

ARRESTED DESIRES

By

Michelle M Pillow

Chapter One

X Quadrant, Baida Proper, Earthbase 5792461

Juliana Harrison stared at the police officer with a cross between gratefulness and dismay on her face. He didn't have the classic crew cut she'd seen most officers on the base wear, but his short blond hair was neatly trimmed and his dark blue uniform was immaculate. It had pleats ironed down the front of the pant legs. Like everything else on the Earthbase of Baida Proper the police style was what she liked to think of as retro-Earth, based of the twentieth century as it was back on the planet Earth--except of course for the obvious, like squad cars that hovered not drove and guns that fired lasers not bullets.

Even the houses looked like some old suburban concoction with their mock aluminum siding and picket fences. Most of the residents of the base didn't realize the historical influence, but Juliana's father had been an architect and she grew up learning about such things. History had always fascinated her, not that she had gone anywhere with it. No, instead she'd gotten married.

Keeping her eye on the man before her, she continued to study him. Badges and pins adorned the officer's short sleeve shirt, drawing her eye to the stately symbols, which led her eye down his toned body to the firearm that hung along his waist on a thick leather belt. He was a handsome man, in the militant sort of way most men of the law had about them. Glancing over his muscled chest, she read his metal nametag. It said, "M. Perkins."

More like Officer Mmm-mmm, perfect. Perfect Perkins.

Officer Perkins had been nice to her since she had walked through the front door of her home, but that didn't change the fact that he was there to evict her from her own house. His partner, a chubbier version of the tall handsome stud in front of her, had left to get food. She had offered the use of her food simulator, but apparently, there was some office policy about taking bribes of any kind--even something as small as lunch.

Standing in the middle of her living room, Juliana's whole body shook. How could her husband do this to her? How could he get a restraining order against her? He was the one sleeping with some twenty-year-old bimbo, not her. He was the one asking for a divorce. They'd been married for eight years and now Jeff wanted a divorce. How could he throw what they had away? So, they weren't happy, but eight years was a lot of time to invest into a marriage. It was a good thing they'd never had kids.

Thankfully, in the eight years of marriage she hadn't stopped getting her pregnancy shots, which protected her against both pregnancy and disease. They were practically mandatory on Baida Proper anyway and if she'd stopped it would've been bad for their image. Though supposedly confidential, things like that had a way of leaking out. Not that she had a reason to be worried about disease. It's not like Jeff had touched

her since he started his extracurricular activities, unless he'd been cheating from the beginning, which was possible. Juliana honestly didn't know.

She looked at Officer Perkins. Why was she thinking of her shots right now? She wouldn't allow herself to do anything about her attraction to her personal rescuer. First, she just couldn't. Even though Jeff had cheated on her, left her, treated her like space dust, she was still technically married and Juliana just wasn't a cheater, not even in the most extreme circumstances. Second, it had been five years since she'd had sex and she wasn't sure how to even begin seducing someone, let alone know if she'd do it right once they started. Third, she wouldn't let herself mistake feelings of gratitude for anything more. It wasn't fair to anyone. She could easily see how a woman could get attached to a man like M. Perkins.

It's a good thing we didn't really have a marriage or this might actually hurt more than annoy.

Juliana really didn't know why she was surprised. In hindsight, she should have seen it coming. It was a tale as old as time. Wife works while husband finishes degree at prestigious law school. Wife creates beautiful home, entertains husband's bosses and colleagues, and helps husband secure a partnership within his intergalactic law firm. Husband has mid-life crises, realizes he doesn't need wife anymore because he'd gotten all the work out of her he could and leaves her for a twenty-year-old with fake, *Medical Alliance for Planetary Health* created boobs and the IQ of a Lophibian slime trail.

Wait, no, that wasn't being fair to the slime trail.

Juliana suppressed a laugh at the thought.

The home she had created was hard to leave. Three floors high and one of the most envied mansions on the base, she'd picked out every vase and statue, every retro-Earth carpet and mirror, every holographic painting and mock light fixture. She saw to the cleaning droids, making sure they were programmed right. Okay, she had reprogrammed them when the officer wasn't looking. Jeff's slacks would never be pressed the "right way" again. It was a petty, small victory, but one she felt justified in taking.

Even her front lawn, the perfect sculpturing of yellow shrubs and red alien grasses, had been of her doing. Juliana had ordered the red grass. She'd created the weaving design into the naturally lush green grass of Baida Proper to create a work of art on the lawn.

It's all stuff. It doesn't matter. She sighed, wishing it was that easy to let it go.

The sad truth was, she wasn't even that heartbroken over the whole ordeal beyond her beautiful home. If anything, she was aggravated. Jeff should have told her to her face that he wanted her out of the house. Instead, he had used his position in the law firm to evict her. She knew what he wanted. He wanted her to cave so he could divorce her and not lose too many of his precious space credits in the process. She couldn't remember exactly when it had happened, but Jeff had stopped being a real man sometime along the way. He was now a cowardly little rocket boy.

Continuing to look at the police officer, she bit her lip. Now there was a real man. Maybe that's what she needed--a strong man who had the balls to take what he wanted. Forget intellect. Forget conversation. She needed to get laid.

Only she couldn't allow herself to think like that, need to or not.

"Mrs. Harrison," Officer Perkins said. His voice was soft with the touch of a

leisured off planet drawl, giving away the fact that he wasn't originally from the Earthbase. He'd been nice enough to call in a favor for her, having some movers take her boxes to a private storage unit a friend of his owned since she had no where else to store her belongings. "Your court allotted time is about up. Is there anything else?"

Juliana couldn't speak. She'd spent nearly two hours packing her belongings with Officer Perkins' help. It was more time than she'd spent in the same room with Jeff in the last two months and that was including nights asleep in bed.

There was just something about the lawman. A kindness she saw in his expression when he looked at her. It had been a long time since she saw a man with such soulful eyes, such obviously deep emotions. Funny how she could know Jeff for years and not feel connected to him, at least not anymore, but then meet someone like M. Perkins who instantly seemed like an old friend. When he gave her another of his brief smiles, she saw the cutest little dimple on his cheek.

Juliana let her gaze roam over his firm ass as he turned around, as if looking for more boxes. Was it wrong to think the man helping to kick her out of her house was incredibly sexy? As long as it had been since she and Jeff had slept together, she'd probably think a clown handing out balloons at the local drugstore was sexy. No, a clown didn't look so delectably authoritative in a uniform.

I've never wanted to be arrested so much in my life. If I confess to something, will he frisk me?

Juliana took a deep breath, trying to cool her suddenly overheated body. Was it wrong to have sordid thoughts about the man helping to evict her? It wasn't as if she blamed him for what was happening. She'd chosen to marry Jeff, even if she'd been pressured by both of their affluent families to do so. It had practically been an arranged marriage. Juliana took a deep breath. She was tired of being the good girl, tired of doing what was expected. In fact, she wanted to be bad.

And she wanted Officer Perkins to be the one to "catch" her doing it.

Mm, intergalactic cops and space pirates. Who says kid games can't be played by adults?

Officer Perkins was easy to talk to. He knew about art and music--not classical, but the good stuff. Old rock n' roll. When he was packing her books, he'd clearly read more than just a few of them. And, somehow, he actually made her feel as if everything would work out fine. The world couldn't look anymore bleak for her than it did on this day, and she still somehow managed to feel all right.

Juliana suppressed a grimace. She was doing it again, thinking thoughts she shouldn't.

"You haven't contacted anyone." Perkins sounded concerned as he once again faced her. "Do you have some place to go?"

"My parents are both deceased and I have no other family. My husband cancelled access to our space credit account this morning," Juliana said. She'd been trying to buy a new dress from one of the traveling pavilions that was on base for a week and the snooty young sales girl had looked at her like she was a pauper when her credit was denied. That was how she'd found out something was wrong. When she got home, Officer Sexy was waiting for her.

"Do you have any friends that you can call?"

"No. There's no one. The women I know somewhat well enough to impose upon

are married to my husband's colleagues. It would be too awkward for them to take me in, being as I'm the soon to be ex of a partner. I don't want to put them into that position."

"Ma'am, I'm really sorry about this," Perkins said, giving another delectable, yet sympathetic smile. He had nice teeth, perfect for nibbling. Glancing down at his waist, she saw where he kept his handcuffs. Maybe she could be the intergalactic cop and he the space pirate. Hearing his voice breaking into her thoughts, she realized he was still talking. She blinked, forcing herself to focus as he continued. "But Mr. Harrison has got a restraining order on you. He claims you've been threatening his life."

Juliana looked down at her slender, five foot four frame. "Have you seen Mr. Harrison? He's six-foot-five and works out every day at the cyber gym."

Yeah, with his girlfriend.

Though, she did know there were ways to kill people without resorting to strength, but for Jeff to say that she was capable of harming anyone, even his own sorry ass, was laughable. Here she was, abandoned, and she couldn't even fathom truly going through with cheating on him during the last breaths of their dying marriage.

"Ma'am, I didn't say that I believed the charges just that I have to escort you off of the premises. Law is law."

"Just doing your job, right?" She gave a derisive laugh. Seeing the look on his face, she said, "I'm sorry. This isn't your fault. You've been very kind today. I guess there's a homeless shelter on base somewhere. Or an alien hostel maybe? I know they have those kinds of things on Nozando because the hover limo used to drive by one when I was vacationing there during an Interplanetary Law Conference."

Juliana sighed, frustrated.

"Do you keep any kind of local currency in the house?" he asked.

Juliana chuckled. "I already looked. He's taken it all--except for the little I have in my purse. He's even hidden my jewelry. I'll be able to get it back in court I'm sure, but in the meantime..."

Juliana shrugged. What could she say? She supposed crying was always an option, but somehow she just felt relief that it was finally over. No use pretending to feel something when she didn't. It was like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. She was finally free.

Only, what did she do with the freedom?

"I have a spare bedroom." His eyes met hers briefly and it looked like he was trying not to stare. The words were hesitant, but sincere. Could it be Officer Sexy found her as attractive as she did him? Was the electricity between them more than one sided? Hope leapt in her heart even as desire built within her. "It's not much, but it's just me in the house so there's plenty of room. You can't be much safer than at a cop's house."

He gave a small laugh. She looked at him, almost mystified that he would suggest it. Glancing at his hand, not for the first time, she searched for a wedding ring. There was none.

"It's just that I've seen the shelters. I don't think you'd be comfortable there, ma'am. Maybe after a good night's rest or two, you'll think of somewhere else you can go. I'll even go to the hardware store and buy you a lock for the guest room door if you're worried. If anyone asks, tell them you're renting an apartment from me."

Juliana let her gaze dip briefly over him. It was easy to tell he took care of

himself. What was it about a uniform that made sexy men look even sexier? Her life was falling apart and all she could think about was finding a way to celebrate. “Tell me, officer. Do you usually invite strangers into your home?”

“Call it Southern hospitality,” he said. “My momma raised me right.”

She quirked a brow at that. “I’ve been to South and I can’t say they’d invite strangers off the street into their homes.”

“You haven’t been to the right parts then, ma’am. Leastways, I’ve been doing this job for a little over eight years. If anything, I’ve learned how to read people. Besides,” he gave her a lopsided grin in an obvious effort to cheer her up, “I know self defense if you try anything funny.”

Juliana couldn’t believe it. Here this man was inviting her into his home and she was actually considering it. Slowly, she nodded. What choice did she have? “Despite what it looks like today, my mother didn’t raise a fool either. I know not to pass up a generous offer when I need it most. Thank you, Officer Perkins. I will gladly stay with you.”

“Name’s Maverick, ma’am.”

“Thank you, Maverick.” She gave one last glance around her home. “You can call me Juliana.”

Chapter Two

Maverick's house was as neat and tidy as he was. Juliana stood in the front entryway, looking around, feeling somewhat like a trespasser, even though Maverick had given her his thumbprint on a temporary key card so she could get inside. He'd handed it to her while his partner wasn't looking, also giving her twenty currency notes for a hover cab and his business card with his address and work number on it. She shivered, remembering how warm his hand had been when he touched her. Never one for fanciful thinking, Juliana had been surprised when she felt what could only be called a 'spark of desire striking her to the core.'

"It's definitely been too long since I've had sex if I'm thinking like this," she said to herself. What was with her today? Her libido had suddenly gone into rocket launch after five years of abstinence.

Gaining the nerve, she began to explore deeper into the officer's home. The place was extremely modest compared to the home she'd made with Jeff, but at least it was welcoming despite the unfinished hardwood floors and evidence of minor remodeling. Her house had become a cold, empty shell--one more focused on impressing others than being lived in.

From what he'd done so far to the walls and molding, she could tell, Maverick had an eye for retro-Earth. However, the home definitely belonged to a single man if the lack of feminine touches were any indication. It was two stories, with a nice open staircase and hardwood floors. Thick, straight curtains hung over holographic windows, which gave pictures of lush green countryside and wide purple-tinted skies. The curtains stirred and she realized they were sense enhancing holographic windows, very high dollar to have installed. They gave every impression of sights, sounds, feelings and smells of whatever alien landscape was programmed into them. She switched through the settings, seeing the scenes change over a dozen times--red earth and barren lands, high mountains with green tinted peaks, city landscapes, deep space. She even found a setting with graphic male content, where a humanoid woman slowly striped her clothes off. Juliana giggled to think of Maverick watching it.

A plain green couch was in the living room before a giant viewing screen. The pillows on it were slightly faded and the wrong shade to compliment the couch's color. There were pictures on the wall of what looked like a big, close family and Maverick with other officers, but no one who could be mistaken for a girlfriend. The electronic calendar in his office had work shifts written down, but no dates with anyone.

Juliana smiled as she pushed the selection button on the big viewing screen. A large collection menu of old Earth transmissions popped up, split into a variety of categories. The man had a lot of old action and horror films. There was also some porn, but nothing more risqué than a humanoid threesome. Juliana could see the appeal of watching, but she wasn't one for joining in on such a thing.

Juliana tried to watch movies for an hour, but was too preoccupied to do much. Glancing around the home, she looked at the stairs. She hadn't explored up there yet and though she knew she shouldn't snoop, she couldn't seem to stop herself. Curiosity got

the best of her. Upstairs, she looked through his bedroom. Luckily, his furniture was of a very old style and didn't require a hand scan to open. Everything was tidy, just like the downstairs. Even his dresser drawers were organized, every piece of clothing perfectly folded. Lifting a pair of tight blue underwear from the drawer, she smiled.

"So this is what a cop has on under his uniform," she mused.

Going to the next drawer, she pulled out a pair of metal handcuffs. Great, like she needed the image of Maverick handcuffed to the bed, wearing nothing but a pair of tight underwear molding his perfect ass. It was bad enough she already had feelings of appreciation for him without adding erotic images of him in sordid positions. She again had the urge to get arrested. Jeff had never been into kinky stuff in the bedroom. Juliana wished she could say it felt strange thinking of another man in her bed. But the truth was her marriage hadn't been a marriage for nearly five years and she'd fantasized plenty in that time. There was no harm in fantasy, so long as she didn't act upon it.

Running her hand along one of the walls, it didn't take long to find the right spot to open the wardrobe hidden in the wall. There were a couple police uniforms hanging next to some dress shirts and an overabundance of leisure shirts and jumpsuits. The colors were muted, not at all like the bright yellow and orange ones that were currently in style.

Reaching to her neck, she lightly tapped her necklace as she glanced around. There weren't any security knobs in the room, or in the house for that matter. A lot of people didn't like to have their lives recorded, especially after the underground scanner thief ring was caught. People's lives were recorded on security scanners only to have the images hacked and stolen. They were taken and sold at the Black Market on Torgan. She couldn't imagine the most embarrassing, intimate moments being handed around to be watched at parties.

Not really thinking of her actions, Juliana slipped out of her simple blue day dress and pulled on a uniform shirt. It was big on her slender frame. She went before the mirror, checking herself out. Her black lace bra, matching panties and thigh high panty hose peeked through where the shirt fell open. Pulling the clip out of her hair, she let her long dark curls spill over her shoulders. She grabbed an officer's hat off Maverick's dresser and put it on, pulling it low on her brow as she picked up his handcuffs. Swinging the cuff back and forth on her finger, she tried to give a determined, sassy look in the mirror. She still wore her high heel shoes. They made her legs look really long. She stepped her feet apart into an aggressive stance.

"You are under arrest. Spread 'em." Juliana giggled, mimicking the old fashioned cop she'd just watched on Maverick's viewing screen. She lowered her voice to try again. "I said to get on your knees, scumbag. You are under arrest. Officer Juliana is here to take you down."

Watching herself in the mirror, she slowly ran her hand down her flat stomach. There was something very empowering about wearing the uniform shirt. She could easily understand why people wanted to be police officers. Seeing some of Maverick's cologne, she sprayed it into the air. It tickled her breasts as it gently fell on her chest. The air instantly smelled like him. She took off the hat and walked around the room, aroused by the starched shirt against her skin. It brushed over her lacy bra, teasing her nipples.

Sitting on his bed, she pulled the nightstand drawer open. The first thing she saw

was a laser handgun, but she knew better than to touch it. The thing wouldn't respond to her hand anyway.

A slow smile crept over her face as she pulled the drawer out a little further. "Well, well, well, Mr. Officer. What do we have here?"

There was a half empty tube of blue lubricant, a pair of padded black handcuffs, a leather cock ring and nipple clamps. She bit her lip. There was some kind of sleeve, the pink lips of a woman's vagina molded in a synthetic skin on one side. A naked woman's picture stared up at her from the outside of a magazine chip.

So, Maverick liked to play, did he? Closing her eyes, she could just see him on the bed, fucking the moist sleeve as he masturbated. Did he put on the nipple clamps, too? Or were the other toys for his lovers? Did the man have lovers? Or was this evidence that he was as alone as she felt?

Pulling the drawer open all the way, Juliana gasped as a small rubber dildo rolled into view. She'd never known a man to have one of those toys before. It was long and skinny, too skinny for any woman to pick out. She didn't touch it either.

This was too much. Surely, Maverick's hospitality shouldn't be repaid with her snooping. What had gotten into her? She really shouldn't be looking through his belongings and trying on his clothes. But, then, maybe he wouldn't mind. He had given her the key to his home. Maybe he wanted her to look. People did snoop and she was only human. Maverick would know that, being in the people profession he was in. On the other hand, he wasn't there to know she was doing it.

Feeling free for the first time in eight years, she couldn't help but be aroused by the sheer naughtiness of going through a police officer's private drawers. Just seeing the toys, knowing that Maverick had used some of them on himself, only excited her more.

Juliana lay back on his bed, wondering if he masturbated there often. It seemed strange to think a man as handsome as Maverick would resort to that on a regular basis. The man was drop dead sexy and probably had women lining up to be with him.

Then again, maybe he didn't take them up on the offer. She was married and she hadn't been touched in nearly five years, except by herself. It wasn't like she didn't get offers. She did and often. What a fool she was not to take some of them! She'd been taking care of her own needs for so long just because of some marriage vows that had lost meaning long ago.

"Maverick," she moaned, smelling his cologne. With the toys she found in the nightstand he had to be a bit of a freak in the bedroom. Surely, Officer Sexy would know how to please a woman.

Juliana closed her eyes, almost desperate to be touched. It had been so long since she'd had sex that she couldn't help but imagine what kind of lover Maverick would be. Would he be rough and aggressive? Did he like to handcuff his partner? Or did he get enough of that at work? Maybe he liked to be cuffed. Maybe his fantasy was to be the one being arrested, dominated. Was that why he didn't have dates lined up on his calendar? Did he have trouble finding a woman confident enough to tie him up, strap on his dildo and ride him to release? Or maybe the dildo was for the women's pleasure. Maybe he used it to tease while he had them trapped to his will.

Juliana ran her hand down her stomach, dipping her fingers down her lace panties. Stroking her body, she parted the wet folds of her sex. Just thinking of Maverick, the idea of him, was arousing beyond measure. He'd been so kind to her today, more so than

he had to be. She wasn't stupid. She had seen the interest in his eyes when he looked at her. The attraction was there. He might never take it further, but the attraction was there. If she were to prod him in the right direction, she'd bet she could get him to pull out his toys.

So what if it was wrong of her to wear this man's uniform and pleasure herself on his bed? She cringed to think of how many years she had spent holding the torch for a dead marriage. Juliana knew she was still in shock over her marriage finally ending. She knew she had a rough road to face and that tears of frustration were in her near future. It wouldn't be easy having to start over. At thirty-three she was hardly old, but try telling that to men like Jeff and his twenty-year old aerobics instructor.

If she was honest, she'd known that this was coming. Juliana refused to let it get her down. She was pretty, mature and smart. And, best of all, it wasn't too late for her. She was just hitting her sexual peak. Years of pleasure stretched out ahead of her and she was free to embrace them.

The realization hit her like a bright light. She wiggled her hips on the bed, stroking harder and faster, reaching a finger up inside her body to hit the sweet spot that always made her come. Her nipples ached and her body wanted more--much more. It was time to make up for lost years. She wanted to be dominated, tied up, pleased and she wanted Maverick to be the one to do it.

Seeing Maverick's officer's cap on the dresser where she'd left it, she stared at it as she grabbed at her chest. The pleasure of oncoming release felt too good. She couldn't stop, even as she longed for Maverick to be there with her. Moaning in delight, she orgasmed against her hand.

Afterward, she slowly came back to her senses. She turned on her side, breathing hard. What was she thinking? Doing this? Here? Being human, it was natural to be curious and to have fantasies, but she did her best to suppress any such urges. No matter how much she wanted Maverick, she couldn't go through with any of her fantasies of him. He would just have to stay in her head where he belonged.

* * * *

By the time Maverick got home from work, she'd tidied up his bedroom. Everything was back in place. He'd never know she had been in there unless she told him. She doubted she would. Juliana liked having the naughty secret.

She had taken a shower and cooked dinner. Food was always a great tool for saying thank you to someone. Most of her clothes were now in storage, but she did manage to dig a navy blue corset and matching thong underwear from her suitcase. The corset was perfect for her black spaghetti strap dress with the tighter waist. She'd started wearing the sexy underwear about four years ago, when she still wanted to make Jeff notice her. He'd never noticed, but she'd never stopped buying it.

Maverick pulled off his jacket when he stepped in the door. Juliana shivered. She'd been thinking about him in that uniform all day. Setting a bag on the floor, he nodded at her. His eyes lingered on her dress, slowly sweeping down before he caught himself staring and turned away. "Sorry I didn't call to check on you today. There were a lot of calls and we were pretty busy."

"Don't worry about it," Juliana said, letting her voice lower just slightly. Her body tingled and her panties were already wet with longing. She really wished her body would turn off once and for all.

Juliana hadn't expected him to check in on her while he was at work. In fact, she hadn't thought past getting him into bed--bad, bad thoughts she needed to banish from her mind. Curious, she glanced down his muscular frame to his trim waist. The slight bulge of his cock pressed against the dark material, but it was only a tease. She drew her eyes away. What was it about this man that made all coherent thoughts leave her? It was like she had turned into a sex kitten all of a sudden and could think of nothing else.

"Did you find everything all right?" he asked, drawing her attention back to the conversation.

"Yes, fine, thank you," Juliana answered, hoping she hadn't been too obvious in her inspection of him. "I hope you don't mind, but I cooked dinner for us. It felt like the thing to do. I mean, you did take me in and all."

"You didn't have to do that," Maverick said, "but I won't complain. It smells great."

"You make it sound like it was hard. You have a food simulator. Really, it was just pushing a few buttons. I did program some new codes into it, though. I hope you don't mind." Juliana smiled. It wasn't the most graceful comment, but she didn't care.

"Really?" He appeared surprised as he took off his belt and laid it over the back of the couch. "That's wonderful. I've been meaning to get to that, but I don't have any of the program codes. I was lucky to get hamburgers and chips in the thing. It's been a good thing I've lived alone or my roommate would've gone crazy with the diet I have."

Juliana smiled. It was as she suspected. He was single. "I was happy to do it. I'll make a list of everything I put in, so you have it in the future."

"Thank you."

Juliana nodded. After years of running a household, it would only take her a few minutes to do and if it repaid even a part of the kindness he'd shown her, it was worth it. "Dinner is ready and I already have the table set. I hope you don't mind. I found your china and put it out instead of the trays that the food simulator materializes."

"No, that's great. It's good to see they're getting some use."

Juliana led the way to the kitchen. The table was small, but nice. She'd cleaned up after cooking, but his kitchen had been tidy otherwise.

"I've never been a roommate before," she said, nervous to be alone with him. It was odd, she'd been alone with him earlier, but now seemed different. "If I step out of line or don't do some roommate etiquette, please tell me. I don't wish to be a burden. And I know that you're only giving me a place to stay, and I'm not saying I'm a roommate, per se, so much as someone you're letting stay here for a night or however long, but ..."

His slightly amused expression stopped her.

"I'm rambling, aren't I?" She gave a weak laugh. "Sorry."

"You're welcome to stay here and you're welcome to anything I have. Don't worry about it."

Juliana smiled and nodded gratefully, but in the back of her mind, she thought of her little tension release in his bedroom earlier. The memory came with a great deal of guilt for having invaded his personal space.

"Shall we?" he asked, when she didn't move.

Juliana blinked, realizing she was getting lost in thought again. She nodded.

"Oh, yeah, um, I mean yes, thank you."

She had materialized green leaf salad with bread cubes and an old family favorite recipe for Fettuccine Alfredo with chicken. It wasn't fancy, but it was good. While they ate, Maverick's demeanor was laid back as he made easy conversation. He even pulled out a bottle of wine from his cupboard, pouring two glasses for them. They talked about his job, her lack of a job, their families, books and old Earth rock music. She never would have thought it when they first met, but they had a lot of the same interests.

Okay, who was she kidding? Since they first met, she'd been thinking of things other than what they would have in common.

"How you holding up?" he asked when dinner was about over. He'd untucked his uniform and unbuttoned the top button, showing his white undershirt.

Juliana shivered. Thinking about him all day, of seducing him, had been very arousing yet exhausting. Each time she looked at him, she wanted to crawl over the table and demand he make love to her right there. She knew it wasn't love, but lust that had urged her to go to him. She wouldn't be in the market for love for quite some time yet. He gave her a look of concern when she didn't answer, the dimple showing in his cheek.

"I'm fine, really," Juliana said, her voice a little hoarse. "Naturally, being thrown out of my house was a shock, but I'm not surprised. Jeff always was a bit of a solar head. As his wife, I taught myself to overlook his selfishness and other bad qualities. But, now that we're not together, I've come to terms with it." She gave a small laugh.

"Did you live in the house long?"

"A few years, so it's not like I was too terribly attached to it. I mean, I am because I decorated it and designed the yards and garden, but then I'm not because it's only stuff. It's hard to explain."

"I think I understand."

"This might sound horrible, but all day I've just had this sense of relief that it finally happened and that the first step is done. My marriage has been over for a long time." Juliana sighed, feeling relaxed and incredibly grateful to have someone to talk to. She hadn't realized how lonely she'd felt over the years. Maybe because it was a gradual decline into solitude. "Does that make me sound like a horrible person?"

"I think it makes you sound like an honest person."

Juliana had friends but, since they were the wives of his associates, she couldn't discuss her marriage or feelings with them. There had always been that image to maintain. She didn't have family to call and any of the off planet friends she did have were no longer close to her and didn't understand the lifestyle she led. To be truthful, she wasn't sure she understood the lifestyle she'd led. It was like waking from a long dream to find she was right back where she started, only older and hopefully wiser.

"Jeff has started the comet rolling, so to speak. Being that he is a partner at his law firm, the divorce will be pushed through by the end of the week." Juliana trembled. "It's strange to say aloud."

"I understand, really I do. But it will get easier."

"If you don't mind, I'm really tired of thinking about it. All I've done for the last five years is think about it." She gave a half-hearted laugh, doing her best to keep the conversation light. "I'm just relieved that it's finally happening. I'm scared because I don't have any idea what I'm going to do with myself, but mostly just relieved that it's going to be over."

He didn't answer, just listened patiently.

“Okay, I’m done talking about it for sure this time.” She shook her body in a dramatic shiver, as if she could throw everything off her soul and cheer up.

“All right,” Maverick stood and started clearing plates. “But just so you know. I think you’re handling this very well. You seem like a strong person and I’m sure you don’t deserve what’s happened to you today. And I know it’s hard to talk about, but know that I don’t mind listening if you do need to talk.”

A small tear came to her eye when he wasn’t looking. How could she ever repay such sweetness? What great deed had she done to deserve this cop, this man, showing up at her door with the restraining order? It could’ve been any number of officers, but it was him. Maverick. Her savior. Her friend.

Was it too soon to call him a friend? It didn’t feel like it. Not when she felt closer to him than she had to anyone in a long time. There was the unspoken undercurrent between them, a connection, an instant easiness and understanding that made it feel like she didn’t have to explain herself to be understood. The conversation just flowed and it was like they’d known each other for years instead of hours. There had even been a few times while they talked that they finished each other’s sentences. Surely that meant something. Or was she so desperate, so lonely, that she had imagined all this?

Juliana shook her head, pushing up from the table to help him clean up. No. She wouldn’t think like that. There was a connection between them. A strong, deep connection that had been there from the moment their eyes met.

They did the dishes together, their arms touching as he washed and she dried. The plates were a nice, antique china set she’d found in his cupboards. They’d been too pretty not to use. There was something cozy about being next to him, doing something so domestic and primitive like hand-washing dishes, but she was losing her nerve to seduce him--no matter how badly she wanted to. It had just been so long since she made the first move, she couldn’t remember how.

Maverick leaned against the counter and glanced down. His uniform shirt was wet from the dishwasher. “I must’ve been busy today. I can’t believe I’m still in uniform. I usually take it off when I get home. Either that, or the smell of food distracted me.”

“It’s fine.” Juliana looked over the shirt. It was more than fine. He was more than fine. Her voice dipped. “I like the uniform. I bet you get a lot of dates with it.”

“Some.” His voice was a little hoarse and she saw his throat work as he swallowed. Their eyes met and she was sure she felt the sparks igniting between him. She unconsciously leaned forward, her head tilting as if she would welcome his kiss. He began to bend down, his face coming toward hers. She waited, breathless, her lips tingling for that first bit of contact. To her surprise, he pulled back. “I just got a new copy of an old Earth transmission. The movie was supposed to be something called a ‘cult classic’. I’m not sure what that means, but the guy who sold it to me said it had a huge following for years after it came out.”

“What’s it called?” she asked, curious.

“Ah, I can’t remember. The title was strange, but he said there’s singing, dancing and that it’s pretty scary. Could be interesting. Anyway, if you’re not too tired, would you like to watch it with me? I can’t promise it will be high-quality.”

“I’d like that,” she said, nodding. Maybe a transmission would take her mind off everything.

Moments later they were on the couch, a small distance between their bodies with

the strangest Earth transmission they'd ever seen on the screen. But, despite the men dancing around in women's lingerie and campy songs, neither one of them wanted to turn it off. Slowly, without Juliana knowing for sure who moved closer to whom, she found herself snuggled into his warm, strong side. His arm wrapped around her so she could feel each rise and fall of his chest, each subtle shift of his muscles when he moved. He didn't make a move to touch her other than in comfort. Feeling protected and safe, she closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Three

Three days passed at Maverick's house. He'd go to work, she'd stay at the house watching his transmissions and trying to figure out her next move. She programmed his cleaning droids to take care of the household functions and added more recipes to the food simulator like she'd promised, at least the ones she could remember off the top of her head.

It was relaxing, not having social duties to attend to. She did call one of her volunteer functions and excused herself from the responsibility. One of the other women on the charity was more than excited to take over her spot and practically hurried her off the phone like she'd change her mind and take the council seat back. Juliana felt bad letting the position go, but she needed her mind focused on putting her life back together. When news spread about her divorce, she'd probably be 'nicely' encouraged to step down anyway. It was depressing to think about so she chose not to dwell.

In the evening, she would have dinner ready for when Maverick arrived home. They'd eat and talk, about nothing and everything. Evenings with Maverick were the happiest part of her day. Then, after dinner was cleaned up, by hand each time, they'd move to the couch and watch one of his transmissions together. He would hold her, and each night, her body would ache even more for him. She tried to get up her nerve to kiss him, to take their cuddling one step further, but every time she held back. Maverick never made a move, always acting like a gentleman.

On the third day, Juliana answered a knock on the door only to find one of her husband's law firm's couriers. He mumbled something about her being incredibly hard to find as he handed her the divorce notice. She signed the clipboard, instantly getting verification that her divorce was finalized. It was over. Jeff was no longer her husband.

Just like that. Simple. Quick. Finished.

Juliana stared at the confirmation, the uninspired, emotionless words telling her she wasn't legally married to Jeff anymore, but also reminding her that their assets still needed to be divided in an Assets Distribution Form or Hearing.

"Do you mind if I come in?" the courier asked.

Feeling a tad spiteful, she remained in the doorway, blocking his way as she read the clipboard he handed her and said, "No, you can stand right there."

He huffed, but didn't argue.

"It means that you are now divorced but in a legally recognized state of needing to separate assets," the courier said. Juliana already knew what it meant, but she let him talk. "The court recognizes your divorce, but also that they need to end the 'business of marriage'."

Thankfully, it wasn't like the old way of waiting months before a person got their freedom back. It was hard enough for most people to petition, but with Jeff's connections, she was sure he had no problem. It didn't matter anyway what the court thought about it. Her heart hadn't been married to him for a long time. Seeing the words in front of her was actually a relief. She was done with Jeff. Well, besides the Assets Distribution.

“Think of it as a business closing its doors, but the inventory still being there,” the courier said, speaking down to her as if she were a child.

Juliana looked up from the board. “I assume you have another document for me to look at?”

“Yes,” the man lifted up another electronic clipboard. “This is the Assets Distribution Form. As you see, your ex-husband has already had it drawn up. If you just sign here and give me a thumbprint, it will all be over. No need to even go to court.”

“Hmm, I think I’ll read it first. I’ll call you when I’m ready to give my answer,” Juliana said, shutting the door on the condescending man. He gasped, clearly exasperated with her answer, but she refused to sign it and finalize the Assets Distribution without going over the document first. It was a good thing she did, because Jeff had tried to take everything.

“Greedy bastard,” she mumbled, eyeing the cleverly hidden clause surrounded by a ton of legal jumble. What Jeff seemed to have forgotten was that she’d helped him get into law school and had even done some of his homework for him when he got too frustrated, or lazy.

Making several changes, which she thought were fair, she called the law office and had them send the courier back. When he knocked, she opened the door, handed him the clipboard and said, “The assets are in dispute. Be sure to send my court date here.”

Attached to the clipboard was a note, telling Jeff to stop being mean and sign a fair agreement. There was also a mild threat about him not wanting her to contact the intergalactic law board about his schoolwork. She felt wrong doing it, like she was sinking to his level, but knew Jeff well enough to know that he wouldn’t want the partners suspecting that his wife had done his homework. It was the only way she could think of to get him to sign a fair agreement, splitting everything in half, without resorting to a long, drawn-out battle that would only get ugly.

“Good for you,” Maverick said, nodding in approval when she told him that night over chicken cordon bleu. He took a bite, moaning slightly like he did each time. “Wow, this is great. I can’t thank you enough for the recipes.”

She smiled. “So you don’t think it was too petty to threaten him?”

“Not at all. I think it’s justified. From what you’ve told me, you did help him during his school years. And, the man did evict you unfairly from your home. I’ve seen divorces get much messier than this one.”

“Yours?” she asked. He’d alluded to it before, but hadn’t gone into great detail.

“Yes. She wasn’t happy being married to a cop and wanted more. She took the house, my hovercraft and for a while my sanity. I was hurt, so I tried to fight it, but in the end, I just let her have it all. I shouldn’t have done that, but it is what it is. That’s why I had myself transferred to this Earthbase four years ago. I wanted a clean start.”

“So it’s been four years?”

“Six. It took time for the transfer to come through.”

“Do you miss her?”

“No, not really.” He gave a small sigh. “We were young and neither of us had seen much of the universe. We should never have gotten married.”

After dinner, Maverick poured wine. The deep red blend was stout, but tasted wonderful. It also made her a little giddy.

Leaning against the countertop, she eyed him. “Why don’t you date?”

He gave a little laugh. "I haven't found anyone worth asking. Most of the women I know are criminals or colleagues."

His eyes held untold meaning and she shivered. She couldn't take it anymore. He was consuming her mind and her body was so tight with desire that she felt it like a sting to her soul.

"It's been a long day," she said, nervous. "I should get to bed."

"Oh, are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm fizzled," she lied. "It's been a long day, you know."

"Good night, Juliana."

"Mmm, night," she answered, making her way quickly to the door and up the stairs. Once there, she shut herself in the guest room, which was her room.

She looked around, taking deep breaths as she made her way over to the bed. Aside from an adjoining bathroom, the room was a lot like Maverick's. The dressers were modern and controlled by electronic scans unlike his antiques, and the bed was a perfect square unlike his rectangle.

She'd wanted to kiss him so badly that she had no other choice but to run from her feelings. Her mind whispered that she was now free to pursue him, but how could she? It had been so long and it didn't seem right with the divorce only being finalized today. Part of her said to think of it as a celebration, another part of her said she was scared and using divorce as an excuse to hide from sex and from her feelings.

Regardless of the reason, she wasn't going to act on those feelings tonight. Closing her eyes, she refused to touch herself as she had been. Maybe the fantasizing was what caused her uncontrollable libido. Or was it that Maverick had the greatest smile she'd ever seen?

Sighing, she turned on her side and did everything she could to get to sleep.

The next day, Maverick was gone when she woke up. It wasn't surprising since her conflicting emotions didn't let her get to sleep before dawn. Not wanting to face him when she was still so easily aroused by just thoughts of him, she left dinner out and went to bed early. Yes, it was cowardly, but her theory on not pleasuring herself to keep her libido down wasn't working. The next morning, she found a note he left, hoping she was all right and telling her to call if she needed anything.

It wouldn't take a shuttle engineer to figure out the first thing her brain came up with in the department of 'needed anything'.

Heading out of the house, she went for a walk, picked up a newspaper chip and, holding it in her palm, she pushed the button on the small square. A holographic screen popped up from the chip. Walking and reading at the same time, she could see through the transparent screen well enough not to bump into anything, even as she touched the menu items floating above her hand. Unfortunately, there was nothing in the advertisements about work to be had, at least nothing she was qualified to do. Most of it was for intergalactic spaceship pilots to haul import loads off planet. There was one for Galaxy Brides, advertising for willing females to go to distant planets to marry humanoid males.

"No, thanks, just got out of one marriage," she mumbled. Yet, somehow, the idea of not staying at Maverick's bothered her more than anything. She liked him, a lot, and didn't want to lose someone who was fast becoming one of her best friends. His nearness had helped her through a rough ordeal. He was still helping her. Just being there, caring,

talking, listening. She would never forget his consideration.

Chapter Four

“There you are.”

Juliana looked up from the newspaper chip, surprised to hear Jeff’s voice, even more so to see him standing on the front step of Maverick’s home. His face was thin, his jaw weak and it struck her how much she wasn’t attracted to him. It had only been a few days since she last saw him, but the image she’d carried of him wasn’t what she now saw. Were her eyes finally opened to what kind of man he really was? Or had she known for a long time and chosen to ignore it?

Glancing to the landing pad out front, she saw their luxury hovercraft parked on Maverick’s spot. San de Val le, Jeff’s little aerobics instructor was sitting in the passenger seat, toying with her handheld makeup case.

San de Val le. Whoever heard of such a ridiculous name? Apparently, it was some sort of stage name for when she became an intergalactic star. But, Juliana had never heard of Galaxy Playmates hiring no talent space trash. Even those exotic dancers seemed to have some kind of skill.

San de couldn’t be any more than twenty years old. Her hot pink hair was straightened and cut at her chin. She looked like a hooker and from what Juliana could see of her low cut, cleavage popping red top, she was dressed like one too.

“What do you want, Jeff?” she asked, turning off the paper chip.

“Wow, so this is where you’ve been hiding. The courier was having a stellar time trying to find you.”

“I’m not hiding. I’m renting,” Juliana said.

“Hmm, really? I heard you were having an affair with a cop.” Jeff wrinkled his nose in disgust.

“It’s not an affair if I’m single,” she quipped, not bothering to deny the accusation. Somehow, she liked him thinking that Maverick was her man. “I could fuck the entire force if I wanted and it wouldn’t be cheating.”

“I see slumming it has made you crass.” He frowned.

“And sleeping with bimbos hasn’t changed the fact that you are a jerk. Now, is there a reason you’re here? Because I’m not legally obligated to pretend that I like you.” Juliana gave him an expectant look. “Well?”

“Sign the Assets form, Juliana,” he said, as if giving an order. “I have it right here.

“I take it you didn’t like the changes I made.”

“If you think you’re getting half, you’re mistaken,” Jeff said. “I earned that money. I worked.”

“And I earned your degree,” she answered. “And helped secure your partnership, and your home. Besides, you know it was my inheritance that bought that house. They left the money to me, not you.”

“We were married. It makes it both of ours,” he said.

“Glad you agree. Give me half and I sign,” she said.

“Twenty-thousand space credits. Right now.”

“Um, half and I sign right now.”

“Juliana,” he warned.

“Jeffers,” she mimicked his tone.

“You really want to take this to court? You know that you won’t win. I’m a partner at a very important, prestigious firm and,” he lowered his voice, taking a threatening step forward, “you know you won’t find a lawyer in this quadrant that will help you. Even if you do, he won’t win against me.”

“Good thing I studied law then, huh?” she said. “And whatever you know, I know.”

“Juliana? Is everything all right?” Maverick’s voice broke into the conversation.

She glanced over, surprised to see Maverick standing near his police car. His partner slowly raised the craft but kept it idle while he monitored the situation from above.

“Jeff!” San de yelled. “Hurry. I’m hungry. You promised to take me to Jo Jeano.”

“This is none of your concern,” Jeff said to Maverick.

“Well, this is my house and you’re trespassing,” Maverick said, crossing his arms. Juliana had never seen him act so bold, so fierce. Instant heat warmed her blood and her sex. She couldn’t take her eyes off him. He looked so authoritative. “Plus, it seems to me you’re harassing my tenant.”

“I am not!” Jeff said. “I only came to get a signature.”

“Juliana, do you have anything to sign?” Maverick asked. His strong, confident gaze met hers and all she could do was shake her head in denial. “There you have it. I suggest you leave.”

Jeff opened his mouth, but as he glanced over Maverick’s uniform and then up at the police hover car, he must have thought better of it. “I’ll see you in court then, but don’t think you’re getting a single credit from me. You had your chance.”

Her ex stormed off and she watched until she saw his car disappear.

“Thank you,” she said, looking at Maverick.

He gave her a small smile. “Sean was just dropping me off early. I wanted to check on you, see how you’re holding up. I know you’ve been exhausted the last couple of days and I thought I’d take you out to eat.”

“That’s kind of you,” she said. “But I don’t feel like going out. Do you mind if we just stay in again?”

“Not at all,” Maverick answered.

“Mav?” his partner asked through the window, parking on the landing pad.

“Oh, sorry, Juliana, this is Sean, my partner. Sean, Juliana,” Maverick introduced.

“So, you’re the sexy tenant my partner’s been chewing my ear off about,” Sean said, laughing. Juliana glanced at Maverick in surprise. He’d told his partner she was sexy? “I’m glad to see for once he was telling the truth.”

It was clear by his tone that Sean was teasing his buddy. Maverick rolled his eyes and waved him away. Still laughing, the man took off.

“You don’t have to work?” she asked, still pleased by Sean’s confession. She felt breathless as they were finally left alone together.

“Sean’s covering for me,” he answered, motioning that they should go inside the

house. "Were you going somewhere?"

Juliana followed his gaze to her purse. "I just got back. I went to get a newspaper chip to look for work. Apparently, I can either pilot a hauling ship, or contract myself to be a bride on demand."

"Oh, that good, huh?" He chuckled. "I'll ask around. See what I can find out."

"Really?" Juliana felt a spark of hope. Somehow, when he said it, she felt like there was a chance she might actually find something. Maybe it was his confidence and charm. Or perhaps the fact that he was a problem solver. "Only if it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all. A guy needs his tenant to have a job." He laughed, opening the door and letting her walk in first.

"So, are you hungry?" she asked, automatically going to feed him.

"No, but how about some wine? Or if you're tired of wine, I have some burbear, diaops, mandice, beer, Qurilixen ale, something from the food simulator ..."

His tone had lowered, just a little, but enough to make her shiver all the way down her spine. Licking her lips, she nodded. Some wine sounded really good right now. "I like the wine."

"Wine it is," he said gallantly, going to grab a bottle from a hidden rack in the kitchen cupboard. "Deep red."

"Perfect."

He poured the glasses and she couldn't help but watch his every move as he turned to hand it to her. Maverick had strong hands and she wanted more than anything to have him touch her. Taking the glass, she quickly drank it, stepping back from him. The liquor was warm as it slid easily down her throat. Before she knew it, she'd finished it.

"You're pretty shaken up, aren't you?"

Not by Jeff.

"No, just...." Juliana shrugged, not having a good excuse. She again looked at his hands as he lifted the wine bottle to pour another glass for her. The liquor had to be going straight to her brain, because she suddenly felt really flushed, and hot, and tingly, and wet, and....

Juliana sipped her drink, looking at his sexy uniform, so strong and commanding. She remembered the toys she had found in his room, the hint of kink to his collection. Why was she fighting her feelings so much? He had told his partner he thought she was sexy. Surely that meant something.

Taking a bold step forward, she went to him, crossing the distance to where he was against the countertop. His gaze met hers and he didn't back away from her advance. That had to be a good sign, right?

"I still can't believe you aren't taken." She wasn't sure where the words came from, but she didn't take them back. Keeping her eyes boldly on his, she drank down the second glass of wine. The stout liquor combined with the heat of desires, desires that would no longer be suppressed, stirred deep within her. Every reason for not touching him dissolved when he returned her look of longing. With Maverick, she didn't feel shy, or unwanted. She felt him, deep in her soul, like no other. It was impossible to put into words, but it was a feeling as real as both of them standing there.

"I told you. Most women I meet are on the wrong side of the law." His lashes

lowered over his eyes and his breathing deepened.

He smelled really good, like his cologne. She often picked up the bottle to smell it during the day, just to feel closer to him when he was gone. Teasing, she asked, "Are you saying you arrest most of your potential dates? So, what? Are you just waiting for them to serve their time before asking them out?"

"Mmm, I'm afraid cops and criminals don't really mix. It's a conflict of interests." He looked at her mouth and she knew he wanted to kiss her but was holding back. They were both adults. Surely, she wasn't imagining what was happening between them.

"What? You've never been tempted to abuse your power? To let a girl off with a warning in exchange for," Juliana reached for his shirt and pulled a button loose, "a date."

"Temptation is what makes us human." His face drew closer to her and she could feel his breath fanning down on her.

Juliana slowly worked her hands down the front of his uniform, unbuttoning it as she went. When she glanced down, she saw the unmistakable bulge of an erection between his thighs. His breathing deepened. There was no mistaking the size of it this time. The man had the weaponry to back up his sexy body that was for sure.

"Tell me, Officer Perkins, would you arrest me if you had to? Or would you let me off with a warning?" She glanced up at him through her long lashes, knowing the implied meaning in her question. "I might have a crime to confess."

"You? I have a hard time believing you've broken any laws. You are as straight as a thruster blast and twice as hot."

That was perhaps the silliest, sweetest thing she'd ever been told. Seeing his lids dip over his eyes, it was as if she couldn't stop herself. Her willpower had melted away and she knew she had to act now, in this moment, or forever be cast into a sea of unfulfilled desires and doubt. This was the new definition to her life. She was rewriting her story and it started right here with Maverick.

"How about assaulting an officer?" Juliana reached forward and grabbed his thick erection. It was so firm against her palm, so warm and thick. Maverick's stomach tightened. Juliana unbuttoned his pants and pulled down the zipper. Since he was leaning against the counter, the pants didn't fall to the floor. Thrusting her hand inside, she massaged his arousal through his tight underwear and added, "What about breaking and entering? Would you arrest me for that?"

He didn't touch her. When he looked at her, his eyes were hot and his breathing harsh and deep. She stroked his length, liking the way his whole body contracted with arousal. "Those are very serious charges and I'm sworn to uphold the law."

She licked her lips as he watched, moving her hand slowly beneath the underwear. Squeezing slightly at his base, she pulled up along his heavy shaft. A long sigh left his lips. Juliana stroked him several times and his arousal only seemed to grow bigger with each pull. "I don't suppose I could bribe you to let me go, Officer Perkins?"

"No, ma'am. I can't be bought."

"We'll see about that." Juliana let go of him and took a step toward the living room. She pulled the zipper along her back and let the dress fall on the floor.

"That's indecent exposure." His heated gaze roamed over her as she moved out the door, taking in her corset bra, thigh high hose and thong underwear.

“Then, why don’t we just add evading arrest to the list of charges?”

Her answer was a devilishly handsome grin.

Juliana squealed in delight as she ran, hearing him behind her. Her sex was wet with excitement and each step only stimulated her clit, sending jolts of pure desire over her flesh. Maverick caught her from behind as she reached the top of the stairs. His tight body pressed into hers. She felt his erection along her back.

“Is that a gun, officer?” she asked, pretending to struggle. Her movements served to wiggle her body against his.

“I’m afraid I have to place you under arrest, ma’am.” Maverick pushed her toward his bedroom, pausing only to flick on the overhead light. “With the list of charges we have on you, you’re fast becoming one of Baida Proper’s most dangerous criminals. I think I’m going to have to interrogate you further.”

“I won’t talk.”

“Oh, we have ways of making you talk,” he said, affecting a dark laugh. Just the sound of it sent chills over her spine.

Maverick walked her to the bed, keeping his hips firmly against her. Then, with a movement so swift that she could barely catch her breath, he spun around and had pinned her beneath him on the mattress. One fist held her hands above her head and the other found hold on her breasts. He quickly kissed her. Juliana moaned as his tongue slipped into her mouth, assaulting her with a passion and need she hadn’t felt in a very long time.

“Are you sure this is what you want?” He pulled back, looking deep into her eyes. Juliana nodded, reaching up with her mouth to kiss him again. Maverick let her give him a brief kiss before pulling back slightly. Against her lips, he said, “You are a very beautiful,” he paused to kiss her, “sexy,” he kissed again, “criminal.”

“Well, you’re a pretty sexy police officer,” she answered.

“Mm, you like to play, do you?”

Juliana nodded eagerly. He took the padded handcuffs from his nightstand. She watched his face as he cuffed her hands over her head.

“Aren’t you going to read me my rights?” she asked.

“Legally, I don’t have to. But, you have the right to scream all you want. Anything you say can and will be used for your pleasure.” Maverick licked playfully at her lips. Now that she was cuffed, he stood by the bed. His pants were still around his hips, though they hung loose. His shirt fell open and he’d kicked off his shoes.

She squirmed on the bed, watching his every move. He walked with authority, eyeing her as if he was sizing her up. Going to the closet he pulled out a rod that police officers used to stun overzealous criminals. When he came back to the bed, he began the slow torture of her senses. He drew the cool stick along her skin, not turning it on. It was hard and smooth, making her shiver. It glided aimlessly over her pantyhose, skimming over her wet panties and up between her breasts. Suddenly, she felt the tiniest vibration as he gave the stick just a little power. It didn’t hurt, but instead felt really good. Juliana arched on the bed, gasping as he moved the tip over her nipples. She wished the clothing was gone, even as she felt the effects of the vibration through them. He moved the rod down to her clit. When he passed her sex, he pressed in slightly, making her jump. She was so wet, so ready. The anticipation of this moment had been building for days. Her knees bent and she tried to rub herself along the stun rod. He drew it away too fast and she moaned in disappointment.

“Are you ready to confess what you want me to do to you?” he asked, kneeling beside her and licking at her neck.

“Undress me,” she said instantly.

Maverick worked his hands behind her back, unlatching the corset bra and pulling it free. He tossed it aside. His thumbs brushed over her hard nipples before taking them into his mouth. He groaned against her breasts, biting them only to soothe them with his tongue. As his mouth moved, he pulled the panties down over her thighs. Juliana automatically worked them the rest of the way off, kicking her legs to get them off.

“Stand up,” she said. Maverick groaned, but obeyed, standing by the side of the bed. Her nipples were wet from his warm kisses and the cool air kept them at erect peaks. He started to pull off his uniform shirt. She shook her head, stopping him. Licking her lips, she looked at the bulge between his thighs and said, “Take out your weapon. Let me see how dangerous it is.”

He obeyed, pushing off his pants and underwear at the same time. His arousal strained, thick with need, over the soft globes of his balls.

Juliana wiggled over on her side, moving toward the edge of the bed. It was hard to maneuver in her handcuffs, but somehow she managed. She licked her lips again with obvious meaning. “Bring it to me.”

He walked to her, letting his shaft come closer to her mouth. It was a tight fit next to the nightstand, but neither one of them cared. Juliana licked the tip. It was a strange game they played. She was trapped physically, her hands bound over her head and yet she commanded him. There was freedom in being with Maverick. She could do anything because she knew he would never judge her, never demand more than she was willing to give. There were no commitments, no unnecessary talk of love and emotions. It was like they had a silent understanding. They both needed to be touched, to feel. He was a nice guy and a true friend, which was important, but this was just pure, animalistic sex.

She teased him with her mouth, pushing his uniform shirt aside with her cheek. It was hard to get a good angle to take him deep, so she concentrated on the tip.

“I’m about to open fire,” he said, chuckling softly at his own words. He stepped away, breathing heavy. “I can’t let you keep doing that.”

“Mm,” Juliana pouted her lower lip in disappointment. The position wasn’t too comfortable anyway, so she gladly rolled over onto her back, getting into a more relaxed pose. It was just that his cock had tasted so good she wanted more of it.

Maverick crawled onto the bed. Almost urgently, he kissed her chest and stomach, working between her thighs. His hands gripped her legs still covered in the panty hose. He pushed her legs open with a confident shove, licking and sucking at her wet clit, nibbling it until every nerve centered on the movements of his mouth. Juliana tried to get closer, but the handcuffs kept her from sliding down on the bed. His tongue worked along her folds, probing and pushing just right. Only when she was crying out for more, begging him to let her come, did he pull away.

Her body trembled, weak with need. She thrust her hips into the air and watched him stroke himself. The sight of his hands on his shaft was very erotic and she instantly recalled her fantasy of him fucking the sleeve he had in the nightstand.

“Are you ready to talk, my bad little criminal?” he asked, his voice full of authority as he continued to pleasure himself. Her eyes didn’t move from his arousal.

“Never,” she said, getting into the role as she pretended to be his prisoner. She wiggled as if to be free, thoroughly enjoying the fantasy, the escape from everyday life. He grinned, angling himself between her legs. Her body tensed, waiting for the first thrust.

“You’re a naughty little criminal, aren’t you?” he asked, pumping his fist over his arousal faster.

“Yes. Oh, yes!” Juliana worked her feet against the bed, keeping her thighs open in invitation. Maverick let go of his cock and leaned over her body. “Very naughty. Extremely naughty.”

“I punish criminals around here.” Maverick bit her nipple hard. It stung, but felt so good she wanted him to do it again. “Do you need to be punished? Have you been a bad girl?”

Juliana pulled against the handcuffs. Though she tried to reach him, Maverick kept his erection just out of her reach. She pushed her hips up from the bed, desperate to have him inside her, pounding her with his huge cock. “Yes. I’m a bad, naughty girl, officer. Punish me. Give me what I deserve.”

“Beg for mercy,” he demanded.

Juliana instantly pleaded, “Mmm, yes, please, officer. Mercy. Give it to me.”

“What do you want me to give you?”

“You’re cock. Give me your cock. I want you to fuck me with it. Punish me. Take me now.” Juliana was nearly incoherent. She couldn’t take much more teasing. He brushed the tip of his erection down over her slit, letting her feel the fiery heat of it against her sex.

“Mm.” He groaned. His arousal danced along her opening, not giving her what she desperately wanted. He drew her legs up to hook over his arms.

“Please, Maverick, please!” she cried.

His groaning only turned louder as he pushed, filling her pussy with his thick, hard length. It had been awhile and her body was tight as he slid inside.

“Oh, officer.” Juliana writhed beneath him. Despite the slight discomfort of his size, the stretching felt so good she couldn’t allow him to slow. The rough patches on his arm scraped her legs, adding realism to her fantasy. Her hands strained against the padded handcuffs. Mindless with pleasure, she screamed for more. “Oh, that’s it! Take me hard. Ride me. Punish me.”

His hips thrust against her, almost as desperate as she felt. Maverick grunted as he leaned back, thrusting deeper, working fast and hard inside her. She felt helpless, controlled. The glint of his shiny badge caught her eye. It was too much. She’d fantasized about this moment for too long. She needed release and she needed it now!

Her body tightened and it didn’t take long before her orgasm hit her. Maverick grunted, joining her in release.

Chapter Five

Maverick lay on top of her in the aftermath of their pleasure, bracing his weight with his arms so as not to hurt her. His mouth nuzzled her neck as he searched blindly for the handcuff key in his nightstand. Finally forced to sit up, he found the key, pressed his thumb to the pad and ran it over the lock to unlatch the cuffs, freeing her. His erection lay sated along his thigh, only slightly engorged. With a heavy sigh, he pulled off the uniform shirt and tossed it aside, following it with the white undershirt. His muscled chest rippled gorgeously beneath his tanned flesh. Juliana moaned, curling up to his body when he lay on his back beside her.

“Wow,” he said, still trying to catch his breath. “That was ... wow.”

“Mmm-hmm.” Juliana sighed. “Wow.”

“That was fun.”

“Mmm-hmm. Fun.”

“That was wow.”

She laughed, rubbing her hands along his chest. Her wrists were only a little sore, and the rewards far outweighed any slight discomfort.

“Want to do it again?” He was still breathing hard, but he managed to give her a lopsided grin.

“Mmm-hmm, again,” Juliana answered with another giggle, snuggling closer. They rested in silence as their bodies cooled and their heartbeats returned to normal. It was nice to be held. She really missed the closeness of human contact that came from lying naked with a man, even if they weren’t madly in love. Sometimes companionship was enough. And who knew what the future would hold for them? Everything was so uncertain and yet so possible. It didn’t matter that she didn’t have a plan. She was free and she was incredibly happy. Maverick’s friendship made her happy.

“You’re not regretting this are you?” he asked.

Juliana glanced up at him and smiled, not pulling away from his strong chest. “I never saw a reason to regret pleasure--so long as no one was hurt in the process.”

“But--”

“Shh.” She put her finger to his warm lips. “Don’t. I want this. I want you. And I am most assuredly thinking clearly.”

Maverick smiled and quickly sucked her finger into his mouth. Pleasure shot back down her, moving like liquid ecstasy down her arm to her breasts then further to her sex. Tingling erupted between her thighs as they eagerly came to attention. When she glanced down his lean body, she saw that her libido wasn’t the only thing springing into action.

“Mmm,” she moaned, lightly kissing his chest. Running her hand over her chest, she affected a small pout. “Do you think I could play with your gun, Officer Perkins?”

Maverick stiffened and glanced at the bedside drawer. “Ah, listen, I know you must be mad about what’s happened to you, but that’s not any way to talk. I’m sure you don’t mean--”

Juliana pulled back, quirking a brow. “Huh?”

“Well, wanting to borrow my gun. Juliana, I know you’re angry--”

Her laughter cut him off. It was his turn to look confused. “Trust me when I say I’m not feeling too angry at the moment. And I don’t want to fire your gun, Officer Perkins, I want to fire your *gun*.”

To emphasize her meaning, she reached between his thighs, grabbing his shaft. She ran her fingers over the length, feeling it grow hard against her palm. Maverick groaned, giving her a sheepish look of apology for misunderstanding. “Oh, that gun. Sorry, it’s hard to turn the cop in me off sometimes.”

“Mmm, nice weapon,” Juliana said lightheartedly, purring in the back of her throat as she began the process of kissing the span of his chest. Stopping by each nipple, she licked the little buds hard. “Do you take it out for just anyone?”

Maverick continued to groan in approval. “Well, you know, I was trained never to take out my weapon unless I was going to use it.”

Juliana laughed at the absurd comment, but it fit with their role playing perfectly.

“Well, you know, officer.” Juliana reached to the side and grabbed the handcuffs. Swirling them around her finger, she gave him a coy look. “I think the criminal is going to turn the tables on the law.”

“Really,” he said, his voice a low, husky sound. “Going on a crime spree?”

“Mmm-hmm.” She nodded. Straddling his naked waist, she rubbed her swollen clit along his hard stomach and dragged the padded handcuff over his chest and up by his neck, tickling him with the end of it. He visibly shivered and his eyes narrowed in response. “First on the list. Kidnapping.”

Maverick didn’t fight her as she leaned over to cuff his hands above his head. His muscles strained beautifully and the heat radiating off his chest warmed her nipples as they brushed against him. When she had him bound, she sat back. Lifting her arms over her head, she stretched, lengthening her body as she rocked her hips back and forth on his stomach. He stared at her breasts, watching them bounce with her gentle movements.

“This is torture,” he growled.

“Mmm, good, a good crime spree has to have a little torture involved.” Juliana winked at him, continuing her little show.

“You might as well add arson to the list because I’m on fire right now.”

Juliana laughed. Her ass slid back, hitting his erection. It pressed into her and she wiggled against it. His flesh was indeed fiery hot. “You are right. I am becoming quite the criminal.”

“The worst,” he agreed. “A real intergalactic crime boss.”

“Oh, I like that,” she purred, sliding to the side as she got off of him. Her sex protested the lack of contact, but she ignored it, going to pull his uniform shirt off the floor. His hot eyes were on her and she simply stated, “Impersonating an officer of the law.”

Going to his nightstand, she pulled it open. Hesitating only slightly, she grabbed the lubricant and the small dildo. Maverick made a strange noise. He was breathing heavily, his body straining against the cuffs so hard that the bed creaked.

“Theft,” she said, keeping the items.

“You’re gorgeous,” he whispered, eyeing her in his shirt as she settled herself between his knees. “I’ll never look at my uniform in the same way again, which might be a bad thing if I’m at work.”

“Good, I’ll call that corruption.” Juliana laughed, liking that she was the ‘bad girl’.

Very slowly, she opened the lubricant and squirted it on the dildo, making a great show of slathering up the rubber cock.

“Is that for me or you?” Maverick asked, excited.

“Who do you want it to be for?”

“I don’t enjoy anything that big in my ass, but I’d love to watch you put it in yours.”

“Oh?” Juliana arched a brow. Angling a finger covered in the lubricant, she touched it to the tender piece of flesh beneath his balls. “What do you like? This?”

Before he could answer, she slipped the tip of her finger in his anus and lightly caressed him. His whole body tightened and shook.

“Yes!” he moaned. When she started to pull it out, his hot gaze caught hers. “How about bribing a law official?”

“Oh? At what price?”

“Suck my cock while you do that.” His eyes flitted down to his heavy erection. “Mm, yeah, only turn around to do it so I can see your sweet pussy.”

Desire shot through her at his bold words. Eagerly, she turned, straddling his waist so her back was to his face. Then, inching down, she drew her sex toward his face. She pulled his arousal between her lips.

The shirt fell forward, cocooning her as she ran her lips along his turgid shaft. Maverick made noises of approval, as she sucked him deeper with each pass. Her tongue rolled over the hot flesh, stopping to swirl around the rim of his hot tip. He squirmed thrusting up into her mouth.

Juliana drew her finger back to his ass. It had dried slightly, but there was still enough lubricant left to ease her way back inside. The firm opening clamped around her as she slid her finger in to the knuckle. Maverick’s harsh breath hit her pussy and she thrust back on him to ride his face. He groaned in approval, instantly swiping his tongue along her wet slit. His moans of enjoyment vibrated her clit as they brought each other pleasure.

Feeling her orgasm fast approaching, Juliana sucked his cock harder. Her body began to shake, releasing cream against his mouth. She took him to the back of her throat, thrusting her finger deeper into his ass. Maverick’s body tensed, joining hers in an explosion of release. Hot seed bathed her mouth and she drank down every drop.

Weak with spent desire, she fell to the side. Her legs stretched out by his head. The taste of him was still in her mouth, but she didn’t care. Being with Maverick was too much fun. What should have been a rotten week was turning out to be one of the best in her life. Never had she felt so free, so open with someone. It was like she could do anything with him and he’d never judge her or demand anything from her but mutual pleasure.

“Ah, excuse me, crime boss,” Maverick said, “but would you mind uncuffing me now? I’m starting to lose feeling in my arms.”

Juliana laughed and sat up. It took her a second, but she finally found the key folded into the messed up bedding. Pressing it to his thumb to get his print, she scanned the lock and set him free. She gasped as he grabbed her face and pulled her mouth roughly to his. He kissed her deeply, exploring intimately with his tongue as he stole her

already ragged breath. Then, letting her go, he grinned.

“You’re a lot of fun to have around,” he said, “even if you are a criminal.”

Juliana laughed, feeling very sleepy. “You’re not too bad yourself, officer.”

Chapter Six

Juliana wasn't sure when she'd gone to sleep, but when she awoke it was in Maverick's arms. The room was dark and she realized he must have turned off the light at some point in the night. His lips brushed her neck as his body curled around hers. Part of her was afraid to fully awaken, afraid that it might be a dream.

"Again?" she asked, feeling his erection pressing into her.

"I just can't seem to get enough of you. I find myself wanting to see what you'll do next," he whispered into her ear before playfully licking at the lobe. "Besides, you got my toy out and forgot to use it."

It took her a moment but Juliana remembered the dildo that had been discarded for other play. Swiping her foot, she felt it bump the toy from under the covers. Soon after the sound of it landing on the floor echoed through the room.

"Well, I guess that's out of the question," Maverick laughed. "At least until we get around to cleaning it."

"We?" she asked. She turned, unable to see his face in the dark room.

"Unless you programmed the cleaning droids to attend personal items, as well."

"They don't care what they clean. They just do it." She snuggled closer. "But I'll see if I can't give it a specialized program before I go."

Juliana frowned, glad it was dark and he couldn't see her expression. He'd given her a place to stay, but she couldn't live off him forever. How long was overstaying her welcome? She wouldn't assume just because they'd had sex that she could continue to take from him. Reprogramming his electronics would only repay him so long.

"I've been thinking ..."

"Oh, yeah? About what?" She waited for him to speak, running her fingertips over the strong arm holding her waist. Juliana wondered why he was hesitating.

After some time had passed, Maverick said, "I think you should stay here. With me."

"Oh?" She pulled back slightly. Pleasure filled her at his admission.

"Not as a tenant, that seems too formal, but as my roommate," he explained when she didn't answer.

Juliana tried to sit up, slightly disappointed though she knew she shouldn't be. His arm tightened, holding her to him. She was a free woman and could do whatever she pleased, but she didn't want to give him the wrong idea. She didn't want to lead him on, only to hurt him. She cared too much about him for that. But, until her life was straightened out, it wouldn't be fair to let him think that there could be anything more between them. Her messy existence wasn't his problem and he'd already been a lifesaver, going above and beyond the call of friendship.

"Maverick, I'm not looking for a commitment. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed our time together, but I don't want you to get the wrong impression. I'm sorry. I should have laid the ground rules first. I just ... Well, honestly, I just thought we were on the same page. I'm sorry if I'm hurting your feelings, but I'm just not ready to commit again, especially after only one night."

He chuckled and kissed her temple. "I know you don't want a commitment and the truth is I'm not one to jump into a relationship either. It's just nice to have someone here when I get home. I'm not looking for commitment. Since my divorce it's been rather quiet around the house. I miss the noise. I miss someone being around to watch transmissions and eat with and talk to."

Juliana sighed, not moving. What did she do? What could she say? It was a generous offer, to be sure.

"We'll just be roommates," he said. "No commitment at all except half the bills and utilities. I'll give you until your Assets Distribution is taken care of, because I know how hard it is, but as soon as you are able to do so, you have to kick in. Honestly, I wouldn't mind the help around here. I want to finish remodeling the house and the extra help with bills would free up the space credits."

"Roommates with a few perks?" She asked, stroking his arm. It was a crazy idea, one she might not have ever considered before now. But it sounded just like what she needed. She didn't want to live alone either.

"Why not? It's not like we're in love with anyone else," he said. "I say if we both feel in the mood then we should indulge our fantasies. If not, then we don't. We'll never have to answer to each other. We'll never have to explain."

"And only we can change the rules of the relationship," Juliana said. "*If and when* we're ready."

"Exactly," he agreed. Maverick pulled her closer. "Besides, I walk the mean streets everyday. It's not always safe for a woman to live alone. What better protection than to live with a cop?"

Hearing the honest tone in his voice, she felt he really meant it. "It would be nice to have a friend around."

"I agree. Also, if at any time you're unhappy living here or if it doesn't work out then you can leave whenever you choose. Until you know what's happening, there's no need to make hasty decisions. What do you have to lose? You said you didn't have anywhere else to go."

Juliana closed her eyes. "Okay. We'll try it. But if either of us is unhappy then we call an end to it. Deal?"

"Deal."

"Okay," Juliana nodded. This was so crazy it might just work. "Deal."

"I'll arrange to have someone bring over your things from storage," he said. "Since it's only been a few days, I'm sure my friend won't charge you. He's a good guy."

"Thank you and make sure you thank him. I really appreciate it." Juliana sighed. Maverick's home as hers? It seemed fitting. She was comfortable here and found she didn't even really miss her old house. Decorating and lawn work had just been a way to pass the hours, to put meaning into her existence. It was a way to drown herself and keep busy.

"And you feel free to put your things wherever you want to. This house will be as much yours as mine as long as you're here."

Juliana reached to stroke his face. "You are a primary amongst men, Officer Perkins."

"Now," Maverick said, flipping her on her back. His tight body settled

comfortably into hers. “All I need to know is do you want to make love here, or in the shower.”

“Mm,” Juliana moaned, wiggling around beneath him as she tried to stretch her tired muscles. “Shower. Definitely.”

“Good choice. I’ll go start the water.” Maverick leaned in to kiss her, missed, and pecked her cheek. Unfazed, he sat up and she heard him walking toward the bathroom. The light flipped on, showing her the way to follow him.

Juliana didn’t move right away. What a strange week it had been. She had started it in one life and was now in a completely different one.

“A better one,” she assured herself. “This is the hard part, starting over, but it’s for the best.”

She lay on the bed, staring up at the ceiling in the dim light. The sound of water running invaded her thoughts. Did Maverick have an old water shower? She had been expecting the warm laser lights of a decontaminator, not water.

“What?” Maverick asked. His naked, perfect body was silhouetted by the bathroom light. He was gorgeous. “I didn’t hear what you said.”

“Nothing. I was just talking to myself,” she answered, moving to get up off the bed. She never was one for marathon sex, but somehow, she felt her body stirring to go again. Maybe it was just Jeff who didn’t turn her on anymore. Maybe he never really had. Juliana had never felt this comfortable with him.

“Mmm,” was all he said, as he pulled her to his mouth. Crushing his lips to hers, he kissed her deeply, walking her with him toward the shower.

Steam filled the bathroom, inviting them to the stream of warm water. Maverick opened the stall door and reached in, testing the temperature before letting go long enough to let her step into the shower. Juliana hesitated as she looked inside. “I’ve never been in a water shower before.”

He chuckled. “You’ll never get into a decontaminator again. I promise, you’ll love it.”

Juliana reached in, touching the warm water. She’d been wet before, so wasn’t frightened. Slowly, she stepped into the stall, only to moan as the water hit her flesh. It felt good, massaging over her entire length. Maverick shut the stall door and grabbed a small container off a shelf along the side. Dipping his fingers into the pot, he took out some white gel. Juliana watched, curious as he lathered it in his hands.

“Soap,” he said, moving to touch her. It glided over her flesh as he took his time washing her. It felt wicked and wonderful at the same time, a slow arousal all on its own. The lather made his fingers glide as he teased her flesh, taking his time to rub every inch.

“You know,” she said, caught between a pant and a moan. “I can honestly say I’ve never had a man bathe me before. Mmm, have I been missing out.”

“Now, that is a real shame,” Maverick answered, moving her so the water hit her skin and rinsed away the suds. “You should have men begging to bathe you.”

Not to be outdone, Juliana lathered up her hands and scrubbed him, as well, exploring the tight peaks of his body down to his stiff arousal. Soon they were kissing, their slick bodies pressed tightly together as they made love in the shower. Her hair stuck to her flesh and the taste of water invaded their kiss as he turned her into the stream.

Maverick continued to bathe her, reaching for shampoo. He ran it into her locks, pressing the soapy length against her back as he kept kissing her. Letting her go so she

could rinse, he ran his soapy hands through his shorter hair and then did the same. He followed the shampoo with conditioner, though more got on her backside than her hair. Juliana didn't mind. She was too busy running conditioner over his hair and neck. The erotic feel of flesh sliding against wet flesh became too much. She needed to feel him inside her once more.

"I can't wait any longer," she breathed heavily. "I need you."

"Mmm," he agreed, crushing her against the wall. The water hit his back as he grabbed her hips. Juliana wrapped her arms around his neck. Maverick groaned, thrusting up so he was imbedded completely inside her welcoming sex.

Their bodies strained as Maverick took her slowly, conquering every inch of her with his hands. He toyed with her nipples, pinching them, moving only to find the sensitive bud hidden in her wet folds to give it the same torturous treatment.

Tension built inside her, making it hard to breathe. Maverick didn't stop as he rocked her higher and higher, grabbing her hips to hold her steady. His movements became more rushed. He thrust harder and faster, grunting as he drove her over the edge of passion. Juliana cried out as her whole body shook. Maverick's groan joined hers, echoing in the bathroom as he stiffened inside of her. His body jerked and she knew he was coming hard.

Weak, she fell limp, pinned between Maverick and the hard wall. The shower continued to beat down, the water cooler than before. Or was it that her body was hot from their lovemaking?

"I don't want to let you go," he whispered. "I feel like I could do this forever."

Juliana didn't say a word. She couldn't. Too much was going on in her life to make any promises or declarations and she refused to lead Maverick on. He said he didn't want a commitment and she wouldn't do anything to try and change his mind. She had to get her life in order first. Then, and only then, could she start to plan her future.

"I love the feel of you. You're so soft, just as a woman should be." He kissed her neck. "And the sounds you make, *mmm*, perfect. You're perfect."

"Let's go to bed," she said, yawning. "I don't think I can stand much longer."

Maverick instantly turned off the shower and stepped out. When she joined him, the cooler air hit her wet skin and she shivered in response.

"Here," Maverick said, quickly drying her with a giant cut of material. After he'd done himself, he swept her up into his arms and carried her off to bed.

* * * *

Juliana was hesitant as she watched Sean and, who she could only assume was an off duty cop, carry a plastic box of her clothes up toward the guest bedroom. When Maverick said he was going to go get help to move her, she hadn't expected them to come back with a load already in hand.

"Hey," Maverick said, walking in with his own box. "We just went ahead and grabbed it all. We'll put it upstairs for you and you can unpack later."

"Oh, okay." She started to nod, but more men followed behind him with even more boxes. There were nearly a dozen helpers carting boxes. After she got over her stunned moment of complete and utter appreciation, she hurried to the kitchen, quickly preparing refreshments for them--small pastry puffs filled with cream and dried sweet flower petals. Putting them on a dish, she carried it out.

She was still holding it when the first mover walked by. He paused, looked at the

food, grinned and grabbed one. She didn't mind, but the other man helping him carry the box protested loudly. "Hey, Tym, carry your own weight."

Tym laughed, grabbed a puff and threw it at the man's face. He opened his mouth and caught it, chewing as he began to back up the stairs.

Maverick walked past and she made a weak noise in an effort to stop him. He did, smiling at her. His eyes went to her mouth as if he'd kiss her, but he held back.

"Do you want me to hire droids to do this?" she asked

"Not a problem, ma'am," one of the men said behind Maverick, having overheard her. "Mav, here, promised to let us sample something called cord and blue."

Maverick laughed. "Cordon bleu."

"Yeah," the guy repeated taking a handful of the dried flowers. "Cord and blue."

Juliana laughed, passing the dish of refreshments to Maverick as she hurried back to the food simulator. It didn't take long before the men were done, armed with plates and standing on the front step of Maverick's home moaning in appreciation while they ate. Maverick introduced her to his friends, who were indeed all off duty police officers. All of them were nice, making jokes about work, about family, about life in general.

"You have got to give this program to my wife," Tym said, as she took his empty plate. "Stars know I love her, but she can't program her way out of a plastic crate full of air."

Juliana chuckled. "I'd be glad to."

"So, ah, Mav, you need help moving anything tomorrow?" Faul asked, turning hopeful eyes to Juliana. "I'm not doing anything for lunch, or dinner, or breakfast for that matter."

"Ah, you're on shift during lunch and dinner," his partner, Jim corrected.

"Exactly, I'm not going to be doing anything tomorrow," Faul teased.

"You are all welcome to stop by anytime and I'll materialize something for you to eat," Juliana promised.

"Ah," Maverick held up his hand. "I don't think you want to do that. You'll never get rid of them."

The men laughed.

"We should go," one of them announced.

"Yeah, it was a pleasure, Juliana," another said.

"See you tomorrow for breakfast," Faul teased, "and lunch."

The men left and Juliana sighed, moving to wash their dishes. A small smile crossed her face as she worked. Maverick joined her, pulling her hand. "Why don't you let the cleaning droids do that today?"

"I really don't mind the work," she said. "I like having something to do."

"I know, but come relax and talk to me before I have to go in to work."

"Don't they give you a day off?" she asked. "You've worked every day since I've been here."

"They were short handed and I agreed to picking up the shifts. It won't be so much on the next schedule." Maverick sighed, plopping down on his couch. He looked at the window. "You changed the landscape."

Juliana glanced at the red, barren hills. Dust looked as if it blew across them. "I was flipping through, and I swear an alien head popped up. I'm trying to catch it again."

Maverick laughed, lying down on the couch. "Come here. We'll watch

together.”

He patted the space next to him and she nestled against his side, laying her head on his bent arm. His arm slid over her waist and he kissed her neck. Being with Maverick was so comfortable. After a few minutes, he said, “Are you sure there was an alien?”

“Yes. I know it was something,” she insisted. Suddenly, a face popped up, as if jumping up to peek inside. Juliana giggled. “Did you see it?”

“Mmm, no, missed it,” he said. “I was too busy looking at you.”

Turning so she faced him, she threaded her legs into his. “I guess we’ll just have to stay here until it comes around again.”

She closed her eyes, completely happy. Nothing else seemed to matter in this moment, not the outside world, not court dates or Assets Distribution forms. There was only Maverick and her and the holographic alien peeping in the window.

Chapter Seven

Three months later ...

Juliana took a deep and calming breath, reaching down to smooth her business suit. The black of the tunic-like top went well with the loose, sheer black over dark gray slacks. She held it together with a thick sash. The slacks flowed as she again started to walk, swishing around her legs. She paused at the door leading to the courthouse. Behind her, the sound of hover vehicles landing and taking off sounded. The landing pads were busy in this part of Baida Proper since it was the main district.

The wind had a cold chill to it, fitting for what she was at the courthouse to do. Maverick had offered to come with her, but she refused. This was her mess to straighten. Whatever happened was between her and Jeff. She reached for the door, only to hear a giggle behind her.

No.

Not her.

Juliana ran her hand over the scanner. The door dissipated and she went through the empty space into the courthouse. She walked faster, not wanting to get caught in conversation with Jeff's girlfriend, San de.

The courthouse was nearly seventy stories tall. The main floor was separated into two equal parts, one half offices and the other half lobby. The lobby's ceiling was nearly forty stories high with a crystal chandelier in the center that reflected the outside light and made little rainbow patterns on the higher walls. When someone first entered the rainbows spelled, 'Baida Proper Courthouse and Earthbase Law Offices'. But, when one continued walking, the words disappeared and the little rainbows seemed to spread over the ceiling in random patterns.

Large columns supported the higher floors, which allowed them to stretch across the building's full length. A transparent, force field elevator was on one of the columns, which would take one up to any floor. Past the elevator was a reception droid and a variety of stores and food pavilions. Above the pavilions, office space was stacked all forty floors up, then only switching to the full building length the rest of the way to the top.

"Yoo-hoo, Juliana, wait," San de called, her voice an annoying trill.

If Juliana walked any faster, she'd be running.

Be nice. Be nice, she thought, hoping to make it to the elevator before being stopped by the woman. She heard heels clicking behind her. *Don't turn around. No matter what you do, do not turn around. You don't want to be forced to talk to the woman.*

"Julie, Julie, wait, I need to talk to you. Wait." With each word, San de's voice got louder. "Julie!"

Juliana stopped, waiting a few seconds until she turned around. The woman was screaming her name, drawing attention from the few people in the lobby. She didn't want a scene and she most assuredly didn't want to talk to the woman.

Juliana really tried not to look down, but San de's very round, very prominent breasts drew her attention. They were like two planets orbiting a twit. The fact that she wore a bright yellow jumpsuit with lime green pin striping down the tight sleeves didn't help matters. The neckline dipped low, showing an indecent amount of cleavage. No less repulsive was the woman's short, bizarrely yellow hair. It was done in large curls that fell to her chin. Juliana blinked, almost blinded by all the yellow.

"Sandy Valley," she acknowledged, her tone flat. "Can I help you?"

"Oh, no, no, Julie. It's pronounced San de Val le," she said, stressing her name. "*San de Val le*."

"It's pronounced Ms. Harrison," Juliana said. The woman looked shocked at the tone, blinked several times and then giggled and waved her hand. "Was there something you needed? I'm due for an appointment."

"Oh, I know. Me, too. I'll walk with you," San de said.

"Oh?" Juliana asked.

"We're going to the same place," San de continued, motioning that Juliana should go. "The Assets Distribution Hearing."

Jeff was bringing a date to the hearing to divide their belongings? And why was she surprised by it?

"That's why I wanted to stop you before we went in," San de said. Juliana reached out and hit the scanner that would call the elevator platform to take them up. "I know you contested the first Assets Distribution Agreement thingy, but it would really be great if you could sign the papers right away today. My parents are coming into town and I was hoping that Jeff would be officially free, before they got here tonight."

"Are you jesting with me?" Juliana looked at her.

"No, they're really coming to the planet today," San de nodded enthusiastically. "And it's been so long since he sent you those last papers. I mean, ugh..."

"It's been three months," Juliana arched a brow. Was this woman serious? Sadly, it was clear by her vacant, expectant look that she was.

"Exactly, I know," San de nodded. "A really long time."

"We were together for eight years," Juliana frowned. "I hardly think three months is considered long in comparison."

"Oh, but that wasn't a real marriage. Jeff says you were just a starter wife and that his parents made him marry you. Poor man. Forced marriages are so nineteenth century Earth--that's what Jeff says."

Okay, that stung. For the most part Juliana didn't give two comets what Jeff thought about her, but even she could admit being called a 'starter wife' stung--even if she and Jeff both knew the words weren't true. The fact that he even discussed her with San de was annoying.

"I'm sure he has told you that we are engaged to be married," San de lifted her hand. Juliana wondered why she hadn't noticed the ring before. It shone almost as bright as the yellow jumpsuit and hair. The champagne diamond was huge, cut into a large square and held in place by bright gold. "He's told everyone about it. Well, everyone but my parents. We're going to tell them tonight over dinner. That's why I need you to make it quick today. I would really like to make it official, for my parents. You know how parents are."

"Uh-huh," she mumbled, more in disbelief than in agreement of the babbling

twit's words.

"Oh, and another question, can you give me the program codes to the cleaning droids? Jeff's pants aren't coming out right. No matter what I tell it to do, the droid won't listen to me. I've been yelling at it day and night."

"Are you living at my house?" Juliana tilted her head to the side.

"I'm living in your old house." San de nodded. "Jeff says it's mine now. Well, ours. As soon as this is final, I'm going to redecorate. No offense, but it's so ... un-modern."

"It's called retro-Earth."

"Whatever. It looks old." San de snorted.

"Let me see if I understand this correctly. This is my Assets Distribution Hearing and you'd like me to make it more convenient for you after you started dating my husband, while he was still by all accounts my husband, after you moved into my house and are wearing one of my old rings on your finger and," Juliana leaned forward, sniffing, "my imported perfume, which was missing the day I was asked to leave."

Juliana's lips pressed tightly together as she stepped onto the elevator platform that appeared. Why continue talking? The woman wouldn't ever get it. Her type never did.

"Uh-huh." San de came with her. "I guess that's what I'm saying."

Juliana looked through the transparent walls as it took them up to the fiftieth floor. The ground level got smaller and smaller and she entertained thoughts of pushing the woman off the platform.

"So we're agreed? You'll make this fast so Jeff and I can get out of here?"

Juliana desperately wanted to ask San de how in all the known galaxies she'd managed to live as long as she did being as stupid as she was. She refrained, but it was hard. No part of her wanted to sink down to San de's level or Jeff's for that matter. She was only here to do what she had to do. If Jeff was fair, she wouldn't fight it and let him take exactly half. But, if he refused to see reason, she'd have no choice but to defend her position.

"You know what, San de, forget I said anything. I don't want Jeff, you can have him. He's all yours."

"So you--"

"Wait," Juliana said, her tone falsely pleasant. "I wasn't done speaking."

"Oh."

"To answer you're inquires. No, you can't have the program codes for the cleaning droids because you're not old enough to legally operate much more than a tooth cleaning laser. No, I won't go into the courtroom with the aim of making your life easier. This has nothing to do with you and, I can assure you, when I'm in there today, you and your parents will be the last thing on my mind. If you want this over quickly, tell Jeff to stop being a greedy little rocket boy and to give me a fair division of assets. All I'm asking for is fair and equal."

Do not let her get to you, she told herself, trying to calm her nerves. How could she not be hurt by being called a 'starter wife'? Do not get in the muck. You don't want Jeff. These last few months with Maverick have taught you that you there is a better way to live. Let this atrocious, airhead of a woman have Jeff. They deserve each other.

"You know, he's right. You act like he's been unfair to you or something. You

just cleaned the house. At most, all he owes you is a wage for services. I mean, he already told me he's been giving you credits all these months out of the goodness of his character. He's already given you five hundred space credits," San de said, as if that made a difference.

"Ah, actually no," Juliana took a deep breath. This not being angry was hard. Jeff hadn't given her a single credit. "He originally offered a hundred and then tried to buy me off with a measly twenty-thousand."

"Oh." The woman looked lost.

Thankfully, the platform stopped and they could get out. Juliana paused only long enough for the security droid to scan her for weapons. At the end of the hall, a woman was in tears, being comforted by a group of friends. The floor was designated wholly for familial domestic affairs--marriages, divorces, asset disputes, custody and any other type of disagreements between family members.

The walls were dark brown, making San de stand out even more in her yellow. The woman tried to hurry past the security droid and Juliana hid a smile as the droid forcibly stopped her. Going down the long hall, she spotted the courtroom labeled for Asset Distribution and went inside. Jeff was already there. His insipid brown eyes found her and she frowned back at him, returning his look.

She thought of Maverick, missing him terribly. The months had been hard, but she'd gotten through them. And all because of Maverick. He left her alone when she needed to cry and be alone, gave her passion when she needed sex and when she needed someone to hold her, he held her. For three months, he hadn't demanded anything from her. He hadn't even insisted she help with bills, even after she'd gotten a job at a local school, working with troubled children. The job came from his recommendation, and was one of the most rewarding things she'd ever done. His not asking for money didn't stop her from helping out. She liked contributing. In fact, just doing that had made her more confident in herself.

Giving a stern look, she stepped inside, walked boldly to the court's record keeper and let her thumb be scanned for the record. Then, turning to Jeff, she asked, "Are you ready to make a fair division? All I want is half."

"You don't deserve a single credit," Jeff answered, his tone confident.

Juliana shook her head, truly disappointed in him. She hadn't come here with the intention of being a bitch, but he wasn't going to leave her a choice. Knowing Jeff, he would never know what hit him, she reached into her pocket and she handed over a chip to the judge, who in turn put it into her reader so everyone could see the contents on the viewing screen behind her. "I seek only to fully reclaim what is mine, your grace."

"Which is nothing," Jeff said. "I'm the one who works for a living."

The door in the back of the courtroom opened and San de called, "Wait for me. I'm here!"

"And you are?" the judge asked.

"San de Val le," San de answered, holding out her ring finger. "I'm Jeff's fiancée."

"Quiet, Miss Valley," the judge said, her tone stern. San de opened her mouth to speak. Jeff shushed her and told her to sit down. She did, sulking.

"Your grace, I have proof that my marriage to Mr. Harrison was never legally binding. He used a fake scanner print in what I'm guessing was an attempt to hide some

very unsavory arrests on his record involving women of, ah,” she paused looking at San de, “low morals.”

“What?” Jeff demanded his face red. He looked down at his table and tapped his pockets, as if searching for some defense. He’d come unprepared, clearly thinking she would be blindsided by the proceedings and not have a clue.

Juliana knew he’d never find a defense for it. In her search of the documents for their assets, she had found Jeff’s print. She didn’t know why she never caught it before, but there was an obvious difference in the marriage contract and the documents he’d signed after becoming a lawyer. It took some doing, but Maverick was able to look up his old record for her. It would seem Jeff was a very bad boy, one who probably thought that he’d erased his record when he became a lawyer. But, electronic records never really went away.

“As you can see, we were never married legally. All the documentation is there-- affidavits from the arresting officers and a denouncement by the clergy. The only legal thing was when I changed my name to fit his.”

“Who wrote that for you?” Jeff demanded.

“I did,” Juliana smiled, moving to take her seat. “I warned you. I paid attention when doing your homework. By the way, Jeff, you should really call your parents. They would like a word with you.”

“You called my parents?” he gasped, appearing very much like the child about to be scolded.

“The clergy did, sorry,” she said, not really sorry. He’d lied to all of them for years and it was time to face his deeds.

“Do you have a list of your personal assets?” the judge asked.

“I do,” Juliana said. “Screen two is a list of what I brought with me into the marriage, itemized and documented. As you see, it includes Ms. Valle’s ring, which I’d be willing to sell to Mr. Harrison for fair market price.”

San de pouted, but looked relieved when she didn’t have to give it back right away. Jeff sulked, looking miserable.

“Screen three is a copy of my inheritance and the purchase documents for my home using the money from it.” Juliana continued to list her case. Jeff had no defense.

“In light of there not being a legal standing marriage, all personal property is hereby returned to the original owner. As for assets shared or purchased during the time of co-habitation, they will be divided equally as it appears Mrs. Harrison was one half partner in the business of your law position.”

“What? This is--” Jeff was cut off by the judge’s hard look as she continued her ruling. The ruling was fair, as the judge let him keep the hover car and a good portion of the house’s furnishings.

“Jeffy?” San de asked, her voice a whine. “But what about my parents? If we don’t have a house where will they stay?”

Juliana didn’t speak to Jeff as she thanked the judge and left. Within seconds the judge had her half of their credits instantly transferred to an account under her name and police officers dispatched to assure Jeff left her property and her belongings without incident.

As she left the elevator platform and walked into the lobby, she smiled. Maverick was waiting for her on the outside steps. She saw him clearly through the front lobby

windows. He was always on her mind and seeing him in his uniform still made her shiver every time.

Nodding his head, he smiled as she came out. The small dimple showed on the side of his beautiful lips. She'd spent hours kissing that mouth. In fact, since their very first embrace, she couldn't seem to stop kissing him. It was crazy to jump from a nonexistent marriage straight into a relationship, but that's exactly what had seemed to happen. Only, neither one of them had ever talked about it.

Pushing through the door, she started to go to him, only to be stopped by a familiar voice.

"Juliana?"

Juliana was surprised to see Arielle, the wife of Jeff's boss. She hadn't seen the woman since before the restraining order. They'd served on charity boards together and Arielle was one of the few women Juliana had missed talking to in her exile. The woman was stunningly beautiful, with a slender, graceful body and a delicate bone structure. Her brown hair was pulled back into a bun, but she by no means looked dowdy with the tame style.

"Juliana," Arielle said, hugging her. "I was so worried about you. No one knew where to find you. When I found out the proceedings were today, I came down to see you. How are you?"

"I'm good. It's thankfully over and I ... I'm good."

"I can't believe Jeff. When I found out what he'd done...." Arielle shivered, shaking her head. "Why didn't you call me?"

"You're married to--"

"Pish!" the woman dismissed, as if knowing what Juliana was going to say about her being married to Jeff's boss. "But, that is exactly my point. I am married to his boss and have some authority over the business. I may be a housewife, but my husband lives in that house and I'm ruler there. When I found out what happened, that he had evicted you without a credit to your name, I made sure my husband was aware of the situation. Jeff is about to get his just reward. Mortimer is going up there right now to have a word with him."

"You didn't have to do that," Juliana said.

"Oh, but I did. Besides, it wasn't hard. I just used the skills all women have to negotiate." Arielle leaned in and said quietly, "I refused sexual attention until I got my way. It only took about five minutes."

Juliana laughed.

"My husband quickly saw the light and agrees with me. A man who doesn't take care of his family obligations wouldn't be a team player and the firm needs someone reliable. He will still have a job, but a woman will be promoted into his spot as a partner. Lacy Vanders."

"That will be a real sting to his ego," Juliana said.

"I know," Arielle chuckled. "So, how are you really? Do you have a place to stay? Please tell me you got the house? That is your house. All that work you put into it."

"Yes, I did." Juliana saw Maverick standing back from them.

"Good, good," Arielle nodded. She turned to where Juliana looked.

"Ah, Maverick," Juliana said. "This is Arielle--"

Arielle gave a small whistle. "Well, well, well, I see now why we haven't seen

you around lately. And, in which case, we all forgive you.”

Juliana tried not to blush.

“I’m going to head up.” Arielle pointed up the side of the tall courthouse. “But I’ll get in touch with you later. I need your help with some luncheon thing. You know those Tennian diplomats are so fussy. I can never please them, but they rave about you. I just might have to hire you to do it for me.”

“I’d be happy to help,” Juliana answered as Arielle waved goodbye.

“I see you have more friends than you thought.” Maverick’s voice washed over her. She’d missed him even though it had been a short time.

“It would seem so,” Juliana answered.

“So it’s over,” he said.

“Yes, completely over.” She sighed, feeling light and carefree.

“Congratulations. I heard a call go out over the dispatch for a couple of the officers to escort Jeff from the courthouse. Apparently, he’s causing a scene and broke a chair.”

“That isn’t too surprising considering his mood when I walked out.” Juliana touched his arm, lightly stroking his uniform. She wanted to lean into him, but was aware that they were in public and he was on duty. “I couldn’t have done it without you. Thank you.”

“Anytime,” he said, not meeting her eye as he looked up the building. “So I heard you got your house back.”

“Yes, I did.” She wondered at his tone. Her house didn’t feel like her home. She liked living with Maverick. “I got everything I asked for. A completely fair division.”

“You deserve it, Juliana. You deserve everything you could ever want.” He touched her cheek. “Are you ready to go celebrate? I got off shift an hour ago. Sean can give us a ride.”

“I know I said I wanted to go out after this was over, but would you mind terribly if we just went home?” Juliana asked, peeking up at him to gauge his reaction when she said ‘home.’ “I just want to take a long shower and relax the rest of the day while we watch an old transmission.”

“I suppose you miss your place, don’t you?” His face was strained as he glanced around the front of the courthouse. They were relatively alone, with only a few people walking back and forth.

“I don’t know. It’s just a house.” She gave him a coy look. “And I don’t have a water shower.”

“I can help you put one in,” he offered. She grimaced. That wasn’t what she’d been hinting at.

Juliana started walking, pulling him along with her. “Can we get out of here before they drag Jeff down? I don’t want to create another scene.”

“All right.”

“Is something wrong? You sound strange.” She studied his handsome face as he brought her toward the hover patrol car. His partner, Sean, was sitting inside, waiting for them. He lifted his hand, smiling and waving. All the guys on the force had been really nice to her, accepting her easily into their midst. A few of them even came to the house to eat, mostly the single guys with no woman at home, and Maverick had invited them over a few times for drinks.

“No,” he said, only to stop before the car, not opening the door. “Well, yes. No.”

“Maverick? What is it?” Her gut tightened. What was this? This was supposed to be a happy day. Now that she was completely free of commitments, did he not want her anymore? Was he going to end their affair? Demand she move out of his house now that she had her own? Did he regret the last months?

“I don’t want you to move out,” he blurted. “I want you to stay with me.”

Juliana gasped, suddenly realizing how silly her worries were. She knew this man, knew him with all her heart. He was good, kind and he would never hurt her.

Smiling, she touched his face. “Why would I move out?”

“Well, you have money now and you,” he paused, taking a deep breath. “You don’t need me.”

“Don’t need you? Maverick, that’s foolish talk. I don’t want to move out of your home. You’re my best friend. I like our living arrangements. Just because I have money doesn’t mean I’m going to change anything. If you’ll have me, I want to stay.”

Maverick shook his head. “That’s a real shame.”

Juliana gasped. “What? You--you don’t like the way things are between us? I don’t understand. I thought you said you didn’t want me to move out.”

He again glanced around. Juliana followed his gaze. No one was there. He was acting so strange. Sean knocked on the window to hurry them up. Maverick ignored him.

“I want more,” he said, looking deeply into her eyes. “I’ve waited for this day. I knew you wanted to get this part of your life over with once and for all and well, now that it is, I have something to say.”

Her heart beat faster and her mouth became suddenly dry. She’d never seen him look at her like this.

“I love you, Juliana. I didn’t expect it to happen, but I do. I like having you at the house and these last months I’ve been so scared that after your financial arrangements were taken care of, you’d want to leave and start over. Well, I’m asking you to start over. With me.”

Juliana frowned, confused. What was he saying? He loved her? He wanted her to start over? It was all so sudden, and yet not. Joy unfurled within her, spreading over her entire length.

Reaching into his jacket, Maverick pulled out a ring, “I was going to give this to you tonight at dinner, but ... marry me. Not right away, just someday. Say you’ll be mine. I love you. I want to give you a life that rocket boy never could.”

“Maverick,” she whispered, tears in her eyes.

“I love you, Juliana,” he said, cupping her face. “And I want to be with you. I don’t care if we get married tomorrow or in twenty years. I just want to know that you’re mine for the rest of our lives.”

Nodding, she smiled, never having felt so happy even as her eyes spilled over with tears. What was it about his man? He could take what should be her toughest days and make them the best. “Yes. I love you, too, Maverick and yes. Yes, I will marry you ... someday.”

He whooped at the top of his lungs, darting forward to wrap his arms around her waist. Spinning her in circles, he kissed her. Everything was perfect.

Sean poked his head out of the hover car’s window. “I take it she said yes? Does

this mean we are having a party at your house tonight?”

“Sorry Sean, tonight is a party for two,” Juliana said, unable to keep from laughing. Then, to Maverick she whispered, “I love you, Officer Perkins.”

The End