

In The Zone

Night had arrived on Luma Six. Its sun, listed as Chara on the galactic star charts, had set over a half hour ago. Two small moons drifted high above the cityscape of Agape. In another hour, the third moon would rise and chase the two smaller ones across the star-studded sky.

The flat screen sky view in the ceiling of the five-foot wide ecodome was the only thing that kept it from feeling like a prison cell.

Jeresa opened her legs and slipped the vibrator up against her aching clit. Set on low speed, it teased and lulled her into a state of almost pleasure. A gentle man, that's all she wanted, a man who'd love her and treat her right. His hands would be callused but tender, strong, knowledgeable and caring. He'd kiss her and touch every inch of her body with those hands before he plunged himself deep inside her and satisfied her over and over again.

Of course, as long as she wanted to indulge in favorite fantasy, why not throw in the rest of her dreams? All her student loans were paid in full. She'd finished her last year in medical school and internship, aced her final board exams, received full certification as a physician and would start work today at Agape Central Medical, the most prestigious hospital on the planet.

"Mommy sad."

Gem and Star sat on their haunches beside the flimsy air mattress. Bioengineered pit bulls, they tilted their heads sideways at the buzzing sound coming from under Jeresa's bed covers.

The nose lock panel glowing at the bottom half of the door gave the dogs the same ability to enter and leave the tiny eco-dome as Jeresa's palmlock. Those locks were crude but necessary security measures within the Zone's slum district. Squatters were always on the lookout for unlocked shelters.

Jeresa sighed and turned the cock-shaped vibrator off. She might as well get dressed. With both dogs staring at her, she'd never be able to concentrate enough to have an orgasm. The only other saving grace about her prefab dome was its proximity to Agape's primary dumping grounds. That location had given her the opportunity to secure two excellent dog guards without paying the exorbitant breeders fees.

The breeders had dumped Gem immediately after birth because she had a black right front paw. They wanted a pure white dog.

Star's defect wasn't as apparent. The breeders didn't figure it out until she was three weeks old. Her second set of vocal cords had failed to develop. She had the enhanced intelligence to understand human speech at the age level of a six-year old human child but lacked the ability to talk. Gem spoke for both dogs.

Jeresa rolled over and tucked the vibrator under her pillow. Her shift at the free medical clinic started at midnight, a little more than an hour from now. "Mommy's fine. Just a little sad. I go to work soon."

She lifted the thin synthcloth covers away and sat up. The air mattress sagged alarmingly under her weight. It had so many small leaks she had to pump it up every eight hours just to keep it from going totally flat. Two more years,

just two more years of working, skimping and saving and she'd pay off her outstanding loans and be able to re-enroll in Agape Community College for another year of training, then six months internship and final exams to secure a general physician's license instead of physician's assistant.

Just like everyone else in the Zone, she and her mom couldn't afford medical insurance. When her mom found out she had cancer, she'd kept it a secret rather than tell Jersa. Then when her mom died, she had to drop out of school and go further into debt to pay for a decent burial.

She'd cut costs even further by moving from a cheap city apartment into one of the welfare ecodomes with its built-in microwave, food cooler and standard ship sonic-cleaner and sanitary cubicle. The dome had no holovid and no net link hookups for newsvids and entertainment. The bare-minimum wristband she wore gave her access to the local library network. Last, but not least, an antique deck of playing cards provided hours of free entertainment.

She'd gotten this far through sheer stubbornness. No way was she going to quit now and become like one of the other Zone girls, looking to secure a local drug dealer as her protector and lover.

Jersa selected a pair of faded blue pants and tunic from the storage cube. She stepped into the sonic-cleaner, let it remove accumulated dirt and oils from her hair and body and then quickly pulled her clothes on. Undergarments were too expensive for her miniscule budget. She braided her hair by touch and tied the end off with a string.

Star whined. That particular whine meant Star wanted to tell her something important.

Jersa unlatched the door panel of the sonic-cleaner and peered out at the dogs.

Gem opened her mouth, panted and then cocked her left ear back at the dome's sealed entry door. "Bad mens outside. We show teeth. They run away." Her voice came out in a rough and distorted growl.

Jersa sucked in a quick breath. Three days in a row, strange men had been prowling in her neighborhood. What were they looking for? Drugs? A cheap lay? Could it be a couple of bored rich kids high on crush-speed, looking to try out their sonic-whips for slap-sex and then end the night with the visceral rush of snuff-rape? "Were they the same men you chased away yesterday, Gem?"

Star shook her head and Gem said, "Different mens."

Star walked forward, stuck her nose in Jersa's crotch and took a good long sniff.

Jersa shook her head and brushed the pit bull's wet nose aside. Doggie socialization techniques were a bit crude.

Star plopped on her haunches, looked at Gem, whuffed whined, and barked a series of short, harsh barks.

Gem cocked her ears at Star, then Jersa. "Star say Mommy needs good mens. We go find good mens. Good mens help us keep Mommy happy."

Jersa bit her lip. Oh great. Her love life had sunk so low that Gem and Star wanted to start a doggie dating and matchmaking service. They'd probably

run up to every male in the Zone and sniff his crotch. Then try and convince the first man who gave either one of them a pat on the head or meat scraps to follow them home. And if that happened, all the local pimps and prosts would go berserk thinking she was trying to horn in on their turf.

She sank to the stained foamcrete floor and sat cross-legged. Both dogs came up and stuck their broad snouts under her hands for a thorough petting. Their tails thumped on the floor. "No. Stay with Mommy. Do not look for good mens. Come to work with Mommy. Guard Mommy."

Axel Dane-Niallsen, captain and pilot, sat in the command chair on the bridge of Nebula. His stumps twitched. He rubbed his hands over his legs and massaged the tight muscles bunched around the links to the control chips in his prosthetic legs. Not much else he could do about that. A decent med-tech could take care of that minor glitch in the programming for his legs with his or her eyes closed.

Except *their* latest med-tech had walked off the Nebula during their first hour in port for a higher-paying position with guaranteed retirement benefits on one of the corporate freighters. Technically, the corporate freighters operated under the guise of sanctioned businesses but their practices amount to blatant piracy. Nebula was too small to be a pirate. Her weapons capabilities were a joke.

Speed and maneuverability were their only advantages. If they didn't have a med-tech on their roster by tomorrow morning, the dock master would lock down their ship and refuse to let them leave. Every day they sat in port increased the total amount they owed for dock charges. Charges that would eat away at their profit margin and eventually allow the city of Agape to impound Nebula for the auction block, or worst yet, resell it to a dump as recycled scrap metal.

Their holds were full of cargo, handcrafted artwork, gemstones and alien plant and animal DNA samples for research and zoology labs. They'd topped their fuel tanks off yesterday and their ship engineer, Derek Jacob-Niallsen, had completed all necessary upgrades and repairs.

Axel checked the local net grid one last time and found no responses whatsoever to the ad he placed for a med-tech. So far, no one had responded to his generous offer of an equal share in his ship's profit. A guaranteed berth, salary and benefits from a corporate freighter were more reassuring in the long run than the minimal profit range associated with a privately owned independent freighter.

Spacer born meant more than dirtsidiers realized. Based on the complex genealogical records stored in the Nebula's data bank, his crewmates all carried the Niallsen name and were his cousins by blood. All major decisions regarding the well being of the ship must be made as a group. Axel opened the ship's internal comlink. "We have a problem. Report to the bridge."

Jeresa leaned against the foamplast reception desk and sucked in a couple of deep breaths. Hopefully, she wouldn't have any more patients within the next five minutes. Gem and Star cocked their heads. She pointed at the door of the

entry foyer section. "Guard foyer. Allow no one out of foyer until I return to desk."

Gem pressed her nose against the glowing noseprint lock panel at the base. The inner door opened and both dogs raced inside. The door sealed itself behind them. A blastproof window in the door equipped with full body medical and weapons scanning capabilities gave Jeresa a full view of the foyer's two empty benches and the closed main entry door.

Jeresa pushed away from the counter and ducked into the sanitary cubicle in order to relieve the pressure of her aching bladder. Judging by the blast burn injuries and frantic pace of incoming patients, two, possibly three of the Zone's drug lords were having a major turf war. No wonder she was the only clinic employee who showed up for duty tonight. The other employees must have accessed the latest net news and decided to take emergency vacations. Maybe she should start looking for another, safer job.

Axel sighed. Everyone in the Zone was twitchy tonight, flinching at the slightest sound and looking over his shoulders. He and his crewmates had hit ten bars so far and found no one willing to hire on as their new med-tech.

They strolled past a dirt encrusted plaststeel wall that marked the border between old town and The Zone. A ball of lava hot plasma splashed against the wall. Axel hunched his shoulders and dove into the nearest doorway. Derek, Marcus and Garian crowded in behind him.

More blasts peppered the foamcrete domes, storefronts and rapidly emptying bars. Silent explosions splashed the night above the chaos of screams and running feet. The shots were aimed high, driving the crowd ahead of them. Axel dove into the running, screaming crowd with Derek, Marcus and Garian right behind him. His prosthetic legs were strong enough for him to keep running forever as long as he ignored the pain shooting up his thighs.

A man's body toppled to the ground a few yards ahead of them. A plasma blast had seared his head off. Cauterized. No blood spurted from the blackened neck stump.

Axel jumped the body and kept running. They needed to get away from the crowd. A dark side alley loomed a few feet ahead. He glanced over his shoulder at his crew and jerked his head in that direction.

They linked arms with him. Four men, tough and wiry from years in space, they formed a solid wedge of muscle, bone and titanium alloy steel and plowed their way out of the crowd into the alley. They raced to the other end and slowed to a stop behind a scraggly line of windowless ecodomes. A trio of desperate stragglers ran by with panicked and glazed eyes.

The blasts had stopped. For now. This battle wasn't over. Most likely, both sides were regrouping for yet another assault.

Derek flashed a grim smile. With his blue-black skin, dark ship suit and buzz cut scalp, he blended into the shadows easily. "Bad night. Huh?"

Marcus sagged against a dome and shook his head. Sweat had plastered his blond ringlets to his scalp. "Just another party night in The Zone."

Garian grinned, scooped his dreadlocks together with his hand and tied them back into a bushy ponytail. He jerked his chin to the left. "Turf battle between two drug lords. Free clinic's in that direction. We have a little bit of competition tonight. According to the bartender in the last bar I scoped out, one of the drug lords lost his entire medical team."

Three moons skipped in and out of the clouds. Their overlapping shadows dappled the ground and cast alternating stripes across Garian's golden-brown skin and dark eyes. It gave him the appearance of a magical creature.

Axel curled his hands into fists and shook his head. "Great. That's just what I wanted to hear. This means both sides are actively seeking out new med-techs. One side wants to replace their lost techs. The other side wants to kill them before his enemy snags them. We better move fast and get out before we get crushed in the middle of this dirtside turf war."

He dusted off his tunic and checked his pants and boots to make sure he looked halfway presentable instead of desperate. If they were lucky, the clinic would be one of the twenty-four hour ones. "We better get there first and do some fast talking before the drug lords show up and fight over the pieces."

Marcus lifted his left hand and peered at the blood dripping from it. He wiped his hand across his tunic and examined it again. "False alarm. That was someone else's blood. I hope the med tech is a woman. As much as I like you guys, adding a woman to the crew would be a nice change of pace."

Axel rolled his eyes. "Think with your brains instead of your cocks. I don't care if this tech is male, female or herm, or what his or her sexual preference is as long as we have one with the right medical qualifications on our roster by lift-off tomorrow."

When Jeresa stepped out of the sanitary cubicle, four strange men rushed inside the foyer. Star and Gem braced themselves in front of the inner door. The hair on their backs rose and both dogs growled. The men stopped and carefully showed their empty hands to the dogs.

Jeresa frowned. All four men were wearing plain dark gray ship tunics over black pants and boots. They had identical holographic ship patches on their right sleeves. Spacers? Why were they here? Spacers had their own med-techs. They didn't need the clinic's limited services and if they were shopping for cheap meds, they were out of luck. This wasn't a pharmaceutical outlet. The only painkillers on site were temporary anesthetic gel tubes.

She pulled up the images and data from the foyer's passive scanner screens. No hidden weaponry on them. The tall, lean, light-skinned one with black hair limped over to the bench. The scan highlighted titanium alloy from mid-thigh to toe for both of his legs. A double amputee, he'd chosen the fast and dirty option of prosthetic limbs instead of undergoing the time and expense of full-limb regeneration.

The other three men knelt on the foyer floor and showed the dogs their empty hands.

Brilliant goutts of multi-colored lights flared a half-mile away above rounded

domes clustered outside the dump. The ground rumbled and shook under her feet. Did she have a home to return to or had it been destroyed in the latest turf war?

Bleep! Jeresa jumped and spun around at the sudden buzz from the vidphone on the wall behind her. Her supervisor's number blinked in the ID box. She slapped the receiver on and positioned herself in front of the vidcam lens. "Sir?"

An unfamiliar face loomed on the screen, a woman with snow-white hair, smooth pale skin and cruel silver-blue eyes. The woman looked Jeresa over from head to toe.

Jeresa gulped and stood very still. Sprawled in a pool of blood on the floor behind the strange woman, was her supervisor's lifeless body with his neck twisted into an unnatural angle.

The woman consulted a holographic listing of employees superimposed on the screen. "Name?"

Jeresa gulped and contemplated lying. But that would probably cause her even more problems if worse came to worst. "Jeresa Lynnwold."

The woman turned sideways and pulled up another holo screen. Jeresa's basic stats, education credits and latest performance evaluation scrolled up. The woman turned back to the vidphone screen and nodded. "You'll do. We'll treat you right."

Two men strolled into the room behind the woman carrying blaster rifles. Gang tattoos had turned their faces into snarling gargoyle masks. The woman snapped her fingers at the men and jerked her thumb at Jeresa. "Go. Get her. Don't mess up this time. I want this one alive."

Jeresa slapped her hand down on the cut-off switch. She was worse than dead now. That woman wasn't a detective investigating her supervisor's murder. That was Deathangel, the most powerful drug lord in the Zone.

If she didn't get out within the next thirty minutes, she'd spend the rest of her life with an explosive collar around her neck providing medical services for Deathangel's syndicate. She couldn't go home, not with Deathangel's men on her trail. She needed a place to hide. But where? No one in the Zone would dare hide her from a drug lord's vendetta.

Gem's growly voice broke through Jeresa's panicked thoughts. "Good mens here."

Jeresa froze and mentally reviewed her original instructions to Gem word for word. "*Guard foyer. Allow no one out of foyer until I return to desk.*" It wasn't the dog's fault she and Star had allowed four strange men into the empty clinic. Gem had followed her orders exactly.

Jeresa squared her shoulders, turned around and aimed her best, drop-dead glare at the four spacers. "Get the hell out of my clinic. I did a preliminary scan when you stepped into the foyer. You have no injuries and no reason to be here."

Axel licked his lips.

Her name was Jeresa Lynnwold. She was in deep trouble right now with

one of the local drug lords. He knew that much from what he'd seen and overheard of her vidphone conversation.

She stared back at him with her gorgeous, frightened amber eyes and was telling them, ordering them to leave the premises. Her olive skin looked soft and smooth, like satin. Medium height with long, chocolate brown curls pulled back into a tight braid, she looked twenty-five, maybe twenty-eight Terra standard years old. A loose, oversized blue tunic and pants covered her from neck to feet but failed to conceal the lush curves of her breasts and hips.

Talk. He needed to reassure her, convince her to join his crew. Think. Open his mouth. Say something. Anything to keep her from kicking them out.

Garian was their communications specialist. He could speak, read and write fluently in eight Terran languages and three alien languages. Why wasn't he talking?

Why wasn't he communicating?

Jeresa gasped and stared past him. Her amber eyes turned black with horror. She slammed her hands down in the exact center of the desk.

A subsonic crackle lifted the hairs on the back of his neck.

He dove over the desk, wrapped his arms around her and crashed to the floor sideways. Sharp pain seared through his right shoulder. A split second later, the rest of his crew landed on top and knocked the wind from him and the woman he held against his chest.

The blaster bolt congealed into a fireball and splashed on the far wall.

A sheet of shattered glass rained down upon their backs in flakes and shards.

His brain caught up with his body and told him to duck.

Whoomp! A ten-foot by thirty-foot sheet of six-inch thick titanium slid down from the ceiling and sealed the lobby. Hissing splashes told them that more blaster bolts were hitting the other side of that barrier.

Excellent reflexes on the med-tech's part. As soon as she spotted armed attackers running toward them, she'd slapped her hands down on the desk and deployed the clinic's defensive shields.

The air turned furnace hot with a greasy, metallic aftertaste. The clinic's emergency fire control system kicked in. A siren wailed in a high-pitched discordance that hurt his ears. Billows of sticky, white fire-suppressant foam poured down from the ceiling ports.

One of the dogs screamed. "Mommy! I hurt!"

The young woman rolled out of his grasp, scrambled to her knees and crawled to the white dog with one black paw. Blood poured from a piece of glass embedded in the dog's shoulder. Axel half-crawled and half-slid through the coagulating foam after her.

The first few seconds of panic had burned away all fear and left only cold intellect behind. Star crouched beside Gem, whining and licking Gem's paw. Jeresa rested her hand on Gem's shoulder. "I'm here, baby. It will hurt a little when Mommy pulls it out. Don't move. Promise."

Gem flattened her ears and panted. "I promise. Don't move even if I

hurts.”

The four strange men knelt on the other side of Gem. Not young men. Older men with concerned faces and faint starbursts of laugh lines at the corners of their eyes.

Globs of foam clung to their hair and clothes. More foam soaked up the blood draining out of Gem and turned it into a pink slush. Jersa tore a scrap of cloth from the bottom of her tunic, wrapped it around her hand, grabbed the shard of glass, pulled it out of Gem's fur and tossed it aside with a flick of her wrist. Bright red blood gushed from the wound. It gaped open like an angry red mouth against Gem's white fur.

Jersa pulled the flaps of skin together. The tall man, the one with the prosthetic legs and gentle hazel eyes, rested his hands over the cut and pressed hard to stop the bleeding.

Jersa pushed herself to her feet. The spacer with caramel brown skin and reddish brown dreadlocks tied back in a ponytail knelt beside Star and Gem, stroked their muzzles and whispered soothing words of comfort.

Jersa said with quiet patience. “Mommy be right back. Help doggie. Get medicine. Make hurt go away.”

The other two spacers rose to their feet. One was a lean Viking with gray streaks in his short, curly blond hair. His face was friendly and easygoing with a crooked nose and lopsided dimple. The other, shorter guy's skin was so black it almost looked blue-black. Superbly toned muscles rippled with every move he made. They followed Jersa into the next room.

Slapping her hand against the palm locks, she opened all the supply panels and yanked out multi-colored gel tubes filled with disinfectants, liquid sealant and anesthetic. While she selected the tubes she wanted for Gem, the two spacers peeled their tunics over their heads. They shoved the rest of the gel tubes, med scanners and other portable devices into their tunics and used the sleeves to tie them into secure bundles.

Jersa froze with her heart in her throat. Looters. They came here to loot the clinic.

The men stopped and stared at her with quizzical expressions on their faces.

Gem whimpered and cried out. “Mommy! I hurt.”

Jersa shoved past them and hurried to Gem's side.

She'd worry about their intentions later. Gem was more important than a few missing supplies and tools.

The dog rolled her head sideways, gazed at her with absolute love and said, “Mommy help.”

“Yes baby. Lie still now.” Jersa twisted the cap from the disinfectant, squeezed a blob on her hands and hurriedly cleaned them. She squeezed a larger glob of disinfectant over the spacer's hands while he continued to apply pressure to Gem's wound. The liquid melted over his hands and ran down Gem's fur, diluting and washing away the blood and foam. Not the best way to clean the wound but it would have to do for now.

The black man twisted the cap from the wound sealant tube and handed

to her. Carefully, pinching the flaps of Gem's blood drenched skin and fur together, she squeezed the sealant in a thick white line over the six and a half-inch long gash. The fluid dried on contact into a hard, transparent scab. As long as Gem didn't exert herself it should hold until the wound healed on its own.

Gem whined and panted, "Hurt. Hurt. Mommy, help please. Stop hurt."

"Mommy will help. Be a brave girl now." Jeresa accepted the uncapped tube of anesthetic from the blond spacer and squeezed it over the sealant. She handed the tube back to him and counted slowly to twenty. That should be sufficient time for it to absorb through the dog's fur and skin and numb her shoulder.

"...seventeen, eighteen, nineteen..."

Gem's panting eased. She banged her tail on the floor. "Hurt gone. Good mens help Mommy."

Jeresa risked a glance over her shoulder at the glowing red blotch growing brighter and brighter across the emergency titanium alloy shield barely ten feet away from them. She licked her suddenly dry lips. "How much longer will it hold?"

The black man sat back on his heels. He studied the wall then said, "Five minutes to blast a hole through. Then we have a minute or two leeway because they have to wait for it to cool down first before they can climb inside without burning their clothes off."

The first man grabbed her hands. "My name is Axel. I'm the captain of the independent freighter Nebula. These men are my crew and family. Is there another exit?"

Jeresa pulled her hands away from him and folded them in her lap to keep them from shaking too much. Then she sucked in a deep breath, exhaled and squared her shoulders. She was running out of choices. "Deal first."

"What deal?"

"I need a place to hide with my dogs until this drug war cools down. I'll pay you."

With what she had no idea but she damn well wasn't going to let them know how broke she really was. *To hell with her debts*. She'd pay these spacers every credit she owned if they got her out alive.

Axel shook his head.

Her heart slammed into her chest. Didn't he believe her? What did he, what did *they*, want from her?

Axel lifted his hand. "We'll help you escape and guard your back. In return, you join my crew as our new med-tech. We leave tomorrow."

She risked a second, longer look at the wall. The red glow was turning into a pure, eye-searing white. Ripples of heat shimmered in front of the glowing spot. What choice did she have? She could stay here and take a chance on surviving tonight's turf battle between the drug lords or go off planet with four male spacers. They had laugh lines around their eyes. More importantly, Gem and Star trusted them. Hopefully that meant they were honest men and not trying to run a sex trade scam on her.

Whoa. Hell of a thing to sit here and make a deal with guys whose

names she didn't even know. What if it was a scam? Well, she'd figure a way out of that after they escaped from the clinic.

Jeresa lifted her chin. "Names please. I'm Jeresa."

Why did they look so relieved?

Oh yeah, right. Rival drug gangs were trying to burn their way in with blasters. Of course they looked relieved. They wanted to get out of the clinic alive just as much as she did. Two years of struggling to survive in the Zone had warped her mind and made her suspect everyone's motives.

The black guy. "Derek."

The Viking look-alike. "Marcus."

The dreadlocked mixed race guy. "Garian."

She held her hand out toward the captain. "My dogs go with me."

Axel took her hand. "Deal."

Then the other three spacers clasped their hands over hers and his.

"Deal!"

Star sat on her haunches and drummed her tail on the floor. Gem struggled to her feet and wobbled slightly before she said, "Mommy find good mens."

They'd secured a med-tech. Now all they had to do was survive long enough to bring her and her dogs out of a turf war in the Zone to the dubious safety of their ship.

Axel balanced the wounded dog in his arms and ignored the way his stumps ached. The escape tunnel under the clinic was crude with packed dirt floor and walls. Half of the lights had burned out. At least it went in a straight line. Faint yells and bangs behind them meant their pursuers had located the entrance and were trying to bypass the palmlock. "How much further?"

Jeresa looked over her shoulder at him. Barely restrained panic shone within her wide-eyed stare and flushed face. "I don't know. This is my first time down here."

The yells behind them got louder.

She turned and ran. The unwounded dog ran beside her. Axel followed her. The rest of his crew ran behind him.

The access shaft was straight ahead. The door at the base was a lighted rectangle.

There was a dull thump behind them. A blast of overheated air rushed along the tunnel and slammed into their backs with a sullen roar. The entire length of the tunnel blazed with a deep red light.

Jeresa slapped her hand on the palmlock. The door for the access shaft slid open and stopped halfway. It didn't matter. She turned sideways and squeezed herself past the opening. Axel turned sideways. Derek held out his hands. By holding onto the dog from both ends, they snaked themselves through the narrow slit without dropping their burden.

Garian and Marcus slid through next.

A ladder.

Jeresa knelt at the top of the shaft and peered down at them.

Axel passed the dog back to Derek and scrambled to the top. He stretched himself out on the ground, peered over the edge and lowered his arms. Marcus climbed halfway up the ladder, turned around and braced himself. Derek passed the first dog up to Marcus.

Marcus passed the dog to Axel. Jeresa stretched herself out on the floor, reached over the edge and helped him pull the dog to safety by the thick scruff of her neck. Then they passed the second dog up to Axel and Jeresa.

The ground shook under him. Another plasma blast in the tunnel. Much closer this time. Super-heated air and acrid, black smoke boiled from the access shaft while Derek, Marcus and Garian rushed up the ladder next.

It was a nightmare come to life. People screaming. Children crying. Sirens wailing.

Jerese couldn't do anything except run.

It felt like she ran forever, ducking and dodging through splintered glass and puddles of black blood. Plasma blasts seared the sky in an insane display of pyrotechnics.

Each flash exposed a single horrific image. An endless strobe of horror upon horror. Twisted and crumpled bodies slumped on the streets like piles of dirty clothes. Black twisted hands curled up in front of a charred corpse. A man lying in a doorway with his eyeballs burnt out and his mouth stretched in the rictus of a soundless scream.

A headless child clutching a rag doll to her chest.

The stench of burnt flesh and scorched hair permeated the air.

Fire flared up in front and splashed against a wall. Jeresa flinched and stumbled. Derek, the spacer with the dreadlocks, caught her arm and pulled her to his side. Strong arms, warm and alive tightened around her. "It's all right. You're doing fine. We're here."

Derek put his hands on her shoulders and turned her around.

A ramp. They were in the spaceport, standing in front of a ramp for a spaceship.

Jerese walked up the ramp with leaden feet. Derek kept his hand at her back, a warm, reassuring touch.

She stopped in front of the closed airlock door.

One of the spacers reached out and touched the palmlock. The airlock door slid aside. She stepped inside. The spacers crowded in next. And her dogs. Both of them. Safe and alive.

The outer airlock door sealed itself. Her ears popped while the airflow balanced itself. The inner airlock opened.

Jerese entered. Scrubbed deck plates. Polished panels. Bright lights. Clean and safe.

She sucked in the air with deep, sobbing breaths. Tears streamed down her face.

Strong arms enfolded her. She leaned against a warm, muscled chest and cried. The spacers murmured soft, comforting whispers. Gentle hands stroked her tangled hair.

Star bumped her head against Jeresa's knee and whined. Gem wiggled her chunky body in between her legs. "Mommy sad. Help Mommy."

Jeresa smiled. "I'm fine. Gem. Mommy's crying happy tears."

Hard, strong bodies held her and kept her safe. A large hand cupped her breast. A rough, callused finger touched her nipple. Gentle hands stroked her back and pulled her closer. An erection pressed against her crotch. Two more erections nudged her on both sides of her hips. A fourth erection rubbed at the cleft between her buttocks.

Jeresa stiffened. Outrage burned through her. She pushed the spacers away and stumbled back against the wall. "I didn't agree to be your whore."

Star and Gem crowded her legs. The hair rose on their backs in a stiff ridge. They growled and wove their heads back and forth between the four men, daring them to approach her.

Jeresa's heart slowed down from a thundering roar to a sullen gallop. She sagged against the wall. Gem and Star were with her. She wasn't alone. They would protect her.

The man with the prosthetic legs spoke in a quiet, matter of fact voice. "No. You're not a prost. You're our new crewmate."

Axel! His name was Axel.

She sucked in a shaky breath.

He tapped his chest. His tunic was torn and filthy. "You needed comfort and we were giving you the comfort we would give to our crewmate." He gestured at the airlock. "We would never keep you here against your will. You're free to go if you wish."

Yeah. Right. Out there in the Zone, her choice tonight was either death or existence as a slave to one of the drug lords. Here, at least, she had a slightly better chance of survival. Only four men to worry about raping her instead of hundreds.

Except they hadn't tried to rape her. They'd touched her with gentle hands. They'd protected her and brought her and her dogs to safety tonight.

Jeresa sucked in another breath. "I'm a crewmate?"

"Yes you are. We needed a med-tech and you agreed to join us."

She tugged her tunic down from its bunched up position around her waist. "Show me the med section. Show me my quarters."

She was safe. She was alive. She had a new job now as ship med-tech. Star and Gem had crashed out on the floor in front of her cabin's built-in bed. Gem's loud snore filled the air with its comforting familiarity.

Jeresa sat on the bed and slumped against the wall. She should rest but she was too wired to sleep yet. Too much had happened to her tonight. She kept wanting to pinch herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming.

Derek, the black guy, was the ship's engineer. He'd spent over an hour resetting the door's palmlock and adding a nose lock so that it only opened to her and the dogs. Right now he was running calculations into his hand comp figuring out what he needed in order to add a sanitary canine waste cubicle for the dogs.

Now that she had the time to actually sit and look at him, he looked pretty damn good. He stood about five nine. Tight, compact muscles rippled on his back and shoulders while he moved around the room inputting his measurements. He'd been so busy setting up her cabin that he hadn't even had the time to put on a new tunic.

Not bad. Not bad at all. Hell, all of the guys looked damn good.

Derek turned around. He clipped the comp to his belt. A warm, reassuring smile lit up his dark features. "That's it for now. When you go with Axel to finalize your paperwork in the dockmaster's office, I'll be able to do my job here."

"Thank you."

Derek glanced at the neatly folded tunic and pants at the foot of her bed. "Hopefully, those will fit you until we can buy you some decent clothing." He backed out the open door of her cabin into the corridor. "Breakfast will be served an hour from now. The galley's the third door down. Marcus is the ship's cook."

Jeresa raked her hand through her hair. Dried blood, dirt and fire foam had turned it into a tangled mess. She needed a shower. Changing into clean clothes would help her feel better too. "Marcus? He's the blond guy who looks like a Viking, right?"

Derek snorted, shook his head and grinned. "Yeah, I guess you could call him that."

Jeresa set the water temperature for a hundred degrees and stepped into the shower. She grabbed the shampoo and scrubbed her hair first.

Pure heaven. A girl could get spoiled with this kind of luxury.

They had no limits on the amount of water she could use. The ship used a three-tier water system. One for waste disposal. The other for drinking water and the third one for cleaning. The used shower water drained through a sonic scrubber that recycled it for continuous usage.

She rinsed the shampoo from her hair, grabbed the soap dispenser and squeezed it into her hands. A white, viscous glob of liquid that looked like semen.

The prosts in the Zone always complained about spacers. They said spacers were cheapskates because they usually paid for one prost to service a group of spacers instead of hiring prosts for one on one sex. And it wasn't just the male spacers who had that bad rep. The women spacers bought single male or female prosts for group sex too.

Could it be that instead of being cheapskates it was simply a reflection of their normal sexual practices?

The image of all four spacers standing around her, holding her and caressing her body exploded into her mind with sudden clarity. Strong gentle hands had cupped her ass and tits. Four hard cocks had pressed against her, all ready to satisfy her needs.

They were her fantasy lover come to life in quadruple. And instead of letting nature take its course, what the hell did she do? She pushed them away,

yelled at them and accused them of treating her like a prost.

Oh god.

Jeresa turned the water off and sagged against the wall. Should she plead temporary insanity and beg them to finish what they started?

Axel came into the galley and sat at the bolted down table. His hair curled at the ends from the shower but at least he was clean and no longer had the sickening stench of scorched flesh and hair clinging to his clothes and body. Marcus slid a cup of coffee in front of him.

Coffee. Real coffee for a change. A simple luxury they often went without. He wrapped his fingers around the thick mug and inhaled the steaming fragrance. Little by little, his brain cells started functioning again.

Garian staggered in, snagged a cup of coffee and collapsed on the bench beside him. In addition to a shower, clean tunic and pants, he'd taken the time to add a bunch of gold beads to his hair. They made a nice contrast to his red-brown dreadlocks and cinnamon colored skin.

Derek came in and took his seat. He'd taken a quick shower too. Tiny droplets of water clung to the tight black curls on his scalp. He hunched over his coffee, blew the steam from the top and took a cautious sip.

Axel raised his eyebrows. "No tunic."

Derek flashed a sardonic grin. "I caught her checking out my bod when I scanned her cabin for the modifications I'll be putting in for her dogs. I think she likes me. And the way I figure it, we need all the help we can get to keep her from changing her mind and walking out on us."

Garian snorted. "Hmmp. You just like showing off your pecs."

Derek's grin widened into a full-fledged leer. "Nice beads, Gar. They go well with that boner you've been sporting for the last hour."

Garian peered under the table at his crotch, sighed and shook his head. "I took care of him when I took my shower. He's supposed to be resting now, not standing up at attention."

Marcus passed around plates of scrambled eggs and synth-bacon and settled into his seat with a hopeful sigh. "My father always said the best way to a woman's heart is through her stomach. I'll find out what her favorite recipes are and handle all the cooking."

He could be right. Marcus's dad was the best cook across six star systems. He always had happy bed partners staying with him, usually two or three of them at the same time, despite the extra weight he carried from indulging in his own favorite recipes.

Marcus devoured his eggs and finished off his coffee. Then he sat back and glared at them one by one. "Keep your hands off the chocolates I'm buying her today."

Axel adjusted his hard-on to a more comfortable position. Then folded his hands on the table. "I like her too. A lot. We almost blew it there at the airlock. Don't push yourselves on her. We don't want to scare her away."

Derek's grin faded. His face went totally serious. "I'll keep my distance. I want her to stay too. Any suggestions?"

Garian raised his hand. "Clothes. All she has with her now are the clothes on her back. When you bring her to the Port Authority Admin Center later this morning and get her officially listed as crew, I'll make a few purchases from one of high-class boutiques I saw in that sector."

Axel turned to him. "You know her size already?"

Garian grinned and wagged his eyebrows. "I felt her. My hands know her exact measurements." He sighed and angled another sardonic glance under the table at his crotch. Absolute yearning filled his face. "I hope she likes us too."

A soft chime echoed from the wall. The ship's computer voice spoke in a neutral baritone. "Newest crewmember has vacated cabin six. Estimated time of arrival at galley is four Terra standard minutes."

Axel stared at their ship engineer. Derek shrugged. "I programmed the ship's computer to give passive proximity advisories. Just in case we need to get decent and to remind us to watch what we say when she's around so we won't scare her off."

Of course. Derek was no fool. None of them were. It was a reasonable precaution considering how they'd almost ruined their chances by pawing at her as soon as she boarded the ship.

Jeresa tugged her tunic down with shaking, sweaty hands. Silky indigo fabric caressed the curves of her breasts and dipped alarmingly low, almost exposing her hard pebbled nipples. It clung to her flat stomach like a second skin.

The pants were just as bad. Tight and supple, the fabric rubbed against her aching clit with every step she took. Not like the oversized tunic and pants she normally wore. The only saving grace was the length of the tunic. It flared out into a soft skirt that ended at the top of her thighs.

Her shoes, the only pair of shoes she owned, a pair of scruffy black soft-soled flats completed her attire.

Whose clothing had they given her to wear? Were they discards from a previous lover?

The bright rectangle of the open galley door waited a few steps away. Soft clinking sounds and the delicious aromas of fresh coffee and scrambled eggs told her that the spacers had already begun to eat breakfast.

She turned the corner and stepped inside.

All four men jumped to their feet with eager smiles. Their pants failed to conceal the thick bulges at their crotches. They surrounded her. Eager hands pulled out a chair and helped her seat herself.

Derek, Axel and Garian returned to their hastily vacated seats.

Soft, gentle voices.

Ardent appreciation shone in Derek's dark eyes. "You look great."

Axel jerked his gaze away from the plunging cleavage at the top of her tunic and fastened it on her face. A deep flush stained his cheeks. "Good morning."

Garian licked his lips. Then flashed a radiant and frankly admiring smile. "My baby sister left a few things behind last trip. They fit you a lot better than

they fit her.”

Marcus placed a steaming mug of coffee and plate of fluffy scrambled eggs and crisp synth-bacon in front of her. He leaned over and stared into her eyes with a worried expression on his face. “Milk? Sugar? More salt? Pepper?”

She gulped and shook her head. If she moved her hand, the side of her arm would brush against his erection. “I’m fine. I like my coffee black. Thank you.”

Horror flashed across his face. “Napkins.” He straightened up, hurried back to the opposite wall, opened a panel above the food prep corner and pulled out a handful of clean, white cloths.

His pants outlined a nice tight butt.

She turned back to her plate, picked up a fork and took a generous scoop of scrambled eggs.

They were perfect. Made with just the right amount of seasoning. Not runny and slimy. Not burnt and dried out either. She ate it in alternating bites with swigs of strong, hot coffee.

Marcus cooked this? Oh my. Damn fine cook. Excellent cook.

Finished. She sat back and wiped her mouth with her napkin.

Four pairs of eyes followed her every move.

Axel smiled. “Good. Huh?”

She folded the napkin and laid it beside her empty plate. “Yes, it was. Thank you.”

Derek moved his chair closer, then ran his fingertip across the top of her hand. The look in his eyes was hot enough to melt steel. “I liked how you made soft little moans in the back of your throat with every bite you took. That was nice.”

Heat flowed from that simple touch straight to her pussy in a single bolt of pure sensation. She jerked her hands back and folded them in her lap. If she stood up now, she’d probably leave a wet spot on the chair.

She plastered a bright smile on her face. “What’s the itinerary for today? Don’t we have to go to the Port Authority office in person in order to sign papers and establish my credentials as your new med-tech?”

The silver haired clerk behind the counter looked them over with flat, bored eyes. He inserted a data sliver into his console. A holographic display appeared listing line after line of Jeresa’s qualifications and education.

The clerk frowned. “Captain Axel Dane-Niallsen.”

“Speaking.”

“We have a problem.”

Axel sucked in his breath and took hold of Jeresa’s hand. She leaned into his side and waited. Her hand trembled within his and he gave her a comforting squeeze. They’d gotten this far. No way was he going to let her down now.

The clerk rested his hand on the counter, palm up. “Ms. Lynnwold has some outstanding student loans. Unless those loans are paid in full, we cannot approve her employment listing with your spacecraft.”

Axel looked up into clerical eyes totally disconnected from that open palm. "How much?"

Clerical lips pursed. The man consulted the columns of glowing figures within the holographic display. "Six thousand for the student loans."

The clerk coughed. "And another four thousand to expedite the process."

Jeresa's hand twitched. She gasped. "That's robbery!"

Axel held up his hand. "A few moments of privacy please so we can discuss the additional expenditures."

The clerk inclined his head in a barely perceptible nod. "Three minutes."

They stepped back from the counter and went out the office door into the hallway.

Jeresa's eyes blazed with righteous indignation. "It's twice the amount I owe. Plus he wants another four thousand for expenses."

Axel ran his thumb across her cheek. "We have no choice. Without a certified med-tech on my crew, the Port Authority will lock my ship down and we'll lose the ship and all of our money on accumulated dock fees."

Startled comprehension filled her face. "It's not charity."

"Far from it. We need you, Jeresa."

She bit her lip. "You can earn this money back with what you have in cargo. Right?"

"We will earn twenty times that amount if we can deliver our cargo on time."

"But if you don't have a med-tech today, you won't be able to leave and fulfill your contract?"

"That's correct."

She lifted her head. Pride glowed on her face. "I'm an equal member of the crew. This means I can pay this back from my share of the profit."

"Yes."

She stared at him for the longest time. Then looked away. A slight pink blush stained her cheeks. "Can I ask a personal question?"

His heart flipped over. "You're crew. No question is too personal among crewmates."

The pink blush in her cheeks deepened into two bright red spots. She lifted her head and stared at him again. "For you spacers, when you're crew that means you're very close, like family. Right?"

He nodded. "Many of our crewmates are also family so this closeness is part of who we are."

"Close your eyes."

He blinked. "What?"

"I want you to close your eyes, please."

He closed his eyes.

Jeresa touched his chin with her hand and guided his face lower.

His heart went into triple overdrive.

Then she kissed him.

That first tentative brush of her lips turned into greedy pressure.

That's all it took for him. He groaned, slid his hand around her neck and clasped the back of her head, pulling her closer. His cock rose in a solid column of eager readiness between their bodies.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and let him plunge his tongue deep into her mouth.

He didn't care if they were standing in the middle of a public hallway in full view of security scanners. He grabbed her ass, pulled her tight against his body and ground his cock against her. She had to know how much he wanted to fuck her right then and there.

She ended the kiss and laid her head against his chest. "Thank you, my captain."

His heart thundered on. He just held her and savored the sensation of her warm curvy body pressed against him in total acceptance.

Finally she sighed. She disengaged herself from his embrace and grinned up at him with mischief gleaming in her eyes. "We have some paperwork to finish first."

His heart turned over with joy. "Agreed."

They re-entered the office. The clerk waited with bored insolence etched on his face.

Axel rested his elbow on the countertop, leaned over and said in a soft, cold voice. "Two thousand for expenses or I file an appeal to the front office."

The clerk widened his eyes with acute innocence and consulted his figures a second time. "My mistake. Two thousand additional will be sufficient to expedite this transaction."

Axel lifted his right hand. A ruby credit chip glinted within the solid silver and platinum band on his index finger. He placed his hand on the palm pad and waited until a soft bleep indicated that it had verified his ID. He inserted the ring in the credit transfer port. "Initiate transfer eight thousand Terra standard from Nebula ship account."

Jeresa stood in the middle of her cabin and hugged herself.

Axel had paid her debts in full. At least one of her dreams had just come true. She now had an official med-tech license and crew ID/credit chip ring.

Derek had installed a brand new doggie sanitary cubicle for Star and Gem. Both dogs sprawled on the floor in front of their empty food bowls and half-filled water dish.

They thumped their tails and panted at her in total contentment when she looked at them.

Garian had bought her clothes. Gorgeous clothes in every color of the rainbow.

He'd also bought her an entire selection of spun silk undergarments and six pairs of soft-soled flat shoes. She'd folded and put all the clothes away into the storage compartments under her bed.

Marcus had given her chocolates. Boxes and boxes of chocolates filled with supra-dark nuggets, chocolate covered raisins, nuts and pretzels, cream filled

and caramel filled confections and pure white chocolate swirls. Her mouth watered at such a treasure. She'd stashed all but one small box away into storage.

Five hours and forty-five minutes from now was their scheduled departure time.

It would take six months before they arrived at their destination of Zeta Five. Six months alone with them. The choice was hers as to how she wanted to spend those next six months.

Jeresa went to her bed and picked up the tiny foil wrapped packet she'd bought at the pharmaceutical store on the way back from the Port Authority office. She unwrapped the foil, exposed a fragile gold chip dot, lifted the hem of her tunic and carefully placed it inside her bellybutton. Fifteen seconds later, after direct exposure to her body heat, the chip shimmered and melted into her skin.

Star and Gem sat on either side of her legs and looked up at her with their heads cocked. Gem whuffed and asked, "What Mommy doing?"

Jeresa smiled. "Mommy just took some medicine, baby. Stay here and guard my room. I'll be back in a little while."

"Okay."

She'd kissed him. And not just any kiss, but a hot, open-mouthed, passionate kiss. Six months. They'd be alone with her for six months. A lot could happen in six months.

Axel hummed under his breath. He pulled up the holographic checklist and went over the ship's take-off procedures again. Maybe he should order a suited drill. That should keep everyone busy for a good hour or so.

Derek leaned back in his chair and folded his hands under his chin. "You look different."

Garian swiveled his chair around. "He's right. You do look different. I can't quite put my finger on it."

Marcus finished drinking his coffee, crumpled the paper cup and tossed it in the incinerator chute. "Ever since he walked out of the Port Authority Office he's been walking around with that crazy smile on his face."

Derek snorted. "I wouldn't mind having a smile like that. What happened?"

All of them turned and studied Axel as if he'd suddenly grown a second head. He cleared his throat and said, "She kissed me."

They leaned forward. Sudden comprehension and hope lit up their faces.

A soft chime pealed from the bridge control panel. The ship computer said, "Newest crewmember has entered lift. Estimated time of arrival on bridge. Two minutes."

On the one hand, it was nice to get the little warnings so they wouldn't do or say anything to scare Jeresa away. On the other hand, it didn't feel right to have the ship's computer keeping track of her like that. She was crew and crew were supposed to be able to work together and trust one another like family. They shouldn't have to keep secrets from her.

What the hell was she going to say? 'Hey guys, I've changed my mind. I want to jump in bed with you, all of you, at the same time.' Would they think she was a slut then and treat her like one?

If that was the case then why were they going through all the trouble of buying her things and treating her like a queen? The lift settled to a stop. Her stomach did a final flip. She ran her hands through her hair and squared her shoulders. She was here now. The least she could do was thank them for their gifts.

The lift door slid aside. She stepped out onto the bridge and stopped at the railing that circled the area. A huge holograph showing the exterior visuals of the ship filled the opposite wall. Loader robots were driving away from the closed cargo bay doors. More robots were busy detaching and removing fuel, water and liquid oxygen supply hoses.

No one turned around from their intent perusal of holographic data grids floating above their individual control boards. They all appeared to be deeply engrossed in their work. This might not be a good time for idle chitchat. After all, they were scheduled for departure in about five and a half hours. Maybe they needed all of that time to do complicated data scans and prep for take off.

At the same time, it would look extremely awkward if she left the bridge without saying anything. She strolled around the bridge and did her best to look casual about the small box of chocolates in her hand.

Marcus had pulled up life-support and food inventory databases. He was looking over air scrubber supplies, the crop rotation in their greenhouse section and a detailed listing of their food, water and other liquid rations.

Axel was studying a star map with their trip itinerary and listing of jump zone paths.

Derek had the ship's drive, computer graphics and jump vane schematics up in all their complex glory.

The holographic screens above Garian's board showed open language databases and ten overlapping communications links. It wasn't difficult to figure out that the laid-back effect of his beaded dreadlocks was just a cover. He not only could follow multiple transmissions, he could do it in six different languages at the same time.

Did they expect her to spend the next six months studying their shot records and X-rays?

Oh the hell with it. She didn't buy that anti-fertility chip so she could sit and play holographic solitaire in the VR lounge. Six months of slut sex would feel a lot better than six months of no sex.

She stopped beside Marcus's chair. He turned his head, gaped at her cleavage, drew in a ragged breath and then wrenched his gaze up to her face. "Jeresa."

Grey threaded his blond hair. She always liked older men. They paid more attention when they made love. She held up the little box and opened the lid. "I want to thank you for these chocolates. I love them. Do you want a taste?"

The silence on the bridge was deafening.

“Sure.”

She selected a piece, closed the lid and placed the box on the console. Marcus watched every move she made with intense interest. She put the piece of chocolate in her mouth, let it melt a little and then bent down to kiss him.

It was as if his body reacted before his brain. He grabbed her, pulled her onto his lap and kissed her. It was a rough and uncontrolled kiss and the chocolate melted away fast under the heat of their hungry mouths. He moved his hand to her shoulder and tugged her tunic aside and squeezed her breast. Yes! It felt so good. He tweaked her nipple. She gasped and wiggled her ass against the nice, thick erection in his lap.

He lifted his mouth from hers and watched her face while his hand traveled from her breast down to her crotch. Her mind went blank, the only thing she could think about or feel was the slow, deliberate movement of his hand. He rubbed his thumb in a firm circle over the damp fabric that covered her clit.

A contented moan escaped from her mouth. She rested her head on his shoulders and opened her legs wider to give him better access. “Thank you, Marcus.”

He lifted his hand from her crotch and patted her on the leg. “Any time, darling. You're very welcome.”

Three men stood around the chair. Their smiles and gazes held open admiration and eager anticipation.

The gold beads at the ends of Garian's dreadlocks clicked against each other.

Jeresa stood up on shaky legs. Cool air brushed her right nipple. “I want to thank you too, Garian. The clothes you bought me are lovely.”

“My pleasure, ma'am.”

She looked at Derek.

“And I want to thank *you* for fixing up my cabin.”

He shrugged. His eyes lingered on her exposed breast. “You're crew now. It's the least I could do.”

Garian gestured at her tunic. “Your top's a bit lopsided now.”

She smiled. “Yes, it is.”

Marcus climbed out of his chair and positioned himself behind her. He rested his hands on her shoulders and said, “Do you want me to straighten it for you?”

Her pussy clenched under the sensual rasp in his voice. “No, take it off. Please.”

A happy growl vibrated in his throat. Marcus pulled the other shoulder of the tunic down her arm, and peeled it the rest of the way off. He left it bunched around her waist.

Jeresa leaned back into Marcus's strong body and rested her head in the hollow below his shoulder. He wrapped his arms around her waist and steadied her upon his hard cock. If she'd been naked, his cock would be jammed between the deep cleft of her ass.

Garian and Derek moved to opposite sides of her. Garian cupped her right breast. Derek cupped her left breast. They lowered their heads. She jerked

and moaned under the fantastic sensation of two hot, hungry mouths on her nipples at the same time.

Marcus slid his hand between her legs and took care of her clit while he dry-humped against her ass.

As for Axel. He opened his pants, exposed his erect cock and stroked it slowly, pumping his hand up and down its swollen length. The engorged head looked purple from all the blood trapped in it. Pre-come dribbled at the tip and a thick vein throbbed along the shaft. It was the most beautiful cock she'd seen in a long time. She wanted him to give it to her right now. He smiled at her and kept pumping.

Garian and Derek sucked faster. Their teeth nipped at her nipples and the sensitive skin along her ribs.

Jeresa rode Marcus's hand with desperate thrusts of her hips. She arched against him and cried out while wave after wave of orgasm ripped through her grateful body.

Garian and Derek lifted their heads from her breasts and grinned at her. Then before she even had a chance to form a coherent thought let alone say anything, they grabbed her tunic at her waist and peeled it and her tights down her legs, removing every last scrap of clothing along with her slippers.

Garian tilted her chin, traced her lips with his thumb and gave her a quick, hard kiss. "Jeresa, you're crew now. Anything you want, we will do it for you, always, anytime, anywhere."

Derek kissed her next. "We belong to you now."

Marcus gave her a quick kiss next. "Welcome aboard, Jeresa. As crew you are closer than family to us. Forever."

Then Marcus scooped her up in his arms and asked, "Where do you want to take her Captain?"

Axel pointed at a black section of the bridge console a few feet away. His voice deepened into a rough carnality that sent shivers down her spine. "There. That control board is shut down. It's just the right height for us to take her, one at a time."

Marcus sat her on the edge and stepped back. Garian and Derek opened their pants. Their erect cocks bobbed between their lazily stroking hands. Long and thick with heavy veins ridging the skin, they were more than ready to satisfy her needs.

Marcus opened his pants and exposed his erect cock. He grinned at her and said, "We go by seniority for the first round. The Captain, Communications Specialist, Engineer and Cook. After that, it's ladies choice."

Her heart thundered in her ears. Her blood raced hot and thick in her veins. She braced her hands on the edge of the console, leaned back and opened her legs wide so they all had a full view of her aroused, wet pussy.

All four men groaned with hunger. Their eyes glazed over.

Axel approached her first. He stepped between her legs, braced his hands on the console and lowered his mouth to hers. The head of his cock nudged at her clit. She groaned and tilted her hips up for easier access.

"Jeresa." He spoke her name in a guttural whisper. "You are special to

us now. There is regular crew and there is crew. Do you understand?"

The way he looked at her went right through her. Hot, hungry and hopeful.

He didn't consider this slut sex with her. None of them did. It was real and important to them

"Yes, I understand." She put her arms around his neck and brushed his lips with a chaste kiss. "I am crew."

"Will you accept all of us, Jersa? We'll try to be gentle, but it may not be easy to stay in control."

"Yes, I want all of you to give me your come and show me how much I mean to you."

Joy blazed in his eyes and transformed his face. He grabbed her by the waist and shoved himself into her, all the way inside.

The sudden shock of his hard shaft filling her so completely took her breath away. It felt so good, like she'd died and gone to heaven. She tightened her arms around his neck, wrapped her legs around him and lifted her hips upon his eager, pounding cock.

No long, slow, fuck for the first round. No, he was going at her hard and fast, groaning in a headlong rush into orgasm. It was a glorious sensation. It made her feel like the sexiest woman in the universe to know that she was the reason for his total loss of control.

He stopped moving as if he'd been struck by a bolt of lightning.

Hot come jetted into her.

She moaned at the sensation, squeezed his cock and milked every last, wonderful drop from him.

"Oh yes," he whispered. "Yes."

She unwound her arms from his neck. He remained with his hands braced beside her. He closed his eyes and fought for breath. Her Captain rested vulnerable and trembling between her legs with his pants down around his ankles.

Finally he opened his eyes and gave her another smile of pure joy. He brushed her lips with a gentle kiss, gently eased himself out of her body, and then moved away.

Garian stepped up and took his place between her open legs. Eager happiness glowed on his caramel colored face. He cupped her breasts, bent his head over them and carefully sucked and bit her aching nipples until she started moaning and squirming with need. Then he grabbed her by the waist and kissed her full on the mouth. He looked at her and slid the full length of his thick cock into her pussy.

She gasped.

"You like that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you want more?"

"Yes, please."

"Tell me what you want."

"I want you to fuck me, Garian."

He pulled out almost to the end and slammed into her again.

"Like this?"

She groaned, grabbed his butt and wrapped her legs around him. "Yes, more please."

He increased his pace and shoved into her in a steady, mind-blowing rhythm. The muscles in his butt bunched under her hands. She looked over his shoulder. Derek and Marcus had taken the time to remove all of their clothing. They held their erect cocks in their hands, slowly pumped them and grinned with anticipation gleaming in their eyes.

"Fuck me harder, Garian." She gasped. "Fuck me good and hard. Give me all of your come. Get me ready for more come."

And he did. Garian fucked and banged her so hard, her whole body moved with each deep thrust. When he came, wave after wave of ecstasy exploded through her.

She mewled with helpless abandon. He pulled out, caressed her cheek with his lips and stepped aside.

Derek quickly took his place. Smooth and sure, he inserted himself and moved in slow, deliberate strokes. "Anytime Jeresa. Anytime you want, you can have me."

Wonderful, lean muscles bunched under her hands. His long, thick cock filled her aching pussy with loving attention. Lifting her hips into those strokes, she met each one as if she wanted to melt her flesh against his strong, sculpted body.

His pace increased into a rocking, shaking ride. He threw his head back with a roar of satisfaction that filled her heart with joy, along with the sensation of his hot come spilling into her.

He stopped and kissed her. Then caught his breath before he pulled out. "Next time I'll do better."

She grabbed his arms. "You did damn good. I love how you feel inside me."

He gave her another swift kiss and grinned. "Gotta go now, Jer. Marcus needs his turn with you."

Marcus walked in slow and easy. He stopped and looked her over from head to crotch and back up again. "Your mouth is soft and red from kissing. Your skin is flushed. You look pretty with your hair in tangled curls. Your pussy is swollen with good loving." He slid his fingers across her swollen clit. She yelped and rubbed greedily against his hand. He smiled and dragged the juices up to her breasts. "Your nipples need a little more loving first."

He leaned down to her breasts and moved his head back and forth between them sucking and nipping. No matter how many times it happened, that lovely suction sent a special zing straight through her into her clit. She arched herself into his mouth and looked over his shoulder. Three happy naked men stroked their cocks, getting themselves ready for round two. The only way she could tell that Axel had artificial legs from knee down was the slight difference in color at that spot.

Come spilled from her pussy with each sharp bite at her nipples.

He lifted his head. "Did they get you all ready for me, darling?"

She tucked her heels behind his legs. "Oh yes, Marcus. They got me good and ready for you."

He slipped inside her drenched pussy with one smooth, easy thrust. "That's great. 'Cause I'm more than ready to give you everything I have in me."

There was no boredom, nothing mechanical about his desperate thrusts. The long, slow orgasm that had been building in her under the incredible delight of four men loving her exploded into a tidal wave with this last ride on Marcus and his eager cock. The bridge rang with her delirious cries. He dug his fingers into her skin and shot his come with long, gasping groans.

Then he sagged against her for a few moments of gasping vulnerability before he could pull out. He leaned in, cupped her chin and gave her a swift, bruising kiss. "Jer." His voice went all thick and greedy. "I can't wait 'til I eat your pussy. I bet it tastes sweeter than honey." Then he stepped away.

The image of him kneeling between her legs shot through her in a dizzy whirl of carnal anticipation.

Axel, Garian and Derek moved in beside Marcus. All four men helped her climb down and stand between them on shaky legs.

She glanced at the time blinking away on the bridge clock. Four and a half hours to go until lift-off. "Round two is ladies choice, right?"

"Of course."

"Take me to a real bed, a full-sized one. I want all of you to fuck me again." She studied the four erect cocks with their swollen heads pointed at her and licked her lips. "Except I want to see if I can handle two of you at a time for our second round."

"Yes!" They shouted.

Axel scooped her up into his arms and led them off the bridge into his quarters.



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