

Kate Hill



COMMANDER

Changeling Press

Naughty Nights 2: Commanded

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Naughty Nights 2: Commanded

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When Finesse, a private detective from Earth, is hired for a dangerous job on the planet Shandra, she can't resist the challenge. She's tired of passive Earth men and the aggression of Shand males is known throughout the galaxy and beyond. Finesse has spent her life fantasizing of a man who can dominate her, but she never dreamed of finding two.

Security Chief Blackstare and his aide, Rocksurf, have been lovers since their training days. Still Rocksurf hasn't been able to tempt the scarred, brooding warrior into a traditional Shand marriage -- two men, one woman. Little did they imagine it would take a willful Earth woman to change their lives forever.

Chapter One

Every Shand baby inherited a family name that was seldom used, except in public records. By the age of six months, children were given a single name by their parents or guardian. When they reach eighteen, they selected a third name. To the Shand people, three was a sacred number and the third naming ceremony was an important rite of passage to adulthood.

Names were not given at random, but reflected a characteristic of the person. His parents had called him Stare, due to the intensity of his eyes, even in infancy. Growing up, he had learned to use his icy blue eyes to control others. He'd found that many adults couldn't endure his gaze and often bent to his will. He thought long and hard over the perfect third name. After the rite of passage, during which he fought three full-grown warriors then used the ritual poker to burn three small spheres into his chest, he became known as Blackstare.

On the same day, four other boys also took the rite, among them his oldest friend, Darkrock, and a youth called Rocksurf, who had recently come to their sector.

Rocksurf wasn't as tall or burly as most Shand warriors, but he was strong and very quick. During his matches at the third naming rite, Blackstare couldn't help admiring him. He had dark brown hair that he wore fairly short. It dampened with sweat as he fought, the glossy tendrils matting to his head. He had strong features, an aquiline nose and wide-set eyes of a very rich brown. Other than his height, Rocksurf was a perfect example of a Shand male -- dark and ruggedly handsome with enough scars on his sleek body to make him respectable.

Blackstare, on the other hand, was ugly even by Shand standards. There was nothing wrong with his body -- few males could compare with his nearly perfect proportions -- but a shuttle accident when he was fourteen had left him covered with

scars. He wouldn't have minded if he'd won them in battle, but they had been the result of a stupid error by a pilot during training maneuvers.

After the ceremony, Blackstare, Darkrock and the other boys -- now men -- decided to celebrate in the city. Rocksurf glanced in their direction, then turned and walked away.

"Hey, aren't you coming?" Blackstare called. Something about this guy gave him the same rush as battle.

Rocksurf paused and turned, looking rather surprised. They'd never met before today, but after sharing the rite of passage together, they were no longer strangers.

"Come on," Darkrock said, motioning with his head toward his shuttle, which they'd be using for their trip to the city.

Rocksurf approached and fell into step beside Blackstare.

"You're new to the sector, right?" Blackstare said, unable to keep his gaze from his new companion. On Shand, male-male relationships were common. A typical Shand marriage consisted of two men and one woman. This was done for two reasons. First, three was a sacred number. Second, on the planet Shandra men greatly outnumbered the women. If two men didn't share a wife, then many males would never have the opportunity to marry and have children.

Blackstare hadn't thought much about having a family. Dedicated to his career, he focused on perfecting his skills and serving his sector. Yes, he'd been with men before and even an occasional woman, but this was the first time anyone had ever made his pulse race just from walking beside him.

No doubt Rocksurf felt the intensity of his gaze. Blackstare excelled at using his eyes to get what he wanted.

A slight smile played around Rocksurf's full lips and he moistened them with the tip of his tongue. A jolt of desire shot through Blackstare and his cock actually leapt in his trousers.

"I get why you're called Blackstare," he said.

Shrugging, Blackstare grinned and ran a hand over his shaved head. His gaze never left the dark-haired youth. "What's the significance of Rocksurf?"

"My parents' shuttle broke down on a tropical island. I was born on the beach, so they called me Surf. I picked Rock because I've excelled in hand-to-hand combat. In my old sector they nicknamed me Rockfist."

"I noticed in your matches during the ceremony you have a bastard of a right hand."

Rocksurf's lips curved in a crooked grin. "Thanks. You looked pretty advanced too."

"I'm enrolled in sector-wide security training. My family has always been in security."

"Mine too. That's what I'm enrolled in. Maybe we'll get assigned to the same unit."

Blackstare's stomach clenched with anticipation. He hoped so.

In the city, the group went to a bar where they had a meal and drank spiced ale, except for Darkrock. He passed on the ale since he was the designated pilot. Afterward they watched an array of exotic dancers at a local club.

For some reason none of the dancers appealed to Blackstare nearly as much as Rocksurf. When the others decided to head for another club, Blackstare asked Rocksurf if he wanted to go to the beach instead. While waiting for his reply, Blackstare thought his heart might beat through his chest. Given his appearance, he'd learned to shrug off rejection, but tonight was different. *Rocksurf* was different.

"Yeah. I've had enough clubs for tonight," Rocksurf said.

"See you at the barracks," Darkrock said to Blackstare, who nodded.

Though he and Darkrock were close friends, they'd never been lovers.

The others left and Blackstare and Rocksurf waited for the shuttle bus. They got off at the beach on the outskirts of the city. It was too early for the crowds to arrive, so other than an occasional person they had the beach pretty much to themselves.

While they walked, they discussed fighting, favorite sports and their plans for the future. The conversation drifted toward more personal subjects and Blackstare knew without doubt Rocksurf wasn't just another comrade, but had the potential to be much more.

"Mind if I ask how you got the scars?" Rocksurf ventured.

"Shuttle accident about four years ago," Blackstare replied. "It was during training. We veered off course and crashed on an uncharted islet. We were there for about five days before they found us. By then it was too late for the reconstructive treatments to fully work on my skin. If you can believe it, my face was actually worse at one time."

"There's nothing wrong with your face. Besides, everyone knows scars make you look like a more experienced warrior."

"That's fine if you got them in actual combat, not some stupid accident."

"You can wear them."

Blackstare narrowed his eyes. "Are you laughing at me?"

"No."

Their gazes locked and another strange, almost excited feeling came over Blackstare. They had reached the coastal caves and paused.

"Want to check them out?" Rocksurf nodded toward the caves.

The two headed inside, using the light sticks on their utility knives to brighten their way.

After several moments, they entered a small cave, partially hidden behind an enormous boulder.

Blackstare's heart thumped wildly as he placed an arm on either side of Rocksurf's head, trapping him against the cave wall. He wanted to get a hell of a lot closer to this guy, but did Rocksurf feel the same?

The dark-haired youth moistened his lips, his gaze fixed on Blackstare's. "Are you safe?"

"I got my disease control shot last week with the rest of my unit."

"So did I."

Tilting his head slightly to the side, Blackstare asked, "You wanna fuck?"

"Do ships fly?"

A smile tugged at Blackstare's lips and he stepped away to pull off his clothes. Hopefully no one else would wander into the cave, but at this point he didn't care. He wanted Rocksurf so much he thought his cock might explode at the first touch of skin.

Rocksurf pulled off his clothes too. His lean body was well-muscled, his chest broad and legs long and sinewy. His thick cock rose from a nest of wiry black hair and Blackstare couldn't resist combing his fingers through it before curling his fist around Rocksurf's shaft. Rocksurf grasped Blackstare's cock too, making him swell even more.

"You like to give orders or take them?" Rocksurf asked, his voice lower and huskier than before.

Blackstare grasped him and forced him face-first against the wall. Holding Rocksurf's arms behind his back, he spoke close to his ear, "What do you think?"

"I think I'm going to enjoy you giving it to me up the ass."

Chuckling wickedly, Blackstare bent and lightly nipped his shoulder, then released him and said, "Suck me."

Again Rocksurf licked his lips, his dark gaze fixed on Blackstare's long, thick cock. He sank to his knees and clasped Blackstare's cock.

Despite his domineering attitude, Blackstare had never been this excited in his life. His entire body pulsed and his head spun when Rocksurf took his cock into his mouth and sucked.

His hot, wet tongue lapped every inch of Blackstare's cock, then he sucked him hard, almost swallowing him. To keep his legs from going weak, Blackstare tightened his thigh muscles until they trembled beneath Rocksurf's carnal assault.

Rocksurf held the tip of his cock between his lips and tickled the sensitive underside with his tongue. Blackstare shoved him away before it was too late.

Panting hard, Blackstare stood with a hand clutching the base of his cock while Rocksurf squatted on the cave floor, a faint smile on his lips.

The handsome youth reached for his trousers and withdrew a travel-sized container of lube. Good. Blackstare liked a man who was prepared for anything.

Finally back in semi-control of his body, Blackstare released his cock and reached for the lube.

“Hands and knees,” he commanded and Rocksurf obeyed, offering his ass to him.

Blackstare dropped to his knees behind him and lubed up his hands, then reached around and fondled Rocksurf’s cock. It was already as stiff as a steel pipe, but Blackstare took a few moments to tease him.

When he ran the tip of his thumb along the underside of his cock head, Rocksurf gasped, “Quit it or else it’ll be all over for me.”

Blackstare grinned and gave Rocksurf’s cock a final squeeze, then squirted more lube into his hand and prepared his lover’s ass. After lubing his own cock, Blackstare positioned himself behind Rocksurf and eased into him. Fuck, the man had a gorgeous, perfect ass. Taut and tight.

Though aroused beyond anything he’d ever felt before, Blackstare moved slowly. He liked being in control, but had no desire to cause his partner pain, at least not without being given the go ahead.

Blackstare sometimes enjoyed it rough. Flogging, biting, and good old-fashioned bondage enabled him to combine fucking and training, but that would come later, after they got to know each other better.

When he felt Rocksurf was ready, he began pumping into his ass while at the same time stroking his cock.

Rocksurf panted and bucked so hard that Blackstare had to grit his teeth and momentarily stop thrusting to keep from exploding. Rocksurf didn’t seem to care, so Blackstare resumed his motions.

Rocksurf came first, and his frantic thrashing did it for Blackstare who came harder than he ever had before. They tumbled onto the cave floor, Blackstare half draped over Rocksurf, both too sated to speak.

* * *

When it came to a life of control and command, love didn't figure in.

Sex was different.

As long as Blackstare remained the dominant partner, he could accept his passion for Rocksurf. When they entered the two-year sector-wide security training program, they were placed in different units, but that didn't stop them from seeing each other when they were off duty. Sometimes Darkrock joined them for extra training, but most of the time they spent alone.

On occasion their relationship caused difficulties. At times the units at their training camp met for some friendly competition. The games included shuttle races, boxing, shooting and wrestling matches. On Shand, days were almost unbearably hot, so most people slept by day in underground dwellings and were active at night. To make the competition more difficult, it was held during the day.

During one particular competition, Blackstare had been selected for the wrestling match, which took place at noon. The day was so hot that by the time he arrived at the arena, he was already drenched in sweat. His temperature leapt even higher when he saw that his opponent was Rocksurf. His lover's dark brown gaze held his with the same surprise and arousal, yet there was no missing his spirit of competition.

The sight of Rocksurf's sleek, naked body, his flesh glistening, made Blackstare think of another kind of wrestling that had nothing to do with this competition. Gritting his teeth, he tried to focus on the task at hand.

Wrestling was an ancient sport, practiced mostly out of respect for tradition. According to custom, the men wrestled in the mud. A pit had been dug in the arena and when the training camp commander signaled for the match to begin, Blackstare and Rocksurf leapt into the mud. It felt good against his hot skin, but the sensation didn't last once he and Rocksurf locked in battle.

Both were fiercely competitive. Though Blackstare was the taller and heavier of the two, Rocksurf was incredibly strong for his size. At first Blackstare focused on

winning the match, but when his body locked with his lover's maintaining control proved more difficult than he'd imagined.

What was wrong with him? Why did Rocksurf threaten his command of himself?

Their hot, mud-slicked bodies pressed close. Though the shouts and cheers of other trainees roared around them, the noise seemed distant to Blackstare. All he could hear was his raspy breath mingling with Rocksurf's and the pounding of his blood in his ears. Locked chest-to-chest, their gazes met and beyond the battle lust another lust burned.

For the first time Blackstare's desire interfered with his duty and it angered him, yet he couldn't control his passion. Between their locked bodies, their swollen cocks pushed against each other. Blackstare's pulse raced. His cock ached and throbbed and he tightened his grip on Rocksurf who grunted with passion and pain. The sound of it made Blackstare's taut belly tighten even more. The sexual thrill coursing through him was almost unbearable.

Control and command, his father had always told him. *Without control you're nothing.*

His teeth gritted, he used his superior strength to force Rocksurf face-down into the mud. His partner's strong, wiry body twisted like supple steel and he nearly wriggled out of his grasp. Blackstare's hold tightened even more. Their hot, mud-slicked skins slid against each other. Straddling Rocksurf from behind, Blackstare relished the feel of his partner's muscular body between his legs. Rocksurf's tight ass wriggled against him as he struggled and Blackstare thought he might come then and there.

Then it struck him that despite his position, Rocksurf wasn't submitting. If his face remained stuck in the mud much longer, he'd suffocate. *Surrender, fool!* Rocksurf thrashed violently and Blackstare knew he had to be at the end of his rope. Torn between the instinct to win and the desire to release his lover, Blackstare hesitated, until Rocksurf's struggles weakened. His brow furrowed, he stood and pulled Rocksurf out of the mud. Why had he never realized how stubborn the man was?

Gasping, Rocksurf swiped mud from his eyes and swayed on his feet. Around them the other men shouted, cheering and booing, depending on whose side they'd chosen. Blackstare scarcely noticed. His gaze remained fixed on Rocksurf. When the dark-haired man could see again, he looked at Blackstare. The emotions gleaming in his eyes disturbed Blackstare almost as much as his own. Anger. Arousal. A hint of fear and an unbreakable determination.

They left the arena since the next match was about to begin. In the locker room, other trainees were in various stages of dressing and undressing, but the vast shower was empty.

Blackstare and Rocksurf stepped in and let the warm streams of water wash the mud off their skin. Closing his eyes, Blackstare tilted his face up toward the nearest faucet. A warm, calloused hand curved around his cock and his eyes flew open. Water stung them and he blinked at Rocksurf who stood, a pensive look in his eyes and a faint smile on his lips as he stroked Blackstare's cock.

Blackstare glanced toward the shower room entrance, his heart pounding. Fucking around with a male lover in private was one thing, but doing it in a public place was another. "That was a good match," Rocksurf said, his hand tightening on his lover's cock. "But I need work on my wrestling."

"Practice makes perfect," Blackstare said, surprised by the steadiness of his voice. His cock felt ready to explode.

Rocksurf stroked a little faster and Blackstare drew a sharp breath. "Want to get in a little practice later?" Rocksurf asked. "I'm off duty tonight. How about you?"

"I'll meet you in Hawk's Cove after sundown."

"I'll be there."

Blackstare buried a hand in his lover's thick, black hair and covered his mouth in a kiss. He bit Rocksurf's bottom lip and they both groaned with desire. Blackstare released him just before three more trainees stepped into the shower room.

Chapter Two

Hawk's Cove was located in a stretch of forest outside the training camp. It was a private place and Hawk's Cove wasn't its official name, but one given to it by Blackstare and Rocksurf. They spent much of their free time there, talking, training and fucking.

That night when he arrived, Rocksurf was already swimming in the bay. Most of the other trainees were on duty back at the training camp or sleeping after the day's games. Blackstare and Rocksurf should be sleeping as well, but a few hours practice wouldn't do them any harm.

The night was warm, but not nearly as hot as a typical Shandra day.

As Blackstare approached the calm water and undressed, Rocksurf swam toward shore. He stood, water streaming down his gorgeous body. Moonlight gleamed on his strong shoulders and hair-dusted chest.

Rocksurf's dark eyes lingered over Blackstare's now nude body. He stepped closer and placed a hand on his chest. He caressed it, his fingers trailing over the thick scars. He pinched Blackstare's stiff, dark pink nipples and a sexual thrill shot through the taller man, rousing his cock and making his heart pound.

"Earlier today, I thought you might kill me," Rocksurf said.

"You should have submitted."

Anger glistened in Rocksurf's eyes, but instead of continuing the conversation, he grasped the back of Blackstare's neck and kissed him hard. Blackstare's tongue thrust into his lover's mouth and for several moments they tasted and teased each other roughly.

Finally Blackstare grasped his shoulders and held him at arm's length. "Are we going to practice or what?" he demanded in a husky voice.

Rocksurf turned and headed for the mud hole a short distance away. Blackstare joined him and soon their bodies were again locked together, their muscles straining.

As they fought, Blackstare pointed out Rocksurf's mistakes and offered suggestions to improve his technique. Using this method of practice, they had helped each other excel. In hand-to-hand combat, Blackstare was superior, but when it came to piloting, Rocksurf acted as his coach. Controlling their competitive nature wasn't easy, but their main goal of advancing in the ranks overshadowed their sense of self-importance.

After an hour of practice, they stood panting and covered from head to toe in mud. Rocksurf smiled, his white teeth gleaming against his muddy face. "That was great."

"This is better," Blackstare said in a husky voice and wrapped an arm around his lover's waist, hauling him close and covering his mouth in a passionate kiss.

Rocksurf embraced him tightly, his tongue meeting Blackstare's with feverish strokes. Growling, Blackstare hauled him even closer and they nearly slipped in the mud.

They walked to the water where they washed quickly. Nearer to the shore, the rocks had been worn smooth and were slippery but felt good against their feet. Blackstare pulled Rocksurf into his arms and covered his mouth in another probing kiss. His hands roamed over his ass. He kneaded the taut spheres and stroked the indentation between them. Using a fingertip, he teased Rocksurf's sphincter, feeling it tighten and throb at his touch.

Rocksurf's hands roamed over Blackstare too, caressing his shoulders and chest, then sliding down to grasp his cock and balls. He kissed the side of Blackstare's neck, making him groan with pleasure. Rocksurf's lips felt so good against his skin and he used the perfect speed and pressure on his cock.

When he thought he couldn't stand another moment of the breath-stealing hand job, he pushed Rocksurf away. Their gazes locked and Rocksurf moistened his lips in a manner that never failed to turn Blackstare on.

“Masturbate,” Blackstare ordered.

Rocksurf offered an endearing, lopsided grin. Stepping even closer to shore, he curled his fist around his cock and stroked. Blackstare watched his long, thick cock swell to full mast, then Rocksurf slowed his motions, his broad chest expanding with each labored breath as his arousal grew.

Blackstare took hold of his own cock and the men locked gazes. Rocksurf mirrored Blackstare’s motions. When he stroked long and slow, Rocksurf did the same. When he pumped faster, so did Rocksurf.

For several moments they played this carnal game before Blackstare grunted with pleasure and stepped nearer, wrapping his fist around Rocksurf’s cock. He pumped quickly and by then Rocksurf was so turned on he came hard after only a few strokes. Panting, he staggered a bit, his legs shaky from his intense orgasm.

Blackstare was still hard as a rock, but he waited patiently for his lover to regain his composure. Finally Rocksurf approached and dropped to his knees in front of Blackstare. Clasp his thick cock, he took the head between his lips and sucked.

Closing his eyes and clenching his fists, Blackstare willed himself to keep control and not spurt into Rocksurf’s mouth after only a few seconds of hard sucking. It was difficult, since Rocksurf knew exactly what he liked. As he sucked, the handsome, dark-haired warrior held his twitching cock steady with one hand while at the same time raking his short nails down Blackstare’s inner thigh.

“Fucking sexy cock sucker,” Blackstare said, his voice almost a growl. Rocking his hips, he wove his fingers through Rocksurf’s hair. Every warm, wet stroke of his tongue pushed Blackstare closer and closer to the edge until finally he couldn’t stand another second and burst in a heart-pounding climax.

Sinking to his knees, he said, “Now this is what I call training.”

Rocksurf chuckled and leaned into Blackstare’s embrace. They remained chest-to-chest, feeling the rhythm of each other’s hearts. His feelings for Rocksurf disturbed Blackstare because they extended beyond lust. He could fall in love with the man, and that was something he shouldn’t allow. Love didn’t win battles or earn promotions, and

if you loved someone who didn't love you back, it would only cause pain. His mother had loved her husbands. One had responded, but he'd been killed in battle, leaving her and the family with Blackstare's father as their sole guardian. Though a great warrior, his father had been a crude, violent man who dominated everyone around him.

Everyone had always said he was his father's son. With that sort of blood in his veins, Blackstare could never truly love anyone. "We need to get back to the barracks," Blackstare said, releasing Rocksurf and rising to his feet.

"Is something wrong?"

"No." Blackstare leveled his most intimidating gaze at Rocksurf, but it had little effect on the man.

They walked toward their uniforms and tugged them on. On the way back to the barracks, they spoke about superficial matters. In his cot, Blackstare drifted to sleep alone, but Rocksurf was in his dreams.

* * *

Two years after entering the sector-wide security training program, Blackstare and Rocksurf were ready for the graduation rite. To pass, the trainees endured a mock combat situation that forced them to use all their skills. First was a shuttle fight that took place in a designated area of Shandra space. Rocksurf was the chief pilot on the opposing team. Though Blackstare was the leader of his team, he knew he couldn't out-fly Rocksurf. Instead he placed their team's best pilot in control of the ship while he took the co-pilot seat. Knowing Rocksurf intimately, he believed he could predict his reactions. His plan worked at first, but Rocksurf had some surprises up his sleeve.

The shuttle fight was close, but Rocksurf's team won with an incredibly risky move that took even Blackstare by surprise. In the locker room after the fight, Blackstare sat on a bench, his brow furrowed as he stared at his handheld computer, going over a replay of the shuttle fight.

"Hey," said the trainee who had piloted their shuttle. "We've already been over it a dozen times."

"I should have predicted his move."

The pilot snorted. "Who the hell could have predicted *that*? It was a suicide maneuver."

Blackstare's brow furrowed. "That's just it. Rocksurf doesn't take those kind of risks. He's one of the most stable people I know. Sensible. Smart."

The pilot grinned and slapped Blackstare's shoulder. "So this time he blew your mind instead of something else. Accept it and move on."

Blackstare cast the pilot his most intense look and the man's smile faded. Lowering his gaze, the pilot sighed and walked away to finish dressing. The man was right however. He needed to move on and also accept that Rocksurf had a side to him that he'd managed to keep hidden. A dangerous side and one that intrigued Blackstare greatly.

The next tests were an underwater game in which teams had to disarm weapons hidden in a designated coastal area. After that came a marksmanship contest with lasars, and finally the land battle. Blackstare's team won the land battle and the marksmanship contest, and Rocksurf's team the sea test. Though all the trainees who survived the rite would pass, regardless of whether they won or lost, competition was high. The winning team would have the best career options when they graduated.

With both teams in a draw, the final test would decide the winner. Each team chose their best hand-to-hand combat fighter to engage in a battle, similar to a leadership battle. The fight would take place at midday in the sweltering Shandra heat. Like a leadership battle, the only rules were killing was optional and surrender was acceptable, though frowned upon.

Blackstare's team decided unanimously that he should represent them in the match. It also came as no surprise when Rocksurf's team nominated him.

This wasn't a friendly wrestling match, nor was it practice. This was the tie breaker that would determine which team would win. It would affect the next career step of every team member. Yet even as he and Rocksurf stepped into the arena, Blackstare wasn't certain if he could bring himself to kill his lover if it came to that.

Facing Rocksurf, he saw a hint of regret in his eyes before the starting signal sounded. The look vanished as soon as the first blows were struck.

Control.

Blackstare thrust aside his weak emotions and focused on the fight.

Like a leadership battle, there was no time limit on the fight and no rest periods.

Fifteen minutes into the fight, Blackstare had the upper hand when he knocked Rocksurf flat on his back. The men's gazes locked briefly just before Rocksurf surprised him with an agonizing kick between the legs.

Again he'd underestimated Rocksurf, but this was the last time.

His lover took his moment of advantage and sprang to his feet, kicking and striking Blackstare onto the ground. Straddling Blackstare, he bombarded him with punches.

Furious by this change of events, Blackstare managed to reverse their position. For the first time ever he unleashed his full fury on his lover. At first Rocksurf tried to respond to the blows, but Blackstare's strength overwhelmed him. Only when Rocksurf lay unconscious, his face bloody beyond recognition, did Blackstare stop hitting.

He rose to his feet and held up his arm in victory, but it was a bitter conquest.

No sooner had he been officially pronounced the winner than he knelt beside Rocksurf to inspect his condition. A medic and two trainees entered the arena and Blackstare moved aside. He watched them attempt to unsuccessfully awaken Rocksurf. Leaning against the steel fence of the arena, he felt uncharacteristically weak. Rocksurf had landed some good shots. The pain in his testicles was still severe and his ribs were on fire, not to mention his face hurt and eyes stung from blood and sweat dripping into them.

A medical shuttle had arrived to remove Rocksurf from the arena. As the trainees loaded him in, the medic approached Blackstare, examined him briefly and ordered him into the shuttle as well.

Several hours later, he lay in a cubicle in sick bay. His injuries had been more serious than he'd realized, but the medics had repaired them and he would be released in the morning.

The medics had used new advanced healing techniques from Deerworld Six. Already his facial injuries had almost disappeared and the medics assured him there would be no scars. He'd nearly laughed at that, considering he was already covered in scars from the shuttle accident years ago.

Though tired, he was unable to rest. He'd heard that Rocksurf had regained consciousness and was healing well.

Blackstare pushed himself out of bed, wincing a bit since his ribs were still tender despite the treatment. He made his way down the corridor, past rows of cubicles, until he reached Rocksurf's bed.

His eyes were closed and breathing deep and even, so Blackstare assumed he was asleep. Still he stood in the doorway for several moments, watching him. Though most of Rocksurf's facial injuries had been repaired as well, his eyes were still bruised and his nose slightly swollen. Strangely, Blackstare still found him handsome. The urge to kiss him almost overwhelmed him, but he controlled it. He was probably the last person Rocksurf wanted to be kissed by.

His lover's dark eyes opened and their gazes met. They stared at each other for a moment, unsure of what to say.

"How are you?" Rocksurf asked.

Shrugging, Blackstare stepped closer. "I've been better and I've been worse. You?"

Rocksurf forced a smile. "I feel about as good as I look. When you kick a guy's ass, you don't fool around."

"It's a natural reaction to someone kicking my balls up to my chin."

"I'm surprised you didn't use the right to kill."

"There was no need. You were quite incapacitated."

Nodding, Rocksurf closed his eyes again.

"Listen, I understand if you never want to talk to me again --" Blackstare began.

"No." Again Rocksurf met his gaze. He was one of the only people who had ever been able to look into Blackstare's eyes for a significant length of time without becoming uncomfortable. "You did what you had to. I'd have done the same to you. I tried, but you won. Congratulations. At least we'll never have to be on opposing sides again."

A smile flickered across Blackstare's lips and he settled into the chair beside the bed. "That's true. Practice is one thing, but a fight to the death --"

"I couldn't have killed you."

Blackstare's heart skipped a beat.

"I know you couldn't kill me either," Rocksurf continued.

"We shouldn't have this conversation."

"Why? I already know you couldn't kill me or else I'd be dead. I also know I'm probably the only person you feel that way about."

Blackstare's stomach clenched and he deliberately hardened his gaze. "What way?"

"You tell me."

"I don't have anything to tell you. We had a match. It's over. We'll move on."

"Where are you moving to?"

"Darkrock and I are going into the minor guard at the sector leader's residency. You know that because you applied too."

"Yeah, but being on the losing team I won't be allowed in. The only way I'm going to see the residency is by proving myself and moving up through the ranks."

Blackstare's jaw tightened. "We'll all have to prove ourselves. You know the minor guard spends years in the front lines of battle to get adequate experience."

"Sure, but you've already got a toe in the door. If you live through the battles, you're practically guaranteed a position in the residency. I might spend the rest of my life in battle and still never get there."

"If you keep feeling sorry for yourself you won't."

"Sorry for myself?" Rocksurf glared and pushed himself to a sitting position. "At the moment I fucking feel sorry for myself. There's nothing wrong with feeling *something* once in a while. Tomorrow I'll be better, but tonight I'm mad as hell."

"Calm down."

Rocksurf curled his lip, then relaxed.

"Things are going to change after the graduation ceremony at the end of the week," Blackstare said. He sounded nonchalant, but the strangest emotions battled inside him. He and Rocksurf had been together for a long time. Despite his youth and sex drive, Blackstare hadn't desired any other lovers. Though he realized their careers would bring about separation, he'd never considered a future without Rocksurf.

"I know."

"Did this battle change anything between us?" Blackstare asked, his entire body tense and his voice even cooler than before. He imagined what his father would say if he knew Blackstare had grown to care so deeply about Rocksurf. Love was a useless emotion, at least that's what he'd been taught. Perhaps it was true. How many times had his love for Rocksurf interfered with his reason?

"Are you hoping it has? Then maybe you won't have to admit the truth."

"What truth?"

Rocksurf shook his head. "Maybe you're right. We're young. Now isn't the time to make this sort of decision."

How was it possible to feel both relief and disappointment? Yet both emotions crashed over Blackstare.

"Leave, will you?" Rocksurf said. "I want to get some sleep."

Blackstare nodded. He bent to brush his mouth with a kiss, but Rocksurf pushed him away.

It was over. They didn't have to speak the words, but Blackstare knew it was true.

He didn't sleep at all that day and it was the last time he and Rocksurf saw each other until the graduation ceremony. When it ended, they shook hands. Their gazes locked and their grips tightened on each other.

The next day, Blackstare headed for the capital city to take his place in the leader's minor guard while Rocksurf headed east to join a shuttle unit.

Blackstare doubted their paths would ever cross again. He buried the overwhelming sadness and vowed that no one would ever touch his heart again. From then on he would focus solely on his career.

Chapter Three

After graduation, Rocksurf and Blackstare lost contact for a time. Rocksurf hadn't expected Blackstare to admit the love between them, but he'd hoped for it. He'd even had fantasies of them marrying and sharing a wife. Even after they'd nearly destroyed each other in the match, he'd still loved Blackstare. The man could be as cold and remote as a Taurothish iceberg, but he had irresistible magnetism.

Maybe it was merely lust Rocksurf felt, not love. Then why did their separation hurt so much?

Though they didn't speak for a few years, Blackstare was always in the back of his mind, in that secret place that he unlocked when he lay alone at night, whether in the barracks or in the field. He kept track of his former lover's career as best he could, but it wasn't always easy. During those years Rocksurf saw a lot of combat. Of all the Shand planets, Shandra was the most warlike, with sectors often attempting to conquer each other.

About three years after graduation, an intergalactic war broke out and Rocksurf's path crossed Blackstare's again.

Rocksurf's unit, of which he was now in charge, was ordered to deliver ground units to the front lines on the southern part of the planet. That area was under heavy attack by the planet Orwill and the small sectors there couldn't handle it.

Most pilots in Rocksurf's unit would transport fifty soldiers per shuttle. Rocksurf and three of his best men would travel in the most advanced prototype shuttles, each transporting ten elite guards from the leader's residency. The elite guards were the most highly trained warriors in the sector.

Rocksurf landed his shuttle at the capital city. The shuttle was a small, sleek model with scrambling devices that made it virtually untraceable. In addition to

exceptional speed, it had highly advanced weapons. If not for the war, he'd have enjoyed flying it.

He turned to watch the elite guards board and his heart leapt in his throat when he caught sight of Blackstare.

Blue eyes locked on brown and time seemed to freeze. Rocksurf hadn't thought an unexpected meeting with his old lover would affect him like this. Yes, he still fantasized about Blackstare, but he'd believed he'd come to terms with their breakup.

They didn't speak and Rocksurf turned to his monitors while the other soldiers settled in.

After takeoff, Rocksurf focused solely on his flight. They passed through several dangerous areas, but the worst came as they neared the south. Even with the scrambling devices, they were fired upon by several enemy shuttles in visual range.

Luckily Rocksurf outmaneuvered and destroyed them. He'd seen battle many times before, but each time he felt the same rush of fear and determination. Over the years he'd learned to control the fear. Experience had been a harsh teacher.

They neared their landing point, but Rocksurf's monitors picked up other shuttles nearby. Within seconds they were surrounded by the enemy.

"Assume crash positions!" Rocksurf ordered.

"Do you need assistance up there?" Blackstare called.

"No. There's no room." It was a single pilot cockpit.

Over the next moments, Rocksurf surprised himself with his maneuvers. It was a miracle they hadn't been hit yet. He shot down several shuttles before one struck him and the craft spun out of control.

Though he tried for a controlled crash, he'd sustained too much damage.

They hit the ground hard and despite his security straps, Rocksurf struck his head on a side monitor. Dizziness overcame him and he wasn't sure if it was from the injury or the turmoil of the landing itself.

By the time he pried himself out of the cockpit, Blackstare was already on his feet, seeing to his men.

"We need to get out of here," Rocksurf warned. "This thing might blow."

Five of Blackstare's men were injured and it took the rest to help them out of the shuttle. Once a short distance away, a soldier used his handheld monitor to scan the area.

"We're only twenty miles from our destination, Sir," he told Blackstare.

"See to the injured first," Blackstare ordered, already examining one of the unconscious men.

All the warriors had first aid kits in their packs and Rocksurf had salvaged a larger kit from the shuttle. They quickly tended each other's injuries, then Blackstare ordered his two best runners, who were luckily uninjured, to head for the base. The rest of them would have to leave the area, for no doubt their enemies would be searching.

Between them they had only two working monitors. One went with the runners and the other remained with the group. Three warriors were unable to travel without aid, which slowed the group's pace. After walking several miles, the soldier carrying the monitor said the readings looked strange.

"What do you mean strange?" Blackstare asked.

Rocksurf's senses straining for any sign that they were being followed.

"It picked up motion, but the readings show no one in the are-" He didn't live to finish his sentence. A lasar cut him down. The others hit the ground as shots flashed around them. It seemed while Shandra had perfected hiding ships from monitors, the Orwillians had managed to disguise their foot soldiers.

Rocksurf saw a soldier beside him rise to return fire. The man bellowed in pain as a lasar cut through his chest. Rocksurf crawled toward him, but shouted and collapsed as a lasar struck his leg. Seconds later, he felt a body half covering his. Beyond the pain, he realized it was Blackstare.

"Don't move," his old lover whispered close to his ear. "The shots only seemed to come from two directions, so there's probably just a couple of them out there."

It was hard to remain still while his leg felt as if it were on fire, but he did his best. He lay, his heart pounding and tremors coursing through him. Blackstare shifted

slightly, covering him more fully. Strange how after five years it still felt right having Blackstare's body so close to his.

Moments later, he heard twigs snap and footsteps poking around the clearing where they lay. Then Blackstare moved quickly and fired his lasar, shooting one enemy sniper in the back. The second man spun. He and Blackstare fired simultaneously. The soldier fell dead and Blackstare grunted, his body jerking as the lasar struck his upper arm.

"Is it bad?" Rocksurf demanded, momentarily forgetting his own pain at the sight of Blackstare's blood staining the sleeve of his uniform.

Glancing at the wound, Blackstare shook his head. "No. Just a nick. Let's check you out, though." He looked at Rocksurf's leg, which was soaked in blood.

Already Rocksurf felt lightheaded and he knew there was no way he could walk on that leg.

Blackstare left him only to locate the first aid kit. He cut the pant leg and removed a temporary sealer that he used to stop the bleeding.

"We need to get you to a medic," Blackstare stated. "Don't try to move for a few minutes while the sealer hardens. I'm going to see if there are any other survivors."

Blackstare stooped by the bodies of his soldiers, checking for any sign of life.

"You think there are any more around here?" Rocksurf asked.

"I don't know."

Blackstare returned to him and sat, his expression stony.

"They're all dead," he said.

Their gazes met and guilt washed over Rocksurf. This was his fault. If he'd been a better pilot --

"Come on," Blackstare said, reaching for him. "Let's get out of here."

"What are you going to do? Carry me?"

"No I'm going to leave you here," Blackstare said flatly, but even after such a long separation Rocksurf knew when he was being sarcastic.

"You'll get farther without me. Go on. Get to the settlement and you can come back for me."

"Forget it." Blackstare hoisted him over one of his broad shoulders and stood.

"Put me the fuck down!" Rocksurf said. "It's bad enough I got your men killed."

"What the hell are you talking about? You're probably the only pilot I know who could have gotten us out of that attack."

"Look where I got us."

"Oh. Now I remember. You're the guy who always feels sorry for himself."

"Just like you're the guy who never feels, right?"

"Listen, I'm not going to carry your ass and argue at the same time."

"Then put my ass down like I told you."

"Are you crazy? When could I ever resist your ass?"

They fell silent as Blackstare made his way through the forest. Rocksurf wasn't sure how long they'd traveled, but eventually he knew by Blackstare's labored breathing they'd have to stop. Walking with both gear and the weight of another man was a lot for anyone, even a Shand warrior of Blackstare's strength and stature.

Finally Blackstare stopped by the mouth of a small cave. He sat beside Rocksurf and wiped sweat from his eyes as he caught his breath. After taking a drink from his canteen, he offered it to Rocksurf.

"I'm not going any farther," Rocksurf stated.

"It's almost daylight," Blackstare said, glancing through the treetops toward the brightening sky. "We'll wait out the worst of the heat in that cave. I can cover the front."

Blackstare crawled into the cave and used his light stick to look around.

"It's empty," he said and shoved his gear inside.

Rocksurf crawled closer, his leg throbbing. He wondered exactly how much damage there was and if he'd be able to walk normally again.

While Rocksurf settled into the cave, Blackstare gathered branches and leaves that he used for cover. They moved farther back. At least the cave was fairly cool. With any luck, they wouldn't be discovered, at least not by the enemy.

"How's the leg?" Blackstare asked.

"I'm not going to complain," Rocksurf said, though his breath hissed sharply as Blackstare examined the wound.

"The seal is holding," he said. "Want something to eat?"

"I'm not hungry."

"I am."

He should be, after lugging Rocksurf's ass for miles.

"You should eat," Blackstare said.

Rocksurf shook his head. The nagging soreness in his leg combined with their situation wreaked havoc on his appetite. At least the sealer had a pain killer in it, so the injury didn't feel as bad as it would have without it.

"You need to get your mind off your leg."

"Nothing is going to be able to take my mind off my leg," Rocksurf muttered.

A smile played around Blackstare's slender lips. Shit, he'd almost forgotten how sexy Blackstare's mouth was, not to mention his slanted blue eyes and his deep, smooth voice. It had been too fucking long since they'd seen each other.

"I used to be able to take your mind off just about anything," Blackstare said, a gleam in his eyes.

Rocksurf shook his head, torn between anger and arousal. "How can you talk about fucking now?"

The sexy, scarred bastard shrugged his broad shoulders. "Why not? It might be our last chance."

"If that's how you feel about it then why didn't you look me up before now?"

"I did look you up, I just never contacted you," Blackstare replied. Both men kept their voices soft so as not to attract the attention of the enemy, should they pass by.

"Why?"

"You're the one who made it clear you didn't want anything to do with me."

"You could have asked."

Blackstare leveled his most intense look upon Rocksurf, but the man didn't glance away.

"Looks like I'm getting your mind off your leg after all."

"Maybe."

Blackstare edged closer and unfastened the front of Rocksurf's trousers. "In a few more seconds that maybe will be a definitely."

"Let's see if you haven't lost your touch," Rocksurf breathed, closing his eyes. Despite the pain in his leg, he could scarcely wait for Blackstare to suck him. Usually he was the one doing the honors to the sexy scarred bastard.

Grasping his lover's cock, Blackstare took the crown into his warm, wet mouth.

Rocksurf gasped and arched his neck back, trying not to moan. The last thing he needed to do was draw the attention of the enemy, but it was fucking hard to keep quiet with Blackstare's tongue tickling the underside of his cock head. While he licked and sucked, Blackstare rolled Rocksurf's balls with the perfect pressure.

A soft moan escaped Rocksurf and he clutched his lover's bald head harder.

Blackstare swirled his head over the swollen tip then lapped the thick shaft from head to base and back again. By now, between the pain killer in the sealer and Blackstare's attentions, Rocksurf had almost forgotten about his injury.

Blackstare took his lover's cock so deeply into his mouth that Rocksurf thought he might swallow it whole. "If the wound doesn't kill me, you just might," Rocksurf murmured.

Blackstare withdrew his cock partway and sucked fast and hard.

That was all Rocksurf needed to hurl him over the edge. To his surprise, rather than pull away, Blackstare continued sucking and swallowing, his hand curled around Rocksurf's spurting shaft.

When it was over, Rocksurf lay panting hard, his eyes closed. Blackstare fixed his trousers, then stretched out beside him and tugged him into his arms. "Get some rest," Blackstare said. "I'll keep watch."

Despite the danger around them, Rocksurf knew he was relatively safe with Blackstare watching over him. It didn't take long for him to drift to sleep.

* * *

They remained in the cave until dusk, then Blackstare left to check the area before they continued their journey. Not long after, Blackstare returned in the company of other Shand warriors. The runners had made it to their destination and a rescue shuttle had been sent.

A heaviness weighed on Rocksurf when he thought of the men who hadn't survived.

Back at the base, he underwent immediate treatment. When he awoke on a cot, Blackstare was seated nearby. "How are you?" Blackstare asked.

"That depends. What did the medics say about my leg?"

"It's going to be fine. You'll be on the next shuttle out of here tomorrow."

"What about you?"

"I'm leaving in about an hour."

Rocksurf nodded and drew a deep breath. This hurt almost as much as the last time he and Blackstare had split. Maybe he should face the fact that he might never get over this guy.

"Do you..." Blackstare began, then closed his eyes momentarily, a tense expression on his face. Rocksurf could have spoken to ease his friend's discomfort, but he didn't want to. Instead he waited for Blackstare to continue on his own. "Do you want to keep in touch?"

"I don't know. That came rather painfully for you, didn't it?"

"Not for the reason you think."

"Then why?"

Blackstare glared. "Will you just answer me?"

Gritting his teeth, Rocksurf said, "Do whatever you want."

"That's fine." Blackstare stood, his spine stiff, and turned away.

"Thank you for saving my life," Rocksurf bit out. So many emotions battled inside him that he almost felt light-headed. Or perhaps it was the anesthesia wearing off.

Blackstare paused. He turned on his heel, his gorgeous blue eyes fixed on Rocksurf in a way that made his cock twitch, even in his current state. Without speaking, Blackstare approached, placed a hand on either side of Rocksurf's head and kissed him. Not just your average kiss. This was deep and passionate, strong yet tender.

Closing his eyes, Rocksurf surrendered. His mouth opened to Blackstare's probing tongue and a soft moan escaped his throat. When Blackstare broke the kiss, both were slightly breathless.

"Take care of yourself," Blackstare said, his normally smooth voice rough with emotion. This time when he left, he didn't look back.

Chapter Four

Rocksurf was surprised to receive a communication from Blackstare several weeks later. Like Blackstare, it was simply stated and rather cool, but by now Rocksurf knew how to read between the lines. The fact that Blackstare had even attempted to communicate said more than any long, saccharine love letter.

From the first Rocksurf had known Blackstare had difficulty expressing his emotions. It wasn't unusual for many Shand warriors. Fucking was one thing. Love was another. Over the next five years, the men exchanged regular communications. Twice Rocksurf was briefly stationed near their sector's capital and while he was there he and Blackstare met during their leaves. The sex was mind-blowing, but as usual Rocksurf couldn't get the blue-eyed bastard to admit anything deeper than friendship and fucking existed between them.

When he was younger, he'd been able to accept having a phantom lover, but things were different now. Rocksurf had always wanted marriage and children, but that had been in the future. No longer. He was growing tired of being alone and longed for a family.

Yes, he had friends and occasionally fucked other men, but nothing serious came of it, due to his feelings for Blackstare. He wanted a wife and a husband, yet he couldn't imagine that husband being anyone but Blackstare.

He had almost convinced himself to forget the notion of ever securing a permanent partnership with Blackstare and start considering other mates. Then something happened that changed his entire life.

The sector leader died and their old friend Darkrock won the leadership trials. As the new leader, Darkrock selected Blackstare as his Chief of Security and second-in-command.

Shortly after, Rocksurf was summoned to the leader's residency. There he was shown to Darkrock's office where he faced the leader and Blackstare. "Be seated," Darkrock said.

It had been ten years since their graduation and Darkrock hadn't changed much. Like Blackstare, he was cool and remote, with piercing eyes. Rocksurf had often wondered if they were lovers. They probably would have made a far better match than him and Rocksurf. Yet Blackstare had stated on several occasions that he and Darkrock were merely friends.

Rocksurf did as ordered and waited for the leader to continue. All the while Blackstare's pale blue gaze fixed upon him, sparking an inner heat that was most distracting

"We're selecting new officers for the security team," Darkrock explained. "With your record and experience, not to mention our personal knowledge of your character, your name is at the top of the list."

"I want you as my aide," Blackstare said.

Aide to the Chief of Security. This was the assignment Rocksurf had desired all of his life. He would live here at the residency, working to keep the sector leader and the capital city safe. It was a dangerous job and among the most important in the sector. With it came excellent pay, prestige and career challenges a Shand warrior only dreamed of.

Yet would working so closely with Blackstare be too much of a temptation? Whether they continued their personal relationship or not, it could mean trouble.

"I'm honored. However, I'm not sure I'm the right person for the job," Rocksurf replied honestly, feeling almost sick inside. He must be crazy to risk an assignment like this.

"You're the one we want," Darkrock said. "However if you don't want it --"

"It's not that at all."

"If this has to do with your personal relationship with Blackstare, rest assured that it didn't affect our decision."

"Nor will it affect our working relationship," Blackstare assured him. "At least not from my end."

"If I take the position, I would give my life for Darkrock and this sector. I've always felt that way and that will never change," Rocksurf said.

"Then do you accept the assignment?" Darkrock demanded.

Rocksurf drew a deep breath, his heart pounding. He controlled his excitement, but it still churned inside him. "Yes. I do."

"Excellent. I'll contact your superior officer and see that you're transferred here immediately," Blackstare said. "Congratulations, Rocksurf."

"Thank you," Rocksurf said, and quickly added, "Sir."

* * *

Rocksurf had been working at the residency for two weeks. It was a busy time for everyone, with Darkrock and Blackstare trying to establish new laws and policies for the sector. Blackstare worked long hours and Rocksurf remained by his side almost every moment. He'd never known a more dedicated man and despite his icy veneer, Blackstare was an inspiration to those around him. They strove to please him because though he asked much of his subordinates, he demanded even more of himself.

One afternoon, long after most others had gone to bed, Rocksurf and Blackstare sat in his office, going over paperwork. "I don't know about you, but I need a break," Blackstare said.

Rocksurf glanced at him. "Me too."

"I'm going to have a workout. Sitting behind a desk makes me restless. Releasing energy will make it easier to concentrate. Want to join me in the gym?"

Exercise sounded fantastic. Rocksurf rarely neglected his training, but over the past few days he'd been so busy that he hadn't been able to work in a session.

An hour later, Rocksurf and Blackstare were sparring in the private gym located in the Security Chief's chamber.

"You've been avoiding me," Blackstare said as the men circled each other, their shirtless bodies glistening with sweat. They wore nothing but black exercise shorts.

Rocksurf's brow furrowed. "I'm your aide. We're together constantly."

"We work together, but you've been avoiding me on a personal level."

"I didn't think you cared about getting personal," Rocksurf said between jabs.

Blackstare avoided the blows and landed a jab of his own. Rocksurf tasted blood, but didn't stop fighting. His leg snapped in a roundhouse kick, but Blackstare caught it and sent Rocksurf crashing to the mat.

Joining Rocksurf on the ground, Blackstare covered the other man's body with his. Bracing a hand on either side of his head, he kissed him deeply. Rocksurf's heart pulsed with desire and he wrapped his legs around Blackstare's waist, hoisting himself closer to his lover. Trapped between their bodies, their cocks stiffened. "How's this for personal?" Blackstare said in a husky voice.

Rocksurf wrapped his arms around Blackstare's neck and hauled him nearer for another kiss. He bit Blackstare's lower lip and thrust his tongue deep into his mouth. Grunting with pleasure, Blackstare responded with aggressive strokes of his tongue. He broke the kiss and sat aside to pull off his hand wraps. Rocksurf did the same and also pulled off his shorts and tugged at Blackstare's.

With a deep, wicked chuckle, Blackstare discarded his shorts, then sat behind Rocksurf and pulled his hands behind his back. Using his sweat-dampened hand wraps, he bound the dark-haired warrior's wrists, then dragged him to his feet.

He shoved him toward the door and Rocksurf walked where Blackstare guided him, the entire scene like a mock arrest.

Rocksurf's heart pounded with anticipation. It had been so fucking long since he and Blackstare had done this, yet he'd never stopped thinking about the man. Whenever he woke with a huge, throbbing erection, Blackstare had been in his dreams.

Even now, they had scarcely touched each other, but his swollen cock ached with need.

Luckily Blackstare's private gym was attached to his chamber, so they ran no risk of being seen naked in the corridors.

Blackstare brought him to his bedroom and shoved him onto the bed. He momentarily disappeared into the bathroom, but returned with a container of lube.

He coated his hand then grasped Rocksurf's cock and stroked him.

Rocksurf's eyes closed and he groaned, his hips thrusting and heart beating even harder. He wondered if Blackstare had any idea how fucking much he needed this?

No man had ever compared to the sexy Chief of Security and no man ever would.

Blackstare hadn't forgotten anything over the years. He knew just how far to push Rocksurf and stopped stroking before the point of no return. "It's been too long," Rocksurf panted.

"We'll have to make up for lost time." Blackstare grasped a handful of his hair, snugly but not painfully. "Do you still like it rough?"

"Do ships fly?"

They smiled at each other, then Blackstare reached into the nightstand and withdrew a belt. He folded it in half and snapped it, a sexy gleam in his eyes.

Rocksurf's heart skipped a beat. He'd almost forgotten how much he loved this.

Blackstare rolled him onto his stomach. The first crack of the belt on his ass stung and Rocksurf jerked, yet remained silent. That was part of the game, to see how much he could take. His cock swelled even more and he grinned. Another crack, then another. None were terribly hard. Just enough to warm his ass. After a while the sensations became frustrating, almost unbearable. His cock ached and he'd give almost anything to feel Blackstare's hands or lips on it.

After one last smack, Blackstare lightly trailed the belt over Rocksurf's stinging ass. Then he discarded the belt and stroked his buttocks with his hand. His calloused palm touched his over-sensitized flesh almost gently.

Blackstare's lips trailed over Rocksurf's ass, sending a ripple of passion through him. One of Blackstare's long fingers stroked between the indentation and poked against his sphincter.

When he felt the wet sweeps of Blackstare's tongue against his ass, Rocksurf's control snapped and he groaned.

"Want it?" Blackstare said in a husky voice.

"Yeah. Bad."

"Bad is good."

Blackstare took his time lubing Rocksurf's ass. The gentle teasing -- completely different than the flogging -- was almost enough to make him come then and there. Still Rocksurf forced himself to remain in control. He tried to regulate his breathing, but it was hard, especially with his heart pounding like mad and Blackstare's lube-slicked fingers prodding his ass.

When Blackstare's cock slid into his bottom, Rocksurf groaned again. His arms ached from their bound position, but it helped keep his mind off the intense pleasure so that he could maintain control longer.

While he pumped slowly, Blackstare began untying Rocksurf's hands. By the time he'd finished, Rocksurf teetered on the edge.

"Oh fuck. Fuck!" he panted, reaching his arms over his head and grasping the headboard so hard his knuckles ached.

Blackstare thrust faster and both men came almost simultaneously, Blackstare groaning and Rocksurf shouting from the release of almost unbearable desire.

When they were able to form words again, Blackstare asked, "Do you still give as good as you take?"

Rocksurf rolled over and bit his lover's bottom lip again and said, "Even better."

Blackstare smirked and reached for the belt. He handed it to Rocksurf and said, "Let's see."

The tall, bald warrior stood facing the wall, his hands braced against it and legs spread in a strong stance that tightened the muscles in his gorgeous ass and legs.

Rocksurf approached, the belt snug in his hand and his belly taut with arousal. Again his cock twitched to life.

He raised his arm and struck Blackstare's ass with the belt. After several smacks, the Security Chief's firm, perfect ass was quite red. Already Rocksurf wanted to lick and kiss it, but Blackstare glanced over his shoulder and said, "You still have a light touch."

"If I hit any harder I'll break the skin."

An icy smile spread across Blackstare's lips and he faced the wall as Rocksurf lashed him a few more times, though no harder than he had before. While Blackstare had never damaged him during their pain games, he sometimes didn't know when to stop regarding his own body. He probably would have let Rocksurf strike him bloody if he were so inclined. To Rocksurf, testing one's limits was exciting, but doing real harm was unacceptable.

Rocksurf tossed the belt aside and knelt behind his lover. He kissed Blackstare's hot, red ass and caressed the gorgeous spheres. Blackstare was just as aroused as he was, his cock rock-hard and waiting for Rocksurf's touch. Turning to face one another, they reached for each other's cocks and stroked, following each other's rhythm.

They stroked faster and harder. Rocksurf loved looking into Blackstare's eyes when he came. If only he could hold out and not climax first so that he could see Blackstare explode.

Gritting his teeth, he fought to hold off the inevitable. "Please," he panted. "I want to see you come."

Usually Blackstare was immovable, but Rocksurf's plea must have gotten to him. His pupils widened, almost filling his blue irises, and he groaned, his neck arching and his cock spurting come on his belly and Rocksurf's.

That was all it took to hurl Rocksurf into orgasm. He came too, his cock jerking in Blackstare's grip.

When it was over, the men leaned against the wall, their gazes still locked. "Is this the right thing to do?" Rocksurf asked.

"It is for me." Blackstare tugged Rocksurf into his arms. He kissed him again, then sucked Rocksurf's lower lip and thrust his tongue into his mouth.

Rocksurf pushed him away and said, "It's not right for me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I've been thinking about this for a long time. I want a family. A husband and a wife. One day I want children. I don't see that happening with us, Blackstare."

Those cool blue eyes studied Rocksurf carefully. "Why?"

"We fuck great."

A smile flickered across Blackstare's lips. "I know."

"We work well together and we're loyal to each other, but there's one thing you've never mentioned."

Blackstare didn't speak, but the look in his eyes said everything. He knew what was coming next.

"Love, Blackstare. Commitment. Family."

"It's that important to you?"

"Yeah. Why isn't it important to you?"

Blackstare's eyes narrowed. "I'm dedicated to my work."

"So am I, but that doesn't mean we can't have a family. I want a woman and children, but I want you to be part of that. If you're not capable of it, I understand. All I want is for you to be honest with me so I can decide --"

"What makes you think I want a clinging lover?"

"Clinging?" Rocksurf snarled. "We've been separated for ten years and we're not getting any younger."

"We're twenty-eight years old. That's hardly old men."

"All right. I understand. Just don't ask me to do this anymore." Rocksurf headed for the door.

"Wait," Blackstare ordered in his most commanding voice.

Rocksurf paused and turned to him.

"Do you have a woman in mind?" Blackstare asked, striding toward him.

"Not just yet."

"When and if we find a woman who's acceptable to both of us, I will consent to marriage. Does that satisfy you?"

“And in the meantime? Do we see other people?”

Blackstare closed his eyes briefly and released a pent-up breath. When he opened them, the emotions gleaming in them almost took Rocksurf aback. “For the past five years, there has been no one but you.”

This confession nearly floored Rocksurf. For several seconds he didn’t know what to say. He’d never imagined Blackstare saving himself for their meetings. Hell, even Rocksurf had sated his lust with others during their separation. “I didn’t know that,” Rocksurf breathed.

“Now you do.”

“Then your proposal is acceptable.” This time Rocksurf approached his lover and kissed him hard. His tongue thrust possessively between Blackstare’s mouth, savoring his taste and texture. At that moment he knew that whether or not Blackstare could ever say the words, he was capable of love.

* * *

It had taken Blackstare ten years to disclose his feelings for Rocksurf, but Rocksurf had no way of knowing that it would take fifteen more for him to learn to love someone else.

Fifteen years they worked side-by-side, dedicating their lives to their leader and their sector. Three times Blackstare had nearly given his life to protect Darkrock in the line of duty and each time Rocksurf had felt the nearly fatal shots in his own heart.

Rocksurf and the other members of security worked hard, but Blackstare was relentless. No doubt he would shed every drop of his blood for their sector, which was why, on the day Strongsea arrived with his suspicions about Blackstare’s loyalty, Rocksurf despised him on the spot.

Strongsea was Darkrock’s new husband. They had been forced into the marriage by Tri-Leader Ridgeback, the supreme ruler of the three Shand planets. He wanted Darkrock and Strongsea to marry and merge their sectors, creating the first super-sector on the planet. Despite their turbulent relationship, there was no denying the passion between them.

Though Rocksurf never allowed his feelings to interfere in his job, he had issues with Strongsea. Unlike most people, he didn't mind that the man was a relatively young leader with liberal political views that defied tradition. What he hated was the way he mistrusted Blackstare for no apparent reason. From the moment he'd set foot in the residency, he'd made it clear that he believed Blackstare part of a coup intent on assassinating him and Darkrock.

All he had to do was look at Blackstare's record to see that he was loyal and consistently went above and beyond the call of duty. Strongsea's unfair treatment and unwarranted allegations had placed added tension upon Blackstare's already stressful duties.

To be honest, Strongsea had reason to question everyone involved in security. He and Darkrock had entered a leadership battle due to false information provided by spies from their sector. They had been informed that Strongsea intended to kill Darkrock and take control of their sector, but that information had been false. Now, with Darkrock and Strongsea forced into marriage by the Tri-Ruler of the Shand planets, they were anxious to find the traitor. Though they had uncovered the man directly responsible for the crime, others in the government had served him and they needed to be found.

Blackstare and Rocksurf worked relentlessly. Unsure of who to trust, they did most of the investigations personally, disclosing as little information as possible to those around them. To top off their problems, Steeltoe, leader of another large sector, had been threatening war.

Sometimes Blackstare went days scarcely eating and not sleeping.

"Why do you feel like you have to prove yourself to him?" Rocksurf demanded one day when he'd awakened to find Blackstare gone from bed and reading reports in his office.

"Principle," Blackstare stated, not looking up from his monitor. He'd obviously been there for most of the day, as his eyes were bloodshot and heavily shadowed beneath. "This was *my* sector long before it was his. Darkrock and I have been friends

since childhood and I'll be damned if that pretty blond waif will convince him that I'm disloyal."

"If that happens then Darkrock isn't worthy of your dedication."

Blackstare sighed and glanced at him. Since Strongsea had arrived, Blackstare had once again become the cool, robotic warrior he'd been in his youth. Not that he ever lavished affection outside of the bedroom, but lately he hadn't even been doing that anymore.

Rocksurf had practically given up on the notion of them taking a wife and starting a family. He also realized that no matter what, he didn't want a life without Blackstare so there was no point in threatening to break it off.

Maybe Blackstare was right. They were dedicated to their careers. A family just didn't seem to be in the stars for them.

To make matters worse, Darkrock and Strongsea had, in less than a month, achieved what Rocksurf had longed for all his life. They had a female to share. Yes, she was a mere human, but quite beautiful and willing to pay both of them endless attention. This only made him dislike Strongsea even more.

"Someone is trying to harm this sector," Blackstare said. "That is something I will never allow."

"I know, but you can't protect the sector if you drop dead from overwork. Come to bed. You'll feel better after a few hours of sleep."

Blackstare turned back to the screen, then rubbed his eyes and sighed again. He switched off the monitor and stood.

The men walked to Blackstare's chamber. Though Rocksurf had his own room, he spent most of his days with Blackstare. In the chamber, they tumbled into bed and within moments Blackstare was fast asleep. Rocksurf took a bit longer to relax. He lay on his side, caressing Blackstare's broad, scarred back.

It seemed as if he'd finally fallen asleep when the communicator beeped.

Blackstare leapt out of bed and Rocksurf joined him as he answered the call from the Captain of the Guard.

“Yes,” Blackstare said.

“Sir, we have just taken a human female into custody,” said the Captain. “We believe she is a spy from Earth.”

Chapter Five

It wasn't exactly a secret that the two leaders of the Colton sector on the planet Shandra were entertaining a human female within their residency. A merchant named Radiance had disappeared in Shand space while making a delivery to the Silver Iris Galaxy. Though she'd recently contacted her family to let them know she was well and remaining as a guest of leaders Darkrock and Strongsea, her mother feared she was being held against her will.

Finesse had been a private detective for the past seventeen years and she liked her job. She enjoyed the excitement and the intrigue, or at least that's what she'd thought when she'd pursued her career. Unfortunately most of the time her cases involved the same boring story. Husband suspected wife of cheating or vice versa so they hired Finesse to secure the evidence.

Honestly, if she had one more divorce case she'd vomit. She was so sick and tired of stupid ass men -- if you could call them that -- boring their wives to death and then getting pissed because the poor woman finally got the nerve to find some excitement. The women with cheating husbands she didn't mind quite as much, though her best advice was to kick the bum to the curb, stay single and play the field.

Shit. Had she been reading too many of those ancient fictional detective stories? What were they called? Hardboiled? Anyway, they had come from a time on Earth when men were men and women experienced the joys of sex. The majority of the human population had since developed into androgynous intellectuals. Nowadays the planet Earth was sheer hell for a woman with submissive tendencies.

Oh sure, Finesse had mastered the art of kicking ass. She made her own way and heaven help anyone who tried to stop her, but deep inside she longed for a simpler life. She would gladly trade in her PI overcoat for a pink apron if she could find one of those

old-fashioned men. The trouble was, no man on Earth was dominant enough for her. She didn't want some abusive, homicidal maniac, but she was sick and tired of guys so beaten down by political correctness that they forgot what it was to be a M-A-N.

Two things about this Shandra case interested her. First was it was a chance for some real excitement. Second she heard the men there were ultimate alpha males.

Of course it was dangerous for outsiders on any of the three Shand planets. The Shand people didn't care about keeping intergalactic peace. They wouldn't attack unless provoked, but if aliens entered their area of space, there was little chance of negotiating for their freedom if captured. Because of this, she knew that Radiance's mother had cause for alarm despite many communications from her daughter reassuring her that she was safe.

Finesse had to cut through lots of red tape to gain security clearance to Shandra. She didn't want to risk being arrested and trapped on the planet.

Unfortunately, things didn't work out according to her careful plan. No sooner had she landed in the Colton Sector than soldiers boarded her ship and whisked her onto a prison shuttle. Within the hour, she found herself seated in an interrogation room, her wrists and ankles bound with chains.

It took a lot to frighten Finesse, but at the moment she was terrified. Despite their advanced technology, the Shand were known as brutal and primitive in their beliefs.

She sat alone for what seemed like hours, wondering what horrors these Shand beasts had planned for her. The soldiers who had arrested her had resembled something out of Earth's prehistoric age. Tall and heavily muscled with long, shaggy hair and beards, they spoke in their guttural language and handled her roughly. She thought they might at least have another woman search her, but no such luck.

She could scarcely believe that a few short hours ago she'd been fantasizing about men like this. Of course in her fantasy she wasn't a prisoner.

The door opened and she drew a steadying breath. Her heart pounded and she willed herself to remain calm, knowing she couldn't show these bastards any weakness.

A tall, powerfully-built man strode into the room. Scars covered his hawkish features and his piercing blue eyes stared at her from beneath dark, wickedly arched eyebrows. Unlike most of the other Shand males, his head was shaved smooth and he wore his dark beard short, just covering his jaw line. He took the seat across from her and stared at her in a way that sent shivers down her spine.

Finally he said, "What's your name?"

"I'm sure you already read the report from your men."

"Just answer the question."

"Finesse."

"What is your purpose here?"

Finesse sighed. She'd already been through this with the guards. Still, it would be in her best interests to cooperate. She told him she'd been hired to confirm that Radiance was not being held against her will.

When she finished, he merely studied her with his icy eyes.

"By the way, who are you?" she asked.

"I'm Blackstare, Chief of Security."

Blackstare. That name certainly fit, despite his blue eyes. Looking at him was like staring into an abyss. His expression was just as cold and unreadable.

"Are you comfortable, Finesse?"

"I'd be more comfortable without the chains," she said, tossing her hair. "Not that I have a problem with bondage, but this isn't exactly my dream vacation."

His brow furrowed. "Human women are quite strange."

Was he kidding? *He* was calling *her* strange?

"Tell me, Finesse, what's your real reason for coming to Shandra?"

"I told you. I'm a private detective. I'm looking for --"

"I see we're going to have to do this the hard way," he said, and touched a fingertip to a silver button on his wrist communicator.

Moments later the door opened and a woman entered. She wore a white robe and carried a silver case and a can of antiseptic spray. Apparently she was a medic.

"I'm not injured," Finesse said, her heart pounding harder. At least she wasn't injured at the moment.

The medic placed the case on the table, stepped behind Finesse and brushed her hair off the back of her neck. She sprayed the area with the some kind of madicinal dressing and it went numb.

"What the hell is going on?" Finesse struggled against the chains, but they held fast.

The medic opened the silver case, revealing a long, ultra-thin needle and a tiny vial of serum.

"What the fuck is that?" she practically shouted.

"This method of interrogation is called The Spike of Integrity," Blackstare stated coolly. "We will inject a dose of serum into the back of your neck. Most likely you won't recall being questioned, but you will answer with the utmost honesty."

"You can't do this! I have rights!"

"Not here. Here a lone alien female without a male guardian to speak for her has no rights."

"Why are you doing this?" Finesse shouted, though her voice cracked. She hadn't meant to lose control, but fear overcame her. "I applied for a security pass. You have no reason to --"

"Medic, you may continue," Blackstare said. "But be gentle. Humans aren't very tolerant of The Spike of Integrity."

Seconds later, flames seemed to creep up Finesse's neck to engulf her head. Then everything went blank.

* * *

Finesse awoke to Blackstare's oddly compelling faceface with its piercing blue eyes gazing intently at her. She tried to sit up on the hard cot, but a wave of nausea washed over her, forcing her back down.

"Don't try to move yet," he said. "The Spike of Integrity has some uncomfortable side effects and humans seem most bothered by them."

"You fucking bastard." She closed her eyes, gritting her teeth against the bile that rose in her throat. After a moment, the sensation passed.

Blackstare eased one of his large hands behind her head and lifted her slightly while holding a canteen of water to her lips. She took a couple of swallows and started feeling better.

This time when she tried to sit up, he helped her, but she knocked his hands away. "Don't touch me."

"I apologize for the discomfort you've experienced," he said, "but I had to be sure you were telling the truth. Though you don't seem to realize it, you've entered a sector under the threat of war. At the moment we're interrogating suspects very carefully."

"Why the hell am I a suspect?"

"You're not anymore, but as an alien we had to question you to be sure of your intentions."

Finesse closed her eyes again. "Oh this sucks," she murmured. "Do you have any idea what the damn Spike of Integrity feels like?"

"Yes."

She glanced at him with contempt. "I'll bet."

"Years ago I was taken as a prisoner during a battle with another sector, so I've experienced The Spike of Integrity."

She sighed. It figured. He looked like the kind of person who had seen and done just about everything. "Now that you know I'm telling the truth, how about letting me talk to Radiance, that is if there's anything left of her after being here for over a month." She didn't bother to keep the note of sarcasm from her voice.

"I assure you Radiance is quite well."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to see that for myself. It's what I got paid for."

"I don't understand humans. One would think a man would be sent for a job such as this."

Finesse raised an eyebrow and tossed him her most pissed-off look. "Excuse me? Humans don't treat their women like second class citizens -- at least not anymore."

"Women should be protected. In a relatively short time I've seen two Earth women who have suffered because they aren't being properly cared for."

This big jerk was really starting to piss her off.

"First Radiance and now you," he continued. His pale blue eyes drifted over her, lingering on her full lips then dropping to the swell of her breasts beneath her snug black shirt. "One would think a woman of your obvious qualities would have a husband to protect her."

"I don't need a man to protect me. Battle of the sexes aside, are you going to let me see Radiance? As soon as I meet with her I'll be out of here."

"Impossible. Your shuttle was damaged during your landing."

"No it wasn't!"

"I beg to differ. At the moment it's undergoing repairs. It will be several days at least before you can go."

Finesse's mouth opened, but no words came out. Finally she said, "Then let me contact Earth so I can ask someone to pick me up."

"Why? By the time they arrive, your shuttle will be ready to go. You'll be our guest for a few days."

"Is this how you got Radiance to be a guest too?" Finesse demanded.

He tilted his head slightly to the side and the vaguest hint of a smile touched his lips. "I'll see what I can do about arranging a meeting with her."

"You do that."

"Are all Earth women so poorly trained?"

"We're not *trained* at all!"

"Pity. It would help your disposition. Everyone benefits from discipline." He stood and Finesse couldn't help admiring his body, especially his long, muscular legs that looked ready to burst through his skin-tight black uniform trousers. One thing about most of the Shand men she'd seen, there didn't seem to be any puny ones.

Blackstare remained standing over her for a moment, his eyes narrowed almost as if he were seeing something he couldn't quite believe. Heavens, his chest was so damn broad and his waist lean. The muscles in his arms swelled against his snug black shirtsleeves.

The image of her wrapped in his arms while he kissed her flashed across her mind. She wondered if that black beard would feel rough or soft? What would all those scars feel like against her fingertips or even better her lips? She imagined trailing her mouth over every inch of his fascinating face. "I have nothing against discipline," she managed. "In its place."

"There's always a place for discipline." He reached out and wrapped his hand around her hair, not painfully, but enough to make her arch her neck back a bit. Ever-so-gently he trailed his index finger along her throat. "You're very beautiful for an Earth woman."

"If you're trying to give a compliment, you need a lot of practice."

His lips twisted into a wicked grin and he dropped his hold on her. She stared at the enticing curve of his backside as he headed for the cell door.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

He ignored her and continued walking.

"Hey! Blackbeard!"

Pausing, he replied, "Blackstare."

"What am I supposed to do while I'm waiting to see Radiance?"

He turned and faced her with those hypnotic eyes. "If you're allowed to see her. I suggest you get some rest. You still need to recover your strength after The Spike of Integrity."

He was right. She felt tired and weak. Rest was exactly what she needed. No sooner had she stretched out on the cot again than she tumbled into sleep.

Chapter Six

Blackstare managed to arrange for Finesse to meet with Radiance. After talking with the woman she felt certain she was here of her own free will. Not only that, she seemed to be quite in love with leaders Darkrock and Strongsea. The only thing the woman's mother had to worry about was Radiance settling down on a planet of primitives and giving her Shand grandbabies.

Maybe that wasn't such a terrible thing after all. Now that she was being treated as a guest instead of a prisoner, Finesse could appreciate the raw sex appeal of these backward but undeniably virile men.

While her ship was undergoing these phantom repairs -- Finesse still didn't quite believe there had been any damage at all -- she was invited to stay at the residency.

On the first night she was surprised by an invitation to dinner from Blackstare. After what he'd done to her, she should have hated the man, but after talking to Radiance and hearing about the political situation in Colton Sector, she grudgingly understood his reasons for interrogating her. Someone was trying to damage, perhaps even assassinate, leaders Darkrock and Strongsea and their sector was on the verge of war. Anyone, especially an unknown alien, would be questioned.

With nothing better to do and more than a little intrigued by the ruggedly attractive Chief of Security, she accepted.

In the room she'd been given at the residency, she washed and slipped into a dress supplied by Radiance. Usually Finesse wasn't one for dresses, but she had to admit it looked rather nice. It was pale peach, fitted on top and with a v-neckline that accentuated her large, firm breasts. The skirt was sheer, layered and flowing. Radiance had also sent her gold sandals that looked much better with the dress than her black hiking boots.

A few moments before dinner, someone rang her door chime. She answered it, expecting Blackstare, but found another man standing there instead.

"Good evening," he said, gazing at her with rich brown eyes. His sculpted face was strikingly handsome and though he wasn't especially tall, he was broad-shouldered and athletic. This man reminded her of what a gladiator from ancient Rome might have looked like. "I'm Rocksurf, aide to Blackstare. I'm here to escort you to dinner."

He extended his hand and she slipped hers into it. It was a warm, calloused hand, yet his grip was most gentle.

"I'm Finesse," she said, though obviously he'd been told about her.

"A pleasure." He nodded respectfully, something she hadn't seen yet from one of these Shand warriors. "We'll be dining in Blackstare's chamber."

As they made their way through the large house, Rocksurf asked her about Earth. He seemed genuinely curious and didn't speak with the same contempt as Blackstare. She found herself at ease with this man. While he wasn't as alpha as Blackstare, he had an aura of confidence that she found quite appealing. He wasn't quite a Shand beast, yet was far more exciting than a human male. Yes, this Rocksurf was *very* interesting.

They stepped into Blackstare's chamber and Finesse glanced around. The spacious room was sparsely decorated with a simple couch, several high-backed wooden chairs and a dining table. The back wall had two closed doors and two other doors stood on the side walls. No artwork hung on the walls and everything was neat and orderly. The table was set for dinner and Rocksurf pulled out a chair for Finesse who sat, a faint smile on her lips.

Old-fashioned manners had long ago been lost on Earth.

Rocksurf also sat and they were about to continue their conversation when one of the doors at the back of the room opened and Blackstare strode in.

Finesse's belly tightened and her heart leapt with arousal and apprehension.

"Good evening," Blackstare said coolly and took his seat at the table. "I trust you're feeling better."

"Yes. Much," Finesse replied.

"And your meeting with Radiance satisfied your curiosity?"

"Well enough." She stared at him with the same cool detachment as he studied her, yet something hot bubbled beneath their icy surface. Or maybe she was the only one who wanted to rip off their clothes and fuck like rabbits.

"How are the repairs on my ship, which I still don't believe were necessary?"

A faint smile touched Blackstare's lips. "They're going according to schedule. Tonight is for enjoyment. I assure you, as a guest you're perfectly safe here."

Finesse hoped she didn't look as nervous as she felt. She was certain of one thing, no one was safe around a man like Blackstare.

A door at the back of the room opened and a tall, black-haired woman dressed in a see-through shirt and silver micro-miniskirt stepped into the room. She carried a tray with three dinner plates.

Finesse raised an eyebrow as the woman placed their meals in front of them.

"Thank you," Blackstare told her. "You may leave for the evening."

"Yes, Sir." The woman bowed from the neck and exited the chamber.

"Who's that?" Finesse asked.

"The housekeeper," Blackstare replied. "I would like to hear more about Earth."

"I don't know any military secrets or have any political connections, so if you want info --"

His predatory smile broadened. "You misunderstand me. I want to know more about *you*, Finesse."

"I thought I told you everything during that damn Spike of Integrity."

While they talked, Rocksurf's gaze traveled from one to the other.

What the hell was going on here?

"This has nothing to do with the interrogation," Blackstare continued. "I find you intriguing. This visit is purely social."

Intriguing? Oh damn, she'd caught the interest of these primitives.

"I'm interested in seeing how certain privileges affect females. Earth women have been allowed to run wild for thousands of years. I find it --"

"I find this conversation offensive," Finesse snapped and rose. Rocksurf also stood, but Blackstare remained seated.

Leaning back in his chair he stared at her with such intensity that she resisted the urge to squirm.

Somehow she tore her gaze from his and headed for the door.

"Please wait," Rocksurf said, lightly grasping her upper arm.

"Our intention wasn't to offend you, Finesse," Blackstare stated, though he hadn't moved from his seat. His back remained to her and his deep, smooth voice echoed in her head. "Perhaps I should be more clear."

He stood and approached her. Finesse took a step back, her heart thumping wildly.

"I invited you here tonight hoping you would be interested in an exchange of cultures."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

Blackstare cupped the back of her head. His fingers wove through her hair and his mouth dipped closer to hers. Heavens, was he going to kiss her? She could scarcely wait.

As if sensing her desire, he covered her mouth with his. Oh damn, he was everything she'd imagined him to be. This kiss was powerful yet surprisingly tender. Everything about him from his fresh taste and herbal scent to his rock-hard chest pressed against her breasts turned her on.

When the kiss broke she felt a bit lightheaded and stumbled toward him. He steadied her by wrapping a powerful arm around her waist.

"Whoa," Finesse said, bracing her hands against his chest. Damn, his pecs were made of iron. This was a man. M-A-N. Powerful in every sense of the word and not afraid of taking what he wanted.

The question was, did Finesse want to give and if she didn't...

"Is there a problem?" Blackstare demanded.

"That depends. Do I have a choice here, or is this going to be a display of Shand male dominance?"

"Yes to both questions."

"I only asked one."

"You asked if you have a choice. The answer is yes. You also asked if this was to be a display of Shand male dominance. If your choice is to spend the evening here, then yes you'll experience Shand male dominance to its fullest extent. You will also experience pleasure such as an Earth woman like yourself has never known."

At this boast Finesse couldn't keep the smile from her face. "What do you know about pleasure on Earth?"

"I know that for you it's sorely lacking." Blackstare tightened his hold on her waist. Pressed even closer to him, she felt his swollen cock pushing against her and the sensation drove her wild. "You want to know what it's like to be possessed. When it comes to that, Shand men are the best in the universe."

"I don't know," she murmured, her eyes closing as he lightly nuzzled her neck. His beard tickled her and the sensation of his warm, slightly moist lips against her flesh made her tingle all over. "Men from Taurouth think they're the best, and the Capriethe from Deerworld Six have some interesting --"

Again his mouth covered hers and his tongue slid between her lips. He explored her with long, wet strokes that turned her legs to water. She leaned heavily against him and instinctively splayed her hands over his back. The muscles tightened and rippled beneath her palms. Finesse's clit throbbed and she stood on tiptoe, pushing her pelvis against him.

The kiss broke and she opened her eyes, glancing from Blackstare to Rocksurf, who stood nearby, his dark eyes fixed on them with a look of arousal.

Excitement darted through her even as a warning signal flashed across her brain. No sane woman would willingly submit to men like this, but when had Finesse ever

been sane? She'd spent her life looking for thrills. Now was her chance to find them in the bedroom. No human man had ever aroused her this much and once she left Shandra, she'd probably never get an opportunity like this again. Yes, once she left this archaic planet, she'd never be back so she might as well get a taste of these men while she could.

"There's no need to be frightened," Rocksurf said, approaching the couple. He placed his hands on Finesse's shoulders and she jumped slightly, then relaxed as he massaged her.

Sandwiched between both men, she should have felt more frightened than aroused, but they smelled so good and their bodies were so hard that she longed for more. Rocksurf's breath tickled the back of her neck and Blackstare's lips hovered over hers.

"Decide, woman," Blackstare ordered.

"No pressure or anything?" She gave a nervous snort of laughter.

"No, as much pressure as you can take," Blackstare said, his usually smooth voice husky as he bent his knees and thrust his stiff cock against the soft cleft between her legs.

Rocksurf's hand caressed her back then cupped her ass and kneaded the spheres.

Her eyes closed and she arched her head back. Blackstare kissed her throat. His large, warm hands cupped her breasts and stroked them. Beneath the silky fabric, her nipples stiffened.

"All right," she breathed, clutching Blackstare's head while his mouth devoured her throat. He licked and kissed it, then opened his lips around the delicate column in a gentle love bite. "For the sake of a cultural exchange."

Blackstare gave a husky laugh and Rocksurf slid down the zipper on the back of her dress then pushed the garment to her feet. Blackstare lifted her and she slid her arms around his neck as he carried her across the room. Rocksurf strode ahead and opened the door leading to the bedroom.

She glanced around the room, noting it was simply furnished, like the rest of the chamber. It had a large bed with a nightstand and a dresser. Other than a collection of swords and daggers that took up one wall, the room had no decorations.

Near the bed, Blackstare placed her on her feet. Gazing into her eyes, he caressed her back and unfastened her bra. She slipped it off and stepped out of her sandals.

Her nipples were already stiff and they tightened even more when Blackstare lifted her breasts and ran his tongue across them from one nipple to the other. She closed her eyes and caressed his head.

Rocksurf slid his fingers into the sides of her panties and slid them down. She lifted one foot then the other so he could remove the panties, then he kissed his way up her leg. His strong hands kneaded her ass and he slid his tongue up her spine. He brushed aside her hair and kissed the back of her neck.

While Rocksurf fondled her, Blackstare continued stroking her breasts, his blue eyes fixed on his hands as they caressed the full spheres and lightly pinched her nipples.

The men changed positions. Blackstare stepped behind her and tugged her to his chest. It felt warm and hard against her back. He took her wrists and guided her hands to the back of his neck.

"Keep holding me. Don't let go," he said, the command in his voice turning her on even more.

She didn't even think about disobeying. She didn't *want* to. Blackstare cupped her breasts. He caressed them and swept his thumbs over her nipples. The gentleness of his big, calloused hands shocked her. He was so rough in one way but tender in another. The combination thoroughly turned her on.

Rocksurf knelt in front of her and placed his hands on her hips. His warm, wet mouth covered her clit and she moaned, squirming with pleasure.

"Be still," Blackstare ordered.

"How can I be still?" she panted. "You guys are killing me."

"Control, Finesse," he stated. "Learn control and lovemaking will be even more pleasurable."

"Not to a human. We're all about fucking like rabbits and screaming with pleasure."

Rocksurf paused in licking and asked, "What's a rabbit? Never mind. Just do what he tells you. Believe me he knows what he's talking about."

"You can scream with pleasure when I tell you to," Blackstare said. "I think I'll like the sound of that. In the meantime, keep as silent as you can."

"But --"

Blackstare lightly bit her earlobe and she gasped.

"Trust me, Finesse, and obey," Blackstare stated.

Curiosity and desire got the better of her. Blackstare nuzzled her neck and used his tongue to tease her ear while continuing to fondle her breasts. Rocksurf busied himself with lapping her clit and squeezing and caressing her ass. With so many erogenous zones covered, Finesse didn't know how long she could keep control. Blackstare had asked for the impossible.

Yet each time she teetered on the verge of orgasm, they seemed to sense it and slowed or stopped their motions just long enough for the feeling to ebb. Then they continued their teasing. Finesse's entire body felt flushed and she trembled all over. Her hands tightened on the back of Blackstare's neck, her fingers biting into the flesh. It probably hurt him, but she didn't give a damn. After all *he* was the one who had given the lecture about control. If nearly strangling him was the only way to keep it, then let him ease up on the orders -- those horrible, wonderful orders that kept her right on the brink for so long that she felt ready to give that scream she'd talked about earlier.

Finally Blackstare lifted her and tossed her on the bed. She gasped upon landing rather hard and stared at the two gorgeous Shand warriors. They stripped off their uniforms, baring bodies which were different yet equally beautiful. Blackstare was tall, lean and powerfully muscled. His skin was very pale gold and riddled with interesting scars. Dark hair dusted his chest, forearms and steely legs. Rocksurf was shorter and

sleekly muscled. He had a broad chest and narrow hips. Though his legs weren't as thick as Blackstare's they were well shaped and sinewy. The men approached her with lust in their eyes and their cocks at full mast.

Blackstare grasped her ankles and dragged her to the middle of the huge bed. Rocksurf knelt behind her and pinned her wrists on either side of her head. He bent and kissed her mouth, his tongue sliding into it. Her tongue met his in a sensual dance.

On his knees beside her, Blackstare stroked her inner thighs, teasing them with light touches then raking them a bit harder with his short nails. The sensation of pleasure laced with pain aroused her so much that she moaned and arched her back.

Blackstare's large, warm hand rested on her lower belly and he rubbed it gently, stirring her passions even more.

"Oh please," she gasped. "I can't stand any more."

"She's done well for her first time," Rocksurf said.

Blackstare tilted his head slightly to the side, a faint smile on his slender lips. "She has more control than most Shand females. Interesting. Very interesting."

He covered her body with his big scarred one. The bulbous tip of his engorged cock slowly pushed into her drenched cunt.

Finesse closed her eyes and moaned. The sound was absorbed by Rocksurf's kiss.

His hands braced on the bed, Blackstare thrust into her and she wrapped her legs around his lean waist, trying to drive him even more deeply into her pussy.

"Yes," she panted and thrashed as he pumped into her. "Oh yes!"

This was like a fantasy come true, being claimed by men such as these.

She never dreamed it would actually happen to her. Maybe she should have sampled other species before, yet despite her fantasies, she'd never found any other alien males whom she wanted to take to her bed.

Blackstare and Rocksurf were the whole package. They appealed to her in every way and it seemed like the feeling was mutual.

Rocksurf kept hold of her wrists while Blackstare claimed her body with relentless thrusts that pushed her closer and closer to the orgasm of her life.

"Scream any time you like," Blackstare said, his voice husky and almost as breathless as she felt.

"Ohhh damnnn!" she wailed, her entire body convulsing with such intense pleasure that for several moments she couldn't focus on anything else. She moaned and shouted his name in drawn-out sobs that apparently turned him on because seconds later he stiffened and came, his heated body surging into her.

Finesse lay in a boneless stupor, her eyes closed and her breath and heartbeat slowing. Fuck, this was unbelievable. The most amazing sexual experience of her life.

Blackstare rolled off of her and stretched out beside her. A few moments later, Rocksurf knelt in front of her and raised her legs, placing them over one of his broad shoulders. He slid his thick cock into her soaked cunt. He thrust into her and she opened her eyes partway, moaning softly. A faint smile touched her lips. It felt so nice.

While Rocksurf thrust, Blackstare raised himself on his elbow and reached between her legs. He used his fingertips to circle her clit, adding to her pleasure. Soon she once again hovered on the edge of orgasm. A few more thrusts of cock and rub of fingers and she came. Her pulsations added to Rocksurf's pleasure and he groaned, thrusting faster until he came too.

When he finished, he withdrew from her and lay on his back, a hand flung over his eyes and his chest heaving.

Blackstare still wasn't finished with her, though. He hoisted her legs over his shoulders and lapped her clit, his wet tongue rolling over her stimulated flesh. Before he started, she doubted she had another orgasm in her, but his tongue and lips rekindled her desire and sooner than she thought possible she burst in a climax so intense that immediately after she tumbled into a state of semi-consciousness.

"Oh damn," Finesse said when she could speak again. Trapped between Blackstare and Rocksurf's hot, hard bodies, she'd never felt so thoroughly sated and content in her life.

Rocksurf pushed himself onto his side and caressed her from breast to hip. His warm brown gaze met hers and they smiled at each other.

"I've never done anything like this before," she said, unable to keep the satisfied smile from her face.

Blackstare shifted his position so that his body half covered hers. He nuzzled her neck then took her earlobe between his teeth and bit.

"Ouch!" she giggled, slapping his rock-hard shoulder.

He cupped her face and stared into her eyes. "I'm not sure I understand Earth women any better, but I know I understand you."

"Oh really?" she quipped.

Grasping her wrists, Blackstare pinned them on either side of her head. Rocksurf edged away, for while he had an aggressive appetite, Blackstare obviously dominated him in the bedroom just as he seemed to dominate everyone and everything.

He kissed her then he brushed his cheek against hers. His beard and scars felt rough, but the sensation turned her on. Once again meeting her gaze, he continued, "I know you want to be dominated. Pleasured. Cared for."

"What?" she snapped. Obviously it was the truth, so she wasn't sure why his words annoyed her so much. "Only in the bedroom, buddy."

"Really? That's not what you said under The Spike of Integrity."

She stared at him, aghast. "You... You questioned me about my desires while I was under the influence of drugs? Security questions I can understand, but what you did is unethical! It's disgusting! It --"

"It couldn't be helped," Blackstare said, unperturbed by her outburst. "I didn't *ask* about your desires. You volunteered them."

"I don't believe you."

"Isn't this what you wanted?" Rocksurf asked. "Tell us you didn't enjoy it."

"That's beside the point," Finesse said through clenched teeth. Narrowing her eyes, she glanced from one Shand bastard to the other. "I was right about my ship being fine, wasn't I? I am being held here against my will."

"No." Blackstare released her and rose from the bed. "Your ship was in need of some repairs, but you're free to leave at any time."

"Like now." She rose from the bed and headed for her dress. Rocksurf squatted and picked it up, then offered it to her.

She snatched it from his hand, trying not to linger over his gorgeous naked body. Even after their wild lovemaking session, his cock was already stiffening again. One thing about Shand males, they had energy in abundance.

"As I said, you're free to go, but I invite you to stay," Blackstare said, folding his arms across his chest and leaning a broad shoulder against the wall. Despite the coolness of his words and gaze, his eye-popping erection revealed his arousal.

Just looking at it made her nipples swell and clit tingle again. Her drenched pussy ached for his cock and when she glanced toward Rocksurf and saw the longing in his eyes, she wanted him again too.

In under an hour she'd had more excitement and pure fun with them than she had in her entire life. Always a secret submissive, she'd never found a man who could truly give her what she needed, but now she had two.

Of course being with them, even for a short time, would mean giving up the independence she'd worked for. But that was part of the fantasy. Giving herself over.

If things got too suffocating, she could always leave.

Or could she?

Rocksurf seemed reasonable enough, but something told her once Blackstare laid claim to someone, he wouldn't give them up easily.

Maybe she wouldn't *want* to be given up. Even worse than her fear of Blackstare's dominance was her fear of loving it, of not being able to live without it once she surrendered.

Damn, she was already imagining what it might be like to be part of a Shand marriage. Would Finesse, PI tough girl, really be happy as the little wife? Could she make it as a full-time mother and homemaker? Was she equipped to handle two aggressive Shand husbands sharing her bed each night, kissing and sucking, loving and fucking her?

Hell yes. Don't be a fool, woman. This is what you've wanted all your life.

"You mean you want me to stay for a visit, like Radiance?"

Like Radiance, who had obviously surrendered to her primitive Shand warriors.

"Yes. You'll be free to leave at any time, providing it's safe for travel," Blackstare told her.

Radiance pulled on her dress, but didn't bother zipping it. No doubt she'd be out of it again within the next five minutes. She sat on the edge of the bed and Rocksurf knelt behind her, trailing his warm, firm lips along the side of her neck. Her eyelids fluttered. It was so damn hard to focus when he touched her like this.

"One thing bothers me," she said. "You guys cheated to find my secret desires. It's only fair I should know yours."

"That's easy," Rocksurf said, using the tip of his tongue to tease her ear.

She smiled and squirmed. "Hey that tickles! Stop it."

"Stop it, please," Rocksurf said, continuing to nip and lick her ear.

"Stop it, please," she breathed.

He did as she asked, but wrapped his arms around her from behind, holding her to his hard, warm chest.

Placing her hands over Rocksurf's, she turned to Blackstare, who still stood, watching them like a breathing gargoyle.

"Our desires," Blackstare said, his voice just above a whisper. He pushed himself off the wall and strode toward them, his arms at his sides.

Finesse's heart skipped a beat. He was so fucking tall and powerful. Dangerous. Gorgeous. A man who stirred strong, primitive emotions.

His gaze shifted from her to Rocksurf. Only when Blackstare nodded the slightest bit did Rocksurf say, "We've been looking for a woman, one who fits us perfectly."

"Oh right. Everyone knows there's a shortage of Shand women, but surely you guys wouldn't have trouble finding one." Actually Finesse couldn't believe these two didn't have women breaking down their door.

“Women are scarce and we’re extremely *selective*,” Blackstare stated. He took a tendril of Finesse’s hair between his fingertips and stroked it lightly. Then he buried his hand in her hair and spoke against her lips. “You’re human, Finesse, but you’re very promising.”

“Lucky me,” she said, intending to sound sarcastic but sounding lustful instead.

“Now. Answer the question,” Blackstare said. “Will you stay or go? It’s up to you, but once you leave, our offer will be revoked.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him he could shove his Shand arrogance as well as his offer up his very fine ass, but she didn’t.

The truth was, his offer interested her. More than that. She found she couldn’t say no.

“If I stay I have one condition,” Finesse said.

Blackstare raised an eyebrow. “Speak and I might consider it.”

“Get rid of the bimbo maid. One thing about Earth women, when it comes to our men, we don’t like to share.”

Chapter Seven

When Finesse had told Blackstare to ditch the maid, she hadn't fully considered the repercussions.

It had been a little over a week since she had agreed to stay. She had moved into Blackstare's chamber as what she considered a test-wife. Now that her dreams of staying home cooking and cleaning were reality, it wasn't as much fun as she'd thought. Housekeeping was boring, thankless work. Who the hell enjoyed making beds and washing dirty socks? She just thanked the heavens neither Rocksurf nor Blackstare wore underpants.

Of course this lifestyle did have compensation. When the three of them settled into bed, she quickly forgot any of the negative aspects of being a Shand wife.

Shand wife? She had to stop thinking about it. This was a strange fantasy vacation and nothing more. Playing house was one thing, but permanently binding herself to Blackstare and Rocksurf was another. She'd be crazy to give up her career and Earth to become a maid, sex slave and mother to the children of not one but *two* husbands.

Finesse stood in the kitchen contemplating this while she attempted to make something besides cheese sandwiches for dinner.

The door chime rang and she breathed a sigh of relief. Anything that distracted her from cooking was more than welcome. Maybe if she went on strike Rocksurf and Blackstare would take her out to dinner for a change.

She answered the door and Radiance stepped in. Being the only human women not only in the residency but on the planet, they had ventured into friendship and found they had more in common than their species. Both had successful careers on Earth and a fierce sense of independence, yet despite this Shand males fascinated them.

"Hey, what's new?" Radiance smiled, stepping into the chamber.

"This." Finesse held up a handful of long, dark blue vegetables.

"Prillstalks," Radiance told her.

"I'm trying to figure out how to cook them."

"You don't cook them. You eat them raw. Kinda tastes like celery."

"Oh." Finesse wrinkled her nose. "Radiance, I need help."

"If you're hungry, why not have lunch with me?"

"It's not lunch. I'm trying to make something decent for dinner tonight."

Radiance raised an eyebrow. "Why? You don't like what the housekeeper cooks?"

"I am the housekeeper since I made Blackstare get rid of the last one."

"What for? One of the perks of living at the residency is no housework."

Finesse walked to the kitchen and Radiance followed. She took a seat while Radiance searched the cabinets for something to cook.

"Sorry, but I didn't want Miss Double D hanging around here."

"Yeah, Shand women don't exactly dress like nuns. The men seem to like it that way, at least *before* marriage. It's funny how they love boobs and butt hanging out everywhere until they claim you as theirs. Then it's for their eyes only."

"I'd believe that's true of most guys, but I'm not sure about Blackstare. He doesn't strike me as the jealous type."

The man was sexy as hell, but had the emotional capacity of an ice cube. She'd only known them a short time, but she already felt sorry for Rocksurf. At least he knew how to relate outside of the bedroom. Blackstare was another case. He seemed able to express emotions only during lovemaking.

In attempts to draw him out, she'd tried flirting with him, talking to him, even taunting him but the response was almost always the same. If he was in the mood, he'd fuck her. If he deemed the question reasonable, he'd answer in the simplest possible terms. And depending on his mood, he either ignored her taunts or ordered her to the

bedroom like a child. The first time he'd done that, she'd told him to kiss her ass. Instead he'd spanked it.

Her face flushed and pussy throbbed at the memory. It had been just two days ago. They'd gotten into an argument over the new law that gave women in Colton Sector the right to vote. It had been Leader Strongsea's idea and both Blackstare and Rocksurf seemed to have an unnatural hatred of the man. Finesse had called Blackstare an ignorant, archaic control freak. He told her she had a lot to learn about Shand tradition and that she would go to the bedroom and contemplate their conversation. Then came her ill-fated "kiss my ass" remark and he'd stood, grasped her upper arm and tugged her toward the bedroom.

"Get your hands off me, you Shand gorilla!"

He did as she asked, but bent his head so they were nose-to-nose. "Do you wish to leave?"

"Maybe."

"If that's the case then go now, or else we will commence with the ass kissing."

The expression in his eyes both frightened yet aroused her. Still she managed to keep the waver from her voice. "You don't really expect me to believe you're going to kiss my ass?"

"Will you dare to find out?"

That was too much of a temptation.

"Yeah. I dare *you* to kiss *my* ass."

His lips twisted in a wicked grin and he hoisted her over his shoulder as if she weighed next to nothing. He carried her to the bedroom, and dropped her on the bed. Before she could scoot away from him, he sat and hauled her across his lap.

Her heart pounded with excitement as he pulled down her skirt and smacked her bottom. It stung and she struggled, but he spanked her three more times.

"I said kiss my ass, not beat me, you fucking animal!"

To her surprise, he stopped immediately and lifted her onto the bed. Bracing a hand on either side of her head he stared at her hard. "I don't *beat* women."

Her brow furrowed. That accusation truly seemed to offend him.

"If I intended to beat you would I have asked you if you wanted to leave first?"

"How am I supposed to know how you think? If you wanted to spank me why didn't you just ask?"

"I did!"

Her brow furrowed. "You're warped."

In response he tugged up her shirt and she finished pulling it off while he discarded her skirt. She wore no underclothes so once she lay naked he rolled her onto her stomach then swept his calloused hand from the back of her neck to the curve of her ass. The spheres still stung a bit from the spanking and felt quite warm. He bent and kissed her buttocks. His lips trailed over the heated flesh, then he swept his tongue over it.

Finesse moaned. Her eyes closed and she tingled all over.

Blackstare continued kissing her bottom, then he turned her onto her back again and shifted to a more comfortable position while guiding her legs over his shoulders.

Her heart pounding, Finesse watched as he covered her clit with his mouth.

"Oh, Blackstare!" she gasped, thrusting her hips against his probing tongue.

His strong hands grasped her ass snugly, holding her steady while he devoured her. Her clit ached and throbbed beneath his warm, wet caresses. Just as she hovered on the edge of orgasm, he stopped licking but remained so close that his breath teased her sensitive flesh. Then he thrust his tongue into her pussy and swirled it around.

"Please, oh please," she breathed, her hands roaming over his head then gripping his steely shoulders.

He withdrew his tongue from her cunt and lapped her clit again, this time not stopping until she exploded.

As she lay panting in the aftermath, she hoped he'd join her. Instead he left the bedroom and stayed away for hours. He'd even missed dinner. During the meal, she learned about his father from Rocksurf. Apparently Blackstare's sire, a former Captain of the Guard, had ruled his home with an iron fist. Though Blackstare rarely spoke of it,

his father's strict rules and abusive behavior had haunted him all his life. Rocksurf believed, and Finesse agreed, it had much to do with Blackstare's cold veneer.

Yet no man who made love like Blackstare could be cold all the way through to his heart. And no wonder he'd taken offense when she'd accused him of beating her. Sometimes she forgot that not everyone had a loving family, like she had growing up. Truly she'd only wanted to taunt him a little to add spice to the moment. If she really thought his intention had been to abuse her, she would have been out of there in an instant, but not before hitting him with the biggest object she could get her hands on.

Blackstare was a domineering lover. She and Rocksurf enjoyed his aggression and were perfectly willing to be tied up and commanded in the bedroom, yet he had never used their need to be dominated against them. He had never tried to do them real harm and their games were always consensual.

"Hey, Finesse, are you all right?" Radiance asked, placing a hand on her shoulder and drawing her out of her thoughts.

"Yeah. I'm just... wondering what made me stay here and now that I am here, how should I handle problematic Shand warriors, actually one problematic warrior."

"Ah. Let me guess, Blackstare?"

"Yeah. Rocksurf is pretty normal, but Blackstare... it's like he needs twenty years of therapy."

Radiance shook her head and sighed. "It seems like that's how Shand men pair off. One normal and one basket case."

"Which one is your basket case? Strongsea?"

This seemed to shock Radiance. Her eyes widened and she said, "Are you serious? He's the sweetest guy I've ever met."

Finesse snorted. "Maybe if you're his lover, but he's made Blackstare's life a living hell."

"Maybe he has reason," Radiance said, a look of annoyance on her face.

This conversation wasn't going well because Finesse's anger rose too. "Maybe he just has it in for Blackstare because he's Darkrock's oldest friend?"

"You've only been here a week. What do you know?"

"It's not like you're a citizen."

"No, but I am a guest of the leaders."

"Gonna pull rank on me?"

The women glared at each other, then smiled and shook their heads.

"I think both of us have been hanging around Shand warriors for too long," Radiance said.

Finesse wrinkled her nose. "I think you're right."

"The only advice I can give from my limited experience is to just keep trying if you want to get through to Blackstare. That's what Strongsea and I are doing with Darkrock. We figured with enough consistency, we'll eventually wear him down."

That made sense. At least it couldn't hurt to try. She was here anyway. If she simply wanted a few weeks of sex, she wouldn't care about getting through to Blackstare. Being honest with herself, she had to admit there was potential for a deeper relationship. Both Rocksurf and Blackstare made her feel things she'd never felt before. Was it possible that her true destiny was here, on a planet so far away and different from her own world? There was only one way to find out.

* * *

With Radiance's help, Finesse managed to put together a decent seafood dinner. She'd just finished setting the table when Rocksurf entered the chamber.

"Something smells great," he said, approaching Finesse and kissing her cheek, then her lips.

"Guess what? We're not having cheese sandwiches tonight."

He chuckled. "That's a relief."

"Is Blackstare working through dinner again?"

"No, he said he'll be here tonight, then we both have some meetings later."

Finesse looped her arms around his neck and brushed the tip of her nose against his. "I'll keep the bed warm."

"You do that." He kissed her again, his hands caressing her back then sliding down to cup her ass.

The communicator buzzed and Rocksurf went to the den to answer it. When he returned, he looked quite distracted.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"That was Blackstare's sister. His mother died this morning and she called to let him know the cremation is tomorrow."

Finesse's brow furrowed and a sad feeling washed over her. "I didn't know his mother was still alive. Your funerals are quick, aren't they?"

"Yes. It's tradition to send the spirit on its way as soon as possible after death."

"Do you want to be alone with Blackstare? I don't want to interfere."

Rocksurf studied her carefully, then shook his head. "I don't think you will."

For the next few moments, they sat in silence. Then Blackstare entered and their gazes riveted to him.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Finesse stood and headed for the kitchen. "I'll get dinner."

No matter what Rocksurf said, it was probably best that he deliver the news in private. What if Blackstare was suddenly overcome by emotion? She doubted he'd want an audience for that. Or was it that she couldn't handle seeing the ice man go to pieces?

In the kitchen, she busied herself for several moments, then decided she'd hidden long enough. When she stepped into the main room, only Rocksurf sat at the table.

"Is he all right?" she asked.

"You know Blackstare. Scarcely shows anything, but I know he cared for his mother. She was different than his father. Her second husband died when Blackstare was very young and his father... well, I told you about him. He never treated anyone with gentleness. Ever."

Finesse shook her head. "That's terrible, but it doesn't mean Blackstare is like him deep inside."

"Maybe not."

"Where is he?"

"The bedroom. He decided not to eat."

"I can see why," Finesse said. Drawing a deep breath, she headed for the bedroom.

"Finesse." Rocksurf stood and approached, placing his hands lightly on her shoulders. "Maybe we should leave him alone."

"Or maybe not."

He nodded and released her, but remained where he stood instead of following her into the bedroom.

The lights were on the dimmest setting and she could just about see Blackstare's outline from where he lay on the bed.

"Blackstare?"

"I'd like to be alone, Finesse."

"I understand," she said, but approached and sat on the edge of the bed. Resting a hand on his broad chest, she continued, "I'm sorry about your mother."

"Thank you, but it's a fact of life."

"Are you all right?"

"Fine. I'm just tired and I have meetings later, so I'd like to get some rest."

She kicked off her shoes and snuggled close to his side. If he'd shoved her away, she wouldn't have been surprised, but he didn't. For several moments they rested in silence. His arm settled around her and he tilted his head slightly, resting his cheek against her hair.

The door opened and Rocksurf entered. He didn't speak but lay on Blackstare's other side.

"I have a meeting with Darkrock and Strongsea tomorrow so I won't be able to attend the cremation."

"I'll go to the meeting in your place," Rocksurf told him.

"No. Strongsea already questions my ability."

"Not your ability," Rocksurf said. "Your loyalty. Darkrock will understand if you miss the meeting. Even Strongsea can't possibly find fault in your excuse."

"There is no excuse. Duty always comes first."

"What about duty to yourself and your family?" Finesse said.

"You're not a Shand warrior," Blackstare stated. "You wouldn't understand."

Before she could argue further, Rocksurf interrupted, "You don't trust me to handle the meeting?"

Ah. Rocksurf was smart and he hadn't spent so many years with Blackstare and not learned how to manipulate him.

"You know I do and don't try to trick me."

Well, it seemed Blackstare knew his lover just as well.

"I'm not, but I am more than capable of attending the meeting tomorrow in your stead. The cremation won't take long and you'll be back on duty by the afternoon. Agreed?"

"Agreed," Blackstare said, his voice scarcely a whisper.

"If you want to cancel tonight's meetings as well --"

"No," Blackstare stated. "One person has died. The world hasn't come to an end."

"But sometimes it feels that way when you lose someone you love," Finesse said softly.

His entire body stiffened and for a moment she thought he might leave the bed.

They fell silent and after a few moments Blackstare relaxed between them. Finesse pressed her body closer to his and his arm tightened around her.

"Would you like me go with you tomorrow?" she asked, unsure if this human gesture might be a breach of protocol among the Shand.

"Yes," Blackstare said quietly. "You may attend if you wish."

Finesse realized this was probably the closest he'd ever come to admitting he could use support.

Whoever thought she could become this involved with a pair of aliens in a little over a week?

Chapter Eight

Shand cremations were quick and afterward the attendees immediately dispersed. Blackstare and Finesse spoke briefly with his siblings before they headed back to the residency. He had a sister and two brothers who resembled him, though to Finesse they lacked his magnetism. They were rather handsome, though, and she glimpsed what he might have looked like if he hadn't been scarred in the shuttle accident. Though she hated to think of what he'd suffered, she liked his scars because they were a part of him that reflected his courage and survival instinct.

Back at the residency, life went on as usual, but Finesse knew something was different between her and her new lovers. It was no longer just a wild sexual affair, but the beginnings of friendship and love.

* * *

Due to the political unrest in their sector, Rocksurf and Blackstare sometimes worked through the day. Blackstare still bore the brunt of Strongsea's suspicions and though he didn't talk much about it, it no doubt added to the stress of his duties.

In private, Rocksurf was much more open about his dislike of Strongsea.

Late one morning, Finesse lay in bed alone while her lovers worked late.

She'd nearly drifted off when Rocksurf entered the room.

"Hey," she said.

"Didn't mean to wake you," he replied, switching on the bathroom light. He pulled off his shirt and tossed it aside, baring his sleekly-muscled torso. Leaning a broad shoulder against the doorjamb, he gazed in her direction.

"Where's Blackstare?" she asked.

"Still working. Not that it matters. Regardless of what he does, Strongsea won't trust him. You'd think after so many years of loyalty Darkrock would do more to defend Blackstare, but I guess Strongsea sucks cock like an Amazurnian prostitute."

If she hadn't been as upset about the situation as Rocksurf, she would have smiled at his comment. Everyone knew the reputation of the male prostitutes on the planet Amazurn.

"I don't like what's going on either, but in all fairness Strongsea doesn't know Blackstare."

"But Darkrock does. He *knows* there's no one more loyal and dedicated."

"Come here," Finesse said.

He approached and she took his hand, tugging him onto the bed. He sat on the edge of it and she knelt behind him, massaging his tense shoulders. "You need to relax."

"That's not easy right now."

"I know, but maybe I can help." She kneaded the back of his neck and his head dropped toward his chest. After a few moments, she felt the tension drain from his body and he groaned with pleasure.

"You're the best thing that's happened to us in a long time, Finesse," he said.

His words warmed her to the core and she smiled. "You don't think it's a little soon to judge?"

"No. When something is right, you know it. It's when something's wrong that you need to take extended time to think on it. Believe me I know. I've hung around Blackstare for twenty-five years and still no marriage. That's about as wrong as it gets."

"Then why stay?"

Rocksurf lifted his head and turned to her. The emotions in his dark brown eyes made her heart ache for him.

"Because I love him," he said simply.

She cupped his cheek. "Then it's not wrong."

"You're the first woman we've agreed upon. Ever."

That startled her, mostly because it made her feel so good. The longer she stayed on Shandra, the more their three-way marriages appealed to her. This was something she'd never have on Earth.

"How do you feel about us?" he asked.

"I like you a lot, Rocksurf. And Blackstare is like... a force of nature or something. You can't help but get swept up in him."

"How would you feel about staying here longer, maybe permanently?"

She sighed and pressed her cheek against his. He took her in his arms and stretched out on the bed. Their bodies pressed close and she gave a little moan of pleasure.

"It's really tempting," she said, "but I'm still human. I want love, Rocksurf."

"I can give you love. It would be easy -- a pleasure -- to give you love."

"I don't mean sex --"

He snorted. "I know the difference between love and sex."

"It's not you, Rocksurf. I know it's fast, but I'd give it a shot with you in a second. It's *him*."

"He does love, Finesse."

"But he can't express it outside of the bedroom. I know it's not his fault, but I'm not sure I can live with it."

"I know. It's hard. But he's loyal and would give his life for those he cares about. He does care about you. If he didn't, he wouldn't have taken you to the cremation. Funeral ceremonies for regular citizens are for immediate family members only."

Finesse hadn't known that. She'd just assumed Blackstare's family had wanted a small funeral.

"Give him a chance," Rocksurf said.

"I'm trying, but for an emotional Earth woman, it's not easy."

"I *like* emotional Earth women." He covered her body with his and kissed her.

"How many Earth women have you known?"

"Just you. I don't want or need any other."

She ran her fingers through his thick hair and smiled. "You know it's almost noon. I think Blackstare has worked long enough."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Definitely."

Moments later, Rocksurf and Finesse stepped into Blackstare's office, where he still pored over reports. He glanced at them sharply and demanded, "What do you want?"

"You," Finesse said.

Rocksurf tugged his chair away from the desk so that Finesse could settle onto Blackstare's lap.

"I don't have time for this," he growled.

Finesse ignored him and kissed his neck. His eyes slipped shut and he tilted his head to the side, allowing her to lick and kiss him. Then he seemed to snap out of it and grasped her shoulders. "Finesse! Now isn't the time."

"It's long past time," she said, sliding off his lap and kneeling between his legs. She unzipped him and his cock sprang into her hands. She smiled. Apparently her kisses had aroused him more than he'd let on.

Finesse pulled off her shirt. She hadn't bothered with a bra so her full breasts immediately popped into his view. Gazing at him with a seductive smile, she guided his thick cock between her breasts and squeezed them around it.

Blackstare leaned back in the chair, his breathing deep and eyes half-closed. "You are a fucking beautiful seductress."

Rocksurf pulled up Blackstare's shirt and tugged it over his head, baring his gorgeous chest. The dark-haired warrior massaged Blackstare's broad shoulders while Finesse continued teasing his hard cock between her breasts. Unable to resist, she reached up and raked her nails gently over Blackstare's chest. She brushed her thumbs over his taut nipples then clasped his cock and sucked it between her lips.

A low groan escaped him when she flicked her tongue along the underside of his cock head, then lapped the bulging crown.

"I shouldn't let you two distract me," he murmured.

Rocksurf kissed him, Finesse sucked him and Blackstare surrendered.

His chest heaved and the muscles in his flat belly tensed and strained. Finesse didn't bother teasing him. He was all about control and it was about time he simply let go and enjoyed himself. Sex didn't always have to be a marathon training session. Sometimes it could be fast and spontaneous. She'd learned how to appreciate Shand methods. Now it was about time he learned how to fuck like a typical male -- fast, hard and concerned mainly with his own pleasure. Of course she was being a bit harsh. Not *all* human males were like that, but she'd been with enough jerks to know that overall Shand men were better at making love.

"Don't," Blackstare gasped, burying his fingers in her hair and gently pushing her away.

"Let me," she whispered.

"Yeah, let her." Rocksurf swirled his tongue in Blackstare's ear and those sexy blue eyes closed against the pleasure.

Blackstare's grip on her loosened and his fingers caressed her hair. She grasped his cock again and took it between her lips. This time she didn't stop sucking and licking until he cried out in pleasure. As he strained and spurted into her mouth, she continued sucking and swallowing until he relaxed, thoroughly sated.

When he recovered, they had little trouble convincing him to finally come to bed.

* * *

The more days that passed, the more Finesse realized how much Rocksurf's offer appealed to her, yet Blackstare's attitude stood in the way. Strange that his *attitude* also turned her on. Still at times he took the alpha male thing a little too far. She understood that not all his scars were on the outside and that he had issues, but if he wanted a family, he'd need to make an effort to sort out his problems.

Despite his desire not to be like his father, at least as far as mistreating his partners, he'd still been influenced by the man. If in twenty-five years Rocksurf hadn't

managed to help Blackstare overcome his past, then how could she hope to within mere weeks?

Yet Rocksurf seemed to believe that together they could do it.

Was Blackstare worth the effort?

No doubt the man had admirable qualities. Courage, loyalty, intelligence and determination. Great for a Shand warrior, but what about for a husband? Those were characteristics she'd always searched for in Earth men, but hadn't found all wrapped up in one. Now she'd found them in two, except one was also impossible.

She'd been on Shandra over three of the most exciting yet stormy weeks of her life. Despite her confusion about the future, she wouldn't trade this experience for anything.

One night Rocksurf and Blackstare surprised her by taking her to the city for dinner. She'd been on brief shopping excursions with them before and she and Radiance went to the city often while their mates worked. This would be their first leisurely evening out of the residency and Finesse looked forward to it, though she wondered how Rocksurf had managed to convince Blackstare to take time off. Tonight would be good for them as well. Lately they'd been working so hard that even their fantastic sex life had suffered a bit. A smile tugged at her lips when she thought how tough it was to settle for a mere half dozen orgasms a day.

Really, though, both guys could use a rest and some fun in their lives outside of the bedroom.

That night she wore a flowing black dress with a deep neckline. Radiance loaned her a pretty teardrop-shaped pendant that emphasized her cleavage. She left her chestnut hair flowing and used lots of lip gloss.

When the men returned from the office, she was ready and waiting.

"Looking as good as you do, maybe we should stay home," Rocksurf said, his warm hands grasping her shoulders while he nuzzled her neck. "You smell so good. New perfume?"

"I got it last night when Radiance and I went shopping. Glad you like it."

"Doesn't it smell great, Blackstare?"

The taller man's piercing gaze lingered over her and he nodded.

"Ease off, Blackstare. I don't know if I can handle all those compliments," Finesse said, her voice laced with sarcasm.

He approached, nudged Rocksurf aside and tugged her to his chest, covering her mouth in a kiss that left her light-headed.

When he released her she was breathless. Fanning herself with her hand, she murmured, "So much for words."

They left for the city in Rocksurf's favorite shuttle. He had made reservations at a fine restaurant where they enjoyed a delicious dinner. Afterward, Finesse asked to go dancing. She was in the mood for something a little less stuffy where they could unwind and have some fun.

The suggestion appealed to Rocksurf. Blackstare grumbled a bit about having to return to the residency, but agreed to go to one pub.

When they arrived, they took a corner booth instead of hanging around the bar. Finesse liked the intimacy of the booth where she could observe others mingling. She was a natural born people-watcher. It was no wonder she'd become a PI.

Shortly after the waitress brought their drinks, Blackstare excused himself to go to the men's room. Rocksurf got a communication from the residency, so he went outside where it was quieter to take the call.

Finesse finished her drink, a strong Shand ale, and since her waitress was nowhere in sight, she went to the bar to order another.

She'd just started sipping her ale when a big, hairy man with a crooked nose took the stool near hers.

"You're too sexy to be walking around a place like this without a guardian," he said.

"I have two *guardians* so get lost," she said with a curl of her lip.

"Really? And where are these phantom guardians? Love, what you need is a real man." He grasped her waist and she tossed her ale in his face.

Growling, he used his apish hands to pin her arms to her sides. Finesse head-butted him.

"Bitch." He tightened his hold on her but seconds later it was broken by Blackstare.

He smashed the brute's face into a glass mug on the countertop while driving his knee into his lower back. Glass shattered and the man groaned. He sank to the floor and looked up, blood dripping down his cut face.

Finesse smirked. "I told you I had protection."

"Come with me." Blackstare grasped her upper arm and tugged her away from the bar, his face like stone. "Where's Rocksurf?"

"He went outside to take a call."

"And once we were both gone you couldn't wait to flirt."

She stared at him in anger and shock. "What? I went to order another drink. Do you honestly think I was flirting with that ape?"

"You're a woman, aren't you?"

Gritting her teeth, Finesse pulled away from his grasp. "You stupid, archaic --"

"Haven't you had quite enough of public displays?"

"I'm not the one who smashed a man's face into a counter!"

"He's lucky I didn't do worse for touching what's mine. Come, Finesse. We're leaving. I knew coming here was a bad idea."

Still fuming but agreeing that they'd already caused enough of a spectacle, she followed him out of the pub. Rocksurf was headed inside and looked surprised to see them.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Ask him," Finesse snapped, jerking her head toward Blackstare.

"Not now," Blackstare stated coolly and strode toward the shuttle.

Once they'd boarded, Finesse said, "What the hell do you mean by 'touching what's yours?' I'm not your property, Blackstare."

"I realize you're just an ignorant human, Finesse, but allow me to educate you," he said in his frostiest voice. "Respectable Shand women do not sit at the bar unless they're in the company of a guardian."

"Why are you making it seem like it's my fault because that stinking hulk hit on me?"

"What?" Rocksurf demanded, glancing toward her. "What happened?"

"And you, fool." Blackstare used his open palm to smack the back of Rocksurf's head. "What were you thinking leaving her alone in there?"

"Hey!" Finesse shouted. "I'm a grown woman. I don't need a keeper, let alone two!"

"This is Shandra. Not Earth," Blackstare said.

Yes, and while she enjoyed playing with her two Shand warriors, she wasn't sure she could stomach the rest of this backward society.

"I'm sorry, Finesse. I didn't expect to be gone so long," Rocksurf said, then narrowed his eyes in annoyance and said to Blackstare. "What the hell took you so long in the bathroom?"

"I ran into an acquaintance."

"So while I was getting hassled you were chatting away? Thanks a lot," Finesse said.

Blackstare glared at her. "I thought you didn't need a keeper?"

"I don't need someone accusing me of flirting."

"All right. I believe you didn't try to attract him," Blackstare said.

She shot him a nasty look. "Well thanks a lot. Now I can sleep at night."

"Woman, you must learn to curb that acid tongue."

"I like her feisty." Rocksurf grinned.

"You think this is a joke?" Blackstare said, his glare switching from one to the other.

"Why are you so upset about this?" Finesse demanded. "Because someone dared touch your 'property' or because he dared touch *me*?"

Blackstare looked perplexed. "What's the difference?"

"Wrong thing to say," Rocksurf murmured.

"Damn right it's the wrong thing to say," she snapped. "There's a huge difference, Blackstare. One means I'm the same as your belt or your shuttle. The other means you value *me*."

"That makes no sense."

"She's asking how you feel about her," Rocksurf said.

"If she doesn't know then there's no point in me telling her."

Finesse drew a sharp breath. Damn, his uncommunicativeness shouldn't hurt this much, but it did.

The three fell silent for the remainder of the ride and when they got to the residency, Finesse began packing her few belongings.

"What are you doing?" Rocksurf asked, standing in the bedroom doorway and watching her shove her clothes into her travel bag.

"Leaving before it's too late," she replied, trying to swallow past the annoying lump in her throat. She would *not* cry. Not with Blackstare still in the chamber. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

Rocksurf approached and took her in his arms. "Talk to me."

She tilted her gaze toward his. "I tried to understand him. I really did. Some things on this planet I can adapt to and even love, but I'm still human. I want to be loved by the person -- or people -- I'm with."

"I love you," he said and she knew by looking into his eyes he wasn't merely speaking the words.

She smiled sadly and kissed him. "You're a wonderful man, Rocksurf. I love you too and I know you deserve better than what he's giving you."

"He gives me everything."

"Except the truth about his feelings."

Their gazes locked for a poignant moment before she sighed and stepped away.

"I can't handle this, Rocksurf."

"I understand," he said quietly and left her to finish packing.

When she stepped into the main room, Rocksurf was seated on the couch. Blackstare stood by the window, gazing out, but he turned toward her.

"Goodbye," she told him, managing to keep her voice steady. "It's been interesting."

"Yes," he said softly. "Goodbye, *human*."

Her jaw tightened and her heart ached. Anger and sadness was such a bitter combination.

"I'll take you to your ship," Rocksurf said.

Finesse nodded and allowed him to carry her travel bag.

Before stepping out of the chamber, she glanced over her shoulder toward Blackstare, but his back was to her. Her stomach clenched, she closed the door behind her.

On the way to her ship, Finesse felt almost numb. What hurt her most was knowing that a loving man like Rocksurf had lost his heart to two people who refused to give him what he wanted most in life.

She and Blackstare were selfish, stubborn fools and Rocksurf would be better off without them. Yet he would never be free of Blackstare. He said he would rather have a half-life with someone he loved than have a family with spouses he didn't.

"I'd ask you to come with me," Finesse said as they held each other tightly before she boarded her shuttle. "But I know you'd refuse."

"If not for my job, I think I might," he said, cupping her face and gazing into her eyes with his rich brown ones.

"Just your job? Who are you kidding? It's him."

"He probably doesn't even realize it himself, but he needs love as much as we do. He just can't say it. That happens to a lot of Shand warriors. His father --"

"Is long dead. Rocksurf, except for Darkrock, you've known him longer than anyone and have never given him a reason to fear admitting his love for you."

"Don't you understand, Finesse? It's the love itself that poses a threat to everything he believes about himself."

"Then he'd better get over the mental issues or he'll end up losing everything, even you. I know you want a family. Are you really willing to give that up for a man who can't tell you how he feels?"

"I know how he feels."

Finesse curled her lip and stepped away, tossing her hands in the air. "I give up. You guys *deserve* each other."

"You're an Earth woman, so you'll never understand."

"No. I understand perfectly. I just don't agree." She sighed and wrapped her arms around herself, gazing at him with heaviness in her heart. "I'd like to keep in touch if you do."

"I'd like that. While you're gone, think about this carefully, Finesse. If you change your mind --"

"I won't."

He nodded and reached for her again, folding her into a tight embrace which she returned.

"Goodbye, Rocksurf. I do love you."

"I love you too," he whispered against her lips and kissed her.

When the kiss broke, she stepped into her shuttle and glanced at him over her shoulder before the door closed behind her.

With increased security due to the threat of war with Steeltoe's sector, it took over an hour for the guards to check Finesse's shuttle and grant her clearance. She was finally about to go when security closed the launching pad. No one would be allowed to leave until the next night.

Great. Just what she needed. She wanted to get off this damn planet as soon as possible. Now she would be forced to stay longer. She was allowed to spend the day in her shuttle, though she scarcely slept. This delay gave her too much time to consider whether or not she should change her mind.

In her cot, she wiped tears from her eyes. The last thing she wanted to do was leave. She already missed her men and knew that Rocksurf at least would miss her as well. Blackstare probably wouldn't even notice she was gone.

Deep inside she knew that wasn't true. Whether he admitted it or not, he did care about her and he loved Rocksurf. Unfortunately, it was doubtful either would ever hear the words. Maybe Rocksurf could handle that, but Finesse wouldn't. If she could adapt to Shand ways, the very least Blackstare could do was try to understand what it meant to be human.

Finally she drifted to sleep.

* * *

The next night, as she waited on the launching pad for clearance to take off, she switched on her communicator. Maybe listening to some music or a newscast would help occupy her mind until it was time to go.

The news announcer said, "It's been confirmed that leader Darkrock has been abducted from the unveiling ceremony in the new capital city. Leader Strongsea has been notified. There is still no word on their Chief of Security, Blackstare, who was shot in the head during the attack."

"What?" Finesse shouted in horror.

There was no way in hell she was going to leave the planet now. She turned her shuttle off the launching pad and headed back to the residency.

When she arrived, it took several moments for her to get clearance to enter. When she did, Radiance, looking pale and as worried as Finesse felt, met her in the entrance hall.

"What happened?" Finesse demanded.

"Steeltoe's warriors attacked during the ceremony. They took Darkrock and now I think Strongsea is going to fight a leadership battle."

"What about Blackstare?"

Radiance placed a hand on Finesse's shoulder and said, "He's in serious condition. He risked his life to protect us."

Nodding, Finesse willed herself to remain in control of her emotions. Falling apart wouldn't help anyone.

"Did they say what his chances of survival are?" Finesse asked, proud that she'd kept the waver from her voice.

"He's holding his own. Head injuries are different for Shand people, especially the males, because their brains have special protective layers that make them less susceptible to injury."

Finesse sighed. Though she realized the Shand's reinforced skulls were a form of evolutionary armor that helped make them such powerful warriors, they were not indestructible. Getting punched in the head was one thing, but a lasar was something else entirely. "Where's Rocksurf?" she asked.

"He's in a meeting with Strongsea, but I think --"

"Finesse," Rocksurf called, striding down the corridor.

She turned and hurried to him. They embraced tightly and he said, "I only have a minute before I have to return to the meeting with Strongsea. Why did you come back?"

"Why do you think?" she demanded. "I heard what happened and there's no way I'm leaving now."

He sighed. "You should go. We're on the verge of war."

"I don't care. What can I do to help?"

He held her gaze and she didn't miss the gratitude in his eyes. "While Strongsea is fighting the leadership battle, I'm in charge of the sector. I can't be with Blackstare at the hospital."

"I can. Just tell me where he is."

* * *

The entire fate of Colton Sector depended on whether or not Strongsea could defeat a more experienced leader in hand-to-hand combat. Many times over the past weeks Finesse had wished to see his ass kicked for the aggravation he'd caused Blackstare and Rocksurf. She never imagined the day she'd be cheering him on, but

today she was. Sitting by Blackstare's bed in the hospital, she kept close watch on the text news on her wrist communicator.

Blackstare still hadn't regained consciousness, though his condition had stabilized. "It's mostly up to him now," the medic said.

The newscast, live from the leadership battle, stated that Strongsea and Steeltoe were both injured but still fighting. Her attention wavered when she thought she caught a motion from Blackstare. Focusing her full attention on him, she took his hand and held it snugly.

"Blackstare," she said softly. "Wake up and talk to me, you stubborn gorilla."

No response. She glanced at her communicator again. Still no winner.

"Rocksurf."

Her heart leapt at that whispered name from Blackstare's lips. Had he really spoken?

"Finesse," he murmured.

"I'm here," she told him, holding his hand tighter. This time he responded with a weak squeeze. "Blackstare?"

Slowly his eyes opened and focused on her. "I dreamed about you."

"A good dream, I hope." She caressed his cheek and smiled tremulously. "Or maybe a nasty one was more fun."

His lips curved upward the slightest bit and he closed his eyes again. Once more Finesse felt close to tears, this time from happiness. She glanced at her communicator and relief washed over her. Strongsea had won the battle. He and Darkrock were returning home.

When she turned back to Blackstare, he opened his eyes again and asked, "Darkrock. Is he..."

"He'll all right. Everything will be all right now."

"Where's Rocksuf?"

"Running the sector."

His brow furrowed. "What?"

"It's a long story."

"I've got time," he said, another slight smile playing around his mouth.

She bent and brushed his lips with a kiss.

"Thank you," he whispered.

"For the kiss?"

His beautiful blue gaze fixed on hers and he held her hand tighter. "For being here."

It wasn't exactly "I love you," but right now it would have to be close enough. After all, they had lots of time to work on it.

Epilogue

Six months later, Finesse swam in the warm water at Hawk's Cove. Nearby, her men wrestled in a mud pit. Watching their nude, muddy bodies straining against each other had gotten her so hot she needed a dip, but she didn't want to take too long.

Watching them mud wrestle was on her list of top ten things she loved to do.

This was the first time she'd been to Hawk's Cove. They'd told her it was a special place to them and they wanted her to be part of it. Blackstare had insisted on this visit, though neither she nor Rocksurf were quite sure why.

She stepped out of the water and wrapped a towel around her middle as she walked toward the mud hole. Blackstare held a struggling Rocksurf face down in the pit. "Hey, let him up!" she ordered.

"He has not submitted yet."

"Are you trying to kill him?"

Blackstare raised his eyes to the heavens and said, "Women." But he tugged Rocksurf out of the mud. The shorter man stood, spitting and wiping his eyes.

"So what do you think of Hawk's Cove?" Blackstare asked her.

Her gaze lingered over the men's gorgeous, naked bodies, the muscles rippling beneath the sheen of mud. By the look of their engorged cocks, they got a lot more out of wrestling than the spirit of competition. "I love the view," she quipped.

"So do I." Blackstare grinned, reaching out to curve his hand around Rocksurf's thick shaft.

Rocksurf returned the favor and Finesse said, "Hey! I'm getting jealous."

"We can't have that," Rocksurf said. The men strode out of the pit and headed for her.

“No!” She laughed, backing away from their outstretched hands. “You’re covered in mud!”

Rocksurf grinned. “We know. It feels good.”

Before she could escape, Blackstare pulled her into his arms and kissed her. She had no choice but to wrap her arms around his neck and return the kiss, which wasn’t exactly a chore.

Closing her eyes, she enjoyed his taste and the warmth of his tongue caressing hers.

He headed back toward the mud pit and carried her into it. Rocksurf was right. It did feel kind of nice. Her arms still locked around Blackstare’s neck, she enjoyed another deep, tender kiss while his muddy hands roamed over her back and buttocks.

Rocksurf came to stand behind her, sliding his arms around her and cupping her breasts. He squeezed the full spheres and teased her nipples.

Blackstare extended his arms, holding both his lovers and trapping Finesse between their rock-hard bodies. “Marry us,” he said.

His words took her aback. She’d have expected a proposal from Rocksurf, but Blackstare?

“Us?” Rocksurf asked. Finesse turned to glance at him and there was no missing the emotion gleaming in his rich brown eyes. Rocksurf blinked, as if waking from a dream. His lips curved into a faint smile. Holding Finesse’s gaze, he repeated, “Marry us.”

Strange, but she didn’t even have to think about it. It seemed Rocksurf had been correct. When something was right, you just knew it. “Yes,” she said.

Rocksurf covered her mouth in a kiss before Blackstare tugged them both into an embrace. They tumbled into the mud, a tangle of limbs and love.

Kate Hill

What do trips around the world, endless nights of breathtaking sex, and a muscular, 6-foot 3-inch, brown-haired, blue-eyed significant other have to do with Kate Hill? Absolutely nothing, but she can dream, can't she? In reality Kate is a single, thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who loves writing romantic fantasies. Visit her online at <http://www.kate-hill.com>, www.myspace.com/katehillromance, or join her newsgroup at groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill. Stop by Kate's Amazon blog at www.amazon.com.