

A person wearing a dark suit and a white shirt is holding a large, glossy red heart with both hands. The heart is the central focus of the image.

Lust in Space

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"Danger, Will Robinson!"

The words looped through Serena Landon's mind every time the ship's captain, Hadrian Castle, entered her field of vision.

She wasn't even sure where the phrase originated, having lost its meaning over the centuries. Though most likely it came from an old Earth parable of some sort. Tracking down the bits of flotsam that peppered the lexicon from their Terran ancestors had become a bit of a hobby since she'd taken what was known as the refugee run between Cimiron and Solarion.

It also helped her keep her mind off the sexy and aloof captain.

By the stars, he was enough to make a woman's mouth water in the middle of the Solarion desert while the dual suns were at zenith.

She stared, willing him away as he neared the pilot's console where she sat punching navigation codes into the ship's helm.

Bless her racing heart, but she loved the way he moved. Confidence oozed from his pores. She'd always been a sucker for confident men.

She took a deep breath to steady herself and willed a bit harder.

No such luck. He loomed over her, a menacing twinkle in his eyes.

Did the man get off by trying to intimidate her? Or paid a commission for each bead of sweat that grew under her arms the closer he came.

One of these days he was going to move a bit too close, tempt her a little too much and she was going to put him into a lip lock that'd make a Kedishian sucker fish take notes.

"Alter our course. We have a package pickup on Cilanie Station." He issued the command as if he expected her to know some secret reason for the deviation from their regular route.

Her fingers flew over the controls. "Altering course."

"When we arrive, I need you to accompany me to the rendezvous point."

Serena tore her concentration away from her task to glance up. "Me, sir? That's highly irregular. The pilot always stays with the ship unless a co-pilot is on board."

Most refugee runs carried only a small complement of soldiers. Since other crew members could pilot a ship enough to make a safe run between their homeworld and the

settlement on Solarion should the pilot become incapacitated, co-pilots had been nixed and reallocated to other duties on the bigger cargo vessels.

"The ship will be in capable hands. Leeway will stand guard while we're away."

Serena caught sight of the Runner foot soldier. A wicked stunner—non-regulation issue—was strapped to his hip, another larger rifle hung from his shoulder. He was a one-man arsenal.

Serena raised a brow. "Just make sure he doesn't shoot us when we return."

Then something amazing happened, Captain Castle laughed. The sound moved through Serena, a flow of warm honey and forbidden fruit. The action changed him so completely she sat mesmerized by the sight.

He sobered. "Is something wrong?"

She tore her gaze away and studied the console. "No. Nothing. We should be at Cilanie Station in one common hour."

He gave a quick nod and finally moved away to bother some other hapless crew member.

Whew!

That was close. She'd heard the countdown to disaster start in her head.

Thee, two, one. Liplock!

Still why did the captain insist she go with him? If the High Command wanted to double this refugee run with a package pickup, didn't it make more sense to send Leeway into the fray on the space station than sending a petite pilot? Though no slouch in the self-defense department, Serena had rather stay on board and watch the ship than go running around with a man who made her light-headed and sweaty.

Wait a minute. Who was she kidding? Cilanie Station was a feast for all the senses. She'd be an idiot to pass up the chance to get close to some of the exotic shops on board. She might actually be able to find a leather-bound edition of *The Brothers Grimm*.

An hour, huh?

She shot a glance to the Runner first class seated at the communication desk.

"Take helm control. I'll be back in five."

She snuck from the bridge and into the lav designated for the soldiers. The few girly luxuries she allowed herself on a run, were stashed in the bottom of her locker in a black bag. She unlatched the front and stuck her hand inside, feeling around for what she sought.

"There you are." She curled her fingers around the expensive bottle of jasmanerine lotion.

After a quick wipe down and a subtle application of the sexy fragrance, she'd be ready to meet the captain.

They docked at the station's third inner pylon, near the commercial district.

"Make sure my ship is still here when I get back," she told a stern-faced Leeway as she and Captain Castle started down the boarding ramp. "I'd hate like hell to have to kick your ass."

Leeway smirked. "Just go pick up your package."

Serena followed the captain through the docking port and into the main causeway. People from all races and species came to Cilanie Station to shop, trade or vacation. Known throughout the galaxy as a pleasure destination, the five-mile port had diversions enough for every taste.

Serena walked behind Castle, watching the hypnotic movement of his muscles through the thin, skintight uniform. There wasn't a flaw anywhere on his physique. At least anywhere that was noticeable. And with the new Runner flight suits, she was pretty damn sure her observation of Castle's perfection extended to all the covered parts as well.

They walked for another few sectors filled with open stall market goods and communication kiosks. A few times she let her pace slow to linger over a vender's cart. Castle had to come back and pull her away. He didn't act upset at her less-than-professional behavior, but oddly seemed amused.

Their journey ended in front of a swanky hotel whose name was fifty-seven symbols long but which translated to *The Garden of Coital Delights*.

Just what kind of package were they sent to retrieve? If it had anything to do with recycled sex toys or bodily fluids, she was so out of there. Nothing in her job description even came close to that kind of pick-up.

Worried, she stopped Castle as an elaborately dressed attendant opened the door for them. "What are we after here?"

"You're a student of old Earth culture, right?"

Shocked he'd know such a thing about her, she nodded.

"Are you as familiar with the legends?" Gently, he tucked his fingers in the small of her back, ushering her into the hotel lobby.

She started walking again if only to get away from the heat of his touch. "Depends on what legends you mean. I know about the Egyptian Pharaohs and the French Kings. I've

heard the stories of Napoleon and some guy named Johnny Appleseed. I'm currently salivating for a collected works of The Brothers Grimm."

Castle gave her one of his disarming smiles. "That's a start."

They approached the counter. Castle spoke to the desk clerk in a common dialect most space ports used as a language of commerce. It was a very direct speech without the inherent problems of individual nuances or misinterpreted emphases.

The clerk passed Castle a small packet, no bigger than a playing card.

Serena looked down at the impossibly insignificant package. "We came here for that? I've seen half a dozen Cimiron uniforms on the station, and we were asked to make a stop-over to pick up *that*?"

He held up the item in front of her eyes. "Remember the legends."

"So this is a treasure hunt?"

The smile returned. "Oh, there's no doubt about it."

Intrigued in spite of the waste in manpower used to retrieve the tiny treasure, Serena turned and followed Castle to the turbo lift on the other side of the lobby.

The glass lifts looked out over the ground floor and as it passed from there to the floors above, the top of the lobby opened to show people bustling along the station's busy market place.

Too bad they didn't have longer to stay. There were so many sights and sounds to explore.

And smells.

Something from the restaurant area made her mouth water. At least she told herself that was the case and it wasn't Captain Sexy Flight Suit next to her making her stomach burn and mouth fill.

If he turned to her and found her drooling, it would be the height of embarrassment.

They got off on the thirtieth floor. She watched as Castle opened the packet and a key chit fell out into his palm.

"Close your eyes?" he commanded as he flashed the chit across the key panel.

"Why? Is this a secret location or something? How are we going to find what we're looking for if our eyes are closed?"

Castle leaned near, speaking into her ear. "Oh, we'll find it. Trust me."

Heat shot down to settle in the pit of her belly.

The door opened with a low click.

"I mean it. Close your eyes."

"Yes, sir." This time Serena did as told.

Nearly stumbling over her own feet, she entered a space that felt closed in. Castle kept his hand on her waist, guiding her down a passage. The sound quality changed, suggesting they moved into a more open area.

"All right. You can open them."

Serena slowly lifted her lids. The room looked as if it came from a decadent dream. Crimson sheers and tiny white lights were draped from the ceiling like some fantasy tent. Cushions were placed on the floor around a short table. Silver dishes sat there, covered to retain heat.

"What's going on?"

Castle took her by the hand. "Are you hungry? We can talk while we eat."

She couldn't deny she needed a meal, but a sudden case of nerves chased the hunger pangs away. "Maybe, if you'll tell me what you're about."

"On the old Earth calendar, today is February 14th." He helped her sit, making sure she was comfortable before he took a seat beside her. Note—not across from her, but right smack dab against her thigh.

While her body short-circuited she took a tour through the celebrated days she remembered reading about in the historical files she'd plundered on the ship's computer.

The answer came to her like a song. St. Valentines Day was when sweethearts or lovers showed their appreciation for each other by giving trinkets or candy. Paper cards were also given with heartfelt sentiments of love.

"I can't believe you did this."

He gave her a gentle smile. "Believe it."

Hadrian had never been so nervous in his entire life. Even that time on Selitus IV when he'd been mistaken for a Boluvian gnat smuggler and thrown in solitary confinement for two common weeks had not caused as much anxiety as waiting for Serena's reaction to his gift.

Her green-gold eyes sparkled like two stars in the romantic lighting. "Why?"

Time to own up. Maybe it was a good thing they hadn't eaten yet. His stomach turned to knots. "Because I thought you'd enjoy it. That it would make you smile."

All right, a half truth, but he was flying in dangerous space here.

"It's amazing, sir."

Hadrian chuckled, taking her hand from where it rested in her lap. Such delicate fingers and soft skin. She was like touching genuine silk, not the manufactured shit that passed for it nowadays.

"Please don't call me sir tonight. I only want to hear my name on your lips."

Her expressive eyes widened. "Is that a good idea?"

"I think so."

Her lips parted, drawing his gaze. "You were going to tell me about the legends."

"You're single-minded in your scholarship." He leaned forward pouring them a bubbly drink called Champagne. He'd never had it before, but had seen it listed on the ritual offerings for the day.

"Depending on how far back you search and what source," he began. "St. Valentine's Day is either not truly associated with a saint at all, or the day a Christian, imprisoned by the Roman Empire, smuggled a letter out to his lover."

"Did she break him out of jail?"

Hadrian shook his head. "No. He was hanged for crimes against the state. However, he was sainted for having restored her sight. His lover was blind."

Serena put her hand to her chest. "I hear something like that I wonder what happened to the lover."

"No mention is ever made of her. Over the centuries, scholars debated the truth of the tale."

"It's still lovely."

He agreed.

She lifted her glass, sniffing at the bubbly drink. Gingerly, she took a sip then laughed. "It's good."

From inside his uniform he pulled a small paper envelope and card. The expense had been worth the look on her face as he placed it in her hand. "Open it."

"Paper, Hadrian? You didn't have to."

"It's part of the ritual."

She opened the flap, sliding the card out into her hand. She ran her finger over the drawn figures of lovers in an intimate embrace. "It's beautiful. I've never seen anything like it but on computer files. Who's the artist?"

He glanced down at the card. A momentary bubble of nervousness grew in his chest. "I am."

The talent of drawing with pen and ink was a lost art in their culture, having given over to programs coded into matrices where the images were only a keystroke away. It took the soul from the expression to Hadrian's way of thinking.

Serena's gaze met his. "You amaze me."

Hadrian had waited so long to hear such sweet words from her. Since the first time he'd boarded the *Cupid's Arrow* and saw her at the helm. She'd sat there staring—not at him—through him, deep enough to brush his soul. He hadn't been the same since.

He swept her golden hair back where it curled around her cheek. "I think you have that backwards. You've amazed me since the day we met. I want so much more from you than the distance there's been between us."

He wasn't sure who moved first, only that her lips were hot and sweet against his. The tight uniform molded to her perfect figure, enticing his hands to caress all the luscious female curves.

Hadrian turned his head, tracing his tongue along the seam of her lips. She opened, letting him in.

Connection.

It was as if the pieces of some great cosmic puzzle finally came together. If he wasn't secure in the knowledge the space station remained secured to its moorings, he'd have sworn they were adrift. As it stood, he felt as if he'd been burned by the sun the heat she put out was so intense.

He kissed each corner of her mouth. "I swear I didn't bring you here to seduce you." It was only a partial lie. He hadn't planned it, but he'd damn sure hoped it would end with them in bed.

Serena continued to kiss his face. Slowly, she made her way over his chin and down his neck. His eyes slid closed.

She grabbed the bottom of his shirt and began to pull it up. "Are you sure? Because if you are, I'll stop."

He laughed, placing his hands over hers. "I'm sure that wasn't my intent, but if you don't object, neither will I."

"The only objection I have at the moment is that you aren't touching me."

"I think I can correct that." Hadrian slid his hand up her waist to cup her breast, the nipple hard beneath the thin fabric.

Serena arched her back, bringing her more fully into his palm. "How long have you been planning this?"

"Since we met. I didn't know how to get your attention. You're very hard to please."

As he ran his thumb over her distended nipple, she let out a long purr. "You aren't doing such a bad job so far."

"I have learned a few things during my career with the Runners." He lowered her onto the cushions, following her down. "Like how to figure out what people want and give it to them."

"Very diplomatic of you."

He wasn't feeling much the diplomat at the moment. More like the horny soldier on his first leave after being on a mission without benefit of female companionship.

And getting more so with every touch of Serena's hand.

At the moment it was doing a slow walk over his chest.

Her fingernails scraped along his nipple, shooting sensation down to his groin. Man, did he ever want to bury himself inside her.

And she smelled like a million gold credits.

He sat up, pulling her shirt over her head. A layer of black clingy fabric separated his hands and eyes from paradise. He started at one side, moving his hand along the stitching of her bra.

Serena's gaze never left his as she reached up and unhooked the front clasp, exposing her beautiful breasts.

This time he ran his fingertips over soft skin, barely touching her. Her nipple stood hard, inviting him to feel it too. He ran his thumb over her then lowered his mouth, pulling the swollen peak into his mouth.

Serena knotted her hands in his hair, bringing him closer, telling him with actions she craved this as much as he.

By all the colonies, she tasted amazing. But what he really longed to taste was father down and still covered by her flight suit bottoms.

Hadrian slid his fingers under the firm elastic waist, pressing along the gentle valley of her belly. Serena moaned, lifting her hips to meet his touch. Her thighs opened, inviting him lower.

Their lips stayed connected as he dipped his fingers into her welcoming heat.

He had to get her somewhere he could spread her out and feast on her. Every time he moved his damn elbow made contact with the low-legged table. He needed room to make love to her properly—the way he'd played it out countless times in his head.

Regretting the need to end their kiss, Hadrian moved away then gathered her in his arms. He picked her up and she clung to him in desire. Her beautiful eyes stared into his. A heartbeat later and he had her in the middle of the big bed.

Without words or reassurances, he removed her boots then shimmied the uniform pants down her long legs. Though the uniforms hid no sins, Hadrian took a long look at Serena's perfection. She laid on the bed with her hair a golden cloud behind her.

The moment burned into his memory. It sunk into his subconscious and became a part of his DNA.

He knelt between her parted thighs, dipping his head to take her scent into his head. He tasted her on his palate even before he ran his tongue through her delicate folds. Serena arched in response, her hands fisted in his hair.

Oh, she was sweet and hot on his tongue. Just like he knew she'd be.

This was definitely an Earth tradition he could learn to love.

A riot of sensations stormed Serena below the waist. Hadrian Castle definitely knew his way around a woman's body. Her body.

It was as if he'd performed this act a thousand times with her before. And yet, nothing was practiced or rote in his lovemaking. It was the way women were told it should be—all hearts, flowers and fireworks.

His clever tongue teased her clit in quick flicks, driving her completely insane with the need to have him inside her. But she'd not be reduced to begging—she wanted him to go in his own sweet time, savor the experience of being with him.

Who knew if the night would ever be repeated?

Oh, who in the hell was she kidding? A night like this could never be repeated. It was a once in a lifetime thing.

She lifted her hands, cradling her breasts, rubbing her nipples in slow circles. Slowly, he slid a finger into her, touching in her deepest part. Her thighs trembled as he brought her to the edge.

Then she was falling. Back through the atmosphere, hurtling towards the planet surface.

Her shout pierced the quiet room.

Hadrian didn't stop. If anything he increased speed and pressure. His tongue and fingers worked in concert, bringing her to the crest of another orgasm before she'd fully recovered from the first. Serena stroked the side of his face, telling him with her hand how she felt. How much she loved what he did.

Before she could protest, he pulled away, removed the remainder of his clothes and came into her in one smooth glide.

Forever.

The word whispered through her mind as Hadrian set a slow, torturous pace. Each movement of his body, every caress of his hands sent her closer to danger. She wanted to keep this night alive. To know more of the same stretched out before her. Hedonistic and decadent, Hadrian's lovemaking had an addictive quality she'd have a hard time breaking free from.

The white lights made patterns on the ceiling. The scent of exotic flowers and sex filled the air. Everything about the night had been orchestrated to the finest detail—and she loved it.

Almost as much as she loved him.

No! Don't think that. This is only one night.

But it was hard not to when he anticipated her every need, every desire.

His mouth closed over hers. Her scent and taste lingered on his lips.

The pressure began to build. She cradled him in the valley of her thighs. Her right leg draped over his hip, changing the angle. With every forward plunge Hadrian made, Serena rose to meet him, bringing them together hard.

Hadrian moaned into her mouth.

His hand bit into her flesh, holding her tighter.

If she didn't know better she'd have sworn the bed, the room, the entire hotel had gone up in flames. Heat trapped between their bodies beaded sweat on her breasts, her face.

"My beautiful, Serena." The words were a caress against her skin.

The sentiment wasn't lost in the moment.

His Serena.

She gripped his shoulders, pouring herself into the act. Her body tightened around his length then she flew into space.

Shockwaves spread through her system. Hadrian let out a long deep moan. He rested his forehead against hers as he let control slip and fell with her into orgasm.

Without words, they remained joined as breathing and hearts returned to normal.

It was the worst fallacy ever.

Nothing would ever be normal again. She was in love with her captain. He was the man she reported to on every aspect of her job. Maybe letting things go so far hadn't been

such a good idea. If this became a one-night stand, things could get really weird aboard the *Cupid's Arrow*.

Then he kissed her. His hands tenderly cradled her face. When he pulled away, he said, "We should eat something before returning to the ship."

Serena swallowed down her disappointment that the lovely diversion was fast coming to an end. But he'd only promised to show her old Earth rituals and share the legend. He'd done that—and then some.

They wrapped blankets around them and ate in bed. The conversation came in fits and starts as Serena struggled to understand what had transpired. Was it just a round of mindless sex between crewmembers? Did Hadrian Castle have some ulterior motives? It was no secret within the Runners that her father held the rank of second-tier general, a position that usually led straight to the High Command. If his interest was politically motivated she'd have to ask her father for reassignment.

Damn, she didn't want to do that. *Cupid's Arrow* was home and the crew like family. It was a small ship for a transport, but she handled like a dream.

After they'd showered and redressed, they left the hotel and made their way back through the crowds to the ship. The tension she'd felt while walking to their destination had mutated from curiosity to regret. She'd been so carried away in the moment, she'd let her guard down to live what amounted to her deepest fantasy with a man who understood and accepted her interests.

Leeway met them at the portal. "Did you get your package?"

There was an odd glint in his eyes that made her blush and wince.

"Yes, we did." She pushed passed him to take the helm. "Will there be any other delays before we depart for Cimirion. There are settlers who need to relocate."

Hadrian took the vacant co-pilot seat. "Before you call for clearance to take off, there's something else you should know about Valentine's Day."

She turned her head and stared into his eyes. "What's that?"

His eyes crinkled at the corners when he smiled. "It comes around once a common year."

The tension she'd held onto since leaving the hotel broke. Serena laughed.

It wasn't a clear declaration of love, but it was a promise of some kind of future. For now, that might just be enough.

Kathleen Scott lives and works in rural New Jersey with the love of her life, husband Dave. Their house on any given day is a riot of laughter, fun and sci-fi geekdom. You can write her at MysticKat1965@yahoo.com or visit her blogs and website. www.MysticKat.com, Katwriter.blogspot.com, <http://chicks-in-scratching.com>.

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