



# ALIEN CONQUEST

By

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Cover art by Eliza Black, © copyright May 2011  
ISBN 978-1-60394-500-4  
New Concepts Publishing  
Lake Park, GA 31636  
[www.newconceptspublishing.com](http://www.newconceptspublishing.com)

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## Chapter One

Cassidy Hamilton sighed before shoving a chocolate in her mouth. As cloying sweetness invaded her taste buds, she studied the page displayed on her illuminated reader for the second time.

The book was a dry read, a dissident rant from decades before when Earth's nations had first been gathered under one banner, ending all war on her home world. Peace reigned over the once battle-torn planet for the most part, tended to by armored soldiers and soulless battle drones capable of wiping out entire cities. Revolts had been quashed with quick ruthlessness, barely disturbing the fearful complacency of the general populace.

The author of this particular book had no doubt been executed for his anti-unified government views. The long-ago renegade seethed over the assertion all Earth's outdated nuclear warheads had been detonated in space, an impossibility he warned, given the smallness of the blasts transmitted through the government-controlled media. He then went on with extensive mathematical formulae to prove his point, formulae that went on for five pages.

It wasn't that Cassidy couldn't grasp the weighty data. She played in mathematics the way a child might play with clay. Normally, she'd be scrutinizing the computations, looking for errors or little twists in logical application that would serve the author's needs. Tonight she couldn't concentrate though. The knowledge that more interesting tomes awaited in the illicit book collection stored in her reader kept her from focusing on the outlawed manuscript.

She shifted, searching for a more comfortable position in the cramped ventilation shaft. Stretched out on her belly, her stiff, long-sleeved nightgown bunching around her knees, it wasn't easy to move around. The narrow ductwork, glowing silvery-white in the wash of light from her reader, was the only place she dared to read the illegal materials she'd downloaded from her grandfather's collection before being sequestered in the convent on Europa.

It was still early in the convent's sleeping hours on the eternal night side of the moon. Cassidy read every night in her hiding place, nibbling on sweets and snacks bought with the modest allowance her grandfather sent her. She'd been stuck on Europa for three years now, her days a monotonous drone of praying, tending crops, scrubbing floors, and Bible study. Even creeping through the ventilation system to spy on her fellow aspirants and the nuns had worn out its novelty. Only the stolen collection of banned books kept her mind sharp and sane. Fortunately, the library was vast. She'd barely sampled the many offerings her grandfather had kept hidden deep in secret computer files.

Cassidy didn't have to wonder why her grandfather, so strict and upright with the Church's teachings, possessed the illegal book collection. His oft-quoted direction to the

soldiers beneath him was, "Know the enemy better than you know yourself." She could imagine him studying the words that enthralled her, his thin lips pressed in a bitter line of disgust.

She was halfway through the page once more when she realized she had again not digested anything she'd read. The siren call of the book she'd discovered two weeks ago kept her usually thirsty brain from absorbing the current material.

The Church taught women were innately evil, awash in sin. Cassidy's preoccupation with her recent discovery certainly bore that out. She'd had no idea what she'd find when she opened the file labeled *The Kama Sutra*, and she hadn't been able to get the illustrations out of her head since then.

*Just like your mother.*

Cassidy shook her head, and her long, platinum blond hair spilled over the reader. No, she'd never offered herself to any man, had never even shown a man any part of her devil flesh. She was not the harlot her mother had proved to be.

But the urges were there. That she could not deny. Right now, there was nothing she wanted to do more than look at those pictures of men and women committing sinful acts. Like Eve, she was seduced by the temptation of the forbidden.

*Just looking won't hurt. It's not like you're fornicating.*

Cassidy gave up, tapping the screen with a trembling finger to change books. She tried not to think about how much easier it got each night to talk herself into viewing the taboo pictures.

She rolled over on her back as the first image came on the screen. Licking her lips, she scrolled through the illustrations slowly, her eyes drinking in the images of men piercing women from every angle possible. When she got to the end of the book, she started over.

Her thick cotton panties were soon damp. The scent of her juices, reminiscent of the salty tang of the Neuse River back on Earth, teased her nostrils. Cassidy looked at the artwork depicting a man, his devil flesh drawn out in a straight line from his body, inserting fingers into the gaping sex of a smiling woman.

She drew her knees up like the woman in the picture, and the stiff fabric of her nightgown slid down her thighs to bunch at her hips. Cassidy drew light circles on her inner thigh with her fingertips as she studied the illustration. Her womanhood flexed with arousal, and she bit back a moan. What was it like, to feel something penetrate her body? Did it feel as good as touching the outer parts of her secret flesh? To judge by the smiling participants in every picture, the sensation must be pleasant.

Cassidy's fingers slid down her soft, downy inner thigh and danced delicately over the moist crotch of her panties. She knew where the spot was, the sweet nubbin of skin that felt best. After only a moment's hesitation, she touched it.

A warm, melting sensation poured through her core. Cassidy sighed.

The characters in the book were all thin dark-skinned people with black hair, definitely nothing like her pale, amply curved body. The people of Earth came in so many colors and sizes, a smorgasbord of offerings. She wondered how many men would find her attractive with her rounded buttocks and large breasts. She certainly didn't look like the almost sexless twigs venerated on magazine covers. Her love for the comfort of

snack food since her mother's arrest had made her a far cry from fashionably thin. Fortunately a good metabolism and hard physical work kept her reasonably in shape. When her face warmed in a blush from the thought of a man seeing her naked, it wasn't because her body embarrassed her.

She scrolled to the next image, her favorite. The man mounted the female from behind, his organ poised just at her opening. Cassidy studied the mushroom top of his sex. What must that be like, to have a rod of flesh sticking out from one's loins, she wondered? Her breath came quickly now, and she forced her fingers to move more slowly against her straining bud. The lightning flashes of pleasure subsided into a pleasurable hum.

She tried to imagine herself as the woman in the illustrations, crouched on all fours, feeling the man kneeling between her legs, the hardness of his erect sex touching her entrance, poised to plunge into her body. His hands gripping her hips. His penis slowly parting her wet lips...

Cassidy's fingers slipped into the leg band of her panties. For only the third time in her nineteen years, she touched bare sinful flesh. She arched with a soft groan, and her fingertips slid against wet warmth. The reader fell from her other hand, landing softly on the cushion of her breasts.

Both hands plunged into her panties, rubbing and caressing her aching sex, spiking desire from the depths of her womb. She was unaware of the tears creeping from beneath her closed eyelids as the pressure built within until it cascaded in warm convulsions to leave her sobbing with release. She moaned softly, her thighs clenched around her hands as her softness throbbed.

*Sinner. Whore. Unclean harlot.*

The guilt flooded in as the last joyful spasms flexed in her belly. But stroking her devil flesh felt so good. Why had God made the most sinful touch also the most pleasurable? Not for the first time, Cassidy's intellect warred with her faith. So much of the Church's teachings made little sense when she thought about them. If only she could resign herself to the pure faith that would keep her soul blameless, she lamented. If only her evil mind would quiet and leave her in peace.

\* \* \* \*

Tranis didn't hear Lidon move to his side, but he could smell him. The Nobek's pleasant animal-like musk was all that gave away his approach. He was a predator through and through, a prime example of Kalquor's warrior caste.

Tranis kept his attention focused on the vid transmission of his quarry as if he could will it into his possession. They'd stalked the Earther spaceship for three days now. The time to take action was upon him.

Lidon's deep voice finally spoke, low and intimate into Tranis' ear. "No sign they've detected our pursuit, Captain."

"How long before they reach Earth's main security grid?"

"Two days, but we might run into security check points before then. They'll break communication silence once they get past the largest gas giant. They call it Jupiter, after some ancient Earth god."

“Earthers and their religious fascinations.” Tranis shook his head and darted a glance at the huge planet displayed on another vid. Its reddish striations and swirls were hypnotic in their beauty, a pretty round bauble seemingly suspended on one side of the stark command center. He paused for a brief second to enjoy the view before redirecting his focus once more to his prey.

Jupiter. Named for an Earther god. How typical. Was there nothing related to Earth that didn’t have religious connotations? Their fanaticism had brought on the war driving Tranis’ people toward extinction faster than the virus had. A year ago, Kalquor had a projected 300 years of survival left for its pureblood citizens. Now the number was 275 and falling fast.

The irony never failed to make him wince. The race destroying his was also the Kalquorians’ only hope for survival. What a sick joke.

Ten men manned the bridge of the spy ship he commanded. Most bent over free-floating computer consoles, their purple eyes absorbing the green-tinged vid readouts as they gathered information. Forty more men, mostly ground infiltration teams, were on the ship.

At the front of the room three large vids floated, their combined size spanning the height and width of the chamber. On the left was the monumental gas giant Jupiter, its rust-colored stripes giving the dimly-lit room a reddish hue. In the center was a diagnostic readout, containing exhaustive information about the planet, their position, ship status and the Earther transport.

The third vid showed the Earther transport, a blocky unobtrusive spaceship designed to convey supplies and goods. And in this case, a certain General Patrick Hamilton. The military leader was in charge of Earth war supplies. He was hurrying home after engaging in talks with the agricultural planet of Adraf. Millions of Earther soldiers, all looking to spill Kalquorian blood, needed a lot of food after all. And Adraf didn’t mind selling to anyone with ready funds, be they Earther or Kalquorian.

Tranis eyed the Earther transport they followed and licked his lips. “So Commander Lidon, if we’re going to make our move it will have to be soon?”

“Don’t do it until you’re absolutely ready to commit. If we get any closer, they’ll be on to us.”

Tranis nodded. His spy ship was cloaked, which worked well enough to fool the eye. Its movement caused distortions in the field around it, making it easy for the Earthers to detect it in a scan. Being discovered by their enemy would be a very bad thing. Earther courier transports, like the one he was currently stalking, were just as heavily armed as their fighters.

Score one for paranoia, he thought. Even Lidon’s lightning fast reflexes and expertise with weapons wouldn’t make up the difference if they got into a firefight with the larger vessel. Spy ships were made for speed and infiltration, not battle.

First Officer Simdow turned from his computer’s green-lined readout. His broad, dark face was animated with excitement. “Earther transport is slowing, Captain.”

“Match speed to maintain distance,” Tranis said, his calm tone a counterpoint to Simdow’s nervous pitch. Simdow was capable but young and anxious with inexperience. The whole crew was untried with the exception of Tranis’ clan. Most experienced

Kalquorians were fighting the war now, leaving him in command of raw youth. Nevertheless, his fifty-man crew represented Kalquor's last best hope for survival.

Tranis' stomach churned.

"What are they up to?" Lidon wondered out loud. "All stations on alert."

Tranis looked at his clanmate of six years, marveling anew at his fortune to have Lidon as his Nobek. The warrior was the eldest of their clan, thirty years Tranis' senior, but still a young man by Kalquorian standards.

They were nearly the same height and weight, average for their race, colossal in comparison to their Earther enemies. Lidon's blue-black hair hung straight to his muscular shoulders, left bare by his sleeveless, red-trimmed black formsuit. His clean-shaven lean face was grim with determination.

"I doubt we've been detected," Tranis said softly.

Lidon turned his predatory gaze to study Tranis. Blue-purple with slitted pupils, those eyes missed nothing. "They've surprised us before. They may not have our technology, but stupidity is not one of their weaknesses."

"They continue to slow, sir. They're approaching one of the planet's moons," Simdow reported.

Lidon hurried to his own computer vid to study the readout. His slight limp was a remnant of a horrific injury he'd suffered long before Tranis had met him. It kept him from typical Kalquorian quickness, but he could move fast when he had to.

"The moon is named Europa," he said, scanning his reports. "We have no intelligence concerning any bases, military or otherwise, on that moon."

A secret installation? "Does it have an atmosphere?"

"Oxygen-based, but not the right mix to support Earthers. Temperatures are well below minus-200 degrees. If they're using it, the installation would have to be containment-based."

Simdow matched their calm tones with his own, falling back into his habit of emulating the elder officers. "The Earther transport has dropped into orbit around the moon."

"Hold here," Tranis ordered. He left his computer podium to join Lidon. "Do you think it's a trap?"

Lidon's fingers flew over his computer controls, bringing up readouts faster than voice commands could manage. Despite knowing Tranis could see the information himself, protocol demanded the Nobek answer his captain. "There is no sign of other ships in the vicinity." He pursed his lips and growled so only his clanmate could hear, "I don't like this, Tranis."

A slight smile curled one side of the captain's mouth. His voice deliberately challenging, he answered, "I want General Hamilton."

Lidon twitched, the slight movement the only indication his hunter's instincts were aroused. His expression remained grim, but Tranis heard the smile in his voice. "Caution is for Imdikos."

Tranis clapped a hand to his clanmate's shoulder in an uncharacteristic show of public affection. "And our Imdiko will have our heads if we rush in blindly."

Lidon snorted amusement as Tranis resumed his place at the captain's podium. "Hold here until the Earther ship's sensors are blocked by their orbit of the moon. When they're out of range, proceed in slow. We'll enter orbit on the opposite side of Europa."

Simdow acknowledged, "Yes, Captain. We will enter orbit in two hours."

Tranis didn't mind waiting despite his eagerness to capture the transport and the Earther general traveling in it. He was a patient man, after all.

\* \* \* \*

The spy ship's senior officers gathered in the strategy room, a fancy name for a space that contained a long, low table and several chairs. Lidon sat still, but inwardly he chafed at the delay. All but one of the required members had arrived, and he caught Tranis' eye before glancing pointedly at the chronometer.

"Degorsk is on his way," the captain said. "Go ahead and start, Commander Lidon."

The Nobek rose from his seat and started for the front of the room, ignoring the now-familiar pull of his right leg. He was halfway there when the door slid open and Degorsk walked in. He nodded at Lidon, his eyes narrowing slightly at his clanmate.

Lidon offered him a shrug and kept moving towards the head of the table. Degorsk was not only the ship's chief medic, he was also Lidon and Tranis' Imdiko, the clan caregiver. Exquisitely tuned to discern the slightest hint of physical discomfort from his clanmates, Degorsk had immediately noticed Lidon's limp was a little worse than usual. Fortunately, Lidon could count on the Imdiko to not humiliate him by fussing over him in public.

Of course, Degorsk had other ways of embarrassing his predatory Nobek and staid Dramok clanmates. A much younger Lidon would have been aghast to know he'd end up clanned to a man who delighted in practical jokes and bawdy humor.

Lidon turned to face the other four men seated at the table. His eyes were immediately drawn to his clanmates. Like most Kalquorians, they possessed the same dark coloring, purple eyes, and similar muscular physiques clothed in black formsuits. They still managed to look nothing alike.

Tranis' features were broader, thicker. His beard accentuated his strong jaw. He let his wavy hair fall loose to his shoulders. His stern, no-nonsense expression betrayed little of his youth and spoke volumes of the man's maturity. Tranis was the epitome of Kalquor's Dramok breed, a born leader. He had attained the rank of captain faster than any Kalquorian before him for very good reason.

By contrast, Degorsk's clean-shaven face was leaner, sharper. His waist-long hair was pulled back in a thick braid. A slight smile softened his face. Even now, with the ship on high alert and readying to attack the Earther transport, the Imdiko managed an air of good humor. He couldn't have been more opposite in temperament to Lidon's warrior mentality. That the scarred Nobek had clanned with such a man confounded Lidon's underlings to no end, but no one would ever dare ask the question of why the match had been made. It was just as well; the answer would have confused them even more.

Degorsk was the only person who had ever made Lidon laugh out loud.



He switched on the vid monitor. "We found this on the moon Europa." An image of a transparent containment dome, housing several structures, filled the wall behind him. His audience's collective intake of breath wafted through the room.

"A secret base," Tranis said. His eyes were avid on the image.

Lidon addressed the assembled group, which included First Officer Simdow and Security Lieutenant Commander Osopa. "It's only about one thousand meters in circumference, not nearly large enough to be a military base."

"Is there any indication of what they're using it for?"

Osopa answered, his voice steady despite the excitement Lidon knew the young man felt. "We're not picking up anything besides a few buildings and agri-fields."

Lidon enhanced the picture to show the small-scale farm located at one end of the dome. The dome was on the dark side of Europa, and a dimmed bank of lighting grids surrounded the crops, no doubt to give the illusion of daylight when turned on.

Degorsk drummed his fingers against the tabletop. "It looks like a colony where they're growing most of their own food. Could the transport be dropping off supplies?"

Tranis shook his head. "I doubt a man of General Hamilton's stature would be acting as a courier. He's using a transport of that type to escape notice of his comings and goings."

"None of the Earth defectors have mentioned this base?"

"There's no information on this outpost in any of our intelligence. Not one single hint of its existence."

Simdow pursed his lips in consideration. "A top secret facility that's too small for any functional use. It's strange."

Lidon said, "Unless the bulk of it is underground. We won't be able to tell without scanning from directly overhead."

Tranis leaned back in his chair. "Is your team ready to take that ship?"

Lidon looked at Osopa, who sat straight up as he addressed the captain. "As soon as we're within range, the boarding party will begin our approach."

Lidon grinned with a born predator's delight at the younger Nobek's obvious eagerness. How he wished he could be part of the boarding party! "Once the team has infiltrated the Earther transport, they'll disable their weapons and communications. Captain Tranis, you'll have that ship, General Hamilton, and Earth's security grid before this work shift is over."

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy woke in the black void of the vent, having fallen asleep after pleasuring herself to two climaxes. She'd slept in the tight confines before. The vent was no less comfortable than the iron bed in her cell with its granite-hard mattress.

The reader had gone dark, letting her know she'd slept at least an hour this time. Cassidy couldn't remember the last time she'd slept an entire night through. Maybe she never had.

As sinful as masturbation was, its aftermath helped her find elusive slumber. Rest was every bit as much a temptation as the pleasure her touch afforded.

She could tell she was really awake, the kind of awake that might keep her eyes staring wide open for hours and leave her head pounding with a migraine for the entire

day. Her hands were still buried in her panties, still in contact with the avid flesh of her sex. Another orgasm might give her an additional hour, maybe even two, of sleep.

"Forgive me for my sin," she whispered as her fingers explored her soft, secret folds. "Not for wickedness this time, Heavenly Father. Only to get rest so I may serve You better."

Sex with herself in service to God. Now there was a novel approach to damnation.

The petals of her nether regions were soon slick with honey. She imagined a man, much bigger than herself and naked, crouched over her as she pleased herself. The hot iron of his dark devil flesh touched her intimate parts, ready to join his body to hers.

She paused, one index finger settled over her opening. Did she dare commit this last transgression of penetration? Was it any worse than any of her previous caresses?

*If I'm discovered, it won't make any difference whether I've entered myself or not. My hands will be cut off, my sex branded and burned. The punishment will be the same.*

She wanted to know how it felt. Locked away in the convent, she'd never be touched by another person.

She pressed her finger gently against her secret opening. The tip slipped in, eased by the thick juices seeping from her core. Heat radiated, inviting her to explore her own inner regions. Cassidy's finger dared another fraction of an inch.

A harsh buzzing splintered the darkness, and Cassidy scrambled wildly to the vent opening, bursting into her dimly lit cell.

Her tiny bed was right below, and she crashed onto its hard surface, already reaching for the vent cover lying on the thin pillow. Hefting the cold rectangle of metal, she shoved it into place over the shaft opening, wincing at the high squeal of metal scraping metal. The moment it was in place she jumped from the bed and ran the single step to her habit hanging on the wall peg. Her nightgown flew into the air, and she jerked on the sleeveless shift of her underdress, followed by the white dress of the convent aspirant. Despite its voluminous folds, it failed to conceal her generous curves.

She gathered her long, thick hair in a wad at the nape of her neck, holding it in place just long enough to stuff it into her head scarf. She grabbed a pair of socks from the shelf next to the wall peg, and after hanging her nightgown, she sat on the edge of the bed and yanked her socks on.

The buzzer blared again, and she shot to her feet with a little shriek. She quickly smoothed the sheet and scratchy gray blanket that covered her bed. With one last look around, she assured herself nothing was out of place in her cell.

Besides the bed, peg and shelf, there was only a wooden chair, too uncomfortable to be sat on for long. Her clunky black shoes sat before it, but she didn't put them on. She'd rehearsed the eventuality she'd be surprised from the vent many times in her mind, and a tiny flare of satisfaction warmed her breast.

She stood before her closed door and quickly wiped her sweating hands on her dress before pressing the button that unlocked and slid it open. Light spilled in from the hallway, illuminating the figure that stood waiting on the other side of the door. Cassidy's mouth dropped open in shock as she recognized the bald man before her.

“Grandfather!”

General Patrick Hamilton, resplendent as always in his olive green uniform, inclined his head in greeting, the rest of his whip-thin body ramrod straight. “Hello Cassidy. I’m sorry to have wakened you at such an hour.” His eyes narrowed as he looked her over and his lips thinned in a disapproving line. “Why are you out of breath?”

Cassidy’s hand went to her head scarf, assuring her it was in place with none of her hair showing. “I thought I’d overslept. I rushed to dress and straighten my room.”

His mouth quirked slightly, a concession to humor. “You forgot your shoes.”

Cassidy’s guts loosened a fraction, and she looked down at her feet in feigned surprise. “I’m sorry for my appearance, Grandfather. I guess I’m muddled from waking so suddenly.”

“No apology necessary. Put your shoes on and join me in the chapel.” He smiled, but it wasn’t for her. He looked like a man who’d just won an argument. “I have wonderful news for you.”

Without waiting for her obedient “Yes sir” he marched down the hall towards the dorm exit.

Cassidy sagged in relief. The plan had worked, and on no less than her observant grandfather. Smug satisfaction warmed her racing heart.

But what in the names of Jesus, Mohammed and Moses was he doing here?

She hurriedly put on her shoes. She knew better than to keep the general waiting.

## Chapter Two

Tranis stepped onto the Earther transport's bridge and fought off a satisfied smile. The sudden appearance of the spy ship when it de-cloaked had sufficiently distracted the enemy vessel. The Earthers failed to detect the small group of spacesuited Kalquorians that gathered outside the shuttle bay. Lidon's young infiltration team had made short work of finding the correct frequency to force open the bay's doors. Once the group of Nobeks had invaded, they'd quickly gotten to the weapons and communications controls, knocking them out before the ship's captain even knew the enemy was on board. Overwhelmed, the Earthers surrendered unconditionally.

Lidon immediately went to a computer station and wired an interface. With Degorsk at his side, Tranis stepped up to Osopa and clapped him on the shoulder in congratulations. The team leader grinned for an instant before recovering his professionalism. He bowed.

"Here is the captain of this ship, Captain Tranis. His name is Biggers."

Two Nobeks escorted the Earther captain forward to stand before Tranis. Biggers was gray-haired and paunchy, his pale face suffused with hectic red blotches. An average-sized male Earther, he stood chest high to Tranis.

"I must protest this attack, Kalquorian. We're a supply ship bringing goods to the Europa colony. We're not military."

He spoke English, one of eight Earther languages Tranis had learned. North American accent, he thought.

"You're carrying military," Tranis said. He looked at the assembled prisoners kneeling in a group in the middle of the bridge. They all looked frightened as well as obscenely small and defenseless. It was hard to believe these were the creatures finishing the job of driving his people to their doom. There were only a dozen on the bridge, another 45 now being guarded in a storage bay. The number of Earthers was no match for his 26 Nobek warriors. He could almost pity them. "Where is General Hamilton?"

To his credit, Captain Biggers didn't flinch. "There are no military personnel on board this ship."

"Was he on the shuttle that went to the colony on Europa?"

"This is a supply ship."

Tranis stepped to one side. "Degorsk."

The Imdiko loomed over Biggers, his hands moving in a blur. The Earther suddenly gasped, clutching one side of his neck. The Nobeks guarding him kept him from falling backwards.

"What did you just do?"

Degorsk returned to Tranis' side. "The drug I injected you with will not harm you. It will help you cooperate."

"I'm just a courier. I know nothing!"

Lidon called for Tranis' attention. "Captain, there is no subterranean chamber beneath that installation. What's on the surface beneath the containment dome is the entirety of the base."

Tranis turned back to Biggers. Degorsk was waving a scanner in front of the now trembling Earther. "Is he ready?"

"The drug has taken hold." He frowned at the scanner.

"Is there a problem?"

"Elevated heart rate, but it's probably the stress of the situation and fear of what he might reveal. I'll monitor him."

In English Tranis asked the Earther, "Captain Biggers, are you transporting General Patrick Hamilton?"

The hectic splotches on his face deepened. Between clenched teeth he muttered, "Yes."

"Where is the general now?"

"At the convent on Europa." He gasped with effort.

"So he was on board the shuttle that left this ship?"

"Yes."

"Who else?"

"Just the pilot."

"What kind of facility is a convent?"

Biggers' face was nearly purple as he fought to not answer, but the words grated out anyway. "It's where nuns live and worship."

"Nuns?" Tranis shot a questioning look at Degorsk who shrugged.

"I've never heard of those." The scanner beeped, and the medic scowled at it.

"Captain Biggers, relax. Take deep breaths."

"What are nuns?" Tranis prodded Biggers.

The Earther shuddered. His breath wheezed. "Women who have given their lives to the Church."

Tranis' heart thumped with sudden excitement. Lidon was suddenly at his side, his eyes sharp. "Women? How many women?"

"I don't know exactly. A couple hundred, perhaps."

Biggers shuddered again. One fat-fingered hand clutched at his chest. He whooped air, and his eyes rolled over white. Degorsk grabbed him by the shoulders a moment before the Earther's knees unhinged. Tranis' elation gave way to concern, and he helped his Imdiko lower the now unconscious man to the floor. "What's wrong?"

"His heart has stopped." Degorsk dropped the scanner and pressed the palm of one hand on Biggers' still chest. He pushed down, eased up, pushed down, and eased up with one hand while prepping a stimulant injection with the other.

Tranis watched helplessly while the medic worked on the Earther captain. Six years of clanship wasn't a long time, but it was enough that he could read the expression in Degorsk's eyes. After a few minutes, the Imdiko sat back, defeat slumping his shoulders.

"He's gone."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. Initial scans indicated Captain Biggers didn't have any heart condition."

"Was it the drug?"

"The truth-telling compound I used was developed specifically for Earthers so they wouldn't be harmed during interrogation. I need to run tests on him."

Tranis considered. "Analysis will have to wait. I want you and all medical personnel on that moon with us when we go down."

"I can't sanction using the drug on General Hamilton until I know it didn't kill Biggers."

"Understood. There are females to be collected though, and their welfare is paramount. If any are injured in the takedown, I want your entire team there."

Tranis stood. Lidon's clap on his shoulder nearly knocked him back down. "Capturing General Hamilton and dozens of Mataras to bear our children all in one fell swoop. You've outdone yourself, my Dramok."

Even though his heart felt heavy for the dead man lying at his feet, Tranis couldn't help the thrill that raced through his being. Females! Perhaps even a Matara to claim for his own clan.

Only consideration for the Earther crew's loss kept a triumphant smile from stretching across his face.

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Cassidy entered the chapel. Her grandfather sat on the bench closest to the altar, his bald head gleaming in the soft colors of the stained light glass and altar candles. She hurried forward.

She kneeled before the altar and the mammoth symbol of her religion that hovered behind it. "The emblem of great religious perversion" one illicit book in her collection claimed. "The North American bloc's final insult to the world it has consumed."

At the center of the icon was a six-pointed star representing the former Jewish faith. Radiating from it were four bars, the cross of Christianity. Topping the brushed gold figure was a crescent moon with a five-pointed star perched on its lower tip for Islam.

Cassidy knew from her reading that Earth's other major religions at the time of Unification had been destroyed, or at least driven underground, during the Great Purge. Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese traditionalists, the Sikhs, Baha'i and too many others to remember...all gone in the name of the one true religion.

She'd read the heathen texts and wept for the loss of the people who'd believed in them. The mass executions of those who refused to convert had gone on for well over a decade. They had trusted in their faiths and paid for it with their lives. The deaths had numbered over two billion. It didn't matter the purge had taken place long before her birth. The thought of so many lives lost still broke her heart.

Cassidy's intelligence warred constantly with her belief. She wasn't blind to the atrocities performed by her government in the name of God. She'd read the Christian Bible, the Jewish Talmud and the Muslim Qur'an and knew how far her religion had

strayed from its origins. Still, every sin she indulged in weighed heavily on her. She could feel the black smears on her soul, damning her to everlasting Hell.

She rose from the ground and stood before her grandfather. He looked at her with quiet approval.

"Here you are and quite presentable. Sit down." He patted the bench's molded plastic next to him.

"Thank you, Grandfather." Cassidy sat, putting a foot of space between them. She kept her head lowered to cover her fear and loathing of the man. He'd like the fear. He'd punish her for the loathing.

"You've been here for how long now? Three years? How are you getting on?"

"Well, I think."

"You're not sure?"

"Look not for praise nor give it; only God, who knows what lies in our hearts, knows who is deserving of accolades," Cassidy quoted.

She heard the smile in his response. "Very good. It's no wonder the Mother Superior is pleased. She believes you have the calling."

So that was what he was here for, to tell her she was to be left on this rock for the rest of her days, her life swallowed in the mundane existence of a European nun. Part of her rebelled, wanting her to scream her refusal. She'd already lost three years of her life to this place! Her hands actually clenched for a moment before she remembered the insanity of such an act. General Patrick Hamilton was a powerful man, and she was a mere woman. His word was law.

She swallowed the lump in her throat. She would not beg him to release her from this purgatory. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction. There was another way out of this. There had to be.

To the general she said, "If it is God's will, it is mine." She wondered at the lack of emotion in her voice.

Her grandfather sighed. "You are the last of my bloodline, Cassidy. If you take the vows, it will die with you. I don't wish to be selfish, so I have prayed hard on this matter, and I believe God has shown me the way. I do not think you are meant to be a nun."

Relief washed over her in a tidal wave. She closed her eyes as dizziness threatened. "You know best, Grandfather."

"I'm glad you think so. I've come to take you home."

Cassidy wanted to scream for joy. Instead, she meekly said, "Thank you." Inside she turned cartwheels.

"That's only half the surprise. You're getting married."

She straightened, surprise making her bold enough to look into his pleased face. "Married?"

"Do you remember Colonel Tucker?"

Her heart stuttered in her chest. Of course she remembered him. Following her father's death, her grandfather had tried to convince Cassidy's mother to marry Colonel Tucker. Jackie Hamilton's flat refusal had made her already strained relationship with her father-in-law worse.

The colonel's son Eli was a handsome young man and already a military officer. For the two years Cassidy had lived in her grandfather's home following her mother's arrest, Eli had been her escort at public functions. He'd been unfailingly polite.

"Colonel Tucker has a son about my age." She warmed to the idea of marrying Eli. He'd always been respectful. Certainly being wed to him couldn't be worse than becoming a nun. She would have her own home, maybe far away from her grandfather. Yes. This had possibilities.

"Yes, well a stepson a couple of years older than you isn't such a terrible thing."

Cassidy's heart again skipped a beat, and she looked at her grandfather with dawning horror. "Stepson? I'm to marry *Colonel* Tucker?"

Hamilton's chest puffed as if he'd bestowed her with a priceless treasure. "A mature, God-fearing man who will be an excellent influence on you. He and I have planned a quiet ceremony immediately after you've taken your classes in wifely obedience and deportment. Wonderful, isn't it?"

*Married to that old man? His eldest son is almost Grandfather's age!*

Cassidy thought of the retired Colonel George Tucker, his sparse gray hair that barely covered his liver-spotted crown, the deep-set wrinkles of his face like ravines. Was she, not even out of her teens, really supposed to marry a septuagenarian?

Maybe being a nun wasn't such a horrible choice after all.

She searched for something to say, something that wouldn't offend her powerful grandfather yet convince him she couldn't possibly be wed to her ancient fiancée. Her mouth opened and closed like a beached fish. The words wouldn't come. Instead, the horrified scream was back, slowly creeping up from her guts, readying to shatter the air with her angry despair.

The hiss of the chapel's opening door and running footsteps saved her. "General Hamilton!" a young man screamed.

Hamilton was on his feet, facing the man in the courier uniform who raced down the aisle toward him. "What is the meaning of this interruption?"

The gasping man drew to a halt before him, his eyes wide and his close-cropped hair standing on end. "Kalquorians have entered the dome!"

Cassidy gasped and rose from her seat. She clutched at her grandfather's arm.

White-faced, he shook her off. "Kalquorians? Here?" For the first time in Cassidy's life, the general looked unsure.

"Yes sir. I can't raise the transport either. They don't respond to my hails. Do you think the aliens have already taken it?"

Hamilton didn't answer him. Instead, he turned to Cassidy. "Raise the alarm, girl. Tell everyone to lock themselves in their cells. Go!" He pushed her towards the door.

She took off running down the aisle, her heavy shoes clunking against the hard floor. Behind her, she heard the general say, "Where did you see the demons and how many are there?"

She flung herself out into the convent's perpetual night before she heard the answer.

\* \* \* \*



Osopa pointed several yards ahead to the one building among the others that didn't look like a featureless block. "The Earther ran in there."

Degorsk peered around the depressing compound, wondering why anyone would choose to live in such surroundings. Suspended lights kept the compound from succumbing to the total darkness of this side of Europa. They emitted little illumination, but for sensitive Kalquorian eyes, it was more than enough to see by.

Besides the low rectangular building with the pointed spire shooting towards the star-strewn sky, two rows of squat box-shelters each sat in the center of a square of trimmed green grass. Straight walkways led from building to building, with a main thoroughfare between the double strings of structures. Like most Kalquorians, Degorsk preferred the natural state of vegetation growing wild, even on terraformed colonies. This collection of squares, rectangles and straight lines appeared aberrant to his eyes. He felt if he spent too long looking at it, he'd go crazy.

To his left, Lidon issued orders. "Osopa, lead the team into that building. Capture that man and any other male without killing them, if possible. Remember, we want General Hamilton alive."

On Degorsk's right, Tranis spoke up. "Also keep in mind there are supposedly a large number of women here. Earther females are fragile, and anyone who causes more than superficial harm to them will be dealt with by Commander Lidon. I don't care if a woman comes at you with a percussion blaster. *You are not to hurt any females.*"

It was Degorsk's turn. "Nobeks, medics will be following you in to sedate prisoners. We'll work as fast as possible, but remember there are only seventeen of us. Try to be patient."

Osopa nodded to his seniors before turning to the two dozen Nobeks eagerly waiting to be set loose on the Earthers. "You have your instructions. First squad, straight in to hunt. Second and third squads, you will provide defensive—"

He paused as the spired building's door slid open and a tiny white figure ran out onto the main concourse. Every Kalquorian froze, and the instant the little Earther noticed them she froze too.

Degorsk had never seen an Earther female up close. He'd been off Kalquor so long, he'd not had the opportunity to meet any of the two thousand or so who'd clanned with his people these last two years.

His eyes drank in the creature staring at them. A pale miniature version of the few Kalquorian women left alive, she would barely come up to his chest. Her hair, if she had any, was covered by a white hood of fabric, leaving her cherubic face bare. A face that, despite being drawn out in an expression of terror, was the loveliest he'd ever seen.

A little nub of a nose and pouty pink lips left her with an almost childlike appearance. In contrast, the heavy-lidded blue eyes gave her otherwise innocent features a seductive cast.

The huge swath of cloth draping her body couldn't mask the soft curves swelling beneath. Degorsk went hard at the thought of the warm yielding flesh of the girl/woman before him.

Her scream shattered the air, and she raced towards the building across from the one she'd exited. She gathered her voluminous skirts to run, displaying heavy blocky shoes and a tantalizing glimpse of white calf. Degorsk suppressed a groan at the sight.

She got to the building and the door slid open for her. Casting one last frightened glance over her shoulder at them, her pretty face lit with the interior's golden glow, she disappeared into the building. A high thin wail of a voice carried through the air: "Lock your doors—" The closing door cut off the rest.

Lidon recovered first, his voice bringing the men out of their shock. "I'm guessing most of the women are in that building. Osopa, change of strategy."

"Yes sir. Two parties. You five will come with me and take the building the male went into. The rest of you follow that female."

Tranis said, "Lidon and I are with you, Osopa. Degorsk, your choice."

Degorsk heard the reluctance in his Dramok's voice and knew Tranis wanted to catch the delectable little Earther as much as he did. But Mataras or not, their main objective remained capturing General Hamilton and getting the codes to disarm Earth's defense grid.

"Duty before pleasure," he grouched. "Sometimes I hate my rank."

His clanmates quirked grins for a bare second before sobering again. It made him feel better that he'd amused the too serious pair. Pushing the pretty Earther to the back of his mind, he followed them to the spired structure.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy smashed both fists against the first of the cell doors, drumming a frantic tattoo to wake its sleeping occupant. "Kalquorian invasion! Lock your door!"

She whirled and attacked the door across the narrow, featureless hall.

"Kalquorian invasion! Lock your door!"

The door behind her, the first one she'd beat on, opened to show Ruth Meredith sleepily rubbing her eyes. "What's going on?"

Cassidy was already running to the next cell. It opened before she could repeat her message, and Mary Anderson stepped out with a scowl, her dark hair tousled. "Who is banging on doors at this hour?"

More doors opened down the hall, more girls stepped out. "It's a Kalquorian attack! Get back in your cells and lock your doors!" Breathless and frantic, Cassidy rushed to beat on the still unopened doors.

"Cassidy, have you gone mad?"

"Kalquorians can't get this close to Earth."

"This isn't funny. I'm telling Mother Superior."

Cassidy confronted the crowd of angry aspirants filling the hall. "It's not a joke! For the love of Jesus, Mohammed and Moses, hide!"

Twelve-year old Darci Soames burst into tears. Her younger sister Marci, huddled at her side, joined her sobs.

Mary huffed. "I hope you're happy, Cassidy. Your prank has upset the little ones. When Mother Superior hears—"

The door to the outside slid open. The first impossibly huge Kalquorian swept in, his purple cat's eyes taking in the throng of young women and girls in their long white nightgowns.

High-pitched screams erupted, but Cassidy didn't wait to see more of the dark-skinned aliens enter the dorm. She raced to her cell, pushing panicked girls out of her way.

Any moment she expected to be grabbed or shot down by the Kalquorians, but she made it to her cell safely, ringing shrieks filling her ears. "Lock!" she yelled, and the closed door obediently beeped. She leapt on her bed and yanked savagely at the vent cover. It came out with a protesting squeal. Hanging onto it with one hand, she jumped into the opening and squirmed into the shaft.

The other girls' cries echoed in the confined space with chilling hollowness. Cassidy wriggled around to get a better angle so she could replace the vent cover. If the aliens didn't know her hiding place, she might get away. She could hide until Earth sent help or the aliens left.

Screams continued to travel down the shaft, but even worse sounds joined them. Cassidy's heart lurched to hear the faint appeals of her fellow aspirants.

"Please, don't!"

"No!"

"God, help me!"

*I told them to hide. I told them, but they wouldn't listen! I tried to help, God, it's not my fault!*

A pinging sound told Cassidy her cell's door lock had been released. An instant later, she heard it slide open. With a gasp, she scrambled away, pushing past her reader and cache of snacks, rushing to escape the monsters who had found the frequency to breach her private room.

Terror descended over her, and she crawled blindly through the dark ventilation system, gasping and sobbing. Screams and pleas rose and fell in cycles, each surge of audible terror quieter than the last. Deep voices, speaking in unintelligible staccato bursts, joined the noises filling her ears.

In the dark, Cassidy missed a bend in the shaft and crawled headfirst into the side. Dull pain thudded through her head, and she collapsed on the floor with a gasp. She lay still as the sudden shock broke through the panic that had gripped her.

She breathed deep and slow, willing her frantic heartbeat to quiet. She was safe in the main part of the ventilation system; it was small enough that she couldn't turn around in its confines. No way could the Kalquorians get to her in here, not those massive brutes.

She swallowed, thinking of the alien men she'd encountered outside. The light had been too dim to pick out details, but she'd seen the one who'd entered the dorm first. His hair had been glossy blue-black and his skin dark brown, much like the men depicted in *The Kama Sutra*. But unlike those slender Earthers, the Kalquorian had been all muscle, his tight black outfit molded to every bulge in his chest, shoulders, arms and legs. Having lived with her grandfather for a brief time, Cassidy had been around many

soldiers who kept themselves fit by working out with weights, but none had come close to the behemoth who'd invaded the dorm.

Were all Kalquorian men like that? She shivered, wondering how it would feel to be subdued by such a beast. Her sex tightened.

*What am I thinking? They kidnap and rape Earther women, force them to bear their monstrous children! How dare you lust for such creatures!*

Cassidy sobbed in shame. "Forgive me, Heavenly Father, for being a weak female," she whispered. "Don't let me fall into depravity like my mother did."

The prayer helped her get control over her unwanted thoughts. She collected herself and set about getting her bearings.

The shaft angled left, with no other avenue for escape. Cassidy had explored the ventilation system of the dorm and knew exactly where she was. Following the shaft would take her from the aspirants' wing to the nuns' side of the dorm. She listened for the sounds of the sisters, but the screams had ended, and all was quiet, save for her own soft breath.

Cassidy crawled slowly towards the nuns' wing after pulling her skirts up to allow for easier movement. What a racket she must have made in her panicked struggle through the conduit! Hopefully her passage had gone unnoticed by the Kalquorians, who'd no doubt been deafened by their victims' screams. She fought off a wave of terror for the other women. No telling what those deviant aliens had done to them.

She paused at a conduit that led to the infirmary. No one was presently sick, so there'd be no patients in there. She looked anyway.

As she'd suspected, the stark room was empty of life. The dim light showed her hospital beds, ten in all, lined up on opposite sides. Cabinets filled with nursing implements and sheets for the beds filled one wall, and the pharmacy was on the far end of the room. The pharmacy was dark, and no doubt locked. Cassidy moved on.

The shaft bent left again. She was now in the nuns' wing and slowed her progress, being very careful to make no noise.

She took the first passage to lead off the main shaft. She blinked to see light ahead. She proceeded slowly, letting her eyes adjust to the illumination.

She approached Sister Katherine's cell. She'd come here often, not to spy on this particular nun as she did the others, but to listen to the quiet woman pray in her soothing, sweet voice. When Cassidy had a bad day, one in which she thought she'd go mad from the drone of never ending boredom, she sought out this very spot to soak in the gentle peace that emanated from her favorite nun.

Sister Katherine was a beautiful, delicate-featured woman who wore a kind smile for everyone. Hearing the deep voice of a male coming from the nun's room, Cassidy paused for an instant. She listened to the guttural alien speech, and a second man's voice answered it. Dear God, two of them were in Sister Katherine's cell! What were they doing to her?

Cassidy crept slowly to the vent opening, terrified of what she might see. The cell came into view by careful increments.

The room was every bit as bare as Cassidy's own. On the opposite wall, Katherine's black habit and wimple hung by the hook. Inching forward, the next sight

that greeted her eyes were the tops of two black-maned Kalquorian heads. One man's hair was wavy, the other's straight. Their shoulders were wider across than Cassidy's ample hips.

They stood over Sister Katherine, who knelt by her bed in her nightgown, her white hands clasped in prayer. Her head was bent so Cassidy couldn't see her face, and her dark blond hair cascaded in soft ringlets around her shoulders. She murmured, her voice a soft cadence.

A fine tremor ran through the nun's frame, but she didn't flinch away when one of the Kalquorians gently brushed aside her hair to expose the graceful column of her neck. The other Kalquorian pressed a metallic cylinder to the pale pink-tinged skin, his hand squeezing one of her shoulders as if to comfort her.

Her voice rose for an instant loud enough for Cassidy to make out the words. "...and give me strength, O Lord, as you gave Moses as he wandered the desert; as you gave Jesus on the cross; as you gave Mohamm—"

A low hiss cut her words off, and she sagged bonelessly. The Kalquorian holding her hair back moved in a blur, catching her before she could slide to the floor. He lifted her in his arms, and Cassidy wept soundlessly to see her mentor's sweet tear-stained face.

The two men stood looking at the nun for an instant, the expressions on their strong features identical with wonder. Then they left the cell, the wavy-haired alien carrying Katherine.

Cassidy backed into the main shaft, shaking violently with anger. She'd wanted to jump out of the vent and pound on those aliens for daring to put their filthy hands on Katherine.

*Damn them! If only I was strong enough to fight them!*

Enraged to be unable to rescue her mentor, she crawled to another vent opening on the opposite side of the main shaft where she could see the hallway.

She bit her lips together, horrified. Unconscious nuns lined either side of the corridor, placed feet to head as far as Cassidy's limited vision could see. Every cell door stood open. Hulking Kalquorians walked up and down the hall, watching the insensible women and occasionally muttering their incomprehensible language to each other. Some went in and out of the cells, carrying out blankets and covering the nuns to their chins. They carefully tucked the blankets around the unconscious women.

If Cassidy didn't know better, she'd think the brutes were concerned for the Earther women's welfare.

\* \* \* \*

Tranis, Lidon, Degorsk and five Nobeks guarding General Hamilton and his shuttle pilot entered the dorm. Tranis gaped for a moment before recovering his senses.

On either side of the hall, Earther women laid in rows to the end of the corridor. The men had covered the tiny bodies despite the lack of any real chill. Looking at the ones closest to him, he couldn't blame them. The females looked so delicate.

He glanced back at the mute Earther general, who beyond offering his name and rank, had refused to speak. In English Tranis taunted, "What kind of man hides among such frail creatures?"

Hamilton kept his eyes trained forward. Except for a muscle twitching in his jaw, he gave no response.

Osopa appeared from a corridor halfway down the hall. He hurried towards his commanding officer. Tranis moved to meet him, his group following.

“Report.”

“One hundred seventy-seven women secured, Captain. Some on the other side of the building are well beyond childbearing age, but the majority can be clanned.”

Degorsk knelt next to one tiny form, the smallest of the females. “This has to be a child.”

Tranis bent for a closer look. The girl’s smooth face was a deeper brown than his own skin, her black hair a fuzzy cap on her diminutive head. A slightly bigger girl of similar coloring, her features almost identical, lay nearby.

“Yes, Doctor. There are a significant number of immature girls in this wing. Preliminary scans suggest that with the exception of this one, they are still physically capable of breeding.” Osopa grimaced, his expression an indication of how repugnant he found his own report.

Degorsk pulled a similar face. “Only if you have no conscience.” He shuddered and cupped his palm around the child’s cheek in a gesture usually reserved for a father and daughter. He stood.

Lidon snarled, “No one can be that desperate.”

“I’d rather we die out than go that route,” Tranis agreed. “The little ones are off limits.” He followed Osopa through a connecting hall to the next wing, where more females lay unconscious. “Keep the young girls with the elder women. How many mature Mataras capable of childbearing does that leave?”

“Almost 120,” Osopa said, his voice lifting with restrained glee. “There’s a squad of Nobeks still sweeping the rest of the compound. Their team leader located the main computer containing the convent records, so we’ll have an accounting of the population shortly.”

“Excellent. Confirm the ages of every female. I don’t want anyone younger than Earth’s legal marriage age clanned.”

Tranis looked over the nuns, his mind boggling at the sight of so many females similar to his own species. No wonder it was theorized Earthers and Kalquorians had common ancestry. The size difference aside, the likeness between their peoples astounded him.

He scanned the faces of the women closest to him, not seeing the one he searched for. To Lidon he said, “Let the seven clans of our ship choose their Mataras in order of seniority. The rest of the women are to begin re-education under Degorsk’s direction.” He allowed himself to smirk at his Imdiko. “I’m sure you’ll have no lack of volunteers among the unclanned crew to teach these Mataras what they need to know.”

“As long as the Nobeks listen to my staff, all are welcome.” Degorsk’s grin was just as lecherous.

“They’ll listen and obey,” Lidon vowed. “If any of them gives you trouble, I want to know immediately.”

Tranis wandered down the hall, still searching the women's faces. "Commander Lidon, as soon as you get to a long distance communications station, send a message to the attack fleet concerning what we've found here. We'll need a transport to transfer the unclanned Mataras to Kalquor. And have General Hamilton placed in containment."

"Yes, Captain. You three, use the Earther shuttle and take these two prisoners to our ship."

Degorsk walked down the hall at Tranis' side, pausing here and there to study the women's faces. "If the clans select Mataras in order of seniority, that gives us first choice."

"Still hating your rank?"

"Did I say that? I must have been temporarily insane. Struck dumb I suppose by the sight of a pretty, white-skinned Earther, all soft and rounded and running from us."

"Who do you think I'm looking for right now?" Tranis turned to call to Osopa, who was huddled in conversation with Lidon. "Where is the girl we saw outside?"

"We haven't found her." He reddened. "I looked for her myself."

Lidon studied his clanmates and allowed one corner of his mouth to turn up. "My apologies, Osopa, but your clan will have to choose someone else. It seems my Dramok and Imdiko have made their selection."

Tranis couldn't help but grin back. "Only if our Nobek is in agreement."

"Oh absolutely. Anyone who can elude my staff is worthy of my interest."

"In that case, I want the girl found as soon as possible."

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy snuck a peek at her grandfather as he was led away by three Kalquorians, marveling anew at how small and helpless he looked next to the aliens. Her powerful, terrifying grandfather rendered impotent! It was unimaginable. And though she didn't wish being captured by Earth's sworn enemy on anyone, she felt a mean kind of satisfaction to see him bullied for a change.

Her gaze returned to the apparent leader of the Kalquorians, standing just below the vent opening she peered from. She shivered. He and his companion with the long, thick braid were handsome, a surprise considering the monsters his kind were reputed to be. She wondered what it would be like to stroke his wavy black hair. Her naughty mind went to the picture in *The Kama Sutra* of the man taking his woman from behind, and a stab of desire shot through her womb. Imagining the muscled, dark alien mounting her in such a fashion made her lower regions clench.

The other alien looked absolutely scrumptious as well. Not only was he handsome and muscled too, but his leaner face wore an easy smile, a sharp contrast to the seriousness of his bearded companion. She wondered how he would look with all that hair unbound. Another image shot through her mind; the gently smiling Kalquorian crouched over her, his hair a curtain concealing their combined nakedness.

A third alien soundlessly joined them, startling Cassidy. He limped, but she still hadn't heard his approach.

*Gosh, are they all so gorgeous? Although something about that one scares me. He looks like he could kill with his bare hands and not think twice about it.*

The third muttered with his companions in their growling, staccato language. Despite the sense of danger Cassidy got from him, she still couldn't keep her lustful thoughts away. He was included in her new mental catalog of sexual positions with aliens. The Kalquorian version of *The Kama Sutra* teased her senses even as she trembled in fear.

While the three conversed, other Kalquorians collected some of the unconscious nuns, carefully cradling the women in their arms and carrying them towards the end of the hall. Cassidy watched the men disappear into the infirmary.

The leader and his companions clapped each other on the shoulders, drawing her attention once more. The lean one with the long braid hurried toward the infirmary where the nuns were being taken. The leader left the dorm with long, purposeful strides. The limper stayed behind, watching the other Kalquorians gather nuns for a few moments. He suddenly spoke loudly in a deep, rich tone that made Cassidy shiver. The command in his voice was clear.

The others moved faster until they were dark blurs flashing up and down the hall. Cassidy's eyes widened in shock to see how quickly the huge creatures moved. She gasped.

The limper looked up at the vent as if he heard the intake of breath. His bluish-purple gaze met hers, and Cassidy's heart nearly stopped.

A slow grin spread over his face. "There you are," he said in English.

He jumped at the vent, whatever made him limp no obstacle to his leaping prowess. Cassidy emitted a little scream and scrambled backwards as the vent cover was yanked off in a screech of metal.

She crawled frantically for the main shaft, hearing a growling chuckle behind her as the Kalquorian entered the vent. Her head scarf caught on the overhang of the smaller conduit as she clambered into it. The scarf tugged free, but Cassidy paid it no mind. Only escape mattered, and she scrambled down the tight confines as fast as her hands and knees could carry her.

Not hearing pursuit, she paused to dart a glance over her shoulder. The Kalquorian stared at her from the wider shaft several feet behind. Too large to follow her any further, he could only watch as she fled.

In the dim light, she saw the glint of his teeth as he smiled at her, seemingly amused rather than angry she'd slipped out of his clutches. He held her head scarf in his fist and raised it to his nose. She heard him inhale.

"I will have you, my little Matara. You may be sure of that."

She was startled to hear him speak her language with only the barest slurring accent. Cassidy licked her lips as the full import of what he'd said struck her. *I will have you.*

He'd called her Matara. The Kalquorian word for childbearer. The man's race was supposedly dying out, and Earther women were the only compatible species they could breed with. Cassidy had no doubt the Kalquorians were on Europa just for that reason.

Was this alien planning to force himself on her? The predatory glint in his eyes made her feel small, like a mouse trapped in a corner by a cat. Cassidy forced herself to



look at him full in the face. She had a feeling showing fear to this man would be a very big mistake. She fought to keep her voice steady. "Leave me alone. Go away."

"Such a beautiful girl should never be alone. It's shameful you poor women have been locked away in this place. You're being kept from pleasures to which you're entitled."

She sat down and looked at the dark silhouette of his head and shoulders, unsure what compelled her to remain near enough to talk to him. Maybe it was the rich baritone of his voice and how it seemed to roll within her belly. "What do you want from me?"

His chuckle washed over her, so deep she felt it in her bones. "From you personally? That's easily answered. I want to show you what nature intended a man and woman do together."

A thrill ran through her body. "I'm engaged to be married. I will do those things with my husband under the blessing of holy matrimony." Or was Colonel Tucker too old for such things? Cassidy's face flushed hotly. She was discussing intimate relations with an alien male. Surely that ranked as a sin.

"Tell me your name."

His invitation caught her off guard. "Why?"

"It's only your name I ask. It's not as if Earth will lose the war if you give it to me."

She considered. "Cassidy."

"Cassidy," he repeated, tasting it. The way he said it made things down below clench. She licked her lips unconsciously, held by his intent stare. He was beyond handsome. He was hypnotically riveting.

"What's yours?"

"Lidon."

"Why do you limp?"

"An old injury, nothing of consequence. Come closer, Cassidy."

"I'm not stupid. I'm not going to let you capture me."

"I will catch you eventually." His grin gave her the chills. "In fact, catching you just became my priority."

Warm terror rolled through her belly. She did not want to be the focus of this man. "Why? You have the others. Why can't you leave me alone?"

"I do not want the others. I want you, with your pretty white skin and soft, curving body. I want to feel you beneath me as I take you."

"Take me where?"

He laughed. His amusement rolled over her, embraced her with its warmth. There was no hint of meanness in the sound. "You are of age but still such an innocent child. I wish to make love to you, Cassidy, and rid you of all those prudish repressions your leaders have burdened you with."

*Oh my God.* She thought being entwined with Lidon in a few of the poses from *The Kama Sutra*. Her sex clenched in response, and her voice wavered as she answered. "You would damn me to hell with your lust. I will not lay with an alien. It's disgusting."

"One man's evil is another's paradise." Lidon sounded as if he quoted someone else's words. "I can tell you're not disgusted. I smell your interest."

Cassidy's face burned with embarrassment. Could he really smell her arousal from several feet away? She had to get away from him. "I'm leaving now."

"Imagine my naked body lying on yours while I kiss you deeply."

She stared at him in shock. He actually spoke of carnal acts! "Stop it."

"My sex, thick and hard, pressing into yours, filling your flesh."

"You're an animal. Shut up." She tried to sound offended, but her voice was too breathy. Even to her own ears, Cassidy's words sounded more like invitation than repudiation. The images he gave her had her heart drumming like thunder.

"Moving in and out of you, taking you gently at first, then harder and harder until you scream with pleasure. You've not known rapture until you've felt yourself joined with a man, my pet."

Her breath came in gasps, and her panties clung damply to her aching sex. "I'm leaving," she repeated.

"No, Cassidy. Come to me. Let me show you how good it feels to be with me."

She wanted to. She wanted to crawl to the dark, deadly Kalquorian, let him pull her out of the vent, carry her to her cell, lay her on her narrow bed, and do all the things he'd described. The man was dangerous in more ways than she'd imagined. She had never known such an overwhelming urge to surrender to someone, an urge she dared not give in to.

She pushed back a heavy tress that had fallen over her face. "You can't have me."

"Let me kiss you all over. Let me taste your mouth, your breasts, and your warm, wet sex."

She had to leave. The temptation to surrender to his seduction was becoming alarmingly hard to resist. She was only a woman, after all, a naturally wanton creature. Like Eve, she would be easily led astray by this evil man.

"Goodbye, Lidon." She turned her back on him.

"For now, my sweet Cassidy. We will meet again, and I'll do all I've described and much, much more. That's a promise."

She crept away into the darkness. His deep laughter followed her into the gloom.

## Chapter Three

Tranis stepped into the tiny room where Lidon and Degorsk awaited him. Degorsk sat on the iron frame bed fingering a white cloth while Lidon leaned against one wall, looking at a flat black tablet with an illuminated vid screen.

Tranis looked around the stark quarters, his head almost to the ceiling. The Earther women were diminutive, but even for them such sleeping arrangements must be cramped. "So this is where our escapee sleeps."

"Not terribly comfortable," Lidon said. "She doesn't spend a lot of time in here. It appears little Cassidy Hamilton has been using the vent shafts for quite some time."

Tranis started. "Hamilton?"

"The general's very own granddaughter, according to the convent records."

"That must be why he's here," Degorsk opined. He sniffed the cloth he held, and Tranis noticed the Imdiko's aroused state. The medic grinned at Tranis' stern expression. "This covered her hair. She lost it when Lidon chased her."

Lidon cleared his throat. "General Hamilton placed Cassidy here three years ago, interrupting her schooling to do so. They don't offer formal academic instruction at this convent beyond basic reading and arithmetic, which Cassidy could already manage. Apparently the Earthers consider it a waste of time to educate nuns."

"But she's of age?"

"Legal for marriage by Earther standards for over a year now." Lidon peered at whatever was on the tablet's viewscreen. "Young, but physically ready for breeding and emotionally capable as well, judging from what I've seen. I found a cache of food and this just inside the vent shaft." He handed the tablet to Tranis.

The Dramok captain nearly dropped it in shock. Artwork depicting two Earthers copulating was displayed on the screen. "Are you sure this was hers? Most Earthers wouldn't dare possess such material. The punishments for these offenses are severe on their planet."

"It carries her scent. For an Earther girl pursuing religious studies her choice of reading is shocking, but not surprising. 'If you would make a man desire a thing, tell him he cannot ever possess it,'" Lidon quoted.

Tranis sniffed the tablet, taking in the aroma of salty musk. He went as hard as Degorsk. "How good to know she's already tempted by her body's natural urges. That should make seducing her easier once she's caught. Have you set the tracking sensors?"

Lidon pulled a locator from his belt and consulted the readout. "I'm monitoring her movements at all times. She's keeping to the shafts where we can't follow for now."

Degorsk stood and stretched as best he could in the claustrophobic chamber. "She'll come out sooner or later to eat, especially since you confiscated her stash of edibles."

“Their kitchen is in another building. Hunger and thirst will eventually force her to chance a run for it.”

Tranis changed the topic. Addressing Degorsk, he said, “I realize your resources are stretched thin what with so many Mataras to re-educate, but I need to know when I can interrogate the general.”

“I’ve got a couple technicians autopsying the transport’s captain. We should have results later today.”

A high-pitched scream traveled through the vent shaft, the cry distant. All three men looked at the covered opening.

“The Mataras are waking,” Lidon observed, his voice dry.

Degorsk tossed Tranis the head cloth and moved towards the open doorway. “They won’t scream for very long. At least not in fear,” he amended with a smirk.

“What protocol are you using for their re-education?” Tranis wanted to know. He took in a breath from the head covering Cassidy had so recently worn. A clean, sweet scent assaulted his senses. Lidon grinned as Tranis sighed. The erection that had been calming was back in full force.

Degorsk paused in the doorway. “The first order of business involves behavior modification techniques employing a system of reward and punishment. Also some mild brainwashing; we’ll disrupt their sleep patterns and feeding schedules, keeping them confused and doubting their own senses. The next step will be making them utterly dependent on us, followed by intense therapy to give them a sense of self-worth.”

Lidon nodded. “Tear them down and rebuild them.”

The medical officer grimaced. “There’s not much to tear down. Earther women have the worst self images of any beings in the known universe. Their religion keeps them subservient to a ridiculous degree.”

Lidon suddenly took a deep breath. “She’s here. Can you smell her?”

Tranis went alert but displayed no outward sign of overt vigilance. Keeping his voice conversational he said, “I can hear her.”

Tiny whispers of sound came from the vent overhead. A hint of a drawn breath, the surreptitious trace of movement.

Leaning against the doorway, his eyes cast towards the floor, Degorsk added, “I hear her too. She’s coming close.”

Lidon consulted his locator. “Close indeed. I see you, little Earther. She’s probably looking for her food stash.”

“Can you catch her?” Tranis asked.

He was disappointed to see the Nobek shake his head. “By the time I get that cover off and climb in there, she’ll be back in the main shaft. I think she knows we’re here. She’s not taking any chances of getting too near after our earlier encounter.”

Tranis considered, his eyes flicking to the vent. Knowing his leader’s moods, Degorsk asked, “What are you thinking?”

“That I’m very tired.” Tranis crossed to the bed and sat on its edge. It was hard and too small for him, but he’d slept in worse circumstances. “I wouldn’t mind a nap right here on this bed.”

Lidon smirked. "She does seem to have voyeuristic tendencies. I found traces of her in several conduits leading to other sleeping compartments. Hair, fabric, fingerprints. She's been all over this building, spying on her companions."

"What's your opinion, Doctor?"

Degorsk grinned fit to split his face. "The real thing is much more enjoyable to look upon than drawings. Plus it will give you the rest I thought I'd have to drug you to get."

"You stay away from me with your sleep inducements. I mean it, Degorsk. I have too much to do to be drugged for hours on end," he growled. Tapping his com, Tranis said, "First Officer Simdow."

"Simdow here, Captain."

"How is our guest?"

"Quiet now, though he did object to having his clothing removed."

Lidon's eyebrow crooked. "Perhaps we can use Hamilton's repressions to our advantage when we question him."

Tranis nodded. "All right Simdow, I'm taking a nap on doctor's orders. You have command. Report to me in two hours." At Degorsk's protesting expression, Tranis repeated, "Two hours, Simdow. No more."

"Yes, Captain."

"Don't ask me for stim tabs when you're too exhausted to stand," Degorsk grouched.

"The attack fleet is waiting on us. I have to get those security codes."

"To that end," Lidon interjected, "I'm going to be on the Earth transport for a few hours. It gets in and out of that security grid; there must be something encoded. With luck, we won't need General Hamilton at all."

He left with a last glance towards the vent shaft. "Our lovely is still there," he said to Tranis as he walked out. "Give her a good show."

Degorsk chuckled. "While you tempt the sweetling, I'll be overseeing the start of the Mataras' re-education."

Tranis pulled his knee-high boots off. "Imdikos have all the fun."

Degorsk's gaze flicked momentarily to the vent. "I think you'll be having fun too. Don't forget to sleep." He left, making the door slide closed behind him.

Tranis stood and crossed the room in a single step. Positioning himself directly across from the vent opening, he slowly pulled his formsuit off.

*Are you watching, Cassidy? As I undress are you thinking about all the things Lidon said, the fantasies he shared that aroused you?*

Baring his chest, arms, shoulders and abdomen, Tranis paused to stretch, making his muscles ripple. He heard a soft rustle from the vent, and her scent, a musky-salty reminder of Kalquor's seaside, wafted to him. He conquered the urge to smile. She was a curious little thing.

He inspected his chiseled pectoral muscles and the double rows of bumps making up his stomach. He'd never been so aware of his own body. Running his hands over his torso, he imagined Cassidy's dainty little fingers on him, exploring him all over.

He hesitated before peeling the formsuit from his lower body. What would she think when she saw the greatest difference between Kalquorian and Earther anatomies? Would she be frightened? Repulsed? Or would it excite her to know what a man of his species could offer her pleasures no Earther could?

He pulled the formsuit down, bending over double to free his ankles of the clinging fabric. Leaving the formsuit lying on the floor, he slowly straightened, revealing his naked body to the girl in the ventilation conduit.

An intake of breath rewarded him as he stood exposed. But whether or not she liked what she saw, he couldn't guess.

He crossed the narrow space to her bed and lay down upon it. Her scent hung heavy in the linens, and he grew hard again. His calves hung over the end of the small bed, and he shifted, trying to find a comfortable position. He finally gave up and closed his eyes to wait for whatever Cassidy chose to do next.

A soft, sliding sound informed him of her cautious approach to the vent's opening. Her quick breath drawing in and out was easily audible to his sharp ears now, and Tranis imagined her looking down on him, her eyes taking in what might be her first live naked male.

His hands crept to grip his erect flesh, made more excited by the girl's voyeurism. Natural lubrication made him slick, easy to stimulate. He rubbed himself in long, deliberate strokes, squeezing the base for extra pleasurable sensation. He groaned low in his throat, taking delight in knowing she watched him. Her breathing grew louder, and the aroma of female grew heavier in the air.

The sound and smell of her arousal drove him wild, and he worked himself hard, gasping with oncoming orgasm. His gratification wasn't long in coming, and he shouted as hot juices spurted from his throbbing cock to warm his fist.

As spasms racked his groin, he thought of the sweet pale girl hiding above him, watching him succumb to the greatest pleasure known to man and not knowing she was the cause for it.

*I hope you enjoyed the show, Cassidy. Very soon, you'll be a participant instead of a spectator.*

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy watched the handsome alien male strain on her bed, whitish fluid pulsing from the larger of his two glistening sexes. He groaned as he gripped each of the appendages, still rubbing himself quickly.

Two sex organs! Her breath came quickly as she watched him pleasure the profane bullet-shaped flesh. The analytical part of her mind noted with almost clinical interest that the ends of his penises tapered rather than blooming in mushroom shapes like the pictures in her dirty book. But why on Earth did he have two of them?

Her hands were busy between her legs. Overcome by the vision of the naked alien, seeing his devil flesh exposed to her, her body had clamored for the sweet release he now enjoyed. Her fingers rubbed the hard pearl of her sex, and she shuddered as warmth built in her loins.

Two sexes, shaded slightly darker than the rest of his skin. One for small women, the other for larger perhaps? She couldn't imagine taking the bigger of the two, situated

in front of its neighbor, into her body. And besides, if he used the massive length to breach her sex, the smaller might slip into her most taboo orifice.

Her pleasure nub sent shocks of desire through her nether regions, as if the idea of anal penetration excited her. No, it was the bliss of her touch. She'd never want such a profane, sinful act. She couldn't. Impossible.

The alien relaxed as the last pulses of bliss eased. She stared at the milky fluid on the back of his hand, slowly seeping to his carved abdomen. Only the bigger of the two penises had emitted the man's juices. Some pictures of her book had shown women taking male sex organs in their mouths. She wondered if the long-ago lovers had tasted the honey that erupted from their men.

She wondered what the Kalquorian below her tasted like.

A bolt of rapture seized her lower regions, and waves of bliss rolled through her belly. She bit back the cries fighting to escape her clenched lips as climax gripped her body. If he heard her, he might catch her. And if he caught her, he would force one or both of his thick members into her.

Another blast of ecstasy, and this time a whimper did squirm out of her throat. She shuddered in the clutch of agonized delight, her mind conjuring an image of the massive alien holding her down and taking what he wanted from her helpless body.

She didn't know how long the spasms held her prisoner. It felt like an eternity before she could gather her thoughts. The moment she regained coherence, she looked at the reclining alien's face.

His eyes were still closed, his mouth curled in a smile. Had he heard her small sounds of pleasure? Or did he simply wear the expression of a man in the aftermath of carnal delight?

She'd seen how fast the aliens moved. Lidon, despite the limp that slowed him, had come within a fraction of an inch of catching her. This man had no physical limitations that she could discern. If he suddenly lunged at the vent with that Kalquorian quickness, even the time spent pulling the cover free might not slow him down enough to keep him from snagging her.

Her hands slippery from her juices, she backed quietly towards the main conduit. As she moved away from her cell and the man occupying it, she thought she heard a deep chuckle.

Once she'd gained the narrow confines of the main shaft, she paused to consider. Her cache of snacks, what she'd originally dared the danger of capture for, was gone. So was her reader. She warmed to think of the aliens turning it on and discovering the last book viewed, but that bit of embarrassment faded in the face of her most pressing concern. She was hungry and thirsty, and though she knew she could survive several days without food, she couldn't trust the aliens would leave before she had to drink.

A far-off scream interrupted her thoughts as it echoed through the ventilation system. Momentarily distracted from worrying about food and water, Cassidy set off towards the end of the building where the infirmary was located.

As she crept down the long passage, she mentally ticked off the names of the aspirants' cells she passed, the wider shafts allowing light in to see by. Susan. Amy. Zaneta. Marci. Darci. Brenda.

Cassidy paused. Brenda was a depressed 14-year old girl who sent frequent messages home begging her parents to bring her back to Earth. Impossibly rich and busy with unending social engagements that sent them traveling the world, her mother and father constantly put her off. They salved their consciences by sending their lonely daughter lavish care packages filled with expensive soaps, exotic perfumes, and foods from around the planet.

Cassidy's stomach growled at the thought of Brenda's stash of provisions, jealously guarded by the forlorn girl. She shared with no one, and though other aspirants grumbled about her selfishness, Cassidy understood her motives. Given so little love, Brenda clutched desperately at every tiny crumb of her parents' regard.

Looking down the shaft towards Brenda's cell, Cassidy noticed how much of the light was blocked off. Like Cassidy, Brenda had taken to hiding her goodies in the vent.

Feeling better about her situation, Cassidy hurried down the wider shaft. She opened the first box she came to and discovered small cooling containers inside. Wishing she had more light to see by, she fumbled one open and sniffed. Something hinted softly of berries, and she cautiously licked the frozen surface of whatever she'd found.

She moaned her delight. Gelato, no doubt straight from Italy. The frozen treat was heavenly, and Cassidy lost no time in devouring the entire pint-sized container.

The worst of her hunger sated, she explored and nibbled her way to a full stomach. It was mostly sweets and salty snacks, but she didn't mind. She had no way to heat or cook food. At least she wouldn't starve trying to wait the Kalquorians out. She also found a case of fruit-flavored sparkling water, so the most important issue of hydration was covered.

As she chewed on a piece of sugar-coated Turkish delight, a woman's scream ricocheted through the ventilation system. Cassidy cringed. She'd kept hidden deep in the main shaft after the dangerous Lidon's near capture of her. She'd been too frightened to investigate what had happened to the other women.

Were the Kalquorians torturing the aspirants and sisters right now? Worse still, were the women being raped by the deviant aliens?

Fear, the need to do something to help the captive women, and morbid curiosity warred for control over Cassidy. Another desperate cry echoed through the shaft, deciding her. She had to find out if she could help the others escape. At the very least, should she be lucky enough to escape the Kalquorians' invasion, it was her duty to report everything that had happened on Europa to the authorities.

Thinking about the authorities made Cassidy wonder for the millionth time what had become of her grandfather. Her stomach churned uneasily as she wondered over his fate. She didn't want him hurt. But at the same time, he'd marooned her on Europa. He would have married her off to an old, old man, an equally unpleasant form of incarceration.

*You imprisoned me. Now you're getting a taste of it. Eye for an eye and all that.*

She resumed her journey to the infirmary, but as she passed another aspirant's cell, the sounds of moans and weeping froze her. Someone was in there, an Earther woman.



It was Tina's cell. Tina was Cassidy's age, a quiet redheaded beauty liked by everyone. Her voice rose in desperate supplication, the tone pleading. A deeper voice answered her in a soothing tenor.

Her heart pounding, Cassidy entered the shaft that led to the cell. Tina's words became more distinct as she crept closer.

"Don't, please don't. It's a sin."

Soft sounds followed. Another, low-voiced murmur.

"I can't. They'll execute me for this!"

The other voice faded in and out, the speaker keeping to barely above a whisper. "No one...safe, my Matara...give yourself...your desire."

"For the love of Jesus, Mohammed and Moses, I beg you."

Her ears ringing with Tina's sobs, Cassidy eased her way close enough to peer into the cell, where a scent reminiscent of cinnamon teased her nostrils.

Her eyes widened. Tina's bed had been moved to the middle of the floor, and the young woman lay naked on it. Kneeling on either side of the bed were two nude Kalquorians, each one holding her wrists pinned next to her head on her thin pillow. Muscled arms wrapped around her thighs, holding her open for a third naked alien who crouched between her legs. Their skin was startlingly dark next to Tina's, who was as pale as Cassidy with a scattering of freckles on her shoulders.

One Kalquorian, his narrow face eager, slowly licked the side of Tina's neck, cleaning the blood from two small puncture wounds. The alien on the other side, his expression tender, stroked her small round breasts, tracing the pink areolas with a fingertip. He bent to tease the hardened nipples with his tongue.

The third, his mustache and goatee lending his face a dangerous air, fondled her devil flesh. Tina's pubic hair was as shockingly red as the hair on her head. Moisture glistened on the parted rose-colored lips of her sex. Her hips rose to greet the man's touch even as she whimpered, "Please, please God, forgive me." Her breath came in harsh gasps.

The Kalquorian's finger entered Tina, and she jerked with a cry. "No forgiveness is required," he said, his voice soothing. "This is what your beautiful body was made for."

His finger slipped in and out, slick with her juices. Tina's moans filled the cell, and Cassidy's sex clenched at the sight. For one wild moment, she wished she could trade places with her friend, especially when the Kalquorian added a second thick finger to the sweet assault.

"No," Tina groaned, even as her body betrayed her. The Kalquorian playing with her breasts sucked one mound deep into his mouth. Her head lolled on the pillow, her eyes unfocused. The third Kalquorian captured her mouth with his.

"Yes Matara," the main Kalquorian said, pulling his fingers free of her wet core. He grabbed his two sex organs, pressing the tips to her orifices. Cassidy's eyes widened and her breath caught.

His hips rocked slightly, and the bullet-shaped penises pierced Tina's womanhood and anus. The turgid flesh disappeared into her little by little, the man taking his time as

he defiled the helpless Earther. When the Kalquorian kissing her pulled back, Tina's mouth curled in a euphoric smile. She sighed, and the sound was pure bliss.

Only once did her obvious pleasure fade. Momentary pain brought a low wail from her lips, and the aliens murmured apologies, the two holding her prisoner soothing her with caresses and kisses. The man impaling her with his iron flesh whispered, "It is all right now, my beauty. The pain of the first time is brief and will not trouble you again."

Tina's grimace faded, and rapture again took her over. She now accepted the aliens' kisses eagerly, and her moans took on a joyful tone as the Kalquorian moved in and out of her, their flesh making wet sounds that prodded Cassidy's womb to flex with desire.

Cassidy watched it all, saw Tina's body tense just before her wild cries announced an ecstasy she could only wonder at. The Kalquorian corrupting her tensed as she bucked wildly beneath him, his muscles bunched and veins standing out an instant before he roared his own release, rutting hard against her slight body. When they quieted, he traded places with one of the other Kalquorians.

It happened all over again. The alien gently entered Tina, his initial movements slow and careful, gradually building to a frenzy as passion overtook him. Tina moaned and gasped, her elated expression telling Cassidy she welcomed the sin. She screamed anew as her immoral flesh betrayed her once more, her cries a bright counterpoint to the Kalquorian's howls of completion.

Then the third man took his turn despoiling the girl, with the same results. Nothing Cassidy had seen in *The Kama Sutra* had hinted at this tempestuous riot of flesh penetrating flesh, the wildness, the fury of the sex act. She was left stunned and aching, aroused and frightened all at once.

As the group calmed from their wicked play, Tina's morality returned. She sobbed and resisted as two of the men gathered her in their arms while the third, the last who had taken his pleasure with her, rummaged in a hard-shelled pack. He brought out a pouch, much like the military emergency food rations Cassidy had seen Earther troops carry. He tore it open and waved it in front of Tina's face.

He said, "You will eat now."

She shook her head, struggling against her captors. Through her tears she cried, "I won't. Let me go."

The man who'd stolen her virginity nodded to his companion, holding Tina's head still to his chest. The second man brushed her red hair from her neck. His head reared back, and Cassidy shuddered to see long, thin fangs appear behind his square teeth. He darted forward, and sank the fangs in Tina's neck near the first set of puncture wounds.

Tina's high-pitched wail brought tears to Cassidy's eyes. The girl sounded lost in the abyss of Hell.

*Nothing I can do. Damn it, I can't help her! God, how could You do this to us?*

After a few moments, the Kalquorian released his bite. Narrow streams of blood ran down Tina's throat, and he licked the fresh punctures clean, as he had the first set.

Tina relaxed in the arms of her captors, and when the Kalquorian offered her the food pouch again, she accepted with a contented smile, letting him feed her.

“You are a good girl. You did very well, Tina,” the alien praised. “After you have eaten we will begin again, and it will feel even better than before.”

Cassidy’s senses were in overdrive, threatening to corrupt her just as thoroughly as Tina had been. Overwhelmed by aching desire, she settled in the vent shaft to watch for a bit longer.

## Chapter Four

Tranis walked into the convent's infirmary. The sight of naked Earther women bound to the beds and suspended in the air by hover cuffs stopped him short. Seeing over twenty helpless female bodies of every size and shape took his breath away. Even more were being kept in another building, awaiting their turn at re-education. His formsuit betrayed his sudden excitement, excitement shared by the other dozen Kalquorians in the room. The spicy scent of their arousal hung heavy in the air.

With the exception of Lidon and Degorsk conferring in the middle of the room, the rest of the men engaged in various forms of pleasuring the groaning women. In some cases, mouths and hands worked to arouse the Earthers. In others, turgid Kalquorian flesh slipped in and out of trembling wet sexes. The expressions of the women receiving such attention were euphoric, their throats bleeding from the telltale punctures of the Kalquorian bites that sent an intoxicating substance into their bodies.

Two Nobeks attended a woman hanging in the air, hover cuffs stretching her limbs in an X-shape. One of the men was on his knees and licked her secret flesh with long, sinuous strokes while the second spanked her with an open palm. The sharp cracks punctuated her eager moans as she writhed helpless in her bonds.

His eyes filled with the delightful scene, Tranis joined his clanmates. They too sported erections, the bulges at their crotches pushing at the stretchy fabric of their formsuits.

"You've wasted no time starting the Mataras' re-education," Tranis said to Degorsk. He looked over the women not being seduced, most of whom were strapped immobile to the beds. A few watched the other females receive their lessons, their expressions varying from aroused to horrified. Most lay with their eyes screwed tightly shut, tears creeping from beneath their lids.

"I saw no point in delaying. The transport that's coming for them is some distance away. Fortunately it will have several psychologists on board to continue the work en route to Kalquor. They'll have nine months to finish turning these women around to healthier attitudes before reaching home."

"The transport's not part of the invasion force? When will it arrive?"

Lidon answered. "The closest with a medical complement is five weeks away. Since the fleet is only one week away, another ship will take over guarding Europa once we've finished our assignment. We won't have to wait on the transport."

Tranis watched a smiling Nobek approach a suspended woman with a thin stiff strap. She sobbed while his free hand stroked her sex, shaking her head violently. He murmured something to her then swung the strap. It struck her buttocks with an echoing crack, and she jerked in the cuffs, the terror in her face chased away by ecstasy.

Tranis swallowed, imagining pretty little Cassidy in the nun's place, learning the delights of pain mixed with desire. "Isn't it a little early for discipline?"

Degorsk crooked a grin. "Some of these scourge themselves as part of their religious practice. They receive pleasure from suffering."

Lidon blew out a heavy breath, his gaze riveted on the pink streaks the strap left on the woman's buttocks. "That's a sweet gift for a clan."

Shaking his head to free himself of the spell of his surroundings, Degorsk said to Tranis, "I have news on the Earther captain. He'd been tampered with."

"Tampered with? In what way?"

"There was a small implant in his heart that was set to explode if non-Earther drugs were introduced to his system."

"Explode?"

"A very small detonation. Just enough to fatally damage his heart." Degorsk sighed heavily. "I had the techs deep scan General Hamilton, and he has a similar device implanted in his heart as well."

Lidon's face darkened. "These Mataras were sedated with our drugs."

"They haven't been compromised. I'm assuming only Earthers with critical tactical knowledge have been implanted."

"The captain of a courier transport should hardly have important information."

"He knew the codes to get in and out of the security grid. That might have been enough."

Lidon growled a curse. "Can the general's implant be removed?"

"Such an attempt would also set off the device."

Lidon exchanged a frown with Tranis. "The Earthers guard their secrets well."

Tranis thought. "What of classic interrogation methods? Will that do damage?"

"Thanks for letting me give you some good news." The Imdiko gave him an encouraging smile. "The device is set up specifically to react against foreign chemical agents and removal. Normal interrogation should be safe, including physical inducements."

Lidon didn't look optimistic. "He won't bow easily to standard methods, not even if pain is involved."

Tranis blew out a heavy breath. "We have no choice. You and I will begin intense interrogation with non-injurious pain components."

Degorsk grimaced. "Pain inflictors are so barbaric."

"At least he won't be physically hurt."

"The emotional toll can be more harmful."

"We have to end this war."

A low beep interrupted their burgeoning argument. Lidon yanked his locator from his belt and studied it. A smile hinted at his lips. "Our Matara is here."

Tranis darted a quick glance towards the vent opening. "Is she? I wonder what she thinks of our re-education center."

Lidon watched the readout for a moment. "She's not in a hurry to leave. She's taking a long, slow look at the fun." He tucked the locator back on his belt. "I have a plan of capture, but a lot will depend on her curiosity."

Tranis resisted the urge to look towards the vent again. "Hold that thought, Lidon." He raised his voice to address his staff. "Everyone's attention, please."

All Kalquorians paused in their activities to attend their captain. The women sagged in their bonds; some in relief, others with moans of incompleteness.

"Crew, our one escapee is viewing this operation right now. I would take it as a personal favor if you'd give our voyeur a good show."

Grins all around him answered better than the resounding, "Yes, Captain!" They eagerly went back to work, and the females' groans filled the room.

"I need food. You can tell me your plan while I eat, Lidon." With a last look around at the erotic scene, Tranis led his clan out of the infirmary.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy barely noticed Lidon and his companions leave. Her stunned gaze took in the aspirants and nuns bound to beds and suspended in the air, some of them recipients of the Kalquorians' immoral attentions.

One Kalquorian took the center of the room. His clinging green-trimmed formsuit showed his erections to advantage. He spoke loudly in his own language, apparently addressing the rest of the room. A few women screamed, and Cassidy saw what they reacted to: the sudden appearance of fangs in the Kalquorians' upper jaws.

*They must be hinged, like rattlesnake fangs.* Several women were bitten, like Tina had been. Necks, shoulders, thighs and breasts were punctured, resulting in cries of pain.

The Kalquorian standing in the middle of the infirmary spoke in English. "There is no reason to fear the bite, Mataras. You will learn the intoxicant from our fangs brings you euphoria. The instant of pain is your entrance to pleasure. Feel it filling your bodies."

As he spoke, the room filled with moans and sighs. The women being bitten relaxed in their bonds, and their faces suffused with bliss.

"It's a sin! Fight it, all of you!"

The voice of Sister Bernadette rose above the mingled groans and sobs of the bitten and frightened. The strictest of the nuns, she had kept the aspirants in a thrall of terror, more so than even the stern Mother Superior.

She hung suspended in a corner, her head high despite her nudity and the cuffs that held her spread-eagled in the air. Her body was thin, her breasts small but perfectly round. Had her expression ever relaxed into a smile, she might have been lovely.

The Kalquorian who had spoken approached her with slow, deliberate steps. "Your god made you for sexual pleasures, my dear, both to provide and receive."

Bernadette's lips thinned as he neared, but she showed no fear. "You lie. Falling prey to weaknesses of the flesh is evil."

He stroked the brown waves of her hair that fell below her shoulders. "We will show you your true nature, my beauty." To the rest of the room he announced, "If you would give me your attention, I will train you on some of the more sensitive parts of the Earther female anatomy."

With a command in Kalquorian, the bonds holding Bernadette carried her through the air, placing her at the center of the wall facing the room. He followed her and addressed the attentive Kalquorians. "Place two fingers inside the women," he

instructed. He shoved his fingers in his mouth, wetting them. "Palm facing forward. I will demonstrate."

Bernadette's muscles tensed as the Kalquorian inserted his long, thick fingers into her sex. "Slowly and gently," he continued, pressing into her unwilling body. "Later some of these will find they enjoy pleasures of the rougher, more vigorous variety, but for now go easy."

A chorus of moans rose as the other Kalquorians copied his movements on the intoxicated women. Cassidy watched many of them arch against the strong, brown hands, inviting the aliens' violations.

"For your souls, resist these monsters!" Bernadette screamed. She writhed in her bonds, trying to escape the gentle penetration of her tormentor. He murmured in her ear, effortlessly continuing the invasion until his fingers were fully submerged within her.

He turned back to his waiting audience. "Work your fingers in and out as you would your penises during intercourse. Again, keep your movements gentle. What we are aiming for is to get their lubrication flowing and heighten their pleasure."

Ignoring Bernadette's struggles, the Kalquorian moved his fingers in and out with exaggerated motions to show the rest of his men what to do. Cassidy licked her lips to see him work the soft pink folds with assurance.

"You will note a hard nub of flesh at the front of the sex's lips. This is called a clitoris, and it contains many sensitive nerves. If you will flick or rub this gently with your thumb, it will produce pleasurable sensations for the Mataras. This will enhance the lubrication as well."

The room erupted in groans from the women as the men carried out his instructions. Delighted chuckles from the Kalquorians joined the sounds of bliss.

Cassidy's hand slipped inside her panties, the ache of her own sex too much to bear. She rocked against her fingers, pretending it was a Kalquorian's hand massaging her helpless flesh. She bit her lip to keep from moaning as pleasure rose in her belly.

Bernadette sobbed, her efforts to escape the teacher's fondling no longer continuous, but coming in fits and starts. Cassidy watched in shock as the Kalquorians' fingers emerged from her sheath glistening with thick honey. Righteous, unbending Sister Bernadette was enjoying carnal pleasures? It was unthinkable!

"Now rub your fingertips along the front wall inside the sex. You are looking for a mass of nerve endings. You will know it when you find it—"

Bernadette wailed, her entire body tensing. Her head fell back, and she jerked as if in seizure.

"And there is yours, my pet," the Kalquorian chuckled. More cries rang throughout the room. "Do not fight it," he coaxed Bernadette, his hand working faster against her.

She groaned. Her hips lifted and fell, lifted and fell as she moved to pleasure her flesh with the Kalquorian's knowing fingers.

"Good girl. Very good. Why would your creator design you thus if not for pleasure?"

"Please." Bernadette's thin whisper was nearly lost in the growing cries of the other women.

“That is not an answer.” The teacher withdrew his fingers and stepped back. He put the wet digits in his mouth, sucking them. She sobbed, thrusting her sex towards him in desperation.

He grasped the crotch of his straining formsuit, opening it and freeing the eager, wet flesh. Bernadette’s eyes widened, and she tried to hide her face against her shoulder.

The Kalquorian came to her, pressing his muscular body to her slight, shuddering frame. One hand clasped her buttocks, shifting her pelvis upward. The other hand worked between them, positioning his sexes. “You were meant for this.”

“Please,” Bernadette whimpered, and Cassidy wasn’t sure if she was begging to be released or taken.

The Kalquorian’s hips rocked against her, and Bernadette cried out, her head falling back. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She tensed and cried out again.

“It is all right. You were made for this pleasure. Say it, my beauty.” His buttocks flexed as he moved.

Cassidy knew he was inside Bernadette now, his sexes buried deep in her flesh. Her fingers slipped between the lips of her own sex, finding the opening that begged to be breached. She watched the Kalquorians thrust against the women and listened to their delighted moans fill the air. Loudest of all was Bernadette, her pinched features relaxed with bliss as desire took her far from her vows.

“You were made for this pleasure. Say it,” the Kalquorian demanded.

If Sister Bernadette had succumbed to lust, what hope did Cassidy have of resisting her most evil desires? What was the point of fighting when the most harshly devout of God’s followers had fallen from grace?

Cassidy’s finger slipped into her core, penetrating the tight softness of her womanhood. She jerked against the delight of feeling flesh within her, of the yawning emptiness finally breached. Her finger slid in and out of the grasping sheath, her palm rubbing against her clitoris to send sweet shocks of pleasure tumbling through her.

“You were made for pleasure.” The Kalquorian was insistent.

Cassidy watched Bernadette’s last bit of resolve crumble as he drove harder against her. Her moans were continuous, but she managed to gasp, “I was made for pleasure.”

His hips bucked faster. “Say it again.”

Her cries grew louder. “I was made for pleasure.”

“Again.”

Cassidy’s palm rubbed harder against the straining nub, and she plunged a second finger inside as Bernadette’s wail rose to a crescendo. “I was made for pleasure!”

The Kalquorian’s voice was an animal growl, and he rutted furiously. “Again!”

“I was made for pleasure!” Bernadette screamed and Cassidy whispered at once.

Cassidy didn’t see Bernadette reach orgasm, nor the howling Kalquorian. Her own climax burst through her, the strongest she’d known thus far, and she bent double as her belly clenched in ecstatic waves. Her sex pulled at her fingers, hungrily milking them for the seed they couldn’t provide. Only instinct kept her from crying out loud, though a part of her wished she could be captured, held prisoner, and ravished by the debauched alien men.



## Chapter Five

Tranis choked down the remains of his food pouch as he and his clan gathered in Cassidy's cell. Nutrient-rich and filling, the things were still an abomination on the tongue. No one had time to go to the convent's kitchen to cook real food. Even the poor captured Mataras were forced to eat the tasteless, gritty emergency rations. Hopefully Tranis' relief would be able to provide better sustenance for the women.

He and Degorsk sat on the narrow bed in the escapee's cell while Lidon leaned against one wall, smiling at his locator. "Cassidy's spending a long time watching the re-education. She can't be too upset with what she's seeing. With her voyeuristic tendencies, I suspect that's where we'll catch her."

Tranis sighed. "We can't spend much more time here. You need to concentrate on decoding the Earther transport's security matrix." He looked at Degorsk. "You have to find a way past that implant in Hamilton's heart, and I need to interrogate him. As much as I would like to chase the girl down, we have a war to end."

Lidon grinned. "We don't have to chase her if my plan works. I'm going to rig every auxiliary shaft that leads to the various rooms in this building. I've already done this one." He raised his eyes to the vent cover over Tranis' head. "All she has to do is enter one to trigger—"

His locator beeped, interrupting him. He checked the readout. "She's leaving the re-education area and heading this way."

Degorsk smirked. "Maybe she's hoping Tranis is back in her bed. I'm sure she liked what she saw." He nudged the Dramok captain, wagging his eyebrows.

Tranis allowed himself a smile of his own. He remembered the tiny moan coming from the vent as he'd stimulated himself to climax. "I hope she did. She'll be looking at me for the rest of her life. What kind of trap did you set?"

Lidon held up his hand, studying the locator with rapt attention. His voice was hushed. "She's nearly here. Let's see if she is coming back for another look at you."

They sat quietly for the next minute. Lidon raised his gaze to the vent opening then looked back down at the locator. He spoke, his voice so low that Tranis was forced to read the Nobek's lips. "She's just outside the auxiliary shaft now. She's stopped. Come on, Cassidy. Take another peek. That's it, little Earther, a little closer..."

He stood up straight, clamping the locator to his belt. A fierce grin lit his face. "She triggered the gas. She can't back out far enough to get out of my reach now. Three-two-one. And it's nap time for our little girl."

Tranis and Degorsk stood, looking at the opening overhead. Lidon stepped up on the bed where Tranis had been sitting and yanked the vent cover off. He jumped into the narrow shaft, and slid out of sight. A thump, a few taps of movement, and he slid back out, pulling the small unconscious Earther out with him.

Tranis and Degorsk eagerly grabbed at her, helping Lidon lay her on the bed. Her hair, so pale it was nearly white, was long enough to pillow her torso. Her face, calm in the repose of sleep, was lovelier than Tranis remembered. Round and childlike, she was the picture of innocence.

His voice husky with emotion, Tranis asked, "How long will she be unconscious?"

Degorsk sounded as moved. "Only a few minutes. The sedative gas is mild and Lidon's trap contained a small amount."

"Let's prepare our new Matara."

The men removed the heavy dress only to find a lighter, airier sheath beneath it. "Too many damned clothes," Lidon growled.

"Not anymore." They tugged the second dress free too, then the bra and panties. At last she lay exposed to them.

She was rounder than many of the women they'd captured, much more to Tranis' tastes than her skinnier counterparts. He couldn't resist touching her softness, letting his dark brown hands sink gently into the malleable flesh of her thighs, belly and breasts. His clanmates also caressed her, their eyes drinking in her white unspoiled skin, her round young breasts, and the furry vee of her sex. The men's spicy arousal scent rose all around them. The agreeable ache in Tranis' groin made him eager for her to wake so they could start her on her new path in life.

Cassidy whimpered, moving beneath their grasping hands, and her eyes fluttered. Tranis' body thrummed with new tension as she regained consciousness.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy had just become aware of hands on her naked body when sharp pain stabbed into her neck. She cried out, pushing against the warm body bent over hers.

"Easy," someone said. "I told you I'd catch you, my pet."

She knew that deep voice, and her eyes flew open as the Kalquorian's fangs withdrew and he sat up. The biter was Lidon's companion who wore his waist-long hair in a braid, and he sat on the edge of the bed next to her. Lidon himself and their other companion, the one Cassidy had watched pleasuring himself in this very room, stood by the bed. Their hands roamed her naked body. Her breath caught to be touched, and her guts flexed in reaction.

A strange languor took hold of her limbs, making it difficult to resist. She cried out and tried to shove them away, struggling against them. They easily thwarted her efforts, pressing her back down on her back and pinning her ankles and hands. After a few moments of writhing to no avail, Cassidy's heavy body fell still. She panted from fading fear and exertion, her eyes wide as she looked at her captors.

"Hello, Cassidy," the biggest Kalquorian said. She shivered at his deep voice, at the way his purple cat's eyes looked at her. "My name is Tranis. I've been looking forward to meeting you."

Surprise and euphoria collaborated to calm the last of her weak struggles. She stared at Tranis. Wow, he was even more handsome up close. Her insides flexed again.

"You know my name. Oh that's right; I told Lidon," she said, feeling the warmth of his hands on her shoulders. She thought of how nice they would feel on her breasts. Arousal added to the intoxicant coursing through her veins.

No, no, no. She was supposed to resist.

*But I feel so floaty and nice. And they're bigger than me. How am I supposed to fight such large, strong men? Just look at those muscles.* She lay very quiet now, waiting to see what they'd do next.

"We know a great deal about you."

Lidon, who held her wrists pinned to either side of her head added, "We're ready to learn more." The heat in his stare made her nether regions clench harder than ever. She moaned, making him smile.

The third man who held her ankles spoke up. "I'm Degorsk." Despite the strength in his hands, his grip on her was gentle. The kindness on his face was at odds with him holding her nude body down. Although, tell the truth and shame the devil, being pinned beneath the three men was nice. Cassidy didn't feel they were being cruel at all.

Some small part of her muddled brain whispered she shouldn't be doing this, lying naked in front of men. She'd go to Hell for such sin. "Where are my clothes?"

Degorsk answered with a gentle smile that warmed her all the way to her toes. "Don't worry. We'll join you in your nakedness." He glanced at her companions. "She's intoxicated enough to let loose."

They released her and began peeling away their black formsuits. She lay still as if hypnotized, watching as each superbly muscled torso came into view. Her sinful flesh flexed at the sight of bulging arms, chiseled chests and carved abs. "It's a sin," she croaked automatically, barely registering her own words.

"According to your faith, it's not wrong if you're married," Tranis reassured her as he yanked his boots off. "You're our Matara now, which is the same as being our wife. My clan claims you."

He stripped away the lower part of his formsuit, and his glorious twin set of penises came into view between his thickly muscled thighs. "I don't understand," Cassidy mumbled, unable to tear her eyes from the amazing sight. "How can we be married?"

"All will be clear soon enough." Lidon also stood over her naked, his body every bit as delicious as Tranis' until she looked at his right leg. Her heart lurched in sympathy for the alien male as the terribly scarred flesh captured her attention. Livid white slashes created a patchwork quilt of flesh overlaying strangely lumped and hollowed muscle patterns that didn't jibe with the sleek beauty of his left leg. No wonder he limped. She wondered what had happened to injure him so badly.

She reached to touch his thigh, running gentle fingertips over the devastated limb. "Poor Lidon. Are you in pain?"

His hand closed over hers. He moved her hand from his thigh to the larger of his two sexes, rubbing her palm over the wet bullet-shaped organ. She gasped to feel his heat. "It feels better if you touch me here. Any pain I feel is forgotten."

The moisture seeping from her sex flowed faster. His devil flesh was hot and felt like velvet over steel. A scent, like the sharp tang of cinnamon, washed over her. She thought of what she'd seen in Tina's cell and the infirmary, and Cassidy had a hard time catching her breath. "Are we really married?"

Tranis crawled onto the bed, laying his massive body over hers, keeping his weight balanced on his elbows and knees. "You belong to us in every way possible, Cassidy."

His moist sexes lay heavily on her belly, and she shivered despite the warmth of him covering her. "I can't be married to three men. Three aliens."

"We can discuss it later. For now, let's celebrate our union."

Lidon released her hand as Tranis moved his legs between hers. Her breath caught to feel the folds of her sex open a little as her thighs moved apart to accommodate the change in position. The tip of his penises touched her there, and arousal so intense she cried out washed over her.

"You bit me," she groaned, making one last stand for her integrity, glad she would certainly fail. "You drug women with the bite and make them want to be immoral."

God help her, she wanted to be very immoral with these men.

Tranis chuckled, his breath warm on her face. "The intoxicant helps erase all inhibitions. It's good to hear you wish to shed a bit of your so-called virtue."

His lips closed over hers. The kiss was light, almost dainty for such a Goliath of a man. Every cell of her being riveted on that hot, wet warmth. Her belly felt swollen from need. Her mouth moved against his as her body clamored for any and all contact she could get from the alien. Without thinking, she ran her hands over his shoulders, amazed at the breadth. Her hips bucked forward, the movement causing the tips of his penises to enter her vagina and anus. She froze at the inch of infiltration.

He broke the kiss to stare at her, the purple depths of his eyes drowning pools. "I am inside you, my Matara. Your innocence is lost."

Cassidy fought for a sense of righteousness, for the strength to resist. Morality was nowhere to be found. Her body clamored to be filled by Tranis. The bliss of his nakedness touching hers, the joy of his kiss, feeling him hard and ready to claim her virginity, all made her want to succumb to him, sin or not. She balanced for a moment, caught equally between the dictates of her religion and the passion of her desires.

Tranis' mouth descended on hers again, his tongue sweeping in to twine about hers. At the same moment, he pressed his groin against her, pushing his hard lengths further into her passages. The electric sensation overwhelmed every thought of decency she possessed. Her arms and legs wrapped around the Kalquorian, pulling him closer, deeper.

Her nether regions ached as her sheath and anus stretched to accommodate the thick, alien organs, but it was a wonderful ache, one that filled her belly with delicious pleasure. As Tranis tasted the soft insides of her mouth, he steadily filled her, making the rapture swell ever greater within her body. A shock of pain reverberated through her as his slow invasion tore the thin membrane inside. Cassidy cried out, pulling her lips from his.

“Easy,” he soothed, holding very still for a moment. “The pain is done. It will never trouble you again.”

Her cry died into soft whimpers as the brief agony faded. The eager delight of being penetrated returned, eclipsing the momentary anguish.

He kissed her again, and she rubbed her tongue against his, enjoying the scratchy roughness of the flesh. Everything about Tranis was a delight; the rock-hard muscles of his body, the soft waves of his hair she buried her hands in, and the long, rigid staves he pushed into her needful flesh.

When at last his groin met hers, he paused, letting her enjoy the feeling of their joining. “Is it good, Cassidy?” he asked.

“So much more than good,” she sighed. “I never knew anything could feel this wonderful.”

“We will show you even more. Things you never imagined possible,” he whispered, moving in and out of her with long, steady strokes.

She gasped to feel the lengths of him work her tight sheaths. Arching beneath her lover, she felt every delicious inch of him taking her to new heights of dizzying pleasure. *The Kama Sutra* hadn’t hinted at this glorious nirvana of sensation. Not even close.

Every plunge he made into her body enhanced the warm, ticklish delight in her belly, building bigger, more exciting. It was a torture too, and she thought if it went on too long it might drive her mad. The exquisite torment grew ever brighter, and she moaned as if vocalizing might release some of the pressure.

Tranis caught his breath at the sound of her bliss. His thrusts became more powerful, driving deep into her, making the agonizing thrill in her loins grow even larger. She tossed her head from side to side, wanting him to stop before she exploded. Unable to form words, she could only keep a high, wavering tone. It felt so good, this terrible rapture, but it was too much...too much...

A thunderclap of ecstasy reverberated throughout her body, and waves of physical elation pounded against the walls of her womb, as if the sensation fought to escape the confines of her very soul. She screamed as the pleasure surged and waned, surged and waned, carrying her beyond the bounds of every joy she’d ever known in her short life. Beyond her cries she heard Tranis’ low roar. The pulse of the flesh embedded in hers joined her convulsions, and they clung together as desire engulfed them both.

The heady swells slowly receded, leaving behind ripples of delight. Cassidy came back to herself to find Tranis smiling down on her. “Jesus, Mohammed and Moses,” she breathed, dimly aware taking the Holy Trinity’s names in vain was a sin. “That was amazing.”

“Indeed it was,” he chuckled and kissed her with thorough sweetness. “And now another husband needs your blessing.”

“Oh,” was all Cassidy could think to say as Tranis slipped from her and Degorsk took his place. The combination of the intoxicant’s continued euphoria and the Imdiko’s ready smile made her easy with anticipation.

“Hello again, Matara,” he whispered, his gaze drinking in her face as he settled over her. His braid fell to one side of their bodies.

“Hi.” She picked up the plait, amazed at its heaviness. She wondered what his blue-black hair looked like loose. “Can I undo this?”

His eyebrows rose, and his smile parted to reveal his white teeth. “If it pleases you.”

The languor persisted, making it difficult to loosen the braid at first, but finally the waist-length tresses fell around her in a thick curtain, crimped in waves. She combed her fingers through it, enjoying the illusion of privacy behind the shield of hair. Now it was just her and the kind-looking Kalquorian.

He bent to kiss her, and she greeted his lips with her mouth parted. His rough tongue explored, running over her teeth, the roof of her mouth, the insides of her cheeks, beneath her tongue. He tasted her thoroughly, bringing her desire to new wakefulness. She shifted to rub her body against his, enjoying the hard planes of his body against her softer contours. The feeling of his sexes so close to hers, the front one stiff against his abdomen, the second jutting straight out, made that ticklish heat in her belly return. She was suddenly eager to feel him inside, to have him soothe the aching need his nearness brought.

“Please,” she whispered as his mouth released hers.

“Of course, my precious girl.”

Degorsk’s hand brought the hot flesh of his masculinity to her orifices, and she caught her breath to feel him there, poised to pierce her. She bent her knees, raising her hips in offering. With a groan he pressed into her, his eyes closing as her flesh closed over his. Their combined juices eased his passage, and he moved easily in and out, sparking intense sensations. Cassidy’s body instinctively bucked against his, driving their groins together. He hissed between his teeth.

“Slowly, slowly, my beauty. I have not felt a woman’s warmth in a long time, and my control might be lacking.”

She battled her desire, trying to keep her longing in check. It wasn’t easy. Her senses were awash with the man making love to her. Her eyes drank in his compassionate face, her ears filled with his heavy breathing, and she inhaled the cinnamon-y goodness that came from him and his companions. His lips were a sweet-salty combination when she licked them. But it was touch that beguiled her most. The whisper of his long hair against her cheek, the strength of his hands as he stroked her breasts, the solid bulk of his frame pressed against her, the delicious motion of his shafts thrusting in her secret flesh drove her to the edge of her wits. Every cell of her body seemed acutely aware of Degorsk and greedily insisted on more.

“Such eagerness,” he whispered, his breath warm in her ear. “You are a treasure, Cassidy.”

She warbled in response, words impossible as she began her ascent to the peak of ecstasy again. Even with Degorsk holding back, his rhythm deliberate and motions gentle, arousal swelled, demanding release. When she bucked against him again, she did so consciously, determined to reach that crest again.

He grunted, his fists curling to grasp handfuls of the lumpy mattress in white-knuckled grips. Cassidy wrapped her legs around his tense buttocks and tightened her

hold while raising her hips to greet his. It drove him hard into her clutching sex, and she cried out in delight.

A growl erupted from Degorsk's chest, and his next thrust was almost bruising in its force. A bright flash of mingled exultation and pain brought her closer to the brink. She gripped his shoulders and jerked against him again.

He growled louder, and his groin beat against hers in a rapid tattoo. Cassidy moaned at the surging tension in her womb, growing by leaps and bounds as Degorsk rutted hard against her.

He released the mattress to grip the fleshy mounds of her buttocks, his fingers biting deep into her white skin. He lifted her lower body to sink his penises even deeper.

The change in position made him rub hard against the front of her vaginal sheath, and he found a spot so sensitive that Cassidy screamed. She writhed, senseless from the heave of ecstasy that electrified her entire being. The climax blasted through her, and she thrashed like a madwoman beneath the now howling Kalquorian.

All was pulsing rapture. Cassidy knew nothing but the terrible joy overwhelming every rational thought. Her surroundings, the man crouched over her, everything ceased to exist for her except the flood of sensation. It pulsed hugely within her, erasing conscious awareness.

At last the throbs lessened, leaving her gasping beneath Degorsk, who lay heavily on top of her. He too panted, and she felt the slow flex of his sex against the walls of her sheath as the last of his passion spent itself. She'd been too far gone in her climax to notice his.

She quieted, and worry nudged at her. What she had done was a sin. She had willingly coupled with two men, two enemy Kalquorians.

*Worse than my mother. Dear God, am I more of a whore than she was?*

No, they'd drugged her with their bite. The intoxicant they'd injected through their fangs continued to hum through her body, making the devil flesh still encased within her feel delightful. It had consumed all concerns for her immortal soul just as it continued to heighten the pleasure of Degorsk's sinful touch. She'd been tricked into what she'd done.

She wanted nothing more than to indulge every lust, to feed each hunger her body was capable of. She'd never known such pleasures as those the two men had given her. But as the euphoric fog cleared her brain, she knew giving into those longings was wrong. They were not her husbands. They were the enemy, debauched and wicked creatures. It was her moral duty to resist them, no matter how good they made her feel.

She pushed against Degorsk, trying to ignore the beauty of his sleek, muscled body. "No more. I don't want this," she said, hating the wavering in her voice.

He propped himself over her, and she heard the others draw close, though they remained unseen behind the wall of his hair. Lidon spoke in the staccato bursts of their language.

"It is easily remedied," Degorsk answered. He gripped Cassidy's chin and turned her face to one side, sweeping her throat free of her hair.

Panicked, she drummed her fists against his chest. "Don't bite me!"

Her words ended in a scream as his face swooped down and the twin pinpricks of his fangs broke through her skin. She cursed as he held her still, keeping her helpless as he injected her with the intoxicant.

Her senses heightened, making her all too aware of his thick lengths still seated deep inside. Even as her mind fought against the domination her body moved against his, beguiled by his hard warmth.

"No. Damn you," she breathed. Cassidy struggled against the sweet languor creeping through her veins, sending pleasure into every fiber of her being. "I will...not...submit."

"Why not? Doesn't it feel good?"

Yes, it did. Passion throbbed, stealing her thoughts away. Her world was narrowing again, focusing on the feeling of a hard body pressed against hers. Such a wonderful body, so male and strong and begging to be worshipped.

She stroked her fingertips down Degorsk's back, investigating the granite planes of muscle she found there. Her hips flexed against his, trying to coax the softening shafts into hardness again.

He withdrew, licking her blood from his lips. He smiled. "What's wrong, precious girl?"

"The sex...a sin...unholy," she stammered, no longer quite sure of what she was talking about. The fog was back in her mind, making everything except the man over her unimportant.

"You're making no sense," he gently chided her. "We're enjoying ourselves, aren't we? That's what's important."

"Yes. I like it...but...but..." she fought to recall why it was so important to fight the aliens. Because her grandfather would do terrible things to her if she was caught? Heaven help her, the Kalquorian she was touching all over felt amazing.

"We'll save unpleasant discussions for another time. Your first time with each of us must be a celebration. A good start for our now completed clan." He shifted, pulling free of her to her dismay. "Lidon has been very patient, but we shouldn't test our Nobek's tolerance."

Degorsk rose from the bed despite her clutching hands. But when she saw Lidon step forward, his dark face intent, Cassidy let the Imdiko go. As wonderful as the first two had been, he was the one she'd been waiting for, the man who had whispered wicked words in the dark.

"My Matara," he growled, gathering her in his arms. He pulled her hard against himself, aggressively molding her to his torso. Any remaining thoughts of resistance fled within his authoritative embrace. "My sweet little pet," he said.

His kiss was as forceful as the grip he held her with, his mouth demanding. She submitted happily, fervent for whatever pleasure he would offer. Her lower body clenched at his show of strength.

"I am not as gentle as the others," he warned as he brought one hand around to clutch her breast. She moaned, arching into his grasp. "But you must not fear me. I will not harm you, my pet. All I ask is your obedience."

"Tell me what to do," she said.



His eyes darkened, and he bore her down to the bed once more. "Open yourself to me. Spread your legs wide."

She did as he commanded, and he leaned back to look at her bare secret flesh. She shivered to be exposed for Lidon's scrutiny. His sexes were rigid exclamation points as he stared.

"Spread yourself open with your fingers. Show me everything."

No inhibitions remained to deny him his commands. She parted the soft petals, feeling the thick honey making her slippery. She displayed her treasures to his hungry gaze. The other two drew close to look as well.

"Show me what you did when you watched Tranis."

Cassidy didn't hesitate. The index finger of her left hand circled the entrance to her womb, and with her right, she slipped the sensitive nub of her clitoris between the first two fingers. She rubbed the hard nub of flesh, her fingers slipping up and down, eased by her lubrication. Her head lolled as bolts of pleasure shot through her core. It wasn't nearly as good as what the men did to her, but being watched as she stimulated herself almost made up for the lack of their touch.

"Enough," Lidon snarled, yanking her hands away. He raised them to his face and sucked her juices from her fingers. He swallowed.

Cassidy gasped to find herself suddenly face down on the bed. There had been a slight dizzying sensation, so fast she could barely register Lidon flipping her over. He grabbed her from behind, pulling her hips up and back. Her favorite illustration from *The Kama Sutra* flashed before her mind's eye, the one with the woman crouched on all fours and the man entering her from behind. She moaned aloud as Lidon's rigid stave pushed against her sex. It was happening. Her most cherished desire was coming true.

He speared her in a long, smooth motion, his smaller penis rubbing hard against her clitoris. Her cry filled the air at the sudden impaling. She had no opportunity to recover from the initial assault as he pounded a rapid rhythm against her buttocks.

He worked her like a jackhammer until her growing moans warned of her impending climax. He slowed, his strong hands holding her hips still so she couldn't press back to claim the bliss just out of reach. She sobbed with need, aching to realize the consuming exultation of her awakened libido.

"Not yet, my sweet Earther," Lidon chuckled cruelly. "You will not rush my gratification as you did Degorsk's. You must learn the joy of serving as well as being served."

She endured his strong but slow thrusts, and her arousal quieted to a gentler hum. She quit fighting to push against him. After a few moments of her docile acceptance, Lidon's pace quickened again. The sharp reports of his flesh meeting hers punctuated their shared gasps as he drove them both towards the precipice once more. His smaller penis rubbed her pink pearl more often than not, and she trembled ever closer to fulfillment.

Once again, just as the final crescendo threatened, Lidon stopped. She wailed in protest.

"Not quite time," he managed between heaving breaths. "Hush, pet. You will have your pleasure, but only when I'm ready to grant it."

He withdrew completely from her, and she sobbed with loss. "Why are you being so mean?" she asked, twisting to look at him over her shoulder.

"Gratification delayed is sweeter once finally realized," he told her, his face predatory. "But I too grow tired of the wait. We will claim our reward now."

There was an instant of that dizzying movement again, and Cassidy was on her back once more. Lidon appeared between her legs, and he impaled her with his thick lengths.

He rode her hard and fast. The swift spiral of ecstasy left her no time to draw breath. Pleasure ballooned in her belly and crested, leaving her jerking beneath Lidon. Her sheath clutched him in desperate orgasm, its insistence pulling a thick ribbon of fluid from him. He screamed with her, his bellow making her ears ring.

A few moments later he stirred, slowly dragging his heavy body off hers. He caressed her face before turning to Tranis and Degorsk who sat on the floor watching.

"Please make sure I didn't harm her," he said.

"If I thought you were doing damage, we would have dragged you off," Degorsk said, rising and joining them. Tranis followed. "But I'll check for your peace of mind."

Cassidy lay still as his fingers carefully probed her sex, intoxication and exhaustion making her leaden. Satisfaction permeated her entire being. If she had been a cat, she would have purred.

"Minor bruising perhaps. She'd be sore from her first sexual encounter anyway. Fortunately, Earther females are remarkably pliant. They're made to adjust to a variety of sizes."

Cassidy giggled. "You make it sound like we're assembled in a factory."

He smiled, and the warm regard in his expression made her feel safe. "I didn't mean to. You're an exceptional example of your species. I'm grateful to be your mate."

"You can't be my mate," she said. "It's a sin, one they'll execute me for. I'll go to Hell."

"We'll discuss that later. It's time for you to get some sleep, my dear girl."

He went to one of the rumpled formsuits lying on the floor and pulled a cylindrical object from a pouch on the belt. He returned to the bed.

"What's that, Degorsk?"

"A mild sedative. I want you to rest for a little while before we begin work on your acceptance of us as your clan."

He pressed one end of the cylinder to her neck, and she tensed. But there was no pain; just a brief pressure before he took it away.

Each man pressed a gentle kiss to her lips as the room turned gray. The last thing she saw was a pair of purple cat's eyes looking down on her.

Cassidy's cell and the Kalquorians were washed away in sudden darkness.

## Chapter Six

The detention area of the Kalquorian spy ship had four cells and an observation area where two guards were posted at all times when a prisoner was housed there. All of the captured transport's crew were confined in one of the Earther ship's more commodious storage areas.

The Kalquorians kept two prisoners in their own detention. One was the shuttle pilot who'd been on Europa when the Kalquorians arrived. He lay on the floor of his cell, sleeping. He'd possessed no useful knowledge for his captors. After initial questioning, they'd left him alone except to give him rations to eat.

When Tranis and Lidon arrived in the containment area after settling an unconscious Cassidy in their quarters with Degorsk, they found General Hamilton pacing his tiny, bare cell. Now he was backed against one of the featureless white walls from which harsh bright light emanated.

Tranis watched General Hamilton simultaneously cover his nakedness with both hands and stand tall with proud defiance. The Earther had been stripped of his clothing as part of the strategy to break his will. With the alien's sexual repressions, it was as good a tactic as any to torment him with.

The man wasn't in bad shape for an older Earther, but his lean body looked unfinished compared to the bulging physiques of his captors. Hamilton's frame resembled a pre-pubescent Kalquorian boy, an odd combination with his lined face and bald head. It made Tranis feel a little ill as he tried to put the two disparate parts together.

Hamilton's attempt at a dignified posture was thwarted not only by his hands shielding his genitals from Tranis and Lidon's view, but his stance hard against the wall at his back. The hatred in his expression didn't quite hide the fear peeking around the edges. Tranis felt gratified at his obvious discomfort. Playing against the general's bigotry and prudish beliefs might yield results.

He folded his arms across his chest and stepped close to Hamilton, Lidon at his side. He looked pointedly at the Earther's hands and shook his head with an amused chuckle. "Even you men are ashamed of your sexual natures."

To his credit, Hamilton didn't shrink from his looming captors, though his breathing quickened at their nearness. "You monsters are known for debauchery with men. Your clans are rife with homosexuality."

Tranis restrained an urge to laugh at the intimation Hamilton feared rape at their hands. "I do not find you attractive, General. Your virtue, such as it is, is safe."

"Cassidy is quite lovely however," Lidon observed with low, suggestive tones. "The prettiest little Earther of all the convent's inhabitants. You must be proud."

Fury widened Hamilton's eyes, and his body tensed. "What have you done? If you lay one hand on my granddaughter—"

“Give us the security grid’s access code, and you have my word she will suffer no harm,” Tranis said. *Protective of his granddaughter, just as we hoped. Let’s see how much her welfare is worth to him.*

Hamilton barked harsh laughter. “Give you entrance to Earth so you can enslave all our women? Never.”

“Earther women are already slaves,” Lidon said. “Your government has made them second-class citizens, their worth only in the offspring they provide you. At least we appreciate their gifts and abilities beyond their childbearing capabilities.”

The Earther snorted derision. “God made woman from man, a helpmate to His divine creation. She is therefore subjugated to man. ‘And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ From our holy book, you godless heathens.”

“The All brought forth women, blessing them with the wombs of creation. From the women were born men. In gratitude for their lives, the men uplifted these life-givers, protecting and sheltering them from storms and predators and enemies.’ From my faith’s holy writings, Earther.” Lidon was equally scornful.

“Blasphemy! Women are inherently evil. If not kept obedient, they threaten the natural saintliness of men who were made in God’s own image.”

Tranis hid his shock at Hamilton’s attitude. “Do you include your granddaughter in that description?”

At the mention of Cassidy, the general schooled his expression to be carefully blank. “I’ve done my best to protect her from her wicked nature.”

Lidon’s disbelieving laughter echoed in the empty space. “Wicked nature? I have never met a more innocent creature.”

Hamilton glowered at the Nobek. “Your corruption knows nothing of blameless purity. At her heart lies a wanton slut, filled with depravity.”

A low growl rolled from Lidon’s throat, and Tranis silenced him with a look. Returning his attention to the Earther, he said, “She sounds delightful, General. You tempt me to know her better.”

He stroked his groin as he spoke. Thinking of the girl now imprisoned in his quarters, tied naked to the clan’s bed, he immediately achieved erection.

Hamilton tensed again as Tranis’ eager flesh strained against his clinging formsuit. “I have spent these last five years righting the damage her harlot mother did. Leave Cassidy alone.”

“The access codes, then.”

Hamilton pressed his lips together and stared into space. Tranis and Lidon exchanged a glance.

Lidon asked. “Where are the girl’s parents now?”

“Dead.”

The sympathy in Tranis’ voice didn’t have to be contrived. “Poor child. How lonely she must be stuck on this rock of a moon with no family.” He considered a moment. Hamilton was shutting down, but he decided to give one last try. “The women on Europa have been most receptive to my men’s companionship. If Cassidy is so weak

in her devotion to purity and starved for affection, I am sure she will welcome my clan's company."

The general's stoic reserve didn't waver. "I won't speak another word to you."  
Lidon glanced at Tranis and rolled his eyes. "I'll get the pain inflictors."

## Chapter Seven

Degorsk slid two fingers into Cassidy's wet warmth, his thumb tracing gentle circles over her straining bud. She screamed with mingled desire and rage, writhing against the soft restraints tying her to the clan's massive bed.

"Tell me, Cassidy," he coaxed, his other hand stroking her round cheek. "Tell me how good it feels."

She twisted her head away, her eyes screwed shut as if by not seeing him she could deny his existence. "No! You can rot in hell before I tell you any such thing."

He rubbed his fingers in and out, feeling how her sheath softly clutched at him. The lips of her sex were swollen from his attentions, her clitoris straining from its hood. Moans mixed with her harsh, angry breaths. He marveled at how easily her body succumbed to pleasurable touch despite the programming she'd endured at the hands of her government and religion. Indeed, he'd never known a female of any species to become so quickly aroused. How voracious would her appetite be if she'd not been conditioned to fear sex?

"Sweet Cassidy," he whispered, caressing down from her face to the soft swell of her breast. Her nipples pointed brazenly at the ceiling, inviting attention. "I know my touch brings you joy."

"I hate it. Stop!" she cried between clenched teeth. Her breath quickened as he pumped her sex a little faster and gently pinched her pert nipple. Her arms jerked in vain against the straps wrapped around her wrists. "If I get loose, I swear you'll regret this. I'll cut your hateful hands off!"

Degorsk quelled a stab of anger at the ones who'd robbed the poor girl of her ability to simply let go into bliss. "You want this lovemaking. If you didn't, you wouldn't be wet. You've soaked the bed linens with your sweet juices, precious girl." Indeed, the hours of his enticements had dampened the sheets admirably.

"Shut up!"

"You want this," he insisted, the fingers embedded inside her searching for that one spot. "You've never wanted anything so much."

She arched with a cry as he found the nest of nerves at the front of her passage. He bent over her, his face near hers. She was still turned away, still trying to deny him even as her trembling betrayed the rising passion.

He whispered in her ear. "It's time for another climax, Cassidy." He rubbed the spot, his fingers insistent.

Her voice was strangled with desperation as her body began to succumb. "No. Don't make me do this. It's a sin."

"It's all right. Let it happen."

She groaned, long and drawn out. Surrender crept over her face as he took her closer, her eyes fluttering as she allowed herself to submit, to grant her body the release it craved.

She was beginning to tense all over, the sign Degorsk now knew signaled she was only seconds from falling over the edge, when the quarters' door slid open with a loud hum. Cassidy jerked at the sound, shifting enough that he lost contact with her sweet spot. She screamed as Tranis and Lidon walked in.

"Monsters! Evil agents of Satan!"

Degorsk sighed, his hands on her body going still as he eyed his clanmates with annoyance. In Kalquorian he said, "Perfect timing, you two. I almost had her to number six."

Lidon dropped into the chair at the computer station and pulled his boots off. "We'll be glad to help you recover." He sniffed appreciatively. "It smells like a Dantovon brothel in here."

Tranis also disrobed quickly, his eyes locked on Cassidy. With Degorsk distracted, she'd taken the opportunity to fall into the exhausted sleep he'd denied her for the last 28 hours. Unlike Kalquorians who could go for a week without slumber if necessary, Earthers were terribly dependent on their rest. Sleep deprivation was one of Degorsk's main tools in the fight for Cassidy's mind.

"How is your work going?" the medic asked.

"Slowly," Tranis answered. "Hamilton shut down without giving us anything. Even hours of pain inflictors got us nowhere. Deciphering the Earthers' codes has been almost as frustrating, but Lidon did have a small breakthrough."

Lidon stood, pulling his formsuit off. "I discovered they use many different codes, not just one. It's impossible to tell what information is most important, given the number of dissimilar ciphers. We could be translating for weeks before we stumble on the security grid access. The Earthers are determined to be mysterious."

Degorsk cocked an eyebrow at his Nobek clanmate. "Speaking of mysteries, where is my ass?"

From the corner of his eye, he saw Tranis look at the now blank wall where a plaster mold taken of the Imdiko's buttocks usually hung. In the cramped quarters, it was Degorsk's one sample of personal expression, displayed for the simple reason he thought it irritated his staid clanmates.

Tranis kept his kurble ball on a shelf, its tough exterior masking the poisoned barbs that shot out at random when the game was played. He was an excellent kurbler. Even the Nobeks respected him on the field when the crew got a chance to play.

Lidon kept a small altar in one corner where he meditated, honored the glorious dead, and read from the Book of Life. Degorsk wasn't sure why Lidon read it anymore; he seemed to have the whole thick tome memorized, which he quoted often. While only casual believers themselves, his clanmates nonetheless appreciated their Nobek's quiet faith.

Degorsk usually had his backside hung directly across from the door so he could moon his companions the moment they walked into the room. He was miffed it had been clandestinely removed and hidden.

Lidon gave him a placatory pat on the shoulder. "I had to take it down. That wall is the best place for the restraints I plan to install. I didn't think you'd mind giving up your...memento for Cassidy's sake."

"Fine. Give it back, and I'll hang it over your altar."

The Nobek gave him a cold stare. "Don't you dare."

Tranis sounded amused. "As soon as the restraints are no longer needed, return Degorsk's property to him, Lidon."

"You're missing your chance to finally be rid of that. He only put it up to mock us."

"I know, but his ass *is* a work of art."

Degorsk gave his leader a delighted smile. "Thank you, Tranis." Mollified, he returned his gaze to their sleeping Earther. "Now let's wake our little Matara and convince her of how much she enjoys our company."

Growling their agreement, the other two men climbed onto the bed as Degorsk woke Cassidy with hard, steady strokes of his fingers in her slick passage. Her eyes opened, and she screamed weakly as the men gathered around her.

\* \* \* \*

"No!"

Cassidy knew she'd been out for only a few precious minutes. Degorsk's fingers were inside her still, moving in and out, making her devil flesh respond. She struggled, her movements sluggish as exhaustion left her heavy on the bed. The warmth of Tranis and Lidon laying on either side of her intensified the fatigue struggling to put her to sleep. Their presence also heightened the pleasure that kept that same tiredness from claiming her.

"It feels good, precious girl," Degorsk prodded, kneeling between her legs as he probed her sinful parts. His fingers reached deep inside, making her ache for more.

"Nothing feels better," Tranis added, his hand covering an ample breast, sending tingles of delight all through her.

They were right. When Lidon's wet mouth closed over the nipple of her other breast, she groaned. His tongue circled her areola, mimicking the gentle motions of Degorsk's thumb on her clitoris. Cassidy's hips moved up and down of their own accord, helping the fingers embedded inside to move harder and faster. Desire grew, its sweet release inching closer. She was losing the fight to deny this evil pleasure as well as losing the ability to care.

"Very good Cassidy," Degorsk encouraged. "That's it. Claim what's rightfully yours."

Tranis kissed her, long and deep. She let him, not fighting them now as her loins caught fire. Her tongue twined around its scratchy twin, liking how he tasted. Lidon's mouth sucked hard on her breast, and his fingers traced light patterns on her sensitive belly. Cassidy jerked harder to engulf Degorsk's talented fingers, twisting in her bonds in an attempt to make him rub the sweet spot inside her sheath.

He did it for her, and glorious sensation erupted in her belly. She cried out in Tranis' mouth, thrusting hard against Degorsk. Higher and higher, the precipice loomed, almost there, almost...



The orgasm broke over her, sweeping her away in a warm rush of ecstasy. She dove into it, letting the deluge flood her senses in a torrent of desire. It pulsed throughout her entire being, each throb sweeter than the last. She rode every wave, letting the bliss consume her, far from guilt or fear. For a few moments there was only the rapture of release.

As her body quieted, exhaustion reasserted itself, and she gave herself to it as readily as she had her climax. But a deep voice dragged her away from the delight of slumber, insistent she open her eyes and face her shame once more.

"Such a good girl," Tranis said, his smile somehow both frightening and soothing. Lidon and Degorsk drew away, allowing him to stretch over her. His sexes probed her still spasming nether region. "Now for your reward."

Cassidy shook her head weakly, knowing she couldn't escape the defilement her evil body clamored for. "It's a sin. You're damning me."

Degorsk's voice was maddening in its reasonableness. "This is your husband, Cassidy. He is your Dramok, and it is a sin to refuse him your body."

He lied, but what could she do about it? Tranis pressed forward, breaching her defenseless flesh with the iron thickness she both hated and wanted. She gasped as he filled her, taking away the yawning emptiness. How was it he felt so good inside when the act was so evil?

He pushed up on his hands to hang over her, allowing them both to watch as his glistening sexes slowly emerged and disappeared back into her slick openings. Stupid with exhaustion, all thought fled at the amazing sight and feel of him. A longing to trace the contours of his muscled shoulders and chest overtook her, and Cassidy wished her hands were free to touch his dark magnificence. His thick invasion pressed against her passages' walls, making her writhe with renewed passion. The lightning flash of excruciating pleasure when his groin met her clitoris, the melting bliss of his movement inside her female sheath, the deeper delicious pressure in her anus drove her towards another fulfillment.

Tranis' strokes were long and steady, making her feel every luscious inch of his length. She thrilled to see his dark body impale her pink-white flesh, claiming what should not be his. Her helplessness only served to excite her more, knowing she could deny the alien nothing, that she must succumb to his lusts, and that he would take all he wished.

Her sinful flesh flexed against his, warning them the onrush of climax would overtake her again soon. Tranis groaned softly in response, his groin meeting Cassidy's with new vigor. The steady slap-slap of flesh encountering flesh heightened her already aroused senses. The quickened pace rubbed her with delectable friction, and she gasped at the intensity.

He lowered himself onto her. Now his whole body moved against hers as his mouth captured her lips. To feel the hard-muscled alien against her as he ground into her core brought climax with the speed and strength of a runaway train. Cassidy jerked beneath Tranis, her whole being caught up in the gut-twisting force of the explosion. She screamed into his mouth and he screamed back as he emptied his juices into her womb.

The iron of his sex flexed and pulsed, bringing her anew with another cry. They strained against each other, their fused bodies throbbing in tandem.

Tranis kissed her gently afterward, his lips soft against hers. Cassidy's sleep-deprived brain struggled to understand why her captor treated her with such compassion even as he forced her to perform the most depraved acts. The look he gave her was so much more tender than any her grandfather had ever gifted her with. Something in her heart reached for that gentle regard, yearning for any semblance of love, and she returned the kiss, forgetting for an instant the sin of her action.

The Dramok reluctantly pulled free of her clinging sex and anus, moving aside as Lidon stepped to the bed. The damaged but still handsome Kalquorian lay beside her, his hand sweeping over her torso.

"Now for your Nobek, my pet," he whispered, his breath warm in her ear. He glanced at Degorsk, who sat at the computer station. "Is she ready for *laxan*?"

Degorsk smiled and nodded. "Cassidy wishes to serve her clan in all the ways they desire. She is an obedient Matara."

*Like hell I am. When Earth finds out, you're all dead, and I'm going to laugh.*

Except she would be dead too. The religion allowed no unmarried women who'd lost their virginity to sully Earth's purity. She'd be executed right along with her captors.

*Mated to depraved aliens or put to death by my own people. Is this really what God wants?*

Lidon sat up. His hands moving in a blur, he freed Cassidy's wrists from the ties. Her arms fell to the bed, leaden with exhaustion. She didn't bother to stir when he freed her ankles. Between the lack of sleep and many sexual encounters she'd endured, she lacked the strength to move. Even her frequent insomnia had never left her this lethargic.

Lidon turned her over, arranging her on her belly with a cushion beneath her hips, raising her buttocks high. Despite her fatigue and hatred for the clan, Cassidy warmed in anticipation. It was the position she liked best. Lidon taking her from behind at their first encounter had assured her of that. She closed her eyes with a sigh as she felt him take his position between her legs.

But when she felt the prod of his larger sex touch the entrance to her tightest passage, she found the energy to move away. Lidon gripped her hips, holding her still. "You will like this. Relax, Cassidy."

Tranis appeared next to her. He stroked her hair soothingly. "It feels good to give yourself to us in all ways. You have no wish to fight."

Her head was turned away from Degorsk as his bulk settled on the other side of her, but she detected the gentle smile in his voice. His fingers traced the line of her spine. "Your body is eager to know us in every way possible. Relax and feel yourself open to him."

"You're godless animals. You deserve to burn in Hell." Tears slid from her eyes.

She trembled as the hard slickness of Lidon's shaft slowly pressed into her hesitant flesh, but the brief burst of energy had departed, leaving her limp. She whimpered but could offer no resistance to his invasion.

Lidon's natural lubrication was thick, allowing him to ease into her tightest passage with little difficulty. He went slowly, giving her body time to accustom itself to his breadth. The smaller penis entered Cassidy's sex, still tight from her last climax. Tranis reached beneath her to stroke her pleasure nub.

The stimulation of her clitoris and Lidon's second organ's entrance brought waves of now-familiar delight. But the steel of his larger member's invasion was a revelation. She ached from the stretch of accommodating him, but the low throb was of little consequence. Her taboo orifice thrilled at the fullness, absorbing him with a deep pleasure that left her moaning. She had never known such consuming desire.

Lidon's voice had a catch in it as he spoke. "That's it, my pet. You're such a good girl to allow yourself to enjoy this."

"She really likes it," Tranis whispered. "My fingers are soaked with her juices."

"It gives me hope I was afraid to have," Degorsk replied.

Cassidy barely heard their conversation. She was fixated on the delights of Lidon filling her as she'd never imagined being filled. He slid deeper into her until at last his groin met her buttocks. He groaned.

"So hot inside. So incredibly tight." His hands rubbed the mounds of flesh then parted them. Cassidy imagined him looking at where they joined and shivered.

"She's taken all of me. I didn't think such a tiny girl would be capable."

Tranis kissed Cassidy's cheek. "Your Nobek is very happy with you, Matara. Well done."

Despite the wrongness of the act, she thrilled at his praise. For some reason, pleasing the aliens made her glad. That she felt so should have upset her, but she was too tired and too aroused to care. Nothing made sense right now except the delicious sensation of being used so sinfully.

Lidon moved, drawing slowly out until she was nearly emptied of him. The loss affected her keenly, and she whimpered a protest. His breathy chuckle consoled her.

"We're not done, my pet. Not quite, though it won't last as long as you and I would wish, I'm afraid."

He pressed into her once more, stretching her with that delicious fullness. She warbled a contented sound, prompting delighted laughter from all three men.

Lidon's long strokes stoked her inner fire, the amazing friction burning brighter and brighter. Tranis rubbed her clitoris all the while, and Degorsk's tongue running down her spine added to the building excitement. Completely immersed in a haze of desire, Cassidy begged her leaden body to move, to allow her to thrust back against the man behind her so she might take him as deep as possible.

Her limbs remained unresponsive, unable to do more than twitch. Incapable of satisfying her mounting needs, she thought, *harder*.

Lidon's rhythm wavered for a moment. "Did I hear that right?"

Dear heaven. Had she said it out loud?

"Your Matara wants to know more of your strength, Lidon," Degorsk said in a voice hushed with wonder.

Tranis added, "I suggest you do all you can to satisfy her."

"A duty I am happy to fulfill," the Nobek growled.

He drove harder against her, plunging in and out of her eager flesh. Cassidy closed her eyes, delighting in the powerful strokes that fed her hunger. Elation ballooned large within her womb until the dam burst, carrying her over the precipice. At some point during the spasms that racked her belly, Lidon added his roar to her cries. His sex swelled in pulses as he pumped his seed into her dark orifice.

The climax left her nearly senseless, and unconsciousness rushed to claim her. But her tormentors refused to give her up to the sweetness of sleep, rolling her over and shaking her until she opened her eyes.

Degorsk covered her body with his. "Now you will make love to me."

She tried to curse him. She tried to lift her unresponsive arms so she could hit him. Instead, something inside broke, and she wept exhausted tears. "Please. I'm so tired. Please."

He kissed the dampness from her cheeks. "I know, poor girl. You've been a very good wife to Tranis and Lidon. Open yourself to me now."

"I can't. I'm so tired I can't move." She hated herself for crying, for letting them see her weaken. She couldn't stop the begging that spilled from her lips. "Just let me sleep. Please, let me sleep."

"After you serve me." His muscular thighs pressed hers apart, and he pressed into her. "Give yourself to me willingly, and I'll let you rest for awhile."

No she tried to scream, but what came out was, "Anything. Take what you want."

"Good girl. Very good, Cassidy." The warmth in his voice again brought unwanted contentment. She didn't want to please them. She really didn't.

Cassidy didn't think she could possibly find ecstasy again. She could barely keep her eyes open as Degorsk rode her. But his demanding thrusts found the sweet spot that wouldn't be denied, and weak cries spilled from her lips. The damning rapture rode her hard, threatening to turn her inside out. Once more, her devil flesh had its way, succumbing to the temptation.

Despite the warm pulses of pleasure, relief washed over her when the Imdiko suddenly tensed and he groaned with release. The steady throb of his sex spilling juices within lulled her.

As soon as his flesh quieted inside her, she whispered, "You promised I can sleep now."

"Yes, precious girl. You've earned a nice, long night's sleep."

Cassidy fled into the consuming darkness of slumber.

## Chapter Eight

Lidon sat at the computer station in the clan's quarters, frowning as he ran decoding program after decoding program on the Earther transport's records. He was finally making some headway, but so far all he'd deciphered were safe handling instructions for transporting hazardous materials, codes of etiquette for dignitaries who hitched a ride, and instructions on how to service the ventilation system. He snorted at the paranoia that drove Earthers to encode everything.

Tranis and Degorsk were in the containment unit with General Hamilton, where the chief medic was performing a full physical on the Earther. The transport captain's death was making everyone cautious when it came to interrogating Hamilton, and Tranis had decided it was imperative they make sure no other ugly surprises awaited beyond the heart implant. No doubt the invasiveness of a complete workup would be a form of torture for the uptight general. Lidon's lips curled in a ruthless smile.

The computer beeped, and he peered at the monitor. Another bit of information had been decoded. Lidon studied the data, his heart beating a little faster.

*Unauthorized entrance into Earth's atmosphere by way of the Triangles will result in Armageddon.*

"Finally," Lidon breathed. Something to do with breaching Earth's security. "Concentrate decoding on one hundred cipher groups surrounding last decoded entry," he ordered the computer. He added, "Define 'Armageddon' as relates to Earth."

A new readout appeared next to the first. *Armageddon. Exact translation: Mountain of Meggido. Popular use: final battle between messiah Jesus and the antichrist as depicted in Earth's official religion.*

"Another damned code. Location and geography of 'the Triangles' on Earth."  
*No geographic correlation for the Triangles. May refer to areas known as the Bermuda Triangle and the Dragon's Triangle.*

The screen displayed two areas on the enemy planet, one off the North American coast and the other off the Asian coast. The locations were in the two largest seas of Earth.

None of it made sense to Lidon. "Close second readout," he sighed. The maps winked out.

At least it was something new to question Hamilton about. Lidon had no doubt he'd eventually expose all the secrets the Earther transport carried, but getting Hamilton to spill his guts would be much faster. And more satisfying.

A soft snore interrupted his thoughts. Lidon turned to smile at Cassidy, well into her second hour of sleep. Poor child, he thought, a stab of sympathy not quite calming the instant erection he got from looking at her. They were putting her through hell so she might realize paradise in the end.

Cassidy's stubborn resolve impressed him. She refused to be intimidated by their size and strength. But sometimes she broke as exhaustion and her natural sexual urges gained the upper hand. Seeing the young Earther cry was harder than he'd anticipated. Lidon had killed enemies in the line of military duty and never lost a moment's sleep over it. Nobeks were the fiercest of Kalquorians, and Lidon was one of the deadliest of his breed. But his little Matara's tears hurt his heart. He'd rather cut off his good leg than make Cassidy suffer emotional anguish.

Lidon checked the chronometer on the computer readout. He was moments away from waking her from her exhausted rest, to ply her cooperation with more persuasive lovemaking. He'd tell her she'd had a full sleep cycle, helping to confuse her sense of time and making her doubt her senses. Fatigue exacerbated the uncertainty they tortured her with, and made Cassidy more susceptible to losing her conviction that sex with the Kalquorians was a sin.

She'd soon find his methods were nowhere near as gentle as Degorsk's. He looked at the blank wall where the restraints he'd planned had still not been installed. No matter. The anti-gravity cuffs would work well enough for his purposes this time. Cassidy would be just as vulnerable to his inducements. Using physical means to secure her obedience didn't bother him as much as the mental games. She'd already shown some enjoyment of rougher play. With Degorsk's blessing to incorporate punishment into her re-education, Lidon was ready to find out how rough she liked it.

He stood and stepped to the bedside. Her sweet, round face surrounded by the cloud of almost-white hair was the loveliest thing he'd ever seen. Looking down on the soft curves of her body, knowing it was his to enjoy for the rest of their lives made his groin throb. He swallowed, thinking of all the pleasurable acts he would perform with her in the years to come.

At his command, a drawer over the bed slid soundlessly from the wall. Lidon took four cuffs from the drawer, and it retracted to blend seamlessly into the wall once more. He strapped the anti-gravity shackles on her wrists and ankles. Cassidy moaned in her sleep but didn't wake as he worked.

As soon as he had her properly cuffed, he ordered, "Elevate prisoner three feet, vertical X-formation."

Cassidy slowly rose into the air, pulled upright by the wrist cuffs. Her eyes fluttered for an instant before closing heavily once more. Her head lolled until her chin came to rest on her chest. Exhaustion owned her, but not for long.

Lidon pulled her body away from the bed so it hung suspended over the floor. Then he went to the workstation where a hypo of stimulant waited, left by Degorsk. It would wake Cassidy without negating the effects of the extreme weariness on her mind, leaving her vulnerable to suggestion.

Lidon injected her and tossed the hypo away. He counted down the seconds it took for the stimulant to work its way through her body, admiring her pale, lush figure as the shackles held her spread-eagle in the air. He walked around her, drinking her in from every angle before stopping at her side.

His breath warming the delicate cup of her ear, Lidon whispered, "Time to wake, my pet." His hand swung and connected with one fleshy cheek of her buttocks, making a satisfying smack.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy cried out at the sharp pain as heat radiated from her hindquarters. She pried her weighted lids apart to see Lidon standing over her. She was shocked to find herself upright and hanging in mid-air.

Lidon pressed a kiss to her cheek. "Good morning Cassidy. Did you have a good night's sleep?"

She stared at him. Had she really slept the night through? It felt as if she'd only just closed her eyes. Her head throbbed with heaviness.

Lidon moved, and three explosive slaps warmed her bottom. She yelped in surprise at the sudden, unexpected hurt. Dear God, was he spanking her?

He kissed her cheek again. She stared at him, exhaustion bringing tears to her eyes. And something else upset her. He was displeased. With her. She didn't like that.

Whatever made him put out with her enough to warrant this punishment wasn't readily apparent. Fighting the irrational urge to apologize for making him unhappy, she snarled, "Don't hit me! You have no right!"

His face was patient, his voice gentle, his purple cat's eyes intense. "I asked you a question, pet. It is impolite to not answer your mate. Such disrespect warrants punishment."

In her dazed state, she couldn't remember his question. Cassidy's lip trembled as the hot sting of her rump spread. She bit back the pathetic sobs that wanted to escape, pulling her lips back in a snarl. "You are not my mate," she whispered.

Lidon smiled. He caressed her breasts and her sex clenched, adding to the heat down below. Cassidy caught her breath.

*Stop wanting him. He's a monster.*

"I think it would be nice to start our day with lovemaking," Lidon said. "You would like that too, yes?"

She ignored the heady combination of fear and desire his words incited, concentrating on her moral duty. "No."

His smile grew, as if he'd hoped for her disagreement. The next instant, he was spanking her again, his heavy palm smacking her buttocks hard and fast. She jerked in her bonds, writhing to escape the punishment, but there was nowhere to go.

"You bastard! Stop!"

He didn't stop. No part of her soft mounds was left untouched. Lidon's spanking was thorough, and her rump turned roasting hot under his attention. The sharp whacks and her enraged screams filled the room.

Even as hurt consumed her backside and fury filled her mind, the heat of the blows radiated, transmitting sensation to her sex. Knowing Lidon could end the spanking and take her anytime he wished compounded the arousal, making her wet with need.

When he stopped, Cassidy hung limp in the shackles, sobbing as much from fury as the ache throbbing from her hindquarters. And humiliation was there too, in large quantities. What was wrong with her to find pleasure in pain?

“The correct answer to my question is ‘yes, please.’ I will ask again. Cassidy, would you like me to make love to you?” Despite the vulgarity of his words, Lidon’s tone suggested he was the most reasonable man in the universe.

Her soul was at stake. Never mind the agony her body was taking perverse delight in. She had to be strong. She had to deny the innate evil of her nature as a woman.

“No. You can rot in Hell.” She tensed for the coming punishment.

He spanked her again. Her buttocks clenched in agony against his open-handed blows, but her devil flesh responded to the harsh use with renewed desire. Honey crept down her inner thighs.

The spanking lasted longer this time, and Cassidy’s cries were ragged with combined pain and want. A part of her sluggish mind conjured the fantasy of Tranis taking her while Lidon continued the discipline. Her secret flesh flexed, thrilling to the vulnerability of her captivity.

Lidon ended the punishment, and she hung limp in the cuffs. *Wanton whore* a voice whispered in her mind. *Depraved slut. Like all other women. Like her.*

No.

“Cassidy, would you like me to make love to you?” His voice was gentle, as if he’d never hurt a fly, much less punish a helpless girl.

She couldn’t answer, because she was afraid of her response. Saying no would prolong the delicious chastisement. Her yearning for more discipline at the big alien’s hands was as shocking as the desire to say yes so he’d bury his sex in hers, relieving the need that drove away all sense and principles. Either way damned her soul. So Cassidy simply hung in the anti-grav cuffs, groaning helplessly as craving warred with ethics.

When she didn’t answer, Lidon resumed the spanking. She no longer struggled against the blows, though she couldn’t help but cry out at each painful crack of his hand. Her being was centered on the luscious feeling of being at the handsome alien’s mercy. Arousal swelled in her lower regions, growing with every sweet strike on her hot flesh. The feeling intensified as the punishment continued, the demand for release about to be realized.

Before pleasure overwhelmed her senses, Lidon again halted the discipline. This time when she sobbed, it was from loss. So close...

“Cassidy, would you like me to make love to you?”

She gasped for air, trying desperately to calm the intense arousal. “Stop doing this. I will never be your Matara.”

He spanked her again. She noticed he was hard, his erection straining his formsuit. Her orgasm loomed, the first tickle of completion tightening her sex.

Just one more strike from his big, wonderful hand...

He stopped. “Answer the question.”

She groaned, the sound a bereft exhalation. She’d been right there, and she actually hurt from need. Cassidy never knew desire could become painful. Her head throbbed in tandem with her nether parts.

“Last chance, pet. Yes or no?”



“Yes, damn you.” She couldn’t remember what she was agreeing to. All she knew was the terrible need would be satisfied by any touch he gave her.

“I’m so glad to hear you want me as I want you.”

Instead of giving her that last sweet blow on her throbbing cheeks, his fingers brushed her engorged clitoris. It was all she needed, and she arched with a delighted scream as the orgasm finally crashed against her. She rubbed frantically against his hand, the pressure ripping spasm after spasm from her overwrought body. After a moment’s startled hesitation Lidon took over, capturing her straining bud between his fingers to bring her anew. His arm circled her waist, holding her still while he massaged her wet flesh.

At last she quieted, her head dropping to rest on his thickly muscled shoulder. “Matara, Matara,” he whispered, his hands stroking up and down her body. “You are twice the treasure I hoped for.”

He moved to stand before her, pulling his formsuit free of his torso, yanking it down to the boots that came to knee height. Cassidy looked at him, his flesh pointing at her like twin divining rods. The remains of her climax still rippling through her belly, she thrust her hips towards him.

Lidon closed the distance between them, his sexes going to their intended orifices, drawn by irresistible force. His first thrust was heady delight, and Cassidy’s head fell back, her ecstatic groan falling from her lips.

Lidon kissed her, his tongue as wonderfully demanding as the penises drumming into her. His strong arms held her close, enveloping her in a demanding embrace. She moaned into his mouth, her loins catching fire again. His hands buried in her hair, holding her firmly in place as he plundered her mouth. His hard body was a perfect counterpoint to her softness, and her flesh molded against him. She was bewitched by his unyielding sense of entitlement to take what he wanted from her. The more he imposed his will, the more eagerly she succumbed.

If only she didn’t want Lidon and his clanmates so much...how could she be saved when their every lascivious demand thrilled her to her very soul?

His groin moved against her clitoris, stimulating her until she jerked helplessly in her bonds, her sex spasming hard, drawing his essence from him. They came together, shuddering against each other as passion had its way with them. Afterward, Lidon pressed gentle kisses all over her face, murmuring gentle words of gratitude and praise. She basked in the warmth of his attention, the loving gestures so at odds with the brute’s evil nature.

But as Cassidy’s lust ebbed, the judgmental inner voice resurfaced, stealing the joy of afterglow from her sated body.

*Shameless whore. Vile, immoral creature. You deserve to burn in Hell.*

“No,” she whispered.

*Just another lewd slut. She taught you well, didn’t she?*

“Stop. I couldn’t help it.” Tears overflowed her eyes.

“Cassidy?”

*After all I’ve done for you, all the work to rescue your soul, you still insist on repeating her sins.*

"It's not my fault!" she shrieked. "Shut up!"

"Cassidy, calm down."

*You are your mother's child, not worth saving.*

"No! Not like her! Not like her!" She buried her face against the strong, warm chest of the man in front of her, desperate to hide from scathing disgust in her head.

"Degorsk, return to quarters immediately."

The muscular arms around her body tightened as if to shield her from the accusations that came louder and louder. She huddled against him, seeking protection.

*Whore! Fornicator! Slut!*

Cassidy crumbled beneath the judgments. "I'm sorry. I'll be good. I won't be like my mother. I promise to be good!" Her pleading voice filled the air despite the muffling pressure of the body her face pressed against. She hadn't meant to sin, to break the law. They would kill her if they found out.

The sound of the room's door opening and thumping footsteps made her scream. They were coming for her, coming to brand her sinful flesh, coming to beat her until she was bloody and broken. Coming for her as they had come for her mother.

Pressure against her neck. Degorsk's gentle voice. "It is all right, precious girl. You will have a nice sleep now and feel better."

The dark face filled her vision. He was one of the men who had put her in danger, but he was her savior too. The authorities couldn't take her, not with the three aliens defending her and acting as living shields against the judges and executioners.

"Don't let them take me. Don't let them put me in the prison."

"You are safe, Cassidy. No one is taking you from us." That was Tranis, and he spoke with grave reassurance.

"I didn't mean to be like her. I tried to be good." Her eyes slid shut.

"You are a very good person, my love. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

The kind voices drove the ugly ones in her head away, and she held onto them as sleep descended.

\* \* \* \*

The men released Cassidy from the shackles and Degorsk smeared soothing cream on her reddened buttocks while Tranis held her. Lidon filled in his clan on what had happened in their absence: decoding the strange 'Armageddon' entry, Cassidy's overwhelming response to discipline, and her hysterical negation of being like her mother.

"Are we doing the right thing?" Tranis asked, laying Cassidy on the bed. He wiped the tears still clinging to her cheeks away as if by doing so he could erase her pain. The raw agony in the words she'd spoken dug at his heart.

Degorsk handed Lidon the last of the anti-grav cuffs. "The method of making Earther women slaves to their desires, followed by rebuilding their self-esteem has been the most successful where forced coercion has been required." He squeezed Tranis' shoulder. "I agree it's painful to watch her suffer, but we're giving her a better life in the end."

Lidon put the cuffs away in their drawer. "A life where she's treated like the intelligent person she is. In my opinion, the general committed a heinous crime by

ending her education. You should see the log of the books she read on that device she kept hidden.”

“Such as?”

“Mostly advanced scientific theories and mathematics, along with political dissertations. I admit what she’s studied gave me a headache, and you know what my intelligence scores are. If she grasps even half of what she’s read, she possesses a formidable mind. Degorsk, I think you should test her aptitudes.”

“I’ll do that.”

Tranis frowned, more disturbed than ever. “If her mind is that superior, I fear what we’re doing may inflict more harm than good. It’s essentially brainwashing.”

Degorsk smiled sadly at him. “She’s already a victim of that by her own people. I’ve been in contact with Imdiko Govi, who heads the psychological research team back on Kalquor. The evaluations we’ve done on the women of Europa show some of the worst cases of emotional damage on record.”

Lidon limped to the computer station and sat down heavily. “So anything we do can’t make these females worse?”

The medic nodded. “Many of them are convinced they’re evil simply because of their gender. Cassidy is a prime example of that. Even her intelligence can’t get around that illogical idea; she’s too programmed. It’s monstrous what Earth’s government and religion have done.” He paused, the frown on his normally cheerful face telling Tranis he debated whether or not to tell them more. It had to be harsh for him to hesitate. Degorsk was an open book with his clanmates.

Finally he sighed. “This information doesn’t go out of this room.”

“Of course.”

“A few on Govi’s research team have suggested full memory wipes on the worst of the affected Mataras.”

Tranis knew the horrified look on Lidon’s face was mirrored on his own. “That’s rather extreme.”

“The degree of self-loathing these women have for themselves is unfathomable. They may be beyond salvaging. Or so the theory goes.”

Lidon growled, “No such thing will be done to our Matara.”

Degorsk’s gaze went to Cassidy. He drew himself up, and his gentle smile returned. “No, she’s not that far gone. And it’s only being discussed as an option of last resort for the ones who are.” He looked again at Tranis. “I’d like to know more about her past and why she’s determined to not be like her mother.”

Tranis nodded. His stomach still churned over the news some of the women might require memory wipes. He buried his fingers in the softness of Cassidy’s long hair and stared at her, drinking in the fragile planes of her sweet face.

*Not you, my little one. I’ll make it right for you, somehow.*

The depth of his emotion made it difficult to breathe for an instant. Tranis forced himself to be calm. Clearing his throat, he turned to Lidon. “It’s your turn to play with the general. Good work uncovering that ‘Armageddon’ notation, by the way.”

Lidon rose. “It will be good work when I find out what it means.” With one last look at Cassidy, he left the room.

“Are you ready to work with her again?” Degorsk asked. He prepared a tab of stimulant.

“You’re sure this is what’s best for her?” Tranis studied his Imdiko’s face, watching for any sign of doubt.

There was none. “Recovery is painful, Tranis. As her Dramok, you must be strong for her.”

“All right.” Tranis pulled his boots off.

He and Degorsk stripped and climbed onto the bed, arranging themselves on either side of Cassidy. The medic injected her with stimulant. Tranis molded himself to her soft body, taking in her warmth as her eyelids fluttered opened.

Degorsk spoke as the fuzziness in her expression cleared. “Good evening, precious girl.”

\* \* \* \*

The faces of Tranis and Degorsk swam into focus. Cassidy felt the softness of the bed beneath, the hardness of their warm, aroused bodies against hers. She struggled against them. “No, no more. Please,” she wailed, fighting to get from between them.

Degorsk’s mouth opened, and she saw the thin, needle fangs descend from the roof of his mouth an instant before he buried them in her neck. Tranis held her wrists as the other man injected the intoxicant into her system.

After a few seconds euphoria chased her fear away, and she softened to the men’s embrace. Degorsk released the bite and gently licked the wounds he’d made. She shivered to feel his hot, wet tongue slide against her skin.

Tranis smiled, his too-serious face handsomer for the expression. “You’re feeling much better now, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Yes,” she purred. She wriggled her hips against his, delighting in the sensation of his turgid organs so close to her eager body. Her head still felt heavy from fatigue, but that discomfort was secondary to the promise of being filled with the flesh of her gorgeous companions.

Degorsk’s deep rumble in her ear gave her gooseflesh. “You’re ready for your husbands to pleasure you now.”

The confidence in his tone gave her pause. “Are we really married?” Cassidy asked, wanting to believe him, wanting her primitive urges to have the freedom to be realized.

Wanting to belong to them in all ways.

Tranis kissed her before answering. “You are our Matara. That makes us married.”

“Not in Earth’s eyes.”

“On Kalquor, it’s a binding commitment that only death can break. Would you like to go to Kalquor?”

Cassidy’s clouded senses embraced the notion, and not just because she’d be allowed to enjoy carnal delights with the clan. What possibilities awaited her free of Earth’s and her grandfather’s suffocating restrictions?

“Can I read what I want? Can I finish my schooling? Study what I want?”

"Of course, precious girl. We think it's important for you to expand your mind and realize your full potential."

To feed her starved brain again and enjoy the dictates of her sensual desires with Tranis' clan ... could she really be granted such paradise?

"I'd have three husbands? You two and Lidon?"

"That's right," Degorsk affirmed.

A lifetime with the three men who made her feel so good despite her best efforts to deny her needs. "I'd love to go to Kalquor." An ocean of longing filled her words.

Tranis' face stretched into the first true smile she'd seen from him. His teeth were brilliant white in his dark face. "Once our business here is done, we'll put in for leave and take you there." He leaned down to kiss her deeply.

In her intoxicated stupor, Cassidy let go of all reservations. When Tranis rolled her on top of his body, it was her hands that positioned his penises to enter her. He growled deep in his throat as she enfolded him with her warmth. Bracing her palms

against his chest, she moved up and down, feeling his thicknesses slide in her tight sheaths. Her platinum hair fell around him in a curtain. The thick tresses swayed with her movements, allowing glimpses of Degorsk lying nearby, watching her make love to his clanmate. A sudden thought brought prickling heat to her womb.

"Both of you," she groaned. "I want you both at the same time."

Degorsk rose to position himself between Tranis' splayed legs and behind Cassidy. Tranis gripped her hips, holding her up as the Imdiko carefully slipped the Dramok's smaller member from her anus.

Degorsk's penetration of her tightest orifice made the overwhelming sensations even more delightful. The men matched her eagerness with their own, their strokes long and sure, driving her to orgasms of such intensity she sometimes forgot to breathe. The three plunged and bucked, a single beast of mindless sensation knowing only the rapacious appetite of lust. Growls, snarls and shrieks filled the cinnamon and sea-salt perfumed air.

At last the bestial cacophony quieted, leaving only heaving gasps of sweet completion in its wake. The three lay upon the rumpled bed in a sweaty, sticky heap of tangled limbs. Cassidy found herself in the middle of the pile, sandwiched between the solid mass of the Kalquorians. She savored the closeness of her lovers, the comfortable bulk of their muscular bodies. How could such joy be evil? She'd never known a more pure emotion.

"How do you feel?" Tranis asked, his hand possessively stroking her breast.

"Wonderful." The euphoria persisted, and she wished she could remain intoxicated, far from responsibility and guilt. She pushed away niggling concerns of loyalty to her race, to her religion. Only this warm enjoyment mattered right now.

"Have you ever heard of Armageddon?"

"Of course. It's not exactly a romantic subject though." Her tone was petulant. Why did Tranis want to talk about such things after what they'd shared? Especially things that reminded her of the sins she committed?

"I'm sorry. I simply wondered what it referred to."

“The final battle between good and evil in which the antichrist is sent packing once and for all. The evildoers too.” She propped herself up on one elbow and looked at the men. “Do you think I’m going to Hell for what we just did? You know, I wonder about this stuff all the time. With all the bad things that happen like murders and abuse, does my having sex with aliens really matter that much to God? It doesn’t hurt anyone.”

Degorsk chuckled. “God would never send such a sweet, beautiful angel like you to that place.”

Somehow he made the saccharine words sound sincere. Cassidy thought perhaps he meant them. The thought made her feel warm inside. “You’re supposed to be monsters. That’s what everyone says.”

“Do you think we’re monsters, precious girl?”

She thought, really thought about his question as much as the persistent exhaustion and intoxication allowed her to. “I know what my faith believes. You are not made in God’s image as we are. You’re emissaries of Satan, sent to foul God’s greatest creation.” Her brow wrinkled as she considered what she’d been taught compared to her own experience. “I know some of it is propaganda, but some of it has to be truth as well. You have taken the women of Europa prisoners. You’re forcing us to do things we don’t want to do.”

“But?” Tranis prodded when she hesitated. He seemed genuinely interested in what her thoughts were, something she didn’t experience often since her mother’s death.

“But despite some very unsavory actions, you don’t fit what I was told about you at all. You look like us, with only a few differences. So it’s logical to assume you were made in God’s image too.”

“What else?”

“You two have been very nice to me, even when you make me do things I shouldn’t. Lidon is usually nice too, but he scared me a little last time.”

She looked around the room, making sure the imposing Nobek hadn’t come in without her knowledge. Even after assuring herself he hadn’t silently slipped into the room, she confided to the others in a whisper, “He spanked me.”

Tranis bit his lower lip, as if to keep from laughing. Degorsk nodded with sympathetic understanding. “I know he did. Your backside was red from it, and I put a cream on it to make it feel better. Does it still hurt?”

“Not anymore. Why would he hit me like that?”

“Lidon’s a disciplinarian but very fair. You must have been naughty for him to punish you.”

Cassidy tried to think what she’d done to warrant punishment. All she could remember was the warmth of his hand on her buttocks, sending painful shocks of pleasure darting through her womb.

Tranis’ expression was sober again. “If Lidon spanked you, it was only to correct your misbehavior. He cares deeply for you, Cassidy.”

“Really?” The thought made her feel better. “But I’m an adult. I’m too old for spankings.”

That earned a chuckle from Degorsk. “In Earth years, Lidon is 72 years old. You’re still very much a little girl to him.”

Cassidy's jaw dropped. Lidon was almost as old as her fiancée, Colonel Tucker. "That's old!"

Degorsk laughed out loud, and Tranis grinned fit to split his face. "I suppose for a girl your age, he would be...mature. Lidon is still quite young for a Kalquorian though. We live an average of 250 years."

"Wow." Enough of the intoxication had lifted for Cassidy to make the calculations. Lidon's life was still in the early stages at the same age most Earthers were planning their funerals.

"Cassidy, do you know anything about Earth's defense grid?"

She wondered how old Tranis and Degorsk were. They looked young too, certainly no older than their mid-twenties to early thirties, but now she realized she couldn't trust their appearances. "I don't know anything about the grid except it's two days' travel from here, and you have to know the code to get past it to reach the wormhole."

Degorsk's brows drew together in confusion while Tranis' eyes went wide. "Wormhole?" the medic asked.

Tranis answered him. "It's their word for a vortex gateway. An interdimensional portal, like the one near Sirius. Where is the wormhole that leads to Earth, Cassidy?"

"There are two, but the one I'm talking about comes out between Florida and the Bahamas. The portal is called the Bermuda Triangle. It's an unstable wormhole and terrible to navigate. Even with automatic gravity buffers, we have to strap down because it's such a bumpy ride. I hated going through it to get to Europa."

Something about the look the two men exchanged bothered Cassidy, but she couldn't quite put her finger on why her benumbed brain was clamoring warnings. She needed to think...

"What about the other wormhole? Tell me about that."

"Its access is in the Andromeda Galaxy and it comes out in the Dragon's Triangle, near Japan. There's another defense grid there to protect it from invasion. Oh!"

That's what her sense of unease had been trying to caution her about. She was divulging information to the enemy!

Tranis tried to keep his voice calm, but she heard the excitement underlying his composure. His sharp gaze betrayed him. "Where exactly is the entrance to the Bermuda Triangle portal?"

"I shouldn't have told you about that." Panic rose to beat back the effects of Degorsk's bite. "What have I done? Get away from me! Get away, demons!"

She flailed wildly, trying to escape the men who'd seduced her, duped her into revealing the wormhole's existence. *Stupid! Evil!* her mind screamed. And she was. Oh God help her, she was a wicked, horrible creature determined to bring about humanity's fall just as surely as Eve offering the serpent's fruit to Adam.

Even the Kalquorians' formidable strength couldn't bring her maddened thrashing under control. She clawed and hit herself as brutally as she did them, screaming her horror for what she'd done. Finally Degorsk shouted, "I have to sedate her again!"

"Do it!" Tranis roared.

He pinned her with his body, taking the brunt of her abuse as Degorsk sprang from the bed. Cassidy managed to sink her teeth into his shoulder in her struggle against him. His blood, strangely sweet on her tongue, flooded her mouth. Tranis hissed in pain, but kept hold of her until Degorsk returned, pressing a hypo against her throat. Cassidy's muscles went lax, and she released the vicious bite, leaving a perfect oval on his dark skin.

*God help and forgive me*, she thought as blackness washed over her.



## Chapter Nine

Lidon stared at General Hamilton in the containment cell. The Earther was suspended in anti-grav shackles as Cassidy had been earlier. The sight wasn't nearly as pleasing. Pain inflictors were now imbedded in the most sensitive areas of his skin. The small, flat white ovals looked harmless, but Lidon knew from personal experience that while they caused no physical damage, the agony they discharged was terrible. He wondered if the general had been trained to withstand such pain as he had, or if it was sheer stubborn will that kept the Earther from spilling the secrets he knew.

Hamilton's spare frame had none of Cassidy's softness, none of her charm. Lidon was glad there was little resemblance between Hamilton and his granddaughter. It made causing the general discomfort easier.

The Nobek's feelings were mixed where Hamilton was concerned. Knowing the same blood flowed in his Matara's veins, that she was a descendent of this man, gave him pause. Still, General Hamilton was part of the government that terrorized Cassidy and other women like her. He was part of her pain. For that, Lidon wanted to beat the man bloody.

He contented himself with staring at the Earther, letting his silence eat at Hamilton's will. Lidon hadn't said a word since entering the cell. He'd easily subdued the flailing man, shackling and dangling him helplessly in the air. Then the Kalquorian stood back, folded his arms over his chest and glared. Hamilton was beginning to respond to the oppressive silence.

"Stop staring at me, Kalquorian demon!" he ranted. "Let me loose. I'll claw your eyes out and crush them beneath my feet! As God is my witness, I'll make you pay for your sins!"

Lidon stood absolutely still, not a twitch betraying his amusement at the empty threats. Hamilton's tongue was loosening quite well now, a welcome change from the stubborn silence he usually retreated behind.

From the corner of his eye, Lidon saw Tranis appear on the other side of the transparent field that made up one of the cell walls. Something in his young Dramok's carriage suggested he wasn't very happy. Lidon hoped it had nothing to do with Cassidy, but he welcomed the frustration in Tranis' attitude. That kind of anger, used in a controlled manner, could yield results with their prisoner.

The field became visible for a moment as Tranis opened a door in it to step through. Once he was inside the cell, the field disappeared once more, a brief buzz letting them know it was whole again.

Hamilton howled in mixed terror and fury, his verbal attacks turning to the captain. "The sodomizer! The man-lover! Rapist!"

Lidon finally looked away from Hamilton to cock an eyebrow at Tranis. "Did you?" he asked in their language.

Tranis' glare skewered him with seldom-seen anger. "Give me credit for having some taste. How could you ask such a thing?"

Over his infuriated hiss, Hamilton continued to scream. "Have you returned to torture me more? Do you think your devil flesh tempts me?"

Lidon ignored him. "I read Degorsk's report. I didn't know if you'd capitalized on what he found during his examination." He twitched an apologetic smile. "You've made extreme sacrifices before to carry out missions."

Some of the tension went out of Tranis' body. "The general seemed to believe the colonic probe was a sexual encounter. Though it was Degorsk who 'violated' him, Hamilton blamed us equally."

"Do your worst, you alien devils! I won't be persuaded!"

"You should have told him Degorsk is much more enjoyable than that." Lidon switched subjects. He needed to know where Tranis' thoughts were. "You look upset."

"Our Matara gave up information she regretted. She became very distressed."

Lidon frowned. He hadn't considered Cassidy might have information that could help their mission. A flicker of self-disgust made him tense. He'd underestimated her, like an Earther man would have. It wouldn't happen again.

To Tranis he said, "It is hard to be disloyal to your own kind, even when you've been ill-used by them."

"I'm talking to you!" Hamilton screamed. "Don't think ignoring me will keep me silent!"

Tranis glanced at the Earther. "At least you've got him speaking again. Has he told you anything of interest?"

"I haven't begun the interrogation. I've just stood here staring at him. It seems to be having an effect."

Hamilton grinned as they turned their attention to him. It wasn't a pleasant sight. "Are you afraid to talk?" he asked, his voice hoarse from shouting. "You should be. Your tongues will be cut out by the swords of God's righteous armies."

"Charming," Tranis muttered. "He seems in the mood to share a few thoughts. Let's see what we can get from him."

The Kalquorians walked up to the suspended Earther. Lidon grasped Hamilton's shoulder, adjusting him so he hung slightly lower than eye level, keeping him in a humbled position. The general shuddered at his touch, and Lidon felt a twinge of mean triumph. The Earther wouldn't cave in from fear, but fear was good just the same. It meant the Nobek had the upper hand.

"Back to humiliate me? To defile me with your demon lusts?"

Tranis had swept all emotion from his face. His voice flat, he said, "Armageddon. What is it?"

Hamilton's grin returned, a hectic light in his eyes. "The end of the world. The righteous will be uplifted and the damned annihilated in a wave of fire."

Lidon restrained the urge to quote one of his favorite passages from the Book of Life: *Belief is the heart's staunch protector, zealotry the world's deadly assailant.*

Instead he asked, "Why is that word encoded in your ship's database?"

Hamilton's reply made no sense. "But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet. They had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

Tranis tried a different tact. "What kind of defenses will we encounter at the Bermuda Triangle when we emerge from the wormhole?"

Lidon was hard pressed to contain his excitement. A portal? One that led directly to Earth, cutting days of travel to mere minutes? Cassidy had indeed let slip important information.

Hamilton's eyes widened an instant before his face took on that closed expression that let them know he would soon go silent again. "Out of this mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations." A tear rolled from one eye to slip down the general's cheek. "Our defense is the embrace of God. We will not be taken."

They were losing their opportunity. It was desperation that prodded Lidon to his next action.

He stepped behind Hamilton and ran his hand over the Earther's hairy inner thigh. "You can do better than that, General."

Hamilton jerked at Lidon's touch. His voice pitched high in panic. "Dear Father in Heaven, grant me the strength to overcome these agents of Hell."

Lidon's hand stroked upward to clutch a skinny buttock. He pulled a grimace and saw his young Dramok bite his lips in the effort to hold back laughter. Well, at least someone was enjoying this.

"I think Lidon likes you," Tranis whispered to the trembling Earther. "Armageddon, General. I want a clear answer."

Despite his sobs, Hamilton's voice filled with venom. "You will not have my world. I guarantee you that."

Behind him, Lidon shook his head at Tranis. In Kalquorian he said, "I can't go any further with this. The thought sours my stomach."

"I wouldn't ask you to. Perhaps the threat alone will be enough." Tranis spoke to Hamilton in English again. "I will let you think about our next session, General. When I come back, I expect some answers. I will not deny Lidon his pleasures if you aren't more forthcoming."

With relief, Lidon took his hands off Hamilton and followed Tranis out of the cell. He needed to get to a wash basin. Fast.

## Chapter Ten

Degorsk led Cassidy by the hand into the spy ship's public dining room. The walls and ceiling emitted soft light over a few small groups seated on thick floor cushions around tables. Only three of the twenty tables were occupied.

The groups were spaced far apart, but the scene was the same at each. Three Kalquorian men fed a huddled Earther female with their fingers. Low voices coaxed and praised the women, who were all clad in the same type of white sleeveless underdress that Cassidy wore. She recognized her fellow captives at once. Gentle Tina, the redhead aspirant she'd watched succumb to temptation in her cell. Mary Anderson, who'd argued with her as she'd warned everyone to hide. Sister Katherine, Cassidy's mentor who'd prayed as the aliens took her prisoner. They glanced at her as Degorsk ushered her to a table in a corner, then quickly dropped their eyes. Every face was a study of quiet shame, and Cassidy knew she'd not been the only one to surrender to sin. It was no surprise to her they had fallen to temptation. After all they were women, sharing the same evil tendencies.

Still, seeing Sister Katherine quietly accepting small morsels of food from the fingers of the men crowded around her was startling. Cassidy wouldn't have expected violent opposition from the kind nun who always spoke in hushed, peaceful tones, but she thought Katherine would at least offer quiet resistance. To see her submissively take every bite offered her, not pulling away from the big dark hands stroking her arms, hair and back shocked Cassidy.

"Sit here." Degorsk tugged Cassidy down to a seating cushion, and rapped his knuckles on the table top. Almost immediately, two Kalquorians hurried in from a brightly lit doorway, carrying huge trays of food that they set on the table. The men disappeared as fast as they'd shown up.

"This is nice isn't it? It's good to get out of our quarters for a little while." Degorsk smiled brightly at her, his lean face so jarringly handsome she had to look away. How dare such a beast seem attractive, she thought, fighting a wave of desire. The Kalquorian devils exploited her every weakness, and she was growing tired of fighting them off. What was the point? She'd already damned herself, hadn't she?

And there was the promise of a better life on Kalquor, one she couldn't possibly contemplate on Earth. But it meant being a traitor.

*God, I'm so confused. Isn't there some way I can have the life I want without hurting my own people?*

"What would you like to try first?" he prodded, and Cassidy looked at the trays of food before her. Delicious scents assaulted her, and her stomach growled.

"I don't want any of it."

"You are going to eat, Cassidy." His voice was still gentle, but his eyes had gone hard.

“No.” She was not giving in so easily.

Degorsk grasped her chin, making her look him in the face. His tone remained kind. Loving, even. “You will eat, or I will lay you on this table and have sex with you until you climax. Everyone here will see you give into your desires.”

She stared at him. Would he really do such a terrible thing? Right in front of an audience?

He leaned back slightly to show her the bulge of his erection. He meant what he said.

Cassidy jerked her head free of his grasp. She pointed at a small pile of what looked like golden chunks of meat. “That.”

“Oh, you’ll enjoy this.” He was perfectly agreeable as he plucked a morsel with his fingers and pressed it to her lips. It was as if he’d never uttered such a vicious threat. “It’s the meat of an avian from Kalquor.”

She accepted the food, her eyes downcast to avoid the other women’s should they be watching. The meat was meltingly tender and sweet, prompting her to glance up at Degorsk with surprise. “This is meat? It’s like a pastry.” Boy, had she missed sweets since her capture.

“I knew you’d like it.” He fed her another piece and selected what looked like a fiery red lump of rock for himself. “You don’t want this grul. It’s much too spicy for Earthers.”

A scream split the air. Mary flailed against her group of Kalquorians, sobbing. Two held her still, murmuring comfort while the third sank long, thin fangs in her throat. His face remained buried against her neck until she quieted and her eyes slid closed.

“It’s all right. She’s fine,” Degorsk soothed. He fed Cassidy a minty sprig of greenery.

Mary’s clan carried her out. Cassidy was surprised to see not angry embarrassment on their faces, but indulgent smiles, as if they tended a temperamental but well-loved child. The man who hefted her in his arms kissed her forehead before they swept out of the room.

“She’s not fine. You torture us with your wicked lusts. You shouldn’t make us do sinful acts.”

“You were made for pleasure, sweetling. Your god designed you to enjoy making babes. How can it be a sin?” He continued to feed her.

Cassidy ate, hunger overriding resistance. She knew better than to argue with Degorsk on the subject of sin. He had an answer for everything. The worst part was he sounded so damned reasonable. It drove her crazy.

When she remained silent, he tried a different tact. “Did your mother enjoy sex?”

Disgust momentarily stole her appetite. “She was a Jezebel. She gave herself to a man right in front of me. She *begged* him to have sexual relations, knowing if I didn’t report her, I’d be every bit as guilty as her!”

“Why would she do that?”

“My grandfather said she was always evil. He knew about her the moment my father brought her home for his blessing, which he refused to give. They married anyway in secret.”

“Your father must have loved her to defy him.”

Cassidy thought about that. “He did. Daddy called her his ‘forever love’. They seemed very happy while he was alive.”

Degorsk offered her more of the sweet golden meat, and she accepted it. “How did your father die?”

“There was an uprising on the Asian continent. Two insurgent groups called the Sikhs and Hindus had banded together to fight the government. Daddy’s division was called to put the rebellion down. I was very little, and it took a long time to understand he wasn’t coming home like he had before.”

Degorsk stroked her hair. The comforting touch felt good. I’m evil to like this, Cassidy thought, but she didn’t resist. She was a lost soul by now anyway. No better than her mother.

“I’m sorry for your losses, precious girl.” He leaned over to press warm lips to her cheek. She suppressed a shiver at the gentle caress. “What was your mother’s fate?”

“She was convicted for her crime and sent to the work camp where she died.” Cassidy looked up at Degorsk, unable to deny the desire his nearness sparked. “You’ve made me like her.”

“I’m trying to show you how beautiful and good you are.”

“If I was good, I wouldn’t like what we do.”

There, she’d admitted her enjoyment of the sins he and the others had forced on her. It wasn’t as if he didn’t know it already. Her eager responses to all they’d done had informed him of her wickedness time and time again.

Before he could press her with more questions she didn’t want to answer she asked, “Where is my grandfather, Degorsk?”

His easy expression remained open. “In a detention cell. We’ve questioned him but he hasn’t been harmed.”

She studied his face, finding no subterfuge or guilt. Did his kind feel shame for what they were? If he lied to her, would she even detect it? “Does he know what I’ve done with your clan?”

“We haven’t told him. We know how important his approval is for your state of mind. He would judge you harshly even though you’ve resisted as best you can.”

The gentle acknowledgement of her attempts to defy their lusts softened her to Degorsk more than all his false assurances of her continued decency. She couldn’t fathom why it meant so much. But the little resistance left diminished even more at his understanding.

Cassidy suddenly realized that barring a miracle rescue, it was inevitable she would surrender to his clan. She would be theirs for the rest of her life, their mate, their childbearer, their Matara. She couldn’t continue to hold out, not when returning to Earth meant execution, a fate she could not simply resign herself to. And especially not when her body thrilled at the clan’s every touch. Not when her heart lifted at the men’s every gentle word.

*I don’t really want to be saved anymore.* The thought of returning to Earth, even without being condemned for her crimes, put suffocating dread in her heart. And to be

married to her grandfather's elderly friend? To never be touched by Tranis, Lidon or Degorsk again? No. No. A thousand times, no.

She was damned for sure. She had nothing left to fight for. To her weary shock, there was relief in giving up the battle for her soul.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy submitted to Tranis' bite on her inner thigh without a whimper. She wasn't sure why he thought it necessary to intoxicate her. She'd offered no resistance when he'd started kissing and caressing.

As euphoria coursed through her veins, she wasn't sorry he'd done it. The intoxicant erased her guilt for the lust her sinful body subjected her to. Now she wouldn't mind that Tranis' touch made her wet and aching for his magnificent body. His bite freed her from all responsibility for her desires.

His fangs withdrew, and he lapped the beads of blood from the punctures with long, languorous strokes of his rough tongue. Cassidy relaxed into the wash of intoxicant, her sex spasming to have Tranis' face so close. She moaned as he licked higher on her thigh, coming closer to where his mouth would feel best.

Sitting naked at the computer station, deciphering codes as he waited for his turn at her, Lidon chuckled. "Tranis has a very talented tongue, doesn't he, pet?"

How would he know that, Cassidy wondered? Perhaps the rumors of Kalquorians' bisexuality were true. As Tranis crept closer to her center, she found she didn't care.

The Dramok's mouth closed over her core. She sighed with deep pleasure, loving how his tongue parted the petals of flesh to lap hungrily at her flowing juices. His palms reached to cover her breasts, molding the supple flesh. She put her hands over his, enjoying his strength.

His mouth worked her wonderfully. Lips, tongue and teeth brought heat licking through her womb, eliciting groans as she climbed to the pinnacle of pleasure. Her climax was gentle sweetness, lapping in soft waves through her loins.

When she quieted, Tranis moved up her body, his mouth leading the way. He kissed a slow path up her belly to her breasts where he paused to suckle each hard nipple. Then he continued his journey, leaving a wet trail that led over the hollow and up the column of her throat. As he rounded the hill of her chin, Cassidy parted her lips to invite his tongue.

Tranis invaded her mouth, sex and anus all at once. Fresh desire ignited her senses, and she clutched the muscled alien to her, arms and legs wrapping around him. Her welcoming embrace excited him, and he rutted hard against her.

She accepted his rough use, her body opening to him. The ache of Tranis' demanding lovemaking mixed in a heady potion with the excruciating pleasure of his sex rubbing the sensitive part of her womb. Her cries were muffled by his mouth still pressing an unrelenting kiss to her lips.

Climax broke over her, leaving her jerking and clawing at his broad back. Still he rode her, his thrusts growing more powerful. He growled deep in his throat, and she screamed as fresh convulsions clutched his sex, trying to milk the sweet liquid from his loins.

At last Tranis gave in, rearing back and surrendering his seed to her with a deafening roar. She writhed beneath him, feeling his flesh pulse hugely within her. He came for a long time, his body rigid over hers.

Finally he relaxed, rolling over to lie spent and gasping beside her. He pulled her close, drawing her into the warmth of his body. She snuggled against him.

As their breathing quieted, the rapid-fire taps of Lidon's fingers on his computer claimed Cassidy's attention. She craned her neck to look at the Nobek over Tranis' shoulder.

He frowned in grim concentration as he looked at the indecipherable Kalquorian characters on his floating vid readout. Cassidy shivered at the predatory expression on his face. Lidon might not be stalking prey that would bleed when caught, but he was hunting just the same. She imagined the savagery his intense look hinted at. He'd killed in the line of duty, he'd said. Had he enjoyed it?

She thought he might have.

Her gaze drifted down to his damaged leg, crisscrossed with brutal scars. He was like a battle-branded lion, still majestic despite years of defending its pride. Somehow Lidon's twisted, lumpy limb accentuated the perfection of the rest of his body, made it more beautiful, more desirable.

"What happened to your leg, Lidon?" she asked.

He immediately turned from his computer to face her. She'd been half-afraid her curiosity might offend him, but there was no trace of irritation in his expression.

His voice was even, as if they discussed mundane matters like the weather. "I used to be commander of a fighter battalion. In a skirmish with the Tragooms, my fighter was nearly blown to bits with me in it."

"Does it hurt? I mean, I know it can't be comfortable, but are you in real pain?"

He smiled, perhaps hearing the concern she hadn't bothered to mask.

"Sometimes. I'm used to it now."

Tranis looked at him, and Cassidy saw the genuine affection in his expression.

"Don't bother with sympathy. Lidon could have had that leg replaced with a prosthetic, but like any Nobek, he likes to show off his scars."

"I consider the damage a mark of honor." And there was real pride in his voice, the pride of a warrior.

Cassidy slipped from Tranis' side. He let her go, and she climbed off the bed to stand before Lidon. The Nobek looked at her, his expression curious.

She sank to her knees so his thigh was at eye level. She traced one long, vicious scar along the top of his thigh with a gentle fingertip. Still intoxicated, she was free to appreciate the man before her, to acknowledge his strength. "So brave," she whispered.

He sat very still for her inspection. She tested the rigid texture of the disfigured flesh, probed the thick lumps, some of which were hard as granite, and some that were as spongy as her breasts. How he must have suffered, not only during the initial shattering injury, but later as he was patched back together and relearned to walk.

She kissed the worst scar, a massive lump of raised pale skin high on Lidon's upper thigh. She continued to kiss the leg, wishing not to heal the scars of which he was



justifiably proud, but the pain, both past and present. She didn't examine why it was important to her. Her mind shied from analyzing her motivations.

Lidon's sexes responded to her caresses, coming to twin exclamation points. The cinnamon-y scent of his arousal surrounded her. She'd never held a man in her mouth that way before, but she wanted to taste him now, her wounded and courageous captor. It was as good a way as any to tell the clan she'd given up.

A bead of liquid sat atop his larger sex, beckoning her tongue to lick it delicately. He shuddered. Cassidy rolled Lidon's flavor around on her tongue, finding the sweetish-spiciness delicious. She wanted more. His members glistened with natural lubricant, and she ran her tongue slowly up both lengths, making him groan. He gripped the armrests of his chair, his knuckles turning the dark skin white.

She worked first on the smaller organ, licking it all over while her tiny fist held the larger one out of the way. Next, she took it into her mouth, enjoying how the vein on the underside throbbed against her tongue. She sucked hard, her cheeks dimpling as she drew him deep into her mouth.

Lidon panted as she moved her attentions to his larger penis. Another drop of sweetness waited, and she accepted his offering by closing her mouth over the bullet tip. She rubbed her velvety tongue over him, and his body thrummed with tension.

He was too big for her mouth to take him all, and she gripped the base of his penis with her hand. She slowly enveloped his length in her mouth until she came close to gagging. She backed off, sucking as she went. Lidon's growling groan informed her she wasn't doing so badly despite her inexperience. She slurped him in again, growing in confidence as his sex grew even more rigid under her attention.

His heavy hand rested on the back of her head, pressing and releasing, pressing and releasing, guiding her rhythm. She paid attention to the sounds he made, noting he grew louder when her tongue ran firmly against the vein on the underside of his sex. She pressed harder on the pulsing flesh and was rewarded by a hiss of passion from her lover.

"Close, Cassidy," he warned. "If you don't slow down, I'll lose control."

She responded by bobbing her head even more enthusiastically. She wanted this. Now that she'd made her decision, she wanted him and the rest of the clan in every way possible. If she was to fall into decadence, she would fall all the way to the bottom.

Lidon yelled, his groin jerking to her face, his hand pressing her head down. Warm, spicy-sweet fluid spurted into her mouth, thickly coating her tongue. Cassidy swallowed, hungrily devouring every precious, profane drop of his ardor.

When he was done, he lifted her into his lap and kissed her deeply. "Thank you, my love."

Tranis had moved close, sitting on the edge of the bed. His hand settled on her thigh. "Does this mean what I hope?"

Though the intoxicant remained in her system, tears prickled her eyes. She nodded, swallowing hard. "You're wrong for what you've done. I haven't changed my mind about that. But my people would have me die for lying with you, even though it was against my will. My crimes of lewdness would have me executed on Earth. I have no choice but to stay with you if I'm to live."

Lidon hugged her hard. “You are unhappy now, but I promise you will not be sorry, my Matara.”

She looked from one man to the other. Their expressions contained quiet joy, making her want to be glad. A part of her recoiled whispering, *just like your mother*.

Not quite. Her surrender came with a price.

“Don’t ask me to help you against Earth. I may be wicked, but I’m no traitor. I won’t willingly give you any more information than I already have.”

Tranis squeezed her thigh. She heard regret in his tone. “Casualties on both sides are mounting because of this war. I’m still hoping Lidon will decipher those codes or your grandfather will give us the information we need.” He gazed steadily into her eyes. “I will not torture you, Cassidy. That I promise. There is nothing that will make me harm my Matara. However, if we have no luck with other avenues of getting what we need, I may have to extract what you know.”

“You’ll destroy what’s left of me if you do.”

Whatever he might have said in response was interrupted by two beeps. An excited voice, speaking in Kalquorian, filled the room. Lidon and Tranis were on their feet in an instant, the former depositing Cassidy on the bed before yanking on his formsuit. Tranis answered the disembodied voice as he dressed, also speaking in the guttural language. They moved so quickly, Cassidy’s eyes could barely follow.

“What’s happening?” she asked as the men put on their boots and hurried to the door.

Tranis paused long enough to answer, letting Lidon leave the room ahead of him. “A Tragoom ship has entered our sensor range. I’m sorry, but we’ll have to lock you in here while we attend to this matter.”

With that, he rushed out, a dark blur. Cassidy was left to stare at the closed door.

## Chapter Eleven

Tranis caught up to Lidon, and they entered the bridge together. Lidon immediately went to his station and his fingers flew over command keys, bringing up information.

“Report,” Tranis said, confronting Simdow at the captain’s station.

“The Tragoom ship has just changed course to intercept. We cloaked the instant we detected them. I think their interest is in the Earther transport.”

“Time of their arrival?”

Lidon answered that one. “Ten minutes.” His gaze met Tranis’. “Three-quarters of our medical personnel and one-third of security are on Europa with the Mataras. Another five Nobeks are guarding prisoners on the Earther transport.”

Tranis’ heart thudded heavily. “We’re spread thin.”

Simdow’s worry was obvious. “Captain, we can’t get our security forces off Europa before the Tragooms reach us.”

Undermanned and outgunned. Tranis looked at the vid of the Tragoom ship, a squat mishmash of other species’ ships cobbled together. The vicious race wasn’t interested in developing its own technology; they preferred to steal everyone else’s. He knew better than to be fooled by the almost comical assemblage of the approaching ship. Tragooms were ugly, stupid-looking brutes, but they were cunning fighters. One only had to look at Lidon’s leg to be reminded of that.

*It’s almost as if discussing them with Cassidy summoned the nasty things.*

He shook off the urge to be superstitious and turned his attention to the Earther transport displayed on another vid. “What kind of weapons does that transport have?”

Lidon wasn’t smiling, but Tranis heard the pleasure in his voice nonetheless.

“Enough firepower to give that Tragoom scout pause. Earthers love their guns.”

“Can you pilot it?”

“What an insulting question.”

Lidon’s disrespectful reply to his commanding officer had its intended result: Tranis relaxed enough to smile. “Take a suit and get over there. Keep their attention long enough to draw them in. Fire when I do.”

Simdow looked surprised. “No prisoners for questioning why they’re here?”

Lidon snorted as he motioned Osopa to the security station to take his place.

“They’re Tragooms, Commander. They’re looking for something to fuck and eat, and there’s almost two hundred Mataras on the moon below us who will serve both purposes.” Ignoring Simdow’s suddenly ill expression, Lidon left the room.

Tranis spoke to the air. “Degorsk, are you monitoring?”

“I’m on line, Captain. I’ve only got four medics on board, so no heavy casualties if you please.”

“I’ll do my best, Doctor.”

Tranis' stomach churned as he watched Lidon's spacesuited form appear on the vid, crossing the void between the ships. He silently cursed himself for having his crew in too many places to launch an effective defense. He'd never expected Tragooms to dare Earth's outer security in their search for supplies and food, but another Earth ship might have chanced upon the Kalquorians, and that would have been bad too. Either way, he'd allowed his excitement over capturing Hamilton and the Mataras, Cassidy in particular, to cloud his usual good sense.

He hoped his crew and the women of Europa wouldn't pay in blood for his lapse in judgment.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy sat on the edge of the bed, wondering what to do. The clan had left her alone for the first time since her capture. She'd given up hope of escaping the Kalquorians and didn't even want to escape now. Still, she needed to do *something*.

She stood up and crossed the small space to the aliens' version of a closet. She tapped the wall as she'd seen the men do, and a tall slice of its surface slid out, along with a row of suspended formsuits and her underdress.

Cassidy slipped on the underdress. Being clothed made her feel more ready for whatever might happen next. She stroked a formsuit, the stretchy silky material cool without the warm Kalquorian body filling it out. The blue trim told her it belonged to Tranis, and she held the sleeve of it to her face, inhaling. Clean, it offered her none of his scent, and she closed the closet feeling cheated.

What was happening now? Would they attack the Tragooms? What were Tragooms doing so close to Earth anyway? Too many questions and no one was around to answer them.

She looked up at a small square high on the wall. The Kalquorian ventilation system was no doubt much more efficient than what the Earthers used. She would barely be able to slip her arm in there, much less use it as an avenue of escape from the room.

Lidon's monitor vid was no help either. The green characters floating in mid-air, a cacophony of squiggles, dots and lines, told her nothing. She couldn't read Kalquorian.

There wasn't even a window to look out of and perhaps see the approaching Tragoom ship. While Tranis and Lidon's expressions had been bland when they left the quarters, the speed of their departure had betrayed the danger. Cassidy knew real trouble could be in store.

If the Kalquorians and Tragooms engaged in battle, she worried Earth security would detect the exchange. Monitoring in this area was sparse, but it existed for the span that went from the wormhole, just two days away, and the outer security border beyond Neptune. A fight might get Earth's attention, bringing a squadron to Europa to investigate.

If Cassidy and the other women the Kalquorians had seduced were 'rescued' by Earth...

She shuddered.

And here she was, locked in and helpless to do anything to save herself. She had to rely on hope and her clan's skill to protect her.

The thought brought her up short. *Did I just call Tranis' clan mine?*

She'd given herself to them, agreeing to be their Matara, to spend the rest of her life with them. Of course it was her clan. But the ease and naturalness of her acceptance of the three men as her mates startled Cassidy.

*Acceptance isn't all, is it Cassidy? There's a lot more, if you'd just admit it.*

She shut down the thought, terror sparking in her chest. She couldn't consider such things, not now. She had to be ready for whatever happened next. If only she could get out of this damned room!

Restraining an urge to bang on the locked door, Cassidy paced the cramped quarters.

\* \* \* \*

Lidon took the bridge of the Earther transport, barking orders as he pulled off his spacesuit. "Man the weapons."

The ranking officer, a young Nobek named Dov, nearly fell over himself complying. "Yes sir."

Lidon's hands ran over the helm controls, quickly memorizing the layout. He brought up a vid showing the approaching Tragoom ship. "Be ready to fire as soon as our spy ship de-cloaks."

"All systems armed." Dov's eyes were bright. "Will they attack, Commander?"

Lidon grinned. "It won't be any fun if they don't." He guided the transport towards the oncoming Tragoom ship, easily mastering the controls. "Can I pilot this ship," he muttered. Tranis should have known better than to ask such a question.

"Time to be Earther-pissed," he informed the small crew. "Com transmit."

"Transmitting, Commander."

Lidon closed his eyes for a moment, recalling General Hamilton's patterns of speech, his accent and cadence. When he had the voice in his head, he spoke. "Attention, Tragoom ship. You have entered Earth-controlled space. This is a hostile act. State your intentions and prepare to surrender your vessel. This is your only warning before we open fire."

At his nod, the Nobek handling com duties shut off the transmission. Lidon's fingers flew over the helm controls, never taking his eyes off the vid projection of the Tragoom ship. They were still coming.

"No response from the Tragooms, Commander."

*Good. I'm overdue for a fight.*

"Commander? We're stopping?" Dov kept his question respectful.

Lidon seized on the opportunity for a lesson. "If you check the read-out for Earth's long-range sensor net, you'll see this is a void area. We can engage the Tragooms here without alerting the defense grid of our presence." He swept a glance over his young crew. "Never forget all your enemies, even while you must direct your attention on the immediate threat."

"Yes, Commander."

He was gratified to see the eager absorption on each face. His Nobek underlings were a good lot; they simply needed the seasoning that only combat could provide.

A slight fluctuation in the field on their starboard side told Lidon the spy ship had kept pace with them. He hoped the Tragooms were too interested in the transport to take

notice. The spy ship had defenses, but not enough to fight off their closing enemy. It was built for subterfuge, not battle.

"Tragoom ship will be in weapons range in five seconds." Dov growled in anticipation.

"Lock on and prepare to annihilate." Inwardly, he urged on his enemies. *Don't make this too easy on me, you misbegotten waste of rotten flesh.*

He hated Tragooms.

A ball of fiery light bloomed at the bow of the Tragoom ship. "Brace for fire!" Dov yelled. Lidon was blinded by the burst of white-hot glare, but his fingers flew over the helm with calm assurance, rolling the transport in a steep dive to avoid the blast.

The flare subsided. An instant before his eyes adjusted, Dov's angry voice filled the bridge. "The spy ship took a direct hit! The bastards knew it was there!"

"Return fire! Hit them with everything!" Lidon roared. His guts clenched as the spy ship's cloak failed and the vessel swam into view. It drifted drunkenly, the thrusters on one side blown completely off. The hull of the entire forward section was a blackened, twisted mess. The crew's quarters were located at the stern along with Medical, so Cassidy and Degorsk would still be safe. But the bridge was nestled in the center of the bow.

*Tranis...*

The spy ship joined Lidon's bombardment of the Tragoom's ship, its weapons systems still intact. The quickness of the return fire allowed him hope. Someone was still alive and fighting on the bridge. The protective bulwarks around the braincenter of the spy ship had done their job.

Lidon piloted the transport around the Tragoom ship, finding the most vulnerable parts for Dov to fire on. He ignored the impulse to get between his enemy and the spy ship, to protect his clan from further fire. He had to take the enemy out.

"Direct hit on Tragoom ship. Heavy damage to their weapons array." Dov sounded positively gleeful as he pounded on their foes' defenses.

"Incoming fire! Brace for impact!"

Lidon held onto the helm station as the transport shuddered around him. "Open com to spy ship."

"Com open."

"Captain, I've got this. Get out of here." He listened for Tranis' voice, but no one responded. The spy ship had stopped firing and seemed to be drifting dead in space.

Dov howled with triumph. "Locked onto Tragoom's engines."

"Fire barrage!" Lidon bared his fangs.

Blooms of yellow, orange and red flowered on the Tragoom ship as explosions shook the haphazardly constructed vessel. Lidon watched the fireworks as they spread over the enemy.

"Direct hit! The Tragoom ship is going critical."

"Tranis, break off! Go!" He held his breath.

For a wonder, the spy ship moved away, its progress a drunken spiral. Lidon had no choice but to leave it behind as he piloted the transport a safe distance from the doomed enemy.

*Too slow. They'll never get clear in time.*

"Commander, destruction of Tragoom vessel is imminent. Brace for shockwave!"

The enemy's ship blew to bits. Lidon could only watch, his lips set in a grim line, as the spy ship toppled end over end when the shockwave hit it.

*Let the gravity field hold.*

He tried not to think of the members of his clan tossed around to break against the walls of their rooms. Especially not Cassidy, so tiny and fragile. As the transport groaned around him, holding resolutely still in the shockwave, the spy ship tumbled past their position. Lidon's stomach churned. For every member of his clan that perished, he'd take out a thousand Tragooms. For Cassidy, five thousand.

The wave passed, and Lidon set off after the spy ship. The stricken vessel slowed its momentum, and he allowed a small sigh of relief. Someone was still alive on the Kalquorian ship's bridge, bringing it to a gradual stop. The gravity field on board must have held.

"Commander, the spy ship is severely damaged. I read no power from the engines."

"Be ready to board and render aid to the injured. Tranis, what is your status?"

Lidon's heart sank when Simdow answered. "First Officer here, Commander. The captain is injured. Emergency medical to bridge! Captain Tranis requires immediate treatment."

*He's still alive. My Dramok lives, and as the Book says, 'while the body draws breath, hope is kept.'*

Degorsk's voice was a relief as well. "I'm on my way. What is his status?"

Over Osopa's orders to seal off the areas blazing with fires, Simdow answered. He'd forgotten to shut off the com. "That shockwave knocked him across the room. Head injury, bleeding heavily from several wounds. Osopa, make sure the power is cut to the engines and nonessential functions. Remove all oxygen from the sealed off areas to put those fires out."

Lidon waited for a lull, letting Simdow attend to the most important tasks first. At last he was able to speak. "First Officer, we're nearly to your position and will board shortly. What is the status of the ship?"

"Most systems are offline. We have backup power only, which is being routed to life support and medical. No defense, no weapons, no navigation, no thrust. This ship is dead."

Lidon heard the raw panic edging Simdow's voice. Had the first officer been a Nobek, Lidon would have had someone punch the man in the face to clear his head. But Dramoks were a different breed and required more delicate handling.

In a trusting tone Lidon transmitted, "Acting Captain Simdow, I recommend you send all weapons crew to the Earther transport. Only minor damage has been sustained over here. We'll keep guard while you make repairs." He added in a respectful voice, "With your permission, sir."

Lidon's quiet confidence turned the trick. After a moment of silence, Simdow responded with more assurance. "Acknowledged, Weapons Commander. As soon as

you are in position, your team will be sent over. I leave the defense particulars in your capable hands.”

He broke communications. Lidon wanted nothing more than to board the spy ship and see to Tranis’ condition himself, but he had his duty and his orders. Still, there was one thing he could do.

He opened his personal channel to Degorsk. “What’s going on with Tranis?”

“It’s going to be awhile before I can answer that, Lidon. He was apparently trying to run several stations himself after some of the men were hurt from the Tragoom’s attack. He wasn’t locked down when the shockwave hit and the bridge experienced a fluctuation in the gravity field. Ricocheting off the stations and walls hurt him pretty bad.”

Lidon swallowed. “Cassidy?”

“She’s fine. I sedated her just before the fighting started, much to her dismay. Grav held in our quarters, fortunately.” His voice took on an angry tone. “Tranis, lie still. You’re pouring blood, you idiot.”

A weak voice that sounded nothing like Lidon’s Dramok slurred, “Fight – fight Tragooms.”

“The threat is over. Sedate him. Stay down, you stubborn, cracked skulled—”

“Degorsk, you’re com’s still open,” Lidon prodded with a gentle tone. His heart thudded painfully.

The Imdiko’s voice cut off in mid-curse. That Degorsk spoke with so much temper told Lidon volumes about Tranis’ condition. When the medic was frightened, he veiled it with impatient vehemence.

*Tranis will be fine. He’s young and strong, and Degorsk knows what he’s doing.*

But the words of the Book of Life rang in his head: *Make death your friend, for it gives life its sweetness. Nothing is taken for granted when mortality is respected and revered.*

Damn little comfort in that, and the Nobek fought against a tide of angry helplessness. Sometimes even the most closely held faith failed a man, leaving him to flail in the darkness. Understanding that didn’t make it any easier.

With tremendous effort, Lidon concentrated on his duties.



## Chapter Twelve

The sounds of the door whispering open and Degorsk's soft voice muttering dragged Cassidy from sticky sleep. She fought to open her eyelids. What she saw helped her push her way out of fog-shrouded slumber.

Degorsk looked tired as he smiled at her. He guided a hover stretcher next to the bed. Stretched on it was Tranis. Her Dramok tormentor and lover was unconscious, his dark skin grayish in pallor. A thick covering hid most of his bulk until the other man pulled it free, revealing the sturdy, nude body livid with freshly healed-over wounds and blackened bruises. Cassidy gasped and forced her dull limbs to move so she could sit up.

Degorsk picked up Tranis as if he was a child, transferring him from the stretcher to the bed to lie next to Cassidy. "All right, you big brute. Safe and sound in your own bed at last."

Tranis' eyes fluttered open. His head lolled as he looked blearily at his dim surroundings. He blinked at his clanmate. He slurred something in Kalquorian.

Degorsk shook his head. "Everything is down. All available power is routed into medical."

Cassidy remembered Tranis and Lidon leaving the room to deal with the Tragoom threat and Degorsk arriving soon afterward, sedating her despite her protests. She'd even thrown a few punches, trying to keep him off her. He'd overpowered her easily.

It was obvious the fight against the Tragooms hadn't gone well. Despite her greatest efforts, tears fell to see Tranis hurt. His head turned, and he looked at her. The dazed expression in his face cleared. He reached to brush her cheek with the back of his hand, his smile warming his pale face. "I'm glad to see you unhurt, Matará. Don't cry. I'll be all right."

She caught his hand in her own, pressing her lips to his fingers. She'd shown his injuries affected her; it was too late to pretend otherwise. "Is he really going to be all right, Degorsk? Is Lidon okay?"

"Lidon is fine. And Tranis will be too if he does as he's supposed to and rests. You promised, my Dramok." Degorsk gave him a severe look.

"I'm fine, and we have a major situation on our hands." Tranis moved as if to sit up. He grimaced, pain obvious.

"You will rest." The medic put a restraining hand flat against the injured man's battered chest, stilling his struggles with effort. "You lost a lot of blood. Don't make me call Lidon to subdue you."

Cassidy saw Tranis' stubborn expression and marveled at the will of the man. She had the feeling if Degorsk let up for an instant, the Kalquorian captain would drag himself around the ship on his hands and knees, barking orders and setting to rights whatever damage had been sustained. Looking at the thick torso, not one inch of it

spared from bruises and long, red lines where the skin had been so recently slashed open, she feared for his wellbeing. He'd drive himself to the grave if they let him.

"Lidon is needed on the Earth transport. Leave him be," Tranis growled.

"Only if you do as you're told. He'll come charging back here if he thinks his Dramok's life is in danger he can prevent. Don't think for one second I won't call him."

"I am the captain. This mission is my responsibility." Tranis bared fangs at Degorsk and shoved himself into a sitting position.

Cassidy saw his back and how it was every bit as damaged as the rest of him. She was almost afraid of defying Tranis when he looked so intent. She knew in his pain-ravaged, determined state, he was possibly as dangerous as Lidon. But she feared *for* him even more, feared he would finish the job the Tragooms had started. He'd kill himself if they didn't stop him.

She threw her arms around his neck, molding her body against his back. "You're not going anywhere, you big, stupid Kalquorian," she said. "Do what he says or I'll find Lidon's cuffs and stick you to the ceiling."

He stopped pushing against Degorsk. She buried her face in the ebony spill of his hair, willing him to be reasonable. His fingertips brushed her arms where they bound about his throat. "You know, I think you would. But there's so much to do, and I'm needed. I'll be fine, I promise."

Degorsk's voice sounded ragged with exhaustion. "Simdow has control of the situation. What he can't handle, Lidon can."

Tranis' frame stiffened beneath Cassidy, and she knew he readied for another protest. Before he could utter a word, she whispered in his ear, "My father once said great leaders know when it's time to get out of everyone else's way." When Tranis hesitated, she added, "What happens to me if the leader of my clan dies?"

"Your Matara has spoken," Degorsk said softly.

Tranis' shoulders sagged. "I hear her." He shifted so he could kiss her before lying back down. "For you, my love," he whispered. "Five hours, Degorsk."

Palpable waves of relief emitted from the Imdiko, and he smiled his thanks at Cassidy. "Ten."

Tranis scowled. "Six."

Degorsk shook his head, rolling his eyes at his stubborn clanmate. "Eight and not a second less. The cell regeneration needs at least that long for minimum repairs." When Tranis opened his mouth again, protest written all over his face, Degorsk held up a hand. Fatigue strained his handsome face. "Tranis, I can't stay and argue with you. I've got more injured to attend to."

At last Tranis seemed to recognize the stress he was putting the other man through. He laid his hand on Degorsk's shoulder. "Eight hours. Thank you, my Imdiko."

Degorsk managed an exhausted smile. To Cassidy he said, "If he gets up, find something heavy to knock him out with."

She knuckled her tears away, trying to find humor to match his. "Won't you have to fix him again if I do that?"

He snorted. "With that thick skull? Not a chance."

Degorsk gave her a quick kiss before leaving the room, the hover stretcher following in his wake. Tranis held up his arms, and after only a moment's hesitation Cassidy slid into them. She couldn't deny she was happy he was alive. The injuries were scary to see, and she sensed from Degorsk they'd been life threatening.

"At least I have something beautiful to look at," Tranis sighed. His hands ran over her underdress, seeking the body beneath. "I'd enjoy it even more if you'd take this off."

She was shocked that despite his injuries, his penises were stiffening, rising from his battered body. "You have to rest," she insisted, shoving at his busy hands.

"Then don't fight me," he growled. He was instantly contrite, and the pleading in his voice softened her. "Let me look at you."

The need in his purple eyes made Cassidy respond, made her sex wet. She sat up, pulling the underdress off over her head. She desired his warmth, the reassurance that he indeed still drew breath. Before she could block the realization, she had the thought that nearly losing him was too much to bear. She needed the closeness he wanted.

"Lie next to me," he whispered, and she drew close, feeling him solid against her. She kissed him, sliding her tongue into his mouth to caress its twin. His fingers found her core, slipping in and out. She arched, feeling how well he knew her already, knew where the pressure felt best. She moaned into his mouth as his thumb rubbed slow circles around her clitoris. The heaviness in her womb grew.

Cassidy wept as climax swept over her, making her sheath clutch Tranis' fingers. It felt good to be with him. Realizing how close they'd come to not having this moment made it that much more poignant.

"Why are you crying?" he asked when the strongest spasms had diminished.

*Because I love you and you nearly died.*

She almost said it. The words wanted to fly off her tongue in neon-bright colors, leaving Tranis in no doubt of his mastery over her. Only her loyalty to Earth, to her own poor religion-crazed, sexually repressed people kept her true feelings dammed up. She couldn't turn her back on her own flesh, couldn't forget that in the end, Tranis was the enemy.

Instead of proclaiming her love, she settled for another truth, one she could share. "I want to be with you. It's wrong, and I feel so ashamed."

For once, Tranis didn't try to convince her she was wrong to feel guilt for her desires. Instead he asked, "What can I do to make it better?"

"Would you bite me?" She wondered at the brazenness of the request, but under the intoxication of a Kalquorian's bite the questions went away. The guilt disappeared. Under the influence, she could truly rejoice that Tranis lived.

"Come here," he said, the fangs already unhinging from his palate. She swept her heavy hair from her neck, and stretched to expose the smooth column to his penetration.

The pain was an exquisite overture to the symphony of euphoria sweeping through her. She moved against the taut exclamation points of his sex, careful not to provoke pain with her enthusiastic caresses over his injured frame.

"Better?" Tranis asked, his hands fondling her eagerly. Despite his injuries, the man's libido remained intact, unfazed by hurt.

“Yes, only now I really want you. Do you think Degorsk would be mad if I did all the work?”

“He’d be furious,” Tranis chuckled, but his face told her he was willing to risk the medic’s censure. “We won’t tell him, unless you want him to punish you.”

“Mmmm.” Cassidy warmed to the idea, remembering the sweet heat of Lidon’s spanking. “You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

Tranis’ grin stretched. “I’ll be glad to discipline you myself, if you’d like. Once I’m on my feet again.”

“I hope you recover quickly.” She looked him over, frowning at the marks masking his beautiful torso despite the intoxicant making her world a happy dream. “Promise to lie still? I couldn’t stand it if I did something to mess up your recovery.”

“I’ll do my best, my beautiful mate.”

He lay on his back. She straddled his groin, lowering herself to capture his livid sexes. She sighed, the empty ache of her womb soothed as she filled herself with him.

Her bliss was mirrored in Tranis’ expression. He stroked up and down her thighs, bringing gooseflesh to pebble her skin. She leaned over him, propping herself with her hands on either side of his shoulders, careful to not put any weight on his battered upper body. He was too broad for her to comfortably rest on her knees, so she drew her legs up so that she crouched over him, her weight on her feet.

She rocked back and forth, her moves slow and sinuous. Recalling the instructions in *The Kama Sutra*, Cassidy added a slight circular motion with her hips. Tranis groaned, eyelids fluttering. His hands captured her breasts, clutching and molding the malleable flesh as if sculpting clay. She echoed his groan, and clenched nether muscles around the thick beams of his desire.

“I won’t last, sweetling,” he gasped.

“I had mine already, remember?” Besides, she was catching fire as she moved against him, feeling him throbbing within the tight walls of her sheath. But it wasn’t just the physical joy of making love to Tranis that excited her. Giving herself to him, completely focused on his pleasure, making herself his willing servant ignited her senses. She’d never known such rapture as what surrender offered. It took down all barriers, allowing her to revel in the act of yielding completely to another’s desire.

Swollen huge with ecstasy, she burst into a thousand pieces when a thunderclap of pleasure resounded through her being. With a long, soft moan, Tranis pulsed deep within her, shattering the remains into even smaller fragments. She hung over him, suspended flecks of desire all that remained in the warm wash of aftershock.

Slowly the traces of Cassidy coalesced once more, drawn back together to reform the whole. Beneath her, Tranis lay still, his eyes closed and arms limp at his sides.

“Tranis?” Her breath caught to see him lie so dormant. “Tranis, are you okay?”

He drew a breath, his bruised chest rising to calm her. “You made it all better, lover.”

She kissed the exhausted smile, her lips soft on his. She loved him. God help her, she loved this man and the other two as well. “I wish we weren’t enemies,” she whispered.

"We aren't." His voice wavered, letting her know he floated on the edge of unconsciousness. "One day you'll see that, and you'll love me as I love you."

Tranis drifted away, sedated by her gentle lovemaking, leaving her to stare at his handsome, dreaming face. He'd said the words she didn't dare.

Tranis loved her.

Cassidy remained bent over him, absorbing the revelation. She wondered what it would change. She knew it altered something, not just between them but also inside her. She belonged to Tranis now. Tranis, Lidon and Degorsk. And what did that mean to her loyalty to Earth?

She wished she knew.

\* \* \* \*

Tranis woke to find Degorsk leaning over him. Next to him, Cassidy whimpered in her sleep.

"She seems to be having a nightmare," Degorsk whispered as he scanned Tranis with a portable unit. He frowned. "You smell too strongly of her to have simply slept with her at your side. And I see you bit her again."

"She did all the work. I lay very quietly. And it was all her idea."

"Really?" Degorsk looked pleased. "Lidon said she agreed to be our Matara."

"She did. Are you going to let me get to work now?"

He snapped the scanner shut. "Yes. You're healing well, cell regeneration is on schedule and none of your vital organs is in danger of re-injury. You're still going to feel weak," he cautioned as Tranis sat up. "The blood replacer only does so much. I'll be nagging you to sleep again in about ten hours."

"You nag even when I'm not injured." Tranis stood, pleased the pain had abated. He looked a mess yet, the bruising still livid, but he felt worlds better.

Cassidy cried out, capturing both men's interest immediately. Her brow creased, and Tranis worried to see her distressed, even in the throes of a simple dream. He got back on the bed to smooth his hand over her face. Degorsk also drew close to her, on the other side.

"Cassidy, it's all right," Degorsk soothed.

She thrashed, coming partly out of sleep but still locked in the dream. "No, please," she begged piteously.

Tranis' heart lurched to hear the fear in her voice. He shook her a little to pull her into wakefulness. "Wake up, my lovely."

"No, no, don't hurt her! Mommy!" Cassidy's eyes opened wide, and Tranis saw clarity seep in as she recognized them.

Degorsk kissed her cheek, caressing her all over to calm her. "What's wrong, precious girl? Who hurt your mother?"

A cold look, unsuited to her sweet, delicate features, slid over her face. "She got what she deserved," she said in a flat voice. "She undressed for him, enticing him with wanton abandon. The evil temptress seduced him. She led him from the path of righteousness." Cassidy suddenly covered her face with her hands. "God forgive me, I'm just like her. Even worse, having sex with aliens!"

Tranis looked hard into Degorsk's eyes, angry realization dawning. The words that had poured from her lips hadn't been hers. He'd worried about brainwashing his little Earther, but someone else had already done it.

In Kalquorian he said, "Do you hear who she sounds like?"

Degorsk looked horrified. "I wonder if her grandfather's version of her mother's crime supplanted the real events that took place." He took a deep breath and concentrated on their weeping mate. "Cassidy, you're a good, sweet girl. You couldn't do wrong if you tried."

She kept her face covered. "I want to be strong. I want to deny you as I should. Why am I so weak?"

Tranis tugged at her hands, forcing her to reveal her tearstained features. "Because deep in your heart, you know this is right for you." He kissed her, eager to erase her pain, knowing he couldn't but trying anyway.

She stiffened in momentary resistance, which only made him more insistent she accept tenderness. As he swept his tongue into her mouth, she melted against him. He sensed Degorsk caressing her, and her youthful desire warmed her to their embrace. Tranis felt gratitude for the still-maturing hormones that made arousal so quick and undeniable for her.

Once they had her writhing with need, he broke the kiss to say, "You belong with men who see not only your beauty and ability to breed. We appreciate your mind as well as your body. We want to hear you speak and share your thoughts with us. You were not meant to serve, but to be served."

Degorsk had been kissing a slow, wet path down her body, and he looked up as he reached the soft swirls of her pubic hair. "Tranis is right. There is so much more to you than you've been given credit for."

Cassidy moaned as he bent to his work, her hips lifting to greet Degorsk's knowledgeable lips and tongue. While he pleased her, Tranis kissed her lovely face and chest, suckling gently on the rose tips of her voluptuous breasts. He poured all his love into every caress, desperate to erase the pain his Matara lived with, pain inflicted on her by her own people.

Her moans came faster and faster. Their seduction carried her away from the agony of guilty conscience to where she could be the woman creation had intended. At last she could be, for a few seconds at least, free of the soul-stealing anguish men like her grandfather tortured her with.

*We will find a way to make it right for you. I promise to obliterate every speck of sorrow you've ever known.*

Tranis didn't know how he'd keep such a promise, but he'd alter the universe itself to make it possible. The clan was the center of his existence, and Cassidy was the heart of the clan. He'd find a way.

He watched her lovely face dissolve in rapture as climax took her to that place of sweet respite, his eyes stinging from unshed tears.

He'd find a way.

## Chapter Thirteen

Tranis walked onto the darkened bridge, his eyes quickly adjusting to the dimmed lights running on backup power. The room was a shambles. Equipment lay in broken hunks and many of the workstations were blackened from torched systems. He'd been the worst injured of his crew, and viewing the destruction, he counted himself lucky that none had died.

Cassidy and Degorsk followed him. The medic kept close as their Matara wandered about to explore the room, curious about everything. Tranis had to control a prideful smile as his crew darted appreciative glances at her.

"Captain!" The relief on Simdow's face was unmistakable. "Returning command to Captain Tranis," he announced.

"Not so fast," Degorsk growled.

Tranis ignored him. "What's our situation?"

Simdow grimaced. "Give us a few months and we can get enough power to the engines to make it to a repair station where they might use this for parts."

He wasn't surprised by the answer. "I can't say I particularly like that idea, Simdow."

"No Captain. I don't either."

Tranis treated himself to a glance at Cassidy before crossing his arms over his chest and challenging his first officer. "What's your solution then?"

Simdow's brow creased as he thought. Tranis had no doubt he'd already formed an opinion but was careful not to speak until he'd gone over it once more.

With a swallow Simdow replied, "I believe we should transfer all personnel and the data banks to the Earther transport, destroy this ship to keep it out of enemy hands, and continue with our mission."

The young man waited, his expression hinting at only a little of his nervousness. Tranis gave him a nod. "Excellent. Give the order, Simdow. The task is yours to command."

Simdow relaxed, even smiled a little. As he began the preparations to abandon the spy ship, Tranis used his private channel to call Lidon.

"Captain Tranis to Weapons Commander Lidon."

"Lidon here, Captain. It's good to hear your voice."

They spoke in Kalquorian, but Cassidy looked at Tranis when Lidon's voice emerged from his personal com unit. A slight smile warmed her expression. Tranis was beginning to entertain real hope they might win the Earther's bruised heart.

"Our ship is dead, Lidon. We're transferring operations to the transport, along with all personnel and prisoners on Europa. Coordinate security for the transfer and assign a detail to take charge of the Earther general."

"I'll take care of him myself." Lidon's voice lifted, a sure sign of good feeling. "I have news for you."

"Let's have it."

"I've broken a few more codes. I know where the entrance to the Bermuda Triangle portal is. It's only two days' journey from here on the other side of the security grid."

Tranis' heart leapt. "Excellent job, Lidon. I'm glad to know I won't have to take the information from our Matara."

"How is she?"

Tranis thought of Cassidy's nightmare, of her continued pain. "She's as good as one can hope for a woman in her situation. I'll see you soon. Tranis out."

Cassidy and Degorsk joined him. "Those Tragooms sure made a mess out of your ship," she observed. "Almost as bad as what they did to you."

"Worse, actually," he answered, taking her hand despite being on duty and surrounded by a large number of his crew. To hell with protocol. "The ship is dead. We're going to use the Earther transport instead."

"I'd better get to Medical and pack up," Degorsk said. "Then we'll work on our quarters."

"Can I help?" Cassidy asked.

"Thank you." Degorsk eyed Tranis. "No lifting, Captain. Doctor's orders."

"Matara's orders too." Cassidy squeezed his hand, making Tranis smile. He bowed his head in assent.

"As you command."

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy found she wasn't much help to the Kalquorians when it came to packing up sick bay. They were too fast and too organized for her to keep up. In the end, she sat to one side, out of everyone's way.

When Degorsk had finished directing his staff and finalizing how they would set up on board the Earther transport, she went with him back to the clan's quarters. Lidon was there with Tranis. For a wonder, the captain was behaving himself, sitting on the bed while Lidon carefully packed objects from his altar in a container. Cassidy sat down next to Tranis, who kissed her. She felt relief that his color had returned. The bruising had already begun to fade. She'd heard Kalquorian medicine was far advanced of Earth's, and Tranis was proof of it.

Lidon lifted his altar, exposing a mold of – Cassidy gaped – someone's buttocks? The Nobek snickered and showed it to Degorsk. "I suppose you want this back."

"My ass!"

Tranis laughed, grabbing his stomach as if the hilarity hurt. "I knew you wanted to keep his ass all to yourself. Greedy Nobek."

Lidon's back was to Cassidy, but his shoulders shook, letting her know he was laughing too. "As you said, it's a very nice one."

Cassidy couldn't contain her shock. She stared at the sculpture, disbelieving her eyes. "Why do you have that?"



Tranis answered, still chuckling. "One of his jokes. Degorsk thinks it irritates us to have it hanging on the wall."

Degorsk grinned. "Our clanmates are so serious all the time, precious girl. Haven't you noticed? A little humor is needed to combat the rampant somberness around here."

Tranis couldn't wipe the smile off his face. "You might not laugh if you saw the attention Lidon gives it when you're not around."

Lidon caressed the mold to underscore the Dramok's words, his expression lascivious. Degorsk snatched it from him.

"Get your hands off my butt."

That prompted more laughter from Tranis. He winced at the effect on his battered insides.

Cassidy looked at the three men, trying to wrap her mind around what they intimated. It had to be a joke. But when Lidon patted Degorsk's real backside with affection and the medic shot a warm smile at him before putting the sculpture in a padded container, she grew more suspicious.

"You're not serious. I mean you three don't – don't –"

She couldn't finish the question. They looked at her, bland patience removing the hilarity. Her stomach squirmed as she saw the truth in their eyes. "But it's a sin! The worst possible!"

Tranis moved so his body touched hers. "Cassidy, there are only a very few women of our species left on Kalquor. I can count the number of Kalquorian women I've met on my hands, and three of those were our mothers." He brushed a lock of hair from her cheek. "Our needs are great, and we can't always deny ourselves the warmth of another body. For us, it's unnatural, even impossible to deny our urges."

Degorsk sat on the other side of her, taking up her hand to press to his lips. "There are those who prefer to be with their own sex. I say prefer, but choice doesn't enter into it. It's encoded in their genes. For the rest of us who favor females, we still have the need for intimate pleasures and must accept what we can find."

Lidon added, "We do what we must and count ourselves fortunate that our bond is so strong."

She struggled with that. "Are you in love with each other?"

"We are clan," Tranis said, as if that explained all. When she stared at him, he said, "Ours is not an arranged clanning. We are together by choice."

"It's a family unit with extra advantages," Degorsk supplied. "There is the respect, concern, and yes, the love one shares with family."

Cassidy sat quiet for a little while, absorbing the startling information. There was no shame whatsoever in their attitudes. They accepted the arrangement as if it was the most natural thing in the universe.

*Without women, it probably is. Some of the illegal books claim that homosexuality and bisexuality were once accepted on parts of Earth, before the Word became law. In some of the societies, men were allowed to marry men; women married women.*

She thought hard about it. There was no doubt in her mind the men of her clan truly cared for one another. Was their relationship such a terrible thing when it was forged from real love, or did her difficulty with such ideas mindlessly stem from the dictates of the Church?

Cassidy spoke with deliberation to let them know she was working hard to understand. "You have to realize, this is complicated for me to wrap my mind around. My people have long had problems with the morality of same sex liaisons. The current religion was formed from three earlier ones: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. All of those beliefs spoke out against such relationships. They were an abomination to God, Yahweh, and Allah."

"Better to clan the beloved who is hateful to others than to clan the hateful, though he be beloved of others'," Lidon intoned.

Degorsk nodded. "Even under the threat of torture and execution, your people still pursue their natural urges. Even when those urges mean sex with their own gender."

"I've never known any of those people."

The three men exchanged looks. Cassidy could feel them weighing something of importance, trying to determine if they should speak.

"What? Did you discover something about the nuns or aspirants?" None of her spying had ever hinted that anything untoward went on at the convent.

Degorsk's voice was so quiet she strained to hear. "Cassidy, your grandfather is no stranger to this supposed sin of lying with men."

She stared at him. "That's not possible."

He squeezed her hand, his demeanor as gentle as if he'd just delivered news of the death of a loved one. "I examined him myself to determine his ability to be questioned. My examination was extremely thorough to be sure his health was not compromised in any way before he was subjected to our interrogation methods. The signs were there. He'd recently engaged in sexual intercourse with another man, maybe the very day we captured him."

A sense of unreality washed over her. The man who'd admonished her every waking minute they were together to fight impure thoughts and desires? General Patrick Hamilton, who prayed louder and went to Church services more often than anyone else she knew? He'd turned to men when there were so many women on Earth who would gladly accept his proposal if offered?

At least the Kalquorians, so close to extinction, had an excuse for their same sex encounters.

That thought prompted another terrible idea, and she stared at Tranis. "Did you—?"

His cat's eyes widened. "Absolutely not. Your grandfather has not been touched by us in that way." The disgust in his voice rang true.

"I can't believe he would do such a thing. He's so devout, so determined to punish sinners."

"The greater the transgression, the louder the distraction." Lidon tapped his holy book before carefully packing it away.

"I'm sorry you had to learn the truth like this." Degorsk held her close, and she let him. She felt she might fly apart without his arms around her.

"It's as if everything I've been told is a lie," she whispered.

Lidon drew close. "What can we do to make you feel better, my pet?"

Cassidy's world was crumbling, and she didn't think she could bear it. The shaky foundations that had made her feel so unworthy were all she knew, and they had fallen, taking her with them. What was right, and what was wrong? She no longer knew and couldn't even begin to find her way in the encroaching darkness.

Her lips pressed grimly together, she said, "Make me not care. Even if it's temporary, I don't want to care for a little while."

Lidon's bite came with such swiftness she never felt his fangs pierce her skin. She dove into the euphoria of intoxication, drowning in it until there was only lust's sweet craving.

Cassidy clutched at each one, begging with hands and mouth to be taken all at once, as if daring the heavens to strike her down for her sin. The three men were eager to give her what she wanted, filling every sweet passage with their need. Lidon was in front of her, moving like silk within her sex. Tranis crouched behind, stretching her tightest passage. Degorsk stood over the kneeling trio, his hand cupped over the top of her head as she tasted him with erotic cannibalism.

They moved as one heaving beast within her, and she immersed herself in the sensation of being possessed completely. Right or wrong no longer mattered; only the joy of enclosing them in her body made sense. Beyond judgment, she closed her eyes, concentrating on Lidon's chest pressing her breasts flat, the strength of his manhood as it stabbed deep into her womb, their combined wetness making soft, moist sounds as he slipped back and forth.

Tranis moved slow and careful but with assured thrusts into her rear entry. The pleasure of him there was of a thick, rich quality, adding to the intense passion sweeping her body. Cassidy's hips rocked, now taking Lidon deeper, now moving back to immerse Tranis in her warmth. Meanwhile, Degorsk slipped in and out of her mouth, and she rubbed her tongue against the pounding vein on the underside of his length, his groans a sweet melody to her ears.

*I wish Grandfather could see me now, the hateful old hypocrite!*

There was no anger in the thought, only delight in the knowledge he had no right to judge her anymore. In her inebriated state, she felt true freedom for the first time. There was no need to fear his condemnation, not when he was condemned himself.

Cassidy held nothing back in her enjoyment of the men. She worked to please herself as much as them, sucking and licking with profound ardor on Degorsk's cinnamon-y sweet larger staff while her hand worked the smaller. She ground her hips in tight circles, sparking thrills of elation in her loins as Lidon and Tranis touched every sensitive nerve of her inner anatomy. Feeling as if heaven itself was in her reach, she rose and fell on the tide of their passionate momentum, glorying in wanton abandon. Cassidy shamelessly pursued rapturous bliss, and when she captured its starlight burst, she stretched to grasp it again. Greedily claiming all she could, all she'd been denied in

the name of righteousness, she carried the men with her, absorbing their expulsions like a sponge.

Later, as their breathing returned to normal and the intoxication faded, Cassidy locked eyes with Tranis. “Do you remember what you told me last time we were together?” she asked.

He didn’t pause. “I remember.”

“Did you mean it?”

“Yes. I love you.”

“As do I.”

“And I.”

The affirmations came without hesitation from all three. Cassidy bowed her head against Tranis’ chest and wept.

## Chapter Fourteen

The moment Cassidy boarded the shuttle taking them from the crippled spy ship to the Earther transport, she stopped short. Her grandfather sat at the back of the passenger cabin, naked and strapped to a seat. Two Nobeks sat on either side of him, holding stun prods.

The intoxicant from Lidon's bite had long faded, and she trembled with rage at the sight of the general. His eyes widened to see her, clad only in the thin, clinging fabric of her underdress.

"Are you still pure?" he shouted.

She had no chance to reply as Lidon moved with breathtaking speed to stand over Hamilton. "You will be silent," he said over the chorus of growls from the guarding Nobeks. Then he whispered something Cassidy couldn't hear, and her grandfather actually cringed in response. She'd never seen him afraid of anything. His often proclaimed assertion, "True believers in the word of God have nothing to fear" rang in her memory.

Lidon turned and stalked back to the clan. Hamilton lifted his gaze once more to Cassidy. Tranis chose that moment to snake his arm around her, pulling her close to himself. He sent a nasty grin to the general.

"Let's sit down Cassidy. You too, Captain," Degorsk urged, pushing them both towards seats where they could sit with their backs to Hamilton.

Tranis sat on one side of her, and Degorsk on the other. Cassidy could still feel her grandfather's eyes on her, burning her like the flames of Hell. Taking her anger out on Tranis, she whispered to him, "Do you have to use me like that to get what you want from my grandfather?"

He was instantly contrite. "I'm sorry I upset you. I didn't do it in an effort to antagonize information from the general."

"Don't wave me in front of him like a piece of bait, Tranis. It's beneath you."

"When I saw the pain in your eyes it infuriated me. I wanted to get back at him, and I chose a very immature way of doing it. Again, I apologize."

Two more clans came onto the shuttle, bringing Katherine and Tina with them. The two women were softly giggling, the small punctures on their necks confirming they'd been bitten. They snickered more to see Hamilton naked in the back. Their clans gently shushed them as they coaxed them to sit.

Cassidy barely registered the goings on. She stared at Tranis, the anger over her grandfather's hypocritical censure dissipating. "You wanted to protect me from him. You really do care," she said, her voice faint with wonder.

Lidon, sitting on the other side of Tranis, smiled at her. "How can we not? You are part of our clan and our chosen mate."

Tranis and Degorsk both nodded in agreement, and she again felt the tickle of freedom that their love and protection gave. Her clan couldn't grant her liberty from her conviction that what she did with them was a sin. That was between her and God. Yet they'd gifted her with independence from Earth's unfair judgment. How could the fallible human government, peopled by men who hid their sins, tell her she couldn't love three aliens? To be married to them and bear their children?

And how dare her grandfather, with his greater transgressions, find her virtue wanting!

Even if joining Tranis' clan damned her in the afterlife, she'd already known Hell. She'd been crushed under the weighty pressure of a life dictated by the whims of others unworthy of the responsibility. Maybe she'd find peace at long last with these men who had set her free by taking her prisoner. Maybe by acknowledging the love she felt for them, the love she'd tried so hard to deny, she'd claim a sliver of the paradise too long denied her.

"Some things are worth daring damnation for," she murmured. When Tranis took her hand, she twined her fingers in his and hung on for all she was worth.

\* \* \* \*

"This is the former captain's quarters," Lidon announced as he led them into their new berth on the Earther transport. Cassidy thought it very spacious after the clan's cramped space. Tranis and Degorsk's eyes widened.

The living area was decorated in relaxing shades of chocolate and cream. It was laid out in three distinct areas: a sitting space with a small couch, chairs and table; a dining section just large enough for four people, and a miniscule kitchen where a light meal might be prepared. Cassidy poked her head in the tiny refrigeration unit and pantry, hoping for a taste of Earther food. Finding a small bag of potato chips, she crunched into salty goodness and wondered what was in the mess hall.

"All this space for one man," Degorsk mused.

"There's a separate sleeping room," Lidon said. He went into another room.

"The bed is quite small. Only one at a time will fit, plus Cassidy," he called.

Cassidy tossed the empty potato chip bag in the recycler. Brushing crumbs off her fingers, she went into the bedroom. Tranis and Degorsk followed.

The bed was a double, at best. A small built-in nightstand stood to one side, and shelves held the former captain's personal belongings arranged tidily.

"We'll sleep in shifts," Tranis said.

"Lidon first," Degorsk said. "He's been up for a couple of days now. Then you, Tranis. I won't have you undoing all my work."

Cassidy sat on the edge of the bed, noting the photo display unit on the nightstand. She turned it on. A free-floating vid shimmered into being over the unit, showing a still photograph of a girl about Cassidy's age, her smile bright as she laughed at the person who had snapped the shot. The captain's daughter, she surmised. No doubt now worrying over why her overdue parent hadn't returned from his latest trip.

"Poor girl," she whispered. She knew all too well what it felt like to lose a beloved father. Her heart swelled in sympathy.

Degorsk's voice was heavy. "I never would have given him the drug if I'd known it would kill him."

Cassidy switched off the display. She patted his hand.

Lidon sat next to her. He cupped her chin, making her face him. "My pet, I don't want you in the ventilation system trying to escape."

She looked up where he indicated. The vent opening, covered by an easily removed grate, was near the ceiling. It was more than large enough for her to squirm into.

She shrugged. "Where would I go? I can't return to Earth now no matter what happens. They'll throw me in a work prison for lewdness, and no one who goes there comes out alive."

He wasn't at peace with her declaration. "Promise me you won't use the shafts to attempt escape."

Cassidy blew out an exasperated breath and rolled her eyes. "I promise."

He crooked a smile and kissed the tip of her nose.

Tranis said, "I have to get to the bridge. We'll start for the wormhole entrance right away." He turned to go.

Degorsk was right behind him. "I'll unpack a few things and join you in a few minutes."

"I don't need a nursemaid."

"You most certainly do. If I don't watch you, you'll overexert yourself."

They both halted in the doorway, Tranis glowering at his clanmate. Degorsk wasn't impressed with the fierce stare. He poked his leader in the chest. "Don't argue or I'll remove you from command until you're fully recovered. You'll lose three days that way."

Tranis growled. "Overprotective Imdiko."

"Stubborn, thick-skulled Dramok."

That ended the contest as Tranis threw his hands up in exasperated surrender. Lidon shook his head in amusement and stood. "I'll see to General Hamilton."

Degorsk turned from Tranis to challenge the Nobek next. "I'm sure your staff has him well in hand. You need some sleep."

Tranis left as a new argument erupted. Cassidy scooted back on the bed, amused to watch the dynamics of the clan unfold. There was no rancor between them. Their disputes seemed more like a chess game than true conflict, an opportunity to see who could verbally outmaneuver the other. Despite Lidon's fierce nature and Tranis' easy command, Degorsk seemed to win most of their disagreements.

Lidon had the look of a man who knew he'd already lost but couldn't resist a good fight. "My staff is capable, yes, but I have questions that need to be answered before we get to that security grid."

"Which we won't reach for two days." Degorsk looked at Cassidy and grinned. "Why don't you properly introduce our sweetling to her new bed before you rest? Tiring yourselves out will ensure good sleep and make me happy."

The heated look Lidon gave her made Cassidy's lower parts clench. "Never let it be said I can't compromise," he said in a low voice.

The door shutting Degorsk out cut off his laughter. Cassidy was breathless with anticipation as Lidon stripped.

“What can I do for you, my pet?” he asked, standing next to the bed. “Tell me what you want most.”

She swallowed. A vision of herself in the hover shackles drifted through her mind’s eye. Warmth trickled from her sex. Wondering at her lusty boldness, she said, “I’ve been very naughty. Even before you came and made me do things I shouldn’t, I read books I shouldn’t, books that gave me ideas.”

Lidon licked his lips. His penises, already thick with arousal, swelled larger still. “Yes?”

Cassidy’s heart pounded. From far away, she heard herself say, “I should be punished for my wicked thoughts.”

His gaze on her darkened, and his expression sharpened to that of a predator. “‘Discipline, though sometimes harsh, keeps the conscience awake.’ I doubt that quote was meant for this situation, but it fits, doesn’t it my pet?”

The hungry violence in his eyes kept her from speaking, but she managed a slight nod. Eager terror sent shockwaves of desire through her body as Lidon sat on the edge of the bed and grasped her tiny wrist in his huge hand. “Come here and accept your punishment.”

She bowed her head, hardly believing she was doing this as she crawled to him. She shivered as he stripped her of the underdress, leaving her naked. The vulnerability excited her.

*I should feel shame for wanting this. I should, but I don’t.*

Her newfound freedom to enjoy all the base urges she’d been denied made her dizzy. She thought she might faint.

Lidon tugged her to lie across his thighs. His erections poked her hip, letting her know his anticipation matched hers. He caressed her buttocks, his hand warm on the soft, trembling mounds.

“Such a gift, my love,” he whispered, the other hand settling between her shoulders, pinning her down. “You are more than I ever dared to hope for.”

His palm struck her rump with a meaty smack. She jerked at the first strike, feeling the sting with acute sensitivity. Then the blows came with clockwork precision, warming her quickly, and she gasped with mingled pain and arousal. The heat of the spanking radiated throughout her nether regions, and she concentrated all her attention on the sweetness of the sensation.

Lidon’s thighs were slick beneath her as her juices flowed. He was meticulous with the discipline, giving every inch of her bottom his harsh attention, spreading the punishment evenly over her padded flesh. His big hand bore down on her again and again, and she smiled through her tears to be so well chastised.

The burning of her flesh made her writhe. Her hips jerked to meet his blows even as she wished the spanking to end so he might fill the aching emptiness of her womb. She’d never known pain could spark such pleasure.

“Shall I stop?” Lidon asked, not pausing with the delicious torment.



He was giving her control, control to direct him. He was hers to command, though she wasn't inclined to rule him. No, in sexual matters she preferred the clan's domination. Their confident strength had seduced her in the end along with her inability to deny their wants. She wanted them to continue to be strong for her. She had no desire to dictate to Lidon, no orders to issue.

Except...

"Do as you wish," she sobbed, her backside roasting from his attentions. "Take all you want, whatever you want."

The spanking ended immediately. "On the bed. On all fours," he demanded, and she clambered off his lap. "Ass towards me."

She obeyed, her insides nearly melting to feel him behind her, probing her orifices with hard, eager flesh. He slid inside her, the larger organ spearing her tighter passage. Her groan of welcome mingled with his animal snarl.

Lidon took her hard and fast, his groin slapping against her sore backside. Her heavy breasts swung like pendulums from the strength of his taking. She panted, the orgasm coming at her at headlong speed. He grabbed a handful of her hair, pulling her head back. His bestial grunts and growls filled the air as he thudded hard against her, all control thrown aside. Whatever civilization Lidon had ever known was consumed by the purest of animal urges. An ancient instinct took Cassidy over too, and she surrendered to the primal need of her mate without coherent thought.

Climax swallowed her with wide-open jaws. She screamed as it ripped through her belly, and Lidon answered her with a roar. His fist tightened painfully in her hair for an instant, and he slammed against her, his sexes battering rams in her quaking flesh. Then the tension fled from his body, and he covered her, his fingers trailing gently through her tresses, exposing her neck for light kisses.

"My Matara," he said. He made a sound that resembled a sob.

"My Nobek," she replied. Her arms gave out beneath her.

## Chapter Fifteen

“Full stop,” Simdow ordered. “This is as close as we can get without setting off the defense grid’s sensors, Captain.”

Tranis nodded, absently scratching one of the nearly healed cuts on his chest. Degorsk’s medicine had done wonders in the last two days. The Dramok would only carry a couple of scars for the rest of his life. The itching of regenerating skin drove him crazy though. It was worse than the pain.

“Show me the magnetic signature.”

The main vid on the bridge switched from the diagnostics on Earth’s defense grid to the details of the portal. Tranis’ eyes widened. “Wow,” he said, Cassidy’s favorite word when impressed fitting the occasion.

Someone – Osopa maybe – allowed himself a snicker at the Earther exclamation. Tranis ignored him. After all, he’d heard the man growl ‘pickle juice’ in frustration when struggling with the Earther food dispensers a day ago. As his meal didn’t include the sweet-tangy green wedges of pickles that Degorsk had discovered a love for, Tranis had to assume Osopa was using an Earther curse of some sort. All crewmembers who now had Mataras were picking up some strange epithets.

Simdow wasn’t laughing. He looked as worried as Tranis felt. “It’s a distorted vortex portal, with massive fluctuations in the magnetic field. Using it would cause intermittent loss of power and huge communications lapses. Even a ship this size would ricochet off the edges like a kurble ball in a fluxor tube.”

“Not a comfortable trip,” Tranis acknowledged. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen one this unstable. Time from entrance to exit?”

“Half an hour.”

“Worth the rough ride to take out several days’ travel. Using it will allow us to skip Earth’s inner system defenses, though there’s no telling what they’ve got set up on the other side of that thing. Continue data download and transmit all findings to the invasion fleet.”

“Yes, Captain.”

“It’s up to your team now, Lidon.” Tranis turned to his clanmate who was giving the three readouts in front of him all his attention.

The Nobek’s fingers flew over his computer controls. “Half the security codes are cracked. We’ll have all of them before the fleet gets here.”

“It’s coming fast now.”

“Once we figured out each piece of the code was encrypted separately, the difference was made.”

Tranis allowed himself a smile. “Good work, Commander.”

Lidon shot him a quick glance. He didn’t return the smile, but Tranis could tell he was pleased. “Congratulate me when I have all of it. I estimate another five days.”

“Simdow, contact the invasion fleet with the current timeline for grid breach.”

The first officer’s excitement at their encroaching success erased his concerns about the portal. “Do you think they’ll engage the outer perimeter, Captain?”

Tranis thought about the battle his planet’s military would have to fight just to get to them. More loss, more death for both sides. If the invasion failed, the war would be over. Kalquor wouldn’t have enough men to do more than defend the empire after this. They would throw everything they had in the attempt.

He gave no indication of the grim situation to his young crew. Instead he told Simdow, “If it were up to me, I’d begin fighting immediately. It’s almost a week’s journey between where they are now and here.”

One week, Tranis thought, a chill shuddering down his spine at the sudden realization. One week until his race’s survival was determined, one way or the other.

\* \* \* \*

Degorsk frowned as he fed Cassidy her dinner: a hamburger patty, green beans and a sweet potato. To serve her the ready-made food that the dispensers spit out meant a host of unfamiliar preservatives he didn’t like the thought of her eating. Not only that, but he couldn’t hide any drugs in them. He’d consulted cooking directions in the kitchen’s computer banks and made an attempt to prepare the non-treated, freeze-dried Earther foods, but the smell didn’t reassure him. He cut around the blackened parts of his efforts.

“I’m not much of a cook even with familiar food,” he apologized to her. “I’m sorry if this isn’t very good.”

She gave him a brave smile, chewing and swallowing what he gave her quickly. Her hands were folded in her lap as they sat nude at the dining table of their quarters, allowing him to feed her. She’d eaten half the tray of food already. “It’s fine, Degorsk. I’ve got no complaints.”

She’d have plenty of complaints if she knew what he was up to. Cassidy had willingly joined the clan, and Degorsk knew full well she’d protest his methods of pulling information from her. If he injected her with the truth-telling compound, it would destroy the tiny bit of trust they’d developed. Hence, the subterfuge of his drugging her food instead. Hopefully the effects would be so slight she’d never realize what he’d done.

Her round pupils were shrinking despite the low lighting, letting him know the medication was well in her system. It was a mild version of the compound he’d given the Earther captain; Cassidy had no implants in her body to react to Kalquorian drugs. She didn’t know anything of defensive importance, but Degorsk wasn’t interested in military secrets.

“I’m glad it’s edible at least. At your next meal, you can have whatever you want from the dispensers to make up for this.” He tried not to grimace as he made that concession. No doubt she’d go straight for the unhealthy sausage and pepperoni pizza. For some reason, Cassidy loved those grease-laden triangles.

Degorsk had tried a bite of her favorite food. He’d had to spit the cloying, cheese-clotted mess back out. It was customary for the men of the clan to feed their Matara, but he couldn’t even bear to watch Cassidy chomp on pizza. It was too nasty.

He held back a shudder and resolved to let her enjoy her food of choice while she could. After all, they wouldn't be on the Earther transport forever.

Turning his thoughts from dietary concerns, Degorsk looked at his Matara to see her lips curved in a slight smile. She was lovely no matter what, but seeing the wary and helpless anger fade from her expression lent her an ethereal beauty that stole his breath.

He reminded himself of his purpose. "Can I ask you some questions?"

"You just did." She giggled, a sweet, musical sound that made him grin back.

"I want to know more about you. Tell me about your childhood."

"My childhood?" She blinked at him, her smile bemused.

"Something nice you remember about your parents."

She thought for a moment. "I liked going to the baseball games with them. We had a triple-A baseball team in our area, and we went to all the home games to cheer them on."

She shook her head at another bite of green beans, and he pushed the tray away. She seemed sufficiently under the influence. "I'm not familiar with baseball," he said.

"It's a sport where two teams play against each other."

"Like kurble?" Tranis had explained the Kalquorian's favorite pastime to Cassidy when she'd expressed curiosity over his kurble ball.

"Not really. Kurble sounds more like our game of football. Baseball is definitely not as violent as kurble. I mean, poisoned barbs, Degorsk? How is that fun?"

Degorsk chuckled. "Mostly Nobeks play it. Their idea of entertainment usually involves blood and pain."

Cassidy shook her head, but she grinned nonetheless. "Or sex."

"Yes, they like that a lot too." Degorsk gently prodded her back on track. "You were telling me about going to these baseball contests with your parents?"

Cassidy paused, considering. Her expression softened as she remembered. "The game itself wasn't important to me. It was how we were as a family when we went. A lot of the games were played at night, and the season started when the temperatures were still cool. My parents would snuggle under a blanket with me between them." Her gaze was far away, seeing something that made her look wistful. "We'd eat hot dogs, pizza, popcorn, French fries – all the unhealthy stuff I wasn't allowed the rest of the week. All the stuff you don't want me to eat." She stuck her tongue out at him.

"The foods you prefer are best enjoyed in moderation." He kissed her to take the sting from his words. "It sounds like you were well cared for."

Cassidy nodded and giggled again. "Daddy called Mom the Vegetable Queen. Vegetables took up three-quarters of our plates."

"So your mother stopped taking good care of you after your father died?" He kept his tone gentle.

"Oh no. She was more protective than ever after Daddy was killed."

"But she had unlawful liaisons with men."

Cassidy's brows drew together as she thought about it. When she spoke again, her voice was uncertain. "It was only that one time, I guess."

"And it happened in front of you?"

Confidence reasserted itself. “Yes. She took her clothes off for the man. She said, ‘I want you. I’ll give you everything.’”

“Who was the man?”

Cassidy’s perplexed expression returned. “I don’t remember. She must have known him to act that way, right?” She bit her lower lip. Degorsk could see her searching her memory, and the frustration when she came up empty curled her hands into tiny fists. “Isn’t that strange how I can’t remember him before she seduced him to sin with her?”

Degorsk now felt confident she’d been persuaded by someone of her mother’s guilt rather than what she’d actually witnessed. A woman as loving as the one she remembered wouldn’t have purposely traumatized her child.

“The shock of what happened must have caused you to block parts of it from your memory,” he suggested.

“I suppose that’s possible.” Cassidy looked sad. “I shouldn’t judge her so badly considering what I’ve done. ‘Judge not lest you be judged.’ That’s what the Word says.”

“What of love, precious girl?” He smiled and stroked her hair to soothe her. “Does your religion mention anything about loving someone so much you’d give up everything?”

She smiled brightly, like a child who knew her lessons by rote. “For God so loved the world He gave us Jesus, Mohammed and Moses to die for us, to save us, to lead us from iniquity so we may not perish but have everlasting life.”

Degorsk nodded the approval she looked for. “That’s a great love. And though I don’t know your religion so well, I can assure you I love you enough to die for you, if it is ever required.”

Her face softened at his words. “You would?” she whispered.

“Without hesitation.”

She came to him, slipping onto his lap and wrapping her arms his neck. Her hands caught up his heavy braid, and she kissed him long and deep as her nimble little fingers undid the plait. He ran his hands up and down her spine, pulling her close to mold her softness against him.

When his hair fell loose, she combed it forward with her fingers, pulling the black waves around them like a curtain. She loved the feeling of Degorsk’s tresses against her bare skin, concealing her from all but him, even though they were currently alone in the quarters. She moved against him, basking in his warmth. He lifted her, and she wriggled in delight to feel the dual penetration of his sexes. He fit her so well, the thicknesses causing a scrumptious friction that made her toes curl with electric reaction.

Straddling his lap, Cassidy’s feet didn’t touch the floor, and she rocked back and forth, only moving him in and out of her clinging sleeves a bit. She whined in frustration, wanting to feel his full lengths driving into her. Degorsk gripped her waist, slowly raising and lowering her, and her beseeching whimpers settled into throaty moans.

“Is that better?” he asked, his voice teasing.

“Wonderful.” She kissed all along his jaw, down his throat, nipping a little with her teeth to make him growl softly.

He stood and leaned over so that she lay on the table top. With the hard surface beneath her, she was at last able to move better against him, to meet his thrusts with her own. The table was the perfect height for the tall Kalquorian to take her.

Degorsk straightened so they could both watch him disappear into and re-emerge from her core. Seeing the dark shaft pierce her pink-ivory flesh was a delight to Cassidy's eyes. Her passion grew at the sight, and she propped herself on her elbows to get a better view. The moist sounds of coupling and their mingled scents of cinnamon and sea salt added to the delectable sensations.

The deep tickle in her nether regions grew trembling sweeter with each plunge. Degorsk pushed with increasing force, his momentum quickening. He looked into her eyes, holding her gaze with the blue-purple depths of his stare. The intimacy of his gaze seized her as if in a gentle trap, and despite the intensity, she couldn't look away. She came that way, grasped in the embrace of his unblinking regard.

As she shuddered beneath him, her face lost in rapture, Degorsk surrendered to the gentle spasms milking his flesh. He groaned, relinquishing his seed in teeth-clenching bursts.

When the strength returned to his legs, he picked her up and carried her to the bedroom. Already her warm center stirred him anew. Would he ever get enough of his precious little Earther?

No. If they both lived a million years, he would never be fully sated. Of that he was sure.

"Degorsk, you'll keep me safe, won't you? You won't let Earth have me, no matter how things turn out?"

His brow furrowed at the unexpected fear in her voice, at the question that seemed to come from nowhere. She was usually so confident. The drug had made her very vulnerable indeed. "You have nothing to fear from Earth, Cassidy. Your clan will keep you safe." He smoothed the almost-white hair from her face.

"Safe," she whispered. She smiled at him, as sweet as any angel of her religion. The muscles of her hearth clenched around his desire. Oh yes, he wanted her again. There was no question of that.

\* \* \* \*

Tranis and Lidon stood outside the one containment cell that held a prisoner in the detention area. The other Earther captives were held elsewhere on the transport.

The Earthers' code of 'take no prisoners' was never more apparent than the tiny detention area. With only six cramped cells, the 75 members of the Earther transport crew and nearly 200 Mataras wouldn't fit. Not that the Kalquorians would have held women in such a manner anyway. The forced re-education of the childbearing-aged females was insult enough. Treating them like criminals as well would have been barbaric.

Only General Hamilton occupied the detention block. He sat on a small bench, his hands folded modestly over his genitals. A waste disposal and sink were his only other furnishings.

“Back to gloat, I see,” he sneered at them. Tranis wondered how fast he’d cower if Lidon lowered the transparent shield and walked in with him. It was the Nobek the general watched.

“We’ve broken the codes to access the security grid,” Tranis said, letting triumph fill his voice. “An invasion fleet of Kalquorian warships is on the way. Earth will be ours in a matter of days.”

He watched Hamilton’s haughty expression sag. “Your forces have gotten through the outer perimeter?”

“Two days ago with heavy casualties on both sides, unfortunately.” The reports had been as bad as Tranis had feared. The invasion was indeed their last-ditch stand. Without victory and enough Earther females to carry their children, the Kalquorian civilization wouldn’t last much longer.

The general’s expression was satisfyingly bleak. “You must have thrown everything you have at us.”

“The defenses of the Kalquorian Empire are still well manned, but our allies have been overrun. It won’t matter once our fleet reaches Earth.”

“Cut off the head and the body dies.” There was grudging respect from Hamilton.

“We’re not planning to destroy your world or people.”

“But you will. And then like carrion eaters, you’ll feast on our flesh and bones. Animals.”

Lidon snarled, “You declared war on us. All we wanted to do was survive.”

The Earther’s lip curled, matching Lidon’s scowl. “By polluting God’s greatest creation with your infernal seed. Did it ever occur to you your kind’s extinction might be part of a divine plan? That the virus that killed most your women and left the rest barren was God’s will?”

Tranis gripped Lidon’s arm to stop another lengthy and loud debate between the two men’s ideologies. Hamilton was a fanatic, and disputing his views was wasted breath. As Lidon liked to quote, ‘Blinded by thoughtless faith and deafened by clamoring zeal, the intolerant stumbles in an exitless maze of his own making, never to find his way out.’

The Nobek’s tension eased at Tranis’ touch. Instead of arguing he said, “With the taking of Earth, I’m curious about the several notations of ‘Armageddon’ imbedded in the codes, especially in reference to unauthorized use of the wormholes. As I’m to understand it, it is an indication of the end of your world as you know it. In other words, the overthrow of your government’s regime. Is that correct?”

A myriad of emotions ran across the general’s expression; sorrow, hatred, and finally resignation. “The just will be uplifted by God, and the infidels will perish.” His smile was a pained grimace. “All things serve God’s will. Even monsters like you. It is the Flood again, wiping the slate clean of our sins.”

Tranis had heard enough, but Lidon persisted. “Talk sense for a change.”

Hamilton rose. Not bothering to hide his nakedness, he strode forward to face them. Slow tears ran from his eyes. “I see now it is God’s will for this end. It is written, set down by the hand of God millennia ago. ‘As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, idolaters and all liars; their portion

will be in the lake that burns with fire.’” His head hung down. “My punishment will be to see this come to pass before I too am cast into the pit. God forgive me.”

Tranis shook his head. “He has nothing more of worth to us, Lidon. Let’s go.”

They left Hamilton sobbing in his cell.



## Chapter Sixteen

The clan's new quarters had one round window in the sitting area that looked out on the port side of the ship. Cassidy stared out at the large number of vessels gathering in space on this side of the defense grid. She recognized them from schematics she'd seen in her grandfather's home: Kalquorian destroyers. No doubt every one of them had a full complement of hundreds of single-man fighters.

The door behind her whispered opened, and she saw her clan's reflection as the three men entered. They paused, seeing that she looked outside.

"How bad will it be?" She couldn't keep the pain from her voice.

Lidon took a breath before answering. "That all depends on the amount of resistance we encounter."

Tranis stepped close, but he wisely didn't touch her. She would have pounded on his already battered body if he had. "The plan is once the destroyers go through the portal they'll take out military installations right away. Then they'll enter the airspace of major cities and threaten the population unless Earth's government immediately surrenders to Kalquorian authority."

Lidon was quick to add, "It's only a threat to force cooperation, Cassidy. Our survival depends on Earth. We have no intention of attacking civilians and wiping out our only salvation."

Cassidy spit the bitter words out. "People will die."

Tranis' voice was low. "Many on both sides already have."

"It was Earth that declared war on Kalquor," Lidon pointed out.

Cassidy swung around to face him. "But it was Kalquor that kidnapped Earther women first. Don't pretend your race is the innocent victim in this conflict."

"We're not." Tranis' voice was heavy. Degorsk and Lidon stepped up to flank him. They looked unhappy too. "I know you're angry to see your planet about to be attacked. You have every reason to be. If there was some way to do this differently, I would, but Kalquor is out of options."

Degorsk rubbed his brow. "We don't want to see you hurt, sweetling. This is torture for us."

She didn't doubt his words. Lidon's hands were fisted at his sides, and she knew for the warrior to show such obvious emotion, he was indeed upset. Tranis was as pale as his dark skin allowed, and Degorsk blinked over bright eyes.

*They love me, and it's ripping them up inside to be a part of this. Still, the pain won't keep them from handing over my people to Kalquor.*

Somehow it made their situation worse. She battled hot tears and lost. They flowed down her cheeks, and it was several moments before she could ask her next question.

"What happens if you win?"

Tranis looked over her shoulder at the destroyers. "Occupation. Dismantling Earth's military until a government more in line with our wishes is established."

"And carting off Earther women to Kalquor?"

Degorsk was able to meet her eyes on that one. "Only volunteers, at least at the outset. Our Empress is adamant the women who come to Kalquor do so willingly."

Cassidy stared at him. "I wasn't willing, not at first."

Tranis looked ill. "The women we've captured are considered spoils of war, to be kept as Kalquor sees fit. Once the fighting ends, the rest of the Earther females must join us of their own accord. The situation will be re-evaluated in five years, but at this time we cannot force them to leave Earth and clan with our men."

Lidon nodded. "Empress Jessica fought hard with the council for that concession."

Surprise shut down her tears. "But she's just a slave for breeding heirs to the throne."

It was the men's turn to look startled. Degorsk answered, "Our Empress is every bit as esteemed as the emperors. She is no slave. We serve her just as gladly as the male members of the Imperial Clan."

"Even though she's an Earther? Even though she's female?" Cassidy gaped at them.

Tranis chuckled, finally managing to find humor in the situation. "She is probably the most respected member of the Imperial Clan, and the most intimidating. I'd hate to be the man who tries to rule *her*."

Degorsk finally touched her, his fingers whispering trails through her hair. "Women are revered for their strength and intelligence on Kalquor. You will learn that we don't want to enslave your people, not when there are Earthers like our empress. Like you."

If they spoke the truth, Kalquor's successful invasion of Earth would give women opportunities they hadn't realized in decades. Cassidy's inner turmoil ratcheted up another notch as she realized the clan had no reason to lie to her about the outcome of the Kalquorian takeover. She was theirs, after all.

She met Tranis' gaze. "You swear Kalquor will do all it can to treat my people humanely?"

"You have my word Cassidy, as a military leader and as your Dramok."

"It would be so much easier if I could hate you," she whispered. It was the closest she'd come to admitting the love she felt for her captors.

"I'm glad you don't." Tranis pulled her close so he could kiss her. She fell against him, wanting nothing more but to forget the opposing forces pulling at her loyalty.

The hands stripping her of her underdress and the mouths tasting her bared skin helped her do that. She didn't know they'd taken her to the bedroom until she was lowered to the small bed.

The men's formsuits were gone in a twinkling, and their skin was hot to the touch. Cassidy glowed in their warmth, in the rough laps of their tongues. They savored her as if she were the most delectable of morsels to delight their palates. She arched and sighed

as they found the most sensitive places to taste. She clutched the backs of their heads, pressing them close, encouraging them to take all she had to offer.

Each sampled the sweet cream that flowed from between her thighs, their moans of pleasure as profound as hers. She writhed against the softness of the sheets, every languorous lick setting off little explosions of delight. At last she could take no more of the magnificent torture.

“Tranis,” she whispered.

He looked up, his eyes so very, very drowning dark. “Yes, my love?”

“I want you inside me. I want you now.”

Lidon and Degorsk fell back. In an instant, Tranis’ great bulk covered her, and Cassidy opened herself wide to take him in. He slid inside easily, and she cried out with welcome.

Tranis rose to kneel on the bed, bringing her up with him. One hand cradled the back of her head, tilting her face so he could smash his lips to hers. The other cupped her buttocks, supporting her while he thrust deep inside. She wrapped her arms and legs around him, rising and falling upon his staffs. She felt she claimed what was hers even as she gave herself up to him.

They moved together, instinctively knowing the choreography of life’s most ancient dance and performing each step with precision. Over and over Tranis filled her, and she clutched at him with inner muscles, drawing him deep into her well. The darts of bliss grew to spears of ecstasy, and she bit his lips as light suffused her being.

Tranis bore her back down to the bed, spasms wracking his hips as he ground against her. She clawed at him, furrowing his shoulders with ferocious glee, marking him as her own. With a strangled cry, he surrendered his seed to her. She gloried in every throb of his flesh within her own, in her mastery of the brute who’d dared to try enslaving her.

Cassidy allowed him a moment to collect himself before shoving against his chest. When he moved away, she held her hand out to the wide-eyed Imdiko.

“Degorsk.”

He bowed his head and came to her, his graceful movements as he crawled onto the bed making his muscles ripple beneath his skin in a way that had her catch her breath. She rose to greet his advance, her hands and mouth greedy to sample the pleasure of his body. Her teeth scraped his skin as she feasted on his neck, his shoulders, and his chest.

“Matara,” he groaned, his voice lost in wonder. His hands tangled in her hair, raising the tresses to his face and inhaling. She rewarded his worship by licking a nipple, to which he arched and groaned again. Cassidy licked and nibbled her way up to his lips. Capturing his face between her hands, she plunged her tongue deep into his mouth, taking the orifice as demandingly as he had taken her sex so many times. He submitted, letting her have all she wished.

“Mine,” she declared.

“Yours,” he hoarsely agreed. His lips parted in acquiescence when she demanded another taste.

Degorsk obeyed her silent command when she pushed against his chest, allowing her to roll him onto his back. She crawled over the magnificent behemoth, her body

charting the muscled terrain as she committed every swell and dip to memory. No part of the stunning physique went unremarked: his thighs, the double row of muscles of his abdomen, the width of his chest were catalogued.

"Mine," she whispered. She lowered herself over him, filling her womb with her prize. Degorsk's neck corded with tension as she slowly took him over, his fists gripping the bedding.

When she'd enveloped all of his offering, Cassidy sat still for a moment, relishing the possession. Her fingertips traced the contours of his torso as she soaked in the sensation of absorbing the double thicknesses of the Kalquorian male. Seated deep inside, Degorsk awaited her command, to be relieved of his need or denied.

She leaned forward to capture his mouth with hers, slowly releasing his shafts from their sweet imprisonment. Just as they came close to freedom, she ensnared them once more, trapping them in tight cages of clutching flesh.

Cassidy propped herself over Degorsk, her hands splayed on either side of his head. She closed her eyes to feel him better as she slipped back and forth over him. She took him slowly at first, the better to feel every fraction of his lengths as they dove deep into her core.

His hands covered her breasts, and she moaned to feel the heat of his touch. Her nether regions clenched, and he groaned in answer. Still, he dared not move except to knead her soft mounds with trembling hands. He was hers to do with as she wished, yoked to her desire. His own wants were subservient to hers, and he would demand nothing.

Cassidy, however, was free to exact any pleasure she wanted from her devoted servant. As the slow friction built a mountain of need, she drove faster against Degorsk. She rammed him deep inside, insisting he relieve the ravenous hunger that could only be sated for a short time before rising to be fed again. She panted through parted lips, the exertion and growing exaltation quickening her breath and heartbeat to match the pounding rhythm of her hips.

"Oh," she gasped as the orgasm sent its first flickering warmth through her. "Oh. Oh, oh, oooooh..."

Degorsk arched beneath her, his hips rising to press him even deeper inside. She felt his larger organ flex hard, and his groans joined hers.

She fell to lie on against his chest, riding the swells of his gasps as the spasms slowly left her. She pressed a soft kiss to his lips before pulling free of him. "Mine," she whispered one last time.

Degorsk's smile made her pulse quicken again. "Always."

Cassidy stood to confront Lidon. His fangs had descended in his lust, and the feral look in his eyes fed her appetite as if she hadn't already been well satisfied twice before. She approached him as a cautious huntress might approach dangerous prey.

"My beautiful warrior-philosopher," she breathed. "What delights do you offer me?"

His smile only enhanced the menace in his expression. "I'm afraid after watching you give yourself so ardently to our clanmates, my control is wanting."

"I have no wish for your control, Nobek. Restraint is the last thing I desire."

Suddenly she was pinned against the wall, Lidon growling as he crushed against her, his sexes battering rams as they breached her nether regions. She screamed in response but, far from fear, her cry was one of triumphant conquest.

They went at each other like two animals intent not just on rutting but devouring as well. Lidon's jaws snapped in the air only inches from her cheek, and Cassidy slowly realized both Tranis and Degorsk were holding him back with fistfuls of hair. The Nobek's hands gripped her buttocks with force. She knew she'd be badly bruised, both inside and out as he took her with incredible strength.

For her part, she sank her teeth in his shoulders and neck, her fingernails scoring every inch she came in contact with. She tore at him, ravaging the brute hammering against her without mercy, tasting his blood and wanting more. She was as wild as a drunken maenad, and she reveled in the brutish need to conquer the unconquerable.

Climax burst over her in delicious agony, and she shrieked her victory to the very heavens. Lidon managed two more vicious stabbing thrusts before his roar joined the bedlam. Moments later, he collapsed beneath her, the attending Tranis and Degorsk barely able to catch them before they hit the floor.

"You'd better grab your kit," Tranis informed the medic as they carefully separated the gasping pair. "There's no way he didn't do damage."

"She dealt out a fair share as well," Degorsk laughed, but he lost no time in snagging the portable medical case he kept nearby.

Tranis placed Cassidy on the bed then stood back as Degorsk rubbed cool cream into her aching parts. The growing agony abated almost immediately, and she sighed. "All better," she said.

"Not quite," he snorted. "That just dulled the pain. Hold still while I do the repair work."

He inserted a cylindrical tube into her sex. Warmth suffused her passage, and she closed her eyes at the soothing sensation. She rested quietly, all the strength sapped from her body. Had that really been her rutting wild with desire; innocent, chaste Cassidy? What had come over her?

*Why am I so surprised? After years of terror and subjugation to men, why wouldn't I seize the opportunity to take some measure of control, even if it was only pretend?*

Degorsk's instrument slid out of her sheath, only to be re-inserted in her anal channel. Fingers brushed her cheek, and she opened her eyes to see Tranis smiling down on her.

"It felt good to claim your right to pleasure, didn't it? And unload some of that pent-up aggression?"

He understood. Tears overflowed her eyes. "Thank you."

Tranis kissed her. She gently traced the shallow scratches she'd left on his shoulders.

Degorsk pulled the tube free and patted her thigh. "Now you're all better. Try not to lose control with Lidon without me nearby, okay? Even with his level of restraint, a Nobek has limited command over his instincts when violently aroused."

Cassidy looked at Lidon where he sat on the floor, propped up against the wall. She gasped to see the bloody ovals her teeth had left, the jagged cuts from her nails. "Oh no," she said.

He grinned at her. "Take out your aggression on me anytime, my pet. That was the best sex I've ever had." Lidon growled at Degorsk when he approached. "Not one mark of honor gets healed. These are mine."

Degorsk rolled his eyes. "Nobeks." He put his kit away with a smile.

"Like you don't carry enough scars." Cassidy was amused at the pride in Lidon's face as he examined the damage she'd done.

"These won't scar, unfortunately. You'll have to give me fresh wounds from time to time." He leered.

"Are we all right, Cassidy?" Tranis asked. Now that the hormones had been quelled, he looked worried again.

She studied him, knowing what he asked had nothing to do with her health. "Everything is in motion now. Nothing I can do will stop it. I'm trying to come to terms with that. You'll have to understand if I don't always feel accepting of the situation."

"Of course. Know we'll do our best to make it right for you." Sorrow returned to his expression, the torment in his eyes somehow adding to his beauty.

Cassidy smoothed her palm over his face, wishing she could erase their combined pain. Her chuckle was rueful. "With you, I have life. On Earth, there is only death for me. The hardest thing to reconcile is that I trust my supposed enemy more than my own people."

## Chapter Seventeen

Admiral Piras, leader of the Kalquorian invasion force, had a rough, grinding voice from decades of yelling at underlings. At the present he sounded pleased. "Codes received, Captain Tranis. Excellent work from you and your crew."

"Thank you sir." Tranis allowed a small side comment. "I hope this works."

"It has to. One way or the other, this war is finished after we reach Earth. The enemy has recalled all its fleet now that it knows we've breached the outer cordon."

Tranis frowned. "How close is our second wave, Admiral?"

"They'll join us in two days. If the defenses on the other side of the portal are too much, we'll regroup with them and fight the long way to Earth. For now, the medical corps has just arrived, so we'll begin the first attack soon." He paused before cautiously asking, "Is Commander Lidon there with you, Captain?"

Tranis looked at his Nobek to see Lidon quirk a smile. He'd been a squadron leader on Piras' ship back when the admiral had been a captain. More importantly, he'd come close to joining Piras' clan. Tranis wondered if the admiral still smarted from being rejected for a much younger, less experienced Dramok.

Lidon caught Tranis watching him. His grin widened, and he rumbled in a low voice, "I'm here, sir."

"I wish you were flying for us like the old days, my friend. Your experience would be welcome on such an important campaign."

"It will be a glorious battle, Admiral. My heart will be in the thick of it with you."

*Very funny*, Tranis mouthed at his Nobek, showing his fangs. Lidon shook with suppressed laughter.

The warmth bled out of Piras' voice when he addressed Tranis again, becoming all business. There would never be friendship between the two Dramoks, but they at least respected one another. "Get those Mataras home to Kalquor safely, Captain Tranis. Save a pretty one for me."

"That won't be difficult, sir. You'll find all Earther women are lovely. Good fortune and great victory, Admiral." He signed off.

The bridge was silent for a time, the crew's rapt attention on the vid showing the invasion fleet gathering at the security grid's boundary. Tranis had already determined they'd stay long enough to see if the attack on Earth succeeded. As soon as they knew the outcome, they'd speed to Kalquor.

He'd been offered the promotion to admiral for the second time in his career. To accept would make him the youngest officer to advance to that rank in Kalquor's history. He thought maybe this time he'd take it, along with a planet-bound post. Cassidy deserved a nice home, somewhere to put down roots rather than knock about space and

its attendant dangers. And truth be told, Tranis was tired of nearly getting killed. This last brush with the Tragooms had reminded him why he'd traded the violent glory of commanding a warship for the less glamorous work as a spy. And Cassidy's pain over him being part of the effort against Earth confirmed he'd had enough of being on the front lines. It was time to step down, if Degorsk and Lidon were in agreement.

Simdow broke the silence of the bridge. "Will this work, Captain?"

Tranis considered before answering. "If our forces can hold the portal until Earth surrenders, it will."

"I hate having to stand back and watch. I'd give anything to be part of the invasion."

*That's because you've never seen hundreds of bloody, screaming men after a real battle. You've never given a heartbroken Matara the news that some or all of her clan has just been decimated. What of your new Matara, Simdow? Are you ready to make her cry with your death? Are you ready to send men to their deaths?*

Tranis kept these thoughts to himself. Yes, a planet-bound home in which to keep Cassidy comfortable had an appeal he'd never before experienced.

\* \* \* \*

"How about this one?" Degorsk mused, looking over Cassidy's shoulder at her reader. She giggled in response.

His bite had relaxed her, succeeding in distracting his young love from the upcoming battle for her home world. Euphoric and aroused, she'd suggested they look through her copy of *The Kama Sutra* for inspiration. Degorsk had been only too happy to peruse the graphic depictions with her, and the results were as good as any foreplay. He was hard and she was wet. At least they'd had sense to get in bed first.

"It looks physically demanding for both participants," she observed, trying to sound clinical. The effect was ruined by her giggles.

"Indeed, but we could do with a little exertion. Not only that, we'll be able to watch everything happen." He leered at her nudity.

She leered back. His bullet-shaped penises were stunning works of art to her greedy eyes. "You should have had a mold made of those as well as your backside. Let's see how they like this position."

Degorsk leaned back, supporting his weight on his hands. He spread his legs, the knees bent. Cassidy scooted forward until her crotch met his, her thighs over his hips, and mimicked his pose. Yes, she could see everything from this angle. Nice.

He used one hand to position his organs to enter her. "Lift up," Degorsk said, and she tilted her hips slightly skyward, allowing his sweet invasion. They pressed towards each other, sliding together like the interlocking pieces of a puzzle.

After a few clumsy starts over which they chortled unselfconsciously, they finally matched rhythm and moved as one. Cassidy reveled in the sight of her dark-skinned lover's body, framed by her lily-white legs and completely exposed to her as they worked to make pleasure happen. Degorsk's long braid hung over the bunched muscle of one shoulder, coiling next to him on the bed like a slick, black snake. She admired his chest, which wasn't as thick as Tranis and Lidon's but well-chiseled just the same. His abdomen was made up of two rows of eight bumps, longer in proportion than an



Earther's. The smooth penises driving in and out of her core were shaded darker than the rest of his skin and gleamed wetly from their combined juices.

Her arms tired quickly from supporting her as she met his strong thrusts, but she ignored the slight discomfort, enjoying the view as much of the sensation. Heaven help her, he felt and looked so right. All three men did.

*It's a sin.* But on the heels of that tired, old argument came a new, startling one. *But why is it a sin? Could the writers of the Word, fallible humans who reworked the stories so many times over the ages to suit their prejudices, have gotten it wrong?*

She knew she looked to justify her behavior and was reaching for any rationalization to excuse falling willingly in bed with three aliens. But with glorious dissolution fast approaching, she welcomed the idea that perhaps God didn't care who she gave herself to as long as love was the central component to the action. She loved Tranis, Lidon and Degorsk. Of that, she had no doubt.

She heaved against Degorsk, now racing to reach climax before her arms gave out. He matched her pace, his gasps telling her he was close too. Their flesh pounded together, and at the first stirrings, Cassidy groaned his name.

Orgasm embraced her, and her head fell back as she jerked helplessly in its grip. A few moments later Degorsk also succumbed. Cassidy forced her head up so she could watch his face suffuse with bliss, his lips parted to breath out sighs of delight.

He gathered her in his arms and pulled her forward to lie on his chest. They rested that way for some time, letting their galloping pulses slow.

"Did you like that?" Degorsk asked, rousing her from a light doze.

"It was wonderful." And it had been, but the condemnations were in her head again, shouting her infamy.

Degorsk sighed, the sound unhappy. "I can always tell when the intoxicant wears off. How sad you can't let go to enjoy fully."

She looked up at his disappointed face and slid up his body to plant a kiss on his lips. "You know it has nothing to do with you. Admit it, I'm getting better."

He smiled a little. "Yes, you are. Has your attitude changed?"

Cassidy grabbed his braid and brought the loose ends to her face. She caressed her cheeks with the soft hair. "I have two different views now. On one hand, I know my body is designed to find pleasure in making children. It makes no sense God would fashion me in such a way only to make sexual pleasure a sin."

"But your upbringing and the laws of your society say differently. I understand that."

She nodded. "It's all I've ever heard, but it's wrong. It has to be. Even my grandfather hasn't been able to deny his needs."

There. That shut up the judgmental voices in her head for the moment.

Degorsk looked cautiously pleased. "And what of being the mate of three men?"

Cassidy gave herself a moment to think before answering. "I wonder if my people got that wrong too. Some of the books from my grandfather's collection mention men having multiple wives. So polygamy wasn't always frowned upon." She traced his lips with her fingers. "Even now, there's contradictions within the official faith. Though

wedding vows in this present time dictate marriage is until the death, men are allowed to divorce all the time and remarry. I've always found that inconsistency odd."

"Societies evolve continuously, and rules alter from generation to generation. Eventually, Earth's current regime will change or fall. The only question is will it be worse or better?"

Cassidy smiled at him, grateful he didn't talk down to her like so many men. Like her grandfather.

Degorsk combed his fingers through her hair, making her shiver. "You didn't really answer my question, sweetling."

She lowered her eyes. "I want to be with your clan. I don't want it to be wrong if love is involved."

"Especially when that love is returned." She heard the quiet joy in his voice. He'd gotten the message she still didn't dare voice bluntly.

She gazed into his purple eyes, eyes so alien yet still so kind. "You're not just saying that to make me feel better."

"We love you, Cassidy."

"Then it has to be all right. God has to forgive it." *Please heavenly Father, please understand.*

"Can you forgive yourself?"

She smiled ruefully. "I'm working on it."

"What about your mother?"

Cassidy's mouth opened and the words tumbled out. "She was a shameless whore who deserves the fiery pit—"

Degorsk stopped her with a finger to her lips. "Whose words are those, precious girl?"

She went very still. "My grandfather's."

*Her mother, with tears sliding down her cheeks. Being led out of the courtroom in shackles between two guards who dwarf her sunken frame. A last glance at Cassidy, sitting by her grandfather's side.*

*"It's all right, Cassie-lassie. I love you forever and ever." The door shuts between them. Her mother is gone.*

"Degorsk?" Cassidy's voice was high-pitched, almost a shriek. The memories came steamrolling back, knocking her nearly senseless with their force. The trial where she'd testified against her mother, and the days before in the windowless room with her grandfather looming over her and telling her *this is what really happened, you know she brought it on herself, say what I tell you or you'll be convicted too.*

And even before that, the day in the apartment.

The man with the knife.

Degorsk kissed her. His hands stroked her shuddering body gently. "Don't be afraid of remembering. I'm right here with you. You can tell me, Cassidy. Tell me what happened."

She curled tight against him, as if she could find shelter from the horror of five years ago. He cradled her, rocking her gently as she sobbed.

\* \* \* \*

Tranis paced the length of the bridge, trying not to look at the Earther battle cruisers lining up on the other side of their defense grid. He'd worried the Earthers would use the portal itself to attack, but either they wanted to keep its existence secret or they didn't like using the distorted passage.

No doubt the gathering battle cruisers had launched the moment Earth knew the Kalquorian fleet had breached the outer security ring. The vessels, spewing out one-man fighters like loathsome multiple births, were clumsy-looking. Tranis knew better than to underestimate the clunky warships. With spoked laser cannons that could fire almost 360 degrees around them, they were more than enough trouble for the Kalquorian destroyers.

*Attack now, Piras, before they get in position and all their fighters are ready for ours.*

As if hearing Tranis' thoughts, Lidon said, "The security grid is down. Attack force is engaging the Earther fleet."

The attack squadron was a distraction to keep the Earthers from noticing the cloaked invasion force. Tranis concentrated his attention on the vid of the portal entrance. A shimmering disturbance appeared briefly on the screen before winking out.

"First ship has entered the portal," Simdow confirmed. "ETA to Earth, thirty minutes."

A weak cheer went up among the crew. They still had a long way to go, and no one was ready to celebrate yet, especially knowing the death toll could be heavy.

Tranis glanced at Lidon. "Any sign the Earthers have noticed the portal breach?"

"None. Our fighters and destroyers are keeping them distracted." He shook his head, his mouth tightening in a thin line. "We just lost a destroyer. Security grid has been re-established."

"How many got into the vortex?"

"Six," Simdow said.

"Security grid down again," Lidon reported. "Our fleet is re-engaging Earth defenders."

"More of the invasion force is entering the portal."

Tranis took a deep breath, willing the tension away. "It's going to be a long fight."

Lidon's ever-fast fingers flew over his controls. "As long as they don't figure out what we're really doing, it will be a worthwhile effort."

Tranis nodded. Once the Earthers realized the portal was being used, the real fighting would begin.

\* \* \* \*

Degorsk was trained to hypnotize others. As a doctor on a spy ship, it was part of his job. The trick was quieting the subject enough to put him or her under.

Cassidy didn't want to quiet. She was remembering something of such tremendous upheaval that her sobs went on and on, leaving her incapable of coherent speech. Biting her would settle her down but leave her wanting sex, not talk. Degorsk had seen enough of her pain, and he was determined to find its cause and yank it into the light. It was time for Cassidy to begin healing.

He held her in his lap, humming a monotonous tone and rocking her in an effort to comfort. Her tears wet his chest as she huddled against him. Degorsk took one of her hands in his and held it so her fingers splayed wide. With the index finger of his other hand, he stroked each of her fingers, one at a time, over and over. He timed it so each stroke lasted as long as the slow rocking. He raised his voice just enough so she could hear him over her sobs and said, "Relax, relax, relax, relax..." the lulling rhythm matching the strokes and rocking.

Little by little, her crying tapered off. The set of her shoulders sagged as tension ebbed away. After several minutes, she lay heavy in his arms, only the occasional shuddering sigh interrupting her breathing.

Degorsk continued to rock and stroke while he said in a soothing voice, "It's all in the past, Cassidy. The pain is behind you. It can't hurt you anymore. You feel only calm now."

She sighed again and snuggled deeper against him.

"Tell me how you feel."

"Calm."

"Good, Cassidy. There was sadness before, but you're getting to a place now where the sadness is just a memory too."

"Yes. I was sad."

"You were sad about what happened to your mother."

"Poor Mom. She only wanted to save me."

He heard the tears returning to her voice. Degorsk's control was tenuous at best. Whatever horror had happened to Cassidy and her mother would not be soothed, only muted temporarily by hypnotic suggestion. The pain could drag her out of his influence at any moment.

"Your mother cannot be harmed anymore. She's beyond all that now."

Sorrow tinged Cassidy's answer. "Yes. It's over for her."

"She loved you very much, Cassidy. She saved you. You're safe now."

"Yes." She was completely relaxed against his chest.

"What was it she saved you from?"

"The man with the knife." She shuddered.

"It's in the past now. He can't touch you. Tell me about the man. What does he look like?"

"His hair is dark with gray at the temples. He's not very tall and kind of skinny. He needs to shave. His clothes are wrinkled and his shoes are scuffed."

"Where do you first see this man?"

"He's in our apartment." Cassidy's voice rose. "How did he get in here? He's got a knife!"

Degorsk tightened his arms around her. "It's just a memory, Cassidy. He can't hurt you now. He's only a picture in your mind."

"Okay." Her tension ebbed, but he could feel the fear waiting to jump her again.

"You're safe with me. Can you feel me holding you?"

"Yes."

“Any time you become afraid, you’ll feel my arms around you, keeping you from harm. Can you do that, Cassidy?”

“Yes.”

“Good girl. Now the man is in your home. What do you do when you see him there?”

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy screamed.

The stranger standing in the living room smashed her against the wall and held the knife at her throat. It was a kitchen knife, of all things, with a scarred wooden handle. Not one of theirs. Their knives were all metal. The intruder must have brought the blade from home.

It was strange what one thought about when life hung in the balance.

His breath reeked of alcohol as he whispered, “Shut up, girl. Make another sound and I’ll cut you.”

Cassidy shut up, feeling the cold metal against her skin, ready to slice in. Her eyes were wide as she looked at the man pressed up against her. His hair stood up in crazy spikes, as if he’d forgotten to comb it this morning. Dark stubble dotted his jaw. His bloodshot eyes were rabbit-scared, intense and darting as he looked her face over.

“You look just like her. Such a pretty girl. So pretty.” The frantic expression he wore took on a sad yearning that might have moved Cassidy to pity had the threat of the knife not been present.

Her mother’s careful voice came from behind the man. “Mr. Walker, let my daughter go.”

Walker. The man who had sent her mother bouquets of discounted, nearly wilted flowers and cheap pieces of jewelry for the last year. He called every day, sometimes half a dozen times. Cassidy was no longer allowed to answer the vid phone if the number was unknown. Stan Walker had been the reason her mother had spent the last three months wrangling a restraining order from the court, answering questions why a virtuous woman would be stalked by a man if she hadn’t tempted him somehow. The restraining order had finally been won a week ago.

Walker shifted to look at her. His lips trembled and tears leaked from his eyes as he looked at Jacquelyn Hamilton, still wearing her navy blue airline attendant uniform. She’d gotten home minutes ago, and her hair, the same platinum shade as Cassidy’s, was a coiled braid at the nape of her neck. Her blue eyes, wide and staring, were the only hint of terror in her carefully controlled expression.

“Jackie.” In Walker’s utterance of her name was an ocean of need and pain. “It could have been so beautiful between us. I loved you, and you’ve thrown that love in my face. How could you do that to me?” He barked a sob. “You need to know how it feels to lose what you care for most.” He turned his attention to Cassidy again.

“Stan, look at me. It can still be what you wanted.” The desperate note in her mother’s voice trembled in the air.

“What *we* wanted!” The knife pressed harder at Cassidy’s throat, and she tried to cringe back, to make the wall behind her bend to help her escape the madman. “You have to want me too.”

"I do." Jackie slowly unbuttoned her jacket and let it slip to the floor. "I want you, Stan, but not if you hurt my daughter. Let her go, and I'll show you how much I want you."

Cassidy sobbed as her mother undressed in the middle of the room, leaving her clothing in uncaring piles on the floor. She could see how difficult it was for Jackie's trembling hands to unbutton and unzip the outfit. Walker watched, his mouth hanging open, breath heaving in and out quickly. But his knife never wavered from Cassidy's throat.

At last Jackie stood naked, pale and shaking. She held her hand out to Walker. "Take me, Stan. I'll give you everything, just as we've always wanted."

A slow, dazed smile spread over his features. He looked at Cassidy. "You see? She loves me. I knew she did."

Jackie's cheeks streaked with tears, but she grimaced a pained smile at him. "Yes, I love you. Come to me. Let me show you how you were right all along."

Walker's delight dropped suddenly. Cassidy stared into the face of another Walker, one as vicious as a rabid dog. He bared his teeth at her. "You stay right here, girl. You move and I'll kill her. I'll kill us all."

Unspeakable horror drained every last mote of strength from Cassidy's body. She slid bonelessly down the wall, coughing harsh sobs as he went to her mother. Jackie took his hand, the one not holding the knife now hovering near her belly, and tugged him to the couch. "It's okay, Cassie-lassie. Close your eyes and stay there."

Degorsk's warm voice drifted through the room, and Cassidy felt his strong arms around her, keeping her safe. "Don't remember this part, precious girl. It's in the past and can't hurt you or your mother anymore. It's only pictures in your mind, and you feel secure."

The scene faded, leaving Cassidy in the embracing dark. She relaxed, feeling his protection. Degorsk wouldn't let anything bad happen to her. He'd promised.

"Now it's after. You are safe, and it's like watching what happened to someone else, so there's no need to be afraid. What happened after Walker attacked you and your mother?"

The living room of Jackie and Cassidy's apartment swam back into focus. Walker stood over her mother who huddled in a ball on the couch. He still held the knife.

He uttered a low scream, like an animal caught in a trap. He fell to his knees beside the sofa. "I'm sorry, Jackie! It wasn't supposed to be like – I love you! I would never hurt—"

His hoarse cries overwhelmed speech, and he crouched on the floor, his shoulders heaving with despair. He shuddered as if he'd been the one who had been raped.

Thuds sounded on the door. "Jackie! Cassidy? What's all that noise in there?"

It was Mr. Carmicheal, their nosy next-door neighbor, a severe man who always scowled suspiciously at them. He was in charge of the Neighborhood Watch for their building.

Walker jumped to his feet, his eyes wild. Jackie didn't respond, still curled tight into herself. Fear brought strength to Cassidy, and she stood. She knew what would happen to her mother if they were seen. Victims of rape were seen as temptresses,

women who had brought the attacks on themselves. They were as guilty as the men who forced them.

Walker gibbered frantically. "I have to fix this. I have to fix this." He brought the knife up.

Cassidy was across the room before she knew what she was doing, the heavy antique iron lamp from the side table in her hands. She swung with all her strength, the thud of the lamp's contact with Walker's skull reverberating up her arms.

Her arms pistoned up and down, fury at what he'd done to her mother driving her mindlessly as she hit him again and again. She didn't see anything, didn't hear anything. All that existed was the growing ache in her arms, starting from her shoulders, creeping down her biceps, elbows and forearms. Even as her arms grew heavy, she kept driving the lamp up and down, up and down. He had to pay. He'd hurt her mommy and he had to pay.

The rest of the world swam back into focus when repeated crashes boomed in Cassidy's ears. She stopped pounding the motionless lump of meat on the floor as Mr. Carmicheal busted the locked door open and stared, his eyes and mouth perfect O's of shock.

"Jesus, Mohammed and Moses! Police! Carnal relations! Murder!" He ran from the room.

The lamp fell from Cassidy's numbed fingers. She looked at the bloody thing lying on the floor, at her mother slowly sitting up. The police were coming. There was no escape from justice now.

Cassidy picked her mother's clothes up, helping Jackie put them on. They were silent as they hid her nudity, restoring some semblance of modesty before the police arrived.

After she was properly clad again, Jackie held her arms out to Cassidy. The dam burst, and Cassidy clung to her mother for the last time. "Mommy!" she wailed as if she had lost ten years and regressed from a near-woman of fourteen to a four-year old child.

"It's okay baby." Jackie covered her daughter's streaming face with kisses. "We both did what we had to. No matter what they say, no matter what ugly names they call you, you did what you had to. I love you, Cassafrass."

Cassidy cried harder to hear the nickname. "I love you too, Mommy."

The deep, dark velvet of Degorsk's voice was like a balm, blanketing them with comfort, rescuing them from the inevitable hell that followed. "It's all over, Cassidy. No more pain, sweetling. It's time to leave this behind."

He drew her away from the coming doom, took her before the police could arrive with their handcuffs and shouted accusations. Her mother's desperate clutch dissolved into his strong grip, and she sighed to be cradled in her lover's arms.

"Slowly waking up. You are relaxed, feeling safe. Waking up a little more..."

Cassidy followed the soothing, deep voice, rising from the horror of that night, the horror that continued for months afterward until her mother was locked away to die in a cold cell and Cassidy sent to live in the mind-numbing prison of Europa's convent.

\* \* \* \*

Lidon cursed. “The Earthers just took out another destroyer. That’s three, plus the eleven single-man fighters.”

Simdow looked ill. “There are one to two hundred men on each destroyer.”

Lidon cocked an eyebrow at him. “Mostly Nobeks. Dying in glorious battle is the end we hope for, so save your sympathy.”

Tranis interrupted the conversation before Lidon could become offended. “How many ships have entered the portal?”

“One hundred twenty of our destroyers are away. The first should reach Earth in twenty-three minutes.”

Lidon grunted approval. “There’s still no sign they suspect anything. Our forces are keeping them well occupied.”

“Estimated time it will take to get all five hundred of the invasion force into the portal?”

Simdow looked at Lidon and schooled his expression to be bland. “Forty-five more minutes, Captain.”

Tranis kept his tone just as emotionless. “The Earthers will figure out what’s going on before then.”

Lidon nodded. “There will be much glory for our warriors today.”



## Chapter Eighteen

Cassidy moaned. Her memories of the past were far from her mind, chased away by the knowing mouth, tongue and fingers of Degorsk.

He sucked gently on her throbbing pink pearl, his tongue swirling around it. Two of his fingers stroked in and out, making sure to rub against the most sensitive spot in her sleeve. His touch was gentle but firm, the perfect mix of care and mastery.

Cassidy's world shrunk to where Degorsk's face and hands worked diligently. All she knew was the growing warmth of pleasure punctuated by stabs of excruciating ecstasy. She jerked in reaction when his tongue hit just the right spot. The swelling bliss of his feeding drove away all the pain, all the concerns, all the disappointments. For these few precious minutes, he kept her suspended where nothing of cold, cruel reality existed.

She didn't chase culmination. She let it slip next to her and slowly enclose her in its embrace, settling in the deepest recesses of her body and gradually creeping out to suffuse her whole being with gentle pulses of ticklish warmth. Her sighs spoke of exquisite capture and acquiescence to its power.

Degorsk pulled his fingers free. He lapped at her juices, his rough tongue carefully extracting every drop. Then he licked his lips, looking for all the world like a purple-eyed cat after a meal.

"Thank you," Cassidy whispered.

Degorsk crawled up to lay beside her. He gathered her up in his arms. "I'm glad you enjoyed it."

She snuggled against him, basking in the heat of his body. "Not just the lovemaking. You gave my mother back to me."

He said nothing, letting his kiss respond for him. Cassidy settled, the first quiet tugs of sleep creeping over her.

A steady, insistent beeping roused them both from the brink of slumber. Degorsk huffed and got out of bed to retrieve his com from the nearby desk. When he answered it, a guttural stream of Kalquorian speech issued from it in rapid-fire bursts.

Degorsk spoke back into the small metallic rectangle and hurriedly dressed in the formsuit he'd left piled on the floor. "I need to see about a sick Matara. She's in great pain here." He pointed to the right side of his abdomen below the ribs.

Cassidy sat up. "That sounds like appendicitis. It's life threatening if the appendix bursts."

Degorsk's mouth tightened in worry. He sat on the bed's edge and tugged on a boot. "Get dressed, sweetling. I need to hurry." The other boot went on in a flash.

"I don't want to slow you up. Can I stay here? I'd like to sleep."

He stood. "You are all right? I don't like to leave you alone after recovering those memories."

"I'm fine." She smiled to show him how fine she was. "Lock me in if it makes you feel better."

"I trust you, Cassidy. But Lidon will have my head if I don't keep you secured." He paused by the door, his brow wrinkling in concern. "You're sure?"

"Go!" She waved at him in mock impatience. "Go save another lady in distress. It's what you were made for."

That made him chuckle, and he swept out of the sleeping quarters. Cassidy waited for a minute, counting the seconds down to make sure he had left the main living area before slipping on her underdress and padding out of the room.

The door leading out to the ship's corridor was locked. Cassidy turned from it. Her eyes fell on the computer station. Both the dead Earther captain's and Lidon's units sat there. She went to the station and sat down.

"Power up," she commanded, and an English-language vid readout appeared before her eyes. Lidon hadn't disconnected it. "Ship's blueprints."

It took some trial and error, but she finally had the information she was after. She looked over the diagram of the complicated ventilation system, memorizing the path she wanted. Then she climbed onto the dinette table to reach the vent opening over it. The cover slid out much easier than the one in her cell on Europa had.

Cassidy boosted herself into the shaft but didn't worry about replacing the cover. If the clan came to check on her, they'd know how she'd left anyway.

The darkness of the shaft worried her a little. She'd have to go for the most part by feel, and it would be easy to get lost. But she had a mission in mind, one she'd contemplated since coming on board the Earther transport. The recovery of her memories had only solidified her resolve to carry it out.

Lidon would be furious with her. But she calmed that little concern by remembering she'd only promised him she wouldn't use the ventilation system to attempt escape. Escape was the farthest thing from her mind right now.

Cassidy was looking for confrontation.

\* \* \* \*

"The Earthers have the security grid back up," Lidon reported. "Let's see how fast our fleet takes it down this time."

Simdow's report came right on the heels of Lidon's. "Half our invasion fleet is in the portal. ETA to Earth arrival, twelve minutes. There are ten more destroyers on that side of the grid flying into the vortex now."

"We're in for it." Lidon's tone held some alarm, getting Tranis' attention fast. "The diversion wing is reporting the Earthers are scanning for activity near the portal."

"They've finally figured our plan out," Tranis said. "Now the fighting gets really ugly."

"Diversion wing is deploying to the portal. As soon as the grid is down again they'll defend – what are the Earthers doing?"

His stunned expression was so unsuited to his face, it was almost comical. After a second's silence, Tranis prompted, "Report, Commander."

"Captain, several Earther battle cruisers are separating from the main group. They're heading back to Earth at high speeds."

“On main vid,” Train ordered.

Indeed, a large number of Earther ships were peeling away from the main group, heading in two directions. A moment later, Lidon confirmed what Tranis saw. “Some of the ships are also rushing for the portal.”

Suddenly, several ships in the Earthers’ main defense opened fire. Gasps rang out on Tranis’ bridge.

“Did those battle cruisers just fire on their own ships?” Osopa gaped.

Indeed, the main phalanx of Earth’s defenders was attacking the ships retreating towards Earth. Stunned silence reigned.

Lidon broke the quiet to report. “Security grid is back down. Oh – have they all gone insane?”

Tranis watched openmouthed as several Earther fighters and half a dozen of their battle cruisers bolted towards the Kalquorian fleet. He winced as two fighters and one cruiser smashed into a Kalquorian destroyer, detonating a conflagration that pained the eyes. The Earthers were suicide attacking. The Kalquorian destroyers were forced to evade the huge vessels.

“The Earther fleet is in chaos, Captain.” Lidon stared at the main vid.

Tranis shook his head in an effort to break the spell of horror. “They’re in complete panic. The moment they realized we were using the portal, the commanders lost control of the fleet. Thoughts, Lidon?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea. Surely they left some on-planet defenses in case we broke through?”

“They must have. What is going on?”

No one had an answer for him.

\* \* \* \*

Cassidy peeked in various cabins as she made her torturous way through the maze of the ventilation system. At last she found what she wanted: a vicious dagger, carefully placed on a table next to a mussed bed. Making sure no Kalquorian waited to capture her, she snuck into the room and grabbed the blade. She took a moment to power up the computer she found in there and check her position.

Good. She was almost to her goal.

Holding the serrated-edged dagger in her hand, wondering if it had ever been used to kill someone (there was no other use for such a brutal weapon she thought), she crawled back into the vent. This time she replaced the cover. She didn’t want some young gung-ho Nobek tracking her down to reclaim his property.

Five minutes later that felt more like five years, Cassidy located the vent opening she’d been looking for. She crept to it as quietly as she could and peered out into the brightly-lit brig.

A short corridor ran between two rows of containment cells. Three cells were on each side, and Cassidy detected movement in the middle one on her right. At the end of the corridor opposite her position, three Kalquorians stood near a computer workstation. Their unintelligible conversation was quite animated, their youthful faces bright with excitement. Cassidy swallowed. She hoped they were as inexperienced as they looked. Only surprise and her status as the captain’s Matara would keep her from harm.

She eased the vent cover off, watching the three men as she did so. The cover came off silently, attracting no attention thus far. As soon as it was free, she braced herself.

Cassidy sprang into the corridor, flinging the vent cover to the side as she dropped to the floor. She landed in a crouch, getting the dagger into position and glaring at the startled Kalquorians.

\* \* \* \*

The hum of the opening door announced Degorsk's entrance to the bridge. Lidon glanced at him as he stopped short at the sight of the disordered Earther fleet, several of which were burned hulks. Another exploded as he watched.

"I guess we aren't doing too badly," he whispered, his expression stricken.

"The Earthers did it to themselves," Lidon answered.

"The ones that aren't running in all directions are using themselves as weapons against us or self-destructing." Tranis faced Degorsk, turning his back on the vid. Lidon didn't blame his Dramok. The sight was stomach churning.

Degorsk stared at them in turn, his mouth hanging open. "Why?"

Tranis could only shrug. He asked, "You left Cassidy alone?"

"She wanted to sleep. She had a major breakthrough." At their raised eyebrows, he glanced at the rest of the crew. "We'll discuss it later."

Lidon hoped the news on his Matara was good. He could use something positive. His com beeped. "Containment to Commander Lidon."

"Now what?" he growled. The last thing he wanted to hear was something had happened to General Hamilton. "Go ahead."

The voice of one of Hamilton's guards was pitched high with concern. "Sir, your Matara is here. She snuck in through the ventilation system and is holding us off with a blade."

Tranis and Degorsk froze. Lidon didn't know whether to laugh or scream at his underling. "A little Earther girl is holding off three Nobeks with a knife?"

"She's threatening to stab herself if we don't stay back. I think we can disarm her without letting her come to harm—"

Lidon was already running from the bridge. "Stay away from her! I'm on my way."

As he raced down the corridor, he heard Tranis shout, "Alert me to any changes, Simdow."

Tranis and Degorsk ran past him as the entire clan rushed to the brig, and Lidon pushed his bad leg as hard as he could.

\* \* \* \*

All the Nobeks' ferocity had drained from their faces the instant Cassidy pressed the point of the dagger to her belly. One begged, "Matara, please drop the blade."

Cassidy slowly advanced. "I just want to talk to the general. Stay back and I won't hurt myself."

The three big aliens fell back. She went to the cell where her grandfather stood waiting, his hands crossed before his nakedness to protect his modesty. He smirked.

"You always were too smart for your own good."

Cassidy stared at him, searching herself for the old fear of the man. Instead, she found rage, unimpeded by an orphaned child's terror. "Is that why you took me out of school, so you could stunt my intelligence? You're a pathetic worm."

Shock crossed his expression. "You can't talk to me that way, girl."

"I can and will. You stole my mother from me, you bastard."

There was no sign of regret, no hint of conscience. "She was a harmful influence who didn't know how to keep her place, a wanton, lustful creature who threw herself at that man—"

"Who was ready to kill me! She gave herself to save me even though she knew what it meant!" Cassidy wanted the invisible barrier between them to come down, so she could bury the Kalquorian dagger in his black heart. "Then you brainwashed me into testifying against her. You made me hate her!"

"To save you from yourself." His nose raised imperiously in the air. "I knew she wasn't good enough for my son and how she'd ruin my only grandchild."

Spittle flew from Cassidy's mouth as she snarled, "The only ruin in my life was you. Because of you my brave, selfless mother died thinking I despised her."

"Cassidy, put the blade down." Tranis' voice was soft behind her.

"He's not worth your life," Degorsk added.

"No. He never was." Her stare remained on the general. "But he owes a life. He murdered her through me, and I will have justice."

Degorsk's hands gripped her shoulders. "I fear you'll regret killing your last living relative, no matter how justified it may be. I won't have you adding to your sense of guilt."

"He doesn't deserve to live!"

Lidon gently tugged at the dagger. "You are right that he should die for his crime. But you are also angry and not thinking clearly right now. If you still want him dead a week from now after you've had a chance to think it through, I will be honored to carry out your wishes."

Cassidy hesitantly relinquished the blade and stepped back to be enfolded in Degorsk's arms. She took hateful joy in the way Hamilton's eyes widened. "Shameless whore," he whispered.

"Man lover."

He blanched, staggering back a step. Cassidy saw the truth of what the clan had told her in the guilty way his gaze faltered. "What would Earth do if they knew your perversions, General?"

He said nothing. He stared at the floor.

She pressed on, taking strength from her clan clustered about her. "Fortunately for you, you'll never stand trial for your crime. The maniacs who run our world will soon be out of power. Or has the invasion failed?" she asked Tranis.

His voice was careful, his face expressionless. "Earth's defense force is in shambles. Our invasion party will exit the portal in moments."

Hamilton's head came up. His lips trembled and his eyes shone with sudden tears even as he smiled with triumph. "And the devils were cast into the lake of fire and

brimstone, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.’ Now both our species will disappear into extinction. You didn’t really think we’d let you take us alive?”

Cassidy heard her own sudden fear in Lidon’s voice. “What do you mean?”

“According to the official history, when all Earth’s governments surrendered to the North American bloc, the remaining nuclear warheads were shot into space and detonated.”

Cassidy remembered the illicit writings in her reader. “Dissidents of the time said it wasn’t true. That the warheads were stockpiled somewhere.”

Hamilton nodded. “They were right. The weapons were placed below several major cities; New York, London, Moscow, Rome, and so many more. The places most likely to foment revolution. The list is long, my dear. Hundreds of cities sitting right on top of Armageddon. All that destruction, just waiting to be triggered.”

Cassidy went cold all over. “They wouldn’t dare.”

His smile was vicious. “When the wormholes were discovered, we knew another race might use the portals to subjugate us. That can’t happen, not to God’s children. We’re better off dead.”

Cassidy felt a fine tremor run through Tranis. Her Dramok said, “Who is tasked to set off the warheads once we get through?”

“It’s in God’s hands now. No fallible humans required. All Earther ships are encoded to clear the wormhole, but if anything else comes through without clearance, detonation is automatic.”

Cassidy screamed. “Tranis!”

Tranis and Lidon were already running out of the brig, the captain shouting desperately into his com in Kalquorian.

\* \* \* \*

Lidon was right behind him as Tranis reached the bridge. He yelled into his com, “I repeat, if breached by our ships, the portal’s exit is rigged to trigger nuclear blasts on Earth’s major cities!”

Admiral Piras voice was grave. “We are sending retreat messages on all frequencies to the invasion force. Distortion in the magnetic waves is blocking our efforts.”

Lidon was at his station, grimly scanning readouts. “Only the last dozen destroyers to enter the portal are acknowledging receiving the message. No response from the rest.”

Degorsk and Cassidy arrived on the bridge as Simdow said, “ETA to portal exit on Earth’s side, thirty seconds.”

“Maybe it’s a bluff,” Degorsk said hopefully. “There might not be any explosives.”

Looking at the vid of self-destructing Earther ships, Tranis knew better. The fanatical rulers of Earth had chosen a path he couldn’t imagine.

They had been speaking in Kalquorian, but Tranis knew Cassidy could read their worried faces. “Please Tranis,” she begged. “Don’t let this happen.”

Tranis could only listen to the desperate communications from Admiral Piras as he tried to call the fleet back. Degorsk hugged Cassidy close.

“Another seventeen destroyers have received the message and are returning,” Lidon reported to the silent crew. “The first into the portal have not responded yet. Too much magnetic interference.”

“Twenty seconds.”

Piras’ voice was strained. “We’re continuing to broadcast retreat messages, Captain Tranis. How certain are you of this threat?”

Tranis glanced at Cassidy’s terrified face. “I have no doubt our invasion will result in severe destruction and massive loss of Earther life.”

“Ten seconds.” Simdow looked gray with worry.

Tranis looked at Lidon. The Nobek shook his head. “No further response from the invasion force. They may have gotten the message but interference keeps us from receiving their acknowledgment.”

Simdow’s voice was so quiet Tranis had to strain to hear. “If they didn’t, they’ll be breaking through any moment now.”

Silent seconds passed, broken only by the frantic retreat messages. As the time passed, Tranis allowed hope to creep in. The fleet had heard them. They’d turned back, and Earth was saved. It had to be.

“Oh no.” Lidon’s groan came a moment before communications exploded with horrified reports from the invasion force. They’d broken through to Earth, never having received the new orders.

“NO!” Cassidy screamed. She collapsed, Degorsk catching her before she could hit the floor.

Simdow’s expression went blank, stunned beyond comprehension as he stared at his station’s vid. “First images are being transmitted from the invasion fleet. Shall I bring them up, Captain?”

“No.” Tranis stumbled towards Cassidy who sobbed piteously as Degorsk held her. The two men’s gazes locked. “I did this,” he told his Imdiko.

“You didn’t know how insane their rulers truly were,” Degorsk said. His chest hitched with emotion as he stared at the main vid where more Earther ships self-destructed. “How could anyone have ever anticipated this?”

Looking at his heartbroken Matara, Tranis felt the weight of guilt smothering him. Clutching Degorsk and Cassidy as if for dear life, Tranis guided them off the bridge.

## Chapter Nineteen

The week that followed was filled with tears and pain for Earthers and Kalquorians alike. The loss of life on Earth had been staggering, beyond anyone's ability to comprehend. All member planets of the Galactic Council were sending aid to the stricken world with Kalquor at the forefront of the rescue mission. The invasion fleet was now faced with containing the nuclear fallout as best it could until evacuation ships arrived.

Cassidy thought of old school friends and the people she'd known back on Earth. Her home had not been near a major city, so she had reason to hope most had survived. But Earth's infrastructure had collapsed, and the Kalquorians' best attempts to feed and shelter the remnants of humanity couldn't begin to address the crisis that continued. Fortunately the stable Dragon's Triangle portal would get about half of the rescuers to Earth in a matter of days instead of weeks.

As the first devastating shock gave way to aching grief for her home planet, Cassidy found small moments of joy peeking in from time to time. She felt guilty about those pockets of happiness, but she also understood she couldn't mourn forever. Her life continued on, and she would live it in the company of men who loved her.

She was enjoying one such lighthearted moment when Tranis and Lidon entered their sleeping room aboard the Earther transport. The two men stopped when they saw Degorsk hanging the mold of his buttocks on the wall. Cassidy giggled, unselfconscious of her nudity as she stood in the middle of the room, directing the Imdiko.

"A little more to the left. Not so high or I can't grab it when I want to."

"At least you aren't hanging it over my altar," Lidon sighed. He winked at Cassidy when Degorsk wasn't looking.

"Are we going?" she asked, flopping on the bed. It had been a long week, and she was impatient to get away from Earth space, away from the reminders of what had once been a thriving planet. Sorrow, never too far away, crept over her once more.

Tranis nodded. "We're under way for Kalquor. My promotion to admiral is now official and Lidon starts his new assignment with Global Security as soon as we get home."

Degorsk made one last adjustment to the mold and stepped back to admire it. "Meanwhile, I have nine months to figure out what I'll do on Kalquor. I'm considering taking up psychological studies. This mission has given me a taste for it."

Cassidy welcomed a wave of contentment that pushed heartache back as she considered the future. She looked forward to pursuing her own studies. Degorsk's aptitude tests had put her intelligence scores in the ninety-six percentile and sent the clan scrambling to find the best possible instruction on Kalquor to continue her education.

That they took her needs so seriously only added to the allure of her new life. "We'll help each other cram for exams," she told Degorsk.



“Cram?” Degorsk looked at her in confusion.

“Never mind. It’s an Earther thing. It involves no sleep, lots of coffee, and in my case eating pizza all night. You’ll probably want to skip it.”

He tweaked her nose. “In that case, you’ll be skipping it too.” He pulled a face and shuddered. “Pizza.”

Lidon grimaced, but it wasn’t because of Cassidy’s love affair with grease and cheese. “Nine months of boring travel. Just thinking about it makes me want to hit someone.”

“We’ll make a few stops along the way.” Tranis smiled at Cassidy. “It’s dangerous to keep Nobeks cooped up in a ship for too long. They get what I think you call cabin fever and start beating up each other for entertainment.”

Lidon seemed cheered a little. “Is Kiwbris along our flight path? I’d love a hunt in the jungle.”

“Our first stop. I also want to set up a game of kurble on the Manrus Plain while we’re there, so start thinking about our team’s strategy. I’ll accept nothing less than decimation of Osopa’s squad this time.” Tranis’ smile faded as if he’d been reminded of something. “You know, there was another containment breach just before we left. Heavy radioactive fallout on the Asian continent.”

Degorsk frowned at him, and Cassidy felt her own anxiety at Tranis’ continued self blame for Earth’s fate.

Lidon’s tone was mild. “Those fields aren’t meant for such large areas. Breaches are going to happen.” In a move contrary to his Nobek nature, he squeezed Tranis’ shoulder. “We came to invade and occupy, not rescue. It’s going to take awhile to get the proper equipment here, so continued loss of life is only to be expected.”

Degorsk added, “You have to stop taking this so personally.”

Tranis almost howled in his anguish. “The entire planet will be uninhabitable in a few years, all because I couldn’t get Hamilton to tell us what Armageddon was!”

“You did your best.”

Cassidy rose and slipped her arms around Tranis’ waist. “Degorsk is right. You couldn’t have known what my people were capable of. I’d met some of those men in charge. I knew how fanatical they were and how much they loved the idea of the apocalypse, but even I couldn’t imagine them going to such extremes.” She tightened her grip around him, willing him to stop accusing himself.

He brushed her hair back from her face. “I don’t deserve your forgiveness.”

“Tranis, the one living man most directly responsible for this will stand trial before the Galactic Council.” Cassidy had granted her grandfather a stay of execution at Lidon’s hands, but only because Earth needed to exact greater justice. Someone had to answer for the planet’s devastation.

“But—”

Cassidy stilled his agonized protest with a finger to his mouth. She quoted from the Bible, the older one of Christianity that preceded the government’s official text. “As Jesus hung dying on the cross, he called out to God, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ If Jesus could forgive the willful brutality he suffered, I can forgive men who did all they could to relieve my misery.”

"I can't believe you don't hate us."

The anguish in his eyes tore at her heart. It decided her. She'd held off telling them the truth long enough, especially now that most of Earth was a shattered ruin. "I can't hate those I love, Tranis."

For the first time in days, the bleak look in his eyes lifted. His voice was soft with wonder. "Tell me what to do."

"Love me." She tugged him towards the bed.

"Forever," he vowed, scooping her up in his arms and kissing her soundly before laying her down.

His touch was softer than Degorsk at his gentlest. Cassidy cried a little to be caressed so tenderly, with such obvious emotion. How had she ever thought this man a brute?

Tranis' lips traveled over her skin, his kisses like the fluttering of butterflies' wings. She stroked his silky black hair as he moved down her body. Lidon and Degorsk surrounded her, their clothing cast aside. They copied Tranis' light kisses on her lips and breasts as he zeroed in on her softest flesh.

His tongue danced over her pink petals, making her sigh with bliss. Cassidy gave herself over to sensation. It was several moments before she realized the damning voices of her warped conscience were silent. None of her lovers had bitten her. She dove into the happiness of freedom, freedom from fear, freedom to love without boundaries.

Tranis' mouth fed at her womanhood, sipping her delicate wine from her font. Lidon suckled one erect nipple then the next, as if comparing the two. Degorsk's tongue wove sinuously in her mouth. They consumed her until she could stand no more.

"Now," she groaned as soon as she pulled away from Degorsk's delicious kiss. "I need you in me now, Tranis."

He was eager to comply. The other two moved aside to allow him complete access to her body. Tranis propped himself up on his hands as if doing a pushup. Cassidy positioned him so that he'd enter her sex with both organs. She groaned in delight as he filled her to bursting.

Still gentle, he rocked slowly within her, his gaze drinking in her lush body. She ran her hands over his massive chest, his strong shoulders, and his square-jawed handsome face. An entire lifetime with this man and the others to love and cherish. She could have wept from happiness.

But Tranis had found that spot, and sentimentality gave way before brute lust. She writhed beneath him, her cries building with the pleasure he gave her. She lifted her hips, driving against him, seeking completion until it swept over her.

When the most mind-stealing spasms faded to slow pulses, she moaned, "My clan. I want my whole clan."

In an instant, Tranis lifted her up, still impaled on his sexes. Lidon knelt behind her, pressing into her most taboo orifice, his natural lubrication sliding him easily inside her. Degorsk stood on the bed, his eager sexes at mouth level. Cassidy took the larger between her lips while her hand pumped the smaller.

They thrust into her flesh, claiming her once again. Her body eagerly accepted them, a willing receptacle for their needs. The air filled with the sweetest of sounds: the

moist movements of sexual friction, moans and sighs of pervading bliss, whispers of love and devotion. Their combined musk of Kalquorian cinnamon and Earther sea salt blended in an olfactory symphony.

Cassidy rode Tranis and Lidon's combined lunges, rising and falling between them. Filled to her utmost endurance, she grunted around Degorsk's driving length. The three men were quickening their pace, seeking exaltation in her warmth.

Tranis went first, calling her name as he gave her his offering. Moments later Lidon stiffened behind her, his gasps tinged with growling. Almost at the same time, Degorsk groaned low in his throat, filling her mouth with his juices. Cassidy joined them in ecstasy, her moans stuttering as she swallowed the hot sweetness pouring down her throat.

Sweeter than the shared orgasm was the lack of guilt as Cassidy gave herself over to her clan. She'd come to terms with the fact that, like her mother, she sinned for love – a worthwhile sin if ever there was one.

The End

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