



Star Crossed Lovers

Layne Macadam

Chapter 1

There was something about the acrid smell of fear that made Nova want to smile. The corners of her mouth lifted, and her eyes behind the purple mask brightened as one of the three felons who faced her, turned tail and ran.

And then there were two.

Standing, that is.

You couldn't count the two she'd already dealt with. Nova spared them a glance and was not surprised to see that they were still unconscious in the gutter where she'd left them only moments before.

It was dark. Midnight had come and gone hours ago. She'd been ready to head home, had even turned toward the palace, and that's when she'd heard the alarm.

It came from across town, an area of warehouses and factories where lowlifes and vagabonds gathered. An area where any law abiding Yorque citizen would be wary to tread in daylight, at night, 't would be foolhardy.

She'd taken off like a rocket and arrived in time to see five men robbing a warehouse. A large transporter van was backed up to the roller door. It wasn't even hovering—the driver so smug, he'd set it down while he waited for the other four to finish. The alarm didn't deter them.

They just kept loading equipment into the transporter as if it was their own.

Verily, the thieves of her planet were brazen and without fear.

Well, she was about to teach them crime doesn't pay.

In the distance a siren had sounded. That's when the two, who now lay in the gutter, had looked up and noticed her. As they'd sauntered toward her their demeanor had reflected their thoughts—that she was no threat and they'd have some sport with her.

Surprise, surprise, she'd soon shown them just how much of a threat she was.

Her night vision was perfect, as good as in daylight, one of the many legacies inherited from her intergalactic time-traveler father.

Fearless eyes skewed back to the men facing her. Although the streetlamps were out, she got an unforgettable look at their features.

The sandy-haired youth with the goatee rolled his puny shoulders while the big bald oaf with the muscular frame grunted and unsheathed a lethal knife. “Now, what have you got to say, wench?” He jeered, waving the knife at arm's length.

The youth sniggered, “Yeah, wench, now wada ya got to say?”

Brute. Dolt.

It was clear they’d learned naught from the earlier whooping she’d given their accomplices.

Nova breathed out a slow whoosh and said, “Just this, surrender without a fight and I promise not to break any bones.”

“In your dreams,” the big oaf roared and charged toward her, his reaction predictable. She neatly sidestepped and he just brushed by. Light on her feet and quick as a blink she turned, flicked out her leg and with a sharp kick, booted him behind the knee. A loud popping sound had him yowling in pain as he crashed to the ground.

With his cry, the headlamps on the van came on and the door slammed.

Nova, bounced on the balls of her feet as the driver joined the youth. He gave her a hard stare, pushed up his sleeves and spat in the gutter.

He meant business.

So did she.

As he bolted toward her, she leaped into the air, somersaulted over his head and came up behind him smelling like a rose.

He squinted into the darkness bewildered. Her fingers tapped a tattoo on his shoulder. “So what’s it to be, broken bones or no?” She asked.

His fist lifted and swung at her face. Nova caught his wrist and twisted it up behind his back. “Last chance.”

“Go to Hell.”

“I think not.” She pushed his arm up until his shoulder dislocated. He squealed like a rat and she took his legs out from under him.

The youth charged with a battle cry. He was just a child, no more than sixteen, and she was reluctant to put him in the hospital too. Nova jumped and landed twenty feet up in the bough of the tree behind her. The youth pulled up short. “What kind of a freak are you?”

Nova ignored him. She’d been called worse over the years. The fact was though, she treasured the gifts inherited from her father and was proud she could put them to good use against scum like this. From her vantage point, she noticed the first two in the gutter had come around at last, and the one who had scarpered had returned and was helping the gutter rats into the transporter.

As quick as a thought she snapped off the huge branch above her and hurtled it through the air where it landed on top of the van.

She dusted off her hands and grinned. The hover transporter was going nowhere with that baby draped across it.

Nova jumped down and her ears pricked up.

The siren was getting louder. The Patrol would arrive within minutes. She ran over to the brute with the dislocated shoulder, picked him up and threw him into the back of the transporter with the others. He mewed like a pussycat.

Nova dismissed him and called to the youth, “Hey Blondie, get your butt over here now.” When he hesitated she said, “Don’t make me come get you.”

He was so transparent, Nova imagined she could see the cogs turning as he weighed his options. When his shoulders drooped, she opened the back of the hover van. With his chin resting on his chest, he shuffled over and climbed inside with his cronies.

With one last look at their sorry hides she slammed and secured the door. They weren’t going anywhere.

Not wanting the authorities recognizing her or asking any tricky questions, she once again leaped into the branches of the tree and waited for them to arrive.

It didn’t take long.

When they discovered the men in the van, they called for paramedics who took their sweet time to respond. Obscured by the leaves, she waited until the crooks were transferred into the medical van along with the arresting officer before heading for home.

Nova was tired. She might have superpowers, but she needed sleep as much as any Yorque citizen.

It was almost sunrise when she crawled into bed. And as she snuggled under the sheets, she promised herself a lazy day. It was Sunday, always a quiet day at the palace. She could sleep until midday if she liked, or later, and no one would disturb her. And that's what she planned to do, stay exactly right where she was and catch up on some sleep.

Chapter 2

Nova was up early.

The palace was in an uproar. Pandora, the Princess Royal, had crept out last night and eloped with her lover. When her father Eamon, learned of the marriage this morning he'd almost had a conniption.

Pandora was betrothed to the Emperor of Tron's grandson, it had all been decided months ago. Everything was organized. The wedding was to have taken place next week on the neutral planet, Gansu. It was a matter of State, and bubble-brained Pandora, had not considered the consequences of her action.

Pandora's mother, Queen Myra, had called an impromptu meeting. Eamon, and all the heads of government had gathered in the Grand Hall to discuss this disastrous turn of events.

Nova listened unashamed beneath the open window. Her Uncle Eamon was in a rage like no other, even Aunt Myra could do naught to calm him.

"This could mean intergalactic war of a scale never before seen," he ranted. "Emperor Jerome will take it as a personal affront if we do not deliver a royal bride next week."

“Eamon, you must calm yourself, we will find a solution.” His life mate and ruler of the planet tried to pacify him.

“What was your daughter thinking, Myra?” Uncle Eamon queried. But it shouldn’t have come as a surprise, Pandora had always been headstrong and a law unto herself. Wild, untamed and reckless, renowned for doing the unexpected, this time though, she’d gone too far.

Growing up, Nova had often followed her older cousin on her hair-brained adventures. Adventures that always boded ill for the youngster. This latest fiasco wasn’t panning out any better for Nova, either. In fact, it was looking more and more like she was going to be the sacrificial lamb.

Nova strained to hear the Queen and the various heads of state discuss the precarious situation in which they found themselves, all thanks to her cousin Pandora’s foolishness.

“It will be seen as a deliberate slap in the face to the Emperor, one that he won’t take lying down.” Uncle Eamon was pessimistic as he reiterated.

“We must make preparations. Our Fleet is skilled, but we do not have the sheer manpower or the resources of the Tron. There is already a division among the other planets. If sides are taken I fear it will be a battle we cannot hope to

win.” Nova did not recognize the speaker, but he made a valid point.

“If only she hadn’t cut her hair and presented it to her mate, the situation may have been salvageable.” Her aunt’s voice held regret.

Nova hugged herself. Last night while she was out incognito cleaning up their world and bringing criminals to justice, her selfish cousin was dooming their planet. The females of their race never cut their hair from the day they were birthed until one month after they had wed. Up until then the bride could change her mind and return home making the union null and void. But one month after the mating, or earlier if she chose, her hair was braided then cut off and presented to her husband in a sacred ritual that mated them for life. Pandora’s ceremoniously cutting her plaited hair waived the waiting period and joined Pandora to her husband for life.

The deed was done. There was no going back.

Many innocent lives would be lost if war was declared.

“There may be an answer.”

Nova cringed at the oiliness in the Minister for Defense’s lilt as he spoke. She did not like him, or the undercurrent in his voice. A weedy man who always tried to intimidate her as a junior cadet aspiring to be a fighter pilot in the Royal

Squadron. Many a time she had to rein in her anger to avoid using her powers to knock his supercilious butt into next week. Still, if he had a solution that would avoid bloodshed, then she was eager to hear it.

“It is true, the Emperor Jerome was promised a royal bride to seal the treaty, but was the Princess Pandora specifically mentioned by name?”

“What are you getting at, Jediah?” Uncle Eamon queried. “Speak up man.”

“Your niece, although not as directly in line to the throne as the Princess Pandora, still is a daughter of the royal house.”

Nova’s hand flew to her mouth. Her barely concealed gasp was not heard over the Queen’s indignation.

“You’re suggesting we send the Princess Nova, in my daughter’s place?” Aunt Myra’s shock was evident. She was the only one privy to Nova’s superpowers.

As a small child, Nova knew she was different. For one thing, she always had greater speed than the other children. Her mother discouraged any display saying, “Nova, you don’t have to win every race. It is not worthy of you. You know your father was a time traveler from the future, and although he is no longer with

us, you have inherited special gifts from him. Gifts never before seen in our world, gifts that will continue to develop as you grow. Use them wisely for the good of our people, as your father did, but it must be our secret. Conceal them well my child, there are those among us who crave recognition. If they discovered you possessed such powers they would not stop short of harm in their quest to discover what makes you unique,” she warned time and time again, right up until her sudden death.

Nova did conceal them even from her family—until her twelfth birthday. She remembered it well, it was the day she first froze time. It was also the day she saved Pandora’s life.

“It is only a suggestion most respectable one.” Jediah’s humble address to his sovereign snapped her back to the present.

“No, I cannot entertain that thought.” Her aunt’s vehement reply gladdened her heart.

“But why not my dear? It is a solution worthy of consideration.” Her uncle sounded hopeful.

“Well, she is ahh ... still so young, not yet twenty.” The Queen used age as an excuse, but Nova guessed her aunt, like she, was remembering the past. Once again memories of her twelfth birthday came to the fore.

Pandora was taking tea in the garden by the west wall. Nova was crossing the lawn to join her cousin when the ground trembled with a violence to rival a bomb blast.

Another strange noise had caused her to look up. A huge urn atop the wall right above Pandora began to topple. Nova reached out her hand as her feet took flight, but before she got to her cousin the urn stopped its free fall and hung suspended midair. She was shocked—it was what she'd been thinking—and it was a new phenomenon for her. But she had the presence of mind to drag the statue-like Pandora to safety. The time freeze lasted mere seconds. The ceramic urn smashed to smithereens onto the tiles below. At that instant, Pandora came out of her trance like state. Nova peered back to the spot where the urn had stood moments before; her Aunt stared down at her, mouth agape. It was clear she'd witnessed the whole event and would demand a full explanation in private later.

“She is of a marriageable age Majesty, and aware of her duty if you so decree it.” Nova could have cursed the Minister for Justice as she pushed the past behind her.

“The Trons are a proud and powerful race. The accord has been signed, and this alliance was agreed to in good faith. If we slight them now, Jerome will make a hostile and formidable

enemy. Many of our people will perish if we do not sacrifice the one.” Jediah argued.

“Myra, this is the only solution. The fate of our planet lies in your hands.”

“I will ponder this further.”

Nova heard the uneasiness ripple through her aunt’s voice. It was evident Jediah did also as he pushed home his advantage. “If I may be so bold Majesty, there is little time for thought. The wedding is planned. If we do not produce a bride in seven days, then for certain, our planet will be at war.”

Nova didn’t wait to hear any more, the dye had been cast. As unobtrusive as possible, she made her way back to her quarters to think.

As she paced her chamber bemoaning her fate, Nova weighed her options. Her powers were still developing. More and more she was learning how to use them for the good of her people. Princess by day, crime fighter by night. But her back was up against a wall with this one. If she stayed then she would continue to fight crime, but at what cost? Her planet would be at war, and verily they were no match for the mighty Tron Empire. On top of that, the threat of an alien invasion was becoming more imminent with the many wormholes springing up throughout their galaxy. Without the Tron protection outlined in the accord, her planet would have little hope.

There was only one solution, but before she committed to the arranged marriage there was something she owed herself to do first. For while her peers were out enjoying the bedspout and experiencing life, she'd been busy fulfilling her dream by fighting crime—now it was time for some fun.

Having formulated her plan, Nova summoned her maid. Sienna would have to accompany her on the adventure. If she left the maid behind, the consequences for the servant would be far worse.

“You sent for me mistress?”

“I wish to visit the Passion Planet of Xygar for a few days. You will accompany me, and mind you tell no one.” Her tone demanded obedience. “Princess Pandora has wed Calum, there is no turning back. If war is to be prevented the Queen has no alternative than to send me in Pandora’s place. I am aware of my duty and will fulfill my destiny, but not before I have sampled some of what life has to offer. I refuse to wed a toad from Tron as an innocent.”

“Your Royalness, this is folly of the gravest nature, and I must advise against it. If you have given your promise then you must not lay with another, Queen Myra will be greatly displeased.”

“The Queen has not asked, and I have given no promise, that is why we must hasten.”

“But Princess...”

“Hush ‘tis not your decision, ‘tis mine. Besides, if I am to give up my life for my people then am I not entitled to one week of fun?”

“Yes, your Royalness.” Sienna lowered her eyes.

“And stop calling me that. No one must know who I am. Call me, Nova. I will travel as your maid and you will be a highborn woman of means. Now, hurry and pack, and fetch me one of your tunics,” she ordered.

Sienna scuttled away. Nova was sorry she’d growled at the other woman, she had always been a loyal and obliging servant, surely she would not fail her now.

When Sienna returned minutes later with the requested tunic and two small bags, Nova knew she could rely on her silence and support.

“I have done as you asked ... Nova.” Her name, a shy whisper slipped uneasily off Sienna’s lips. “But Queen Myra will...”

“Say no more. Queen Myra is still deciding my fate, though I know what it must be. Until she informs me, I am free to lie with whomsoever I choose. If I don’t go now, I will lose my chance. Do you begrudge me that?”

“No, mistress, not ever, it shall be as you wish.”

“Good. Now go swiftly to the launching bay and wait for me in my Racer. Do not speak to anyone or draw attention to yourself.”

Sienna skedaddled. Nova picked up the servant’s tunic and held it at arm’s length. Her nose crinkled as she shed her expensive attire and pulled on Sienna’s garb. She was a similar size to her maid, but the tunic was so skimpy she felt half-dressed, and that wasn’t the only issue. Servants were forbidden undergarments. And there were no pockets, so what in the name of the stars would she do with her communicator and tracker? Nova scowled at the open sandals Sienna had given her, then her eyes slid to her own boots. She only hesitated a nanosecond before pulling them on and sliding her communicator down the inside of her calf-high boots along with her micro tracker. It was a snug fit, but a necessary inconvenience. She scribbled a note to Aunt Myra, promising to be back in five days then shoved her discarded clothes into a bag for Sienna. With one last look around she quit her chamber.

As Nova made for the launching bay she came across a number of servants and guards. They were not a problem though. She simply waved her hand in an arc and froze time, suspending their movements midstride. Each time freeze was

different, lasting from a few seconds to several minutes. The problem being, she hadn't yet mastered the art of controlling time, so picking up the pace, she swiftly moved between them.