

"Kordy!"

A beat.

"Wha d'ya wan', lass?"

"Uhh, to see you, you paranoid jackass?"

"Sure, right...dressed like tha'."

Eyes narrowed.

"Are you sayin' there's something wrong with how I dress, rat? You ain't never complained before, and ain't nothin' wrong with showin' off *my* body if I want to."

"Oi, ya know m'all fer ladies expressin' themselves. Dinnae try ta twist me words."

"I'll twist your arm off is what I'll do. I've been workin' hard ta get my figure back since Sammy, ya don't gotta be a prick about it..."

A tail whisked out, smacking her hand lightly.

"Now yer just layin' it on too thick, Sats. You an' me both know how good ya look."

The woman's pout turned to a wicked smirk.

"But it's so easy to guilt you, Kord. I could've had free drinks, or borrowed Strong over there for a babysitting night..."

The heretofore ignored but extremely uncomfortable-looking Chiss gave a polite reply that was probably supposed to be a mutter but from him was really a shout.

**"Greetings again, Miss Tameike. If permitted it or required in the discharge of my duties, I would make a most excellent child caretaker, as I am well informed of the rearing methods passed down by the Garmis family for generations."**

"Always just peachy ta hear from ya, Big and Blue. Really."

She rolled her hips while she said it, and the bodyguard purpled further, covering his red eyes and quivering. Next to him, Captain Bly merely looked unamused.

It was almost as if he'd seen the former Consul in — marginally — less. In even worse positions. In the throne. On top of her twin and his former Proconsul. Oh gee.

"Yer really not tryn' very hard, are ya, lass?"

"Who says I'm not? Sometimes, direct is most effective."

"I can nae argue wit tha', but c'mon, Sats, ya know better...I shouldn't even be seein' this right now."

"Who says you can't just appreciate sights you *happen* to see when they *happen* to be there through no fault of your own? It's not your fault I'm here sunbathing while you walk by."

"S'somebody's damn fault," muttered the Ryn. "Ya know what today is, woman."

"Midday? Yeah, I keep a calendar too."

"Inspection day."

"Inspectin' what?"

She uncrossed her legs, slowly, before crossing them again. Strong buckled, catching himself on Bly, who himself buckled under the immense bodyguard's weight, staggering them both. Kordath might have been praying as she recrossed her muscled, oiled thighs and wiggled her painted toes.

"The. Team," the Ryn gritted out, looking to the heavens for strength, patience, and alcohol. Sadly, it didn't start raining booze. "I need a bloody drink."

Less sadly, as he spoke, a small, precisely-aimed hail of bottles did fall mysteriously from the sky, landing around his feet. He picked one up, noting the age and proof of the whiskey, and gaping.

"This is karkin' bribery!"

"Really? Looked like a freak of nature accident to me." She shrugged, and pulled the popsicle she'd been doing terrible, awful things to with her tongue and lips out of her mouth to speak.

"There's some rocks glasses in this cooler if you wouldn't mind pouring me one?"

Kordath slapped a hand over his eyes. And at his tail, which had started reaching towards her of its own accord.

"This is ridiculous, Sats. I'm tryna be good an' do this karkin' job half-right so Zuj won't think so bad o' me, right, so jus' quit tryna ta be a distraction and let me do the bloody inspection," he growled at last, mustaches twitching.

Satsi slurped at the damn icy treat loudly and pulled it out of her mouth with another wet *pop*. Her dark brows quirked, and her smile was full of wicked, secret laughter.

"Oh, sugah, I'm not the distraction. I'm the bait."

"Wha..."

"BLEU!" shrieked a voice from behind the tiny crowd in front of the gates of Fort Aurora.

Spine tingling, the Consul turned to see none other than Lucine Vasano striding up to him with all the grace she could muster when one of her heels was broken and most of her skirt was shredded. She was clutching the most intact parts close to her groin, as if shielding it.

Strong immediately seemed to find new strength, rushing to her side and offering her his jacket and shirt and oh gods he was nearly naked again. The noblewoman took the proffered coverings and settled her fiery emerald gaze on the Ryn, a stare that promised death.

"It was one thing," she said dangerously, "to have your little robotic beasts stealing my undergarments from my drawers and recording me in the privacy of my own home. But now that I've managed to get a handle on *that* mischief, you go and program one of these monsters to *take my unmentionables right off of me?!'*"

"Wha— no, what?! Uh, I wouldn't, I, I can nae even program, luv, please, dinnae be mad, s'just a mistake..." His gray eyes glanced wildly around, but somehow in the last two minutes, Satsi had bloody vanished. In her place was one of his ID-9 droids with a very torn-looking set of lacy teal things.

"I will not stand for having my person assaulted just for the sake of your perversions, Bleu," snarled Lucine, leaning close. "Find yourself some working women to pay like a real man, and know that I am going to destroy you and all traces of you for this."

"It was nae me!" cried the Consul. "It's just a setup, ta keep me busy, yeah!"

"Very believable, darling. I am so very convinced."

"It was Satsi!"

Lucine paused just a blink. "Now that, that is more convincing. However, that filthy shrew has already tried and failed to antagonize me today, and she never uses droids to do it. It's simply not in her...shall we say stubborn...character. You, on the other hand..."

"IT WASN' ME!"

"Why, darling, I simply do not believe you. I think I will have to inspect all the given facts thoroughly." From somewhere on her person, she lifted the heel that had obviously been damaged in the Skitters attack. "Starting with the itemization of my wardrobe, and how you are going to refund all its damages."

*Kark me*, thought the Ryn, while Strong all but simpered to the 'distressed damsel' and Bly proceed to actually be useful and stride into the base himself. Not that he was likely to find anything out of order, if damn Spectres had been this well prepared. *Why did I ever announce any of this?*

He should have known.