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The Sevarian Way

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Edited by Lisa Cox

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

THE SEVARIAN WAY

Justine Elyot

Dedication

To lovers of space exploration and BDSM everywhere, especially Tricia

Chapter One

It wasn't the danger Suka had a problem with, nor was it the workload. She was easily bright enough to handle the multiple data streams that poured into her Communicatex every parsec of every timeslice. In fact, she had graduated at the top of her class in the Academy, which had greatly contributed towards her selection for the crew of the *Ulysses IV*.

No, what Suka struggled with was the rules. Endless, relentless regulations to follow and obey, seemingly pointless, in many cases. There were rules about bedtimes, rules about how much to eat, rules about uniform, rules about socialising, rules about how to address officers of various ranks within the starship. Suka had always been one for following the spirit, rather than the letter, of the law, and this tendency was making the voyage one of low-level misery rather than exciting discovery for her.

Even more galling than the rules themselves was their enforcement by one Commander Azed Paul, a man with whom the toss was impossible to argue. Commander Paul was accustomed, over several turbulent years in the outer rim of the Spaelian Galaxies, to running the tightest of ships. One speck of lint on an officer's skintight dermolex trousers would be noted and remarked upon. He had found and destroyed Suka's box of contraband sugarfizz within one hour of her embarkation. His motto was 'discipline or doom'. Suka was inclined to favour doom just now.

She crouched low over her monitor, hoping that her apparent commitment to it would make her invisible to Commander Paul. Her hair, tightly braided now after an earlier contretemps over 'professionally appropriate styles', pulled at the skin above her ears and temples every time she hunched a little further down. She knew he was going to mention her confiscated glowstick at some point, but she really didn't see what was so wrong with a bit of reading in bed. Was she supposed to abandon all her extraneous interests in life, sacrifices to the efficient running of the ship? It was too big a thing to expect of a twenty-two-year-old woman.

Paul was busy, bent over the shoulder of another ensign, her friend Callil, checking that every machine powering this heap of junk was correctly calibrated. From across the bridge, his backside in the figure-hugging uniform pants drew her eye in an irritatingly irresistible

fashion. Whatever else she might think of him, she couldn't deny he had one of the finest arses in the Quadrant.

Suddenly, he straightened up and spun on his boot heel, catching her in her mildly lustful musings. Suka's head dropped so swiftly she almost banged her forehead on the screen, but it was too late. His keen blue-glass eyes had registered her interest, and he smiled his broad, sharky grin before addressing her.

"Ensign Demontel, we need to discuss your reading habits," he proclaimed, crossing past the banks of flashing hardware towards her station.

Immediately, she raised her chin in stubborn challenge, preparing to defend her position.

"Is reading against the rules now? I'm an anthropologist—if you expect me to abandon study of the very reason I'm on this voyage, then..." She broke off, unable to finish the sentence, fearfully reluctant to take it to its logical conclusion of 'you're a stupid bastard'.

"You know very well that reading isn't against the rules. Reading after Lights Out is against the rules," said Paul, his voice teasingly light. "As for anthropology, you have studied it for six years, and now you have the chance to put your knowledge into practice in the field. It's why you're here, isn't it, Suka, or am I mistaken?"

"Yes, no, yes, when we're cataloguing and analysing the new planets, that's great. But all this in-between time...just drifting around in the vessel...it's *boring*."

Commander Paul stared for an uncomfortably lengthy few seconds.

"Boring, Ensign Demontel?" he said eventually. "Well, I'm so sorry not to provide you with the non-stop circus you evidently crave, but I thought you might have been prepared for the fact that space exploration requires a great deal of *time in space*. What do they teach you at the Academy these days?" He shook his head sadly before snapping into grim disciplinary mode. Suka always identified this by a locking of his jaw and a narrowing of his eyes. She swallowed, aware of her hair prickling her skin. "You won't be seeing the glowstick until we return to port. And, for the remainder of this shift period, you will catch up on lost sleep by going to bed at the start of Association Time."

"Oh, don't make me miss Association Time!" wailed Suka, embarrassingly aware of how bratty and pathetic she sounded. "It's the only thing to look forward to most days."

"You can sulk all you like, Ensign," said Paul briskly. "I won't have deliberate rule-breaking in my crew, and the sooner you process that lesson, the better for you. I had such

high hopes for you when I read your reference from the Academy, and I don't take disappointment well."

"Neither do I," whispered Suka, half-hoping Paul wouldn't hear her. The half-hope was in vain.

"I beg your pardon?" He turned back from the move towards the bridge front he had been beginning and fixed her eyes uncompromisingly with his.

"Nothing. Doesn't matter," she muttered.

"Yes, it does," he said, deceptively gently. "What my crew thinks matters very much to me. Tell me."

"It's just, well, I thought I was joining an elite crew of enlightened intelligent explorers. I wasn't prepared for Sparta in space."

For a moment, Suka had the impression Paul was about to strike her. Her palms grew slippery and her breath retreated into indefinite suspension. The Commander, pale and impassive, seemed to be calculating how hard he should slap her. She had never seen him actually rattled before, and it unnerved her more than she could express.

The monitor began to bleep and flash, precipitating a huge exhalation from Suka. She put her trembling fingers to the keyboard.

"Paladium Three, Sir," she managed to say, when speech was possible. "It's within teleportation range now."

His skin flushed back to a more normal shade and his eyes lost their glaze as he swung around the side of the monitor and crouched over the back of her chair, scanning the screen eagerly.

"Right. Paladium Three. Callil, the environmental checks have been run?"

"Yes, Sir. You'll need an oxygen patch, mid-grade. As we know, all denizens are dead, so you won't need diplomacy tools. Superficial check shows no active airborne threat to humans. I'm just running the full scan, Sir."

Paul's face drew closer to Suka's, his breath fanning her cheek as he watched the satellite swoop lower, picking out sharp, focused images of the planet's surface.

"It's a recent ruin," he commented. "Most of the buildings intact. You know what killed them, I take it?"

"Yep. Those hoodlums from the Chavian Belt, dropping toxic waste from their illegal dumper ships. Outrageous. They need sorting out."

"Well, the Federation is doing its best, I gather. They aren't an easy species to deal with. Out and out hedonists, no values, no *discipline*."

His breath puffed against Suka's skin, making it prickle and inducing a strange clenching between her thighs. Spoken so close to her ear like that, the word was irresistibly erotic to her. But Paul wasn't to know that!

She straightened her stance in an effort to force him back. It didn't work.

"Fascinating people, the Paladians. Did you study them at the Academy?"

"No," admitted Suka. "I've read a little, though, recreationally." She emphasised the last word, still angry at what struck her as heavy-handed punishment for a bit of light studying.

"Good." Paul stood up, finally releasing her from the strange half-arousal his nearness had locked her into. "Because you're coming down to surface level with me."

Suka swivelled her chair around so quickly she almost knocked Paul off his feet.

"What?" she squeaked. "Are you serious?" Her breath gathered at the top of her lungs. All her life she had dreamed of surface-level exploration, but she knew it would be at least three years of slaving over hot monitors before she would get the opportunity.

"I need to make a decision on you," explained Commander Paul. "Whether to keep you or let you go at the next port."

"Oh." Suka's lungs collapsed. Was it really that serious? A tiny bit of stupid rule-breaking?

"If you can prove yourself down there, I'll reconsider my opinion. You'll need to show that you can demonstrate good space sense, intelligence and *obedience*. You'll have to follow my orders *without question*. Is that clear?"

"Yes, yes, I'll do it, you won't regret it, I promise."

Commander Paul chewed his lip assessingly. Suka didn't realise until he spoke again that she had been clenching her fists so hard she had made half-moons in her palms.

"Right. Come on then. Let's get saddled up and ready."

Suka couldn't resist a shining-eyed grin over at Callil on the way out of the bridge. She must be dying of jealousy! They had spent so many Association Times bemoaning the three-year rule. And now Paul—the ultimate Rule Freak—was breaking it. For her! It was unbelievable, but she wasn't about to pinch herself. She was too excited for that.

"I've never been in here," she chattered breathlessly as the Commander led her along the Prep Corridor to the Teleportation Suite.

"Of course not," he said, with a sidelong smile at her visible giddiness. "You won't need too much in the way of preparation. Aside from an oxygen patch, we don't need special equipment for this environment. No masks or skin protection. They have a mild, Earth Sector III-like climate and it's their equivalent of early autumn, so what we're wearing now should be fine."

"That's good to know. I tried on a SkinShield once and it wasn't a great look."

Paul rolled his eyes. Suka wondered if he was regretting his impulse already and decided to hold back on the airy chit-chat.

"So the toxic cloud has dispersed then? Completely?"

"Yes, the final check didn't pick anything up. You'll like the Paladians. You'll mourn their passing, I think. Incredible that such a cultured society should be wiped out by the intergalactic equivalent of those antisocial louts down the road. Makes you wonder about the future of the universe."

"Yes," said Suka soberly. "It does."

They had reached the Teleportation Suite and Suka was being instructed to roll up her sleeve in readiness for the oxygen patch. The little round sticker was fixed to the crook of her elbow and she rolled her sleeve back down and watched Commander Paul as he raided various cupboards for measuring and information-gathering equipment. Once his small waist pack was full and secured to his belt, he gestured Suka forward, towards the Teleport Cubicle.

She experienced a nanosecond of hesitation. This thing was going to take her body apart, cell by cell, and reconstitute it on the planet's surface. It was an intimidating thought. But it was that, or back to Sector III, to work in some sealed-up tax office forever more. Reconstitution it was.

Once inside the plexiglass booth, Suka was surprised when the remote and austere Commander Paul took hold of her hand and gripped it tight to his chest, as if to squeeze out every element of doubt or fear in her mind.

"The first time is daunting," he said softly. "I remember it well. You're safe with me, Ensign. Just shut your eyes and let it happen."

She was shaking. She hadn't even realised it, so full of trepidation and exultation had she been. Commander Paul's comforting grip managed to send the right signals to her body, calming the worst of the shivers, bringing her into quiescence.

She let his warmth and stability flow into her through the pores of her skin, reassuring her until she was barely aware of anything else but the strength of his presence.

When the switch was flicked, she kept her eyes shut and clung on tight, feeling only a cramping disturbance in her stomach and groin area and a bit of pressure at the back of the neck before finding solid ground again, and different air in her lungs.

Her eyes flew open and she stared, laughing the slightly hysterical laugh of somebody who had just staggered off a particularly nauseating fairground ride.

"This is real!" she blurted between manic whoops.

"Calm down," Paul advised her, holding her shoulders steady until she recovered her composure. "Take a deep breath. You'll get used to it in time. Well, I hope so."

"Sorry," she said, subdued. "This isn't very professional, is it?"

"Oh, all the ensigns do it," Paul said with a smile, releasing her. "You should have seen Lieutenant Prentiss his first time. He threw up on my boots."

Suka let a shout of laughter out. Lt Prentiss was an arrogant man who hated to show any sign of human vulnerability. "I can't wait to tell Callil!" she crowed.

"Don't!" said Paul firmly. "It's our secret, Suka. It goes no further."

She bit her lip, chastened, and took her first really comprehensive look around. The sky was almost like an Earth sky, except that it was overlaid with a sulphurous yellow tinge that bathed the landscape in a rather bleaching, unflattering light.

The ground they stood on was dry and patched with small areas of prickly scrub. Nothing of interest, except to their colleagues the space naturalists, but in the distance, about half a mile away, was a scene that both Suka and Paul thought very interesting indeed.

"Is that their capital city?"

"Sevarium," confirmed Paul. "The walled city. I think you should see it. You would find it of particular interest."

"Would I?" Suka frowned. "Why do you think that?"

Paul took her arm and began to steer her through the scrubby thorn bushes.

"I read your dissertation," he said softly.

Suka stopped dead for a moment, quaking with horror. "You...did?" she said. "Why would you do that?"

"A few nights ago, I was pondering the thorny issue of your low-level rule-breaking, trying to come up with a strategy for dealing with it that wouldn't disturb the workings of the crew or the ship too much. I had a read of your file. The title of your dissertation piqued my...curiosity, let's say. I couldn't resist logging on to the Academy's archive and taking a look."

It seemed she was expected to respond to this revelation in some coherent way, when gibbering was pretty much all she was capable of.

"Ah," she said. "Did you...like it?"

"I found it excellent. Very well researched and eloquently argued."

"It was a bit controversial. My supervisor almost refused to let me do it."

"I don't think she was right. I don't think our society has taken the right path on that issue at all."

"You don't think urge-repression is a good thing?" Suka's words fell over each other in their haste to get out.

"Not always. Not that kind of urge. Yes, to some of the more extreme ones—the harmful ones. But this was a consensual practice. It should never have been outlawed."

"I'm...wow. I've never met anyone who agreed with me. All my friends were a bit freaked out when they read it."

"Conditioning." Paul shrugged. "Repression. Who knows? Your dissertation struck me for two reasons."

"What reasons?"

"One, it showed that you have an original mind. You don't accept without question—yes, I know that's what *I* ask you to do, but the context is different."

"And the other?"

"You wanted to write about the practice of BDSM in the first place. After the banning, its apologists and practitioners were hounded, seen almost in the same light as paedophiles. You had to be brave to take the subject on. And, to strike up that kind of courage, you had to have a personal interest. Am I right?"

"You'll think I'm a freak," muttered Suka.

"No. I promise I don't think that. I do find it amusingly ironic that a person with such an aversion to authority...well...am I right? Or is it because *you* want to dominate?"

Suka caught her breath. "No! My dissertation was about the female submissive in bygone culture. I wrote about her because I felt close to her. I'm sorry, I can't talk about this with you. I want the ground to open up..."

They were at the city walls now, ready to pass through its enormous gate of overarching black marble.

"I don't," said Paul softly, letting his grip on her arm tighten just a notch. "I can't think of anyone I'd rather be exploring this city with."

Suka looked up at him with vivid interest, searching for reflections of herself in him, for signs that she was not alone. She thought she could see them. Could she really see them? Was there really a man who...?

No. He was her commanding officer. It would be unethical anyway.

She turned her face away again.

"I can't imagine why," she said stonily.

"Oh, I think you can," he said with an odd little sigh. "Come on then. Let's see the sights of Sevarium."

He dropped her arm, clapped his hands together decisively and strode beneath the archway at such a pace Suka had to trot to keep step with him.

"It's a bit like ancient Rome," she offered breathlessly, looking around what appeared to be a large public square, like a forum, walled on all sides by public buildings, the fourth side inset with a second black marble arch. Wide, wide stony space under an ochre sky, stretching out for a good half-mile square, was the introduction to Sevarium. The space was partitioned by the colour of the stone, like a less chequered chessboard, and Suka wondered aloud what this signified.

"Different usages," said Paul, though it wasn't clear whether this was a guess or a statement of fact. "You can see that that area with all the flags was probably a market of some kind. There's a stage over in the far corner."

They walked on, through the eerily empty expanse. Paladian bones were chemically constructed to dissolve and biodegrade, something Suka knew the Earth scientists were working to incorporate into humans. It was as if nobody had ever been here, Planet Marie Celeste. She felt nervousness at the pit of her stomach that wasn't entirely down to the

bizarre atmosphere of the dead metropolis. *Commander Paul read my dissertation* continued to flash through her mind in bright red alarm mode every now and then. *He knows what I am.*

They stopped at the top-left corner of the square, where a small platform acted as plinth to what looked like some kind of sculpture. Crafted from a smooth obsidian-like mineral, it mimicked the crude outline of a humanoid shape, dark legs travelling upwards in an inverse V to a broad flat torso, with arms raised. The only thing missing was the head—at neck height, a padded semicircular dip curtailed the body's progress. Suka and Paul, once on the platform to examine the installation more closely, noticed thin leather straps dangled from the knees, waist and wrists of the sculpture.

"You know what this is?" Paul turned to Suka, seemingly expecting her to supply the answer.

"I'm...not sure," she hedged, though actually she had seen a picture of one of these in her copy of *Peoples of the Outer Reaches*. That chapter had been abandoned halfway through for Suka to dive beneath the covers and think about it in exquisite detail, fingers working busily inside her slicked sex lips.

"Yes, you are," contradicted Paul, one hand travelling down the defenceless left arm of the headless statue. "You know exactly what this is." He turned and grinned, challenging her. "Don't disappoint me. You aren't usually so coy."

"It's a whipping post," said Suka, the thought of disappointing Paul somehow unbearable.

"That's right. The nobility of Sevarium underwent an interesting form of training. They believed that, to demand service, you first needed to experience it. To rule, you needed to understand how it felt to be ruled. Men and women alike, it must be said. They were equal opportunities deviants."

Suka laughed.

"Judging by the height of this, it was the women's post. Tell me what you know about this aspect of Paladian society, Suka. What have you read?"

"Once a Paladian noble reached majority, they were put into the service of a Sevarian master or mistress. It was quite a harsh regime, I think. Training lasted three or four years...I can't exactly remember. If they didn't please the boss, they were whipped."

"Good thing we don't operate that policy on the *Ulysses IV*, eh?" Paul smiled. "Or is it?"

Suka's cheeks burned. She was uncomfortably damp between her legs at the thought of standing on the whipping platform as it was, and her trousers felt too tight all of a sudden. If Paul was going to personalise all this, she was going to end up coming then and there, right in front of him. She wondered what the Federation penalty for *that* was. Nothing as exciting as a whipping, obviously.

Paul began searching the deck, looking for something he eventually found beneath a loose plank of the platform. It had an ornate, marbled handle and six stiff leather tails. A whip.

"Ah," said the Commander, swishing the thing through the air.

Suka was transfixed. *An actual whip*. In the Commander's hands, it looked so deadly and sexy that her knees began to feel as if they might give way. She held on to the sculpture, wrapping an arm around its waist for support.

"Commander Paul," she ventured faintly, pressing her body into the cool, sleek embrace of the whipping post.

"Mm-hmm?" he replied absently, running fascinated fingers along the whip strands, curling them around and around.

"Are we...observable? From the *Ulysses*?"

He looked up sharply. "No. This is a low-risk mission. Visual satellite link has not been enabled."

"I see." She fitted her chin over the padded neck rest. Exactly the right height.

"Why?" Paul's arch question hung in the air, seemingly laden with hope to Suka's oversensitive ears.

She spread her legs to fit the sculpture's inverse V and raised her arms up, pressed in a close embrace with the whipping post. It felt too good, wickedly good. She knew she ought to take a step back, recover her wits and ignore her senses, but this was too intoxicating to resist. She was a young Paladian noblewoman, in the service of a strict lord who looked highly reminiscent of Commander Paul...and she had failed in her duties...and now the price must be paid...in front of the populace. There they would stand, all around her, munching on hot snacks from the nearby market, jostling and catcalling, remarking on her physical attributes.

Her master would approach, whip in hand, and then...

She flinched as something—it could only be the handle of the whip—came to rest at the small of her back.

“Suka.” Paul’s voice, in her ear, saying her given name, was so intimate that she shivered. “I asked you a question. Why did you ask whether we could be seen?”

She gripped the top of the model, where the hands were meant to rest, and thought that, perhaps if she wasn’t looking directly at Paul, she might be able to say this.

“Because I can’t help thinking...this chance will never come again...”

“You may well be right. But I’m your commanding officer. If it ever gets out that I—”

“It won’t. It wouldn’t. Ever.”

“And I have certain principles to which I must adhere. I can’t just go giving in to my base desires.”

“Just this once...”

“Especially with an ensign. It’s an abuse of power. An abuse of privilege.”

“I want you to abuse your power. I will do anything if you’ll just abuse your power, just today, just this once, please.”

“Then ask me for it. There must be no ambiguity at all. Tell me what you want me to do.”

“Please whip me, Sir. Please tie me to this thing and whip me hard.”

“All right,” he whispered, bending to strap her legs to the post. “I can do that.”

Suka could hear the roar of the phantom crowd as her wrists and waist were firmly secured. Probably in Paladian practice her bottom would be bared, but Commander Paul did not go so far as that, leaving the thin, skin-tight trousers in position—not that their super-lightweight microfibres would afford much protection.

She tried to regulate her breathing, but the sound of Paul’s boots pacing up and down the platform behind her was making her pussy convulse and her hips squirm and writhe against their bonds. *Oh, please, get on with it*, she pleaded silently, but at the same time, the way he drew out the anticipation was so deliciously cruel she found herself getting even hotter.

“So then, Ensign,” he said gently, and Suka felt the faint tickle of those leather strands travelling across her bottom, making her squeak. “We have issues to address, don’t we?”

“Yes, Sir,” she exhaled.

“Disobedience will not be tolerated in my service. I am going to show you what your petty rebellions have earned you. I hope the lesson will be learned. Ready?”

“Yes, Sir.”

The maddening tickles withdrew and there was a moment of pure tension before the air sang with the sound of flying leather then a starburst of heated sting lit up Suka’s behind.

“Ahh,” she cried brokenly, finding the sensation at once better and worse than her imagination had prepared her for. She worked hard on processing and assessing it, letting the burn sink into her skin before she came to her final conclusion.

Paul held back. “Yes?” he murmured. “More?”

She nodded. “Please. More.”

Then he did not hold back. The lash fell again and again on Suka’s tautly-clothed rear, opening the door of the chamber she had considered forbidden for so long, letting her sensual self out of its prison. Simultaneously she blessed and cursed Paul’s strength, stamina and disciplinarian determination. He left no portion of her bottom or thighs unscathed, whipping the strands with expert precision from the crest of her buttocks to the tops of her knees, searing the tender skin until Suka feared it might crack, so tight and swollen did it feel.

As the lash fell, so did Suka, into a maelstrom of passionate submission from which she was not sure she could ever emerge. This was life now, this was her—one helpless subject, beneath her master’s whip hand.

It took a few moments for her to realise he had stopped. Her bottom and thighs continued to pulse with urgent heat and she had writhed herself into exhausted passivity. She wondered why her face was wet then realised she had been crying. She hung, loose and infinitely relaxed in her bonds, finally understanding the meaning of the word *catharsis*.

Paul’s hand landed on her shoulder, light and reassuring.

“Did I go too far?” he asked abruptly, beginning to untie her.

“No,” she gasped. “No. Oh no.”

Once untethered, she collapsed into his arms, seeking a comfort he seemed to provide instinctively, holding her close and burying his face in her hair, letting the tears flow until the sobs subsided and she lay, quiet and peaceful, in his embrace.

“I think I got a bit carried away,” he said with a rueful little catch in his voice. “I’m sorry if I—”

"No, you don't have to be sorry. I know what I've been missing now. Something amazing. I'm so grateful to you. So grateful, and I'll never forget it."

"Shh," he soothed, tightening his hold on her. "It's me who should be thanking you. I'm the one who should be grateful."

"Hmm?" She looked up at him, daring to hope this hadn't all been a little treat for her sole benefit.

"We're mirror images of each other, Suka, when it comes to these practices. Do you think I didn't enjoy that—more than I legally should? Eh?" He smiled indulgently, and a little fearfully. "What you like to receive, I like to give. Always have. Urge-repression will never change that."

"Really? You're a, you know, what they used to call a...dom?"

His apparent embarrassment was so endearing to Suka she felt a rush of emotion for the man she had cursed and reviled for the past months.

"I can't deny it," he said. "When they finally perfect time-travel, I'll be first in the queue at the dungeons."

Suka giggled. "You'd have to hold me back."

"Believe me, it would be a pleasure."

They maintained wry eye-contact, glowing at each other, neither quite ready to say the thing they were both thinking.

"So, have you done that before?" Suka asked.

"Not on a human person," he admitted. "Not outside my imagination."

"You seemed quite the expert."

"I've studied widely." He patted her bottom. "How does it feel?"

"Very sore." She sighed contentedly. "Gorgeously so. It..." She held herself back. Even given the powerful emotional experience they had just shared, she was not about to tell her commanding officer that his whipping her had made her insanely horny.

"What?"

"Nothing. Just...it was nice. I wish we could do it again. I mean, I could do it again." She corrected herself swiftly, but Paul had stiffened and released her from his embrace.

He shrugged. "If only," he said neutrally.

Shit, now he thinks I've got a crush on him, thought Suka, cross at herself. But I have. Oh, stars. I really have. The way he did that...the way he whipped me...oh, I want him. I really want him. Oh, this is awful. I wish I'd never come down now.

"Well," said Paul briskly, putting the whip in his belt beside the landing pack. "That's one way of introducing yourself to the local customs. Shall we look further?"

Chapter Two

Suka dusted herself down, still naggingly aware of the tug of need for Paul at her crotch, but determined to ignore it. Difficult when your arse was hotter than Mercury and every step caused friction between the unforgiving fabric of your trousers and the smouldering surface of your behind, but it had to be done.

“Right,” she said. “What is that building over there? Is it a temple of some kind? A religious edifice?”

“Let’s see, shall we?”

He strode a few paces ahead of her, so she could not help feasting her eyes on the broad shoulders, the strong back, the long booted legs and the perfectly-shaped behind in front of her. The head of close-cropped hair made her want to reach up and run her fingers across its prickling fuzz. Everything about him seemed designed to torment her with unassuageable lust. The universe hated her – it was official.

She concentrated on shaking herself free of these inconvenient longings by taking a keen interest in her unusual surroundings.

The building they were entering was made of something a little like marble but with a glow about it. Before Paul and Suka reached the top of the steps, Suka was stopped in her tracks by a *feeling*.

When Paul turned around to look at her, Suka knew he felt it too.

“This is...what’s this then?” she asked helplessly. She had a violent urge to drape herself around Paul’s neck and cling on to him.

“This must be the coupling place,” said Paul, visibly struggling to keep control of himself. “One of the little tricks the Paladians had – infusing building materials with emotion traces. Their cultural signature, if you like. Or one of them, at least.”

“When you enter this building you feel –”

“Love. Erotic love. Romantic love.”

Suka had not noticed herself doing it, but she had managed to wrap herself up in the crook of one of Paul’s powerful arms. Her head rested against his chest as she lifted her eyes to his.

"It's like a spell," she murmured.

"I know," he said, bending his head lower until his lips were close, so close. But he tore them away in time. "We can't do anything about it until we leave. Perhaps we shouldn't go inside."

"Oh, we should," gasped Suka, putting a hand to Paul's cheek, the physical connection of skin on skin almost knocking her off her feet.

"It's not your call, Suka," he said, but his voice was a croon now, low and deep, his chest vibrating against her ear. He was losing this fight.

"Think of the book I could write," she marvelled.

He gave in and pulled her into the vast chamber with its jewelled ceiling and fragrance of musk.

"This was where Paladians would have their weddings," said Suka, her arms around Paul's neck now, their foreheads bumping.

"Yes." His breath warmed her ear and neck. "All the congregation would come together in the spirit of love and passion, to celebrate the joining of the couple."

"Come together...literally?" Suka's hand had found its way to Paul's backside. Paul grabbed one of her thighs and lifted it so her leg was hooked around his and a convenient resting place for his hardening cock was provided.

"Yes. The Paladian concept of a good wedding party was an orgy."

"I kind of love these people. I wish they hadn't died out."

"I might have settled here." Paul's words poured directly into Suka's ear now, hot and savage with lust. "I might have brought you with me."

"Oh lord." Suka sighed blissfully, though the tiny part of her that retained its rationality wondered with unease whether it was just the erotically-charged stone speaking. "I would have come."

"You most definitely would," he agreed, and his hands stroked down the curve of Suka's back until they met the swell of her bottom, still burning sorely from the whipping, so that she winced when his palms rested there.

"So." Suka shuddered, feeling she should probably look up from Paul's chest and take in her surroundings, but somehow unable to do so. "Talk me through the Paladian coupling ritual."

"Mmm, okay," he said. With an effort of will, he unwound Suka from his body and led her to the raised dais at the centre of the chamber. "Let's say we're the happy couple. We come up here, where the crowds can see us properly."

They climbed the steps and stood in front of a piece of furniture resembling an altar, but with padding, all covered in richly coloured, water-resistant fabrics, reminiscent of earthly silks.

"Now, the form of service depends on the type of bond," Paul explained, his hand coming again to rest on Suka's bottom while she drank him in, longing for him with every fibre of her being. "The type of bond I think you'd be most interested in is the subjection bond."

"What is that?"

"It's the pledge of a man or woman to offer full and lifelong submission to their bondmate." Paul's free hand cupped Suka's chin, his thumb pressing into her cheek, forcing her to hear and absorb every word. "Do you think that would appeal to you?"

"Oh...my," was all she could say.

"Let's re-enact the process, then, shall we? I don't know all the words of the service, so I'll give it my best guess. First of all, you have to kneel at my feet."

Suka dropped to her knees as if shot, bending her forehead so it touched Paul's glossy black boots.

"Exactly like that," he approved. "Then some vows are spoken. You would say something about giving yourself to me unconditionally and obeying my every word. I would say something about cherishing and protecting you and not sparing the rod."

Suka gulped and kissed his feet. She was soaking wet between her legs and almost twitching with need for him.

"That's nice. I'm not sure it's part of the service. But this is."

He pulled her to her feet and she fell with infinite gratitude into the heat and fury of his kiss. Their lips smashed together and their tongues curled around each other, greedy and insatiable. For Suka, the intensity of the passion was almost like anger, causing her to crush her body up against his and take rough fistfuls of his flesh. He moved her round and round on the spot, ravaging her mouth until it was dry and her lips throbbed, swollen and spent.

"Now you get your clothes off," he panted hoarsely, tugging at her top. "I have to display my new acquisition to the crowds."

“Acquisition?”

“A wealthy Paladian could have up to five bond subjects. Of course, if it was me, I’d stick with one. One is enough.”

Suka, beyond argument or reason now, pulled off her boots and peeled down her tight trousers until she stood naked on the dais in front of Paul, who turned her around to better inspect the state he had made of her arse.

“Gorgeous,” he muttered, cupping the welted flesh. “I’d keep you like that.”

“Ohhh,” sighed Suka.

“I *will* keep you like that. When you’re mine.”

This cathedral stone was strong stuff, Suka mused. It sounded as if he really wanted her, seriously, long term. But that was the illusion, wasn’t it?

“Now,” he said, wheeling her around roughly so her nude front view faced the vast emptiness and the patterned windows beyond. He planted his hands on her hips, standing behind her, then bestowed a long, hard suck on her neck, marking her in a place that would only just be concealed by the high collar of her uniform top when she dressed again. “Here is my subject, Suka,” he declaimed to his imaginary audience. “All of this is now mine. The expanse of her flesh. The sweetness of her lips. This curving neck and these soft breasts.”

His hands were on the bare mounds, squeezing them together to give the audience the optimal view. He stroked and caressed the nipples, letting the blood swarm into them and harden them into stiff little buttons. Suka threw her head back, nuzzling her crown against Paul’s still-clothed chest.

“No, you have to look out at the audience.” He tutted, twisting the nipples now, making her gasp and squeak at the leaping pleasure-pain. “You must have your subjection witnessed, and you must witness it yourself. That’s in the rules of service.”

“When...did you read that?”

“Oh, years ago. As a student. Stuck in my mind somehow.”

“I’ll...bet...ooh.”

He slid the tormenting hands down her sides, flipping her around by the hips to display her whipped bottom.

“This bottom will be kept tender by my disciplinary attentions,” he promised his invisible witnesses. “It will be used in any way I see fit.” Fingertips travelled slowly,

whisper-lightly, down the crack, opening the cheeks to expose the secret within to the audience. "I will train her to accept what I have to give."

"Train?" Suka swallowed, imagining some kind of anal sex boot camp. Not that that prospect was without its allure.

"Slowly," soothed Commander Paul. "Gently. But firmly. And relentlessly. I will give your most private place my very special attention. You will undertake to keep it ready and prepared for me at all times. Won't you? Hmm?"

He encouraged her assent with a thumb on her lower lip and a narrowing of eyes. Suka could only nod.

Then she was facing the front again, her feet nudged wide apart while Paul's capable hands pulled her sex lips open to reveal the glossy red fruits within to his eager supporters.

"And this. This is mine. These lips, this clit, this opening. This, as well, will always be kept in readiness for me. You will work on maintaining its tightness and wetness, and this will be subject to testing at any time."

"They would have to stay wet *all the time*?" queried Suka, though at that moment she could not imagine finding any problem with this requirement. She squirmed against Paul's confident touch, trying to trick him into rubbing her clit properly.

"The people of Sevarium had ways," said Paul, probing inside her with one finger, then two. "Lords, but you really are wet, Suka. I could take you here and now."

"Is that what happens next?" she asked hopefully.

Paul chuckled softly. "Patience," he chided, causing her to wriggle her hips frustratedly, pushing her bottom into the hard bulge in his trousers.

"First, according to the ritual, the master would invite each and every member of the congregation up, one by one, to inspect and admire his new bond subject. Imagine it, Suka. Here you would stand while I presented you, front and back, to all-comers. They were encouraged to feel you, to take a handful of your breasts, to check your cunt for wetness and your clit for fatness, to perhaps give your bum a good smack before standing down for the next person."

"Oh my, wouldn't that take *hours*?"

"Yes, I imagine so. There would be upwards of a thousand guests at these shindigs. Think of it, Suka. Thousands of hands, feeling you up, fingering you, opening and examining you. It makes you wet, doesn't it? Well, wetter," he amended, his fingers rotating easily

inside Suka's soaked passage. "And you weren't allowed to come. Not unless the master permitted it. If you did, you would be shamed straight away and sent to the punishment suite."

"The punishment suite?"

"We'll have to see if we can find it later on."

Eek! Must we? thought Suka, but the idea excited her beyond belief. She needed just the tiniest flick of Paul's thumb on her clit to bring her to spectacular orgasm. But he was not about to grant this favour and he took his fingers from her pussy to the accompaniment of her desperate protests.

"Once all that was done," said Paul into her ear, bending low because she had slumped forward, chin on breastbone, sulking at not being allowed to come yet, "there was the ritual clothing."

"Clothing? You mean I have to get dressed again?"

"Not really. I wonder if..." He turned around and crouched before the altar, scrabbling around inside the silk drapes that hid the space beneath it. "Brilliant!" he crowed, emerging with a web of slender silver chain, exquisitely delicate and expertly crafted. "Subject links," he said, holding up his discovery.

"What do they do?"

"Look." He began to arrange them about Suka's body, slipping them first over her shoulders, then letting them cross her breasts at the nipple, where a small clip midway along the linkage was conveniently placed. The clips, when attached to Suka's nipples, were not painful, but they awoke a permanent throb, keeping the nubs hard and full. Once the two strands met at the base of Suka's cleavage, they joined and passed down through her pussy lips and up the crack of her bottom until the end was fastened to the strip of chain across her shoulder blades. Suka shifted from foot to foot, instantly aware of a tingle transferring from the metal to her sex, keeping it stimulated as if by electricity or magic.

"Oh God. This is how they get the constant horniness thing going," she exclaimed, rubbing herself against Paul shamelessly now. "This is impossible. Oh, Sir, it's unbearable. I will come!"

"You won't. It won't let you. It stimulates without ever tipping you into climax. Clever lot, weren't they, the Paladians?" His grin was sadistically gleeful and she was sweating now, struggling to keep a tenuous grip on her mind.

"Genius...es," she tried to say. "I feel like...I feel like I'm going to...oh God, please let me..."

"You would get used to it," Paul said, unreassuringly. "But I think it took a week or so."

"It's *torture*," Suka dropped to her knees, pushing the chain further between her lips, crushing it against her clit, but finding no real relief, whatever she did. "Please take it off!" Her voice broke into a wail of tension.

Paul lifted her from the floor. "I think the time is right," he whispered in her ear. "I have to take you. No recriminations? No regrets?"

"I promise, seriously, I have to have you, Sir."

"I won't hurt you."

"I don't *care* about that! Please...just..."

He laid her flat on the padded altar, then swung his legs over to straddle her.

"This is the ceremonial mounting," he informed her, though Suka was long past requiring any educational material.

"I get the picture. Just fuck me."

"I'm not sure that's the right attitude for a bond subject, Suka. I think we will be visiting the punishment suite later," teased Paul, but he was kicking off his boots and freeing his cock from its long imprisonment, ready to indulge Suka's desire.

He unclipped a connecting link from the base of Suka's slave harness, immediately releasing her from the worst of the frustration, though her clit still throbbed and her pussy continued to drench the padded leather beneath it.

"This," gritted Paul, lining up the tip of his cock with Suka's cunt and bathing it in the wetness there, "is where I lay my claim on you. When my cock owns you, you become irrevocably mine. Put your arms above your head."

She obeyed, although every instinct told her to grab his backside and force him inside her.

"Make me yours," she whispered, and he took her at her word, impaling her swiftly and without ceremony on the thick curving rod of flesh that was now her master.

"A harsh master might insist on making you beg permission for your orgasm," said Paul, holding himself in at the hilt, teeth gritted, every sinew strained. "But I won't do that. You may come whenever you are ready."

"Thanks." Suka's tone contained just a hint of snark, and she knew she was paying for that when Paul began subjecting her to a blistering, head-banging bout of fucking, showing no mercy, just the way she wanted it.

In between the starbursts of pure sensual stimulation, Suka found stray thoughts weaving through her consciousness.

Commander Paul is fucking me. I am lying underneath him, taking his cock, on an altar. I am his. He is good at this! Very good at this. Oh shit, am I in love? I want him to look at me, I want him to...

He looked at her and she convulsed, heart and soul, seeing in his eyes exactly what she sought. Desperate, furious need, but also tenderness and a touch of bewilderment. Events had overtaken them, Suka realised, both of them. She was not the only vulnerable one here, perhaps not even the *most* vulnerable.

He took her face in his cupped hands and kissed her through the strongest orgasm of her life, plundering her with his tongue as she twisted and kicked beneath him, accepting her helpless screams into his own throat.

Later, after his own powerful climax, filling her with his hot essence, he slumped on top of her, his face beside hers, damp and slippery. He was heavy – six-feet-two of solid muscle on Suka's slight frame, and she gasped underneath him.

"Sorry," he said, sounding far away from her. The altar was not wide and it was not possible to lie side by side. "Like this." He manoeuvred her on top of him. She sighed and untensed as her sore bum unpeeled from the damp fabric and felt the breath of cool air. She burrowed into Paul's arms, letting herself fall into satiated exhaustion. He held her so well. Never had she felt so protected, so cherished. *Just like it says in the vows.*

"The audience would be all over each other now," said Paul softly. "And it would be one long orgy for the rest of the day and night. Some masters and mistresses liked lending their bond subjects. Others preferred exclusive rights over them. Either way, you would be leaving this place sore and used up."

"That's how I feel already."

"You've learned a lot today."

"Thanks for...educating me."

"Thanks for being so...intellectually curious. I would teach you again, any time."

"I hope you will."

Chapter Three

Paul lifted his head, peering down at Suka's face where it lay, looking sidelong at him from his chest.

"I know the stone has this effect," he said, "so the High Council would excuse us what's just happened. They would understand we had no choice. Don't worry about getting into any trouble."

Suka bit her lip, hesitating to speak her mind.

"No choice," she said at last. "It was the stone that made us do it."

"That's what the High Council will know."

"Is it true?"

"What do you mean?" Paul's grip on her tightened and he frowned.

"Oh, nothing." She buried her face in the rumpled material of his uniform top, which he had not bothered to take off for the ceremony. Was he able to disconnect, just like that? View what had passed between them as an *occupational hazard*? She could hear his heart beating next to her ear, hammering away, but she thought perhaps it was just a sound recording, standing in for a vacancy down there.

Paul pulled at her tight braid. "Are you sulking?" he asked sternly.

"Of course not." She raised her head, chin up, mouth in a tight little line. "I am bloody starving, though. Should we eat an energy bar?"

"Good idea." Paul held Suka carefully by the shoulders while he sat up and swung around, vacating the altar. "We should get out of here. Come on."

The back entrance of the temple took them out to a garden, overgrown and untended, but still beautiful. They found a bench to sit on and took the energy bars from their waist packs, neither one of them speaking.

Suka bit into the teeth-achingly sweet bar and chewed it silently, watching the birds that still inhabited the planet as if they hadn't realised it was dead.

Now what? Am I supposed to go back to a formal professional footing with a man I just lay beneath, in the throes of orgasm? Does he really expect that to happen?

Her trousers, back up now, felt tacky and clingy, and a reminder of Commander Paul's recent presence leaked out of her and stained the material at the crotch.

He spoke first, just as the silence was at its heaviest.

"Are you embarrassed?"

"Should I be?" she replied quickly.

"You know it wasn't my intention to take advantage of you."

"Do you feel guilty?"

"I suppose I do. I've gone well outside the boundaries of professionalism, let's say."

"And the stone made you do it. It wasn't the stone that made you pick up that whip, though, was it?"

Paul turned, his eyes wide, flashing alarm signals at Suka, who shrank back instinctively.

"No, that was *you*, Ensign. Because if you're suggesting otherwise —"

"I'm not," she said quickly. She bit into the bar again, thinking about her next conversational move. "You're just a plaything of the gods today, aren't you? First your bad little ensign makes you do things, then the temple stone. Poor Commander Paul. It must be terrible, being so coerced all the time."

Paul finished the final bite of his bar, scrunching up the biodegradable wrapper and discarding it in a neighbouring bush.

"You think I don't want to take responsibility for all this?" he said. "I accept it, Suka. I accept full responsibility. When I chose you to come down here, I thought you could handle it. I made a bad call. It won't happen again."

Suka felt as if he had kicked her in her already tender crotch. The almost-irresistible urge to scream *Fuck you!* swept over her and she held her fists tightly clenched and counted to five while it passed.

"What exactly have I done that was so wrong?" she asked, fighting to keep her voice level.

"You're taking everything personally," said Paul. "You seem to be blaming me for all this. You're disrespectful and sullen now. Why?"

Suka turned her face away. "Because I made a mistake," she muttered. "I thought you..."

She couldn't finish the sentence.

Paul took a quick breath. "Thought I what?" he said, also looking away.

"Thought it meant something. Hoped it meant something."

He reached for her hand and took it, fidgeting with her fingers restlessly.

"You still think that? Now we're outside the temple?"

"What should I think, Commander? We had intense, passionate sex. It felt like a real connection to me. You're acting as if it was just a trick of the stone."

Paul was quiet for a moment. The long fronds of the abandoned plants blew and shushed in the soft breezes. Suka tried to tune out, to just enjoy the feel of real weather and unrecycled air. Screw Paul and his ethical hang-ups.

"It doesn't matter whether it was a trick of the stone or not," he said quietly. "We can't pursue this. You know that."

"Because of intergalactic protocol?"

"Yes. Of course because of intergalactic protocol."

"Because it's the rules."

"Suka —"

"And the rules always rule. Right up there before humanity, or common sense, or love. Rules."

"You *knew* that, Suka, you've always known it."

"Yes, but that was before I knew I..." She stopped herself just in time. "Before I knew how I felt. About you."

Paul squeezed her fingers. "Suka, you've had a very powerful sexual experience. That can affect your reasoning —"

"Don't you *dare* patronise me, Commander. And don't you dare tell me how I feel."

Commander Paul hauled her to her feet.

"Okay, enough," he said. "You're going back up to the ship. I'll complete this mission alone." He moved to take his communicator from his belt, but drew the whip instead, having forgotten he had placed it there.

This gave Suka enough time to slip free of his grasp and race out of his reach.

"I'm not going back," she called from behind a huge flowering shrub. "You'll have to catch me first."

"Ensign!" he roared, but she was away, picking out the remnants of the path beneath the drying reeds and leaves, sure of only one thing, which was that this adventure was not ending yet. Not until she had made Commander Paul realise exactly how significant the emotional exchange between them had been.

It was hard to run with her legs still weak from the sex and her bottom tingling and her whole groin area aching and swollen, but she managed to gain some ground, taking advantage of the obfuscatory foliage to foil Paul's attempts at second-guessing her route. Through the brown-greenery, she began to make out the wall of a building, looming ever closer, built of a dark, glittering brick, windowless and sinister in its appearance. Suka tried to find a door, but between running full-pelt and trying to place Paul's location by the sound of his irate yelling, her senses were busy enough, and it wasn't until she was almost smack-bang into the wall that she worked out how to get into the building.

She vaulted over an iron balustrade and scampered down some steps to a basement door. Hoping against hope it would not be locked, she yanked at the handle. The door creaked aside and Suka found herself in pitch darkness. *Good*, she thought. *He won't be able to find me just by looking.*

She reached out, feeling for walls, and tiptoed rapidly along the side of the building, listening out for sounds of her master's voice.

Crackling of undergrowth from above, heavy footsteps on the stairs, then his voice.

"Suka? Stop this now. You're in more trouble than you can ever imagine, girl. When I get my hands on you..."

Suka had to suppress a gasp, sure already he would be able to locate her by the deafening beating of her heart.

A narrow beam of light bisected the darkness. He was using his communicator torch. Luckily, the chamber was vast and full of strange corners and cubbyholes. If she used her sense of touch wisely, she could find a way out of here before he lit on her.

Huge shapes, malevolent and fantastical, loomed in the greyness. Had Suka not been so focused on the chase, she might have wondered about their purpose, but only one imperative drove her. The beam of light swished around, sometimes coming close, but she was light-footed enough to keep her footsteps near-silent.

She heard Commander Paul curse.

"Suka! This isn't going to help you. Come here now."

Her fingers closed around a metal ring in the wall. It might be the latch of some kind of portal. Feverishly she tried to turn it without making a noise. The light gained on her, advancing with Paul's footsteps, closer and closer.

Damn, she thought. *I don't have time to be subtle*. She gave the ring a wrench and a door began to slide open. Now Paul would know where she was – as evidenced by his quickening pace and sudden, nearby roar of, “Suka!”

Come on, door, open, open, quickly. But the grinding of the gears was infernally slow, and Suka was halfway through trying to insert her slim figure into the narrow opening when Paul's hand landed on her elbow, closing around it like an iron band. *Fuck. So much for that plan*.

Not that it had been much of a plan. More an anti-plan, a reaction against Paul's unacceptable plan for her.

“You've broken one rule too many, Ensign—” Paul was barking, when suddenly his torch caught the edge of something and he was silenced, flashing the beam slowly around the new chamber.

“The punishment suite,” quavered Suka. “It must be.”

“Yes.” Paul, forgetful of his wrath, used the communicator to light the room more fully, zapping the wall-mounted brackets until a flickering glow illuminated the scene.

Suka's legs buckled and she was momentarily grateful for Paul's firm, if uncomfortable, hold on her elbow. This was *incredible*. She was reminded of an illustration in one of the anthropological texts she had studied for her dissertation. ‘*Figure Two: Typical BDSM “Dungeon Club”*.’ She had looked at that picture over and over, imagining herself restrained in some of the equipment, at the mercy of a heartless man or men, or maybe even a woman like the one in ‘*Figure Three: A Professional Dominatrix*.’

“It's like a dream,” she said softly, “all of this.”

Paul jerked to attention, reminded of her company. He narrowed his eyes, frowning down at her.

“Your worst nightmare?”

“No. Leaving here. Leaving here without you is my worst nightmare.”

“One you don't have much choice about,” said Paul robustly, but Suka could see he was struggling to maintain his resolve.

“We always have a choice,” she said. “Commander. Please don't send me back.”

“I have to.” There it was, palpable regret, almost anguish.

Suka knew she had to build on this, drive home her advantage. She bumped her hip against his and raised entreating eyes.

"Another punishment? Please? I know I deserve one. Anything you want. Just don't send me away."

"Suka –"

"Give me what I deserve, Commander. Make me take my punishment. Please discipline me as you see fit."

He groaned, trying to push her away, but the bulge of his crotch signalled her imminent victory and she pursued it relentlessly.

She used her free hand to push the waistband of her trousers downwards, bringing her bottom, cooled now but still tender, out into the frigid air of the punishment chamber.

"Use the whip, Sir," she suggested feverishly. "I need it. I need to feel your dominance over me, or I'll never learn, will I, Sir? Teach me the lesson. Make it a hard one, one I'll never forget." She rubbed her hand over the receding welts, pinching her flesh, moving in to press against the imprisoned erection.

Paul's hand smacked down hard on the rudely-exposed backside, and Suka's cry was only partly of pain. Jubilation fizzed through her. He could not resist this opportunity. She had bought time, time to convince him this was no momentary aberration but a shared emotional experience on which they could build a happy partnership.

"You'll get it," snarled Paul. "Believe me. You won't forget this for a long time." He pulled her roughly forward, taking her on a tour of the well-equipped suite. "The only question is, where shall I start?"

Suka's beady eyes worked hard at taking it all in. There were hooks and chains hanging from the ceiling with adjustable pulleys. There was a large wooden cross on a platform. There were medical gurneys with arrangements of straps. As they advanced through the room, Suka began to have misgivings. Some of these items were proper, fully-fledged torture devices. She screwed up her eyes and clamped her legs instinctively, praying she had not let herself in for anything too physically gruelling.

Paul stopped in front of a horrifying-looking bed of nails.

"What do you deserve, Suka?"

She squeaked, trembling, wanting at once to hide in his arms, and run away. Which was the best option?

He took pity, patting her shoulder.

"I'm not a true sadist," he told her, and she let the balloon of air that had been constricting her chest out again. "I don't like hurting people who aren't enjoying it. But this is my quandary, Suka. I want to punish you. But I don't want you to enjoy every moment. I want to test you, stretch you, take you to a limit. What's your limit?"

"I don't know," admitted Suka, her voice uneven. "Never been there."

"We'll find it," promised Paul. "And it will be painful. Don't think it won't. You need to feel it. But when you're sure you can't take any more, you must tell me. Say the word 'surrender' and I'll stop. And you can go back to the ship, alone."

Suka pouted. He was still talking about making her return.

"What if I never surrender?"

Paul sighed pleasantly. "If you never surrender...I'll have to rethink, won't I? I have my limits too. I couldn't damage you, couldn't draw blood. I wonder whose boundary will be reached first?"

Suka felt there was nothing in the whole wide universe she wanted to find out more.

Chapter Four

“Strip,” said Commander Paul suddenly, and Suka froze for a moment, gathering her wits and her nerve, before leaning down to remove her left boot. She was going to view this as a test. A test of obedience, a test of endurance, a test of courage. And if she passed it, she told herself her prize would be Commander Paul as her master, in her personal life as well as the professional sphere.

Standing barefoot on the cold smooth floor, she finished the job of lowering and removing her trousers until only her top half was clothed. She wondered, with a hot flash of embarrassment, if Paul could see the dried crust of his own semen clinging to her inner thighs, but she banished the thought by lifting her crew jersey over her head, pulling stray blonde curls from the severe plait.

Now naked, Suka could not help hugging herself under her ribcage, shivering in the frigid air. Luckily, the wall lights seemed also to generate heat. A bearable temperature would take a little while to establish itself, but it was on the way.

For now, though, Suka’s nipples stood out like hard pink pearls, painfully tight and still slightly raw from Paul’s earlier treatment. She was not sure what to do with her eyes—if she looked at him, was that too bold? But she didn’t want him to think she was scared of him, even though she was, a little. She settled for tilting her head down and regarding him from beneath lowered lashes. He seemed to approve, feet planted wide, arms folded across his chest, letting his eyes travel from her toes to the crown of her tousled head.

“What shall we do with Suka?” he asked the shadowed walls, looking around him. “What does she deserve?”

He found a large storage chest and opened it up, exclaiming delightedly at its contents. Suka watched him retrieve a glossy black thing and hold it up.

“She needs to be dressed and prepared for punishment,” said Paul. “Lift your arms.”

Suka obediently raised her arms above her head and allowed him to wrap the item around her middle torso. It was a cupless corset-type affair, strictly boned, cinching in her waist and supporting her breasts, which stood pertly above the shiny fabric. Paul drew the back-lacing as tight as he could without making her squeal, restricting her so she had to

breathe with care. He put his hands on her hips and traced their outline, apparently pleased with the way the garment made her bottom swell underneath its rigid busk.

"You should wear one of these all the time," he said conversationally. "It would keep you in check, I think. Now, next..."

He returned to the chest, and this time he bore a wide collar of a dark, leather-like material, which he buckled around her neck, forcing Suka to keep her chin up. The final item made Paul laugh as he rummaged in the box of tormenting treasure.

"Good old-fashioned high heels," he said, drawing out a pair of dangerous-looking pumps. "You know, all sorts of women used to wear these all the time, even on Earth."

"I know," said Suka, having to exercise her chin muscles to get the words out over the top of the collar.

"What did you just say?"

Suka stiffened. Something had displeased him, but she wasn't sure what. She gambled.

"I said, I know, Sir."

"You didn't," said Paul sternly. "But you should have. Okay. I'll overlook it. What size are you? I think these should fit."

He pushed Suka's bare feet into the stilettos, giving her a few moments to stagger around in an attempt to accustom herself to her sudden height.

"This is a punishment in itself," she muttered to herself. The shoes were wildly uncomfortable, cramping her toes together at the pointed end. Had ordinary women *really* worn these? Wouldn't their feet have evolved accordingly, so as to make them easier to walk in?

"Prolonged wear damaged the foot," noted Paul. "So they died out eventually. However, it has to be said, I can see why they were popular. They make your legs look sensational, and as for your arse..."

He slapped her outthrust cheeks with relish.

"Let's see you parade your new look," grinned Paul, almost openly salivating. "Up to that whipping bench and back."

Suka tottered along, her spine poker-straight and her head held high, conscious of how the shoes made her bottom wiggle with every step. She imagined Paul's eyes on her hot-pink rear and tried to inject that extra bit of sass to her step. *You will want me. You will not be able to resist me.*

By the time she turned to face him again, he had one hand discreetly hanging over his crotch, the other clamped to his upper arm, pretending a casual, natural posture. But Suka knew different, and the power this gave her probably did little for her efforts to appear meek and submissive.

Confident on the heels now, she strode up to him, hands on swinging hips, lips pouting outward.

"All right, the catwalk show's over," said Paul gruffly. "Take your disobedient backside over to those suspended cuffs. It's time for your lesson."

Hanging low to the side of the room were some leather-lined metal wrist cuffs, attached to a chain. The thick metal rope disappeared upwards until it met a hook in the ceiling, then it travelled back down again, ending in a pulley a few feet away from the cuffs. Suka could see straightaway how this would work. Paul would literally be able to keep her on her toes.

She held her wrists out for him, making no comment as he snapped the cuffs shut then stepped back to put the pulley into motion. Her arms swung upwards, slowly enough to make it seem like a ceremony of sorts. She felt the pull of tension against her corseted ribs, then her arms were vertical, reaching for the sky, up again, fractions of inches, so very slowly, until she was on tiptoe, struggling to keep upright. Now she knew that this was going to be a real test. Every nerve, every sense, was on alert. The tension of her body spread, inside and out, until she was one tightly-wound string, waiting to be plucked. The high collar prevented her from turning her head to try and locate Paul. All she could do was look ahead, at her own shadow, gigantically tethered and teetering, on the opposite wall.

"Now then," said Paul, fixing the pulley in position and sauntering over to Suka's helpless form. "Let's start with an inspection."

He ran a finger down her cheek, feather-light and caressing, making her want to sigh and lean into it. But he held the flushing cheek in his palm, using his thumb to part her lips and push inside her mouth. "Mmm, someone's hungry?" he said as she tried to suck the thumb inside. "Dinner may be a while yet."

He laughed quietly and pressed down on her tongue while his free hand made a thorough inspection of Suka's prominent breasts.

"Nipples fully engorged," he noted as if ticking off a checklist. "Those little clamps earlier made them sore, didn't they? Ooh, ouch. Does that hurt?" His pinch was gentle, but it was still enough to make Suka flinch.

"They're sensitive, Sir," she squeaked.

"Good," he said, leaning down and breathing warm vapour over them so they throbbed ticklishly. "So they should be." The tip of his tongue danced a light circle around each in turn. Suka writhed in her bonds again, but this time her actions were motivated by pleasurable frustration. She was dampening below again, despite the recent and serious seeing-to Paul had given her in the temple. It occurred to her that the Commander could torment her in all kinds of ways while she was trussed up like this. A whipping would be the very least of it.

He moved his hands to her shoulders, holding her still so she wasn't tempted to waver and wheel about on her toes, and began to attend to her breasts in earnest, bathing them with his tongue and sucking at them for all he was worth. Deep sounds of throaty relish made Suka want to push them further into his mouth, prolonging the feast, while she tried as hard as she could to urge her pelvis forward into contact with his. He had her fixed in position, though, and her poor needy pussy had to wait.

"I think they'll do," he said finally, releasing the oversensitised nubs to the now-warm air. His hands followed the artificially-enhanced curves of her waist and hips, dropping below the corset to land on her bottom.

"The whip marks are fading," he said, using his hands to make this observation. "Your skin is almost smooth again, and cooler than it was in the temple."

"It still feels a little sore, Sir," Suka told him.

"That won't make any difference to the severity of your punishment," Paul said, and she bit her lip. "Well, you should have thought of that before you went running off, shouldn't you? Ensigns with sore bottoms should know to behave themselves. By the time I've finished with you, you'll know the meaning of the word sore." He pushed a finger between the cheeks, which Suka tensed shut immediately. "Don't you resist me, Ensign," he scolded. The finger pad seated itself firmly at the hidden twist of her arsehole. "There are all sorts of ways to discipline a rebel. As you will see."

Suka tried to squirm away from him, but he had her too highly-strung. Any attempt to elude him could only end with her spinning and lurching out of control. He took pity—for the moment—and concentrated on her front prospect, lightly slapping the insides of her thighs to make her stand with her feet wider apart. This was a struggle, bringing her almost

off the floor, but she persevered and managed to hold her stance somehow. All those years of military-type parades at the Academy had paid off at last.

"And down here..." murmured Paul, spreading her cunt lips and crouching to peer into the dark valley. "Aha. Haven't you been fucked enough for one day?" He grinned up at her, all white teeth and blazing blue eyes. She rolled her hips, desperate for his firm touch to move in and find her clit, or poke a finger or three up inside. He had used her there, but she was far from used up.

He dipped his fingers in her juices, mixing and swirling, coating them luxuriantly before the cruel withdrawal. Standing straight, he offered his sex-scented digits to her mouth. She lapped at them greedily, sighing, wanting them back down there.

"Taste yourself," he whispered. "You love it, don't you? You love to be tied up and used."

"Mmm," she confirmed, mouth filled with his strong, large fingers.

"Let's see if you'll still love it when I'm done."

He moved swiftly out of her line of sight and she watched his shadow recede, back to the treasure chest.

What next? Her throat tightened and her stomach lurched as the reality of the situation sunk in. She could only get out of this by surrendering. And if she surrendered that would be her chance to live this life with this man scuppered. Whatever he was going to do to her, she was going to take as much of it as she could. She was going to win this.

She felt his body behind her again, then she gasped as a hand reached rudely between her legs and appeared to snatch at her pussy. It took a few seconds for Suka to realise he was attaching something—two somethings—on the inner wall of her labia, just where they made contact with her puffy, swollen clitoris.

"What's...that, Sir?" she panted. A mild buzzing sensation began to fill that wet, slick channel, and there was a constant pressure on her clit from both sides.

"Stimulant patches," said Paul. "They'll keep you coming. And coming. Until you can come no more."

"Oh God." Suka could already feel the first tremor building. *Punishing me with pleasure. You're even smarter than I thought.*

"They're not the strongest," he said with satisfaction. "I could attach the real super-strength version if you'd prefer."

"I think...these are strong enough." She wanted to rotate her hips violently, to reach down and rub, and fill her cunt with something long and thick and hold it there. It would take less than a minute for her to start climaxing, she thought. Then her thoughts were stopped in their tracks by a sharp smack to her bum.

She swung forward in her bonds, surprised, but Paul's hand kept falling, heavy and hard, over and over, while the furious whirligig of sensation continued to fill her pussy. The swats seemed to intensify the action of the stimulants and Paul had barely delivered a dozen before the first orgasm spent her spinning on her wire, round and round. Paul spanked her all the way through it, showing no quarter, just laying handprint after handprint on her burning arse.

"That's one," he said. "Now let's add a little something."

Seconds later, Suka moaned as a long, thick object with a rounded head nudged at the entrance to her still-spasming vagina. The clit buzzers hummed away, accompanying the slow progress of the dildo—for presumably that was what it was—inside Suka's wet, tight channel. It was quite wide, and she had to stretch to accommodate its girth. She thought it was about the same size as Paul's cock, from the way it made her work to accept it. She puffed and gasped at each extra inch of incursion, wanting to bend over to make it easier but not having that option.

"How does that feel?" asked Paul, one hand holding her still on her hip while he continued to feed the dildo to her hungry pussy.

"Oh...I'm full...really full...and I'm going to come again in a minute...those darn buzzy things...oh, oh, oh." The fat fake cock made its way to the end, and she came again, so quickly it took her by surprise, a warm wave of pleasure rippling outwards while her muscles clenched around the invasive presence.

Paul smacked her bottom again before retreating to the chest and returning with something he laid against her tingling cheeks, something flat and rectangular and made of a cold, smooth material, maybe wood.

"Now for that paddling you've earned," he promised.

Suka wished she had a gag. She knew she was going to howl, all dignity long gone. Just the memory of the whip was enough to make her wince.

The paddle met her flesh with a substantial whap, and at the same time as her yell of pain filled the room, the dildo inside her began to thrum, joining in with its clitoral equivalents.

The pain and the pleasure were so close, yet so different, and yet one seemed to set off the other. Suka's mind began to disintegrate, it was all too confusing. Which was pain? Which was pleasure? What was making her say 'ouch' and what was making her say 'ooh'? It all seemed the same, one giant sensation made up of these conflicting parts—the deep, shocking jolt of the paddle, the insistent vibrations around and inside her pussy, the straining of her muscles, the clenching of her jaw.

She came again after twenty hard strokes of the paddle, knowing her bottom must be deep, deep red and would likely be bruised for a while. Paul certainly didn't hold back, but somehow this was good, this was right. If he'd gone easy on her, she would have been disappointed. This might be their last chance to do this—if so, she wanted her marks of memento.

Paul wielded the paddle through her climax, concentrating on the overhang of her buttocks and the tops of her thighs. "I want you to feel this when you sit," he told her. "I want you to remember this and learn from it."

"Yes, Sir," she managed to say between smacks. *Not much chance of ever forgetting this. And I've learned from it all right. I've learned that this is what I want. This is how I want to live.*

It wasn't until he put the paddle down that she realised her whole body was trembling and her chest heaving fit to burst. The storm between her legs and on her behind had completely focused her, to the exclusion of lesser events, like the increasing soreness of her wrists and the discomfort of her feet in the high heels.

"Don't want to numb these cheeks," said Paul, stroking her raging rear. "I'm a long way from finished yet."

Suka made an inarticulate sound that she didn't even understand herself. Her own feelings were slipping away from her, becoming cloudy and unidentifiable. She did not know anything except that she wanted this to go on and on, even though her pussy was starting to feel wrung out and her whole body ached. She was falling through a wide dark sky of inner bliss. A word from her Academy project flew through her mind. *Subspace*. Was this it?

"Are you feeling this, Suka?" asked Paul gently, behind her shoulder, massaging it. "Are you feeling punished yet?"

"Mmm," was all she could say, pushing back into him, inviting him. Her bottom pressed into his rock hard thighs, and the vibrating dildo met the resistance of his firm flesh, increasing its potency. Rocking back against him, Suka came again, and he bent his lips to her neck and sucked through the orgasm.

"That's four, isn't it?" he murmured. "Though I think you're a bit beyond keeping count. I'm working you hard. And it isn't over. Not by a long way."

He stepped away and she fell back, as far as her tight leash would allow, soon righting her posture, keeping her legs apart, rolling her hips in time with the vibrators, trying to keep another orgasm away.

Then his hands were on her again, parting her red hot butt cheeks, stroking their tender insides before placing a lubricated fingertip against that tight pucker.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, tensing her sphincter.

"No," he admonished, wiggling the finger, making her feel the pressure. "This is all part of your punishment. You don't get to pick and choose. Don't forget, let me know when you reach your limit. You can still speak, can't you?"

"Just...about..." she gasped, shimmying violently as his fingertip made it through the tiny ring, opening up her most private space to his intrusions.

"Are we at your limit, Suka? Do you want to stop now?"

"No!" she exclaimed, relaxing into the odd sensation, revelling in how utterly owned and surrendered it made her feel. This was another dream realised, never mind the discomfort his prodding and poking around in her bum was causing her. He had that right. He held all rights over her. She belonged to him, in every respect now.

Another finger spread her wider. She struggled to retain a semblance of composure, but the buzzers defeated her and she wailed aloud, sure that another unwanted climax couldn't be far off. This felt so uniquely sinful, so decadent.

"You can take this, Suka," he said, softly, keeping her calm, tamping down her rising panic. His fingers scissored inside her, then they met the solid resistance of the dildo, just a thin stretch of flesh separating them. He pulled out and Suka released a long exhalation, only to yelp anew as a larger, wider, colder substitute took the place of Paul's fingers.

"You know about butt plugs, don't you, Suka?" he asked, easing it carefully between her cheeks and into the circular aperture. "They are especially necessary for bad little ensigns like you. They keep them in their place. You won't be able to forget you are wearing one of these. I'd like to take one of these back to the ship. It would be nice to know you were squirming in your seat on the bridge with one of these stuffed inside your tight pants every time you broke a rule. Beats loss of Association Time privileges. Bending you over and spanking your arse, then filling it up with one of these would work wonders on you, I think. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, Sir," she moaned, twisting her hips as the widest part of the plug tested her endurance.

"I think we'd soon have one very obedient, very well-behaved little ensign, wouldn't we?"

"Yes, Sir." The plug seated itself fully and then, to Suka's mingled ecstasy and despair, it began to buzz in unison with its pussy-bound counterparts.

"Ohh." Suka's moans were low and throaty. The vibrator in her arse added a mind-blowing power to the fifth orgasm and she crumpled in the bonds, a boneless doll, taken over the edge of heavenly darkness.

"Stand straight," commanded Paul.

Somehow, she obeyed. Somehow, though her knees no longer existed and she was no more than a sticky mess of lust and exhaustion and submission.

"I'm going to give you six. Count them."

"Can't..."

"This is your limit?"

He put aside whatever he was holding and made to release her wrists.

"Yes, I can!" she cried, delirious with the power her submission had given her. No amount of drilling on the Academy quadrangle had ever tested her tolerance levels like this, but, in the very kernel of her being, Suka knew she could take more. She could take as much as he could give. "Give it to me! Give me what I need!"

"Since you put it that way..."

She heard a low swish through the air behind her. *It must be a cane.*

Fear and exhilaration coursed through her. This, she knew from her studies, was the most severe of implements. If Paul gave her this, he must think she could handle it. She had won! She had won his hand, the hand that would hold her in check.

You have to take the caning first, Suka, she cautioned herself, realising a victory celebration might be pre-emptive. *Marshal your strength. Ignore the vibrations. Breathe through it. Take it. It's only six strokes.*

The slender rod tapped against the apple of her backside. She had had time to recover from the paddling and her bottom was no longer anywhere near numb, though the heat and sting were still very much in evidence. Her thighs were soaked with her own chilling juices, her clit fat and overworked, her cunt and arse straining to keep up with the relentless stimulation.

The menacing swish cut through the air again, and this time it ended with a flat split of sound that, for a moment, Suka did not recognise as the cane's contact with her bottom. But in a millisecond ferocious white-hot pain streaked a line across her cheeks and she needed all her breath control, every scrap, not to scream like a banshee.

"Ohh, ohh, one, Sir," she whimpered, trying to escape, trying to distract him with her swinging hips, trying to do anything that might get her out of any more of those breathtaking stripes.

"Is that painful?" he asked, with pretend sympathy. "Poor Suka. I think we've found the implement for her. I think we've found the thing that will work. I'll take this back with me too."

Oh, please do!

His words spurred her on. Cheekily, she pushed out her bum, inviting the second stroke.

It hit the end of the butt plug, causing it to shudder inside her and increase the intensity of the vibrations. Vibrations all over her, from the sting, from the plug, from the dildo, from the clit buzzers, she was one big vibration.

"Two, Sir."

He laid the third and fourth vicious cuts on the 'sit' spot where she would feel them for days on end. She counted them, and went further than that, thanking him as well.

"You're thanking me?" he said in surprise. "You're quite a girl, Suka. Quite a girl. Thank me for *this*."

It whipped down across her lower buttocks, adding its burn to that which already licked across her punished skin.

"Five, Sir, thank you, Sir, oh, I'm on fire!"

"Last one. Brace yourself. It'll be a hard one."

He was right. It set her leaping from one extended foot to the other, yelping and yowling, powerless to do anything to douse that evil conflagration on her bottom. The vibrators made her come again, the sixth orgasm at the sixth stroke, a fusion of passion and pleasure and pain that left her shaking and tearful.

"You didn't count," chided Paul, but he seemed beyond caring, hurrying to pull out her dildo and replace it with his stiff, thick cock. His thrusts were quick and powerful, his abdomen slapping against her throbbing bottom, reawakening the sting, butting the plug, making her scream through a final climax that lasted for minutes rather than seconds, multiple melting orgasms that didn't end until Paul had come inside her, his fingers bruising her hips, his last words a reminder that she belonged to him.

Suka trembled through the uncuffing and removal of the toys and fell against Paul, who gathered her close, lifted her and carried her to the one comfortable-looking prop in the whole room—an old-fashioned four-poster bed. He laid her down, then took off his boots and uniform and joined her, lying propped on his side. Through half-closed eyes Suka could see him looking down at her, his expression sombre, his face streaked with sweat.

She felt limbless, floating in the ether, everything inside her scooped out to make a hollow, weightless shell. She could feel the angry throb of the cane welts, but they seemed irrelevant somehow, and far below her surface.

"Who won that then?" wondered Paul aloud.

"We both did." Suka's voice was dreamy and faraway.

"I didn't go too far for you, did I? You would have said something, wouldn't you?"

Suka lifted a hand and put it to his cheek, barely managing to keep her arm raised, it shook so.

"Oh God, tell me it's okay?" Paul sounded agitated. "You're okay, Suka? I feel guilty. I've taken it over the edge."

"No." Suka's languid tones seemed to soothe him a little. "It was the best thing ever. It was just incredible."

"Really? You aren't just saying that because you don't want to go back to the ship?"

"No. Not at all. I mean it. It was. You were. Just like the old-fashioned doms I've read and dreamed about. Fantasy come true."

"That's...good," said Paul, but he sounded troubled.

"Good."

"Listen," he said, whispering for some reason. "What are we going to do?"

Suka turned her head, the fractional effort it took depleting her of what little energy she still had.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think you can forget about this? Because I don't think I can. Pandora's Box. Well and truly open. But a box of pleasures rather than ills. Perhaps it should be called Suka's Box instead."

"You're right. It's too much to just leave behind here. It's a part of us, Commander."

"Call me Azed."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" Suka's hand flew to her mouth and she suppressed a giggle.

"Oh, call me Master then, if that's easier for you."

"In a weird way, it is. Master. I like that."

"It's a part of us," he echoed, musing. "Yes. We can't lop it off and carry on as normal. So the question remains. What are we going to do?"

"Sleep," said Suka determinedly.

"As a short-term plan, it's a good one." He slid an arm around her, pulling her close, cradling her head beneath his chin, and on the silent, deserted planet, they were the two lone dreamers.

Chapter Five

On waking, Suka almost expected everything to be different. Paul would have changed his mind, have slept off the intensity of emotion and be insisting on a swift return and a blotting out of inconvenient feelings.

But, if anything, he seemed almost keener to retain the link than Suka was, kissing her eyelids until they opened, stroking her hair, whispering into her ear.

"Sleepyhead. We have a decision to make."

She smiled into his hawkish face and impulsively pulled it down, her hand on the back of his neck, for a long, slow smooch.

"Can't we put it off?" she whispered, coming up for air. Her whole body ached, stung, throbbed, but somehow she was ready for him again, her juices gathering between her legs.

"No," he said sternly, tweaking her nose. "We can't."

"So." She sat up with a deep sigh, then changed her mind, and moved around to lie on her hip. Much less painful. "Back to the ship, I suppose."

"I suppose. I don't know what I can do. I can ask to be relieved of command —"

"No! They would refuse anyway."

"Well, the only other way is to synchronise leave and have at least a few weeks of the year to look forward to. But we'd have to keep it very quiet."

Suka gazed dejectedly at his hand, flat on the bed in front of her.

"It's not great. But I guess it's the best we can hope for."

He bent to kiss her, sweetly, regretfully, but firmly.

"That's settled. That's a plan. Come, then."

They dressed—Paul rapidly, Suka with a great variety of wincing and sucking in of cheeks—then they left the punishment suite, passing through the darkened room in which Suka had hidden earlier. Paul shone his communicator torch through the gloom, able to look closely at the fixtures and fittings now he was not chasing his errant ensign.

"This is the Hall of the Futures." He spoke reverently, walking over to a computer console of some kind and running his hand over the apparatus. "Where the Paladians developed new technologies. Something they were extremely good at, by the way. This must

be some kind of communications device. Shame there's no power to watch it in action. Perhaps we could come back down with boosters."

"I thought the Paladians were quite isolationist."

"They were, to an extent. Neighbours didn't approve of their lifestyle. Neighbours were prudes, essentially."

"Like our civilisation."

Paul turned and grinned. "Yes. Blundering along thinking they're doing the right thing, invading people's private space."

"It's a crying shame. Do you think it'll ever change?"

"Probably. Not in our lifetime, though."

Paul was frowning over another machine, tapping at various buttons with some of his tools.

"Don't know what this is. I haven't seen this one in the books. Must have been something new. A prototype."

"It's very strange-looking," commented Suka. "Like a lift car but with lots of extra knobs on. I think something happens to you if you step into it."

"Perhaps it's a new punishment device. But it doesn't seem to work on electricity. Is there a manual anywhere? A blueprint?"

Paul cast around for the essential piece of information, but found none.

"Well, we may never know. I'm going to photograph it and research it back on board ship." He took a snap of the device, while Suka crouched down and opened a drawer in the outer wall.

"What's this?"

"Perzidium. The treasure of Paladium Three. Very rare, very valuable, with magnetic and electrical properties."

Paul turned the bright blue shard of crystal over and over in his hand.

"Could it be used as fuel? Could it be what makes this thing work? No! Stop! What are you doing?"

He leapt forward just a fraction too late to prevent Suka from putting a piece of the Perzidium into a tube on the front of the capsule. A low hum pervaded the air and the periphery of the box fluoresced into life.

Paul's foot knocked Suka off-balance and she fell backwards into the capsule, screaming as her backside hit the floor, both from pain and from fear of whatever unknown doom she might have consigned herself to.

"I'm disappearing!" Her foot was beginning to melt, the silver boots dripping.

"No!" Paul, without a second thought, took a dive into the capsule with her, trying to drag her out, but already he too was beginning to degrade, his strength crucially sapped. He possessed only enough energy to hold on to Suka and watch as her blonde curls migrated, one by one, from her head.

Suka lay on her stomach, crushed by the weight on top of her, struggling to breathe, unable to see.

Just as it seemed inevitable that her ribs would cave in and her heart would burst, the pressure lifted and she was able to take in lungfuls of air again. The blackness turned to dark spots in front of her eyes, then brightened to a blur of colour and movement.

"You're okay? You're alive?"

She turned to the voice. Who? Where?

A hand on her arm, then around her shoulder.

"Christ, what have you done, Suka?"

Yes, that's my name! And this is Commander Paul. And...

The memories came back all at once, winding her with their intensity and vividness.

"We were in that place. The Hall of the Futures or whatever. Where are we now?"

They huddled beneath a stone arch in the centre of a dusty square. Many of the ancient buildings they had seen in Sevarium towered over them, and in the distance some kind of military drill was taking place, observed and cheered on by a crowd of onlookers.

"Can you stand?" Paul hauled her to her feet. She swayed at first, hanging on to him. He took his communicator from his belt and switched it on. "No signal," he frowned.

They were halfway across the square when an official-looking man in dark robes hurried over to them.

"The Arch," he said. "Did you come through the Arch?"

Suka and Paul exchanged a nervous look. It would be clear to their interlocutor that they were not local. He had only to look at their attire and hairstyles.

"I believe we did," admitted Paul. "Though how is a question I can't answer. My name is Commander Azed Paul, I'm the captain of —"

"Yes, yes, never mind," fussed the official. "I'm the keeper of the Arch. I must take you to the Minister. Come with me, please."

As they accompanied the keeper to the fine building that housed the government of Paladium Three, Suka noticed the event taking place was not a military drill but some kind of slave training ritual. A group of naked young men were performing a variety of lewd acts on their masters and mistresses in strict formation, to the obvious enjoyment of the crowd. Those that defaulted in any way were taken to the side, to be soundly cropped by a scary-looking official before being sent back on to the parade ground.

"We're still in Sevarium," she whispered to Paul. "How is this possible? It looks interesting though."

He squeezed her hand, then they passed through the doors of the Ministry, away from the heat and dust and lust of the outdoor spectacle.

The Minister sat at a vast desk made of a sparkling deep green mineral. He looked up from signing documents, obviously interested to see the keeper.

"Varga! I had not expected to see you today. These have come from the Arch?"

"So they say."

Paul took advantage of the fascinated silence to introduce himself and Suka.

"Oh," said the Minister. "Intergalactic anthropologists. I did wonder if we would get any."

"What has happened? I would like to hear your explanation."

"Before those disgusting Chavians destroyed our civilisation, we were working on a time-travel facility. You seem to have discovered it."

"Time travel! Then we are in...the past?"

"Yes, a hundred aeons prior to our doomsday, to be precise. Or rather, ninety-eight now. Two aeons have passed."

"You came through the Arch as well?"

"Yes. Myself and the majority of our best engineers had time to escape destruction before the toxic waste hit our planet's surface. We have assimilated very well into our planet's past, as you see. Within a few aeons, Paladium Three will be at the forefront of interstellar technologies and we will be able to alter the course of time."

"That's frowned upon, as you know."

“Question of survival, dear fellow. Survival of the brightest. I like that take on evolution, don’t you? And besides, there’s precious little you can do about it. Now you’re here, you’re here. For good. So you can play along with us and join in the spirit of Sevarium, or you can spend the rest of your lives in incarceration. Which will you choose, I wonder?”

“We can’t ever leave?” said Suka in a small voice.

“Can’t have you sneaking off to Federation High Control and telling tales, can we? I know what you people are like. You don’t understand our ways. We’ve had mega-aeons of being told we’re disgusting perverts who ought to be blasted into oblivion. You can go and click your tongues and voice your distaste in splendid isolation, where we don’t have to see it. Keeper, send for the incarcerators.”

“No!” Paul stepped forward, holding up a hand. “Listen to me. You are mistaken. Suka and I, we understand your ways. And we are in sympathy with them.”

The Minister paused long enough for a sneer to form. “Really? You know, the phrase ‘I wasn’t born yesterday’ is truer for me than for most. I was born tomorrow. And I know you’re looking for a way out of this fix. Pretending you can live the Sevarian Way won’t work.”

“But we can! We came here because we had a personal, illicit interest in your way of life—one we were forbidden to indulge. We even performed the bonding.”

“Oh, come, come—”

“I took Suka to the punishment suite and we made full use of its facilities. Suka.” Paul turned to her, exasperated by the Minister’s reluctance to believe him. “Show the Minister.”

Her eyes widened. “Show him?”

“Yes.”

“Show me what?” The Minister leant forward, salaciously interested.

“Ensign, I order you to lower your trousers and present your bare backside to the Minister.”

The firmness of his voice was not to be brooked. Suka shuffled around, red-faced, and bent to lower her tight trousers, easing them, with some sucking in of breath and wincing, down over her bottom.

“Oh...I...say,” breathed the Minister, sounding awed. “You didn’t lie. You have tasted our ways. And you, Commander, you like the whip hand?”

“I do indeed. Did I say you could pull those up, Ensign?”

Suka dropped her hands, keeping her eyes on the ground, knowing if she raised them they would meet the gaze of the keeper by the door.

The Minister walked around behind her, and she felt cold fingers trail along the welts. Her skin burst into goosebumps and she emitted a tiny squeak.

"You used a cane," he noted. "You seem to have had practice. These are expertly laid."

"Suka is my first submissive," confessed Paul. "As you know, our laws forbid the expression of power exchange within a sexual relationship. This was our first opportunity. But I had practiced on...soft furnishings. In my youth."

The Minister laughed. "You poor, repressed people. Perhaps it is as well that you find yourself trapped here. Perhaps you can live freely and fully among us."

"We would be honoured."

"Your relationship is that of bond master and servant?" questioned the Minister. "In every respect." His hand landed on Suka's thigh, stiff with dried semen. "Ah, I see that it is. You use her carnally."

Suka shivered. Paul seemed lost for words at this blatant remark.

"Well, that is good," continued the Minister. "Your servant can cover herself now, if it pleases you, Commander."

"You may," he said gruffly to her, and she began to hoist the trousers, with the same discomfort as lowering them had caused.

Turning back around, she moved closer to Paul and buried her face in his arm, unable to face the Minister. Paul's chuckle was low and affectionate and, to her relief, he pulled her closer in with a protective arm.

"Well, I find I can't doubt you," said the Minister, stroking his chin. "It's a risk, I know, but I'm inclined to offer acceptance into our civilisation. On the condition, of course, that you assimilate well and undertake to respect our culture. I will place you under observation. You, Commander Paul, will undergo a course of instruction in conduct becoming a Sevarian overlord. I think you may take to it. As for your servant, she shall be prepared for her legal bonding. For the period of one quartile, you will not meet. Keeper, send for the Overseers of the Way."

"We will not meet for...?"

"A quartile," muttered Paul. "Equivalent of eight weeks or so."

"But—"

Paul took her hands. "Be brave. I know you can be brave, Suka. If we do this, we can live the way we've always dreamed of. I want to do this, to be with you. If you want this too..."

He broke off.

Suka nodded, emboldened by Paul's declaration.

"Yes. It's what I want. I'm just a bit scared."

"Face your fear. I'll make it worth your while. Do you believe in me?"

"Yes."

* * * *

Veiled and shrouded in white robes, Suka allowed her bonded attendants to help her up the steps to the temple. Leaving the training centre had been an unexpectedly emotional experience—in the eight weeks she had spent learning her submissive arts, she had grown close to her Paladian fellows. What a revelation it had been, to speak openly of her needs and desires with like-minded women. Frequent bouts of homesickness for her old life were tended to with almost psychic kindness by the girls she had come to view as her sisters. Soon she would be with her master, they would reassure her. His dominion over her would make everything well again. Then they would bring her the warm spiced wine of the Paladians, or a box of crystallised hola-fruit, and run her a perfumed bath.

And today, their reassurances would come to pass. She looked up through her gauzy veil at that building, recalling so exactly what had passed there before with Commander Paul that she shivered with excited desire. A real bonding now, with a real audience. She was ready for it.

Entering the temple, she felt straight away that intoxicating flowering of lust, and she looked through the crowds, eager to catch her first glimpse of Paul.

Yes, he was there. Splendidly clad in the sparkling black robes of a Sevarian bond master, Paul looked even more striking than she remembered. His bearing was prouder, his expression more confident, his head held higher—Suka would not have believed this even possible, back in the days on board ship when she had considered him an arrogant, overbearing prick. What a long time ago that seemed.

For now, the man who used to arouse only irritation caused her heart to thunder, her cheeks to flush and her thighs to dampen in anticipation.

He caught sight of her and she felt pierced by the intensity of passion and expectation in his eyes. Yes, this was right. This would be her future.

You have waited for me, Master, and now I am coming to you.

She moved through the crowds, oblivious to their noise and motion, knowing only that she and Paul would be joined forever in that unique bond that constituted the Sevarian Way.

About the Author

Justine Elyot is a UK based writer of erotic romance and erotica. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies from Black Lace, Cleis Press, Xcite and Constable & Robinson. Her first full-length book, On Demand, was published by Black Lace in 2009, followed by The Business of Pleasure (Xcite Books) in September 2010.

Email: justineelyot@gmail.com

Justine Elyot loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

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