high-heeled shoes and frowned. "No wonder you didn't make it far when you tried to run."

He was just now noticing her poor choice in shoes? "Your powers of observation are to be commended." She caught her heel on a soft spot and careened into his back.

He shook his head and swept her into his strong embrace. "Well, if I carry you, you won't have to navigate in those heels."

She clung to his neck, afraid he'd fall beneath her weight, but he carted her to her new home as if she were nothing more than a stuffed animal. "Tell me why a man would want to stay on a desolate planet with no one around."

"Not so desolate. There's a tribe of Crandamans about two hundred miles away."

"But still. You're secluded. Alone."

"Not anymore."

"You sure make it difficult to enjoy small talk. I'm trying to find out more about you."

He shifted her weight, making her grunt. "I like my space."

"Then why marry?" They'd reached his house.

"I also love sex." There was nothing gentle about the way he said the word sex.

She'd placed herself wide open for that one. He'd gone shopping for a bride and come home with her. He kicked open the door and made his way straight for the bedroom. She swallowed against a flutter of nerves.

The bedroom was at the back of the abode. The place could have been the setting for any of the *Wild Things*' layouts. Decorated in red, gold and black, he'd chosen every item with seduction in mind. Her right shoe fell off the moment he tossed her none-too-gently on the bed. He stared down at her through hooded eyes.

"I've been gone from my station too long. I need to check on things."

She blinked, expecting him to want to consummate their marriage now as opposed to later. What was so important to take him away from his obvious desire?

"When I return, I want you naked on that bed and posed as if your very meal depended on it."

She sputtered. "What?"

He leaned over her, and his rich, earthy scent sent her reeling with desire. "I want you anticipating every move I make."

"I-I'm not your slave."

"But wouldn't it be exciting to pretend for just one night that you were?"

Gawd, but he knew just how to make her pussy pulse. He backed away and went to a dresser in the corner. Without looking her way, he removed a large packet from his vest

pocket and placed it in a drawer. After a moment, he closed the drawer and locked it. He then headed for the doorway, which allowed her a chance to admire his tight butt. As soon as he was gone, she collapsed against the plush coverlet and stared at the mirrored ceiling. The image of herself made her catch her breath. She'd be able to see every wicked thing he did to her body. Feeling, experiencing, tasting were emotions she expected during lovemaking, but watching herself being seduced until she screamed with need made her crave the coming moment.

How much time would she have?

Not wanting to stir his ire, she decided to prepare herself as he'd asked or rather commanded. She smiled. His authoritative manner did have a way of striking her fancy. After a bit of exploration, she discovered a bathroom with facilities similar to those in her own home. She wanted to jump for joy. Even the littered evidence of his habitation couldn't dim her joy. The discarded socks on the floor and grooming items strewn about the counter made her smile. The untidy room made him seem more ... human. She divested herself of her garments and took a quick shower. On the sink, she found a razor. Surely he wouldn't begrudge her the use of his razor if it meant being able to caress silky limbs. Besides, he should have thought to furnish her with personal items.

Beneath the warm water spray, she ran the razor across the stubbles on her right leg. Halfway through the next stroke, she stopped, her thoughts arrested by a photo she'd seen in an issue of the *Wild Thing*. The model whose name

she couldn't recall had been completely devoid of hair including her genitals. How would Gondar react if she shaved her pubic area? She shook off the thought. Not tonight. Tonight, he expected to find her as he remembered her from the centerfold. Perhaps in the future, once she learned his likes and dislikes, she could experiment. Her skin warmed, but not as a result of the shower.

She resumed shaving and hastened to complete the task. Once she'd completed her toiletry, she re-entered the bedroom and fixated on the large bed. He wanted her posed as if she were modeling again. She twisted her hands, wondering why she was considering his demand. Even while she debated her sanity, her nether lips moistened in anticipation. She wanted him as much as he seemed to want her.

While Gondar frustrated her with his unwillingness to open up, he had a way about him that made her want to be his wife. Enamored of his rugged good looks and his deep, bass voice, she'd come to realize just how perfect he was for her. But lust didn't equate to love or friendship. To make their new relationship work, they would need to develop deeper feelings.

But for now? For now, she anticipated the physical benefits from being coupled with such a brawny guy.

At the thought, her skin tingled with renewed desire, and she stared at the large bed with longing, pleased by Gondar's choice in colors. The soft greens and blues seemed a contradiction to the stern but sexy man she'd married. She smiled. After a brief pause, she climbed onto the thick, silky

comforter, and crawled toward the head of the bed. She fluffed the pillows and breathed in a faint lingering, musky scent. How should she pose? What could she do to make his desire mirror her own?

"Not quite the pose I anticipated, but I won't complain."

She jumped at the sound of his voice and flopped onto her back. Propped onto her elbows, she stared at him without replying.

"Hmm, now there's a pose I really like, but could you widen your knees just a little more? I'm not getting the full picture."

Her skin warmed at the feral gleam in his rich brown eyes. He chuckled and crawled onto the bed. "Your photo fueled my erotic dreams, but it doesn't compare to the real thing. Welcome home, Mrs. Lem."

"You have too many clothes on, Mr. Lem."

"What should we do about it?"

"Take them off," she commanded.

"Naughty girl. I give the orders around here." But he complied.

He climbed off the bed and slowly removed each layer of clothing until he was as bare as she. Eyes wide, her gaze roamed every facet of his sculpted body but came to rest on his enlarged penis. Curious, she sat up and stared. Something seemed quite different. He chuckled and crept toward her on all fours. "See something you like?"

"Your—your..."

"I'm not from Earth, remember?"

How could she forget? The obstinate man dragged her through space to bring her to his home.

"But you have an extra..."

"Penis? No. I have an appendage that aids sexual stimulation."

She licked dry lips. "Show me."

He sat back on his haunches and flaunted his equipment. Very impressive, indeed. The man sported a cock that promised a most satisfying experience. But it was the small tail attached to the base that caught her attention. "May I touch it?"

"I'd be disappointed if you didn't." His deep voice rumbled over her quickening nerves, making her want to do more than just touch.

She reached out a tentative hand and stroked the velvety skin along his shaft. His quick intake of breath made her bolder, and she slipped her fingers to the base, to explore the thick appendage. Thinner in diameter, it stiffened at her touch.

He bent forward. "It's called a sepher, and its main purpose is to stroke a woman's clitoris to heighten pleasure. Ready for a demonstration?"

She'd been ready the moment he walked into the room. "Please."

"Lay down."

The command in his voice made her stomach tighten. Apprehension only heightened her desire. She fell onto her back, and his mouth latched onto one of her breasts. A fresh, clean, earthy scent wafted from his bent head. She groaned,

loving the feel of his whiskered cheek against her sensitive skin. He nibbled along her rib cage, licking and nipping his way even lower. When he reached the soft thatch of pubic hair, he lifted his head slightly and pried her pussy lips apart with his fingers. She inhaled a sharp breath. He bent his head again and latched onto her inner labia. He sucked the folds, flicking her clitoris with his tongue until she thought she might die from the spiraling sensations. She closed her eyes and dug her fingers into the thick cover.

He turned his head to the side and nipped her inner thigh.

The touch of pain complemented her mounting pleasure, making her yearn for something just beyond her comprehension. She'd read all the stories of women reaching climaxes, had even masturbated, but never dreamed the building pressure could be so intense.

"Do you want this?"

The question momentarily diverted her attention, and she opened her eyes to focus on his earnest face. "Yes."

"Tell me. Tell me you're glad to be my wife."

"You make me quiver and you..."

"Tell me what I want to hear."

"Yes. Yes, I want this. I want you."

He captured her lips in a searing kiss. The tip of his cock brushed against her belly while his sepher tapped her mons, seeking her sweet spot. He moved lower, and his penis pressed against her vaginal opening. Above, the image of their entwined bodies heightened her desire. She spread her thighs wider, welcoming his advance. The sepher wrapped in front of his shaft and once more stroked her clitoris. Vibrating

waves of sensation flooded her system. He entered her, breaking through her hymen and burying himself deep within her vaginal canal.

She tightened her thighs around him, holding him still until the brief discomfort dissipated. The tip of the sepher latched onto the head of her clitoris and began a stimulating massage that had her writhing. Her vibrator had never felt this good. The intensity of his lovemaking took her to the top of a plateau, one that held her suspended in ecstasy. He pumped harder. "Come for me, Sierra. Show me how much you love what I'm doing to you."

At his words, she dived off the plateau, and a rush of emotion made her cry out. She continued to convulse long after her orgasm. When her breathing returned to normal, she opened her eyes to discover him smiling down upon her.

"I can still feel your spasms."

"Did you...?"

"Not yet." He bent his head and pressed his lips to her cheek. "I was waiting for you to recover."

He moved within her, and she felt comfortably full and well loved.

She smiled, stroking his chest. "It's my turn. I want to see the rapture on your face when you cum."

His sepher slipped from her pussy and inched inside, coiling around his penis while he slid in and out in fast succession. The ridged effect of the extra appendage stimulated her pussy again. Before long, she was on the verge of another climax.

Strong fingers clasped her bottom, holding her tighter. She gasped. The sensations were too much, too strong. He arched his back. "Let it go, love." His features contorted, the veins sticking out on his neck. Her fingernails scraped his back, and he pumped harder, faster. All at once, a strangled groan escaped his lips, and he collapsed. Her pussy spasmed around his stiff cock, and she fell against the bedding, exhausted, but pleasantly so.

Her lips curved into a smile. Married to an alien and very pleased so far.

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Nine

Gondar stared at the lovely vision asleep beside him. Before consummating their union, he'd ventured out to check the gauges but cut his journey short, thinking of his wife waiting for him, nude and pliant. Upon his return to the house, she'd proven more perfect than he'd hoped. Erickson came through for him, and Gondar couldn't be more pleased. His only regret was Hartman's interest in Sierra. From experience, he knew the man would be relentless in his search.

Time had softened the pain of Seonie's death, and Gondar enjoyed solitude on this forsaken planet. But Hartman now had another reason for seeking him out. Lust for Sierra would drive the man to Gondar's door. Neither he nor Sierra was safe.

Before he could change his mind, he slid from the bed and padded to the office in the next room. The ceiling fan stirred the hairs on his nude body. He settled into the leather chair behind his desk and entered the code for a communication link to Faegan officials. It was time to move the Farenate Trasale. He'd given up his life, his honor, to protect the FT project from falling into enemy hands. Playing the martyr when only he was involved was one thing, but with Sierra a part of his life, it was time to come clean. Time to regain his life.

The device squawked and grainy lines drifted across the screen, but a few minutes later he had a solid connection.

"Gondar Lem reporting on FT's status."

"Go ahead."

"Location compromised. Request reinstatement of official status." Gondar fiddled with the controls, hoping for a less static-filled conversation.

"Understood. Command will advise in two hours."

Short, sweet, and to the point. He flipped the standby switch and stared into space.

He'd been obligated for the past nine years to keep the FT safe. Why they just didn't destroy the thing, he had no idea. At present, most government officials were corrupt. The few that understood the FT's power feared allowing the current board access to the age-defying technology. At the same time, those that comprehended the machine's uncanny ability to prolong life knew something this important couldn't be destroyed, not without first dissecting and probing its mysteries.

They'd used the accusations against him as the perfect cover. But no more.

Now that he was married, his obligation shifted. He didn't love Sierra. Not yet, anyway. Emotion that deep didn't happen overnight, but he did feel overly protective toward her. Her unbridled passion had been a gift, and he'd enjoyed every inch of her silky body. Married for only a few days, but already he felt a strong connection to Sierra. The depth of his responsibility toward his new wife surprised him. All he knew of the girl was what the matchmaker told him and yet, a possessive urge to keep her close and safe swept through his body.

He shot a glance at the partially opened door to the bedroom and caught a glimpse of her bare thigh. His cock stiffened at the creamy white skin just begging for a closer look. His mouth stretched into a slow smile. He had two hours to kill.

Naked, he crept back to his room and onto the bed. His approach failed to awaken Sierra. He didn't mind. With an appreciative eye, he studied her natural beauty, amazed he'd been given this precious gift.

He shifted his gaze to his dresser where he'd hidden the packet Erickson gave him prior to landing. He hadn't had a chance to look it over, but now might be a good time. Would Sierra be upset at his invasion of her privacy? Probably. On the other hand, how would he know what special fantasies she entertained?

Quietly, he opened the drawer and removed the clipped pages. Propped against the dresser, he thumbed through the papers. His eyes widened as he absorbed the various images. Like a cat drawn to fish, he committed each scene to memory.

"What are you doing?" a sleep laden voice asked.

Gondar turned. "Finding out what makes you really tick."

"Hmm. Did you steal Candy's tarot cards?" She rose up on her elbows, and her long, ash blonde hair spilled across her rosy breasts.

"Better." He waved the packet at her. "Erickson supplied me with candid images."

She fell back onto the mattress. "The magazine can't tell you all my fantasies."

"These aren't magazine photos, doll." He laid them on the dresser top and approached. "Want to find out what I know?"

"A fantasy is one thing. Reality is quite another. I'm not sure I'm ready to blend the two."

He grabbed her ankles and pulled her toward him. She gave a surprised screech. He laughed, enjoying her sudden look of apprehension.

"Don't ever second guess me," he said. "Pleasure comes from both."

"But I imagine the best pleasure comes from a deep abiding love, something we don't yet share."

"Yes, but we have this." His mouth latched onto a pert nipple, and he sucked—hard.

She arched into him. "Oh, my. I promise not to complain. You've shown me how good it can be."

"But, it could be so much better."

Her full lips puckered. "I'm not ready for creative play. All these new sensations are overwhelming."

He chuckled. "I'm a patient man. We'll put the file away for now."

"Hmm. But that doesn't mean I don't want more of what you gave me last night."

"You're not sore?"

"No. Well, maybe a little, but—you could always kiss it and make it better."

"Oh Janus, but you turn me on." He stroked her soft skin and pressed kisses until his mouth found her sweet nub. He'd do more than offer kisses. Anything to bring this treasured gift pleasure. His lips wrapped around her clit, and he lost

himself to the moment. To her. He'd waited a lifetime for this kind of pleasure and now he reveled in wedded bliss.

* * * *

Sierra lay next to her new husband and stared at his profile. The man didn't look quite so austere when asleep. Exhaustion claimed him shortly after he'd climaxed. After all, he'd just wrung from her responsive body the fifth orgasm since they'd arrived eight hours ago. Her thighs and pussy felt deliciously sore, and her body was more relaxed than it had ever been. How much better could it be?

Her stomach growled. When was the last time she'd eaten? She frowned. If she went into his kitchen, would there be food to prepare? Would she know how to cook alien fare? The rumble in her midsection made her shift. Now might be a good time to explore and find out just how different Gondar's facilities were from hers.

She placed her bare feet on the cold metal floor. Padding barefoot toward the door, she stopped at the dresser. The files Gondar had bandied about were no longer there. A pull on the handle yielded nothing but a locked drawer. She frowned. While she hadn't wanted to experiment yet, he'd aroused her curiosity with Erickson's revelations. Just what had those images revealed?

She shrugged off her disappointment. In the bathroom, she took care of her personal needs then hunted for her clothing. A deep frown formed when she failed in her mission. Had he hidden her clothes?

Her stomach growled, reminding her of her hunger. She located the fair sized kitchen at the end of a long hall. Surprisingly, the area resembled a typical Earth kitchen, complete with island, stove, refrigerator, and sink. Though a few dishes rested in the sink, the rest of the room was tidy, something she hadn't expected from a man living alone.

After opening the fridge door, she stared at the sparse contents. "Does the man ever eat?"

"Very well."

She jumped and clutched her hand at her throat. Suddenly she felt very vulnerable standing before him naked in a room other than the bedroom.

He leaned against the doorjamb and gave her a lazy smile. "I'm staring at something very delicious and getting a mighty big appetite."

She tossed her long tresses over her shoulder and peered back into the fridge. "Too many sweets are bad for you. You need something more substantial than..."

"Your sweet nectar?"

She closed the fridge door and crossed her arms over her pert nipples. "I need my clothes."

He shook his head. "Why? There's no one around for two hundred miles. Just you and me."

"I'll rephrase. I want my clothes."

"No." His gaze caressed her nudity.

A quiver attacked her pussy. The masterful way he said no made her all too aware of her status. She was alone, with no friends on a planet devoid of laws to keep her safe. Just what had she gotten herself into?

"Come here."

Another command; one punctuated by a feral gleam in his eye.

She shook her head. "Food. I'm hungry."

"So am I." A twinkle in his eye belied the stern tone of his voice. He pulled away from the doorway and approached with the grace of a panther stalking a small rabbit.

Adrenalin soared through her veins at the heated gaze he focused on her. Her lungs expanded, and a faint buzzing muted her hearing. The hollowness in her stomach disappeared, replaced by a different need. How had she become addicted to the nourishment he intended in so short a time?

He stood in front of her and opened the fridge door. A blast of cold air pebbled her nipples. He pulled out three containers and placed them beside her. Even colder air swept across her cheek when he pulled open the freezer and withdrew an ice bucket. He set the ice next to the other items. Before she could ask what he planned to serve her, he bent and tossed her over his shoulder. She squealed and wiggled to be free. He gave her a playful pop on the backside that stilled her movements.

She expected him to escort her back to their bed, but instead, he sat her in the middle of the kitchen table. "Lay down."

She complied more out of curiosity than anything else. He stretched out beside her. "Drobot on."

A strange whirring sounded, and she twisted her head to investigate. A mechanical creature swept through a door from

a corner closet and rolled toward the counter. Gondar placed a hand on her belly to keep her from fidgeting.

"Prepare food," he commanded, and the robotic creature worked with the various items. In the meantime, Gondar stroked her thigh. "Be very still and anticipate the most erotic meal you've ever eaten."

"What..."

"And quiet. Drobot isn't trained for your presence yet and might react in an unpredictable way. Let me command for your pleasure."

Command for her pleasure? Did he have any idea how those words made her pulse race?

The robotic creature completed his preparations and approached the table with a tray of strange but fragrant foods. Her mouth watered, and she started to reach for a nibble when Gondar caught her hand. "We need to work on your hearing."

"My hearing's fine."

"So, you willfully didn't mind me?"

"I ... I thought..."

He ignored her confusion. "Drobot. My companion and I wish to eat. Clean surface first."

The robot placed the tray on the table at their heads and went to the sink. The sound of running water calmed her nerves. She closed her eyes, wondering what he planned next. Her stomach growled again, and she was acutely aware of her growing discomfort and the strange tingle in her pussy.

Her eyes flew wide when a warm cloth trailed along her skin. Above her, a metallic arm stretched back and forth, scrubbing her skin with gentle motions.

"Bend your knees and spread your thighs," Gondar said and mimicked his instructions.

As soon as she did as asked, the robot stroked the rag between her legs. She squirmed against a fresh wave of desire. The warm cloth combined with a hint of the unknown made her yearn for something more than food. Cool air touched her damp skin the moment Drobot quit to attend Gondar. The metal maid cleaned her husband in a similar fashion, and he smiled his approval.

"Fetch the stimulator belts," Gondar commanded, and Drobot dropped the rag on the floor to obey.

A moment later, the bolt and tin servant returned, its steel arms laden with odd straps. It draped a strap over both their stomachs and another around their chests. Sierra shifted, uneasy with what it intended. "What's this thing going to do?" she whispered.

Gondar turned his head her way and smiled. "Patience isn't one of your stronger qualities, is it?"

She stared into his deep brown eyes, willing herself to trust this stranger. "No. It really isn't."

"We'll have to work on that."

What did he mean by that remark? But her attention shifted when the strap over their chests was tightened, preventing upper movement. Another part of the strap was placed between her legs and a cup wedged against her

mound. She lifted her head, straining to see, but all she could detect was the bent bucket head of the servant.

"How does this relate to food?"

Gondar merely smiled at her.

"Drobot, engage straps and serve us."

She would have said more, but a few minutes later, a morsel of food was held against her lips. The fragrance was too tempting, and she was too hungry to question what it was. She parted her lips, allowing the robot to slip the piece into her mouth. The moment she started to chew the salty, meat-like bite, a warmth blanketed her pussy and mound. Something stiff, but soft pushed at her entrance. She clenched her knees and swallowed.

Beside her, Gondar's gaze stroked her features with a look of triumph. "Another bite?"

"The sensation..."

"Is more than stimulating. Just relax and enjoy the meal." He turned away and opened his mouth for more.

Relax? When her whole bottom half was on fire? She stared at his profile, awaiting the moment his body reacted to the food. His features tightened and beads of sweat formed on his brow. Metal hands forced her head back into place and dangled a piece of fruit against her lips. The sweet flavor prompted her teeth to sink into the fleshy slice. Immediately, the object posed at her vagina walls slipped further inside, and the cup against her mound vibrated. She chewed slow, realizing she could control the amount of pleasure by how long she enjoyed the bite.

On the third taste, the cups around her nipples compressed, squeezing and emitting heat at the same time. She moaned, enjoying the apricot flavoring that exploded in her mouth at the same time stimulus to her pussy increased. Several more nibbles and her body writhed against the restraints. The sensations to her insides were almost more than she could bear while the various flavors tantalized her taste buds. Never had food tasted so good.

Beside her, Gondar arched against his constraints and cried out. She approached her own orgasm, feeling sated by the treats and on fire for release. The bulbous dildo buried itself to the hilt, filling her completely with vibrating pressure. She wiggled her hips, arching toward the finale. A cry burst from her lips, and the straps cut into her tender skin. Waves and waves of spasms flowed through her insides, turning her genitals into a sensitized minefield of sensation.

"Drobot, snap photo." Through a fog, Gondar's voice sounded strained.

She collapsed, unable to embrace the orgasm further.

Slowly, the dildo withdrew and the pressure against her g-spot lessened. She peered at Gondar through hooded lids. "I want to do that again, but I'm too full. I couldn't eat another bite."

He smiled. "Did you enjoy the meal?"

She laughed. "Food never tasted so good."

"Drobot, release bonds."

With the straps gone, Sierra still didn't have the strength to move from the table. She stared at the ceiling, wondering what other surprises her husband had for her.

He rolled onto his side and swept a hand across her nipples. "That was a wedding gift."

"One I could become addicted to."

"No. Afraid not." Gondar's hand splayed against her belly. "The Taste Enhancer is only good for one episode a year."

She settled her gaze upon his. "What? That makes no sense."

"It makes perfect sense. The stimulation provided is more intense than anything I can do for you or you for me. As you said, the device could become quite addictive. I purchased it at a market fair on CP-Fifty-nine, a seedy little planet tucked away in the Phantiased Galaxy. At the time, I thought I would be married within the year. That was seven years ago."

"And this is the first time you've ever tried it?"

His skin blushed a nice shade of red. "Well no, but I can honestly say, the sensations are far better when the thing is shared as it is meant to be."

She sighed.

He chuckled. "Take heart. The Taste Enhancer will be something we can look forward to each anniversary and with something a bit more elaborate than my leftovers."

"Hmm. My pussy is still spasming. Are you sure we have to wait a year?"

"We have a photo to remember the moment." He waved a graphic image at her. "In the meantime, we'll just have to explore other ways to make you cum."

She closed her eyes. "That does sound promising, but not right now. Right now, I need sleep. I think jet lag and sex have worn me out."

Airies Rising
by Syrell Starr

He smoothed a stray hair from her forehead. "Then sleep."

In the background, the whirl of a robotic engine and the jangle of loose straps swept across the room. The hard table bit into her backside, but she didn't care. She was too exhausted and sexually sated to worry about a little discomfort.

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Ten

A multitude of high-pitched voices stirred him from his slumber. He raised his head from the hard surface and rubbed sleep from swollen eyes. About ten Crandamans crowded around the table. Beside him, Sierra shifted and rose up on one elbow.

She screamed and pressed her nakedness against his back. "Who are they?"

"Meet our neighbors."

The odd pixie people gibbered in their language, and Gondar had a difficult time answering all their questions. They wanted to know about the woman and if this was the reason he'd summoned them to journey the long distance. He answered as best he could, enjoying the feel of Sierra's warmth pressed against his skin.

Sierra pointed an accusing finger at them. "This is why I need clothes. I can't be parading around in front of strangers without a stitch of clothing."

"Why? You've done it before."

"I have not."

"What do you call posing nude for a well circulated porn rag?"

"That's different."

"I don't see how," he said, keeping his gaze on each of the Crandamans. While he liked them all well enough, they tended to have sticky fingers whenever they were about.

"I couldn't see everyone looking at me."

Well, that made perfect sense. He shook his head at her warped perspective. "The Crandamans mean no harm and could care less about your state of dress, but if it makes you feel better, they're here at my request to measure you for a tunic or two."

She leaned her head over his shoulder. "Really?"

"Keep pressing into me that way, and we might have to postpone the measuring session, though."

She laughed, and the sound made his heart swell. He sat up and dangled his feet off the edge. Sierra scrambled to a kneeling position behind him.

"Get down and let them do their job."

"They can't just eye-ball my size?"

"No and I don't understand this sudden shyness." Her apprehension made no sense. She'd posed for a camera crew of photographers. How was this any different?

"Fine." She pulled away, taking her warmth with her.

After rounding the table, she stood before the assembly of Crandamans and stared at a point on the floor, one hand cradled against her breasts and the other shielding her pussy. Her awkwardness in front of these strange beings caused a fierce protectiveness in him. At the same time, he wanted to reprimand her for her childishness. The conflicting emotions made him grit his teeth.

In the meantime, Kar, the leader of the bunch, barked orders. Disks were held aloft, digitizing her body for later analysis. In a flourish of hand gestures and guttural phrases, Kar promised adequate garments in two days. Once done, they hurried away as quickly as they came.

An awkward silence fell between him and Sierra. Without sex, they'd yet to develop a common link for conversation. He'd been alone so long; he wasn't sure how to verbally entertain anymore. He cleared his throat. "I have to work."

"What should I do with my time?"

He shrugged. "You're welcome to tag along."

"Without clothes?"

"No one will see. You just met the only neighbors we have, and they're already miles away by now." He hopped off the table and padded to the door. "Come or not. Makes no difference to me."

"But..."

"I'm just as naked, babe, and way too sore to indulge my carnal appetites." He winked. "Besides, I need to rest for another round tonight."

She blushed, and the pink-tinged cheeks made her eyes appear more vibrant. He shrugged and exited, not waiting to see if she followed or not. Within minutes, her musky sweet scent alerted him to her presence. He smiled, glad she'd chosen to accompany him.

"I'm not sure I'd be a good nudist," she said.

"Which is something I really don't get." He kept his gaze focused on the distant horizon and the outbuilding perched on top of the knoll. "What made you pose nude, if you don't like folks seeing your body?"

"I did it for money." She spoke to the ground in a small voice as if the admission caused her great humility. "But—I'd do it again given the same circumstances."

"Which were?" He already knew, but sensed her need to confess.

"My brother needed medical attention. My parents died prior to his terminal illness. I was all he had."

"And it wasn't enough."

"No."

"Your parents wouldn't have approved." His toe caught a crystalline rock and sent it skipping ahead of them. The sun bore down, arresting temperatures that exceeded Earth's hottest clime by at least ten degrees. She didn't complain even though her skin glistened and she struggled to breathe normally.

"How did you know?"

"You're not all that hard to read." They wound around a large boulder. "When we return, I'll give you what you need to deal with the guilt."

She gave him a funny look but didn't ask what he intended. He quirked his lip. If she only knew.

Her gaze swept the countryside with intense interest. "So, what do you do to earn your keep?"

"I dig for relics."

Her eyes grew wider than the head of his penis. "You're an archeologist?"

"Yes."

"Oh my God. I can't believe it. That's what I was going to study in school." Each word flew from her lips with animated gestures from her hands. Her sudden joy amused him. "Will you teach me?"

"Sure. What else am I to do with you?" They entered a narrow pass with tall rock formations towering on either side.

"Well, I suppose you could keep me locked away as your sex slave, but that would get tedious after a while, don't you think?"

"Oh honey, you don't want to go there. Give me half a reason, and I'll take you up on that offer in a heartbeat."

She laughed. "True, you are rather randy for an old fart."

"Old fart?"

"Well let's face it, you are a bit older than me." She skidded to a stop when they reached the end of the pass, and it opened to reveal the ruins of a lost city. "Oh my, this is magnificent."

He beamed, relieved she shared his joy of the ancient structure and stone carvings. The dwelling was at least two thousand years old and possessed features similar to some of the pyramids found on Earth's Egypt.

She followed him to an area to the right of the most intact part of the dwelling. Stakes and a thin rope marked the spot for excavation.

He frowned, kneeling beside a shallow hole. "I'm thirty-four of your Earth years."

"I'm twenty-one." She smiled and knelt beside him. "I guess thirteen years isn't that great of a span."

"This is the sight of an ancient alien civilization. At one time, this planet was teeming with life. I've been trying to discover what happened to diminish the population."

"Any theories yet?"

"A few. What little evidence there is suggests some sort of epidemic." He picked up a brush and swept away debris. "Pick up that other brush and start sweeping. Do so in gentle movements like this. Later, I'll show you the best way to use the pick."

"Where are all the artifacts you've unearthed?"

He nodded toward the outbuilding a few yards away. "In there. I need to start cataloguing what I have, but I'm more fond of this part of the work."

Her eyes brightened, and she dropped the brush.

"Would you let me?"

"I suppose it couldn't hurt." He placed his brush on top of hers and straightened. "Let's go inside and see what we need to do."

She rushed ahead and he laughed. When he reached the building, she was nowhere to be seen. "Sierra."

She didn't answer. He cupped his mouth. "Sierra!"

The silence proved eerie, frightening. He took a step inside.

A mud ball caught him in the chest and sent splatters raining on his face. He sputtered. A high-pitched giggle sounded to his right. "Gotcha."

"Not funny."

Another mud ball landed on his shoulder. "Sierra. I'm warning you."

"Lighten up, dude. You're way too serious."

This time the voice came from a point to his left. Where was the mud coming from? He growled. He really needed to work, especially after being gone for a week. Maybe he should

have returned her clothes. Nudity was bound to distract them both at some point. "Come on, Sierra. Enough's enou..." He sputtered and spit out a mouthful of mud.

"Ooops."

He narrowed his eyes and charged into the dim room. He flipped a switch and flooded the area with light. Rows of tables cluttered with remnants of a past civilization filled the large space. He navigated the narrow paths between them, searching for a sign of his wayward wife. Her antics hadn't made him mad. Not really. Few opportunities came his way for play. The thought tempered his anger and made him realize the gift she presented to him this day.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are."

A ball of mud splashed in front of his feet. He laughed. "You missed."

Her answer was another mud ball that hit him right above his groin. That was a bit close for comfort. He frowned. Maybe he didn't want to play, after all. He spotted a pit of dark ooze in the far corner and headed that way. "You're caught now."

"Not quite yet." She taunted. "I still have ammunition. You don't."

She stood in front of the pit wearing nothing but a grin and took aim. He closed the distance between them in a flash and dove for her. He landed at her feet and wrapped his arms about her ankles. She fell backward. The splat sounded louder than a diver's belly flop.

He rose to his knees and peered at her. Laughter erupted and great tears of mirth gathered at the corners of his eyes.

She sat up and wrinkled her nose. "What is this stuff, anyway?"

He couldn't concentrate for the laughter and didn't answer. A sharp pain made him lean forward and gasp. She'd yanked his flaccid penis to get his attention. It did the trick. He sobered immediately.

She chuckled. "You have this stuff all over your willy. Guess my aim isn't too bad, after all."

"Good or bad, we aren't going to get any work done today. We're going to have to go back to the house to shower or suffer a very uncomfortable rash."

"Rash?"

"You found a snaedra pit. Ooze seeps from the ground without warning and in the oddest places, but if it stays on the skin for any length of time, a really nasty rash forms."

"Oh." Her contrite reply made him smile. She tilted her head. "You're joking. Otherwise, you wouldn't be so blasé about it."

He shook his head. "I'm quite serious. We should head back posthaste. I don't relish a rash on my—how did you put it? My willy?"

She clamored to her feet and took off at a quick pace, dripping mud in her wake. He rolled his eyes and followed. Already, his marriage kept him amused in ways he never thought possible.

* * * *

Sierra leaned her head against the tub and sighed. She never would have thought being kidnapped by an alien would

work to her advantage. Not only did he offer fabulous sex, he also agreed to teach her all about being an archeologist.

He entered the bathroom and sat on the closed toilet.

"Here. Drink this."

"What is it?" She took the offered glass and took a sniff. Wine?

"The Crandamans call it Temba, but it tastes just like wine to me."

She took a sip and leaned her head back as the heady flavor slipped past her tongue and down her throat. "This is very good."

"I had Drobot wash your clothes."

"You did?" She brightened then frowned. "Why? I thought you planned to keep me nude all the time."

"While it's a great thought, I find it distracts me too much from my work."

She closed her eyes again. "Maybe I like distracting you."

"That kind of thinking might get you spanked, but then, you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

More than steamy hot water caused her skin to warm, and a delicious tingle pricked her skin. How had he known? She always thought it an odd quirk, something to keep quiet about. After Candy's admission right before she'd agreed to wed Terfada, Sierra's pussy had quivered with unexplained need. She wiped her hand across her damp face. She could deny his assumption, but he was giving her a chance to discover for herself if it was something she really wanted to experience.

"I-I might."

He chuckled. Move over, and let me rinse off this mud goop. After we're clean, we'll just see if you do."

Water sloshed over the sides as he climbed in and sat across from her. "You still have a bit of goo on the tip of your nipple." He wiped it off with his finger. "Perhaps I should have licked it clean, instead."

She wanted to enjoy the rest of her bath and the sexy innuendos he tossed her way, but her mind focused on only one thing—getting her tush slapped. Every time she pictured herself draped over his strong lap, her stomach did a flip flop, and heat suffused her loins.

"Pass me the soap."

"Uh? Oh, yeah, sure." She reached for the slippery bar, and it flew out of her hand and shot toward his chest.

He grabbed it and laughed. "You really do need help concentrating. Might need to pepper that sexy bottom of yours with more than a few slaps."

She splashed the water with the flat of her palm, sending a spray of moisture toward his face. He grabbed her ankle in response and tugged so her head went underwater. He let go, and she came up sputtering.

He laughed again, filling the small cubicle with robust sound. "We could stay here until we shrivel to nothing, but it's time to get out." The sucking, gurgling noise of water sucking down a drain alerted her to the pulled plug.

Stepping from the tub, he dripped water across the metal floor and reached for a towel. Unable to prolong getting out, she stood and stepped over the rim. The towel he handed her was soft and warm. She dried quickly. Gondar padded into

the bedroom, leaving the door ajar. She hung up the towel and followed but came up short when she saw him seated on a chair, his thighs slightly parted.

He crooked his finger. "Come here."

"Maybe we could try something else for foreplay."

"It wasn't a request." He patted his lap.

She swallowed the lump of apprehension clogging her throat and did as requested. As soon as she neared his side, he grabbed her hand and tugged her across his hard thighs. The position proved highly embarrassing and yet, that emotion only heightened her anticipation.

He rubbed her derriere. "Relax. You have the most stunning bottom, full and soft, just made for warming."

"This is very awkward."

"Hmm. Not from my position." His hand continued stroking in circular motions. "Tell me what you're feeling."

"Embarrassed."

"Is your pussy throbbing?"

More than she cared to admit. "A little."

"Liar." He slapped her, and a sharp, but not unpleasant pain made her gasp.

"So, how did that feel?"

"Tingly. I-I think you need to do it again to make sure." Had she really said that?

But minutes later he rained a volley of slaps to her exposed bottom. The strokes didn't hurt, but he hit hard enough to spread growing heat along her skin. After about ten, he stopped and massaged the area. "You're nice and pink."

"That feels nice." She moaned, not wanting him to stop. His hand slipped between her thighs and brushed against her sensitive clit. She lifted her hips, wanting him to insert a finger.

"No. Naughty girls don't get to cum yet." He withdrew his comforting hand and rained more slaps across her buttocks. She squirmed as the heat grew in intensity.

"Stop. It's too much." She cried out, grinding her pussy into his lap as she tried to evade his hard hand.

"And deprive you of a well warmed bottom? No. I plan to spank until you're a nice shade of red." He wrapped his leg over hers and held both hands against her back with one of his. She was secured so she couldn't move and once more, the bite of apprehension took a chunk out of her stomach.

"This no longer sounds like a good idea."

"You're right. It sounds like a great idea." He massaged her seat. "Just relax. I promise I won't give more than you can take."

She inhaled a deep breath and waited what seemed like an eternity before he began peppering her sit spot. She cried out and tried to wiggle, but he brought his hand down again and again. Just when she didn't think she could stand the pain, his sepher slipped against her clitoris and added a different kind of stroke. She gasped at the enhanced sensation and relaxed against Gondar's lap.

"That's it," Gondar purred. "Cum for me."

At his words, she exploded, lifting from her position only to collapse in a quivering heap of orgasmic euphoria. Still draped

across Gondar's knees, embarrassment turned to rapture. He smoothed the fire in her bottom with light, feathery strokes.

After releasing her hands and legs, she continued to lie there, absorbing the after spasms that rocked her body. She rolled onto her back, and he scooped her into his arms and carried her to bed. "You can't sleep yet. It's my turn."

She stretched, loving the warmth that cushioned her buttocks. "That was incredible."

"Yes, but the next time you try to bite me, I'll spank for real."

Her eyes widened at his accusation. "I did?" She didn't recall, though she did remember fighting the pain.

He pointed to a set of teeth marks on his upper thigh. "Bloodthirsty wench. Kiss it and make it better."

Her lips pressed against the red, circular indentions. Course hairs tickled her nose, but she licked and nipped until a moan escaped his lips. She moved closer to his erection and wrapped her mouth around his stiff warmth. The salty taste of pre-cum tantalized her buds and made her want to give him an orgasm to equal her own.

She pulled away and stared into his stormy eyes. "What would make you cum harder than you've ever cum before?"

"Keep sucking my dick, and we might find out."

She laughed and settled around his shaft once more. Somewhere she'd read that humming could enhance the experience, so she struck up a tune and delighted in his immediate response. It didn't matter that she couldn't sing. The vibrations alone were enough to stimulate his experience. She cupped his scrotum and massaged his anal lips while

keeping his cock firmly embedded in her mouth. His hands clutched the bedding, and his sepher wiggled about uncontrollably.

She removed her mouth and straddled him. Reaching behind, she guided his lubricated cock into her moist folds. Not long after, he cried out, finding his release. She smiled. The man was amazing. Sex was amazing. Only one thing put a damper on her elation. Did they have a true marriage yet? One like her parents had enjoyed, where trust and love were the main ingredients?

She eased off of him and stretched out next to him. She wanted him, was addicted to the feelings he aroused, but she also wanted more. What would become of their marriage when the newness wore off, and they were stuck on this desolate planet with no one for company except themselves and a passel of pixie aliens?

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Eleven

"Honeymoon's over." Gondar slapped her ass, and she rolled to her back with a muttered oath. "Get up. Time to dress and pack."

She lifted her head, looking far too adorable with her mussed hair and sleep-laden eyes. "What do you mean, pack?"

He tossed her a set of clothes the Crandamans delivered that morning. "I've been given another assignment." While not a lie, it wasn't exactly the truth. Radar activity alerted him to a ship hovering just outside normal orbit. Once they neared gravitational pull and set orbit speed, he wouldn't have time to escape. He estimated distance to arrival to be about four hours, give or take.

Perky pink nipples emerged from the blanket as Sierra sat up and clutched the tunic. "This is beautiful. Is this what those cute pixie folks made for me?"

"Yep."

"Can I see the rest?" She clamored out of bed and padded naked toward the bathroom.

"I've already packed them."

She stuck her head out the door and frowned. "Then why did you ask me to help with packing if you've already done it?"

"I need help with equipment."

Her eyes dropped to the bulge in his pants. "Oh, I think your equipment is just fine."

"Saucy wench." He tossed a pillow at her. "Hurry and get dressed. I need to focus on the mission and not your enticing body."

* * * *

Mission? What mission?

But he was already gone before she had a chance to ask. She stared at her image in the mirror and blushed when she caught sight of the rosy evidence left from last night's lovemaking. Every moment thus far had been spent trying new ways of foreplay. Did she want to repeat each experience? She wasn't sure. Some were almost too intense in retrospect.

She wiggled into the new tunic and sighed. The feel of the material was unlike anything she'd ever owned. Soft, form fitting, but flexible as well. The colorful designs were intricately woven with artful precision. The Crandamans knew how to weave. She longed to see the other garments they'd crafted for her but knew she had to wait. Beneath the tunic, she wore a pair of pants that ballooned at the hips but tapered to fit snug at the ankles. The royal blue picked up the bits of blue in the pattern and complemented the other fiesta like colors within the tunic. The Crandamans had constructed matching slippers also, ones that were a whole lot more comfortable than her heels.

Dressed, she ventured into the living area in search of Gondar. A thorough search of the house yielded no results. Gondar wasn't inside. She stepped outside and shaded her eyes against the sun. To the right, a large vessel hovered

over the ground. Gondar appeared at her side looking more like a warrior than the man she'd made love to for two full days. He wore what looked like a uniform that fit snug against his sculpted chest and thighs. The faded brown color made his swarthy dark looks more pronounced and added a hint of danger. Tall, black leather boots hugged his calves while a wide belt rode low on his trim hips. The belt appeared to be some sort of weapon holder though items tucked away in various pockets didn't resemble any gun or ammunition she'd ever seen.

"Follow me."

His curt command sounded more like the Gondar who'd kidnapped her. She swallowed her unease and fell into step behind him. Questions begged to be asked, but she kept silent, sensing the tension within his corded muscles.

He led her to a secluded spot behind the house. He swept away debris to reveal a hidden hatch buried in the ground. With much grunting, he wrestled the door open and motioned her down a flight of narrow stairs. She gathered her tunic closer to her body, not wanting it soiled from the dirt clinging to the sides.

Once they both reached the bottom, he turned on a light and motioned her to the far corner where a small but complicated device rested. "I got this thing down here by myself, but it's been nine years since it's been moved, so I want to make sure we treat it with delicate hands."

"What is it?" The item looked to be made out of ceramic or carved stone, and was surrounded by unrecognizable

symbols. A ring of clear glass revealed the workings of a complicated piece of machinery.

"Nothing special. Just something I located on one of my digs."

Nothing special? Then why go to the trouble to move it? "It must have some importance."

"I've been asked to deliver the item to my home planet."

"Is this the mission you referred to?"

"Part of it." He waved her around the other side. "See the handle toward the bottom?"

She nodded.

"Lift using the handle."

She did as requested at the same he lifted from the other side. The machine wasn't all that heavy, for which she was grateful. They spent a clumsy moment carrying it up the stairs. Once they reached the top, he instructed her to ease it to the ground. To her surprise, he boosted it into his arms and carted it to the ship without further assistance from her, though he did so with some awkwardness. She followed, afraid he might drop it. He set it down again once they reached his pod.

"Time to board." He helped her into the vessel before loading the ancient equipment into one of the side compartments.

"We don't have time for pleasantries," he said. "We'll be flying at mega speeds the moment we find an interstellar highway. Just strap yourself in and do everything I tell you, when I tell you. No questions asked."

"You ... you sound like we're in some sort of danger or something." A flutter of nervous energy swarmed her veins.

"Strap in." He ignored her comment, something that didn't reassure her in the least.

She belted the restraints and smiled at the faint memory of her time with the Taste Enhancer. In the meantime, Gondar darted from one console to another, fiddling with all manner of gauges. The ship vibrated in hover mode, but as soon as he strapped in and flicked a switch, the engines roared to life. The deafening sound drowned out the pitter-patter of her heart as it pounded her apprehension. Her head flew forward then back, and the vessel blasted into space. Encapsulated as they were, the g-force still tugged at her body. Not even the Solar Space Ride at the local amusement park could prepare her for the sensations flying her way. She closed her eyes and prayed Gondar knew what he was doing. This smaller ship wasn't as tightly made as Erickson's larger one had been.

Finally, the ship settled into a smoother flight pattern, and she relaxed against the padded chair. She forced a yawn, and her ears popped. "Wanna tell me where we're heading exactly and what's the hurry?"

He removed his straps and adjusted a few more dials. "Faegan."

"Am I supposed to know where that is?"

"No." He reached for something above her head.

She hit the release on her straps, but he stopped her. "I didn't tell you to unbelt yet."

"But it's uncomfortable, and you're floating about."

"This pod isn't like Erickson's fancy ride. For one thing, it's seen a few years, and it hasn't been flown in two. Anything could happen, and I want us both prepared."

She sat back with a huff. What happened to the lover who catered to every erotic need?

"Wipe that pout off your pretty lips. I'd rather be back on Vi Twelve screwing you silly, but duty calls."

She shifted her gaze to the lighted console and focused on the various blinking lights. What would happen if he became incapacitated in some way? Who would fly this bucket of bolts? "Tell me about Faegan."

"Population fifty-six million or roughly thereabouts. Much like your Earth. Clime mirrors Earth's as well. Where we're headed, it stays cold year around. I have thermal outerwear on board for when we land."

"So what aren't you telling me?"

He rolled his eyes and flattened his lips in a thin line. After a moment, he heaved a sigh. "Faegan is my home planet. The place is split by two different continents, which are always at odds with the other. My place of residence is Sarmed, a very proud clan of conservative thinkers."

"You don't seem happy to return."

"I no longer share the same cultural beliefs they do. While I have strong ties to the community, and my loyalty will always be to them, I have no desire to live there."

She glanced over his shoulder. "Is that particular light supposed to flash red?"

"Damn!" He rushed forward to investigate. "I've got to check the wiring on the stabilizer. Stay put and stay fastened in."

She folded her arms about her waist. Gondar lifted a hatch and disappeared into the belly of the ship. She wasn't sure she liked this domineering side of him. Well, that wasn't exactly true. Her bottom wiggled against the hard cushion, seeking a more comfortable position. His masterful approach to lovemaking made her more susceptible to erotic stimulation. She never thought she'd become so comfortable in a man's arms after only a few nights of rapture, but Gondar had turned her into a wild woman. Even now, she craved the heady feelings only he could inspire.

The hinges on the floor hatch groaned, and Gondar squeezed massive shoulders through the opening. "Damn squerrel rodents nibbled through several wires. I've made repairs and set out traps. They won't be eating any more wire and plastic treats this trip."

"You mean squirrels?"

"No. Squerrels. Similar to your squirrel but smaller and prone to making their home on space vessels."

"Oh."

"I do a maintenance check once every three months, so I usually catch any activity before it becomes a problem, but I made an unscheduled trip to another planet about the time I should have been tending to business." The way he said trip and the gleam in his eye sounded like an accusation.

"You can't blame me."

"Why not?"

"You kidnapped me. I'm the offended party here."

He latched onto a handhold and leaned over. "How offended are you?"

What was he asking? Did he want her to regret their marriage? Or was he looking for reassurances? Her gaze fell onto the tattoos left from the bonding bracelets, and she frowned. On hindsight, she sure fell into bed with the man quick enough. Any other stranger would have had to fight for the right, but not Gondar. She considered the marks on his wrist. Had the bonding bracelet influenced her feelings toward the alien? Her temper flared at the thought.

She dreamed of finding romance and love, of experiencing the first blossom of infatuation that made the heart ache for more. He'd stolen that from her.

"I don't know what you did to make me so pliant, but I won't fall into your arms so easily next time."

"Good."

"What?"

"The customs of Faegan don't allow for outward displays of affection."

"No worries there, big boy."

He opened his mouth but closed it again when the ship lurched unexpectedly to the right. The movement forced him to stumble into her. She caught her breath. The vessel lurched again to the left, sending him careening in the other direction.

"Blasted meteoroid shower." He stumbled to his feet and latched onto the controls. "The stabilizer still isn't working as it should."

After tweaking a few gauges, the flight smoothed to a less rickety path. "Prepare for a jump to a space highway. The new trajectory should have us arriving in three days."

And to think she'd once cursed the freeway system.

"Tell me more about Faegan."

He stretched out in the chair with his arms behind his head and smiled. "All those wonderfully inventive things I did to your body?"

She gulped. "Yes."

"They're considered taboo where I come from." He gave her a lazy smile. "Women aren't allowed to enjoy sex quite so freely, and men only plow the field when they're ready for a family."

"Sounds Puritan."

"Sounds criminal," he said in what sounded like a growl.

"If you grew up believing that way, then..."

"What happened? I spent three years on Earth on an archeological dig to find evidence of past Faegan civilization."

"Wow." She couldn't say anything more. The whole idea of past alien life on Earth left her speechless. She cleared her throat. "What made you leave?"

"Not what. Who." He looked away; his face wore a troubling frown.

"Does this have something to do with that man attacking me?"

He nodded. "Hartman used to be my partner."

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Twelve

They woke two days later to the sound of sirens going off. At least that's what it sounded like to Sierra. She shifted uneasily and groaned at the stiffness in her muscles. She peered out of half lidded eyes to see Gondar bustling about.

"What's happening?"

"We're being followed. They're trying to slip a pull noose about us."

"A pull noose?"

"Kinda like a magnetic net that encircles a smaller vessel and reels it in. A rather fancy way for them to capture us."

She sat taller. "You aren't frightened?"

He swore under his breath and fiddled with more levers. "Nah. I enjoy having my balls in a sling. The damn anti-magnetizer is busted." He pounded the console with his fist. "First the stabilizer and now this."

"Can we shoot at them?"

"If you want to die right now." He shot her a mocking glare. "The other ship is a Faegan warhound and either sent to welcome us home or detain us for interrogation."

"Why would they interrogate you if you planned to return?"

"I'm wanted by the authorities?"

"Wanted?"

"Long story, and I'll tell you later."

Perspiration broke out along her hairline and dampened her armpits. "I didn't sign up for this."

"Me neither, love." He reached into his pocket and withdrew an amulet on a gold chain. Without asking permission, he slipped it around her neck. "For good luck and because I didn't get you the traditional wedding gift."

His generosity surprised her, especially during such a tense moment. She fingered the heavy medal and drew it forward to study the design. At first glance, she thought it to be a piece of sculpted metal, but she was wrong. A polished ivory stone the size of an antique silver dollar rested in her palm. An odd warmth radiated from the center. "Thank you."

He shrugged and continued to fiddle with the controls.

The ship lurched then came to a stop. Gondar dropped his chin and sighed before straightening to his full height. Moments later, the hatch door opened. He pointed at her restraints. She nodded and unbuckled the belt. He held out his hand, and she gladly accepted his show of support.

Before they disembarked, he handed her a thin cape made from a stiff, crinkly type of material. "Protective outerwear for the cold. Drape it over your shoulders."

She allowed him to place the cape around her. "Thanks."

"Let me do the talking." He put another cape around his broad shoulders. "Women here don't have many rights."

Her throat constricted, so she nodded.

He led her into a hangar bay, and it took a minute for her feet to become accustomed to solid flooring after her three days in space. Men in dark blue uniforms came forward and addressed Gondar in a language she'd never heard. Well, that would solve the problem of her conversing by accident. A loose thread worried the underneath part of her upper arm,

and she scratched, causing the cape to slip. Gondar gave her a warning glare. What? She couldn't even move?

He answered the men in the same garbled speech then followed them into the belly of the larger ship. Rounded walls surrounded them, giving the feeling of being in a bubble. A row of low relief story panels adorned the walls of each aisle, depicting scenes of brutal battles. Good grief. She understood now where Gondar got his more serious side.

They were escorted to a holding cell and left alone with only a table and two chairs. She chuckled at the typical interrogation room of some of her world's most popular crime solving shows. "So what next? Good cop, bad cop?"

"I wouldn't start laughing anytime soon." He tested the door, but it wouldn't budge.

"Okay. Should I cry?"

"You should keep quiet. The walls have ears."

The door swung wide, and a broad shouldered man appeared. "Gondar Lem, I've been waiting years to meet you. I'm Fanlock Brent, head of the Artifact Research Lab."

Gondar smiled and inclined his head. "I'm acquainted with your work."

Sierra poked him in the side, wanting an introduction. She was more than pleased that this alien chose to converse in English. In answer, Gondar pushed her into a chair. "My wife doesn't yet understand Faegan etiquette."

"I understand."

"Perhaps you'll explain the reason for this meeting. I hoped I would be welcomed back with less hostility."

"It was necessary. Those seeking to abuse the FT still consider you a criminal." Fanlock handed him a packet of documents. "Someone from Skynet has been selling secrets to the Galenites. Your previous team has formed a special unit to deal with the problem. We still don't feel the FT will be safe here, but we thought it was in more danger of being stolen where it was."

"I agree."

"Special agents are removing the FT from your pod as we speak. Only I and a handful of loyal followers will know its new location."

"Has there been any further progress in finding Seonie's murderer?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not."

"I need to be free to move about Sarmed."

"There's the matter of the bounty on your head. Opposing factions want you and for obvious reasons." He took the envelope from Gondar and dug into the bottom, pulling from it two surrender patches. "Wear these and it will indicate that the bounty is no longer in effect, that you've turned yourself in to the authorities."

"What plans do you have for me after I'm freed of charges?" He rifled through the folder of papers.

"None. As soon as the FT is unloaded, I'll start procedures for having all charges dropped. Just sign those papers." He inclined his head toward Sierra, and she stiffened. "I've arranged for an apartment in your name. Your personal items, minus any weapons, have been placed inside for your

enjoyment. You can leave your woman there while you visit the sights."

Leave her? She crinkled her brow and opened her mouth to protest, but Gondar cut her off. "Not a word."

Gondar slipped into a chair and spent time poring over the fine print while Fanlock stood stiff and unyielding. Finally, Gondar took a pen to the indicated spaces and signed his name.

The chair screeched across the metal floor, sounding like fingernails on a chalkboard. Gondar stood and nodded to Fanlock. "Thank you. You should know. Hartman is on my trail. I expect him here within the day."

"He already arrived." Fanlock gathered the signed documents and opened the door. "He petitioned the courts for possession of your woman."

"He what?" Sierra and Gondar spoke in unison, but Fanlock closed the door without answering.

* * * *

Gondar ushered Sierra into a transport vehicle and motioned her into a vacant seat. The handful of Faegans on board stared with unabashed curiosity. Gondar ignored them, keeping silent. Security cleared them after five hours of procedures. Had Hartman suffered through the same rigmarole?

Staying even for a short time did not fit his plans. He wanted to leave the FT and hurry back to Vi Twelve. Just because security cleared him didn't mean he was safe from bounty hunters. He fingered the white surrender patches

pinned to his shoulders. They really didn't mean much in the scheme of things. Charges of Seonie's murder still hung over his head.

The troubling thoughts kept him from enjoying his homecoming. He wanted to strip Sierra until she stood naked before him. He longed to stroke her silky skin and explore her sexual delights. A hard bulge formed at his crotch, and he mentally groaned. Here, thoughts of sweaty sex were discouraged. The only position allowed was the missionary one.

His time on Earth had showed him more pleasures than he'd ever dreamed possible. He'd become addicted to sex and had experimented with some of the kinkier indulgences. Here, those practices were taboo, illegal even. Until he was free to leave, he was better off not copulating with his wife. Would she understand his reticence? Doubtful. The woman was as randy as he in bed.

He stole a glance at her rigid form. Her anger showed. He hadn't done much to reassure her. His attention shifted to the passing scenery. Flashes of red and purple flew by, muted by the grime-covered windowpane. He'd been on Vi Twelve for nine cycles and Earth, three cycles prior, yet Faegan looked no different.

"Will we be there soon?"

"Getting antsy?"

"Just making conversation."

He'd rather be making love. He squeezed her knee. "Not much farther. We'll have to stay long enough to settle

Hartman's allegations." And the charge of murder. The first worried him more.

"You ... you won't let him take me, will you?"

"Does it matter to you?"

"Of course."

"Why?" He didn't know what he wanted her to say. They hadn't known each other long, and yet he felt connected in a way that had nothing to do with sex. He shifted, uneasily awaiting her answer.

She clamped her mouth tight and stared out the window. After a long drawn out minute, she turned her head his way. "I'm not sure. I feared the worst when you first took me, but now, I fear not being with you. You've shown me more of life in the last two weeks than I've ever known."

"I won't let them take you from me." He held up his tattooed wrist. "Place your marked wrist against mine."

She fit her tattoo to his, and her silver-blue eyes blazed with wonder. "How?"

The flare of heat between them symbolized a deep connection, one he planned to keep for years.

Realization must have dawned, for her back stiffened.

"This is the reason why I didn't fight, why I gave into you so easily. Somehow, the bonding bracelet made me susceptible to anything you desired."

"The bonding helped open your heart, so your mind wouldn't interfere as much."

She sat back and folded her arms. "I'm such a fool."

"No. If you truly hadn't wanted our union, the bonding bracelet would have been ineffective."

"How can I believe you?"

He shrugged. The conveyance squealed to a stop and portals slid open. They'd arrived at the living complex. Taking her by the hand, they stepped out into a bitter cold. She wrapped the cape more securely about her shivering body. "You weren't lying when you said it was cold here."

Placing an arm around her shoulders, he hurried her to a set of tall, double doors, more triangular than rectangular. Once inside, he led her through a series of hallways until they reached the unit assigned to them. By then the temperatures proved more comfortable, and he helped her remove the protective outerwear, but kept his in place. He wasn't planning to stay.

"Welcome to Faegan," he said after escorting her inside.

The tiny two-room dwelling was to be expected. Another reason he held no desire to move back to Faegan on a permanent basis. Living space was at a premium.

"It's kinda cozy."

"Don't lie. It's small." He found their few pieces of luggage sitting on the floor and picked them up to carry to the bedroom. "They equipped us with an entertainment module and a few books which should relieve the boredom some."

"Gondar?"

"Hmm."

"I'm frightened. This is all new and not what I expected."

"Can't be helped." He made a sweep of the place for suspected surveillance. "Tomorrow, I go before the courts to answer Hartman's charges. I don't have a lot of time to

prepare my defense, so you'll need to stay here while I make a few house calls."

"No. Please."

"Stay put, Sierra. I can't protect us both." He opened the door. "Lock it after I'm gone."

The rattle of the door let him know her displeasure. He stared at the closed portal for a few minutes, fearful she might try to follow him. When the door stayed closed, he heaved a sigh of relief. She had no idea the dangers that existed on this planet.

He boarded the shuttle again. Fanlock had provided a contact within the packet of papers. The identity of his contact was unknown. All he had was a meeting time and place. Anxiety filled him as he contemplated the outcome. In a few minutes, he'd either be free of all allegations or arrested on the spot. With Skynet, there were only a few loyal men who could be trusted.

He played back the moment in time when Seonie had lost her life and a new wave of emotion stabbed his heart. The blast had obliterated the storage unit, leaving very little evidence behind. He'd been in the building to help Seonie catalogue some of their recent finds, hence one of the reasons he no longer enjoyed that aspect of his job. A message had alerted them of an attempt to steal the FT. On a whim, he decided to move the artifact to a different location. Seonie thought him silly and laughed. Thirty minutes later, the building was gone and so was Seonie.

At Hartman's accusations, Skynet placed a bounty on Gondar's head. The few men who believed in his innocence

were the very ones who requested he hide the FT from enemy hands. He'd accepted his criminal status to protect the Farenate Trasale and because without Seonie, he no longer looked forward to life as he'd known it. He'd thought himself in love.

The shuttle stopped and Gondar disembarked—alone. No other Faeganites milled about. He'd been led to a secluded area outside city limits. Feeling exposed without a weapon, he cautiously walked toward an outcropping of trees. The area provided the perfect spot for an ambush. He shivered, but kept walking, knowing he had little choice. The gamble to get his life back was one he was willing to take. If not for his sake, then for Sierra's.

The thought brought him up short. When had he started to feel more than lust for the precocious woman? His steps slowed. When had his heart healed? When had he stopped loving Seonie? He halted and took a deep breath. His feelings for Seonie had never been as intense as those for Sierra. Maybe he'd equated his strong bond of friendship with love. Her loss had hit him hard, making him question his feelings. He'd just assumed...

A shadow materialized from the stand of trees. "It's good to see you again, Gondar."

"Waintron." The name came slowly to him as recognition set in. He hadn't seen the ex-Skynet agent since before leaving for Earth. "You're looking fit."

"You too."

"So ... what do you have for me?"

Waintron stepped closer. Another shadow crept from the trees. The figure was encased in a large outerwear cape that hid the figure's identity. He squinted his eyes. The hood fell back, revealing more details. A woman?

"Hello, Gondar."

That voice. No. Not possible. He crept closer. "Seonie?"

"I know it's a shock, but..."

He ran to her side and swept her into an embrace. "I thought you were dead. All these years I mourned..."

"I know. I'm sorry for the deception."

"You can release my wife. The subterfuge was my idea."

He stepped back and speared Waintron with a heated glare. "Explain."

"We knew of the planned attack. I contacted Seonie with our plan. With you accused of her death, you were more likely to hide and stay hidden for years, buying us time to prepare a better situation for the FT project. We never expected you to have to stay hidden so long, but until last week, we didn't know whom to trust."

"And now?"

"Let's just say the bad guys have been dealt with. A secret facility has been built to house the unit and keep it safe. Those involved swore an oath to keep the project from being used for nefarious means."

"Does Hartman know?"

"Not yet," Seonie said. "I plan to search him out tomorrow. I fear what the shock will do to him. He blames himself. My brother never wanted me to accompany you guys. My presence went against Faegan protocol, but I begged. He was

my only family. I don't know how he did it, but he pulled strings, asked favors. I was the first woman ever allowed on that type of mission."

Gondar snorted. "And his grief played right into your hands."

"Can you forgive me?"

He took several steps back. "What's to forgive? You were only doing what authorities told you to do."

He turned and walked away. Hartman couldn't accuse him of murder, but he could still fight him for Sierra. Whatever bond they'd once shared as friends was destroyed when Hartman refused to believe in Gondar's innocence.

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Thirteen

Gondar faced the court members with confidence. He bore the tattoo as proof of his claim. "Hartman's claim is unjustified as you can see by the marks left by the bonding bracelet. My tattoo matches my wife's." He stressed the word wife, making sure all in attendance heard his claim.

"Hartman, what proof do you offer?"

Hartman approached the panel, his face full of hate and vengeance. "I offer this magazine as evidence."

The magazine fell open to Sierra's nude photograph. The judicial team gasped. "What is the meaning of this outrage?"

Hartman wasn't fazed by their sudden anger. "I saw her first and tried to make arrangements with a matchmaker for her hand. The unscrupulous fellow went behind my back and gave her to Gondar."

"Gondar, you will address the issue of your wife's vulgar display."

Gondar smiled. "She's quite beautiful, isn't she?" Hartman had handed him the case. Did he realize his mistake? The law was explicit.

"The court does not need to deliberate. Law must be maintained. In light of this evidence, we find in favor of the defendant. Gondar's claim is just. However, in accordance with the law, his support of his wife's flagrant disregard for propriety leaves us with no recourse but to banish both of them from this planet. Hartman, we find no bearing on your claim. You are ordered to desist in further attempts to claim

property that isn't yours. Do you both accept this court's findings?"

Gondar nodded. "I do."

Hartman looked as if he would protest, but finally nodded. "I do."

"Court is adjourned."

Sierra flew into Gondar's arms. A cough and Gondar's gentle but stern rebuff made her take a step back. He bent his head. "Not in public. But when we're alone, you may thank me properly."

She smiled, and his whole insides warmed. By Janus, he loved this woman.

Hartman stepped between them. "I wanted you to suffer for what I thought you did to my sister."

"Hartman..."

"Let me finish. The shock of seeing Seonie almost made me crumble, but knowing how I let my anger and grief tear our friendship apart made me sick inside. I found out from Waintron that Skynet had plans of making you an officer. Their way of rewarding you for saving the FT. I-I knew you wouldn't want the honor. I, too, wish a different life, one less restrictive."

"You—you staged this whole thing so I wouldn't have to stay on Faegan?"

Hartman nodded. "I know it doesn't make up for my lack of loyalty, but Sierra deserves a stronger man than I."

He walked away before more could be said between them. Gondar smiled. "Let's go home, love."

* * * *

The pod made a rough landing, but they finally arrived on Vi Twelve. Gondar helped Sierra from the ship and swept her into his arms. "Welcome home, Mrs. Lem."

She laughed. "I never thought to be happy to be back here, but I am."

"Good. I bet I can make you even happier once I get you inside and have my wicked way with you."

She pinched his right nipple.

"Ouch. What was that for?"

"For refusing to make love to me all those days on Faegan, you oaf." She understood the need to be more discreet, but his refusal to even touch her had left her feeling unwanted.

"I didn't trust myself to adhere to Faegan sex etiquette."

She giggled. "Sex etiquette? I still can't believe they let you leave. What did that machine do, anyway?"

"It was sorta like a fountain of youth and held the ability to cure any disease and prolong life."

"Wow. I hope they put it to good use."

"They won't." He touched the medallion on her neck. "They don't exactly have all the parts to make it work."

She gave him a puzzled frown. "Either way, I'm glad we're home."

"Me, too." He set her down, yards from reaching their front door. "Strip. Now."

"What? But anyone could see? And the sun might damage my skin."

"Strip."

Her insides turned to jelly. She took a step back and worked the fastenings of her Faegan outfit. The tent dress slipped from her shoulders and puddled at her feet. Undergarments quickly followed until she stood naked and vulnerable save the medallion nestled between her breasts.

He growled, a guttural sound that made her shiver. The bulge straining against his pants indicated his growing desire. She ran her hands along her ribcage, stroking and undulating for his pleasure. He grabbed her around the middle and slung her over his shoulder. "Tease. I'll show you what Faegan men do with teases."

She stifled a giggle as he tore through the house and entered their bedroom. He placed her in the middle of the bed and licked his lips. "Don't move."

She wouldn't dream of it. He went to the dresser and unlocked the drawer. He removed several items including the packet of papers. She frowned. She didn't want to visit her subconscious desires, sure they would be more than she could handle. Not now. Now, she just wanted Gondar to put out the fire in her pussy.

"Gondar?"

"I told you not to move. Guess I'll just have to use restraints." He clamored onto the bed with silk scarves in his hands. "Do you trust me?"

She swallowed hard and nodded.

"Give me each wrist." He used two scarves to secure her hands to the bedposts.

"I'm not sure..." She tested the bonds and discovered them tight and unyielding. A tiny fissure of fear skidded along her spine.

Stripping out of his clothes, he brought the packet of images to the bed and placed them in front of her. He then slipped behind and wrapped strong arms around her. Positioned this way, he could flip pages for her to see. "I know you don't want to delve into these, but I refuse to keep anything from you. Trust is the most powerful bond we'll ever have between us."

"Gondar, I do trust you, but I'm not ready to trust myself."

"I know." He stroked her shoulders, massaging tense muscles. "So I'm going to share my images with you first."

"Your images?"

He nodded and opened an album to reveal photos of him growing up on Faegan. His chest hairs pressed against her back, and warmth cocooned her. She peered at the images and saw nothing that remotely suggested anything sexual. She frowned. "I don't see anything."

"Look again. But this time look with your heart."

Her heart. Yes, she could do that. Somewhere between his kidnapping of her and their adventure in Faegan, she'd fallen in love with Alien Boy. She peered at the first image of him playing in a tub of water. The image wavered and in its place she discovered a man who enjoyed being washed, each inch of skin, each orifice carefully cleaned with a soapy rag. Her heart pounded, and her toes curled.

He turned the next page and again, she had to focus differently, but the image of him playing some sort of

ballgame, revealed his love for controlling the pace in bed. She remembered draping herself across his lap and almost came just from the memory. "Show me more."

Image after image revealed the things that most turned him on. Her tongue on his body, her mouth on his cock, playacting the role of aggressor when the mood struck, and loving every inch of her body, including orifices they'd yet to explore.

She turned questioning eyes at a scene with them dancing nude at a gathering of Crandamans. "What is happening here?"

"A ritual dance for blessing the crops. You might say I have a bit of exhibitionist in me."

"So, you thought since I posed nude, I wouldn't mind sharing this fantasy?"

"I hoped."

She pointed to another. "And this one?"

"In my travels I've encountered a variety of sexual toys and practices."

"But it looks painful." She stared at pins that were imbedded near and around his genitals and shivered.

"It's not that different from the acupuncture that's practiced on Earth, only the Narz people have developed a way to stimulate sexual pleasure through the use of these special pins. I'm thinking a trip to Narz for our six month honeymoon would be exciting and different."

He leaned in and kissed her neck. "I'm no different than you in my sexual preferences. I promise not to abuse the

privilege of my knowledge or think any less of you. Will you look at your images with me?"

She wanted to hug herself, but the bonds prevented this comfort, so she leaned against his warmth and closed her eyes. "Thank you for sharing yourself with me."

"And?" He cradled a breast in each hand. "Will you open yourself up to me?"

"Why did you share yourself this way?" She opened her eyes and stared at the fading images, wanting to hear the words.

"My heart needed to reveal itself."

"Say it. Please I need to hear the words."

His fingers slid to her thighs and stroked the downy crest of her mons. "I love you."

Tears blurred her vision, and she smiled. "Yes, I'll look at the images with you."

He laughed. "I knew you loved me back."

His hands shifted to his book. He set it aside so that her book was now in front of them. Turning the first page, she smiled at the gangly child who threw marshmallows at her younger sibling. As she refocused, an image of her spreading whipped cream on Gondar's chest and genitals formed. She'd always dreamed of licking sweet stuff off her lover's body. This only confirmed her desire.

On the following page, was a snapshot of her and Kyle playing cops and robbers. He'd captured her and tied her loosely to the chair, but another picture superimposed over this one showed her desire to be tied to the bed while Gondar indulged in his own wicked and dominating fantasies. Her stiff

body relaxed against the silk ties. "You peeked. You've already looked at all my pictures."

"Guilty."

"You don't play nice." She wiggled, rubbing her posterior against his rigid cock.

His quick intake of breath made her giggle. In return, he pinched her nipples, holding them between his fingers until she adjusted to the pain. "I think you forget who's in charge here."

"Turn the next page."

He pressed a kiss on her neck and released his hold on her sensitive flesh. "Gladly."

More images flashed before her, displaying a variety of desires including spanking, light bondage, and to her dismay, exhibitionism. The book revealed her need to perform in front of an audience. At this ending revelation, Gondar closed her book and set both albums on the floor. "In a year, we'll travel to Faydown and renew our vows Phaliad style with Candy and Terfada as witnesses. Would that please you?"

She melted into him. "Yes."

"Good." He stroked her body. "Now, let's see what else I can do to please you."

"There. Oh yes, I like when you play with my clit."

"Do you?" He withdrew his hand and climbed from the bed. "Lay down."

She straightened her legs and discovered enough slack in the ties that she could stretch out on her back. Before she could catch her breath, though, he secured her legs as well. "Let's play. First rule, you can't say a word. I do all the

talking. Second rule, you can't cum until I say you can. Third rule, your butt can't break contact with the bed and last rule, you must gladly submit to a spanking for every rule broken."

She almost came just listening to his low-pitched delivery of his laws. Moisture gathered between her legs at the anticipation of his next move. Maybe she'd have to break a few on purpose. She grinned, feeling wicked, naughty, and deliciously on fire for her man.

He straddled her belly and clamped his mouth on a breast. Lapping and sucking until she moaned her pleasure. His tongue trailed lower. "You please me ... greatly."

"Oh gawd, Gondar. I'm pleased too."

"I'm glad to hear it even if it will cost you later." He patted her hip and waggled his eyebrows.

She writhed beneath him. "I don't mind. I trust you."

"And?"

"I love you."

He slid lower and flicked his tongue across her clit. "I waited years for Erickson to find a mate for me. You, love, were well worth the wait."

She clamped her mouth closed at the words she wanted to say in return. Dang his silly rules, but she smiled. Married to an alien had turned out to be the best thing she could have wished for. She thought posing nude would bring her all sorts of bad luck, but she was wrong. No longer would she feel guilt for something that had gained her the world.

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About Syrell

Syrell Starr is a product of two very independent thinkers who taught her to believe in the moon. She derives pleasure from fanciful musings and hopes to share her love of storytelling with readers who possess a passion for titillating scenes.

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