

# STARGAZER

CAITLYN WILLOWS



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*The Heir*

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*Teacher's Pet*

*Warrior Princess*

*White Lies*

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BY

CAITLYN WILLOWS

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STARGAZER  
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# CHAPTER 1

Kestral lifted his flask of Ionian ale. The cobalt blue caught the invisible rays of laser light, pulling in the power until the liquid fluoresced. He swore it beat in time with the music that shook the walls around him, as if it had life all its own. It beckoned his lips, promising delights that came with intoxication.

Female attendants fawned over the patrons, promising pleasures of their own. Their short silver dresses barely covered their nether regions from view.

That was the point—to grant anyone who wished ready access to bliss. The silver shimmered in the pulsing light, a liquid in its own right.

Tossing back his flask, Jamel's laughter mingled with the music. He snagged a willing participant from the parade of females and bent her face down over the nearest railing. Her dress hiked up as she spread her legs. Her fingers dipped forward, spreading her cunt lips wide for Jamel's bouncing erection. He seated himself in a full thrust and rode

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her hard.

The woman closed her eyes on a gasp and took it. As quick as it started, Jamel was finished. He wasn't really known for seeing to the pleasure of his woman.

Yanking free, Jamel stuffed his flaccid penis into his pants then smoothed his black hair and slipped into his seat.

"You're selfish, Jamel, and always have been," Durok chided as he snagged the girl's arm. In one slick movement, the woman was mounted on his lap. Durok grabbed her ample ass and gyrated her on his erection. His free hand dove between them, giving her incentive to continue on.

Eyes wide, she twitched against him. With each thrust she arched her back a little more until she was laid out on their table while Durok edged her on. Not to be outdone or left out, Macris stood and pulled out his own erection.

Kestral grabbed his arm. "Let the girl have her pleasure."

"Spoiler," he accused. "Look at her mouth, those lips. So full and inviting."

"As I said...let her have her pleasure. Grab another."

He did just that. In seconds, a red-haired beauty was on her knees before him, sucking away.

Kestral's penis hardened. It was impossible to watch and not be caught up in it all. Noticing his interest, a buxom female headed his way. Kestral waved her off with a slight jerk of his head. If he wanted meaningless release tonight, he'd find it privately.

Macris bit back a grin as he pumped himself into his attendant's mouth. The poor thing had little choice but to comply since he clutched her head in rapturous abandon. Sucking hard, she finished him off then pulled back into the crowd when he sagged into his chair.

A long cry from the girl sprawled over their table turned heads their way. Suddenly, they were surrounded by an audience. Shouts of encouragement spouted up. The music stopped. The beat now came

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from Durok pounding himself into his very willing companion. People clapped in time with the sound of flesh slapping against flesh.

Durok was on his feet now. One hand still worked her clit; the other grasped her hip to keep her in place. Around them, chips of platinum changed hands as bets were placed on who would come first—him or her.

The girl's lids flashed open. Dark, wide eyes focused up at Kestral. Whatever pleasure she had experienced was gone. Durok was hurting her. She pleaded for help silently. He couldn't stand to see her this way.

Leaning forward, he shoved Durok's hand away with his own. She sighed with relief at the gentler touch. Relieved of duty, Durok grabbed hold of both hips and ground into her. Seconds later, he tossed back a cry and hurled himself into her. When the last shudder died, she crawled away and into Kestral's lap.

"Please," she whispered against his neck.

It would have been cruel to refuse her. Shutting out the cheers around him, Kestral drew her close. Focusing his attention, he increased the blood flow to his fingers until they pulsed warm and steady. Had she been a lover he would have hovered above her point of pleasure, letting her build and absorb the throbbing heat. Instead, he danced slow, soft circles around the hard center.

Soft cries drifted to his ears. She clutched his neck in a death grip as her pleasure grew. A spasm seized her. She tensed, tightened, then sagged with relief on a soft moan.

Money passed to winners. One by one, the crowd thinned. Once her breathing returned to normal, she dropped a kiss to Kestral's cheek then slipped away. He watched her wobbly walk to the nearest washing facility. He could do with a little clean up himself.

"Show off." Jamel tossed him a wet napkin.

Kestral wiped his hands. "Twenty million years of evolution and you three still rut like primitives."

"Only in public, my friend. Only in public."

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“Yes...I can see the ladies flocking to your doors as we speak.” He lifted his flask. The glow had subsided, but the nectar would be just as sweet. “First one to chug the full measure wins.”

The other three grabbed their flasks and hoisted them to their lips. Kestral waited a second or two, then did the same. The ale was thick, sweet, cool, and potent going down.

Macris’ flask clinked against the glass table first. “Done. What do I win?”

Kestral laughed. “The right to buy us all another round.” He motioned over an attendant with a wave of his finger. Having helped their friend achieve her release, all the attendants were quick to come Kestral’s way now.

Durok helped himself to two more flasks. “Enough games. I say it’s time for a real wager.” Laser light reflected the gold in his hair.

Kestral glanced over his friend’s shoulder to his own reflection in the mirrored wall behind them. Reds and golds in his brown hair came to life under the dancing lights. It was the only thing about him to do so.

*When had life become so mundane?* He repaired warp drives by day. At night, he returned to an empty home only to wind up here with friends trading idiotic wagers. It wore on a man after a while. If truth be told, he was bored.

Lately, he wondered if his parents might have been right. Service with the Interplanetary Commission would have given him the travel, excitement, and challenge he’d always claimed he longed for. They knew him so well. Thankfully, they never belabored the point and let him follow his own path—even if it made him miserable.

He laughed to himself. It wasn’t too late.

*Blast the moons!* He’d do it. The next workday, he’d zip over to the nearest office and sign up. The age difference might do him in during training, but he’d kept fairly fit over the years—scaling mountains on Naru and plunging into the depths of Caldonia’s oceans did that for

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him. Nimble, fast reflexes were also points that counted with the IPC. Kestral had that, too. And any other disadvantages he faced would be evened out by maturity.

His heart lightened with his mood. He was actually excited to see the suns rise for the first time in what felt like a lifetime. He tossed down the icy contents of his flask and reached for another.

“What kind of wager do you have in mind?” he heard Macris asked.

“And, more importantly—” Jamel braced his arms on the edge of the table. “—what’s the prize?”

“Something completely wild and totally daring.” Durok gave them all a self-satisfied smirk as he kicked back. “The first one of us to get an Earth girl pregnant wins.”

“Earth girl?” Jamel’s shocked laughter competed with a new round of music. “That’d have to be one hell of a prize.”

Durok’s smile didn’t falter. “A Terellian Planet Skipper with a Plutonium 595 engine.”

Jamel gave a low whistle. “Top of the line.”

Kestral nodded more to himself than to the others. They went from zero to warp five in ten nanoseconds. That’d be a possession the IPC would really lift their eyebrows over. They’d never think of refusing a recruit who owned one of those. It was too valuable an asset.

“Bah! Earth girls!” Macris sliced his hand across the air. “Who can stand them? They reek of manufactured scents, are intensely mercurial, selfish, demanding, difficult as hell to bed, and harder still to be shed of.”

“All you have to do is leave, my friend,” Jamel told him. “How hard is that? It’s not like they can follow you to Naru.” He rocked back in his chair. “I like being on Earth. Make’s me feel like a...like a...I don’t know...a god.”

Earthlings were farther down the evolutionary scale than Naruns were. They had all this potential locked away in their heads they had yet to tap. It was a terrible waste.

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Kestral had to agree he had little use for them, although his distaste wasn't as strong as Macris'. What he found repulsive was their insistence on eating flesh. As far as bedding them—he'd had one or two. They weren't all that bad...certainly no worse or better than Narun women. He'd force his revulsion aside for a shot at that rocket ship.

His six flask slid down smoothly. He signaled for yet another. Kestral couldn't believe he was entertaining this insane idea.

"There will have to be some rules."

"Aren't there always rules with you?" Durok asked as he helped himself to a full tray of ale, then waved the attendant away.

"No forcible coital activity. The joining must be in real time, not on a different plane of conscience." Kestral held up his fingers as he ticked off each item. "We get to scan for a woman who is fertile and without disease." Yes, they were still primitive enough to have diseases there.

Macris jumped in. "And we get to scan them and leave the second they become pregnant." Obviously, the ownership of a Planet Skipper outweighed his qualms, too.

"And what about the child?" Jamel's question hovered among them.

Durok burst into laughter. "If those fools only knew how many Narun-spawned children exist on their world..."

They called them prodigies or psychics, these extremely gifted children. One thing was certain—they never suffered and always prospered.

"Are we in, my friends?" Durok slid the empty tray to the neighboring table. "If so, let's see what we can pick out for ourselves."

Reaching under the table, he flicked a switch. The surface of the table shimmered as the viewing screen came on. Kestral punched the control panel for Earth, then studied continents in the Northern Hemisphere.

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## CHAPTER 2

Anne Sherwood sorted her tips by denomination. Two hundred dollars! What a great night! But, then, payday for the military community normally were. She stuffed the wad of money deep into her big black leather tote, then smiled up at her co-worker.

“Ready to call it a night, Peggy?”

“I’ll say.” She tucked a strand of her platinum blonde hair back into place in its braid. “My feet are killing me.”

“They did keep us running tonight. But it was a good night.”

“Little Miss Mary Sunshine as always.” Still, Peggy laughed lightly. “I swear, if we had one customer who left you a quarter, you’d still think it was a good night.”

Anne couldn’t help it. It was so much easier being happy than sad. If a person looked hard enough, she could always find something good in a situation.

She steered Peggy toward the door. “You just need to get home to that man of yours. That’ll put a smile on your face.”

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And it did. Peggy fairly glowed with anticipation. “And your plans?”

“I’m off for groceries, then home to my menagerie.” She swung open the glass door and stepped into the warm late summer night.

“Damn it to hell,” muttered Peggy. “The street light’s out again. Find some good in that.”

A flash across the sky caught Anne’s eye. “Look.” She jerked her hand toward the disintegrating meteorite. “A shooting star.”

Peggy merely shrugged. “Is there a night when you don’t see one?”

Eyes wide, Anne scanned the heavens for more. “Hardly. I just love watching them, wondering where they came from, how old they are. There’s going to be one heck of a shower tonight. Are you going to stay up to watch?”

“At one in the morning? Are you crazy?”

Anne glanced at her friend. Peggy’s eyebrows had shot up like exclamation marks.

“Life’s too short to spend it sleeping. This is an event.”

“Yes, and it happens every year. So what’s the big deal?”

“It’s...celestial.”

That earned her a laugh. “Yes, and magic, too. Like the comets.” Peggy hugged her shoulders. “See you on Tuesday. Enjoy your weekend. We’re spending ours in Vegas.” She walked on to the parking lot.

“Enjoy.” Anne lifted her hand in a wave the other woman didn’t see, then looked skyward again. Two more meteorites shot across the black night. It was going to be a spectacular show later on. She couldn’t wait.

“Well, well, well. Look what we got here.”

The deep voice drifted to Anne from the shadows of the building. Three men stepped from the inky depths. A shiver of dread wiggled through her body. Her heart raced in fear. She shot her gaze to the parking lot. Peggy was already gone. If she hurried, she might be able

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to make the safety of the restaurant. Two deputy sheriffs were just finishing up dinner inside.

As if anticipating her move, they surrounded her, chuckling with glee. She ticked off identifying characteristics—white males, slender, early twenties, baggy jeans and sports jerseys, black knit caps.

“It’s our cheery, little waitress,” one said.

“Wonder how friendly she really is,” said another.

“Come on, sweet thang.” The man in front of her gestured toward her tote. “We could use a little sumpin’, sumpin’. Gonna give it up without a fight?”

She sucked in a breath, ready to scream her lungs out. A big hand clamped over her mouth. He reeked of french fries, stale beer, and cigarettes. He clutched his arm around her waist while his friend tried to peel her fingers away from the straps.

“Yeah, fight, baby. That’s the way I likes it. Fight it hard.”

A green glow lit them like fireworks on the Fourth of July. Anne clicked her gaze skyward. A meteorite zoomed low overhead, shooting green flames as it traveled from east to west. It was a truly phenomenal event.

The hand over her mouth loosened. Anne saw her chance. Pulling power from deep within her gut, she prepared to shout out a blood-curdling scream.

“I think you’d better let the lady go.” Another man stepped into their circle.

His voice was low, firm, and music to her ears.

Anne watched the green ball slowly disappear over the horizon. Its remnants highlighted the gold and red in the man’s tousled brown hair. He wore light-colored khakis and a pullover shirt she swore matched the fading meteorite.

“Yeah? And who’s gonna make us?”

Anne saw the flash of metal. “He’s got a knife!”

They charged him as one. The man crouched low and snapped out

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his palms. With a muttered “oof”, two were hurled against the brick wall. Gasps for breath followed. Her savior whipped a fist around to their partner.

Anne had to blink twice. She swore she saw light pulse as he made contact. The mugger tumbled backward, then scrambled to his feet. His friends wasted no time following. Anne listened to their footsteps beat a path to safety.

“Are you all right, miss?”

Long fingers curled around her upper arm. What she could only describe as energy coursed through her, lifting every baby fine hair she possessed. Deep brown eyes studied her. His eyebrows tugged together as he waited for her response; he was genuinely concerned.

Anne was mesmerized by his sharp angled features—the long, straight nose, the squared jaw, the hint of shadow carved just under his cheekbones, his full lips. What was his smile like? Were his teeth white and perfect? She wanted to stretch to her toes and kiss him, to wrap her arms around his waist and nestle her head against his broad chest. His touch, his nearness made her feel safe, protected. Desire overwhelmed her. Nothing was a more powerful aphrodisiac than heroics.

“I’m fine, thanks to you,” she finally managed to say.

“Fortunately, I just happened to be in the area.”

His thumb caressed her arm in slow circles. Anne’s blood thrummed with each round. She imagined the callused digit on her nipples, flicking them back and forth until they were hard. Then he’d wrap his full lips around them. His breath would be hot, his tongue wet, his touch...

“We should probably call the police.” He dropped his arm, breaking the sensual spell.

Anne hugged herself against the sensations that still gripped her. Nothing was stolen, she wasn’t hurt, and they were long gone by now, so why bother? Her conscience intruded. They could be off hurting someone else. The least she could do was notify the police.

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She glanced at her watch. What about her groceries? It was getting late. Her animals needed her.

“Do you have a cell phone?”

His question cut through her thoughts. “No. There are two deputies eating inside. I could just report the incident to them, I suppose. But...”

He waited for her to continue, then prompted her with a, “Yes?”

Anne looked up at him again. His eyebrows were still inched close. “I have to get to the store before it closes. My animals need me and food. Reports take forever to fill out.”

Worry faded with his bright smile. Anne’s legs wobbled. The man was gorgeous!

“These creeps need to be reported. I’ll go to the store for you, Anne. Just give me a list.”

She narrowed her eyes. “How did you know my name?”

Light laughter swirled around her, caressing her skin into goosebumps. “Your name tag.” He tapped the plastic badge.

Feeling foolish, she laughed at herself. “Of course...Anne Sherwood.” She extended her hand to his.

“Kestral Dermot. It’s a family name. Friends call me Kes.” His hand wrapped around hers. Warmth spread up her arm, through her body, and her breathing quickened. “I’ll be glad to go to the store for you while you file your report. A list and some cash is all I need.”

Was it an underhanded trick to take her money and run, or a genuine desire to help her? Anne wished she could know for sure.

The instant that thought left her head, a spate of shooting stars burst over his head. That had to be a good sign. The stars had yet to fail her when she searched them.

“Thank you. I do want these men stopped before they hurt someone.” She dug through her tote for the list, then handed it and her hard earned tips to him. “It’s probably more than you need—”

“Then you’ll get a receipt and change back. Mind if I borrow your car? Mine’s down. I was headed to a pay phone when I saw you.”

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Anne slipped him her keys, her trust, and a little piece of her heart. After she'd watched him drive away, she returned to the restaurant to find the deputies.

\* \* \*

Thank the moons he'd gotten there in time. Kestral would have never forgiven himself if he hadn't been able to save her. Too much ale had played havoc on his system. For the first time in his life, trans-light travel hadn't agreed with him.

He'd had to leave the tube somewhere near Ecart, purge his stomach, then jump the tube once more. New rule for him—limit the ale to two flasks. He couldn't indulge and do supremely with the IPC with messed up innards.

He found the food store with no problems. Her list tucked in his hand, money stuffed in a neat fold in his pocket, Kestral walked through the sliding glass doors. The favor for her was another way to win her trust and hopefully be on their way to a sexual encounter before the evening waned.

Kestral needed to get this over with as soon as possible. Already she intrigued him more than was safe. The light in her eyes as she watched the sky. Her bravery under the threat of force. Her calmness afterward.

He loved the softness of her skin beneath his hand. The way the darting of the trans-light tubes above reflected in her sea green eyes. Eyes the color of the Caledonia Sea at sunrise. And her lips—soft, beckoning.

Kestral's heart pumped in warp time. He shook the feeling aside and trudged ahead.

In truth, he liked shopping for food. It was one of the pleasures of Earth. The stores were open and spacious, generally cool no matter what the weather. Tens of thousands of selections awaited him—much more tempting and pleasing than pressing the button on a meal synthesizer.

A wiggle of his index finger pulled a cart his way. Darting a quick

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glance around, he wrapped his hands around the plastic handle. He'd have to guard his abilities more carefully.

A peek at her list set him in motion once more. Hundreds of tiny stars were watermarked into the light purple paper. *Pretty.*

Kestral was instantly glad his friends weren't around. They'd tease him unmercifully over that thought.

He focused his attention back to the list. Each item was neatly printed and very specific—a giant bag of carrots, twelve tiny cans of tuna, a big bag of shelled peanuts, and fifty pounds bag of birdseed.

"What kind of animals does she have?" He shrugged and hurried on.

Obviously the checker thought nothing of the unusual order. She scanned each item without blinking.

"Anything else?" she asked when the dog food went by.

He glanced at the final item on Anne's list and frowned. "One Quick Pick?"

She peeked at the paper and smiled. "Looks like Anne's paper."

He nodded.

"Then, yes. One lottery ticket." She punched some keys on another machine that spit out a small piece of orange and white paper.

"Weird." She laughed. "Eight-six-seven-five-three Mega Number nine. Anne ought to get a kick out of that one."

He took the paper from her out-stretched fingers. "Why is that?"

"You know...the song... eight-six-seven-five-three-oh-nine," she sang out.

Kestral feigned a smile. "Oh, yeah." What *was* she talking about? There wasn't an "oh" there.

Still, she seemed pleased he got it. She entered the price of the lottery ticket and gave him the final total. "You her boyfriend?"

He peeled money off the roll. "No. We just met. I'm doing her favor."

"She's a good kid. Heart of gold. I hope she wins that lottery one

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day. God knows, she could use a break.”

Curiosity demanded to know more. Unfortunately, the line of people behind him kept Kestral from asking any more questions. Was that also a warning he detected in the woman’s voice?

He couldn’t let that stop him. A Planet Skipper was at stake here. Anne Sherwood would give birth to a gifted child and it looked like she had friends to help her.

Anne was just finishing up with the police officers when Kestral returned to the restaurant. Long, delicate fingers lifted a wave his way. Her smile, her eyes, beamed pleasure at seeing him. A thousand attendants all at his beck and call had never been able to pull the response from him now coursing through his veins. He pulsed with need—not just his penis, but his entire body. Her smile, her trust, her instant acceptance of him called out to his very soul.

Kestral swallowed hard. He had to get this done and get out of here before it was too late.

He snickered to himself. *Too late for what?* He was Narun; she was Earthling. There was no contest who was more powerful. So why feel he was walking into a snare? Nothing Earth people possessed could hold a Narun.

The officers waved their goodbyes. She flashed that smile toward them as they drove away. Without its beam, Kestral felt...lonely. Then she turned back his way. Anne was entirely his once more. He dared to breathe.

“It’s been a rough night. Would you like to go somewhere for a drink before you go home?” Earth girls liked having money spent on them. Plus a drink always gave them an excuse to loosen their inhibitions for sex. They wanted the sex, they just needed an excuse—another reason Kestral didn’t spend much time with them. He had little time or patience for games. Honesty was a priority.

And here he was being completely dishonest. Suddenly, Kestral didn’t like himself very much.

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Anne glanced over his shoulder, then smiled. What was she looking at? He turned in that direction and saw only a fading trans-light.

"I really have to get home. My animals need me. Why don't you come with me? I'd love a cup of hot chocolate. Or maybe coffee. That'll help keep us awake for the light show later."

Kestral frowned. "Light show?"

"The meteor shower." She looped her hand through his arm. "It'll be a late night, but worth it."

Another mystery. Did it matter? He was in.

Conversation was nil during the fifteen minute drive out of the small city. Anne had slipped a CD in for someone called "Queen." She sang to each tune without restraint. He had to admit it was catchy. Within seconds, his fingers tapped against the armrest in time with the music.

"We're almost there," she said as she turned onto a dirt road. She gasped and pointed. "Shooting star. It's going to be a great night."

Kestral watched the trans-light tube fade. *So that's what she meant.* It was high travel season for this section of space. There would be thousands later on. He wondered how she'd feel if she knew what they really were. Would it make the wonder disappear for her?

She pulled up to a tree-covered area set back from the road. A small house was tucked away within. Wire fencing—chain link they called it—protected part of the yard. A parallel board fence closed in another larger area. A small building was set in the corner. He saw a screened-in porch and railing on a flat area of the roof.

As he opened the car door, a big "woof" greeted them. A large black dog wiggled at the fence as if seeing Anne was the happiest moment of its life. Three small dogs—two curly brown and one shaggy tan—skidded to a stop beside their bigger friend. The excitement tripled.

"Yes," she said softly. "Anne's home."

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Another “woof” brought movement from the small building inside the board fence. Two sway-backed horses strolled their way. Kestral swore they were smiling. Anne sure was.

He stood beside her, grocery bags looped in his hands and watched, felt, the love radiate between her and her animals. She turned that gaze up at him. His heart hammered against his ribs. By the moons, she was beautiful!

She stepped closer, and one hand pressed against his thudding heart. By slow degrees, she lifted her face to his. Her lips neared, then dropped softly against his. With a soft groan, he parted his mouth and slipped his tongue around hers.

A spark flew between them. They jumped, laughed lightly, then deepened the caress. With each touch of nubbed texture against the other, Kestral’s heart raced a little more. She was more potent than a thousand flasks of Ionian ale and far more enjoyable.

Anne sealed the kiss with a soft sigh. Her face glowed with affection. And at that point, all Kestral wanted was to keep her favor forever.

“We should go inside.”

Kestral nodded mutely. He’d followed her to the lava pits of Rebazet if she asked him to.

As they neared the front door, he heard voices. “You have family?”

Her smile never faded. “Only my animals. My parents were killed in a car accident years ago.”

He was puzzled. “Then—”

“The television. It keeps Stewie entertained.”

A twist of her key unlocked the door and they stepped into the kitchen. Seconds later, a flash of green feathers swooped their way. Kestral ducked as the parrot landed on the back of a chair near Anne.

“Hello, hot stuff. Stewie loves Anne. Stewie loves Anne.” He bobbed and weaved for attention.

She laughed and ran a gentle hand down the parrot’s back. “Anne

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loves Stewie.”

“Cheese it, the cats!” Stewie fluttered to higher ground. Unfortunately, it was Kestral’s shoulder.

Three cats barreled into the room, followed by the dogs.

“Mind your manners, kids,” Anne told them as they surrounded her. “This is Kes. Say hello.”

Stewie squawked, “Hello, lover boy! Kes loves Anne. Kes loves Anne.”

She laughed again. “Please forgive him. He’s an eternal optimist.”

Kes held out his arm and let the bird walk up it to the safety of a high bookshelf. “Rather like his owner?”

She shrugged. “What good does being negative do?” Looking at her adoring crowd, she clapped her hands. “Dinner time.”

That got everyone’s attention.

“What can I do to help?” Kestral asked.

“Just sit. This won’t take long.”

“Just sit right back and you’ll hear a tale...” Stewie wove back and forth as he sang.

Anne opened the bag of peanuts as she laughed. “He watches way too much TV. Here...give him some of these on his perch. That usually settles him down for the night.”

The bird flew by Kestral as he walked into next room. For a place that burst at the seams with animals, Anne’s house was immaculate and radiated her personality. Plants in every corner made it look like a Derkellian garden, and he decided it felt like one, too—calm, cool, peaceful.

The only place to sit in the whole room was a long, cushy sofa of midnight blue dotted with big ivory colored pillows. A low table sat before it, covered with neat stacks of books and magazines and a remote control.

Stewie fluttered to his perch in the corner. Another remote control was taped to the cross bar. Head cocked, he used his talon to turn the

## STARGAZER

small television off.

“Just sit right back and you’ll hear a tale. A tale of a fateful trip...”

“Yes, I know. You want your treat.”

“You betcha,” the parrot squawked.

“How many, Stewie?” he asked as he walked over.

Stewie tapped the tin cup clamped below him. “Fill ’er up, mate.”

“Will do...mate.”

He dropped six peanuts into the cup. The bird watched every one, then waited until Kestral was finished before helping himself.

“So, Stewie, how’s life here?”

The parrot studied him carefully. “Anne loves Stewie. Stewie loves Anne. Pretty girl. Pretty girl. Hot stuff.”

Kestral smiled. The impressions and images he got from Stewie said so much more. He saw Stewie’s capture in a jungle, him thrown in a dark box and afraid, Stewie’s escape when the box fell and broke open. Exhausted, hungry, and confused, he flew into a storm and wound up in Anne’s back yard where the big, black dog, Daisy, gently lifted Stewie in her mouth and brought him to Anne.

He dared a caress down the parrot’s back. “You’ve found a good home, Stewie.”

“You, too. Take it.”

The advice took him by surprise.

“Good girl. Pretty girl,” Stewie squawked.

*Another warning?* Kestral’s conscience was starting to nag at him.

“Good night, Stewie.”

“ ’Night. ’Night. Lights out.”

He left the bird to his treat and wandered back to the kitchen. A large window over the sink showed him the yard beyond. Wind chimes hung from tree branches as did two little red feeders. Another feeder stood just beyond.

The scent of tuna reached him. He found Anne and the cats on the screened porch. Rapturous purrs drifted to his ears.

## STARGAZER

*You are the best mom ever!* he felt one say.

Bent at the waist, Anne scooped a mixture of tuna fish and cat food into three individual bowls. The dogs had their heads stuffed in their own bowls. Tails flicking, tongues licking their lips, the cats waited for her to finish.

Kestral dared a leisurely glance up her smooth legs to her thighs. The skirt rode up to just below her backside. Her legs were bare, and not a hair dared to mar them. He caught a glimpse of underclothing and ducked his head lower for a better look.

*Shame on you.*

He pulled up. All three cats stared a hole through him.

“Sorry.”

They snorted and looked away.

Anne straightened and turned his way. “You say something?”

“Uh...no...What else can I do?”

She stepped back and let the cats have at it. “Dogs have been fed. Horses are next. Grab that bag of carrots and we’ll finish up. Then it’s up to the roof with our hot chocolate...unless you’d prefer coffee.”

Anne was determined to see the stars tonight. Looked like he’d be indulging her if he expected to make any headway.

At the corral, she measured out grain for the two old horses while Kestral treated them to carrots. As with Stewie, they told him of their hard life before coming to Anne through a place called Horse Rescue. They loved her. Blast it all, everyone loved her. And who wouldn’t as good, as unselfish as she was?

He caught a twinkle in the horses’ eyes. Suddenly, one of them nudged Kestral toward Anne.

*Go on. Kiss her.*

The other one nudged Anne. She gave a laugh, scratched its ear, then draped her arms around Kestral’s neck. Her lips found his first, just as before. Fire raced through his blood. His cock lifted, hardened, and felt like it tripled in size. She had to feel it. It was wedged between

## STARGAZER

them like log of Caldonian cedar. And still she kissed him, tracing her tongue in searing circles around and around his mouth while she pressed her stomach against him.

Another sigh pulled her back. “The steps are over there.” She jerked her head toward the back door where a set of white stairs led to the roof. “Grab a comforter off the bathroom shelf and go on up. I want to change out of this uniform first.”

“Comforter?”

“Quilt.” She traced a line down his face. “I’ll get it for you.”

Hand in hand they returned to her house. Kestral pulled the scanner from his back pocket and ran it over her body. A quick check confirmed she was ripe. Not that it mattered at this point. He wanted her under any circumstances. If he didn’t do something about it soon, he wouldn’t have any seed left to give her...it’d be staining his pants.

Her bathroom reminded him of the seashore, all coral and sea green with pictures of mermaids on the walls. She dug through the closet in the corner of the room and pulled out a dark green quilt.

“Here you go. I’ll be up in a second.” A kiss sent him on his way.

Every step up to the roof was agony. His pants squeezed against his erection, creating friction and heat where he didn’t need it. As he topped the stairs, a million stars greeted him. The sight took his breath away. He’d seen stars before, uncountable times. But now Kestral felt like he was seeing them anew through Anne’s eyes.

He snapped the quilt in place in the middle of the deck and stretched out on it.

Were his friends watching him right now? Most probably not. If they wanted that Planet Skipper, they’d be off on their own pursuits.

Stars above, he was hard! He curled his hand around the pulsing ache, trying to ease some of the discomfort. Even his testicles throbbed. Not even in his youth had Kestral felt this...needy. *What did the Earthlings call it? Horny.* He had a full grasp of that word now.

Breath held, he eased the zipper down—a dangerous device that

## STARGAZER

threatened to castrate a man. His erection pushed free, straining the confines of the cotton underclothes he had on. It felt a little better, but not as fine as it would wrapped in Anne's heat. And he bet she was hot.

Wiggling his hand into the boxers, Kestral indulged in a stroke, then another. He felt a surge and dove his hand between his legs to squeeze his hardened balls into submission. A footfall on the steps froze him.

Kestral scrambled to shove himself back into place. It was no use. Now free, his penis refused to be tucked away until it got what it wanted.

Anne's head topped the stairwell. He snapped the edge of the quilt over his lap. It was better than nothing, but too late. The action caught her eye the second she cleared the stairs. Her gaze fell to his crotch yet her step never faltered.

Clutching two steaming cups, she wafted his way. Yes, wafted. The long, flowing, diaphanous gown of blue, gold, and white swirls left no other word suitable. She looked like a goddess, a cosmic goddess sent from the stars themselves. Her brown hair dusted her shoulders with every step. She set the cups aside and knelt beside him.

"Here...let me help you."

Before he could protest or play innocent, she flicked back the quilt and perched herself astride his legs. Nimble fingers traced the ridge that strained for her touch.

Kestral sucked in a breath between his teeth. "Anne—"

"Shhh...I know how uncomfortable you must be. I'll take care of everything. Just relax." She tucked her fingers around the waistband of trousers and shorts, then tugged them down. The warm night air caressed his erection like the teasing kiss of a woman.

Kestral leaned back on his elbows. He should refuse. He should take the lead. He was the man. He only wanted one thing. He had to get...

"Ahhhh." He fell back as her tongue flicked around the swollen tip. Kestral was helpless, her slave to do with as she pleased.

## *STARGAZER*

Around and around her tongue twirled like a thousand flames. He balled the quilt beneath his fists to still his bucking hips. It was to no avail, especially when her mouth engulfed him and she took him deep into her throat.

Kestral quivered as she sucked him hard, then gently, then hard again. He felt himself crest. Her grip around the base of his cock tightened, choking off the orgasm.

“Moons, woman, you’re killing me!”

She chuckled and pulled away. Lifting her gown, she pressed his penis in the valley of her breasts and rubbed against him. Deep moans tore from his throat. All he had to do was grab her, throw her beneath him, and pound his flesh into hers. He was Narun; he was stronger. Yet he couldn’t move.

Anne shifted once more. He felt the breeze against him, then the welcome heat of her mouth. Nimble fingers massaged his balls. Her other hand circled the base of his cock once more.

“Please, Anne, don’t stop! Don’t make me stop! Let me—”

She sucked him hard. White-hot fire shot from him over and over again, until Kestral swore he’d been coming for hours. When the last drop spurted, he collapsed, exhausted.

“There,” she cooed. “Isn’t that better?”

He couldn’t talk much less move. He actually felt dehydrated. “You,” he somehow managed to say.

Anne peeled the gown over her head. His jaw dropped in wonder. Even in the dim light, the perfection of her body couldn’t be hidden. Dark brown circles highlighted her ivory breasts. Her hips were rounded in perfect proportion. Her skin glowed. Everything about her was flawless.

Smiling, she crawled toward him. The scent of her sex drifted his way. His body came alive once more.

Kestral’s hands girdled her hips and guided her closer until her essence was a kiss away. “I want you taste you, Anne.”

## **STARGAZER**

Sighing, she combed her fingers through his hair, then closed her eyes and arched her back. Her sigh turned to a soft moan as his tongue swirled looped around her hard center. Kestral couldn't get enough. He longed to bury his face into her, to drown in her wetness. Long laps traced every fold and ended with a flick around her clit. Each time, her breath caught in little gasps.

She rocked against his chest, riding his mouth. He longed to see her face as she came. He sure couldn't see it from this angle, but he couldn't stop.

He wiggled his tongue into her opening, wishing it was long enough to pierce through to her womb. Anne cried out and reared back. Her clit begged for attention, as hard and throbbing as he'd been minutes before. He caught it between his teeth and twirled. Anne shuddered, her cries unrestrained.

His cock was hard as ever, begging to join in. Kestral ordered it to wait, forced himself to stay in control. Still captured in his teeth, he flicked her nub back and forth with the tip of his tongue. A gush of wetness flooded his face, like sweet nectar of the gods. Her thighs tightened around him. Her body tensed. Then he latched on and sucked her into his mouth. Her orgasm exploded, shooting through him like a bolt of lightning.

Kestral caught her before she could collapse. Laying her gently on the quilt, he thrust himself into liquid fire. He was like an untamed beast, slamming into her over and over again while he watched the rapture bloom on her face once more. A thermo-magnet wouldn't have held him so tightly, or hotly. She wrapped her legs around his waist, digging her heels into his buttocks as she urged him on.

There was a flash of light. Then another. Thousands of lights darted across the sky. Anne gasped, her eyes wide with wonder. She tightened around him as another orgasm tore from her to him, demanding he come, too. Kestral dug his fingers into her hips, lifted her higher and seated himself hard.

## CHAPTER 3

“That was beautiful,” Anne said in a rush a breath.

Kestral flopped back, taking her in the cove of his arm as he did so. “Absolutely amazing.”

“The stars...you...perfect.”

He glanced down and laughed. He still wore his shirt. Grabbing the bottom, he pulled it over his head. “That’s better.”

“Much.” Smiling, she danced her fingers along his ribs. “We forgot our hot chocolate. It’s probably cold right now.”

“Or just perfect for drinking.” He snagged the cups.

Propped against the solid railing, still tucked around each other, they watched the light show around them. For the rest of his life, Kestral would never look at trans-light without remembering this moment with Anne—his stargazer.

“When I was a child, I used to imagine shooting stars were really thousands of people traveling from one planet to another,” she said.

Kestral hid his surprise behind a long drink. *If only she knew.*

## STARGAZER

“How’s the chocolate?”

“Great. Best I’ve ever had.” The only hot chocolate he’d ever had. On his previous excursions, alcohol and coffee were the only drinks he’d imbibed. He liked this stuff. It was simple and sweet, just like Anne.

“Your animals love you.”

She hugged her knees to her chest as she watched the sky. “I hope so. I sure love them. Poor Daisy has been through so much.”

*That would be the big, black dog.*

“She’s a good old girl. Edging up on twelve years now. She belonged to my parents and sure did grieve when they died.”

“And you didn’t?”

“Oh, yes...and I still do,” she softly replied. “There isn’t a day I don’t miss them. But they taught me to always look for the positive.”

“And what was positive about them dying?” Kestral thought he detected the sheen of tears in the corner of her eye. She rapidly blinked them away.

“That they didn’t suffer. That they died together. That they left me behind to carry on their genes. That they taught me life is to be lived to the fullest and without regret. That we say yes to the Universe and not fight the stream.”

“And so, you always find good in everything?”

She nodded. “I do.”

“You were attacked tonight. What was good about that?”

Laughing, she looked at him. “If they hadn’t stopped me, I would have been in my car and long gone by the time you came by. We never would have met. And the night has turned out wonderfully.”

“Yes...it has.” He dropped a kiss to her lips. Guilt hammered at his head.

Anne nestled deeper into his arms to watch the stars. “I often wish I knew what my animals really thought. I’d like to know I’m giving them what they need.”

## *STARGAZER*

He brushed a kiss to her temple. It might do her good to know how much they really loved her and appreciated her. "There are ways you can learn to communicate with them."

A soft laugh turned her head his way. "Like the Pet Psychic?"

When Kestral shrugged, she cast her gaze to the stars once more.

"That would be something to add to my list of idiosyncrasies."

"Come on." He gave her a little nudge. "You know the mind possesses untold powers not yet tapped. Wouldn't you like to try?"

Eyes bright with amusement focused on him. "And who's going to teach me? You?"

"Sure. I know a few things."

"Oh, I see. You're more than just a pretty face."

"Much more. I'll show you." He stretched out on the quilt.

She gave him a look down her nose that questioned his ability. Kestral merely laughed and tugged her down beside him.

"Trust me. You'll like it. Just relax."

Anne wiggled down. "If I didn't trust you, you wouldn't be here."

"And just why is that?" Kestral cocked his head to one side.

She cupped her hand against his cheek. "If I tell you, you'll laugh."

The question begged to be answered now. "I won't. I promise."

Anne shook her head slowly. "Maybe another time... You were going to show me something?" She laid down, ready and willing. Kestral wouldn't disappoint her.

He turned his thoughts inward, concentrating heat and energy to his hands. It pulsed with gentle force. Kestral waited until he could control the ebb and flow, then hovered it just barely above her skin.

Anne closed her eyes on a soft gasp. Her skin glowed, golden and pure as his hand traveled lower. Seemingly of their own volition, her legs parted. He cupped the energy above her crotch, pooled it, then shot a tiny ball of light to her clit.

"Oh...my!"

Kestral gathered another and released it with a twirl. It kissed her,

## *STARGAZER*

danced around the edge, then dissipated into her velvety softness.

Anne reared from the quilt and spread her legs wider. A wave of his hand fanned a warm breeze over her. She writhed from the sensation. He spun another, larger, harder ball of light against her. Shudders wiggled through her body.

Two fingers together, he stabbed a bolt toward her. It pierced her gently. The glow heralded her orgasm. He sprinkled dots of energy against her, over and over again, reveling in her quick and unfettered response. Then she came...

All the energy she'd absorbed exploded from her in sparkles of blue, gold, white, green, and red. It drifted up her thighs and into the night.

Kestral glanced at her face. Slow, rhythmic breathing signaled sleep. He eased away to retrieve his scanner. One pass over her body told him all he needed to know. The deed was done. His seed was sown. He should leave now. He could claim his prize.

A contented sigh pulled Anne to her side. Using her arm as a pillow, she snuggled more deeply into sleep with a smile curving her lips.

Tomorrow... He'd leave tomorrow.

"Come on, sleepy-head." He scooped her into his arms. "We can find some place much more comfortable than here to sleep."

"Ummm... That's how you handled those three jerks."

"Yes, that's how."

She giggled. "And I thought it was karate." She cuddled deep into his arms. "I want to learn to do that to you first."

Kestral picked his way down the stairs and into her house. Her bedroom wasn't hard to find. It was right beside the bathroom. He swung her through the door and froze. Were they still outside?

Anne lifted her head. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"Beautiful!" The midnight blue ceiling was awash with pinpricks of light sparkles simulating stars. Recessed lighting cast a soft glow

## STARGAZER

hinting at the sun just beyond the horizon. Mouth agape, Kestral set Anne on a big bed set upon a raised pedestal.

“I got the idea when I went to the planetarium,” she said.

He just stared. Whether she realized it or not, she’d captured constellations near his home world—Targon’s Sphere, Laser Blast. “Beautiful.”

“I’m glad you like it.”

Heat rushed to his groin. Kestral jerked his gaze down. Anne knelt on the bed before him, circling her hands slowly around his rapidly growing erection.

“Lay down,” she whispered. “Help me learn.”

His knees quivered as he lay before her. He forced his voice passed a throat gone dry. “Think of the energy and—ahhh—yesss... You’ve got it. You know.”

Anne slowly stroked the space around his cock, up and down. Fissures of energy pierced his flesh and arrowed straight to his balls. She cupped her hand to that area, but didn’t touch. She didn’t have to. Heat pulsed from her palms, hardening him all the more.

Kestral reached for his cock. She gently pushed his hand away and looped a circle of energy around it. A ring of light appeared. Anne moved it up and down, tightening it one time, loosening it the next. He bucked against it, fucking the pulsing vortex for all he was worth. A drop of pre-come moistened the tip. A flick of Anne’s tongue just above swirled it around.

A groan ripped from his throat as the first spasm hit him. Anne funneled the ejaculate with the force of her energy, focusing it onto her breasts. Wave after wave of white liquid spurted from him until he had nothing left to give. She’d drained him.

Kestral watched his essence glow against her breasts and belly. It echoed in her womb. He should help her clean up. He should...

\* \* \*

*Get up, Kes. Are you going to sleep all day? Anne has breakfast*

## STARGAZER

*ready. You don't want to miss eating.*

He pulled open his lids and found Daisy hovering over him, tail a-wag.

“Good morning, Daisy.”

*Come on, Kes. It's pancakes!* She jumped for the door.

“What? No bacon?”

Daisy sat and snorted. *We do not eat meat in this house.*

“Sorry. My mistake.”

Smiling again, she darted for the door.

“Wait! My clothes.”

The dog whipped around, snagged his pants from the chest and tossed them his way.

*Here. Now, come on.*

It seemed he had little choice. As he left the bedroom, he found the other dogs waiting for him. Obviously, Daisy was the messenger. They let him stop long enough to relieve himself, then hurried him on with nudges.

“Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale...”

“Good morning, Stewie.”

“Soup's on! Chow time!”

Anne's smile greeted him. So did a stack of pancakes.

“Just in time. Help yourself. What would you like to drink?”

“Hot chocolate,” he said without hesitation.

“A man after my own heart.”

Kestral glanced out the big kitchen window. Her yard was full of wildlife this morning. Hummingbirds darted to the red feeders, orioles perched at the larger one, rabbits and two tortoises wandered through the yard picking up light purple blossoms dropped from the trees. He could have watched for hours.

Anne poured two cups of chocolate and joined him at the table. “I realized we forgot all about your car last night. As soon as breakfast is over, I'll take you back to town.”

## STARGAZER

He'd have to cover that ruse somehow. "That would be great." He shoved a forkful of heaven into his mouth.

"Hard core," she said. "No butter. No syrup."

Kestral stared at his plate. Another mistake. "They're great the way they are. And I'm starving." There was a nudge against his leg. He glanced down at the littlest brown dog.

*Fibber*, she said.

He had to laugh.

"Now, Dot, mind your manners," Anne said.

"Dot?" The dog was all brown.

Smiling, the little dog flicked up her tail to reveal one white dot on the tip.

Kestral laughed again. "I see...Dot. I suppose all of you want your share."

*Now you're talking.*

That brought them to their feet. Snagging two of the pancakes off the stack, he walked to the individual dog bowls and broke pieces into each.

Anne's eyes sparkled. "Thank you for spoiling my dogs."

"You're welcome."

"Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale—"

"Does he ever shut up?"

Anne laughed. "Rarely. It's his favorite song."

"You woke up early," he said as he dove into his meal.

"The animals needed to be fed and I love to watch the sunrise."

He wished he'd seen it with her. To be wrapped in her arms. To make love to her as the first rays of sun kissed her naked flesh. "Next time wake me."

"Will do." She tapped his chin with her forefinger. "Now eat up. We can only pray your car is still there."

Hopefully a car of some kind was around he could pass off as his. He had to play this through. All he really wanted to do was haul her

## STARGAZER

back to bed and lose himself in her heat. Later. The sooner he covered up the car problem, the quicker he could get back to Anne and this little oasis of love.

Luck was on his side. Two blocks from the restaurant, he saw a blue car with two flat tires. Anne pulled to a stop without even asking if it was his.

“Here you go. Need me to wait?”

He lifted her chin on the crook of his finger. “Nope. I’ll get it taken care of and see you later.”

“Excellent.”

A gentle kiss parted them. He couldn’t wait to see her again. Maybe he’d help her around the house or something. They’d pass their night wrapped in each other’s arms, loving until they were exhausted.

After a glance around, Kestral knelt before the car. Hands braced above the puncture, he welded the rubber together.

“What *are* you doing?”

He jerked around at the sound of Durok’s voice. “What the... What are you doing here?”

“I came to get you. You *are* a showoff. She was pregnant with the first shot. You won. Come claim the prize.” Laughing, Durok clapped him on the back.

He’d won. The Planet Skipper was his; so was acceptance into the Interplanetary Commission. Everything he’d ever wanted was his. Kestral smiled. Life *was* good.

“Come see what you’ve won.”

They were home in less time than it took to think about it. The Planet Skipper sat gleaming in the midday suns. His friends gathered around, congratulating him with back slaps and demands for details. Kestral ignored them. Some things weren’t right to share.

Snagging a micro-cloth from Jamel’s fingers, Kestral polished the titanium chrome shielding on the Skipper. She was a beautiful piece of equipment.

### **STARGAZER**

“You’ll be the envy of the crowd now,” Macris said.

“And probably be pressed into giving ride after ride,” Durok added.

“Probably,” Kestral said as he lifted the control hood. “Sweet engine...sweet.”

The four of them bent over for a closer look and lost themselves in the wonder of near-perfect technology.

“Just sit right back and you’ll hear a tale. A tale of a fateful trip—” Kestral jerked himself upright. Blasted bird. Now *he* was singing that stupid song.

His friends looked at him as if he were crazy. Maybe he was. He’d just won the biggest wager of his life, but at what cost?

“Hop in.” He raised the hatch. “Let’s take a tour around the galaxy.”

## CHAPTER 4

Anne brushed the currycomb down Sunshine's back. The old horse quivered.

"You like that, huh?"

*Sure do.*

Anne snapped upright, then laughed. "Okay, now I'm hearing things." She resumed her brushing. "Although Kes says it's possible for us to actually talk." She shrugged a shoulder. "I don't know. What do the two of you think?"

*All you have to do is trust and listen.*

Anne smiled. "If that's all it takes."

Moonstar nudged her from behind. *Do hurry. I want my turn.*

She stared unblinking at the horses. Could it be? She really wanted to believe. Why not? What did it hurt? Who was to know but her? And if it made her happy, what of it?

"I'm hurrying as fast as I can. I promise tomorrow you'll go first."

*If Kes comes back, you can both do us at the same time.*

## STARGAZER

“He’ll be back. But we must be ladies and not impose upon him.”

The horses actually sighed. Anne laughed, took brushes in both hands and did the horses together. Kes would be back. She felt it in her soul. What a wondrous night. A magical night. The stars had guided her well.

Still, there was that nagging feeling of doubt. It pained her to think she’d taken a single night and blown it out of proportion, but she felt a oneness with Kes that hadn’t existed until now. She loved the way his hair reflected the starlight in passion. Anne refused to believe anything but good would come of it all.

By the time she was done grooming the horses, the sun was edging toward the horizon. Daisy and her entourage trotted her way.

*What’s for dinner?*

This was too much. Anne tossed the brushes in the bucket and measured out feed for the horses.

*Well?*

“Vegetarian pizza?”

Four tongues swiped across their muzzles.

“Okay. I’ll start cooking.”

She cut squash, zucchini, and mushrooms into a pan and slowly steamed them. In a separate pan, she chopped onion to add later after the dogs had their share from the other vegetables.

*Six o’clock.* No Kes. No word from him either.

She topped her mixture onto a pizza crust and put it in the oven. It dinged and was cold before she realized—he wasn’t coming back.

Her animals fell silent. Even Stewie kept his beak shut. Anne swallowed her disappointment, her heartache, her tears and climbed the stairs to her rooftop porch. She’d get through this just like she had all the other hurts in her life.

Something positive. She had to find something positive about all this.

They’d had great sex. The best ever. She’d learned a new skill...but

## *STARGAZER*

using it with another man wouldn't feel right.

He'd helped her talk to her animals. That was a good thing. Yes, that was the best.

One good cry and she'd move on.

She hugged her knees to her chest and let the tears fall.

"There you are. And here I thought you'd hopped the next shooting star to adventure."

Anne spun around at the sound of Kes' voice at the top of the stairs. "I thought... You're here." She wiped her tears away with the heel of her hand before he could see she'd been crying.

Laughing lightly, he pulled her to her feet and into his arms. "Of course I am. Sorry it took so long. I didn't have your number. You aren't listed in the book."

Anne hugged him tight. "Silly me." God, how she loved this man! She couldn't wait to tell him. "What about your car?"

He held her at arms' length. "Funny thing. A friend offered to buy it from me. I couldn't refuse. I got a good deal."

"Did you?"

He combed his fingers through her hair and love radiated from his golden brown eyes. "The best ever."

"I'm glad you're back. I'll zap dinner in the microwave and warm it up." She grabbed his hand and tugged him toward the stairs. "The strangest thing happened today, Kes. You'll never believe... Oh, no!"

She raced ahead of him. It was almost too late. A silly thing. She could always get the lottery numbers later, but Anne liked the thrill of hearing them.

Grabbing her ticket in one hand, she turned the TV on with the other. Kes eased down beside her.

Stewie squawked, "Hello, lover boy! Kes loves Anne. Kes loves Anne."

"Hush, Stewie." She waved her hand to silence him. Stewie bobbed and weaved impatiently.

### STARGAZER

“The jackpot is twenty million dollars. And tonight’s numbers are eight, six, seven, five, three and the Mega Number is nine.”

Anne stared in disbelief. Words were impossible. “I...I...ohmygosh...I won.” She shifted her gaze Kes’ way.

A broad smile greeted her. “Of course. I expected nothing less. Guess being positive *really* pays.”

She laughed lightly. “I guess it does.” She squeezed his thigh. “I’m so glad you were here with me.”

“Love...I’m not going anywhere. Kes loves Anne. Kes loves Anne.”

Another revelation that dropped her jaw. Giggles overcame her. “Oh, Kes...”

He covered her words with a deep kiss. Sealing it, he butted his forehead to hers. “Just how open-minded are you?”

Anne laughed. He was better than any lottery. “After what I’ve experienced the last twenty-four hours, I’d have to say pretty open-minded. Why?”

“Well, to quote Stewie’s favorite song...”

## CAITLYN WILLOWS

Caitlyn Willows is the pseudonym for award-winning author Catherine Snodgrass, who wanted to flex her writing muscles in the romantica genre. Readers will find the same quality from “Caitlyn” that they have come to expect from “Catherine,” but the stories will be more over-the-top and more steamy. Sometimes the novels are written singularly, and sometimes they are a collaborative effort with award-winning author Paris Dixon. Always they will be action-filled...in more ways than one.

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\* \* \*

***Don't miss *Just Partners*, by Caitlyn Willows, available Winter 2003,  
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