

ELLORA'S CAVE **AEON**



## Lucy in the Sky

*Barbara Elsborg*

When you wake up to find a spaceship in your backyard, what do you do? Choose from three:

*Phone the police.*

*Scream.*

*Go yell at the alien for wrecking your garden.*

Lucy storms out of her house to confront the inept pilot and the last option turns out to be both the right and wrong choice when she finds the gorgeous hunk's name is Three. She's torn between fury that he's crushed her roses and decapitated her statue of Eros, and a longing that he enliven her boring life and whisk her to the stars. Three doesn't give her a choice when he throws her over his broad shoulders and takes her into space. Lucy soon finds herself exploring alien territory in ways she never imagined.

Three's efforts to hide and protect her on the mother ship are stymied by his inability to keep his hands—and other body parts—off the luscious Lucy, and it looks as if her immediate fate might be a solo trip into space without a spacesuit.

*Reader advisory: Contains hunka-hunka-burnin' male/male sex scenes. Score!*

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Lucy in the Sky

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# *LUCY IN THE SKY*

**Barbara Elsborg**

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## Chapter One

*Chlorella: single-celled green algae, one of the simplest and earliest plants on Earth, that can only grow when soaked by rain.*

Lucy had always thought that if she was ever lucky enough to see a spaceship, it would be as a fleeting bright light in the sky. There one second and gone the next. If she was really lucky, maybe a multicolored disk would hover long enough for her to grab her camera and snap the photograph of a lifetime. If she was extraordinarily out-of-this-world lucky, she'd spot an alien waving or maybe mooning her through a porthole. What Lucy had never expected to see was a spaceship sitting in her garden.

Only six in the morning, so she hadn't been drinking, not even a cup of tea. Lucy had been reaching for the kettle when her gaze slid to the window and got stuck. She stared openmouthed at the massive sweep of dark silver—something—in the center of the lawn. No windows or doors. No mooning from a porthole, Lucy thought in disappointment.

She came to her senses in a snap and filled the kettle. Of course it wasn't a spaceship. It wasn't even there. She'd wanted something different to happen in her life, and when it didn't her imagination had obliged with a real humdinger. She grabbed a mug from the cupboard and dropped in a teabag.

"Don't look out the window," she said and laughed. "Ah, talking to myself, the second sign of madness." The first—thinking there was a spaceship in her yard.

She couldn't resist taking another quick glance.

*Um, still mad then.*

Lucy tried to look away but the shining object tempted like a naked man and she couldn't help staring. *So what is it?* It couldn't be a spaceship, but it didn't look like a plane or part of plane. If it had fallen from an aircraft or dropped from space—some wayward disintegrating satellite—she would have heard it crash. Plus it would have made a big hole, probably a crater deep enough to bury it. Instead it just sat there on the grass. Looking perfect. Watching.

*Watching?* Where had that thought come from? On its back came fear. Lucy's pulse spiked, her mouth lost all moisture and her knees refused to lock. She leaned against the countertop, her heart hammering to get out of her chest so it could run upstairs and hide under the bed. She took a deep, calming breath. Well, took a deep breath. Nothing exciting ever happened to her, and now that it had she was not going to hide under the bed.

There wasn't enough room. Too many shoes and paperback novels.

Living up to her mother's perpetual claim that one of Lucy's middle names should have been Stupid, she padded barefoot across the kitchen and left the house through the side door. A glance around the corner sent Lucy reeling and she scraped her elbow on the wall. The yard was empty. What the...? Her heart bounced between her throat and her stomach. How could something that massive disappear without her hearing?

She ran down the stone steps and skidded to a halt on the wet grass. A groan of despair burst from her lips. The spaceship wasn't the only thing that had gone. So had her beautiful garden. A deep trough had been cut right through the middle of the flower bed destroying the roses and uprooting every shrub and bush. The herb patch had been plowed into the soil, all her little sculptures had been smashed to smithereens and there was no sign of Eros. Torn between tears and fury, Lucy howled. All those hours her father had spent planting the garden, all the work *she'd* done so he had something to look at through the window when he was sick, the one thing she had to remind her of him and now it was gone – ruined.

Tall trees surrounded her yard. The thing she'd seen was too big to have slipped away between the pines. The gouged earth suggested it had ground to a halt just where she'd seen it. So where had it gone? Lucy tilted her head back and looked up into empty sky, relieved to find no monstrosity looming over her and the whole of West Yorkshire.

She took a few tentative steps, the early morning dew cold underfoot. The stretch of lawn between her and the devastated garden looked wrong. No pearls of moisture beaded the flattened blades of grass. Lucy gulped. Not her imagination. Something had been there. It had managed to miss the trees, but skidded through the wilderness area at the far end of her property, then scored through her flower bed and come to a halt not far from where she stood.

Lucy walked in an oval loop, mapping out the area, chewing her lip over the remains of her devastated plants. Could she save any of them? Probably not. Back at the point she'd started, Lucy stood with her hands on her hips. The area the lump had covered measured twenty feet across and maybe fifteen in length but narrower at the back. Was the grass really dry where it had lain or was she imagining it? Lucy stepped forward to check.

*Oomph.*

She looked at the sky from her prone position, then pushed up on her elbows and stared directly ahead. Lucy couldn't see anything in front of her but something was there. She'd walked into it. Adrenaline raced around her bloodstream, exciting her synapses and driving her brain into a frenzy. She scrambled to her feet and brushed her wet hands on her thighs.

*Invisible?*

*Impossible.*

But...one tentative stretch forward and her fingers made contact with something she couldn't see. She snatched her hand back as though she'd touched a snake, swallowed her whimper and tried again. Warm. Smooth. Hard. It had looked like metal

and that's what it felt like. Lucy ran the flat of her hand over the surface, tracing the shape of the craft she'd seen from the kitchen window. She hadn't imagined it. Aliens had landed in her backyard.

*Yippee.*

*No. Not yippee.*

*Help. Police. Fire. Ambulance.*

Well, maybe not an ambulance, though the way her heart skipped and jumped Lucy suspected she might soon need one. Only what the hell could she say if she called the police?

*A spaceship's destroyed my garden, and I was wondering if you'd be good enough to come and remove it? Did I mention it's invisible?*

She pictured the response—an ambulance, a tight white jacket, and two burly nurses. She wouldn't even get a chance to persuade them to go down on the lawn and have a feel. Lucy thought about that. She'd better not word it in quite those terms.

Lucy walked all the way around again, this time trailing her fingers over the metal. She wondered if there was a door at the rear she couldn't see from the kitchen. Judging from the state of the garden up to the point it had stopped, the thing must have crash-landed. What if someone was injured and needed help? They could be inside dying while she stood outside gawking.

An idea shot into her head. She turned and raced back to the house.

As the woman ran her long slender fingers over his O-class shuttle, Three flinched. He'd seen her coming across the grass and suspected he'd not cloaked the vessel soon enough. Her collision with the ship confirmed it. Fortunately she was unhurt. Tall and slim with untidy, short blonde hair, she looked more excited than afraid. He estimated thirty Earth years.

She circled the shuttle and he pondered the best way to handle this. If he stepped out of thin air, even though he looked like an Earthman, she'd probably scream. If he uncloaked the ship, she'd probably scream. If he took off, the down-thrust would kill her, but she'd scream for a moment first. Not that it would be a sound he'd hear, but that was beside the point.

Three didn't like screaming women. Admittedly, the screaming that annoyed him was a sound of pleasure rather than fear or pain, but a scream was a scream and this Earth woman *would* scream. Apart from the fact that it might draw unwanted attention, he found the screeching sound irritating. Her nearest neighbor was the other side of the bank of trees at the far end of her yard—Moorfield Garden Center. The owners might have arrived by now and he had no idea if she could shriek loud enough to alert them. Three sighed. Of course he could simply take off now she'd run back to her house and that would be an end of it.



He *should* take off. He had what he came for and he'd been on his way back when there had been a shuttle malfunction or—reluctant as Three was to admit it—perhaps a moment's inattention on his part and he'd skidded back to Earth. He hoped no one would ever find out. He'd done no damage to the shuttle's systems. He'd already checked the exterior. Nothing more than smudges of soil and scratches and they would be removed by the friction of the planet's atmosphere on the journey back to the mother ship.

The woman was still out of sight. She might be calling the authorities. He had to leave. Why did he hesitate? Three felt uncomfortable. His indecision disturbed him. Usually he knew what was required and executed his mission without question. Immediately.

He'd just wait a moment.

When Three saw her coming from the house carrying a paper container, he furrowed his brow. What was she doing *now*?

What was *he* doing? He'd take off.

One more moment.

Three groaned. Why couldn't he stop watching her? She picked up one end of a long, flexible green pipe and dragged it over the grass to his shuttle. Water sprayed over the craft. He knew the droplets would bounce off the surface, but she still wouldn't be able to *see* anything. Then her hand dipped into the bag and a cloud of white powder flew into the air. Three tightened his mouth and felt it twitch at the side. Clever girl. Now she *would* be able to see the ship. A scream was no doubt imminent.

"Floor down," he ordered. The ship was programmed to accept all languages he was chipped for, including English. He might as well practice. Three found it slipped off his tongue more easily than some.

The square under his feet lowered him to the entry level. Three pressed the door release, the hatch slid open and the ramp unfolded. Speed was of the essence. Render her unconscious. Put her inside her dwelling and leave. When she came round no one would believe her. Yet another deluded UFO spotter.

He coughed as a deluge of white particles hit his face. Three's tongue slid out and he licked his lips. Plant origin. Nontoxic. Flour. *Whoa, how do I know that?* He shook his head, brushed the powder from his eyes and blinked. The woman had neither screamed nor run. She stood glaring at him. He took another step toward her, ready to slam his hand over her mouth.

Too slow.

"What the hell do you think you're doing in my yard? Why on earth would you think this was a good place to land? Thousands of empty fields out there, miles of deserted moorland and you pick my garden. If you were out of control, couldn't you have at least aimed for some uninhabited spot? You've wrecked my flowerbed and destroyed my herbs."

Three stared at her. Barely aware his jaw had dropped, he clenched his teeth together.

"Those roses were grown from cuttings. They've been in my family for years. They were special to me and now they're buried under a pile of dirt. Worst of all, you've decapitated Eros."

Three was aghast. "I hit someone?"

She stomped up and poked him in the chest. "Not just hit him. I spent months working on that guy, knocking out every imperfection, getting him just as I wanted and you've sliced his head clean off."

"The scanner indicated one female living alone." Three had noted no sensor readings suggesting another life form, or the elimination of one. He'd schedule a maintenance overhaul for the shuttle when he returned. Maybe the crash landing hadn't been his fault. He brightened at the thought and then remembered Eros. "I'm sorry," he said. Sorry wasn't enough but what could he do? His medical manual didn't deal with putting heads back on bodies.

He expected tears yet none appeared. Three watched the expression on her face move through indignation and confusion before it settled on apprehension. That lasted a brief moment before she switched back to belligerence. She hid nothing.

He liked her.

"I'm going to go and get my husband," she said and took a step back.

"Eros isn't your partner?"

"No, I keep him in the yard." She frowned. "Kept him in the yard." Another step back.

That's why she wasn't more upset. Was Eros an animal? A dog? He'd had a pet when...what? Of course he hadn't.

Three knew she intended to run, saw the moment fear swamped every other emotion. He timed it perfectly, slipped ahead of her and she ran straight into his chest. As she fell back, he caught her and pulled her into his arms.

"*Mphmph*. How did you do that?" she gasped.

"I'm very fast."

She narrowed her eyes. "Well, try and avoid this, fast boy." She jammed her knee up between his legs. His lightning reflexes enabled him to trap her knee between his thighs before it connected with his groin. She struggled and Three tightened his grip.

His hand touched a strip of warm bare flesh at her waist and his pulse jumped. What she wore concealed little. Loose leg wear and a short top with thin straps. Her breasts were squashed against his chest. She scowled and her eyes—ah, her eyes were unusual. Dark blue, flecked with light green. Little brown dots speckled her nose and cheeks. She smelled sweet, of flowers and sunshine and a warm bed. For a moment, Three yearned—but the moment passed.

"Let me go," she snapped, trying to squirm out of his grasp.

He slung her over his shoulder.

"Put me down, you big jerk. What the hell do you think you're doing?"

*I have no idea.* He held onto her legs and walked toward the shuttle. She beat at his back with her fists, thumping him hard in his kidneys and Three let her drop until he held her by her knees. Something he regretted a second later.

"Hey," he yelped. "Stop that."

The little hellcat had sunk her teeth into his backside. Three wrenched her off. She wriggled like a Legolian snake and he dropped her. She needed her behind paddled.

On her feet in an instant, she dashed off. He was impressed by her speed. Three watched her bend over and he exhaled. Such a curvy butt. He saw the head coming his way, registered this must be Eros and in the split second he wasted putting two and two together, the chunk of stone hit him.

## Chapter Two

*As well as water, plants require light and carbon dioxide in order to photosynthesize and grow.*

A lucky shot, Three guessed, but the blow to a motor control patch next to his ear sent him crashing to the ground. He'd need a moment to let everything recalibrate before he took this Earth woman over his knee and — Three felt a surge of blood rush to his groin. What the hell was happening to him?

The woman dropped at his side. "Shit, shit, shit. Are you all right? Oh God, I've killed him."

Her fingers stroked the side of his face. A gentle touch. He couldn't remember the last time someone touched him with kindness.

"Good grief, has rigor mortis set in already? His cock — ouch, that looks uncomfortable. Oh shit, his head's bleeding."

Yes, but not much. It would stop in a moment. The nanobots in his bloodstream would already be moving to heal him.

"Typical. The first good-looking guy I've seen for ages and I've bloody well murdered him."

Three felt a buzz of pleasure. She thought him attractive and was sorry she'd killed him? Her hair brushed his cheek and more blood raced south.

She tipped back his head and pressed her lips against his mouth. Three accepted the mix of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide though he didn't need it. If necessary, he could go several minutes without taking a breath. He made more efficient use of air on this planet than any of its inhabitants. But he liked her soft lips touching his and tried to remember the last time he'd kissed a female and enjoyed it.

He couldn't. Had it never happened before or had the memory been blocked? This Earth woman did something to make...something was happening inside...oh for the love of *zimboots*, no more blood rushing in that direction, please. Three opened his eyes and blinked in bright sunlight. Her mouth hovered inches from his and her warm breath hit his lips.

"Hey, it worked. You're alive." She beamed at him, the smile lighting up her face.

Why had his heart rate accelerated and his mouth lost all moisture? Was the injury more serious than he thought? Three took a deep breath. Sensors indicated not.

"So where are you from? Maybe the American military base at Menwith Hill? Except I thought that was just a listening station. This has to be top-secret technology, right? Invisibility." She winced. "Forget I said that. I know nothing. I saw nothing. I'll say nothing. No need to kill me. Ha!"

The white, golf-ball-shaped radar covers on the North Yorkshire moorland had been clearly visible as Three flew over. They couldn't detect his shuttle. He'd erected shields the moment he'd moved into this solar system.

"Did you crash-land? Well, of course you did. You didn't deliberately wreck my garden. What happened? Equipment failure? Catastrophic malfunction of a red button? Daydreaming? Do you need to call someone? Is there anyone else on board? Would you like a cup of tea?"

Three didn't think he'd ever met anyone who talked so much.

"Tea?" he asked, picking up on the last thing she'd said.

She grinned. "Oh, I suppose an American would rather have *caw-fee*. You don't have much of an accent though. Want to come in the house and get cleaned up?"

He levered himself to a sitting position. An enigma. One moment she tried to kill him, the next she wanted to take care of him. He focused on her little top. Level with his eyes, the hard peaks of her nipples tented the thin material. His...cock throbbed. Ah, maybe not a good idea to stare.

She stood and held out her hand. Three reached up, grasped her proffered palm and got to his feet. When she didn't let him go, his heartbeat spiked in a way that, with no danger present, caused him concern. She pulled him across the grass toward the dwelling, a small two-story construction of light stone blocks with many windows. His house had...no, he didn't remember having a home, though he hoped he'd had one once. Parents too. A mother who touched him gently. A father who was proud of him. If he had, those memories were gone. He'd been left with only what he needed to do his job and the lingering wonder if he'd once been more than a number.

"Sit down," she said, tugging out a wooden chair from under a table.

Three sat and looked around. This was her kitchen. Small and neat. His gaze faltered. Her backside. Small and neat, but beautifully curved. He'd like to see her naked. Three flinched. Why was he so obsessed with her body?

She soaked a cloth and wiped the material over his face. "Sorry about the flour."

"It was an intelligent move."

He itched to put his hands on her waist, lift her onto his lap.

*And do what, sepat brain?*

When she lifted her arms, it revealed her navel, a sweet button that his tongue—Three jerked his head up.

"It's a nasty graze," she said. "I really am sorry. I'm usually a terrible shot. Don't have me on your side in a snowball fight. I'm more likely to hit you than the opposition."

He raised an eyebrow. Snowball—a collected mass of precipitation in a frozen state shaped into a sphere and used as a non-fatal missile.

"I'm Lucy. What's your name?"

Claws dug into his heart. "I don't have a...name."

"Of course you do. People have to call you something, apart from man-who-can't steer-for-shit." She grinned and then frowned. "Oh, maybe you aren't allowed to tell me. Rank and serial number will do."

Three sucked in his cheeks. "Three."

"Wow, that's not very long for a serial number."

Oh gods, why did he want to laugh? "No, my name's Three."

She furrowed her brow. "As in twenty-seven, ninety-four or sixty-eight?"

He nodded. This was a woman who would never take a straight line.

"Oh, not very imaginative parents, though it could have been worse. In fact, you're lucky. My parents had far too much time on their hands and an awful sense of humor. My name is Lucy Brilliant Sunbeam Pineapple Princess Ferze."

Three gawped at her.

"Thank you for not laughing. I got Pineapple because that's what Mum was eating when she went into labor. Princess—well that was because Dad thought it might be useful if I didn't meet a prince. The Brilliant Sunbeam was what they hoped I'd be—the light of their lives. I only wish they hadn't called me Lucy."

Three furrowed his brow. "Why?"

"Think about it. First name, last name. Lucy Ferze. Lucifer's? You think you were teased? I went through hell." She laughed, stuck out her hand and grabbed his. "How do you do, Three. Pleased to meet you."

Three had to bite back a gasp of astonishment. "How-do-you-do." He let her hand go.

"So where are you from? Not the American listening station at Menwith Hill, I mean where do you come from? What state? California? Texas? Oh, I know. New Mexico! Roswell? No? Florida, then? Oregon? Kansas? Arkansas? Oh, I have to be careful not to say that wrong. Wash—"

Three stopped her before she went through them all. "I'm not an American. I'm not from Menwith Hill."

"Where then?"

"It will mean nothing to you."

"You're probably right. I bet I've never been there. I've only been abroad once. A trip to the Costa Blanca on a hen party and it was awful. We all got food poisoning though it might have been the alcohol."

She grinned and Three felt a chip of ice fall from the block that was his heart. She talked too much, talked nonsense, but he didn't want her to stop.

"So come on, out with it. South America? Russia? New Zealand?"

"I'm not from this planet," he said before she launched into another list.

Three watched it sink in and waited.

She licked her lips and took a deep breath. "Right. You mean the thing that wrecked my garden really is a spaceship?"

"Yes."

"And you're from outer space?"

"Yes."

"An alien?"

"Yes."

"You're not green."

"Not the last time I looked."

Lucy's brain worked so fast she scrambled to keep a thought running straight in her head. *Should she run away? Did she want to? What would he be like in bed?* No, scrap that one, *bad Lucy*, except she could hardly take her eyes off him.

Under a dusting of flour was well over six feet of solid muscle barely disguised under black pants and a black T-shirt. She could see every line of his abs, the curve of his pecs, the bulge at his... He had eyes so dark, she wasn't sure he had an iris at all. His short hair was jet black and his skin a coppery bronze. As far as she could tell, he looked as human as her. She knew his blood was red. No sign of a tail or horns or a bulbous suppurating rib cage bristling with eyes. She shuddered. Too much Stephen King.

Though she might have hit on something there. Maybe he'd assumed this hunky shape to deceive her. He might be Mr. Hideous but projecting Mr. Gorgeous, her ideal dark-haired guy. But then she'd felt him, had his strong arms wrapped around her. Was it wrong to have liked that?

*Lucy, get a hold of yourself. He's an alien!*

*Don't be stupid. He's probably escaped from some lunatic asylum. Psychopaths can be very persuasive.*

*What about that state-of-the-art flying thingymajig?*

*He's staring at me.*

*Stop acting like an idiot. And stop talking to yourself.*

"I was just going to have a cup of tea and some breakfast. Are you hungry?" she asked.

*Yes, that was very intelligent.*

"Yes."

Mr. Talkative he was not. That was all right. She loved talking.

As he stared, Lucy became aware of how little she wore, still in her sleep attire of faded navy blue strappy top and matching drawstring pants decorated with little yellow stars. But what *was* the appropriate meet-greet-and-seduce-alien-in-the-morning

attire? She felt perversely annoyed she wasn't wearing something sexier. Perhaps she could nip upstairs and change. *Lucy, get your brain in gear!*

She took eggs, milk and cheese from the fridge and flicked on the kettle. Should she believe him? She wasn't sure what to make of her – fake or otherwise – spaceman.

"Are you still learning how to fly?" she asked. "Did your foot slip on the gas pedal?"

He made a choked sound and his mouth tightened. "A slight miscalculation that will be investigated."

Lucy put the frying pan over the heat, and poured boiling water into the mugs.

"How come you speak English?" she asked.

"A translation chip."

Why did she think he'd have an answer for everything? "Do you know how to swear?"

"Those words are included, yes."

Lucy sniggered.

"Though it's hard to know when to use vernacular speech," he added. "I don't know every word. What are the brown marks on your face?"

"Freckles."

He nodded.

"How many languages do you know?" she asked.

"Eighteen –"

"That's not very many."

"You didn't allow me to finish. Eighteen hundred and thirty-one. Many are dialects spoken on the same planet. For example, Micros 22 has one hundred and ninety-four variations on its main language of Lerm."

"Say something in Lerm."

Three cleared his throat.

Lucy waited. And waited. Then it dawned on her the throat clearing was him talking. She laughed. "What did you say?"

"You have beautiful hair."

She dragged her fingers through her choppy blonde locks. "Thank you." She might have been pleased except for the fact he showed no emotion when he said it. Lucy was annoyed that she was annoyed.

"Do you take milk and sugar?"

"Milk and three sug –" He gasped.

She laughed. "Hey, don't worry. Nothing wrong with having a sweet tooth. The latest news is that sugar is good for you. Anyway, you don't need to diet."



Lucy put in three spoonfuls of sugar, a splash of milk and stirred. Then did the same for herself. Wasn't hot, sweet tea good for shock? No matter that she didn't believe he was from outer space, this morning was extraordinary. There she stood in her kitchen, cooking breakfast for a gorgeous hunk of a man, and she hadn't even slept with him. *Ha!*

While she cooked, Lucy felt him scanning her. A reminder that she was in trouble. Before she'd brained him with Eros, he'd been going to take her into his ship. Just because he'd agreed to eat something didn't mean his plans had changed. Her best guess—he was Russian. Super-secret technology lay embedded in her lawn and now she'd seen him and seen his craft, he'd have to silence her. She gulped.

If she pretended to believe he was an alien, maybe he'd let her go. No one would believe her if she talked about what had happened. But maybe he wouldn't take that risk. Since he hadn't killed her yet, he must intend to take her with him. Or maybe he wanted information first and then he'd kill her. Or breakfast first. What did she know? Tim Richards was cheating on his wife. Mary Dermott was a kleptomaniac. Ah, maybe he didn't need that sort of information.

Lucy glanced at him. She *was* scared. Not because she thought he'd kill her, she didn't. If he'd wanted to, it would already have happened. There was a gentleness about him, something she couldn't quite put her finger on, but he tugged at her heart. So Lucy's fear was not because he might abduct her but more because he might not. She didn't want this extraordinary morning to come to an end. She didn't want the cutest guy she'd ever seen to fly off without her.

She tipped the omelet onto a plate and put it in front of him. Had she lost every brain cell she possessed? Had the sight of a tall, dark and handsome man scrambled her neurons and scorched her synapses? She needed to run. Fast. Before lust strangled her common sense.

"I'm just going to see a man about a dog," she said.

"You don't have a dog."

Maybe a Russian wouldn't know that phrase. She tried again. "While you're eating, I'll go and get changed."

Into a sensible woman who'd walk straight out the front door, climb into her car and roar off, burning rubber in her wake. She'd always wanted to do that. Now she had the perfect excuse. Trouble was, she had a gravel drive.

Three's hand shot out and grasped her wrist as she edged past. "Stay."

He tugged her to a chair. Not so easy then. Lucy sipped her tea, watching him devour the omelet, and wished she'd thought to crush sleeping pills and add them to the mixture. Of course, she didn't have any sleeping pills but it was a great idea. She could make a fortune selling this story to a newspaper—assuming she lived long enough—even if they did think she was crazy.

He placed his knife and fork neatly together down the middle of the plate. "Delicious. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

He stared at her. She stared at him.

*What now?* Lucy thought.

"Explain why you're not screaming."

She gulped. "Er...sore throat. No one to hear." *Oh damn, that was careless.* "You haven't hurt me." *Yet. Bugger.*

She could almost see thoughts ticking over in his head, though his expression hardly changed.

"You don't believe me," he said.

"Isn't it better that I don't? I mean you don't want me to tell anyone do you?"

"They wouldn't believe you."

Lucy glared. "They'd believe the wreck you made of my garden. What are you doing here? We're not at war with you. You're buying up our soccer clubs, all our old mansions. We're supposed to be friends now. Unless you're a terrorist. You're not a terrorist are you?"

Of course he was hardly likely to admit he was a terrorist, but she ought to get as much information as she could to tell the authorities. If they didn't believe her, at least she'd tried.

"I'm not a terrorist. I'm a collector for the ASS *Xenothak* out of Syobwoc in the Deltan solar system."

Lucy's mind stalled. Didn't happen very often. Her brain jumped straight to hyperactive the moment she woke and didn't usually switch off until her eyes closed at the end of the day. Now she didn't know what to think. No such thing as a shield to make planes invisible. There might be one day but—Lucy gulped as thoughts rushed in like a tornado. Not a plane. Not a terrorist. He really was an alien. She hadn't wanted to believe but sadly, it was the only thing that could explain a gorgeous guy sitting in her kitchen.

Gorgeous guy might not be a threat to *her*, but could be to everyone else. "You're here to take over our world, aren't you? Part of a scouting party sent to check out our defenses. Your home planet of...Syobwoc is doomed and you need somewhere else to live. Though you might want to solve global warming before you settle in the UK. I think our weather is going to be even more crappy than it is now. Rain, rain and more rain. So are you planning to turn the Earth's population into mindless slaves who'll sweat and toil while you live a life of luxury? Will we still have chocolate and high heels?"

He stared at her in astonishment, his mug halfway to his mouth.

"Oh crap. I got it right? Well, er, we're really not good at being slaves. Particularly me. I'm hopeless at ironing. I never do as I'm told. I argue a lot and—"

"Talk incessantly."

She glared. "You know, something's just occurred to me. Maybe you were off course. You see that lovely shiny star over there in the sky? The big yellow one? I'm sure you'd get a warm reception if you land on it."

"The spectral G2 class star with the V luminosity? Your sun?" His mouth twitched. It was the nearest she'd seen to a smile. "I'm sure the reception would be warm with a surface temperature of 5,756.457 degrees centigrade. Assuming I got that close."

"You could try. Maybe you're a degree or two out. It would be as well to check."

His eyes darkened. He put the mug down. "The tea was very good. Refreshing. Thank you." He stood up. "Ready to go now?"

"Go?" Lucy jumped to her feet and backed off. "I'm not going anywhere."

Faced with *actually* going with him, panic rose up her throat and settled like a lump of peanut butter. Romantic fantasy was all very well but this was a shocking reality.

He took a step toward her.

"I have a boyfriend upstairs," Lucy blurted. "The lazy blob is sleeping. He'll be down in a moment. He's huge. Massive. Not fat. Just big."

"No other humans are present."

"I can't leave my cat."

He cocked his head on one side and then looked at her. "The only animal is a *rattus norvegicus* under the floor in that room." He looked left.

"Oh my God, a rat?" Lucy jumped at him and wrapped herself around his body, lifting her feet off the floor.

"Yes, a rat. Did you wish to take it with you?"

Lucy let go of him and stepped away. "That isn't funny."

He smiled then. A proper grin and Lucy melted. The guy stopped her heart. She wanted and didn't want at the same time.

"Come with me, Lucy Ferze." He held out his hand. "Please."

If she'd met him in a bar, she'd have gone anywhere he asked, including his bed, so why was she hesitating? *This isn't a date, you idiot. He's an alien. It's an abduction.*

"Let me get my medication. I'm prone to fits of homicidal mania."

She tried not to run. Left the room and grabbed her cell phone from the table in the hall. One button pressed before he caught her wrist and twisted it. She dropped the mobile.

"No more delays. If asking nicely doesn't work, I'll have to use force."

Lucy jerked free and dropped into a fighting stance, legs braced, arms up, fists clenched. "Just try it."

They were stupid words. He trapped her hands by her sides and picked her up as though she were no more than a child. As he strode out of the house, Lucy struggled. She was having a hard time coming to terms with what was happening, that she was

being man—er alien-handled toward a spaceship about to take her away from Earth. She hadn't packed her sunscreen, bikini or anything to read.

*Because you're not going to go, said the little voice in her head. Escape, you moron.*

## Chapter Three

*Sap circulates bringing fluid vital to the health and vitality of a plant, keeping woody stems firm and erect.*

Lucy did her best. She squirmed, wriggled, went stiff, went limp—tried everything she could, but his arms remained locked around her. As he reached the flat stretch of lawn, Lucy adopted a different tactic. She kissed him.

Only his neck, because that was as far as she could reach, but she feathered her lips along the corded muscles, flicked her tongue down the taut column of skin within licking distance and landed a series of nibbling kisses. He stumbled and a jolt of delight shot through her. Then his arms tightened. *Damn.*

She kissed him harder. Lucy felt his pulse sprinting under her tongue's caress. Her own raced alongside his. She closed her eyes. He tasted so great, of something spicy, citrusy and she didn't remember the last time she'd had a chance to kiss a guy like this. Even though it was only his neck. Would he mind a little hickey? She licked her lips and sucked.

"Ouch." Lucy gasped as she landed on her butt.

Her eyes flew open. Oh bloody hell. She was inside his ship. Three had his hand clamped to his neck and looked as if he wanted to kill her. Guess he didn't want a love bite. She'd have to notch that one up in her weapons of mass destruction. Aliens don't like hickeys.

"Door closed," Three said.

Lucy looked back and saw the door to freedom closing. She thought about flinging herself through the narrowing gap. Would the door slice her in half? Leave her top half on Earth while her backside and legs blasted off into space? The gap and her chance disappeared. The floor began to move and she realized they were going up. Lucy pushed herself to her feet. She was not quivering jelly. She would not freak out.

*Oh shitshitshitshitshit.*

After the floor lifted them into a narrow passageway, it stopped moving. A door slid open and Three pushed her forward. In the cabin ahead two seats were mounted in front of a bank of control panels plastered with lights and screens. Above them ran a semi-circle of curved windows. Lucy saw her house. A whimper rose up her throat and she pushed it back. Forget trying to pretend this was her imagination, a dream, insanity. Accept that life on other planets was a fact and she was about to be—what? Dinner? Love slave? Stuck in a test tube? Feted as a queen? *Yeah, right.*

Lucy looked behind her for the door. Nothing but an expanse of dull, gray metal. No handles or knobs.

"Strap yourself in," Three said.

She didn't move. Non-cooperation might be her only effective weapon.

"Strap yourself in or when I take off you'll suffer a termination of your biological functions."

"Huh?"

"You'll be—pushing up daisies."

*Well, when he puts it like that.* Lucy settled her behind in the chair. The moment her butt hit the seat, straps erupted and crisscrossed her body, locking her in place. She pushed against them and they pulled tighter so she stopped moving. When the band slid around her head, she freaked.

"LemmegoLemmegoLemmego."

"Keep still. I'll be back in a moment."

Lucy wasn't the type to panic, but it took every ounce of self-control to stop herself from crying. The band flexed around her head and pulsed with heat. Mind probe? Brain destroyer? Memory sucker? *Shiiiiit.*

The heat faded and Lucy gulped. Did she still have all her faculties? Divide three thousand and thirty-two by nine. Er—nope, still couldn't do it. This was really happening. There really were such things as UFOs. She was sitting in one and pretty soon she'd be flying in one. Christ, what if they got shot down? Would Three give her the chance to speak to the Royal Air Force fighter pilots and tell them she was on board? Would it make any difference?

Then Lucy laughed and relaxed. She was such an idiot. This was a trick. Probably one of those TV programs where they pick some poor unsuspecting member of the public to bamboozle. A really stupid one, easy to fool. In a few months' time, on some rainy Saturday night, she'd be sitting laughing at herself. *Right.*

Didn't explain the invisibility thing though. Mind you, if master illusionists could make elephants and planes disappear into thin air, then how hard had this really been? Mirrors. That's what it was. She felt so much better now that she'd figured it out. They were going to have to put her garden back to rights. She'd insist on that. Which wanker had volunteered her for this? Steve? Getting his own back because she'd won the sculpture contest and not him? She'd plot something special in return.

Lucy smiled and winked at the camera she couldn't see. Had to be there somewhere. Should she let on she'd twigged what was happening? Maybe better to let them think they had her fooled. After all, they'd gone to a huge amount of trouble and expense. Three—well his name was probably something ordinary like Peter Smith—would come back and pretend to take off and it would be like one of those virtual reality rides, they'd change the view out of the window, she'd be shaken and jolted

around and then the door she couldn't see would open and out would step some B-list celebrity with a plastic smile and a "got you" trophy.

Relieved she'd worked it out, Lucy gave a happy sigh. The band retracted from her head and she rolled her shoulders as best she could. Her head ached a bit as though she'd been trying to remember the names of all the characters in *Lord of the Rings*. She'd made a lot of effort for a guy who'd then dumped her after the second date. Probably because she made up names for the Orcs.

A door slid open out of sight and then Three settled onto the seat next to her. Straps zipped out to wrap around him. He did have a very nice body, chiseled and hard. Lucy's nipples tingled. Oh God and they'd have filmed her staring at his cock, sucking his neck. She cringed.

Control panels lit and lights flashed.

"Do we go straight up?" she asked.

He glanced at her. "Why?"

"Well, I always fancied a trip to Hawaii but it's too expensive."

Three made a noise that almost sounded like a laugh. He stared straight at her and they shot up so fast Lucy left her stomach behind in her garden. She was supposed to act scared not excited but boy, what a trip. It was like being fired into the air on one of those theme-park tower rides, only this one kept going up and up and her body felt heavier and heavier. Amazing what they could do these days to fool the senses. Then they stopped and Lucy's stomach zoomed into her throat.

The craft tipped forward and Lucy saw the whole of Yorkshire lying below. Grassy valleys dotted with sheep, lines of rocky crags and acres of ling-covered moorland sprawled for miles, the drystone walls turning the countryside into a complex jigsaw puzzle. Ooh, there was her house. And her ruined garden. Which had to be impossible because they were still on the ground and what she saw now was pre-recorded.

Wasn't it?

Lucy couldn't hear a thing. Nothing whirring or clicking. Absolute silence. So why did it feel like they were really hovering in the sky? How the hell was that possible? If they were actually in the air, this had to be some newly invented, super-special stealth craft, and they wouldn't be using it in some lame TV program to trick a gullible member of the public.

Bells rang in her head, the planets lined up and the clichéd penny dropped with a loud clank as realization finally sank into her thick skull. Acceptance of what was happening sent Lucy plummeting to Earth because she knew her first thought when she'd looked out of the window this morning had been correct and everything else that followed only wishful thinking.

She really had been abducted by an alien.

He was taking her somewhere in his spaceship.

Thank God he was good-looking.

"Beautiful," Three said.

Lucy looked down at fields every shade of green. Hills of purple and pink moorland rolled into the distance with dark rivers cutting and curling their way to the sea. She turned to Three and found him staring at her.

"You don't actually want to take over the Earth, do you?" she asked in a quiet voice. "We know we're not doing a particularly good job of looking after it, but we're trying to make things better. Recycling, electric vehicles and those horrible energy-efficient light bulbs."

"As far as I know there is no interest in taking over the Earth. "

Lucy gasped as the craft accelerated. Land rushed away below and she could see water in the distance.

"The North Sea?" she asked.

"Irish Sea."

Then Ireland. They were moving faster now. Ireland disappearing in the blink of an eye. Lucy imagined this must be like traveling in a supersonic jet. Faster.

"Can you loop the loop?" she asked.

Three's eyes widened.

"Twists and spirals?" she suggested. "Any sort of aerobatic display?"

There was sound that could have been a laugh but might have been a snort. Then they were flying upside down and still shifting at lightning speed. Lucy yelled with excitement. They spun all over the sky, rolling and flipping, diving and soaring, and she burst out laughing.

"Hawaii," Three said and the ship stopped, tilted down.

Lucy stared at the chain of islands. They looked like a chunky necklace made by a child. A lump erupted in her throat. Hawaii had been created by volcanic activity and one day another island would rise above the surface. Plants would grow and colonize, turning rock to soil. Brand new life. Was that what she was heading for? A new life...or death? Well, at least she'd seen one of her "list of things to see before I die". She turned to Three and attempted a little smile. "Can I look around for a bit?"

"No."

"Thanks anyway."

He inclined his head and then they went up and up through every shade of darkening blue into the black. Lucy knew with heart-wrenching certainty she'd never see her home or the Earth again.

Three didn't feel...right. He wasn't ill. That was virtually impossible. He'd been engineered to withstand 99.9247 percent of known diseases. Nothing indicated any enhancement malfunctioned. But his mind was playing tricks on him, making him think he remembered things when that couldn't be the case. Tea, for example. How did



he know he wanted three sugars? Why did he think he'd had a pet? Why did the landscape of Yorkshire look familiar? Why did his heart beat so fast? He could come up with no explanation for the way he felt – except for one.

Lucy.

She'd thrown him off line. Perhaps the blow from the stone head had damaged a sensor chip just enough to make it arc library and map images in a loop cycle. He'd not followed orders. Three's pulse and temperature soared at the thought. He'd brought her with him knowing the consequences for both of them, especially her, if...no, *when* she was discovered. What in the Legolian void had he been thinking? What was he going to do with her once he got her on board the Colonizer?

He turned to look at her and got caught up in her tousled hair and tense, bare shoulders. She stared wide-eyed and open-mouthed through the viewing port as they flew through space. She must be terrified. Her hands gripped the seat arms so tightly her knuckles had lost color.

"The stars are so bright. Ooh, look over there. Hey, isn't that the Dipper? I don't know any of the other constellations but that group of stars looks like a treasure chest spilling diamonds. Oh God, it's so beautiful up here. I feel so lucky."

Three had expected screaming, possibly weeping and perhaps vomiting, but she was simply excited. He was unable to predict what she might do or say and while it had the potential to be annoying and painful, he also found it refreshing.

When Lucy kissed his neck, Three had felt the stirring of some deep-seated, long-suppressed emotion. It wasn't just the blood rushing to his cock but a feeling of sexual attraction. He didn't understand why he'd responded to her touch. He wasn't supposed to. He'd been...programmed not to. More to the point he knew the kiss was meant as a distraction. But while Lucy might not feel anything for him, when he looked at her, she made him feel...warm. Was that why he'd brought her with him? Because she made him feel warm?

Three gritted his teeth. Apart from hot and cold, he wasn't supposed to feel. And emotions? Certainly not beyond a small range. Fury, curiosity and contempt were fine but not this soft, fuzzy feeling. It was disconcerting. *She* was disconcerting. He liked her and he didn't want to like her. He needed his mind back on his job, though now he'd brought her with him he'd made a problem for himself. What could he do with her onboard the Colonizer?

He could eject her before they got there.

No!

"Engage AG," he said.

"What? What's that?" she asked.

"Artificial gravity, but I wasn't talking to you. The computer responds to my voice. You can leave your seat now if you wish."

She pulled at her restraints. "How?"

"Green button by your left thumb."

Lucy pressed it and sighed as the straps retracted. She stood up. "What happens if you don't engage AG?"

"Your body becomes weightless."

"Oooh, let me see."

The moment "disengage AG" came out of his mouth Three wished it back but Lucy whooped in delight as she rose into the air.

"Ooh I'm flying."

"Floating."

"My stomach feels like it's about a second behind the rest of me. This is amazing. Wheeeee."

Three watched as she turned upside down and tried to walk on the ceiling. He caught a quick view of her breasts as her top slid away and he swallowed hard. His brain said "don't watch" but Three followed her progress, hoping for another glimpse of a rosy nipple as she pushed herself from place to place in slow motion runs up the walls, over the ceiling, down and around again. He was disappointed.

"Look, I'm a hamster." Lucy laughed.

She was likely to make herself sick but her genuine pleasure in doing something so simple entranced Three. Had he ever disengaged AG and done what she was doing? How long since he'd enjoyed himself doing anything? He did his job, got annoyed with the Pleasure Bs, went to sleep, got up, did his job, got annoyed with the Pleasure Bs and went to sleep again. Sometimes he derived pleasure from the company of Hyll, the ship's senior science officer, but Hyll also made him feel uncomfortable. Even eating brought no pleasure. That meal she'd cooked for him was the best thing he'd had in his mouth for a long while.

Lucy shoved herself away from the wall and grabbed the arms of his seat as she drifted past. Her long legs floated up behind her. Three tried not to look down her top. But not too hard.

"You do it too. This is so much fun."

Lucy curled in a ball, pushed herself into a slow spin and collided with the viewing port. "Ding," she shouted and spiraled back to hit the wall opposite. "Ding. Hey, I'm a human pinball."

Three's finger moved over the button on his seat and before common sense could stop him, he pressed it. The straps retracted and he rose into the air.

"Catch me," Lucy yelled and tried to run.

It was impossible to move anywhere at speed. Her feet bicycled and when she hardly moved, she laughed. As Three reached her, she kicked him in the head and sent him floating away.

"Oh sorry, sorry."

Lucy swam back and turned herself the same way up as him by grabbing hold of his body. Her fingers brushed his cock and Three bit back a groan.

"Sorry," she said.

Then her knee caught his groin.

"Sorry. Did I hit you in the balls? Ouch."

Three wrapped his arms around her and sighed. "Safer for both of us if I hold on to you." Though he wasn't sure that was true. How could she miss his erection sandwiched between them?

"This is so weird," Lucy said, staring into his eyes.

"Weird?" That wasn't a good word, not when used in relation to his cock.

"I have this urge...I want..."

She didn't finish what she was saying. She ran her tongue over her lips and then pressed them against his. Three was so shocked he thrust her away. He stared as Lucy rolled to the other side of the deck while he drifted backward and tipped upside down. He turned to look at her.

Her gaze dropped. "Sorry," she muttered.

*No. No. No.* Three did *not* want her to be sorry. He wanted her to do it again.

## Chapter Four

*The best known sap is maple syrup. Sugar maple trees can produce twelve quarts of sap in one day in optimum conditions.*

Floating across the deck, Three maneuvered until they were face-to-face. Not easy when Lucy wobbled all over the place.

"Your lips...I think..." Three lost the words. They swirled inside the maelstrom in his head and he wasn't sure which ones to grab. "I need..." He wanted to tell her how soft her lips felt, how sweet they looked and tasted, how he wanted to feel them back against his.

"You want to kiss?" she asked with a shy smile.

Three nodded so hard he drifted away.

Lucy grabbed his arm. "Come back here."

Three caught hold of her waist. "If we want to stay together, we have to hold on to each other. Easier if I switch on AG."

"But not so much fun," Lucy said.

Three's mouth twitched. "No, not so much fun."

Lucy wrapped her arms around his neck and he pulled her close to his body, crossing his arms over her back. She smiled and brushed her lips against his, a feather touch, hardly more than a wisp of warm air, but Three felt the responsive throb in his groin. His already swollen cock hardened further.

For a moment his mind went blank. Did he know how to do this? He'd seen the Pleasure Bs kissing, only what was *he* expected to do? Lucy's mouth pressed harder against his, her tongue teasing the line of his lips, urging him to respond. He opened his mouth and let her in. In an explosion of sensation, Three realized what he'd been missing and began to kiss her back.

She was so soft, so sweet. She tasted like truffles from Tronia. Their tongues tangled, tangoed, tussled. Three laughed against her mouth as his cock struggled for room in his pants. He *had* done this before, but it had been so long since...oh for the love of *zimboots*. He'd forgotten. No, not forgotten. It had been removed from his memory. He wasn't allowed to have sex, think about sex or play with the Pleasure Bs. Three didn't understand exactly why that was so, it was just something he'd felt from the moment he boarded the ship. Part of his genetic engineering? A sick joke by some mean-hearted technician? Three wasn't supposed to get erections either but sometimes, alone in his bed he—well, that's what he had now, a rock-hard cock fighting a battle

with the fastening of his pants. He hoped his cock won, and while it fought the good fight, Three didn't stop kissing her.

He tilted his head so he could thrust his tongue more deeply into her mouth and a moment later, he became aware of Lucy struggling in his arms. Oh *zimpra* shit, had he done something wrong? He lifted his mouth from hers and she took a huge gulp of air.

"Can't breathe."

Three mentally asked his sensors to do an immediate check. No problem with the air quality. The computer had scanned Lucy's breathing requirements the moment she entered the craft and life support had been adjusted.

"The kiss was great...but you need to let me breathe." She stroked his back with her fingers.

Three's face flushed hot. He'd forgotten her respiration rate ran much faster than his. No wonder they said sex was bad for him, it stopped him thinking.

She kissed the side of his mouth. "Hey, Lucy calling Three. Come in, Three. It's okay. I'm not dead, just out of breath."

Three's heart clenched. No, she wasn't technically dead, yet he'd probably killed her the moment he carried her on board. She couldn't go back to Earth and it was unlikely Caled would let her travel onward.

"You're so gorgeous," she whispered. "A tall, dark, handsome spaceman. I can't resist you."

Three's mouth twitched.

"Go on, let it out," Lucy said.

"What?"

"Your smile. I've noticed you don't smile hardly at all but it's lovely when you do. Your eyes light up and sparkle like fireflies."

He rarely smiled. He rarely needed to. He wanted to now. Before he could, Lucy's mouth slid back to his and she licked his lips, a sensuous slide of her warm, wet tongue along his upper lip and then the lower. She landed a series of tiny pops from one end of his mouth to the other and then nibbled the fleshy pad inside his bottom lip. Everything she did wound him tighter and made him ache, as though he had a metal coil turning inside his belly.

While she held on to his back, Three moved his hands and slid his fingers through her short, silky hair. She smelled of flowers, woman, sex. He felt a sudden rush of anger he'd been deprived of this.

"Gently," Lucy gasped.

Three relaxed his grip on her head and kissed her nose, her eyes, her cheeks, the line of her chin. Saving the best for last. Her smiling lips. Kissing was thrilling and magical. Kissing was the best thing ever.

Oh, maybe not.

Lucy slid one hand to his butt to keep him against her. The other snuck to the front of his body and crept under his shirt onto his skin. Where she touched he caught fire. Tendrils of heat rippled from her fingers over his trembling stomach, dashed up the center of his chest before veering off to his nipple. The tip hardened before she touched it. One twist of the puckered bud in her fingers and Three thought he'd been hit by lightning. Electric spasms shot down his nerves to center on his groin. A groan escaped before he could stop it. If his cock grew any larger it really would burst out of his pants.

Lucy had always thought it was men who had one-track minds, but she'd been forced to revise that opinion. She had only one thought in her head. Getting Three naked as fast as possible. She had no idea what had come over her. She wasn't forward like this. She was the one who always went home alone at the end of the evening while her friends disappeared with strangers. Lucy pretended she was brave but she wasn't. She loved to look but rarely touched.

So who was this siren wrapping her legs around Three's waist? Who was this bold creature staring into Three's face as she lifted his T-shirt? The Lucy she wanted to be, and for once she was going to live her dream. Especially if she might end up as his dinner if supplies ran low. His eyes grew darker and darker. Even this close to his face she couldn't see the difference between the iris and pupil.

"Not a vampire, are you?" she whispered.

A pause before he shook his head. Slightly too slow a reaction for Lucy to feel entirely reassured, but she wasn't going to stop now. She tugged the T-shirt higher up his chest, over his head and let it float away from her fingers. Taut, toned and tanned. *Yum*. Lucy swallowed fast in case she drooled. There wasn't an ounce of fat or loose flesh.

She sucked in her stomach, then gave up and relaxed. She wasn't out of shape but Three was...perfect. The muscles of his abs were sharply defined ridges and mounds, it almost seemed like a...oooh...a spider shape. Lucy gulped. In fact it was very similar to the shape of a spider. A three sectioned body with Three's navel in the center of the abdomen, four legs either side reaching up toward his pecs and...

*Arggh*. Lucy blinked. She had far too much imagination.

"You're quiet," Three said. "I worry when you're quiet."

"Never an unspoken thought. That's what my father always said, and most of my teachers. I talk too much, I know."

"What are you thinking now?"

*Nix with the spider thing*. "You have a beautiful body." Lucy swept her palm over his rigid abs.

"I can hear a but."

"W-what are you?" *Please don't say a spider*. Not that she minded eight-legged insects, she didn't, except Lucy didn't want him to be a six-and-a-half foot spider.

"What do you mean?"

"Can you rip open your skin and turn into a green blob? Do you have wings, fangs and claws? Are you pretending to be—"

"I'm humanoid, human like you. Though I did once meet a green blob with fangs."

She ran the edge of her thumb around his taut nipple. "Three! Was that a joke?"

"No."

Lucy snorted. "So I'm looking at the real you?"

"Yes, but with..." Three's breath hitched, "enhancements."

"Enhancements? You're not suddenly going to turn into a woman-eating monster with razor-sharp teeth and a huge cock? Though maybe I wouldn't mind the huge cock, but not too big because that..."

She watched him trying not to laugh, his dark eyes shining. Maybe she should throw the word spider in there to see what happened.

Maybe not.

Tight copper nipples topped his smooth rounded pecs. His shoulders were wide and strong. He looked too good to be true. She ached to see the rest of him.

Lucy stamped on Miss Timid, slid her legs down his body to clamp around his thighs and reached for his pants. Her fingers fumbled to unfasten the straining top button. Having mastered that, she encountered another.

"All this technology and they still have button flies?" she said with a groan.

But it was kind of sexy struggling to get the metal disks undone while the two of them floated around the cabin. Three breathed noisily as he stroked her hair with one hand and kept a firm grasp on her shoulder with the other.

Another fastening popped free and Lucy realized he wore neither boxers nor briefs, nor cartoon pants featuring the message "Aliens made me do it". Lucy's hand slid between the flaps of material to touch hot, bare flesh and wiry curls. The tip of his cock nudged her fingers, wetting them with pre-cum, and Lucy's mouth watered.

A moment later, she panicked. What the hell was she doing? She did not do this with guys she'd only just met. She definitely did not do this with aliens she'd only just met. To be perfectly honest, if *this* turned out to be what she thought, she'd never done it with anyone. She'd read about blowjobs, had a sneaky look at a few free sample clips online, never more than that in case her computer was seized and some expert retrieved all her deleted stuff and declared her perverted—though there was nothing wrong in being curious—but she'd never actually...done it.

She'd never particularly wanted to.

She did now.

Forget the fact that she knew virtually nothing about Three. She was more attracted to him than she'd been to any man. Ever. Not because he was tall, dark and handsome, though that helped. He intrigued her. It was almost as though he'd been repressed in

some way, not allowed to smile or laugh. Lucy wore her heart on her sleeve and that wasn't always a good thing, but she was honest about her emotions. Three was an enigma.

Lucy slipped her hand inside his pants and wrapped her fingers around his cock. He let out a breathy moan as she pulled his erection through the gap. Lucy was amazed how hard it felt. Silk over steel. She wondered how much extra blood rushed there. Were other parts of the body deprived? The brain? She'd have to look it up on the Internet—ah no, she couldn't. His cock was as tall, dark and handsome as him. And thick. Lucy stifled the urge to laugh. Whether alien or earthling she knew a chuckle right now would not be appreciated.

Lucy settled for a muffled, "Wow."

"Something wrong? Perhaps I should inform you that our bodies are not the same in space as they are in normal gravity. There's a slight decrease in the size of my cock due to lower blood pressure."

Lucy let a bubble of laughter escape. "Oh God, I don't think that's a problem. Your cock's more than... Hey, what effect does it have on my body?"

"It has a positive effect on sagging body parts."

She squeezed his cock hard and he yelped. Lucy narrowed her eyes. "You're lucky that wasn't your balls. I don't have anything that sags either in space or out of space."

"No," he gasped. "But in space you're taller, have a thinner waist, slimmer legs, bigger breasts and higher cheekbones."

Lucy gawped at him. "You're kidding?"

"No."

"Is there a mirror somewhere?"

"No."

"Damn."

"You don't need a mirror. You look...beautiful." Three stared at her mouth.

Well he would say that, wouldn't he? Lucy ran her thumb over the head of his cock and it quivered. They currently floated upside down and Lucy wondered how she was going to do this? She fluttered her fingers down his length and slipped them inside his pants to cup his balls. The sac was so hard and full there was barely a wrinkle. A gentle caress and Three's groan matched Lucy's. She wanted a closer look. Hanging onto the waistband of his pants, which slipped on his hips as she tugged, Lucy kissed her way down his chest, pausing to dip her tongue into his navel.

Ooh, his skin trembled when she kissed him there. She did it again.

"Lucy," Three groaned.

She pressed her breasts against his cock, and through the thin material of her top, rubbed a nipple along his length. He seemed to have stopped breathing and she took a quick glance to check. He stared at her intently, his eyes dark with need.



She'd got this far, she wasn't going to back out now. *Please let me do this right.*

Lucy made one leisurely lick down his length, from shining tip to rock-hard balls and his hands fisted in her hair. She began to float up and wrapped herself around one of his legs. It had already occurred to her that she'd have to swallow otherwise things could get very messy. She circled her fingers around the base of his cock and put her mouth over the shiny head. He tasted nice, which was a relief, sort of sweet and tangy at the same time. The exposed skin at the crest was very soft, like the fur on a new puppy. Pre-cum oozed from the little slit and Lucy's tongue shot out to lap it up. His fingers tightened in her hair.

"Oh gods. What...what..." he gasped.

Lucy kept her grip firm at the root as she began to lick the silky cock head. Licks turned into sucks, into kisses, moved on to lingering caresses by her lips and tongue. The tighter he pulled her hair, the tighter she gripped the root of his cock. No way was he coming until she'd driven him mad with desire. She had to be doing this right. He hadn't yanked her off and called her names. In fact, his other leg had moved over her back to keep her in place as they floated around the cabin.

Her cheeks hollowed as she took as much of him into her mouth as she could and sucked hard. She drank in the ripple that ran through his body and a flood of moisture wet the crotch of her pajamas. Lucy took her other hand off the waistband of his pants and used both fists to caress him, one after the other, pulling and twisting as she sucked and then released him from her mouth.

One quick glance at Three found him with his head back, eyes shut tight and his mouth open as ragged gasps burst out. Almost as if he sensed her looking, he opened his dark eyes and stared down at her. A spurt of pre-cum hit Lucy's lips and she licked it off.

"*Zimpra* shit," he groaned.

When she began to suck again, Lucy let his cock out almost to the tip and showed him the glistening length moving between her lips. Three's shudder vibrated through his shaft.

"Lucy," he whispered as she sped up her hands and mouth. "Lucy."

She wanted to give him the best blowjob he'd ever had, not just because she wanted to please him but if it came to a decision over her future, she wanted him to remember how she could make him feel. Lucy felt his climax rising in the way his cock heated and swelled and his body tensed. He wasn't the only one excited. Her pussy muscles kept clenching and her pajamas were soaked. She really wanted to slip a hand to her clit but she couldn't let go of him. Instead she rubbed herself against his thigh trying to find some relief.

"Lucy." He exploded into her mouth with a long sigh. The warm spurt of cum hit the back of her throat and she swallowed. Three gasped with each jet he fired into her mouth. Lucy tightened her lips and sucked.

Uh oh, what if this was the way his race made love? Could he get her pregnant?  
Was it too late to spit?

## Chapter Five

*Australian honey possums pollinate large flowered banksias. The possum is only four inches in length but has a long, slender tongue that sticks out an inch beyond its nose.*

For a long moment, Three thought he'd died. He couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't think. He just floated.

Then thoughts rushed through his head in an overpowering wave like the Worker Bs heading for the pools after a day in the biodomes. To use an Earth expression—fucking hell! Why hadn't he remembered what a woman's lips around his cock could do? Why had it been considered necessary for him to forget, to forego the pleasure? How come it had happened now? Oh Gods, did he drown her?

"Are you all right? Did...did I hurt you? Do something wrong? Suck instead of blow?" Lucy asked.

Three looked at her. Her head lay against his hip and she panted into his crotch. Her arms clutched his waist, her legs were wrapped around one of his. He saw his hand stroking her hair, and wondered that he'd thought to make such a gesture.

"Lucy," he whispered, liking the sound of her name on his lips.

She clutched him tighter but didn't look at him. He puzzled why not but Three felt a deep sense of ease, as though something special had been returned to him, a precious gift. *Lucy*. Three pulled her up so she faced him and he wrapped her in his embrace.

"I haven't done that before," she said. "I don't want you to get the wrong idea about me. I don't get frisky with every alien I meet. I mean, I don't even know you. Ooh, your...you could have poisoned me. Any minute I could be writhing in agony while my organs liquefy. Are my eyes red? Do I look pale?" She coughed. "Oh, my lungs."

Three felt his mouth quiver. "I haven't poisoned you."

She smiled and he saw stars shining in her eyes. "Really?"

"Will you take your clothes off?" Three asked.

"You mean you want me naked?"

He nodded.

"You first."

Three pulled off his boots, grabbed his floating T-shirt and pushed them in a locker. He peeled off his pants and tucked them away too. When he turned to look at Lucy, drifting across the cabin, clutching her clothes in front of her, Three's heart throbbed. He'd seen naked Pleasure Bs and one of them in particular, Vileda, took delight in

taunting him, teasing him with glimpses of her body, but Lucy took his breath away. She let go of her pajamas and as they drifted away his cock sprang back to attention. Three stuffed her clothes in the locker with his.

"Let's play chase," Lucy said.

His pulse jumped. "Let's play catch."

Three could have caught her sooner but he allowed his fingers to miss her, delighting in the way she squirmed free. Each time he brushed a part of his body against her, his desire for her grew.

"Missed me, slowpoke." She grabbed the back of one of the seats and used it to push away from him.

Her giggles thrilled him. Nothing like Vileda's sultry tones. He *wanted* to play with Lucy. Three yelped as she nipped him on the butt.

"What did I tell you?" he growled and grabbed her ankle as she flew away.

"What?"

Come to think of it, he hadn't told her. When she'd thrown that stone head at him he'd wanted to paddle her backside, slap his palm on her skin until it turned rosy red. Not hurt her, just... Three shivered. *What?* His cock twitched.

"What did you tell me?" Lucy asked as he pulled her close and rubbed his erection against her soft belly.

"I didn't, but you deserve a...spanking."

She grinned and his heart thumped.

"Alert. Moisture content in excess of —"

"Computer silent," Three snapped at the automated voice. He wondered why it hadn't butted in before.

"What was that?" Lucy asked.

"The onboard computer monitors everything. All ship functions. My...functions. Yours too. We perspire more in low gravity. There's no natural convection to take away body heat so we're hotter and wetter."

"And what we're doing now makes us even hotter and wetter." She kissed his chin.

"There's no danger. The computer will make the necessary adjustments."

"I might be in danger if you want to spank me."

Three swallowed hard. "In low gravity, unless I could pin you down, it wouldn't have much effect."

"Is spanking me all you want to do?" Lucy raised her eyebrows and locked her arms around his neck.

Three nudged his rock-hard erection against the junction of her legs and locked his hands on her butt as he flexed his hips against hers. "I want..." He struggled to find the words. "I want to...fuck you with my fingers, my mouth and my cock. I want to do it

upside down, forward, backward and sideways. I want it fast. I want it slow. I want it every place in between."

Lucy's low moan sent him weak at the knees. Luckily with no floor under his feet, it didn't matter, though he suspected she knew the effect she had on him. Three kissed the slender column of her neck, ran his tongue along the salty ridge of her collarbone and down to her breasts. He wanted to touch them with his hands too but he couldn't let her go or they'd drift apart.

He licked her nipple, felt it harden in his mouth and then nibbled, laved and circled it before he sucked hard.

"Oh my God," Lucy gasped, her fingers digging into his lower back.

She tasted hot and sweet and Three thought he could do this forever. He moved from one breast to the other, licking until she was soaked. He could feel moisture on his leg where she'd wrapped her thigh over his. He wanted to taste her. She purred as he slipped down her body. She let him slide through her grasp as he trailed his tongue along her sternum. Three clutched her hips and dipped his tongue into her navel. Her hands threaded his hair and held his head in place.

"Where did you get that tongue?" Lucy murmured.

It was all his. One of the few parts of him that was. Unless that wasn't either and... Three stopped thinking. He fluttered his tongue down and down until he reached the junction of her thighs. Soft curls. The Bs were hairless there. Three liked Lucy's blonde wisps. His hands cupped her bottom to keep her close, tightened over the rounded globes and squeezed. He laid his lips over her moist, blushing ones and kissed her. Three used his tongue to open her, licking his way between her soft, pink folds. He drank in her sweetness, and even before he'd reached the place he instinctively knew would bring her most pleasure, she came. Lucy unraveled against his mouth, her contractions making his lips zing as she tightened her hold on his head.

Three didn't stop licking her. His tongue seemed to have a mind of its own, dipping and diving into her honeyed depths. He pressed his face closer so he could thrust deeper. He had to have more.

"Suck my clit," Lucy whispered.

Three was pretty sure he wasn't a virgin but it felt like this was the first time for him. He pulled back to nudge the sensitive nub with the tip of his tongue. Lucy's sharp intake of breath told him to continue. He circled and nibbled, clutching her backside tighter and tighter as his cock continued to swell, the pressure building in his balls. Three sucked the little knot into his mouth and felt her groan vibrate through his body. He lapped and swirled, nipped and nibbled as her hips bucked against him, and when she came again, a surge of triumph shot through him.

He pulled himself back up her body to kiss her and then worried she might not want to taste—no problem, Lucy was as ravenous as him.

She dragged her mouth from his. "I want you inside me. Do you have any protection?"

Three's gut twisted. He had no disease but she couldn't know that. "I'm completely safe," he said. "Completely." He hoped that was enough.

Lucy sighed. She wasn't on the Pill, so if she wanted to go any further, she had to trust him. Maybe his planet had an oral contraceptive for men. They must be more amenable than men on Earth who were happy for women to take a contraceptive pill yet balked at the idea of taking one themselves. The Pill must have been invented by a guy.

"Lucy? Okay?"

He nuzzled her neck and locked his heels around her ankles as they rolled around the cabin, ricocheting gently from wall to wall. Three held her so tight Lucy couldn't breathe without feeling some part of him. The problem was they had to loosen their hold to get in the right position and loosening their hold sent them drifting apart. Making love in low gravity would prove a challenge.

"Stop fighting it," Three whispered.

"I'm fighting to get it."

They looked at each other and laughed. Lucy melted. His electric smile sent current sizzling along her veins to every erogenous zone and beyond. Lucy thought she'd do anything to make him smile.

"I could turn the AG on," Three said.

"Don't you dare. I might be the first Earth woman to do this and I've never been first at anything. Not even the egg and spoon race. The astronauts were always a bit coy about what happened in space but they had so little room and privacy I suspect the answer is nothing. I could go down in history," she paused, "or not."

Three turned her around so Lucy's back lay against his chest. "Hold onto me."

Lucy reached behind and wrapped her arms around his waist. Three pressed his chin into her shoulder, his damp lips nuzzling her skin as he slid his hands over her breasts. His thumbs raked her taut nipples and he left one hand playing there while the other dropped between her legs. Hooking his heels over her shins, he opened her to his touch and a red hot wave of desire scorched a path to Lucy's core.

His fingers slid over her swollen folds and his cock nudged at her opening. As he pushed himself inside her, Three bit down on her neck and she felt it all the way to the soles of her feet. He kept pushing into her and at the same time dragging her down onto his shaft. Her muscles clamped around his rigid length and she wasn't sure whether she was trying to keep him in or stop him going further.

"Oh God," Lucy gasped. *How much more of him?*

Lifting his head from her neck, he twisted around to plant his lips against hers and Lucy arched back against him. Three held her tight as he plundered her with his tongue. She linked her fingers behind his back and bucked her hips to make him move one way or the other. Preferably both. His tongue speared her mouth as his cock did the

same between her legs in an opposing rhythm. Lucy thought her head would explode in pleasure. She whimpered into his mouth, need overpowering every other thought.

Three thrust his cock deep inside her in long surges, pulling her down with every stroke. Lucy had already passed the point of control. She gave herself up to the exquisite pleasure of the moment, the sensation of his thick cock sliding inside her, the strong thrust of his tongue in her mouth. As he stiffened and tightened his hold, Lucy clasped every part of him as hard as she could, as though he'd thrown them over an abyss and they'd meet their end together.

The end was a climax that would have knocked her socks off—if she'd been wearing any. Surge after surge of raw pleasure flooded her body, surfing her veins to send tingles from the top of her head to her toes. Lucy forgot to breathe as rockets shot up her spine and thundered to detonation in her head. As she lost her link with sanity, Three gave a roar of animalistic delight and spurted inside her, his warm seed jetting so strongly Lucy felt every pulse.

They spun in slow circles as tension eased from their bodies, though her toes were still curled tight. Three rubbed his cheek against Lucy's head and panted into her ear. She felt as though she wallowed in the aftermath of an explosion, her head pounding, her chest tight while her arms and legs hung limp and useless. Three kept a firm hold on her, anchoring her to him. Lucy sighed when he withdrew his cock but the next moment his mouth was where his cock had been.

Lucy shrieked. "What are you doing?"

"Licking you clean," he mumbled.

Lucy's brain clicked into gear. In zero gravity any molecules of liquid would float around the cabin so he was just being—*ooh*. She stared at his dark hair as he worked his tongue across the swollen nub of her clit. Lucy thought she'd come enough to satisfy her for at least a week only she'd been wrong. She gasped as Three drew his tongue down her soaking lips, licking and sucking as though she was the most delicious thing he'd ever tasted.

He flicked her with his tongue and dipped it inside her. The way he touched her with his mouth and his hands made Lucy shake with emotion. Did all spacemen have magic tongues? His swept over her, teasing, fluttering and then his fingers pressed deeper into the crease of her bottom.

She was so hot and wet.

She couldn't come again.

She *could* come again.

One finger teased the rosebud of her asshole as his tongue speared her pussy. He wouldn't—yes, he would. Lucy let out a sob as the tip of his finger pressed into her anus. She squirmed to make him stop. Squirmed to make him keep going.

Bad Lucy.

Good Lucy.

Burning sting and molten pleasure worked together to drive her wild. Awash in sensation and emotion, she felt her body overrule her brain. He pushed deeper with his finger, sucked harder and every one of her muscles clenched. Lucy erupted in flames, caught in a surge of primitive joy that rushed through her veins and for a moment turned her world dark.

She came around to find herself cradled in his arms, his lips planting gentle kisses on her neck.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Lucy shook her head. How come she didn't know sex could be that good? She would never be all right again.

"AG on," Three said.

They slid down the wall to their feet and he held her until she could stand. Her knees shook like a newborn foal's. One press of a panel and he pulled a couple of moist wipes from a tube and handed one to her.

Lucy glared. "You didn't need to lick me clean at all."

Three grinned.

"What are you messing around at?"

The man's voice made Lucy jump.

Not Three.

Not the computer.



## Chapter Six

*Some seeds are so tough, they can stay dormant for hundreds of years but may be triggered into life by a special combination of light, moisture and warmth.*

Three dragged Lucy into his arms and clamped his hand over her mouth.

"Three? Respond."

"*Zimpra* shit," Three hissed.

Lucy tried to get free and when that failed sank her teeth into his finger. Three glared but didn't remove his hand.

"ASS *Xenothak* hailing Omega shuttle. Come in, Three."

"Omega Shuttle responding."

"What *have* you been doing?"

Lucy guessed he wouldn't admit to fucking his passenger.

"I've collected the samples and I'm on my way back," Three said.

*I'm a sample?* Lucy stopped struggling. Oh God, he'd said he was a collector and she'd conveniently ignored that fact. Maybe there were more like her. Maybe Three had taken women from all over Earth, all shapes and sizes and colors, and had them stored in cages downstairs. How much room was there below?

"Computer systems indicate an elevated heart rate, hormone imbalance, respiration rate above—"

"I was on manual and had a near miss with Earth's orbiting space station."

Lucy blinked. She hoped that was a lie. And why hadn't the computer system spotted she had a heart too?

"You left Earth's orbit six *milos* ago."

Lucy felt perspiration erupt on Three's skin. His hand moved from her mouth and she slid from his grasp.

"That near miss was followed by..." Three stumbled to a halt, a stricken look on his face.

Lucy thought fast. Mimed "come" by jerking an imaginary cock.

"Come," Three mumbled.

She pretended to hit him.

"Hit. Come-hit? Comet in my path." He smothered a laugh.

"A comet?" asked the disembodied voice. "Are you feeling all right? Switch on visual."

Lucy pointed to her open mouth.

"Black hole?" Three said.

She pointed to her backside.

"Asteroid." He slammed his hand over his mouth but the guffaw escaped.

"Three, return to your seat and link into the computer for a full bio scan. You need maintenance."

He hesitated and then sat naked on the chair and pressed the button. The straps flashed out to hold him in place.

*Maintenance?* What did that mean? Lucy bristled. He wasn't a machine.

"Switch on visual," the voice commanded.

*Oh fuck, where are my clothes?* Lucy ran around the cabin touching the wall. Nothing opened. Three signaled to get behind him and she sank to the floor at the rear of his seat and curled up. Maybe he wasn't supposed to play with the samples he collected. Lucy wasn't sure whether that made her feel better or not.

"Do you always fly naked?" asked the voice.

Silence.

*Think of something, dimwit.* Lucy wondered if he had a problem lying.

"I had difficulty collecting the last sample and contaminated my spare set of clothing."

Well, that wasn't a lie, Lucy thought, remembering the flour.

"Hmm. Time until docking?"

"Fifteen *milos*."

"Report to Hyll as soon as you dock, then to me. ASS *Xenothak* out."

Three expelled a noisy breath. "You can come out now."

Lucy didn't move. Something had just occurred to her. How come she could understand what that guy had said? She heard the word *milos* but had no idea what it meant. Or *zimpra* shit. *Grrrr Earth shit. What has he done to me?*

Three pulled her to her feet.

Thoughts tumbled in her brain. "Why was I able to understand him?"

"Translation chip." Three lifted his hand and his fingers brushed the back of her head. "Here."

Lucy's stomach roiled. The band that had tightened around her head when she'd first sat in the chair. The ache. She took a deep breath. She *was* a sample. She meant no more to Three than that. The only reason he hadn't wanted that guy to see her was because he wasn't supposed to mess around with the merchandise. Stupid to think she meant anything to him. It was just sex. Were all guys the same? Even aliens?

"Why didn't you ask me if I minded?"

"It didn't hurt."

"That's not the point. I'm not speaking to you anymore."

Three rolled his eyes.

"I mean it."

She saw his mouth twitch and glared. "It's not funny. Oh God, I'm so useless. I can't even not talk to you."

"I like to hear you talk."

He wasn't going to like her questions.

"How long will the experiments take?" she asked, her voice more pathetic than she'd have liked. "Can you put me on the fast-track program and then take me back to Yorkshire? Maybe you could go through the space-time continuum or something and make it a week ago—I think I can remember the lottery numbers." She tried to smile.

His finger slid around her cheek and pushed up the edge of her mouth. "No."

Lucy's heart lurched against her ribs. "Spoilsport. All right, same month would be good. No point wasting my cable subscription."

"I mean you can't go back."

"Not straightaway?"

"Not ever."

Okay, so Lucy had known, but it still hurt to hear it. She swallowed hard. "You going to put me with the others now?"

"What others?"

"Samples. Don't they speak English? Is that why I need the translation chip? So we can talk to one another? Obviously if one of them is an American, I'd definitely need the chip. Ha!"

Three sat on his chair and pulled Lucy onto his lap. "Don't you let your brain check your words before you allow them out of your mouth?"

Lucy pressed her lips together. Not that it would stop her speaking.

Three nuzzled her shoulder. "The samples are plants."

"Plants? Didn't ET get them all?"

"What?"

She should have known he wouldn't get that.

"I wasn't supposed to bring you."

"Then why did you?"

Three really didn't know. His behavior was a complete aberration. From the moment he'd dropped into the Earth's atmosphere he hadn't felt...right. He could have easily put Lucy in her house and left her to wake up thinking she'd had some out-of-body experience, so what the hell had he been doing? Thinking with his cock? No wonder the need for sex had been chipped out of him.

Only it hadn't, had it? Three gulped. On the other hand, Lucy might have triggered some change in his behavior, depressed his sexual inhibition and reminded his cock what it had been missing. Or perhaps Hyll had done something to an operating system at his last med inspection. Hyll told him everything was fine but maybe he'd lied. Both of them knew the senior science officer had an ulterior motive. Only it hadn't been Hyll who'd switched on Three's sex drive, but Lucy. She'd thrown his world into turmoil. He'd not followed orders. He was contemplating not following them for as long as he could keep her with him. That couldn't be right. Three thought about the way he'd pounded his shaft into Lucy, the exquisite sensation of emptying his balls into her sweet depths.

*Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.*

He hadn't sampled the Pleasure Bs for the last five *manos*, despite the efforts of some of them, so how had Lucy managed to get under his skin in the space of a few *milos*? Something must have malfunctioned in one of his systems. *Malfunctioned*? He looked into her beautiful eyes and his gaze slid to her soft lips.

*Right. Right. Right.*

"Why did you bring me?" Her voice quavered.

Three understood the importance of saying the right thing here, that his words could have implications far beyond this moment, only he didn't have an answer.

"Why?" she repeated.

"It felt right to bring you."

"Right for you, but not for me," Lucy said in a glum voice.

Three wrapped her hand in his. "Right for both of us." Except it wasn't.

"So what did you see in me? I tried to brain you with a stone head."

"Then you tried to save my life."

"Damn, I knew I should have run for it."

"I'd have caught you." *I'll always catch you.* The words froze in his throat. How could he be *feeling* anything for Lucy?

"Are you going to get into trouble if they find out you've snuck me on board?"

"Yes."

"What will they do to you? Bread and water for the rest of the trip? They...they wouldn't hurt you would they?"

Three sighed. She worried about him and not herself.

Lucy sighed. "Much better for both of us if you say nothing. I can hide in your room. You bring me food and I'll keep your bed warm. So long as I don't have to walk the plank if I'm discovered. Well, I guess I'd just get fired out of an airlock to float forever in space. Or would I implode? I should have paid more attention in physics. Once we got to fission and fusion, I'd had it. I'd definitely be dead though, right? So long as I was dead first, maybe that wouldn't be too bad. Only I'm not into pain so

make it quick. Ooh, I might end up pressed against the porthole of some spaceship and be collected for a museum of space oddities. I'd live forever like an Egyptian mummy. Sort of."

Three struggled to filter sense from nonsense. "No."

"Admittedly I wouldn't be wrapped in bandages."

"No, I can't hide you. I have to tell Caled."

"Caled?"

"Caled Ekarb. Commander of the *Xenothak*. The one I just spoke to."

"Why do you have to tell him?"

Three's mind raced. How could he hide her? She was incapable of keeping quiet. The ship's com system could catch her out at anytime. The cameras couldn't all be avoided. He couldn't turn them off for extended periods in his quarters without arousing suspicion. He'd have to move her continually. Could he do that?

"You could try to keep me a secret," Lucy said. "If you wanted to."

"The life systems of the *Xenothak* are finely balanced to support those on board. He'll know if I—"

"Please don't let him hurt me."

Three wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. How could he protect her? He might not even remember her once Caled and Hyll had finished with him. Three was aware his behavior had been both reckless and selfish. He wasn't stupid. He knew what the consequences would be, so why did it still feel as if he'd done the right thing?

Lucy kissed her way up his neck to his lips and Three's cock burst into life like a *boolus* flower. Was she using sex as a means to persuade him? The tip of her tongue rimmed the line of his mouth and she nibbled his lower lip. Or doing this because she wanted him?

A twist of her body and Lucy leaned face forward between his outstretched legs, her belly pressed against his rigid cock. She grasped the back of his neck with both hands and returned her lips to his. While one hand held him tight, the fingers of the other speared through his hair, gently twisting and turning against his scalp. Three opened his lips and her hot little tongue slipped inside. He groaned into her mouth, petted her head, her shoulders and her spine before he let his hands trail down to clutch her backside, his thumbs caressing the dimples on her lower back.

With slow, silky strokes against his tongue, Lucy explored his mouth, and all the time a fiery dragon coiled in his balls, building up for eruption. Lucy was gentle and he wanted hard. As though she'd read his mind, she thrust with her tongue, little stabbing pulses he felt in his groin. The hard points of her nipples brushed against his chest as she writhed against him, massaging the tip of his cock, his pre-cum surging to wet them both.

She stole his breath, turned him on like a supernova, made him desperate to be inside her. Three's hands tightened on her backside, the pads of his thumbs circling,

fingernails teasing. His tongue tangled with hers as he explored the sizzling heat of her mouth. When they broke apart, they panted into each other's faces. Lucy reached between their bodies, bypassing his cock to scoop cream from her slit. She brought her hand to her lips and licked each glistening finger as she stared him in the eyes. The second time she did it, Three opened his mouth, inviting her to let him taste, but she stole her sweet nectar again. Not the third time. He caught her wrist and devoured each finger in turn.

As if the flood of moisture between her legs wasn't enough, Lucy's half-lidded gaze told Three this was no pretence. She wasn't using sex to manipulate him. Except that's what was happening. He wanted her more than he remembered wanting anything. He felt a spark of anger he'd been denied this. He ran his hand over the curve of her hip then lifted her over his cock. Her breasts within reach, Three flicked his tongue around her nipple and chuckled at her stuttered groan. He brought her body down slowly, pressed his tongue into her mouth as he eased his cock inside her slick channel. He swallowed her little moans and whimpers, allowing her to swallow his.

Three didn't move for a while, just sat with his shaft buried deep inside Lucy's comforting heat, her cream seeping over his balls. He could smell her arousal, hear her labored breathing, feel her trembling. Something about being joined with her in this way made Three feel they were meant for each other, that he'd been waiting all his life for Lucy. With slow, delicate strokes he lifted her up and down on his cock, letting the mixture of his pre-cum and her juice coat his path. She was so tight, so wet, so hot, Three though he might expire from the strain of holding back.

Then Lucy pressed down on his shoulders, raised her hips and enveloped him, pushing the pace, fucking *him*. His balls slapped at her ass, the sensation part pleasure part pain. She clenched him with the muscles of her channel, twisting on her down stroke to drag a growl from his throat. Three lifted his hips from the chair to thrust into her as she drove herself down. A long wail burst from her mouth but she didn't stop what she was doing, so Three didn't either.

She rode him hard and fast. His hands moved from her butt to her breasts, urging her up, driving her down. Watching his hard, dark gold cock disappear between those swollen pink lips, watching her face as she wound herself toward nirvana, mesmerized Three. She clenched his cock so tight with her muscles he thought his balls had passed the point of explosion and moved to imminent spontaneous combustion. With every thrust she groaned. With every withdrawal, Three groaned.

He wanted to remember every second. Somewhere in his lust-fogged brain he feared this was all he might have. Three dropped his hand between their bodies, down to where they joined and slipped a finger to her clit. He used their juices to rub the little knot, circling, squeezing, flicking. When he discovered rubbing his fingers either side drove her wild, made her grind herself against him while she gulped in breathy whimpers, Three's heart jolted with pleasure because he was learning about her body. The computer would think he was having a heart attack—and in a way he was. Lucy

had attacked his heart and made him see he was more of a man than they wanted him to believe.

The walls of Lucy's hot pussy tightened more forcefully around him. She tensed and cried out, then tilted her head back and let out a protracted cry. Three's cock reacted to the rhythmic contractions by swelling. The orgasm started at the back of his head—well, it might have been somewhere outside the viewing port, on one of the stars—but it shot down his spine and ignited his balls. Three thrust and jerked as he exploded into her, jetting bursts of hot cum deep inside her spasming channel as they shuddered against one another. Her muscles milked him dry, dragged every last drop from his body.

They came down together, holding each other, wet bodies plastered together. He rubbed her back. She nuzzled his chest and licked him. Three tightened his grip. His brain frantically computed the possible outcomes of bringing Lucy on board. None looked good. Three didn't want to give her up yet he knew there was no way to keep her.

## Chapter Seven

*Depressa aurea and ilex aquifolium – juniper and holly – are dioecious. Individual plants are either male or female, unlike most tree species, where both male and female flowers occur on the same tree.*

Lucy tugged on her pants and pulled her pajama top over her head. She'd spent so long naked, it felt weird to put clothes on again. She'd wanted to talk to Three about his planet, his friends, what he liked, what he didn't, but each time she tried, he stopped her mouth with kisses, distracting her with his touch. Lucy suspected he was trying to hide something.

Her gaze slid to the window and she sucked in a breath. "Whoa, Three, look out. You're heading straight for that planet. Turn the wheel or something."

He snickered.

"I don't think it's funny. I'm beginning to wonder about your driving skills. Did you actually pass a test? Do they make you take one? Maybe you need glasses. You want me to drive?"

"That isn't a planet. It's the mother ship, the *Xenothak*."

"Oh my God." Lucy slumped into her seat. "It's enormous."

"An A-class colonizer."

"Colonizer?" Lucy wasn't sure she liked the sound of that.

"There are three other mother ships exactly like this one. For the last five *manos*, we've been travelling the galaxy collecting plant specimens and cultivating them in specialized biodomes."

"A *manos*?"

"An Earth month – roughly."

"For some particular reason or research?"

"Need. One of our two suns is dying."

"Doesn't that mean it will explode?"

"It's not big enough to explode. It'll expand and then fade away. Without gravity strong enough to retain its gas, it will slowly flow into space."

She might have understood physics better if Three had been her teacher. Then again, maybe not.

"The seven orbiting planets are cooling. Syobwoc's orbit is the most distant and so it's cooling the fastest. The only other habitable planet in the system can't cope with a transfer of our entire population, and before too long, they'll be in the same position



anyway, so scientists are attempting to adapt our vegetation to the lower temperatures and reduced light conditions resulting from only one functional sun."

"And that's your job, to go and get plant samples?"

"Yes, I'm a collector. It's one of my jobs."

Lucy stared at the looming craft. She could see bits sticking out, lines of lights, straight-sided valleys. It was hard to believe what she was looking at. "Are there many people on board?"

"People?" He sucked in his cheeks. "Well, a squad of workers tend the flora in the biodomes and —"

"Maybe I could help. I know all about plants. I'm an expert." A slight exaggeration but making herself indispensable had to be a good move. "I work—worked in the garden center next door. I could be incredibly useful, not a waste of oxygen."

Lucy flinched when the safety straps snapped over her. The entire window had filled with the view of the spaceship. She felt like she was watching a sci-fi movie. No—like she was *in* the movie. A tiny part of Lucy wondered if she'd had a brain hemorrhage and lay in a coma dreaming all this. No, she wasn't capable of imagining sex that great.

She had to find some way to persuade Three not to give her up the moment they docked. "If you're bringing plants on board, won't that alter the ratio of oxygen to carbon dioxide? Could their respiration balance mine?"

Three frowned. "It would take between three and four hundred leafy plants to keep you alive for an hour."

"Did you bring that many plants?"

"No."

Lucy's shoulders slumped.

"Though the ones I brought are very leafy."

She looked up.

"It won't help. The ship's bio scanner will automatically adjust the environment to assimilate the new plants. It expects increased levels of oxygen and a decrease in carbon dioxide."

"Can't you pretend I'm a plant? Please don't give me up. I can be quiet. You won't even know I'm there. Honest. I'll do anything you want. I could hide in your closet. I wouldn't mind a book to read, but I could stay there all day. No problem. Er—if there was a bathroom."

Three sighed. She hoped it wasn't with exasperation.

Just as Lucy thought they were about to crash into the surface of the ship, a hole opened. Three didn't appear to be doing very much so she assumed computers controlled the docking. In the cavernous hangar ahead stood three shuttles similar to the one they were in, though much larger. They settled in a gap and there was a slight

clunk as they landed. Once the lights went out on the board in front of him, Three released his seat restraints and got to his feet. Lucy's heart beat so fast she felt sick.

She jolted at the sound of a woman's voice filling the cabin. "Three, report immediately to medbay." There was a pause. "Then report to me." No mistaking the giggling in the second part of the order.

Lucy opened her mouth then closed it again. No point saying anything. She pressed the button and her straps retracted. Three pulled her to her feet. He bent to put his mouth against her ear. "Do you trust me?"

She pulled back and stared at him.

He sighed as if he understood her reticence. "Let me rephrase. No matter what happens, I want you to trust me."

Lucy gave a little nod. Over her dead body.

Robotic transportation units—TBs—waited in the unloading bay, a line of opaque rectangular hover boxes ready to take the plants—and Lucy—to the quarantine unit. Once Three had unloaded his cargo, the shuttle and docking bay would undergo their own decontamination. Three made sure Lucy stayed out of the camera's path.

He put her in the leading unit, between—according to their labels—a *depressa aurea* and an *ilex aquifolium*. Oh yes, Juniper and holly. Red berries would grow on the holly and blue on the juniper. Three froze for a moment. How in the Legolian void did he know that? He shook his head. Must be image flashes from his library store.

Within moments, Lucy was lost from view behind a veil of green shrubs as he piled plants around her. Normal procedure was to engage the hermetic seal once the unit was full, but Three left Lucy's container open until he'd unloaded everything, including the things he'd taken from her garden, though they didn't go into her container.

He piled up boxes of seeds, bags of compost and bottles of fertilizer. His instructions were to bring samples of everything the inhabitants of Yorkshire used to take care of their plants. Three had been disappointed when he hadn't been given the mission to Kew Gardens in London. Kew had one of the largest and most diverse living botanical collections on the planet and seeds from every ecosystem—but not Lucy. He smiled.

Three stripped off, threw his clothes and shoes in the chute and stepped into the sterilizing unit. He was obliged to remain there until the cycle ended, but he didn't take his gaze away from the window and the line of TBs beyond. No point wondering if he'd done the right thing. He'd chosen his path.

As the door of his compartment opened on the other side, the TBs moved through a low-level exterior decontamination of their own and on to a waiting area beyond. Three dressed quickly in regulation khaki button-down shirt and trousers, and hurried to the leading TB. He spread his hand over the lid, thinking about Lucy crouching below.

So far so good. He'd be taking a big risk not going straight to the medbay. But he had only one chance to keep Lucy a secret and he was seizing it. After all, how much worse could things get between confessing now, or Caled finding out later? Three suspected the outcome would be the same for both of them but with a bit more time, there was a chance he might think of a solution.

Three bent and put his mouth against the leading unit. "Lucy!" He waited but she didn't answer. Was she angry with him? "Lucy Brilliant Sunbeam Pineapple Princess Ferze," he hissed more loudly.

"What?" came a quiet muffled response.

"You must keep quiet."

"I'm not the one making the noise. Have you heard me yell? Not yet. Just wait."

He smiled and pressed the exit button. The door to the transportation corridor slid open and Vileda stood smiling at him. *Zimpra* shit. She wore a skintight black bodysuit, her large breasts spilling over the top.

"Welcome home, Three." Her perfect eyes brightened and her perfect mouth widened into a perfect smile. "I'm glad you're back. I missed you."

Three sidestepped her embrace.

Her smile never faltered. "I've reserved the private bath for us after your med check and debriefing."

He clenched his teeth.

"I wish to show you my new massage technique."

"No thank you."

"I have prepared *poolah* for your meal."

"Not hungry."

"Caled wishes for me to arrange a time for you and I to join him in the Pleasure Dome."

Three's stomach lurched. Bs weren't supposed to be cunning but he wondered about Vileda. "I'll work it into my schedule." *Which would be never.*

Three thought if she smiled any harder, her face would crack.

Vileda laid her hand on his arm. "In the meantime, I've come to escort you to the medbay."

Three removed her hand. "I have work to do first."

Something brittle in her eyes alarmed him.

The hand came back and the grip tightened. "I can request Worker Bs to do this for you."

Three shook her off. "No. I have a delicate specimen that requires careful handling." He thought fast. "What I do need before I speak to Caled is a clean uniform. Would you ensure there's one ready in my quarters?"

"My honor. I'll wait there for you."

Three shuddered as she walked away. The Pleasure Bs were supposed to be pliable, biddable, malleable. They didn't inveigle, wheedle and plot. They did as they were told. That was the whole point of their existence but Vileda didn't seem to understand the word "no". She'd have a long wait in his quarters and it seemed to have slipped past her radar that he already wore a clean uniform.

The journey to Biodome Seven seemed to take *milos*. He constantly expected to hear Hyll's voice over his com device, asking what the *zimpra* shit he was doing. Three had no answer. Once he'd maneuvered all the units into the dome's quarantine room, he breathed a sigh of relief. Before the Worker Bs next door noted his presence and swarmed to help, Three unlocked the first TB.

He was crazy to do this. He should have just confessed and had done with it. He might be able to hide Lucy for a while but the conclusion was inevitable. What in the Legolian void was he thinking? The lid hissed open, Lucy's beautiful eyes smiled up at him and Three's cock lunged against the fastening of his pants. Ah yes, that's what he'd been thinking.

He put out his hand to help her up and yelped.

"For the love of *zimboots*, what the —?" Three looked down at the holly leaf sticking in his palm.

"Next time, think," Lucy said. "I've been sitting on that. And who the hell were you talking to? A private bath and a massage? Do I get one?"

She climbed out from between the plants and brushed herself down. He grabbed her hand and pulled her through a link corridor to one of the sleeper units.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"Somewhere safe," Three said.

He shoved her inside and locked the door.

At a glance, Lucy took in the stark room, four pale gray walls, the low single bed and spun around. Three had gone and the door had closed. *Damn*. And he hadn't answered her question about who he'd been talking to. She banged on the door. "Hey, let me out."

Lucy pressed the control pad, thumped it, swore at it but nothing happened. She turned and took another look at her surroundings. Prison cell about covered it. Gray walls and gray — maybe rubber — floor. One corner dipped with a drain at the bottom, a wide shower head above. She pulled down an oval seat from the wall beneath to find it was a toilet. A way to pee and shower at the same time without feeling naughty.

*Oooh I need to pee.*

Nothing to shield her from view but there were no windows. Before thinking stopped her, Lucy dropped her pants. She hadn't intended to sit properly — not sitting on strange toilet seats an instruction deeply hammered into her brain from the moment

she stopped wearing diapers—only the seat had other ideas and Lucy found her backside suctioned down. She yelped, tried to pull up and couldn't. *Oh fuck, I'm stuck.*

Her need to relieve the ache in her bladder was now too urgent to resist and Lucy gave in. If she was going to be trapped, she might as well be trapped in comfort. She hadn't expected the following soapy wash, nor the blast of dry air that followed. When the toilet had finished with her, the suction relaxed and Lucy scrambled to her feet, yanking up her pajamas. The toilet slid back into place and a wash basin emerged. Water, soap and drier all automated. The moment she moved away, the basin disappeared into the wall. Like a child with a new toy, Lucy stepped forward and the basin reemerged, she stepped back and it vanished. A giggle burst from her lips. She did it three more times before she worried she might break it.

The moment of pleasure hadn't lasted long and she slumped on the bed. What was she supposed to do? Work out what else lurked out of sight? If she pressed the right piece of gray panel would a TV emerge? A shelf of books? She glanced at her bare feet. A rack of shoes? How long was Three going to keep her here? Was he with that woman? This couldn't be his room, surely. How many hours before she went crazy with boredom?

Ah.

How many minutes before she went crazy with boredom?

Lucy lay down on the bare gray mattress and curled up. A pillow for her head but nothing to cover her body though it wasn't cold. She felt like hiding. Deprived of that, she started to count the rubber dimples on the floor.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where the *zimpra* shit have you been?" Hyll demanded. "I expected you here a *milo* ago."

Three looked at the *Xenothak's* senior science officer, the closest he had to a friend on board, and didn't tell the whole truth. "Specimen emergency."

Hyll ran his fingers through his short white hair. "Caled's demanding to know why I hadn't sent him your function report. I had to tell him I was still doing it. Get your clothes off and slap your ass on here—fast. If he comes down to see for himself what's happening, I want it to look good."

Three stripped and vaulted onto Hyll's examination table. The first electrode pad fastened on his chest before Three had time to get comfortable.

"Gods, I wish I had your body."

Hyll was a little shorter and slimmer but Three couldn't see he had anything to complain about.

"You really are perfect," Hyll said.

"Most of it's not mine."

Hyll rolled his eyes. "Yes, it is. You might have enhancements but your body is yours." He eyed Three's groin and sighed. "If I'd been picked I'd have made sure they gave me an enormous cock."

"And mine isn't?"

Hyll pretended to drool.

Three smiled. "Ah, it's yours that's undersized then."

"You know damn well it—ah, was that one of your rare attempts at humor? It failed."

Hyll hooked his foot under one of the wheeled machines and rolled it over. He checked the readings and frowned. "How did things go on Earth?"

"Fine."

"Deception indicated," intoned a voice.

Three sat up. "What?"

Hyll pushed him down. "Your pulse spiked, that's all."

"That's probably because Vileda was standing outside the shuttle dock when I arrived. She won't leave me alone. I don't understand it. None of the other Pleasure Bs pester me."

"She's the most gorgeous. You're a lucky guy."

Three could barely tell the Bs apart and he didn't feel lucky, he felt harassed.

"Why don't you take her to bed?" Hyll asked.

"I don't want to." Three hoped his tone of voice told Hyll not to push.

"Is there another you'd rather have?"

"No," Three snapped.

"Two together?"

"Leave it."

Hyll glared. "Well, your pulse spiked because of your response to my question about Earth, not because of your welcome party. Didn't go sniffing anything you shouldn't have on the planet, did you? Eat anything you weren't supposed to?"

"No."

"Evasion detected."

*Shit.* "It wasn't poisonous. I couldn't resist."

"Hmm. Your blood pressure seems to have been on its own exciting adventure. Heart rate too. They've jumped several times over the last thirty *milos*. What have you been doing to get into a sweat?"

Three tried to keep his breathing even. "Nothing. Exercise. Well, I had a bit of a slip with the shuttle."

"What sort of slip?"

"An unplanned landing."

Hyll's eyes opened wide. "You crashed?"

"More like skidded. I've scheduled a full systems check."

"Not your error then?"

"I don't make mistakes." *Oh that was funny.* But Three didn't like the way Hyll sniggered.

The *biosync* descended and moved down from his head. "Injury to left temple. Healing," intoned a voice.

"Were you strapped in?" Hyll asked.

"Yes."

"Then how did you strike your head?"

"Tripped on the way out of the shuttle."

"Deception indicated."

"I hadn't finished. And collided with a stone object."

Three dared the computer to answer back.

"Bruise on neck. Healing."

*Oh Gods.*

Hyll bent to look closer. "That looks...what...how...?" He stood up.

"Altercation with a local sucker. The plant life is very interesting on that planet."

Hyll waited. Three kept quiet. So did the computer.

"What did you think of Earth?" Hyll asked as he attached a device to Three's arm. "Remind you of anywhere? Sort of place you'd like to live?"

Hyll asked the same questions each time Three came back from a mission to a planet.

"From space, Earth looked beautiful. It's very blue. On the ground it looked just as beautiful. It felt..." What sort of comment was that? Beautiful? Hyll would think he'd lost it.

"Felt what?"

"Comfortable."

Hyll smiled. "So you got everything you went for?"

"Yes," Three said carefully. "Absolutely everything."

## Chapter Eight

*Ninety percent of all flowering plants have bisexual flowers with sex organs of female pistils and male stamens.*

Three wished he knew for certain Hyll was his friend. The senior science officer had been the first person he'd met when he boarded the *Xenothak*. He'd greeted Three with a smile and an invitation to drinks that darkfall. Three had been surprised to arrive and find he was the only guest, though it hadn't taken long to figure out why.

Hyll had teased him during his med exam, admiring every part of his body, one part in particular, clearly expecting Three to respond and nonplussed when he hadn't. With an innate dislike of all medical procedures after what had happened to him—what was *still* happening to him—Three hadn't wanted to like Hyll, but he did. Something about him reminded Three of the surgeon who'd put him back together. Though was that because they were doctors and paid to care? Yet Three couldn't help wondering whether Hyll's interest in him was more than sexual and different from the interest he had in the others on board. Was there some reason Hyll had latched onto him from the outset of the voyage?

It was Hyll who'd warned him about Caled's sexual appetite. So far Three had managed to avoid having to say no to the commander by keeping well out of his way. Hyll sat with Three when they ate in the mess and always saved him his portion of *poolah*, yet Three suspected Hyll liked it just as much as he did. Hyll was good company as long as Three ignored the offers of sex, though Hyll never pushed. Was sex the only reason he courted his company? Could Three trust him? He didn't know. Three wished he could trust his instincts, or remember his life before the accident, what he'd been like, what his friends had been like, but he couldn't.

Three knew he ought to keep quiet about Lucy, but sooner or later, he'd need an ally. Hyll was second-in-command and Three wanted him on his side. Still, he hesitated.

"You expended a lot of energy doing something," Hyll said. "Care to tell me what?"

"Shifting the load."

He should ask Hyll what to do about Lucy. Ask the question that had been tearing at him since he'd first seen her. Not that it was anything new. The same question had lingered in Three's mind like a *jelix* maggot from the moment he'd understood what they'd done to him. Or thought he understood.

"Exactly how much of me is left?" Three asked in a quiet voice.



Hyll looked up from his screen and met Three's gaze. "Plenty. Enough to make you—you."

Was it? How did Hyll know? Three was a number. Why hadn't they let him keep his name? His greatest fear was that it was because he'd never had one. Had those vague memories of a home, parents, another life—been subtle implants to keep him grounded in his belief that he was human?

The doctors told him he'd been picked for the treatment because he was a perfect Syobwoc male and without it he'd have died. Sometimes Three wished he *had* died. Maybe they lied. Maybe he was some grotesque experiment—an advanced version of a Worker B, a biodroid, a biobot. Because he had such little interest in sex, Three thought they'd either turned off his sex drive or hadn't bothered adding the pleasure circuits, but Lucy had proved that wasn't the case. Only what if they'd deliberately left that part of him dormant to see if it could be awakened? Had they planned for him to bring an Earth woman back to the *Xenothak*? What if it hadn't been his decision at all?

Three sucked in his cheeks. In his bioengineered heart, he suspected he was the latest developed biobot, maybe one they wanted to convince was human just to see what happened. Did they wonder if he could become human if he hadn't started off that way? Three thought it entirely possible Hyll was in on this, pretending to be his friend, watching every move he made, recording and reporting his every word. Three couldn't trust anyone, because he couldn't trust himself.

"I don't even have a heart." *Zimpra shit, did I say that out loud?*

"Of course you have a heart. What in the Legolian void do you think I'm monitoring? It might not be the one you were born with, but it's muscle and blood like mine—only better, you lucky *zim*. Look, you really have been blessed. You'll probably survive the damned ice age with a smile on your face while the rest of us freeze to death."

"I feel the cold."

"Not as much as me. You can withstand—well, maybe they'll come up with a way to recharge the sun. I've heard they're making progress in the experiments on the dying sun in Jert's system."

"How much of me is left?" Three repeated, not deflected.

Hyll sighed. "You have bioengineered heart, lungs, kidneys and liver. Your glands and bones have been enhanced, some major blood vessels replaced and nanobots introduced. Your muscles contain slow-release chemicals which make you faster and stronger, the reason why it's important for you to use the gym regularly. Exercise triggers the uptake."

"What about my brain?"

"You're just as stupid as you were originally, *sepat* head."

Three glared.

Hyll grinned. "Hey, how often do you beat me at *burhs*?"

A complex game of 3D logic that Three hated. He had a feeling Hyll had let him win on two occasions so he'd keep playing. "What did they do to me?" Three asked, back on track.

"You have the same brain with a few modifiers to scan your systems, make adjustments and repair when necessary."

Three saw confirmation of what he already suspected from the shift of Hyll's eyes.

Hyll knew he'd seen. "Okay, so they interfered a little more than that. They had to so you could cope with the changes to your body, your improved metabolism and all the rest. No point giving you systems your brain couldn't accept."

"So I was once like you."

"Yes, only not as good-looking."

"They took my name."

Hyll sighed. "How do you know? Parents give their kids stupid names all the time. My sister's named after that mountain in Dacrstan."

"Not Stynk?"

Hyll nodded. "Sounds bad in any language."

Three took a deep breath. "They interfered with my memory."

Hyll shook his head. "My data says not. It's still there, just suppressed."

"When I was on Earth, I thought..."

"You thought what?"

Was it his imagination or had Hyll's tone sharpened? "I knew I wanted three sugars in a cup of tea."

Silence.

"Is that all?" Hyll asked.

A desire to tell Hyll everything sat on the tip of Three's tongue, if not about Lucy then about the familiarity of the landscape, the thought that he'd had a pet. He pressed his lips together.

"You had time to stop for a drink?"

"There was a vending machine in the garden center."

"Deception indicated."

*Shit.*

Hyll raised his eyebrows.

"I was going to add that I didn't use it. I had no English money. I just thought about it. But how did I know I'd want three sugars?"

Hyll fiddled around with his machine. *To keep his face averted?* "Probably something in the memory pack I installed before you went." He slapped his hand on the top of the monitor. "Lump of *etah* shit." Then grabbed the sides and shook it. "Ah, that's better."

"You're not filling me with confidence, fighting with the equipment."

Hyll grinned. "I'm practicing for when you join my wrestling league."

*That would be never.*

"What else can you remember?" Hyll asked.

Three knew he was talking about his trip to Earth but he took a different path. "Nothing before I woke in the hospital and they said I'd nearly died. I couldn't understand why no one came to see me."

"What did they tell you?"

"My parents were dead. No living relatives. They said I was celebrating the birth of a child with friends and there was an explosion. I was the only survivor."

As soon as he'd been able, Three had checked the media records and found what he'd been told matched the reports. Not his child, thank the gods, though that didn't mean any of it was true. He'd gone to the place where it happened and the building had been razed, the ground cleared. Not unusual apparently – the authorities on Syobwoc worked fast to get rid of visual unpleasantness.

"I remember nothing about what happened, nothing before it happened. Makes me wonder if it ever did happen."

Three watched Hyll's face but it stayed blank.

"Seems to me they could have built me from scratch, implanted whatever memories they liked and are now watching to see what happens."

Hyll shook his head. "You're not a biobot. You have real emotions and feelings. You get pissed off when I beat you at *burhs*. You get annoyed with Vileda when she comes on to you. You're always first in line when we get *poolah* for dinner. Biobots don't have feelings. You do. You can't tell me you don't."

But they weren't right. Something was missing. Lucy had made him feel it.

*I'm different from the Bs. I am.*

Three still needed to keep hearing it, to *know*. He took a deep breath and wrapped his fingers around the edge of the bench. No mistaking the emotion of fear. His gut churned. "Swear to me on your life that I'm not a biobot."

"I swear. If you were like the Bs, you'd respond to me when I required you to. You'd put your name down for the wrestling league and you'd join me in my bed when I asked."

"You mean you have to ask the Bs? They aren't reacting to your natural charm?"

Hyll's eyes opened wide. "Another joke? What happened to you on that planet?" He grasped the root of Three's cock, squeezed, then dragged his fist down the length. "I wish you would respond to me. I have dreams about me and you, upside down and inside out."

*Oh zimpra shit.* Three pleaded with his cock to play dead. He wasn't stupid. He knew how much Hyll wanted him.

Hyll rubbed his thumb over Three's cock head, then raised his hand to his mouth and licked his fingers. "Have you any idea how much I'd like you to do that to me?"

Three forbade every muscle to move. He didn't even swallow.

Hyll sighed. "See? If you were a B you'd yank my pants down and suck me off."

Three wasn't sure that he did see. Hyll unfastened him from the equipment and tossed him his clothes.

"Did I pass?" Three asked.

"Do you have an overwhelming desire to bring me great sexual delight?"

"No."

Hyll smiled. "Then you passed – unfortunately."

"So why don't I want you?"

A glimmer of pain passed across Hyll's face. "You tell me. The only consolation is you don't want anyone."

"Everyone else on board is bisexual – crew and Bs." *Apart from Lucy.* Well, as far as he knew.

Hyll's gaze sharpened. "Everyone else? You mean you're interested in females? Is Vileda getting to you?"

"No. I don't want Vileda." She worried him, not attracted him. But he *was* attracted to Lucy. Three took a deep breath and told Hyll something he'd held inside for *manos*. "I have this feeling I'm not supposed to have sexual urges, not supposed to respond to the Bs."

Hyll gave him a careful look. "Why? Syobwocs are sexual creatures. We *need* sex. You should need sex. It's our culture. Why did they create Pleasure Bs for the Worker Bs? Because even biobots need playtime. The Pleasure Bs keep the Worker Bs happy and productive."

"And the rest of the crew."

"They're a perk of the job – yet not for you, which is puzzling." Hyll stared straight at him. "There's nothing wrong in having sex. You haven't had sexual desire removed from you. Though I'm beginning to think there might be something wrong in having too much sex."

Three raised his eyebrows.

"I don't like the damage done to the Bs."

Three had seen the one that Caled had – well, he hadn't been able to eat that night.

"But there's nothing I can do. Do you think our deviant commander would have accepted being stuck on this lump of a craft for so long if he didn't have the compensation of a swarm of compliant Pleasure Bs? He's working his way through them in ones, twos and threes."

Three stared at Hyll. "He's not the only one."

Hyll's face fell before he smiled. "What can I say? Bzzzz."

Once Three had left, Hyll sat at his work station and replayed the entire conversation over the re-call. He sighed when he heard Three ask if he was a biobot. He'd known for a while that concern stagnated in Three's mind and at least he'd voiced it now, but Hyll had a feeling Three didn't believe his answer. Three wasn't a B. Hyll could tell the difference. And Three *was* different, not just from the Bs but from the rest of the crew. Hyll rather liked that fact and that Three was a challenge. Hyll wanted him with an intensity that hadn't diminished since the first time he'd said no. Trouble was, not only hadn't it diminished, it had grown faster than a *boolus* flower.

Hyll grew increasingly frustrated at his inability to get through to Three. He had something locked away inside him that Hyll was determined to drag out because he was convinced that when he did, Three would fall into his arms.

Maybe.

And Hyll wasn't working his way through the Bs despite what Three thought. But he had some pride left. Better that Three thought he was one in a line of sexual partners, than the only one Hyll wanted. Perhaps he ought to reconsider his use of Vileda. He'd wanted to turn Three on and instead he appeared to be turning him off. Hyll had picked the most appealing Pleasure B and altered her sexual balance from SR to AR, submissive responsive to aggressive reactive but so far Vileda had done nothing more than irritate. Hyll decided to increase her hormone dosage. Maybe she wasn't being forceful enough. Maybe *he* wasn't being forceful enough.

Something had happened on Earth. Three's composure had been shaken. The implanted memories and pictures from the image library were supposed to help him blend in with the locals and enable him to perform his mission successfully. Instead they seemed to have stirred up trouble. Hyll made a note to check if tea with three sugars was part of the data bank. Maybe he could just ask one of the other Collectors.

He prepared the med report for Caled. He couldn't fudge the results, though there wasn't much cause for concern. Caled already knew Three's heart rate had spiked several times. There were no medical reasons to explain the physiological changes. The fall that had damaged his head and possibly his neck had been minor, but if the shuttle report came up negative then Caled would want further checks done. Something had caused Three to brush his craft against the ground. He'd made an error and Hyll wanted to know why.

Hyll sent a copy of the report to Caled and a copy to Syobwoc. He'd wondered about the interest in Three. Why did the Central Science Department want a special check on him? Hyll pushed his hand into his pocket and adjusted his cock. It had been hard as *neit* rock since Three had walked into the room. Hyll hadn't missed the fact that Three kept his gaze well away from that part of his body. Hyll jerked his hand from his pocket when he found himself fondling his balls. He needed to take his frustration out on someone and since Three wasn't yet receptive, Zend would have to do.

He switched on his com. "Zend. Here. Now."

By the time Hyll had stripped, the Pleasure B had arrived. Zend moved into the room with a smile on his face. Didn't he always?

"Door locked," Hyll said.

Zend had a perfect physique. He was tall, muscular and beautiful but then so were all the Bs. Zend shed his clothes as he crossed the room, leaving a trail like a Legolian snake. His cock was already erect and thick, the tip shining. Zend stood in front of Hyll and his smile broadened. "What do you require?"

Hyll's jaw twitched. "Why don't you decide?"

He knew he was wasting his time. Confusion filled Zend's face but Hyll, just for once, wanted not to be the one in charge, not to be the one setting the stage. Even if he told Zend to fuck him senseless, it was still Hyll in control. Domination was all very well but the Bs never said no, never said stop, had no understanding of the concept of a safe word because they'd take everything thrown at them. Even destruction.

Caled had completely wrecked one and seriously damaged several others. Hyll had attempted repair of the worst with the help of a specialized Worker B but had failed to save the biobot. The Bs were more delicately balanced than many thought but the tendency to submissiveness left them open to abuse. Hyll had risked changing Vileda's hormone setting to see if that would appeal more to Three, but in her case, he could use the excuse of experimentation because Hyll didn't have sex with her. Everyone knew Zend was Hyll's B of choice. If Zend became aggressive, Caled would demand answers so Hyll couldn't risk interfering with Zend's hormones.

The B stood there, waiting, still smiling, still erect. Hyll didn't want to look at his compliant face.

"Kneel on the examination table. Face toward the door. Butt in the air. Head on the pillow."

*Zimpra* shit, it was like a med exam but you had to be exact with the Bs. Another frustration. Easier to use them than get them to use him. Hyll lowered the table to the right height and stood behind Zend. The B knelt with his head down and his backside up, exposing the moist pucker of his starry asshole. Hyll's pulse quickened. He reached around and ran the curve of his fist down Zend's erection. The B moaned.

Hyll pressed his face against Zend's back. Moaning with pleasure or moaning because he'd been programmed to do so? Hyll didn't want it to matter but it did. Every time he fucked Zend he thought about it more and more. What was the point in transient pleasure that might satiate on a physical level but do nothing more? Hyll squeezed Zend's balls and licked a wet path down his spine. Would Three taste like this? Better?

Pulling back to squirt lube onto his palm, Hyll smeared it down the length of his erection, fisted himself once and watched the swollen, purple head emerge from the dark skin of his cock. They'd not found a way to keep the Bs lubricated, yet Hyll knew scientists were working on it. What a pathetic waste of resources. There was more to life

than this. Having sex with a biobot just because he could. Hyll pressed the tip of his cock against the ring of muscle, closed his eyes and pushed.

A slow, delicious slide through two sets of muscles and Hyll's mind fogged. Zend sighed but said nothing. He knew better. The tight clasp on Hyll's cock felt exquisite. His orgasm hovered in the distance, a tantalizing pleasure that built second by second.

"Ready, steady, go," Hyll murmured and wrapping his hands around Zend's hips, he thrust back and forth in steady strokes.

He could feel Zend's glutes tightening, feel the muscles of his thighs taut against his own. Zend's breathing quickened to match Hyll's—grunts turned to gasps turned to groans. The burning friction pulled Hyll's orgasm on, racing now along the track as he shunted harder, drove faster, pounding into Zend's ass.

The pain at the rear of Hyll's skull intensified. Zend lifted his backside to change the angle of entry and triggered Hyll's release. Orgasm flashed down his spine and he stiffened, leaning against Zend, fingers digging into his hips as he spurted inside him, burst after burst of his juice, until he could feel it dribbling back down his cock. Zend collapsed under the pressure of Hyll's weight. Hyll's heart raced against Zend's sweaty back and he moved his lips to the spot on Zend's shoulder blade that made him squirm, then licked and nipped. Zend let out a strangled yelp and Hyll felt his cock pulse one last time as the B's ass muscles squeezed him hard.

Once his breathing was back to normal, Hyll withdrew and stood on shaky legs. Zend pushed himself up and got off the table. His cock was still rigid.

"Shall I clean you?" he asked in a quiet voice.

Hyll raised his eyes. The tone of Zend's voice sounded—for a moment Hyll sensed something different. Pleasure Bs didn't care whether they came or not. Their purpose was to pleasure others, not themselves, so if they *did* come, it was only because the one with them wanted them to. Sometimes Hyll *did* want Zend to reach orgasm, sometimes he didn't. But Zend didn't care.

Did he?

## Chapter Nine

*Cornus Canadensis, a species of dogwood, fires its pollen faster than any other plant, accelerating at a force eight hundred times greater than astronauts experience on takeoff.*

Lucy sang and danced her way through approximately one hour of captivity and felt fairly certain she'd go crazy within a day. It wasn't that she was used to having people to speak to. The days when she didn't work in the garden center she might not talk to anyone. Though if some poor sod of a telemarketer happened to call at the wrong time, no matter what they were selling, Lucy was inclined to chat just for a change in tempo. But this room felt as still and silent as...a grave.

*Oh shit. Don't think that way.*

She missed her garden, missed the wind whistling in the trees, the twitter of birds. She even missed the sudden rush of a Royal Air Force fighter jet practicing low level maneuvers that always made her jump and often sent the sheep over the road stampeding across the field. She missed her dad. Seven months since he'd died and she missed him every day even though he'd been a pain in the neck. She missed Three. Where the hell was he?

Apart from the feeling of sensory deprivation—no one to speak to, nothing to listen to, no smell to comfort her, nothing to look at—Lucy was also hungry and thirsty. How many days since she'd eaten? All right—hours. She'd scooped a few mouthfuls of water from the sink with no small amount of skill considering it appeared to be programmed only to wash hands in quick spurts. She'd almost trapped her head beneath the tap trying to get her mouth under the flow.

Lucy counted the number of dimples in the floor seven times and got a different answer on each occasion. She'd gone through the alphabet with boys' names, girls' names, places to have sex, places not to have sex, and realized when she thought about it, if she was in imminent danger of dying, there was nowhere she wouldn't have sex. She considered taking a shower but there was no soap, no shampoo, no towel, no change of clothes. Worst of all—no hair dryer. Well, not in sight anyway. Lucy had tapped and banged her way around the room several times hoping a section of wall would open with or without a fanfare of trumpets. Shouting "open sesame" didn't work either.

She'd resorted to practicing standing on her hands when a panel opened next to her foot and she slid sideways to the floor. Lucy scrambled to her feet and rushed to look inside the compartment. *Ha!* Did Three think Earth women had no brain? No way would she voluntarily take the three pills sitting there, though the glass of water tempted. Only what if it had been drugged?



*Oh fuck it. What does it matter? How much worse off could I be?* Lucy gulped the whole glass in one go. Tasted like water so it probably was water. She tucked the pills under the mattress – she'd pretend to be doopey – and lay down.

Not a princess then, Lucy thought with a smile. Mind you, she'd always wondered about that story – The Princess and the Pea – because wouldn't a pea have been squashed flat and made a mess? Unless it was a dried pea. Lucy rolled over and groaned. She'd already lost her mind. It hadn't taken long at all.

In the end she had a shower just for something to do.

\* \* \* \* \*

In order to ensure food and water would be supplied to the room where he'd hidden Lucy, Three had to hack into the mainframe and he didn't want to do that from his work station. He used the control room outside the Pleasure Dome knowing he'd be safe from Vileda who still waited in his quarters. Unfortunately he was not safe from the screaming. The sounds of gleeful satisfaction filtering from the pools were all too clear, though to his surprise he found they didn't grate as much as usual.

Three wanted to locate another Collector and ask if their memories included tea with sugar, though he hadn't yet thought of a way of doing so that wouldn't arouse suspicion. He switched on the camera to check the pools.

Vasp, a Collector and one of Caled's yellow jacket guards, who had the ability to rub Three the wrong way just by looking at him, lay in the shallow water of the blue pool being pleased by two Bs, one male, one female. Vasp had drawn the prime mission to Kew Gardens in London. Fixed, Three was sure. The other two Collectors had been to Moscow State University and the Canadian Museum of Nature. Three didn't show any reaction to being sent to a small garden center in Yorkshire but he'd resented it. Now he thought he'd never been so lucky.

Apart from a three *milos* per cycle maintenance shut down, the pools were in continual use by Pleasure and Worker Bs and by the crew. The facilities of the Pleasure Dome were an extravagance but the relaxation they provided was considered essential. In case of emergency, the water turned to gel at the touch of a button and tight fitting screens quickly covered every pool. Even something as simple as a body of water sloshing around could endanger the stability of a craft. The Colonizer was no exception. Three liked to swim lengths in the lap pool. He never ventured into the bubble pool. More happened below its surface than above.

He decided to wait for Vasp to emerge. Three clicked off the screen and swiveled in his chair, trying to decide whether he dare check on Lucy. He couldn't do so from his own control pad but what risk was there in looking from here? One quick glance to make sure she was all right and then he'd disable the camera – just in case. He tapped into the link for Rest Room B7 and gulped. Hard.

Before he'd been on the mission to Earth, Three could have counted on the fingers of a *fentris* how many times he'd had an erection other than when he'd been in bed –

alone. Since a *fentris* was a mollusk, that would be never. Now his cock had gone rigid in an instant at the sight of a naked Lucy.

"Door locked," Three snapped.

He didn't need anyone walking in on him. Three watched water cascade over Lucy as she turned her face to the shower head. He smiled at her yelp when the wall opened to reveal soap and shampoo. Maybe he should have explained the way the sensors worked. When her hands cupped her breasts and her thumbs grazed her nipples, Three licked his lips and wished he was in there with her. No point heading over there, showers were strictly timed. She'd have finished before he arrived and he'd miss this.

"Three?"

Vileda's voice over his com made his stomach tighten. "Yes?" he asked.

"I'm waiting for you. Your uniform is ready and I'm ready too. I've taken off my clothes and I'm lying naked on your bed."

Three switched off his com device.

Water droplets bounced off Lucy's body, tiny diamonds sparkling in the light. He zoomed in on her face and watched water drip down long, thick eyelashes to trickle over her freckled cheeks. Zoomed out again to watch the trickles grow as they trailed down her neck and over her breasts to hang for a long moment on her taut nipples.

The dry jets started and Lucy leapt to the center of the room. Three laughed. When she walked back into the corner and let the warm air roll over her, twisting and turning her body under the currents, his laugh turned to a groan. Three slid his hand into his pants and adjusted his cock.

He needed her to put her clothes on. Only he didn't really want her to do that. Lucy flung herself on the bed. Naked. Her lovely backside blushed rosy from the shower and she stretched like a *Micros henga*. Three gritted his teeth. He should have switched off the monitor, instead he unzipped himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hyll licked his lips, his gaze fixed on Three's hand stuck down the front of his pants. He'd heard Vileda's voice before Three switched off his com. Was the B actually getting to him?

"Door locked," Hyll said, then whispered at the screen, "Take your cock out."

He didn't blink as with one tug, Three exposed himself. Hyll groaned. He groaned louder when Three stood and yanked down his pants. Hyll's fingers fumbled with the camera control. Then closed in on the shining, dark pink tip of Three's cock as it swung in a lazy arc, thickening, lengthening. *Zimpra shit*.

The Pleasure Bs always seemed to arrive erect. He'd never seen Zend's cock doing anything other than point up. Hyll had seen Three's cock before—when he examined him, in the pools when they'd swum, in the solar rooms. But he'd never seen this—the way it grew fast like a *Grigus* plant, strengthening, blossoming, getting ready for the

seed head to burst. Hyll groaned again. Three unbuttoned his shirt, spread it open and sat in the chair.

*Thank you, Gods.* Hyll's view of Three's crotch was perfect, though he'd have liked to know what had Three so excited. Could he be watching Vileda lying naked on his bed? Or someone else? And why now? What had happened on the trip to Earth? Hyll unfastened his khaki pants and released his cock before the thing exploded. Reaching for a strip of black *benus*, Hyll wrapped it around his balls, cinched it tight, then clenched his fist at the base of his shaft. He wanted to last as long as Three.

Three's heavy ball sac had drawn up tight to the base of his cock and Hyll's mouth watered at the thought of nuzzling it with his chin, taking it in his mouth, sucking, licking, kissing. He imagined Three above him, spearing his fingers through his hair and urging him to do more, take him deeper, swallow him. Hyll allowed himself one leisurely stroke along his length and shuddered.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy pressed her face into the pillow and thought about Three. He'd said she should trust him and although she'd thought she couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't—what choice did she have? She was up in the stars millions, trillions, gazillions of miles from home with no means of getting back. Was trusting such a hardship? Okay, so guys had let her down in the past. Badly. Mike and then Jasper and Richard, oh and Eric—*oh stop it*, she told herself. Why think about jerks when you have something better to imagine? Lucy thought about the way Three had touched her, as if he hadn't quite been able to believe his luck. She rolled onto her back, threw an arm across her eyes against the light and slid her hand to her breast.

A pinch of her nipple between finger and thumb and Lucy drew her breath through her teeth, remembering the way Three had nipped her. She squeezed hard, feeling the pull deep in her core. Her fingers slipped to the damp junction of her thighs.

*Three. Three. Three.*

A gush of warm liquid wet her hand and she drew one finger along the length of her swollen folds, gathering moisture before she slid it back and forth, opening the delicate petals of her sex. As she spread her wetness in increasingly tight circles, her breathing grew noisy. Fiery tremors of delight began their rippling path through her body and she rocked her butt into the bed.

As slowly as she could, Lucy sank two fingers inside her pussy until the heel of her hand pressed against her clit. Heat coiled in her belly like a snake getting ready to strike and she let out a loud moan. Her nipples tingled as her pussy muscles clenched. She moved faster now and the sound of her fingers shunting in and out of her soaked channel wound her tighter. Lucy lifted her hips to meet the push of her hand, bucking harder as she increased the speed of her thrusts.

She screwed her eyes shut and brought her other hand down to her clit. Dragging her heels up the bed, Lucy spread her knees and began to tease the swollen nub,

lightning fast strokes to match the thrust of her fingers, then slow movements to drag out the pleasure. Once she had her fingers rubbing together either side of her clit, there was no place to go but into the inexorable grip of raw pleasure. Her chest tightened and the spasms bit hard and hot, like wild fires bursting to life in her gut. As the intensity grew, Lucy rubbed herself harder and with a wild groan she rode the burning wave all the way to the center of the fire.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three forgot to breathe. He forgot to blink. He forgot to care someone might wonder at any second where he was. One hand clenched the root of his cock so tight he'd lost feeling in his fingers. The other hand pulled along the length of it—a tight grip then loose, tight, loose, squeezing it like a tube of toothpaste. His fingers were soaked with pre-cum and his shaft slipped faster through his wet fist. His balls ached with the need to come, swollen so tight the slightest brush was agony—ecstasy.

Lucy's movements became more frenzied and Three matched them, twisting his cock as he jerked it in his grasp. When her hips bucked and she cried out, Three released a strangled groan. He rubbed the bulbous tip of his cock in a series of short, rough squeezes using the pad of his thumb and forefinger, and released his balls, letting them draw tight to the base of his erection. The last breath he took before he came was a ragged gasp of delight. As Lucy slumped on the bed, his juice boiled in his sac, shot down his cock and Three spurted in long, thick strands all over the screen.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hyll rarely masturbated. He didn't need to, not with a choice of ninety-nine Pleasure Bs to do it for him, even though he hadn't taken full advantage of that. He didn't remember being this turned on since he'd reached maturity and his father had taken him to the Pleasure House. He *wanted* Three, really wanted him and the fact that he didn't seem to be able to have him was a more powerful aphrodisiac than the most succulent of *Kanha* roots.

Forget that he'd only just jetted into Zend, his balls were full again, his cock never harder. Hyll mimicked Three's movements, imagining Three's hand on him rather than his own. Fast, slow, smooth and twisting, each pull of his fist sent skitters down his spine. Pre-cum dripped in long, viscous threads from the pulsing slit in his cock head, the little eye opening and closing as his climax neared. Hyll pictured Three on his knees, mouth ready to catch every drop of his juice and the image catapulted him to release.

For a long moment Hyll's world went utterly black, then stars exploded one by one, until everything was white. As the last tremors of his orgasm died away, his vision returned but blurred. He blinked to clear it and when he saw what he'd done, Hyll laughed. Despite the ring of *benus* around his balls, he'd erupted like a geyser, spewing his juice all over everything on his desk. *Zimboots*, even his mug of *jav* hadn't escaped.

## Chapter Ten

*A weed – a plant mostly considered undesirable, unattractive and troublesome because it's found growing where it's not wanted.*

Three strode down the corridor. Eight *milos* since he'd watched Lucy pleasure herself and he'd counted every *tretos* of them. He'd wanted to go straight to her and put his cock where her fingers had been but he had work to do in Biodome Five where a cooling unit had failed. Specimens had to be moved and he needed to supervise. That took precedence over his report to Caled and his chat with Vasp and also, unfortunately, over pleasure with Lucy. The survival of the plants always came first.

"Need a take-off and landing refresher course, Three?" asked a voice behind him.

How the *zimpra* shit did Vasp know about the crash? Had Hyll told him? Three wondered for a brief moment if Vasp had done something to the shuttle to cause it to malfunction.

He turned to face a smirking Vasp. "You must have attended dozens. One you'd recommend?"

"No wonder Caled didn't trust you with anything bigger than a garden center out in the middle of nowhere. Did you remember to put up your shields?"

Three refused to snatch at the bait. "How was Kew Gardens?"

"Superb. Caled's delighted with what I brought back."

"Good for you."

"So what happened, Three? Did you have a brain fart? Your circuits get themselves into a loop? You sit in a puddle of water and fry your ass?"

Three simply stared at him. He wouldn't ask this *sepat* brain about the tea and three sugars. He'd try one of the other Collectors.

"Come on, Three. What happened?"

Vasp used his name to annoy him yet this time it didn't work. Three thought about Lucy and her amazing name and smiled. He walked away and then called back, "There was a catastrophic malfunction of a red button."

"What?"

"My foot slipped."

Three's smile didn't last long. He still hadn't come up with a way out of the mess he'd dragged Lucy into. In his most optimistic moments he envisaged Caled saying, "*She can work in a biodome, share your bed and return with us to Syobwoc. It will be a pleasure*

*to have her on board.*" More likely Caled would – well that was the problem, he had no idea what Caled would do. But Three *did* know it wouldn't be anything he'd like.

When he walked onto the bridge, Caled sat in his chair, waiting. His square-jawed commander fixed his bright blue gaze on Three's face and didn't shift. Three put his hands behind his back and wiped his palms on his pants. Why did he have this need to confess everything, including an obsession with *poolah* and periodically switching off his com device? Had some guilt complex been implanted in his head?

"Begin," Caled said.

Tempted to start at some ridiculous point, like "*after I cleaned my teeth and had a shave*", just to see what Caled would say, Three resisted and ran through the mission with complete truthfulness until the point he'd crashed into Lucy's garden. No point trying to pretend it hadn't happened. The log had recorded it and Three hadn't got around to deleting it. He'd been too busy with Lucy.

"I've put the shuttle in for a complete diagnostic check."

Caled tapped his fingers on the arm of his seat. "There appears to be no evidence of malfunction."

"A sudden unexplained blip." Even as he said it, Three knew he'd never get away with that.

"No such thing. Your error?" Caled asked.

"Not to my knowledge." *Though was it?* Three wondered.

"Your bio data indicates elevated serotonin levels on several occasions."

"Concern over the unexplained blip."

Caled stood and walked around Three, crowding him. Three could smell something musty. Caled disturbed him on many levels.

"A near miss with Earth's orbiting space station?" Caled asked. "An encounter with a comet? An asteroid? A black hole? Anything else you'd like to add to that list? Take on a squad of Legolian pirates? Had to surf a Ventusian blast?"

Three opened his mouth and closed it.

"You flew naked."

"I explained. My –"

"There's a spare set of clothes on board."

Three opened his eyes wide. "Is there?"

Caled frowned and made another circuit around Three. "You found everything in the one garden center?"

*Gods, he's letting me off the hook.* "Yes." Three ran through what he'd picked up and the condition of the specimens.

When Caled stayed silent, Three was still convinced he knew everything.

"Are you happy in your work, Three?"

*He knows something.* "I don't understand the question."

Caled smiled and Three had to repress his shudder. There seemed to be far too many teeth in his commander's mouth.

"Do you feel there's something missing?"

Yes. "No."

"Something you want to tell me?"

Fuck. "No."

"Get yourself booked in for a complete overhaul. Dismissed."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy had built up quite a collection of pills. She discovered if she placed her palm over a certain section of wall, and kept it there for three seconds, it slid open to offer her water and more tablets. Heat and pressure, she thought. She'd stacked up thirty one glasses and ninety three tablets. Okay, she got a little carried away and meant to stop at thirty but she was *so* bored.

The pills came in a collection of rainbow colors so she put them in teams, gave them names and started to play a game, flipping them between dimples on the floor. Anything to distract her from thinking about Three, the woman's voice and the gnawing hunger pains in her stomach. The order of importance of those changed minute by minute. The pillow was looking tasty.

Seconds later, bored with the improvised tiddlywinks, Lucy tipped them back into a glass. She laid a trail of upturned glasses around the room intending to step from one to the other. That lasted three steps before she fell. Then she built a multi-layered glass tower and arranged the pills as decorations. An ultra-modern Christmas tree. If only she'd had something malleable, she could at least sculpt to amuse herself.

When the door opened and she saw Three, Lucy jumped up and rushed to throw her arms around him. "I don't know whether to eat you or kiss you."

Three groaned and dropped his mouth to her neck.

Lucy pulled away. "Have you brought me something to eat?"

The door closed behind him and his gaze slid to the piled-up glasses. "You can't be hungry."

"But you haven't given me anything to eat for days."

His mouth twitched. "You've been in here for eight earth hours."

Lucy's shoulders slumped. "Oh, well I still need food."

"You're playing with it."

"That's food? I thought they were drugs to keep me quiet and compliant."

"I'm not sure anything could render you quiet and compliant."

Lucy slid her hands onto his backside and squeezed. "I can think of a few things."

"You can?"

She sighed. "A large plate of fish and chips."

"With lots of vine...gar." Three stiffened as he finished speaking.

"Have you *eaten* fish and chips?" Lucy wondered at the puzzled look on his face.

He shook his head. "Maybe one of the tablets would be to your taste. Each is a different food. Three pills constitute a balanced meal. Though now you've muddled them up, that's not necessarily true."

Lucy pulled away and collected a handful. "I'm hungry enough to eat a horse. What happens if I eat twenty at one go? Will I explode?"

Three cracked a grin. "Perhaps. Try this. Red's usually tasty." He popped the pill in her mouth.

She sucked and swallowed. A moment later, Lucy's eyes opened wide. "Whoa, I feel like I've eaten something sweet. I want to say it was nice, but I'd like to know what it is first. I thought black pudding was nice until I found out it was solidified pig's blood."

Three cleared his throat.

"You can't trick me twice. Some Lerm delicacy. You don't seriously take these tablets instead of eating real food, do you?"

"Sometimes."

"I...don't...call...that...progress." Lucy groaned between each word as Three kissed his way from her ear to her mouth. "I..." Then his tongue was in her mouth and Lucy could neither speak nor think, only feel.

Three fucked her mouth with his tongue in such a hard and insistent invasion that Lucy fell back under the onslaught. Pinned between Three's hard body and the wall, she released her moan into his mouth. Her pussy ached and she ground herself against his muscular thigh.

His hands slid under her top, levered it over her head and tossed it aside. Fingers teased her already hard nipples, his thigh rubbed insistently between her legs and all the time he kept kissing her, ravishing her. Finally, he dragged his mouth away and Lucy gulped air in ragged gasps.

Three held her by the hips and stared into her eyes. "I want you naked."

"Yes, sir."

Lucy shrugged down her drawstring pants and kicked them away from her feet. Three smiled and dropped his head to lick around her ear. He might as well have licked her clit, Lucy arched into him and sank her fingers into his arms. His kisses moved to her throat and he held her breasts in his hands, gently kneading as he trailed a wet tongue to her nipple. Everything he did was echoed between her legs. He sucked a nipple and Lucy could have sworn his mouth lay against her pussy.

Three nibbled, licked and nipped her breast until Lucy didn't think she could stand it a moment longer. Then he shifted to the other and began the process of driving her mad all over again. Pressure built with every touch. Sensation heightened to such a



level that Lucy had to consciously make the effort to breathe. He dropped to his knees and licked a path to her navel, keeping her breasts cupped in his large hands. Lucy trailed her fingers through his hair and pressed herself against the wall hoping it would keep her upright. The flutter of his lips over her belly had her skin jumping and she felt him smile against her.

He tucked his hands around the globes of her backside and held her as he pressed his mouth between her legs, landing soft kisses on the inside of her thighs. His nose brushed her folds and Lucy's knees trembled. She was soaked, embarrassed to be so wet. She chewed her bottom lip, desperate to come, desperate not to come.

When he touched her with his tongue, Lucy's hips jerked against his face. Three clutched her tighter, holding her steady.

"Not yet," he whispered. "Wait."

She would have laughed if she could. Instead she groaned.

One sweep of his tongue along her wet folds and Lucy bit back her squeal.

"You taste like the best thing I've ever eaten," he whispered.

Lucy cleared her throat. "Better than that Lerm delicacy?"

His shoulders shook her thighs as he laughed. "Yes."

Then his fingers were in her pussy and his mouth was on her clit and Lucy couldn't have made another joke to save her life. The sensation of oncoming bliss built inside her, tightening and relaxing in stronger and stronger waves. She fought against the flow. This was too good to come straightaway. But his fingers pushed in as his tongue lapped her sensitive bud, circling and pressing, driving her along the narrowing path to completion and Lucy had no choice but to let him take her.

As she bucked against his face, moisture spilled from her.

"Three, Three, oh God," she gasped.

Fireworks exploded in her core, fiery trails of heat igniting every part of her body. Good thing Three held her up. The bones in her legs had melted. Tiny aftershocks teased her, brought her down until Lucy became aware that he was looking at her. She stared down at his wet face and gulped.

"The first time you've used my name," he said.

"What—God?"

The smile on his face almost made her heart explode with joy. He was gorgeous, strong and yet so fragile. Three stood and lifted his fingers to her mouth. Lucy tasted herself, a salty-sweet musk.

He kissed her forehead. "After you'd showered, when I saw your fingers sliding —"

"What?" Lucy tried to squirm away but he wouldn't let her. "You were watching me? How?" She scanned the room. "A camera." An elbow in his chest to get free and she dropped to the floor to grab her clothes. Her fingers shook as she held them in front of her and backed to the bed.

"Lucy –"

"Shut up. You *watched* me. Oh God."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Gods, you looked so beautiful. I couldn't help it. I just wanted – sorry. What can I do to make it right?"

Lucy swallowed hard and thought about it. "Let me watch you."

Three gulped. "Watch me?" He wasn't sure, but he thought he'd caught the glint of a smile on Lucy's face as she turned. He had a mouthwatering view of her pert backside before she sat on the bed. She settled cross-legged, hugging her clothes in front of her. *Did you smile, you little henga?*

"You mean you want me to –"

"Yes."

Now Three smiled. It was hardly a punishment. He unfastened the buttons on his shirt and slipped it off his shoulders. Her gaze lingered on his chest before it dropped to the tent in his pants.

When he kicked off his shoes she stared at his toes. Three wriggled them and Lucy's eyes widened. He wondered what she was thinking. Hard to tell with Lucy. Her mind didn't work in a way he could predict. He spread open his fly and the tip of her tongue slipped between her lips. Lucy licked the middle of her upper lip, pulled her lower lip between her teeth, closed her mouth and swallowed hard. Three's hand froze over his crotch. His heart raced. Except no guessing what she was thinking now.

"Why have you stopped?" Lucy asked.

Three shucked out of his pants and his cock sprang free. Never taking his gaze from Lucy's face he grasped the root of his shaft and squeezed hard. Lucy let her bunched up clothes fall from a breast to expose a pink-tipped nipple.

*Don't come. Don't come. Don't come.*

Three made a slow, upward stroke – squeezing as he went and brushed the pad of his thumb over the swollen head. He could do that once more. Maybe twice. Lucy exposed both breasts. Three trembled. No, not even once. *Look at her eyes.* He didn't want to do this. He wanted to bury himself inside her but he dropped his hand to the base of his cock and dragged his fist up again, twisting and squeezing. His balls tingled and Three pulled down on them – hard. Pain might delay the inevitable.

Warm, sexy, full of mischief, those beautiful eyes had him mesmerized and the ache in his balls receded. She focused on his hands, watching every move he made, every pull at his cock. Three kept one hand pressing down on his sac while he slid a finger over his ultrasensitive cock head to scoop up a bead of pre-cum. She released a breathy moan and his stomach muscles tightened. *Soon*, he promised his balls.

"Who was the woman?" Lucy asked.

Three froze, and his cock and heart winced. "Her name's Vileda."

"Have you fucked her?"

*Jealous?* His heart thrilled at the thought. "No and I don't want to." He'd never wanted to. He'd been waiting all his life for Lucy. He opened his mouth to tell her but sensed it wasn't the right time and pressed his lips together. Her honeyed sweetness still lingered on his tongue.

She curled her forefinger and beckoned. Three jumped across the room and leapt onto the bed, knocking her clothes aside as he propelled her onto her back and then flipped her to her front. He planted his hands either side of her head, his knees enclosing her hips.

"Oh, you're like a big puppy." Lucy laughed into the pillow.

Three dropped his head and licked a wet trail from her neck, over every bump of her spine, down to her wriggling butt.

He groaned. "Lucy, I can't wait."

She turned her head to look over her shoulder and her eyes narrowed. "Neither can I."

Three slid his hands beneath her and lifted her hips, spreading her legs so he could position his cock against her soft, glistening folds. He plunged deep and she gasped and clenched around him. Hot, wet and tight. Nothing could feel better. Three couldn't move. He couldn't *not* move. He withdrew until only his swollen tip remained inside her and then thrust forward at the same moment as Lucy pushed back against him. The sensation of her soft tissue sliding along his hard length reignited his urgent need to come. He clenched his teeth together and stopped moving. Lucy had other ideas. She rocked backward and forward and his balls slapped against her wetness.

Why was he fighting? They both wanted the same thing. Slow could follow fast. Three took control and rode her, powering in and out of her pussy, letting the pressure build. He slid his arms over hers, held on to the back of her hands as he jerked his hips to get deeper. Then Lucy cried out and gripped him so tight with her muscles she yanked his orgasm out of his body to greet hers. Three convulsed into her, each hot jet accompanied by a grunt. He shook with the intensity, his world converted for that moment into one of pure sensation.

Awareness seeped into his fogged brain that all his weight lay on top of her. Three let his cock slip from Lucy's warmth, then settled at her side and pulled her into his arms.

Lucy panted puffs of air into his face, opened lust-soaked eyes and smiled. "You are so good at that. Have you had lots of practice?"

She might have been trying to sound jokey, but Three didn't miss the tremor of uncertainty.

He was as honest as he could be. "I don't know."

## Chapter Eleven

*The beautiful Nerium oleander could be the most deadly plant on Earth. All parts are poisonous and eating the honey made by bees who've collected the plant's nectar can be fatal.*

Lucy blinked. "What does that mean? How can you not know if you've had sex a lot?"

Three's stomach churned. His mouth lost all moisture. "I don't...I haven't...I'm not what you think I am."

She frowned. "You mean you really do have a tail, horns and a bulbous, suppurating rib cage bristling with eyes?"

"Huh?" The disturbing thing was, Three had a feeling she was serious.

"If you show me your true self, I'll try not to freak out. I could probably put up with the tail and horns but not the rib cage bit. And obviously I wouldn't object to two cocks. That could be very interesting."

He'd made her as jumpy as him.

"I'm not..." Oh Gods, he had no idea how to tell her.

"Not what?" she whispered. "Not a man? You're a dragon? You're a...spider?"

"Lucy, stop guessing and listen. I've been—manufactured."

There was a long pause before she spoke. "Good job the designer didn't give you a bulbous, suppurating rib cage."

"Thanks."

"Manufactured. Well, guess what? So was I."

Of all the responses she could have made, that was one he didn't expect. "What?" he blurted.

"My mum and dad always told me I was special. When I was ten they sat me down and told me they couldn't have children the natural way. They tried all sorts of things and spent a lot of money until finally they got me. I was made in a laboratory. I started life as a speck of cells in a test tube. I was very special." She grinned. "So you're special too."

Ah, not the same kind of manufactured, he thought. "I..." Tell her. "I'm bioengineered. My organs were grown and transplanted into me. I've been enhanced to hear better, see better, run quicker and think faster. I don't remember parents. I...I don't think I had any. I'm Three and much as I might not want to accept it, somewhere there's a One and Two. I'm a number. I'm not a person."

Lucy glared. "Not having parents doesn't make you any less of a person. You can be more of one. You can be whatever you want to be because you're not saddled with or tainted by what came before. Nobody judges you by what they thought of your family. Not having a history can be an advantage."

Three ran his hand along the curve of her side. "But you're the person you are because of your parents. You're kind and sweet and —"

"How do you know it's because of them? Maybe it's in spite of my parents. Could be a reaction against the way I was brought up."

"Is it?"

Lucy shook her head. "No. My parents loved me to bits. They taught me to respect life and those around me. They showed me it was better to be happy with what I had, than to mourn what I didn't. I learned a lot from them but ultimately each person is responsible for the way they behave."

"But how do I know I've not been programmed to make certain responses? How do I know it's my choice and not someone else's? I'm a number without free will or a soul."

"Crap. How can you think you're not a person?" Her fingers trailed over his chest and she laid her palm against his heart. "Here's warm skin that flutters under my touch. A heart that beats fast when you're excited. Further down there's a lovely piece of flesh that can change from puppy soft to rock-hard when I stroke it. Sometimes just when I look at it. I *feel* how much you want me. You think for yourself. You're an individual. You brought me here when you weren't supposed to. I know that's not something I should be happy about but I *am* happy you're in my life. I'm millions of miles up in the sky and I'm scared but I know you'll do everything you can to keep me safe."

Something broke inside him, some dammed-up feeling burst through a barrier to flood his heart, overwhelm every thought, overpower every need but one. The desire to take care of Lucy, to cherish her, make her his forever. Three held her tight and pressed his face into the nest of her shoulder.

Lucy clung to Three as she tried to make sense of what he'd told her. Was he saying he was no more than a sophisticated robot? A clone? Were a One and Two out there looking just like him, behaving like him? A Four, a Five... Lucy gulped. Did it make any difference to the way she felt about him? After all, he ate, drank, spoke, irritated and thrilled her in equal measures. And forget about her, what about him? Her big, handsome alien was insecure and a little scared. She could put one thing right.

She cupped his face in her hands. "Can I program you to do the ironing, cleaning and taking out the garbage?"

Three blinked. "No."

"Damn. I specifically asked for a House Three and you're only a Sex Three."

His mouth twitched. "Is that a problem?"

Lucy pretended to think about it.

Three growled. "You're taking too long."

"Maybe I need persuading."

"How many times?"

"Just once. I mean – once I'm persuaded, I'm persuaded. Mostly."

"No, I mean how many times do you want to come?"

That shut her up. His warm, velvety tongue licked along the line of her lips. Lucy's mouth opened without her even thinking about it. His hand stroked her chin as he dipped into her mouth. Lucy thought she could kiss him forever. Something in the way he tasted, the way his tongue played with hers lit fires in all her erogenous zones, including some she didn't know she had. He teased and tormented until her body blazed and her chest heaved against his. She needed to breathe, but didn't want this to stop.

Three broke away, landed delicate kisses all over her face and slid down the bed to suckle her breast. Lucy threaded her fingers through his silky hair. *Pull him off. Push him on. Off. On.* She gasped as wet warmth flooded her pussy. Three pulled her leg over his hip and slid his fingers down the crease of her bottom. He nibbled her breast as he gently pushed a finger between her swollen folds.

When the finger slipped back toward her anus, Lucy pulled his hair. When the finger lingered, Lucy pulled harder. Three lifted his head from her breast. His lips were glistening, his eyes half-lidded with desire, his cheeks flushed. *What the hell are you doing?* hovered on Lucy's lips only that seemed a superfluous question. She knew damn well what he was doing.

"Let me," he whispered.

Anticipation coiled like a sleeping snake in Lucy's gut. What exactly would he do? Would it hurt? Would she like it? What if *he* didn't like it? She pushed his head back to her breast. He wouldn't hurt her. Fool that she was, she trusted him.

His wet tongue zigzagged over her belly to her pussy. He nudged through her folds with his nose and his mouth closed in on the hard little knot at the top of her sex. He circled it gently with his tongue and Lucy dug her fingertips into his shoulders. This time he didn't vary what he did, but maintained the same movement, the same pressure and Lucy felt her hold on the cliff face slipping. With a little sigh she tumbled off, coming against his face.

"One." Three mumbled into her groin.

How many fingers did the guy have? They seemed to be everywhere. Lucy tried to move her leg back and Three pulled it higher onto his shoulder. She could feel a finger twisting inside her, the drag of his knuckle, his mouth on her clit, licking now, lapping like a cat. Another finger pushed into the crease of her bottom, finding the other entrance to her body and circling, pressing a little harder each time as he coaxed the tight ring of muscle to relax and let him in.

Lucy was horrified and thrilled. She gulped air noisily and gasped as his finger entered her anus. It hurt and then it didn't and she wanted him deeper. The next moment she didn't have him at all. Three pulled away to roll her onto her back. He reached up to snag the pillow from under her head and shoved it beneath her hips. Pressing her thighs apart with his shoulders, he stared at her face and smiled.

"I want to taste all of you," he whispered.

"Oh God." She suspected she knew what he meant.

He kissed his way along her leg.

*Stop him.*

Lucy opened her mouth and as his tongue licked between her buttocks she pressed her lips together.

*Don't stop him.*

She knew she should, only she had an ache inside growing into something the size of the Empire State Building. This time when she came, she knew it would blow her mind. His tongue connected with her puckered hole and Lucy's hips bucked. A hand on her belly pressed her down.

Then he was slurping her. *Slurping her!* One hand grabbed his head to push him down, one hand pulled his hair to drag him up. Lucy felt as though a phosphorous flare burned inside her, red-hot, white-hot, unquenchable. He licked her asshole and Lucy heard a strange whimpered "yes" leap from her throat. Some little demon inside her – not her. She was a good girl. *Was a good girl.*

*I'm bad. Very bad. Wicked. Oh God, let him keep doing that.*

His tongue teased its way into her forbidden hole and a surge of moisture rushed from her pussy. Then his tongue slipped deeper inside her and Lucy started to shake. All of her – arms, legs and heart. Every vein in her body flowed with molten fire. The loss of control both scared and exhilarated. The grip of orgasm felt stronger than any steel cable. Lucy's back arched and her lungs locked as powerful contractions gripped her core, firing grappling hooks to the farthest reaches of her body, stretching her, holding her until she exploded and screamed.

Three's hand slammed over her mouth. Lucy still screamed. His mouth replaced his hand and she let him catch her voice, swallow her up until she realized she was still breathing, still had control of her limbs, still lived.

"Thank you." The words were nothing more than a throaty whisper. Hardly adequate but what do you say to a guy who's just given you the orgasm of a lifetime.

"You screamed."

Lucy raised an eyebrow. "You noticed?"

"Two," Three said with a cocky smile.

Lucy's eyes narrowed. "No trying for Three, Three. Oh how I've longed to say that. I'll take a rain check. The only thing I can move is my mouth."

"Perfect."

She giggled and squirmed on top of him, tickling under his arms.

"Hey." Three clamped his elbows to his sides.

"Ooh, you're ticklish?" She couldn't resist.

A moment later Lucy's butt hit the floor. Three hauled her back onto the bed. Her heart jumped in her chest, using her stomach as a trampoline.

"No more of that," Three said.

"How come you're ticklish?" Lucy asked.

He gave her a confused look.

"Think about it," she said. "Why the hell would you be manufactured to be ticklish?" She scooted down the bed and grabbed his foot. "No kicking." Less than two seconds of her fingers fluttering over the sole of his foot and Lucy was back on the floor.

"Lucy, do that again."

"All right, but keep away from the walls. Another kick like that and you might breech the hull."

The next time Three laughed, it was different. He laughed with joy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Vileda watched her vid screen as Three walked away down the corridor from Biodome Seven. He had a strange expression on his face. The urge to follow him was strong but she resisted because the urge to see what he'd been doing in Rest Room B7 was stronger. She hurried toward the room he'd vacated. Vileda ached with need for him yet didn't understand why. A Pleasure B, her reason for existence was to provide pleasure for everyone on board the ship, Worker Bs and crew. She had done everything she could to make Three happy. She'd tried to serve him with food and he'd refused her offering. She'd tried to make his quarters more beautiful and he'd made her take away the decorations. She'd tried to pleasure him in the pools and he'd removed himself from the water. Why?

She was convinced the unsettled feeling inside her could be relieved by sex with Three. Many of the Pleasure Bs had formed attachments to several crew members who they served regularly but Vileda wanted to serve Three exclusively. Why was he resisting? Vileda stared at the door to B7. Thirty-three meals had been supplied to it in the last few *milos*. Not all could have been eaten by Three. Did he have other Bs in there? Vileda bristled. Maybe it wasn't a Pleasure B at all. She'd heard him speak several strange words when she waited in the transportation corridor. Were they names?

The door didn't open at her command.

Not a problem.

\* \* \* \* \*



Three looked through the window and saw Hyll working in the tech room linked to Biodome Five, the coldest ecosystem. He tapped on the glass. Hyll looked up and waved at him to come in. Three clutched the sealed *pylm* tighter in his grasp. Through the floor-to-ceiling observation port in the tech room, Three could see Worker Bs in the biodome below checking, feeding and sexing the plants, taking measurements, recording data. The Bs didn't feel the cold but Three needed outerwear when he ventured inside. Sometimes they even made snow in there to test the plants' hardiness. If he was a more superior model, why hadn't he been made able to withstand greater changes in temperature? And tickling? Three smiled.

"Something funny?" Hyll asked. "You know, before you went to Earth, I thought you only had one expression."

"Handsome?"

"No, hands off. What's that?" Hyll nodded at the bag.

"A plant that wasn't on the list. It's clean. Been through quarantine."

Hyll opened the *pylm* and pulled out a bundle of thorny sticks. He looked up at Three.

"Varieties of Earth roses," Three said. "Can you grow another from these?"

"Why?"

"I saw them on Earth and want some of my own to look at."

Hyll raised his eyebrows. "Try again."

"I want to give the flower to someone."

Hyll laid a section under the scanner. "Yes, it's possible. Hormone rooting powder, water, an accelerating compound and my magic touch. Not much I can't get to grow once I get my hands on it."

Three ignored the wink. "Will you do it?"

"Who do you want it for? Vileda finally got to you?"

"No."

"Not Vileda? Then who? Another Pleasure B? A crew member?"

Hyll stared at him and waited. Three kept his mouth closed.

Hyll's face paled. "Oh Gods, what have you done?"

"Nothing."

"Yes you have." He stood up. "You brought more than those twigs back with you."

"I brought all the plants —"

"I'm not talking about plants, *sepat* brain."

Three sighed. He should have known Hyll would figure it out. Maybe he'd wanted him to. "How did you know?"

Hyll slumped onto his stool. "Gods, I didn't. You just told me. *Zimpra* shit, Three. You brought an alien on board?"

"Lucy Brilliant Sunbeam Pineapple Princess Ferze."

"Whoa. Six of them?"

"Just one with six names. Lucy."

"What were you thinking?"

"She ran her fingers over my shuttle."

Hyll rolled his eyes. "Right."

"No, I mean, she touched the ship. Then she saw me and I wanted her."

"Oh, you were thinking with your cock. That explains everything and excuses everything."

"Really?"

"No, you pile of *etah* shit. Of course it doesn't. What the hell happened to you on that planet?"

*Lucy*, Three thought.

"Where is she?"

Three stood before an invisible line. He needed help. He couldn't keep her locked away for the rest of the mission.

"You know Caled will find out," Hyll said. "You know what he'll do when he does. Not just to the alien but to you. You disobeyed orders."

Three didn't want to think about that.

"If you want me to help you, tell me where she is."

No point hesitating. "One of Biodome Seven's rest rooms. B7."

## Chapter Twelve

*Once there was a beautiful maiden named Rhodanthe who was pursued endlessly by eager suitors. She was forced to seek refuge in the temple of her friend, Diana, goddess of the hunt, but when Rhodanthe's suitors broke into the temple, a jealous Diana turned her into a rose and her suitors into thorns.*

When the door slid open, Lucy expected to see Three carrying something for her to put on but the figure in the doorway was female. Oh God, really tall and beautiful with long blonde hair that swung like liquid satin. She was a walking advertisement for shampoo and healthy living. Her breasts—watermelons came to mind. A persuasive endorsement for plastic surgery. She looked as though she'd been poured into her tight black outfit. It accentuated everything—curves, long legs, narrow waist. This woman had only plus points. Lucy straightened her spine and her creased top—a walking advertisement for goodwill.

"You're not safe," the woman said. "Three sent me to take you somewhere more secure."

"Who are you?"

"Janus."

Lucy wasn't stupid. What if she was lying? "Not Vileda?"

The woman shook her head. "She's in the pools. Do you wish to see her?"

"No. What's the password?"

The cartoon Barbie blinked. "Three gave me no password. Shall I go and ask him, Lucy Brilliant Sunbeam Pineapple Princess Ferze?"

Three wouldn't have told anyone her name unless he wanted her to trust them. "No, that's okay. I'll come with you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Three's pulse rate increased in fits and starts as he made his way to the bridge. He'd been heading back to Lucy with clothes when the order had come over his com. He'd dumped the clothes in a tech room and changed his route. Three could feel his heartbeat thumping in his head, striking like a hammer blow right between his eyes. An unexpected summons from Caled was never a good thing, particularly when Three had something to hide. The man resented the hell out of being stuck on a Colonizer, despite the importance of the mission, and jumped on any infringement of rules because he had nothing better to do—other than have sex with the Bs.

When the door slid open to allow Three inside, he found Hyll there too. Caled was on his feet and stalking, which meant trouble. Three was tall but Caled was taller, bigger and liked to remind Three of the fact.

Caled spun to face him. "Why?"

He could have been asking a number of things. Why was their sun dying? Why did they only get *poolah* to eat once a month? Three glanced at Hyll, the man who'd betrayed him. So much for thinking he was a friend.

Three could have told the truth, that Lucy intrigued him, that she'd ignited something inside him he'd thought he didn't have, that she was the softest, sweetest thing he'd ever seen or held. Only Three knew if he said any of that, he'd never see her again. What had they done to her? Maybe he'd never see her again anyway. His fists clenched at his side.

"Don't make me ask you twice," Caled snapped.

"She saw the shuttle."

"You weren't shielded?"

"Not fast enough. I'd just taken off, the shuttle came down again in her yard and I'd gone to check for external damage."

"There was no shuttle malfunction."

"Correct."

Caled raised his eyebrows. "Therefore it was *your* malfunction." He glanced at Hyll. "Your med report indicated nothing significant."

Hyll nodded.

Caled turned his dark gaze back on Three. "You know the procedure. Render the alien unconscious and leave. Few on Earth take reports of unidentified flying objects with any degree of gravity. When she came round, no one would have believed her. If you had doubts, you should have rendered her permanently unconscious. Then we wouldn't be wasting time on this conversation."

Three's heart protested by battering his ribs. The ache in his head intensified.

"She's probably disease-ridden," Caled said. "You've endangered the entire mission." He strode right up to him. "Where is she?"

*What?* Why had Hyll told Caled about Lucy but not where she was? Three could see no point in lying. Maybe Hyll was giving him the chance to make up for what he'd done, though he still wanted to beat the *zimpra* shit out of him.

"Well?" Caled demanded.

"I put her in one of Biodome Seven's rest rooms. B7."

Caled returned to his desk and a moment later an empty room came up on the vid screen. Three knew it was B7, the glasses were still piled in a pyramid. What he didn't understand was how Caled had bypassed the loop feed he'd set up to ensure the

camera in B7 only broadcast B5. Three saw from Caled's face he'd already known Lucy wasn't there, so Hyll *had* told him. *Pultari* ass-wipe. Only where was she?

Caled nodded to Hyll who approached Three with his scanner. He held it against the side of Three's head.

"Where is she?" Caled repeated.

"I have no idea."

"Truth," intoned a voice.

Three didn't miss the flash of surprise on Caled's face.

"Did you tell anyone but Hyll where she was?"

"No." Three clenched his teeth.

"Truth."

Three glared at Hyll whose face remained impassive.

Caled slammed his fist on his desk. "You lost her. You find her. Don't use the Bs. They have better things to do. Bring her to me. Then I'll deal with you both."

Outside the bridge, Three leaned against the wall and took a deep breath. Gods, what was he going to do? The Colonizer was massive. She could be anywhere. How in the Legolian void did she get out of B7? Hyll emerged and took a step toward him. Three sprang forward and launched a fist at his face. "*Gigbat*."

Hyll jerked back and Three's knuckles grazed his chin.

"Wait," Hyll mouthed. He twisted his hand by his ear, the sign for "com off" and switched off his communication device. Glaring at Hyll, Three did the same.

Settling this outside the bridge when Caled could emerge at any moment wasn't the most sensible thing to do. He'd bloody Hyll's nose around the corner. Three grabbed Hyll by the scruff of the neck, dragged him away from the door and drew back his fist.

"Camera," Hyll choked out.

Three frowned but pulled Hyll to the spot below the mounted monitor. The two of them had issued each other a challenge when they first came on board—to try and get from one point to another without being detected by a camera. Not that anyone was constantly monitoring them, well at least Three thought not. What would be the point? And what was the point in Hyll wanting to be beaten up out of camera range?

Hyll struggled until his mouth was close to Three's ear. "I know how to find her."

Three gripped his neck tighter.

"I suspect Vileda snatched her."

Three's fingers squeezed.

"Let me explain." As Three's hold relaxed, Hyll took a deep breath. "I checked B7 on the vid link and it was empty. Too empty. It didn't look as though anyone had been in there so I went to check in person. No one there but the room I'd looked at on the vid

screen wasn't that room. I guessed what you'd done, switched the feedback and went to see Caled."

Three's hold tightened again.

"He was going to find out sooner or later. This way, he thinks I'm on his side. I have a better chance of learning what he intends to do with the Earth woman when she does turn up and it will give us time to figure out a plan."

That made sense and Three wanted to believe him. "Why do you think Vileda took her?"

"She wants you. Lucy stands between you and her."

That could equally apply to Hyll, Three thought. He didn't know who to trust. Not that he had much choice.

"The ship is huge," Hyll said. "Even using a squad of Bs you could search for *dalos* and not find her. Caled doesn't wish to waste resources searching. Despite the detector's declaration, he thinks you're lying and that you know exactly where she is. He expects you to obey orders and bring her to him as commanded. How long before your next shuttle trip?"

"Two *dalos*."

"And it's to Kirt. Similar to Earth, similar to Syobwoc. You could string out the search until then and leave Lucy there."

Three's jaw tightened. "Similar atmosphere but the inhabitants are eons behind in intellect."

"Then she'll be a goddess. They'll worship her."

"I worship her."

Hyll looked at him in astonishment.

"I don't want to lose her. She's inside me, part of me. I would do anything for her, give up my dream to make hers come true, sacrifice myself for her. I don't want to live without her." Three gulped. *Where had all that come from?*

Hyll shook his head. "Sex talking. You've been abstinent for too long. I feared this. The first experience and it's gone to your head. Lust does strange things to us all."

Three glared. "No, it's not that. She's made me remember what I've been missing. Lucy makes me happy, gives my life meaning. She's beautiful. She has these little freckles over her face and every time I see her I want to kiss each one of them. There's a word to describe how I feel about her. It's on the tip of my tongue, the edge of my brain only I can't grab it. All I know is that she's special. She's made *me* feel special. I don't want to lose her."

Three stared at Hyll. For a moment neither of them blinked.

"I have to find her," Three whispered.

"You do know what Caled will do if he gets his hands on her?"

Three's jaw tightened.

"He's fucked almost every Pleasure B on this ship. He's damaged one irreparably. Maybe he'll make his ninety-nine Bs back up to one hundred again if he gets his hands on Lucy. Caled's a sexual predator. If his father hadn't been one of the elite on Syobwoc, he'd never have got this mission. You don't have any choice here. If you care for this Lucy, then you have to find her, hide her, take her with you to Kirt and leave her there."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy wasn't sure what it was about Janus that made her uncomfortable. Well, apart from the fact that the woman had a beautiful figure, beautiful face and beautiful hair — oh and kick-ass shoes. Black, pointy toes and fascinating cut out heels. Lucy shook her head. *Stop thinking about footwear.* She had more important things to worry about because awareness was sinking into her thick skull that she'd made a mistake.

How likely was Three to send someone like this to take her to safety? She'd already made her feelings clear on the woman who'd offered the private bath and massage. How did she know this wasn't the same female? Three said he'd come back with clothes and Lucy should have waited. Now she was following Ms. Beautiful deeper into the heart of this vessel and for all Lucy knew, she could be planning to push her into a room and activate a switch allowing her to be sucked out of an airlock. Or maybe Lucy would be catapulted into the garbage compactor and the sides and floor and ceiling would move together and — Lucy's knees trembled. No more movies, assuming she got out of this.

*Enough is enough.* Lucy clutched her stomach and dropped to the floor. "Ow, ah, oohhh, aarrgghh."

Janus turned and stared at her. "What's wrong?"

"I need a doctor. My appendix is rupturing." Lucy's appendix was probably still in a glass jar in some hospital lab. She'd been quite proud when the doctor said it was biggest one he'd ever taken out.

"Help me," Lucy gasped.

Janus just stood there. It belatedly occurred to Lucy that if the woman wished her gone, she was hardly likely to respond to a call for help. Still, she was too far down the bad-actress road to back out now. She groaned more loudly.

"Come with me," Janus said.

Lucy writhed in the middle of the corridor, swirling on her back with surprising ease, tempted to try break dancing.

"Get up."

"Can't." She should have been an actress. Lucy wondered whether to fake a heart attack or a seizure. Or both. Why not take the leap from bad acting to over-acting? She shook from head to foot, drumming her heels on the floor. *Ow, that really did hurt.*

Janus stared down at her. "I'll get help."

The moment she'd turned the corner, Lucy got up and ran the other way.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three couldn't take his eyes off the vid screen. He'd located Vileda via her chip, and when he'd seen Lucy rolling on the floor he'd felt a surge of anger so strong he snapped the arm off his chair. He saw Lucy get up and run and followed her progress from camera to camera, praying to the Gods no one else watched this. She had no com device. He couldn't tell her where to run, all he could do was watch.

She faltered when she encountered a group of Worker Bs, but when they paid her no attention, she followed them into Biodome One. Three sighed with relief. Now she'd stopped moving he had a chance to get to her. Ten *tretos* and he'd be there.

Biodome One had the most lush vegetation, predominantly collected from the planet Ventriss, the first one visited by the Colonizer. Three had made five shuttle trips to the surface to collect a variety of vegetation. Each section of Biodome One was dedicated to the development of low-temperature-resistant flora of one form or another—cereal crops, fruit, vegetables. The plants here were more advanced and small trees flourished.

Three looked through the observation window. Worker Bs in their white *hazsuits* stood out against the mostly green backdrop. He guessed Lucy would be wearing white too. He donned a protective suit and set off to look for her.

He found her sitting cross-legged on a path, well away from any of the Worker Bs. She was talking. Three smiled.

"You're only little now but you're going to grow into a...maybe whatever this is next to you. Tall, with a hard, thick stem full of lovely juice. You've got the prettiest leaves I've ever seen, so delicate. Oooh, are you ticklish?"

She pulled away a small carpet of lime green growth from the little plant's base and sighed. "There, now your roots can breathe. I'll give you a drop of water. Not too much, I don't want to drown you. Oops, splashed a bit on your—oh, wow, you have a bud. I hadn't noticed. That's a tiny flower that's not quite come out yet, in case you didn't realize. I wonder what color—"

"Lucy."

She jumped up and with a wide smile flung herself into his arms. It killed him to do it, but Three pushed her away, shooting a nervous glance toward the cameras. "Someone might be watching."

Her face fell and then she smiled again. "Oh sorry. Pretend to be happy about this plant then. Look, isn't it a beauty?"

She dropped down and Three crouched at her side. He wondered whether he should tell her she'd just pulled up the real plant—the green crawler—and was praising a weed. Her hand slid over his. No, he'd keep quiet.

"This woman called Janus told me you wanted me to go with her. Because she knew my name, I thought she was safe but then I changed my mind. Anyway I gave her the slip," Lucy whispered.



"That was Vileda."

"Ah, I wondered. So what's happening? Are we being watched? What are we going to do?"

"I'm going to take you back."

The moment the words were out of his mouth, Three knew that was what he had to do.

"My next shuttle flight is scheduled for the planet Kirt. I can steal one of the larger shuttles and take you back to Earth."

Though he'd have to read up how to fly it. Three wondered why Lucy wasn't saying anything. Her hand fell away from his.

"Until then, I'll move you around so there's less chance of you being found. The Worker B *hazsuit* is a good disguise but it will only work inside a biodome and if the Workers Bs are told to look for you, it will be no protection at all. I think you'll be safe in here tonight. I'll bring you something to eat and drink."

She still didn't say anything.

"Okay?" he asked.

Lucy gave a little nod. Three reached out and slid his hand over hers, squeezing gently. Most likely she was overwhelmed, having given up hope of ever seeing Earth again. Yes, that was it, Three thought. She was full of gratitude.

*You stupid, idiotic jerk.*

Lucy seethed so hard she expected steam to spurt from her nose and ears. The chances of all her fillings remaining intact were not good.

"When the lights go down, the Worker Bs will leave. Go to the place where they store their tools and I'll meet you there."

He squeezed her fingers again and stood up. Lucy didn't watch him leave. Disappointment swirled around her bloodstream, depressing every cell. He wanted to take her back. He'd dump her on Earth and fly off again. He didn't love her but she'd fallen in love with him.

*Hah, so who's the stupid, idiotic jerk?*

Three was just like all the others. He'd fucked her and now he'd leave her. Lucy didn't know what she did wrong. She gave guys her heart and they trampled all over it. She was a nice person, always kind to people even when they didn't deserve it. She never dropped litter. She recycled paper, glass and plastic. She didn't gossip. She hung the toilet paper the right way round. She watched films she hated. She pretended to like beer. But what was the point? It didn't make guys want to keep her.

She turned to see if Three was still in sight, but he'd gone. Her head dropped and her gaze settled on a little plant growing on the other side of the path. It matched the one she'd been talking to. A moment later, after apologizing for disturbing its roots, she settled it in the soil next to the first.

"There, you can talk to each other," Lucy said. "Now you won't be lonely. Hey, you might even make babies. How cool would that be?"

Her eyes opened wide as the bud on the first plant shimmered and a delicate blue flower opened. It was like watching one of those speeded-up nature programs on TV. Lucy stared at the other plant. "Be pink," she whispered. When the bud opened, it was blue like the first.

"Wow, you did that so fast. Are you going to be any help in the search to find plants that can cope with the cold?"

She could have sworn the flowers moved closer together. Lucy grinned. "Hey, love will keep you warm." Then the smile fell from her face. Going to be a bit chilly for her then.

## Chapter Thirteen

*Germination: the process by which a dormant seed begins the growth process.*

Hyll gave up trying to work. Impossible to concentrate while his conversation with Three danced in his head. When Three described how he felt about Lucy, Hyll thought for a moment he might be having a myocardial infarction. There was certainly something weird happening in his chest. His bio sensors indicated nothing amiss but Hyll scheduled himself for a full physical.

He stalked back to his quarters wondering whether this feeling could be put down to sexual frustration. If that was the case, he could summon Zend and relieve it, but he suspected sex, particularly with Zend, wouldn't improve his mood.

Hyll had wanted Three from the moment he'd seen him. His enthusiasm for the long mission blossomed at the sight of the rangy, dark-haired man stepping from the transport shuttle. Except Three failed to respond to any of Hyll's sexual overtures. Direct or subtle, nothing worked. In fact Three seemed to have no sexual interest in anyone on board and Hyll had been determined to find out why.

A combination of scientific curiosity and personal need pushed Hyll into experiments he hoped would narrow the odds in his favor. First he'd slipped a hormone compound into Three's *poolah* that would suppress any attraction to women. The slight flaw in that plan was that Three had shown no interest in women before the treatment. More to the point, it hadn't made Three lust after men, much to Hyll's disappointment. Then he'd stopped the food additive and turned Vileda from passive to aggressive and ordered her to pursue Three. No man should have been able to resist. Three had. None of these details made it into Hyll's report to Syobwoc.

What had he hoped for? For Three to be so repulsed by Vileda, he'd leap at a guy? *Me!* Or alternatively that a more persuasive Vileda might have kick-started Three's interest in sex which could have extended to Hyll. Whatever he'd hoped, all his effort had resulted in Three going out of his way to avoid Vileda without being driven into Hyll's arms.

Hyll should have turned her back to passive *manos* ago but it amused him to watch the pair spar and he'd still hoped the tension between them might work in his favor. At least Three had started talking to him. Only now the *sepat* brain had collected an Earth woman on his travels who'd given Three's sex drive the kick start Hyll had hoped for – just not in the right direction.

Everything had gone wrong. Lucy had made it go wrong. The sooner she left the *Xenothak*, the better. He hadn't pushed Three too hard with the idea of taking Lucy to Kirt but Hyll figured unless she disappeared, he stood no chance. He already knew

pressing Three to do anything could be counterproductive but at least the seed had been planted. The best case scenario was that Three managed to keep Lucy away from Caled until the next mission, then he left her on Kirt. The worst – that Caled found Lucy and Three did something stupid.

Life was so simple on Syobwoc. You worked. You had sex. When you tired of your partner or partners, whether it was after *dalos* or *milos*, or sometimes *tretos*, you simply moved on. Hyll expected one day to choose a female he could mate with and have a child, two if they had permission, but even those partnerships rarely lasted. His parents were the exception. They were still together after thirty-five years. But people sniggered behind their backs. It was abnormal to want to spend that long with anyone.

Nothing lasted. Nothing. Hyll took a deep breath. He suspected their planet was doomed, no matter what the Colonizers achieved and whatever experiments scientists did on that sun in Jert's system. Doomed just like his chances of keeping Three in his life. He'd never lusted after anyone or anything like this before. Not being able to have what he wanted had fueled his desperation and turned it into a dangerous obsession.

Hyll had been left by partners several times, but done the leaving more often. He might have experienced some disappointment when they'd left but it only lasted until he found another. It was the Syobwoc way. Overpopulation in the past had led to violence. Now a chemical adjustment took place within an hour of birth so all children grew up bisexual with no strong emotions that might disrupt their lives. Syobwoc was a peaceful, happy planet. The lives of the people were balanced. So why was Hyll annoyed and out of sync? Why couldn't he figure out a way to put things right?

Maybe Three's accident and his subsequent extensive enhancement surgery had altered his hormonal equilibrium in some way. But shouldn't the medics have spotted that before they passed him fit for this mission?

Maybe Three wasn't from Syobwoc at all.

Hyll gulped. Not the first time that thought had crossed his mind. He sat at his desk, waited for bio recognition to activate his station and then tapped into Three's files.

A *milos* later he'd come up with nothing. Not one word to suggest Three was anything other than the same as him – with improvements. Though he did wonder about that appendage at the beginning of Three's large intestine. Some sort of abnormal growth? Maybe what Hyll didn't find was more significant. No medical records earlier than when Three had been in the explosion.

Hyll looked up the name of the surgeon who'd operated on him and let out a gasp of surprise. Astra Merk. Hyll's mother. Well, maybe not such a shock. She was brilliant. One of the top reconstructive surgeons on the planet. How had Three warranted his mother's skilled hands? Her time was highly prized. Hyll sometimes had to schedule appointments to see her. Maybe Three was a son of one the Cadre, the ruling body of Syobwoc? Or was that a jump too far?

He contemplated contacting his mother. Did the reports he'd been ordered to make about Three for the Central Science Department end up with her? Would she tell him if that was the case? Hyll didn't like unanswered questions. Finding out *why?* had been important to him since he was a small child. He couldn't help but think about the way his mother talked him into applying for this job on the *Xenothak*, how she'd persuaded him to take it after it had been offered and he'd been wavering. Coincidence? Hyll tapped a message to her and then wiped his screen. He had to be careful what he said. He'd think about the wording.

One thing he could do. He linked in to Vasp's com.

"Yes, Hyll?"

"Report to me at your earliest convenience. I need to do a check on the memory bank installed for your trip to Earth."

"Two *milos*."

"Accepted."

Hyll closed the link. Would Vasp recall tea with three sugars?

\* \* \* \* \*

Hiding in plain sight seemed like a good idea. Lucy dressed the same as the Worker Bs and no one paid her any attention. They were a quiet bunch. She hardly heard them exchange more than a few words and those were all work related. Leaf defects. Length of shoots. Amount of sap. Problems with pollination. No discussion over what was on TV, what was for dinner, who shagged whose boyfriend. Lucy sidled up to work alongside one of the women, thinking she might as well make herself useful.

"Hi, I'm Lucy. What's your name?"

It seemed to take a long time for the woman to answer. "My name is Vonda."

"Hi, Vonda. Can I help?"

"If you wish."

Lucy copied what the woman did, transferring tiny seedlings into individual pots.

"Grow big and strong," Lucy said and pressed down the soil around the base of the plant with the tips of her fingers.

"Reach for the sun," Lucy said to the next and a woman on her other side looked askance at her.

"Cling on with those roots." She picked out another seedling. "Suck up that water." Lucy's voice rose like that of an evangelical preacher. "Take in that carbon dioxide. Loosen those guard cells and let your stomata breathe."

Lucy glanced up to see the woman in front of her staring, and beyond her, a little army of white *hazsuited* workers all looking her way. *Oops. Me and my big mouth.*

"It helps them," Lucy mumbled.

"Yes," Vonda said. "Plants need carbon dioxide. Therefore when you breathe on them, you are giving them an extra dose of the required gas."

Lucy hadn't thought of it like that.

"Though you would need to spend several *milos* conversing with a plant at close quarters in order to have a significant effect," said a man behind Lucy.

She sighed. "I used to sing to my plants."

"Sing?" asked another woman.

Lucy wasn't good at holding a tune but she launched into her own version of *An English Country Garden*.

"How many kinds of plant life grow

In a spaceship's biodome garden.

I'll tell you now of some that I know

And those I miss I hope you'll pardon."

Lucy danced over to the labels on the rows of plants. *Shit, how do I pronounce those?*

"Gellybur and Thristletop,

Bollypot and Vollygok."

She was going to have to fiddle this so it rhymed.

"Gentian, lupin and blue forget-me-not.

All these wonders growing tall and strong,

In a spaceship's biodome garden."

She hadn't expected applause but the stunned silence worried her. What was wrong with these people? No sense of humor?

"More," whispered Vonda.

Lucy took a deep breath. Not exactly a standing ovation but —

"How many kinds of insects come and go

In a spaceship's biodome garden.

I'll tell you now of some that I know

And those I miss I hope you'll pardon.

Spiders, moths and honeybees

Wasps and beetles, bumblebees

Ants and earwigs, ladybirds and fleas

Best of all is the special Worker Bee

In a spaceship's biodome garden."

More silence. Then everyone began to work again. Lucy sighed and eased out another seedling.

The humming was quiet at first, just one or two people and then more joined in until they all hummed the tune together. Lucy laughed.

"Which biodome are you from?" Vonda asked.

"I'm new."

"New?"

The humming stopped and Lucy had the impression they were communicating in some way. A moment later, she was surrounded. Wasn't she *supposed* to be new? One of the men reached out to touch her face. His fingers stroked her cheek. Lucy knew she ought to feel threatened but she didn't.

"What are all your names?" she asked.

The man cocked his head on one side. "You want to know our names?"

Lucy nodded.

"Why?"

"Well, in case I want to call you. I mean, I can't say, hey, you in the white suit, can I?" She laughed.

It took a moment but the faces around her began to smile. Then they told her their names. Lucy had to concentrate hard to remember them all. Her usual method of linking names to articles of clothing wasn't going to work and these people were all so beautiful, joining names to facial features wouldn't work either.

The light dimmed and everyone moved away from her as quickly as they'd come. They packed up their equipment and left without saying a word. They were a really strange group.

Lucy didn't want to just sit and wait for Three. The workers had left a pile of twigs and branches ready to go into a shredder but Lucy could think of a better use for them. She gathered them up and set to work. The light stayed at a half-level so she could see well enough. Not part of her job at the garden center, but in her lunch break she often used waste materials to create pieces of artwork. Keith, the owner, mostly threw them away but once a lady had asked if she could buy one. Lucy had been thrilled until she found out she wanted it to scare birds.

She guessed there was no place in a Colonizer's world for anything frivolous. Everything had a purpose and everyone worked with the same goal which meant Lucy wasn't much use for anything. Rather like on Earth. She liked sculpting but would never earn a living at it. She picked up more twigs and bent them into shape.

Lucy had no brothers or sisters, no aunts or uncles. After her parents died, she'd researched her family tree to see if there were more Ferze anywhere. There weren't. But she wasn't lonely. Of course she wasn't. She didn't have many friends but she always had a boyfriend. Most of the time. Okay, occasionally.

It had taken Lucy a while to understand why Mike had never wanted to take her anywhere other than bed. He'd been worried his wife would spot them. Jasper, the banker, had seemed such a straightforward guy until he'd shown her his bedroom and the sheets of plastic all over the floor and told her what he wanted to do to her. Lucy now knew water sports were something she only wanted to try on a beach loaded with

sailboards and canoes. Eric never seemed to have his wallet with him and Lucy had gone along with that for too long because she thought he really liked her.

Huh, men.

Ah, Three.

Lucy sighed and wandered around the biodome distributing her little twig birds and animals. Maybe they'd bring a smile to someone's face. She'd made a heart-shaped wreath to stick in the soil behind the two plants she'd talked to. Their flowers were closed now but the heads rested together. She wondered what planet they were from, wondered if Three or whoever had taken them had thought to check whether the plant life there was sophisticated enough to have feelings.

The idea of intelligent plant life didn't seem so farfetched considering what had happened to her, but if you could get what you needed to survive by just lazing around in the soil and light, then it didn't seem like having a great intellect would be any advantage. Still, what if it hurt when they'd been wrenched from the soil? What if their scream was something only a dog could hear? Lucy was pleased she'd apologized. Maybe they'd understood.

"Lucy?"

She froze at the whisper. Had they spoken? How did they know her name?

"Lucy."

Ah, not the plant.

Relieved Three hadn't witnessed her stupidity, she turned and rushed toward him, leaping the last few feet into his arms. *Damn*. She'd forgotten she was supposed to be cross.

"How come you look sexy even in a white *hazsuit*?" Three said with a groan.

"I'd look sexier with it off. Do I need it on?"

"We'll go to the far side where the plants are less vulnerable. I've brought you something to eat."

He held up a bulging bag. Lucy was pleased it appeared to hold more than three tablets. She picked up one of the little birds she'd made and offered it to him. "This is for you."

Poor as the light was, Lucy didn't miss the look on Three's face. Not surprised pleasure, but deep shock. *Shit*. Wasn't she supposed to touch the twigs? They'd only been destined for the shredder, hadn't they? Maybe it wasn't a shredder. Maybe it was a revival machine or something.

Three reached out and touched the sculpture as though it were real. *Maybe he's never seen a bird before*. She hadn't considered that. Or maybe she'd accidentally created a model of some evil creature on his home planet that crept in through windows, ripped open your chest and stole your soul. Lucy shuddered. She really *did* need to stop reading Stephen King. Ah, that wasn't going to be a problem now. What did they do for pleasure? Where were the books?



"A wren." Three sighed.

"Hey, I was trying for a wren so that's good. My models aren't always recognizable."

"How did you learn how to do this?"

"My art teacher started me off. She brought in a sheep she'd made with willow branches and I thought it was great." Lucy took a deep breath. "So what's wrong?"

"Nothing."

She stamped on his foot.

"Ouch, what was that for?"

"Lying." *And not loving me like I love you.*

"It seems familiar, as though I've seen something like this before."

"You did. In my garden. Well, before you landed on top of them."

Three smiled and then stopped when she glared. "That must be it." He took the bird from her hand, put it in the bag then tugged her along the path.

They stopped in front of a shimmering plastic barrier. Lucy had seen it when she'd wandered around and thought it was the entrance to some sort of greenhouse.

"Have you been through a *bubchek*?" Three asked.

She shook her head. He smiled and stepped through the material. Lucy gasped. Whatever the stuff was—it moved like a liquid and closed around him to leave no trace of a break in the surface. Three stood on one side and she stood the other.

"Step through," he said.

It was like walking into bubblegum only instead of sticking to her or popping, it reformed behind her. "Wow." Lucy turned and thrust out her hand, then pulled it back. The material sealed in an instant. She put her face through next. Maybe it was more like bubble mix only not wet. When she pulled her head back and turned to look at Three, he smiled at her. He smiled much more now. He was handsome without his smile, devastating with it. Only he wasn't hers. Lucy smiled against the ache in her chest. No point sulking. She might as well make the most of the time with him that she had.

"Is it warm in there?" she asked nodding toward the other side of the bubble they stood in.

"This section of the biodome is on its upper cycle. They're trying to simulate conditions the plants might face as the sun deteriorates by fluctuating the temperature. It's warm in there at the moment."

Lucy slipped out of her white overall. "Are they making progress?"

Three shrugged. "Hyll says so but the technology is beyond my grasp."

"What exactly do you do?" Lucy pulled off her little top and stepped out of her drawstring bottoms.

Three's eyes had glazed over. Ah, maybe she'd only been supposed to take off the overall. She snapped her fingers in front of his face.

"Collection mainly but all sorts of logistics issues, supply, repair, anything that's needed." He yanked off his *hazsuit* and the rest of his clothes.

"There's something I need so badly." Lucy curled her finger over his chest. His hands cupped her backside and she squirmed away. "Food."

Three laughed. He picked up the bag he'd brought, took Lucy's hand and pulled her through the other side of the bubble.

Lucy gasped. "Bloody hell." It was as though they'd stepped into a jungle. "How did you get trees that size in here?"

"We didn't. They grew. We have the technology to speed up the growth cycle for most plants."

Branches dripped with vines and creepers. The variety in the shape and color of leaves seemed endless—broad-leaved palms, pale lacy ferns, sharp spikes and huge leaves the size of elephant's ears. Lucy could smell the damp earth, the beginnings and the end of life. It reminded her of home.

"No lurking big cats?" she asked.

Three nipped the top of her ear. "Might be."

"Snakes?"

He pressed himself against her back, his thick erection nuzzling her spine.

"Oh, only dead snakes with rigor mortis," she said in a tone of mock-disappointment.

Three laughed, took her hand and tugged her forward. "I know just the place for us to eat."

He led her to a little glade where a carpet of soft moss lay underfoot. Lucy rubbed her bare feet into it and groaned. "That feels lovely." She sat down and fingered the frilly green blanket. "Oh, this is the stuff I pulled out."

"It's not a weed."

"Eek. Sorry."

Three took everything he'd brought out of the bag. Lucy didn't recognize any item as food. Bright pink cubes with something floating inside that Lucy hoped wasn't alive, wet black balls, orange wormy-looking things. Everything was either a strange shape or a weird color. Who on Earth would eat green spotted stuff unless they were desperate?

Ah, not on Earth anymore and she was desperate.

The tastes were vaguely familiar and yet strangely different. She ate her fill before slumping on her back with her cupped hands tucked under her head.

"Do you want the good news or the bad?" Three trailed a red berry around her nipple.

"The good." *You love me. You've decided to keep me.*

"Caled hasn't yet authorized the use of Worker Bs to look for you. Their job in the biodomes is more important. He thinks you'll be found soon anyway."

That was good news? "The bad?"

"The Pleasure Bs are looking."

"Won't they tell the Workers?"

"Not unless instructed to do so."

Lucy snorted. Three didn't know people at all.

"How can I tell the difference between them?" she asked.

"You can't—not physically anyway. You'll be okay for the time being inside the biodomes. The Pleasure Bs won't go into them until they've searched everywhere else. It upsets the Worker Bs' schedules and throws off the air balance. But outside the domes you're not safe. We can keep ahead of those looking for you though. I'll move you from one to another after they're searched."

Three dropped his head and slurped the trail of juice running down her breast. Lucy trembled.

"I'm still hungry," he whispered. "We were supposed to be sharing that food."

Lucy gasped. "I'm sorry. I'm such a pig."

"Seems like I'll have to eat you instead."

## Chapter Fourteen

*The Resurrection Plant, also known as the Rose of Jericho, can lie dormant for up to fifty years and then be revived by water, unfurling into a vigorous green fern. When removed from water, it dies again. The cycle can be repeated over and over.*

Three's mouth settled over her nipple and sucked. Lucy drew in a ragged breath and arched her back, urging him to take more. But he moved his lips from her breast to her mouth and pressed her down. It was hard to push him into doing anything. He tasted of the berry he'd just squeezed onto her, sweet with a tang. She'd never enjoyed kissing anyone as much. No sloppy wetness, no thrusting until she thought the sides of her mouth would split, no hungry chicken dry pecks. Three used the perfect amount of pressure, the perfect amount of moist tongue.

He nibbled her lower lip before tugging it between his teeth and into his mouth. Lucy wrapped her arms around him and Three dropped to her side, his hand skimming the curve of her body. He changed the angle of his head and deepened the kiss, tugging her against him so they were plastered against each other from head to toe. His fingers drifted up her spine on a seductive mission to tangle in her hair while Lucy's roaming hands rose and fell over the sculpted muscles of his back.

As though a switch had tripped in her brain, rational thought disappeared and the pursuit of pleasure became the overriding aim. Muscles tightened, nerves tingled until every cell in her body ached for him. Lucy took control of the kiss and explored his mouth, tracing the ridges and valleys of his teeth, the silky-smooth skin inside his cheeks while her fingers rubbed the emerging stubble outside. She thrilled at the slight roughness of his tongue, a reminder of how it felt as he caressed her delicate folds. The thought of losing this, losing him, forced a lump to her throat. She had to make every moment count, store each second in her memory.

Lucy pulled back from his lips with a soft *pop*. She kissed and sucked her way down the center of his body, along the dark wisp of hair until she reached his shining cock standing proud in a bed of wiry curls. Lucy slipped the tip of her tongue into the narrow slit at the head, teased out a drop of pre-cum and dragged a deep groan from his throat. Taking hold of his cock at the base, she smoothed the crest over her lips, rolling on his juice like a lip gloss. Lucy looked up into his eyes and Three slid his fingers through her hair, his thumbs circling over her ears.

"Lucy," he whispered.

She felt with her mouth for the indentation that ran below the cock head and explored it, teasing the dip with the tip of her tongue before encasing him with her lips and squeezing. Her reward was a growl that rumbled through Three's body like

thunder. His breathing deepened, the sound amplified in the still air. Lucy wrapped a hand around the base of his cock and held him tight. A tiny burst of pre-cum hit the roof of her mouth and she rolled the salty pearl around the head of his shaft, swirling with her tongue, lapping and sucking until his loud groans grew even noisier.

Lucy let him loose from her lips and raised her chin. He rested back on his elbows, watching her with his intense, dark eyes. She moved her hand a fraction higher up his cock and squeezed, then released him and moved higher, before she tightened her grip once more. Every clench of her fist dragged a breathy gasp from Three's throat. *I'm milking him*, Lucy thought as she continued to squeeze and shift her fingers higher. A bead of fluid swelled above the slit.

She waited, hand around his root, watching the drop enlarge until it rolled down the purple head of his cock, then she lowered her mouth and staring straight at him, licked it up.

"Oh Gods," Three choked out.

His balls were tight against the bottom of her hand, hot and full, ready to burst. Lucy feathered her tongue all the way down his groin and licked the point where his balls joined his body. His hips bucked. When she sucked the line of flesh at the back of his sac, he let out a gurgling gasp.

"Lucy, Lucy, Lucy." He stroked her hair, pulled it, stroked it again.

She mouthed the textured skin, gently pulling it between her lips before she took his balls in her mouth and hummed. The muscles in Three's thighs tensed against her shoulders. Tightening her grip at the base of his cock, Lucy used her tongue to separate the delicate egg-shaped balls, fondling them for a moment in her mouth before she let him go. Using her other hand, she wrapped her thumb and index finger around his sac and pulled it away from his body so the skin beneath was tight, the base of his balls almost bulging. One suck there and Three's butt shot into the air.

"Oh for the love of...let me come."

No, Lucy didn't think so. Not yet. She pushed him down and reached for the orange gloopy thing that had tasted like marshmallow. Her grip at the base of his cock remained firm.

"What are you doing?" he gasped.

"Enjoying myself."

"You do know I'll get my own back?"

"I'm counting on it." Lucy smeared the orange gel all over his cock then began to drag her hand up from the base. Once she'd reached the tip, she wrapped her other hand around the root and pulled up again, repeating the process, pumping slow, but always hard and tight.

"Don't come," she said.

Three let out a gruff snort. "Tell our suns not to rise."

"I thought one of them was about to stop."

His cock jerked in her hands, the ropy veins thick and bulging. She took him as close to the edge as she dared, then dropped her mouth to his glistening tip and swallowed. One hand stayed tight around his base while Lucy worked her mouth up and down his shaft. She sucked hard on the pull up then reversed on the drag down. When his cock hit the back of her throat, he came, gasping each jolt of his release. The creamy jets blasted with such force, Lucy had to swallow fast before she choked. Cum dribbled from her mouth as she pulled back.

Three groaned and laughed. "Gods, you look like you've got some strange disease." He reached up to wipe her mouth and showed her the orange froth.

Not a strange disease, just love, but how could she tell him that? She had a feeling he didn't even know what the word meant.

"My turn," Three said.

He spun Lucy onto her back, lifted her foot to his mouth and licked across her toes.

"Oh my God," Lucy whispered.

He might just as well have trailed his tongue across her clit. When he sucked her big toe, Lucy tried to crawl away.

Three yanked her back. "Now who's ticklish?"

Every toe enjoyed the wet rasp of his tongue, the soft suction of his lips and every touch sent fiery flutters of sensation rushing to her core. Lucy let herself sink into the moment. Her eyes closed and she spread her arms to caress the moss, allowing the moss to caress her. When Three released her foot, she whined until he started on the other.

"Two mouths would be good," she mumbled. "If you're only assuming that shape but really have a couple of mouths, three dozen hands and two cocks, that's absolutely fine so long as I don't have to look at you."

He laughed his way along the sole of her foot and landed fluttery kisses around her ankle before nipping, nibbling, nuzzling his way up her calf to the back of her knee.

"Arrrrgghh. Erogenous zone two hundred-and-forty-seven," she gasped.

"I only counted two hundred-and-forty-six. I'll have to start again."

"Nooooo."

Lucy's blood caught fire and raced around her body setting every organ ablaze. Spirals of pleasurable heat swirled inside her, punctuated every now and again by a rippling contraction in her womb that made her hips lurch and her stomach twitch. Three's mouth reached her groin, and as his lips settled over her pussy, the roughness of his cheeks rubbing against her thighs wound her tighter.

Tongue and finger explored her soft folds. Tongue teasing her clit, finger teasing her anus—pushing and pressing until the resistant muscle opened to let him slip inside. Three's thumb worked her little nub together with his tongue, letting it slide between the two until Lucy's breathing became strangled gasps. Her brain couldn't keep track of what he was doing—a thumb twisting in her pussy, a fingertip stroking her clit, a finger

sliding in and out of her anus and Three's lips always kissing, kissing. And the soft moss, that couldn't be stroking her too. *Could it?*

He lifted his head. "Okay?"

She let out some unrecognizable grunt. She'd never be okay again. Lucy sighed, then choked out a strangled groan when she felt the blunt head of his cock press against her anus. Maybe she'd forgotten how to speak.

"I want all of you," Three said. "I want you here."

A slender finger was one thing, his thick cock something else entirely. "I...you...will...big..." Well that was good. Anyone could understand that.

"I think it might be easier if you turned over."

"Think?" The one thing she didn't seem to be capable of doing.

He dropped his head and gave her a gentle kiss. "I don't think I've ever done this before."

Her eyes opened wider and she gave a quiet yelp. "What if you get it wrong?"

His shoulders shook as he laughed. "I'm not going to get it wrong, but if you don't want this or you want me to stop, I will."

Lucy rolled over beneath him. No point pretending she didn't want this, she did. She was a little afraid but she *did* trust him. When Three moved to one side, she brought up her knees, stuck her bottom in the air and took a deep breath. This had to be the most unflattering pose ever. Why had he gone quiet? What was he doing? What was he thinking? Had he changed his mind? What did — Lucy yelped. "Jesus Christ, what the hell?"

She looked over her shoulder to see Three holding a dripping green stalk above her backside.

"It's natural lubricant."

"It's freezing."

"I'll warm you up."

He slid the crest of his cock along the crease of her bottom, spreading the cold lube deeper and deeper until he came to a rest over her anus. Three slipped his hand under her hip and stroked her pussy. Lucy could feel his breath hitting her shoulder, the brush of his chest against her back. His cock kept nudging forward and back, each time pressing a little harder. As he thrust two fingers inside her pussy Lucy gasped and the ring of muscles opened around his cock to let him slide inside.

"Gods," Three groaned. "You are so tight."

"You're huge." It felt — no, she didn't want to think too hard.

"No, you're tight," Three whispered.

"Is this a time to argue? Too tight?" Damn, that was a squeak.

"Push back against me."

His hips pressed forward and his thighs tightened around her. He had one hand braced on the moss next to hers, one hand in her pussy and his cock desperate to get inside her. Lucy felt awash in shame that she wanted this so much. Only bad girls did this, didn't they? *No one knows*, said the little devil on her shoulder. *You know you want it*, said the devil on the other. How come she didn't get an angel? *Because I'm bad. And this is so good.*

He ground himself against her, constant pressure, a battle of attrition she didn't want to win. Lucy knew the exact moment her body gave in, the moment her muscles relaxed their hold. The burning pressure morphed in an instant to guilty pleasure. Three flexed his hips and sank deeper and deeper until Lucy could feel his balls pressed up against her folds. When he let out a loud groan of pure pleasure, her lingering guilt evaporated.

"Oh you feel so good." He nibbled her shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"Peachy."

Three pulled back and Lucy went with him.

A choked laugh burst from his lips. "You have to let me move."

"I think you're stuck."

She felt his chuckle all the way along his cock as it vibrated inside her. Three nipped her neck, thrust what felt like his whole hand inside her pussy, and as Lucy's muscles tightened their grip on his fingers, her hold on his erection loosened. Three managed to push in and out once before a mini orgasm grabbed Lucy and shook her in its jaws.

"Oh God, God, God," she gasped.

Three gave a ragged groan and the moment her spasm died away, he began to thrust into her, his hips bucking against her backside. Lucy felt stuffed, too full, his fingers still working her pussy, twisting and pulsing as his thick cock sank into her ass. Lucy wanted to shout that it was too much, or maybe not enough, but it was all she could do to breathe.

She sighed as Three released her pussy and slid his arms under hers, leaning over her back, holding her up by the shoulders as he continued to pound into her. The long, deep strokes sent ripples skittering to her fingers and toes. Three tensed against her and his cock jerked his release.

Lucy's fingers sank into the moss as she came. Her climax rushed over her like a wall of water, tumbling her in its path so she no longer knew which way was up or how to get to the surface. Everything went black and she could have sworn she saw brightly colored stars explode in a night sky before they slowly faded away.

She came round lying in Three's arms. He had one hand over her hip, the other cradling her head.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"No." Not then, only when he'd told her he was taking her home.



A small spidery-looking insect crawled on Three's shoulder and Lucy let it move onto her hand before tipping it onto a leaf. She didn't mind insects. She'd spent so long at her dad's side listening to him explain which were the gardener's friends, that very few bothered her. Except these weren't Earth insects. *Eek*. She rubbed her hand on Three's chest.

"I hope Incey Wincey isn't poisonous," she whispered.

"What?"

"Incey Wincey spider climbed up the waterspout," Lucy sang. "Down came the rain and washed the spider out."

"Out came the sunshine and dried up all the..." Three sat up and Lucy tumbled to one side. "How do I know that?"

She pulled him down. "You studied Earth, didn't you? It's a nursery rhyme."

A drop of water landed on her shoulder and she froze. Was he crying? Then she felt a drop on her backside. Ah, not tears.

"Three, I—"

Water poured down and they were soaked in a moment. She laughed.

"Raindrops keep falling on my head, and just like the guy whose feet are...too...big..." she sang until she caught sight of his face. "What is it?"

Three sat up, water dripping from his eyelashes and hair. "I know that song too. Sing it."

"I don't know the words. I can la la the tune."

As Lucy reached the end, Three joined in. "Because I'm free. Nothing's worrying me."

Lucy nodded. "Oh yeah, that's it."

He grabbed her shoulders and stared straight at her. "How in the Legolian void do I know the words to an Earth song?"

## Chapter Fifteen

*Ecological interest in invasive organisms arises not just because of the devastation they can cause, but because it is not yet understood how they transform from minor roles in their native communities to dominant roles in the communities they invade.*

Three needed to speak to Hyll. In private. Preferably in Three's quarters where they couldn't be overheard. Hyll had his com switched off so Three left a voice message asking him to meet him. He'd been tempted to drag Lucy along and persuade her to sing every Earth song she knew, to talk about Earth food to see if it triggered another memory, but his quarters were exactly where they'd look for her and he still didn't know if he could trust Hyll. Three had been forced to switch his com device back on so no one got suspicious. Short periods offline were acceptable but if he had it on while he was with Lucy, someone would hear her. No way could Lucy keep quiet if they were together. He smiled.

When Three turned the corner and saw who waited in the corridor, his smile withered and died.

"Have you been successful in locating the Earth woman?" Vileda asked.

Oh yes, located and pleased better than any B could. Three was about to come out with a snippy comment until it occurred to him that Vileda could have been set up with a lie-detection device.

"Why did you remove her from B7?" he asked.

"She has no function on board."

His mouth tightened. "And what function do you have?"

"I'm a Pleasure B."

"Your role is to bring pleasure?"

She smiled. "Yes."

"You don't bring me pleasure."

Her smile tightened. "Let me try to—"

Three moved out of reach. "You don't bring me pleasure, Vileda. You'll never bring me pleasure. Look for someone else who will appreciate you."

He slipped into his quarters. "Door locked," he snapped.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm outside," Hyll said into his com.

Three's door opened and Hyll switched off the communication device as he walked in. Hyll glanced around. "Is she safe?"

"For now." Three paced.

"What is it?"

Three stopped in front of him. "Why would I know a nursery rhyme that Earth children sing? How would I know a song sung by Earth adults?"

Hyll made sure he showed no reaction. "The information would have been part of the data pack installed before your trip to Earth."

Three paced again. "I don't recall any Dribt songs or knowing any Parsil nursery rhymes after my trips to those planets. What was different about Earth?"

Hyll opened his mouth and closed it.

Three turned to face him. "I know about fish and chips with vinegar. I know that I like milk and sugar in my tea."

When Hyll checked Vasp's memory library, he'd found nothing about tea, milk or sugar. He'd added it so Vasp would remember. Gods, did he need to add songs too?

"You need to have sufficient local knowledge in case of capture."

Three laughed. "So I was supposed to sing to the authorities and ask for tea with milk and sugar? They'd think I was insane."

"Maybe, but they wouldn't expect an alien to know those sorts of details."

"I thought in case of capture I was to terminate myself."

Hyll's jaw twitched. "After all other options fail."

Three sighed and propped himself against the wall with the flat of his foot. "Talking of options, I told Lucy I'd take her back."

A warm rush of relief flooded Hyll's body and lifted his heart. "To Earth?"

"I should never have taken her away."

"But the O shuttle won't go that far. Take her to Kirt. Leave her there."

"No. I'll learn how to fly the K shuttle and take her home."

The blood in Hyll's veins caught fire. He didn't want to ask but he had to. "And you'll leave her there?"

"Yes." *Oh Gods, please let that be true.*

"How does she feel about going home?"

Three gave a short laugh. "Well, she's happy."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Not exactly, but of course she's happy. It's her home. It's where she belongs."

Now Hyll had another report to write.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy woke and groaned. She hadn't slept on anything so hard since she was a student and been too drunk to shift her ass from the floor to the bed. The pile of *hazsuits* beneath her were too thin to provide much padding. She rolled from her side onto her back and opened her eyes.

A whimper slipped out before she could stop it. Worker Bs encircled her and curious faces stared down. Lucy wasn't sure what to do. Getting up probably not a bad idea.

"Do you require repair?" Vonda asked.

*Repair?* "No, I'm fine thank you. Just a little backache."

They stepped away when she stood.

"Good morning, Jonik, Vonda, Berit, Kool, Fenk, er...everyone," Lucy said. "Another day another dollar." Ah, not going make much sense, she thought. "Ready for another day on the treadmill?" More blank looks.

"Did you do this?" Berit asked.

He held out one of the twig birds. Lucy thought about Three's reaction and hesitated, though she could hardly deny it. "Yes."

"Why?" Kool asked.

"The twigs were going to be scrapped so I thought I'd use them."

"Why?" asked Jonik.

"Just for something to do."

"Why?" Fenk and Vonda asked together.

"Well...er..." Lucy struggled.

"What purpose do they serve?" asked Berit.

"They're pleasant to look at. You know, like when a flower blooms and all its petals come out. Well, they're supposed to be nice to look at. They're fun. Make you smile. And if they don't look quite as they're supposed to, they make you laugh."

A ripple of something passed around the group – not words, more a muttered hum.

"Worker Bs are provided *with* pleasure," said Berit. "We don't *give* pleasure."

"You do to the plants. You cherish them and care for them."

Vonda shook her head. "Plants are not responsive to emotion."

"Who says? I know the ones in my garden mourned when my father died." Lucy knew it sounded crazy but she could have sworn the color of the roses faded. "Anyway, why don't you give pleasure to people?"

"It's not our role," said three voices in unison.

"Why should that matter? It's lovely to bring a smile to someone's face, to see it light up because of something you did or said. It makes me feel all warm and cozy. You should try it."

"How?" asked Kool.

Lucy tried not to roll her eyes. "Say something nice."

"Such as?" asked Vonda.

"Your hair looks pretty today, Vonda." Lucy reached out and twined a lock around her finger. She turned to Fenk. "Your beautiful eyes are the color of a tropical sea."

Blank faces. Well, it was a bit cheesy and they probably had no idea what a tropical sea looked like. Neither did Lucy. The closest she'd got was staring at one on TV.

"You could make all sorts of things from the material you throw away and give them to each other as presents. Everyone loves receiving a gift."

"We recycle," said Kool.

Lucy sighed. "Well, you can recycle the sculptures when you're tired of them."

"We only have fun with the Pleasure Bs."

"Whoa, Marj, you never have fun on your own?"

*Oh God, don't take that the wrong way.* She wasn't asking if they used vibrators or for details of what they did in the privacy of their beds. The empty faces told her they hadn't taken it either the right or the wrong way. These people were nothing like Three. Maybe they just needed to loosen up a bit. Lucy loved a challenge. She'd show them how to have fun.

"Right, form a line," she said. She grabbed a trowel and a metal lid and handed it to one of the men. "Here, Jonik, show me you have a sense of rhythm." He stood there like an ice sculpture in his white *hazsuit*. Lucy sighed and taught him how to play a drum.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where have you searched?" Caled asked.

Three trotted out his prepared answer. He could say in all honesty where Lucy was not.

"What about the biodomes?"

"I thought she'd be unlikely to hide where there were many who might spot her."

Caled narrowed his eyes. "Sure you're trying to find her?"

"Of course. I follow your orders."

Usually he did. He'd never thought of doing otherwise. Perspiration trickled down Three's spine while Caled clicked on the vid screen and moved from biodome to biodome. Lucy would be wearing a *hazsuit* and she had enough sense not to draw attention to herself. Didn't she?

*Zimpra* shit.

"What are those Worker Bs doing? Having some sort of fit?" Caled stared at the screen in amazement.

A line of white-suited Bs were moving in unison, kicking their legs and swinging their arms. It was unmistakably Lucy who jumped around in front of them.

"I think they're dancing." Three stared at her.

"Sound on," Caled said and they heard Lucy singing. Not tunefully. Three winced.

Caled scowled at the screen. "I found her within moments. You had all darkfall and failed to spot her?"

Three didn't offer an answer. There wasn't one.

Caled turned back to look at Lucy. "The Earth woman is rather small."

"Well above average height." Three heard the note of defensiveness in his voice and chewed the inside of his cheeks. But Lucy *was* small compared to the Pleasure Bs and Three rather liked that.

"I assume I can trust you to bring her here."

Three saw the way Caled ran his tongue over his upper lip and he wanted to smash his teeth down his throat.

"Don't touch her," Three growled.

Surprise flashed hand in hand with anger across Caled's face. He clicked his com device. "Hyll to Biodome One. Three *tretos*."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Worker Bs stopped moving and looked at each other. Lucy had the distinct impression they were talking to each other inside their heads. Well, they were aliens, who knew what the hell they could do.

Vonda approached her. "Pull up your hood and put these on."

Lucy took the goggles and did as she was told. Every one of the Worker Bs did the same as her.

"Do not sing," said Berit.

She winced. "Oh God, was it that bad?"

"Do not talk," said Fenk.

"Be like us," said Marj and Fenk together.

*They're helping me.* Lucy wasn't sure how she knew, but she did. They dispersed to their work stations and Lucy returned to picking out seedlings. Vonda touched her arm and Lucy became aware someone had entered the dome.

"Bs stop work."

Lucy copied everyone else. She turned and faced the voice. Three men. A big guy with jet black hair, a smaller guy with short silver hair and the gorgeous Three. The big goon stepped forward. Lucy guessed he was Caled.

"Hoods down. Eye shields off," he said.

No one moved. Lucy saw Three's eyes widen. Caled strode forward and grabbed Kool. He yanked down his hood and pulled off the goggles.

"I gave an order. Why didn't you obey?"

"The integrity of the biodome takes precedence. We are conducting—"

Caled shoved him aside and strode through the white-suited workers, pausing every few paces to rip off a hood or snatch goggles from a face. Lucy could see fury sprouting from his every pore. He passed without touching her and strode back to Three.

"Hyll, scan them," he snapped.

The silver-haired man took a device from his pocket and began to move among the workers. Lucy's heart jumped into her throat. Not hard to guess that the thing Hyll held would bleep, flash and scream "imposter" when he reached her. Except the workers were moving, nudging her, drifting around making Hyll unsure who he'd checked.

"Stand still," Caled shouted. "What in the Legolian void has gotten into you? You're trying to protect her? Why?" He began to wrench the hoods and eye shields away from every worker within reach.

When Vonda tumbled to the ground and Caled kicked her in the side, Lucy exploded. She stormed over and kicked Caled back, right in the butt. She felt like she'd launched her foot at a wall. *How many toes did I break?* Lucy fought back the impulse to yelp. A moment later a hand wrapped around her neck and her feet dangled off the floor. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Hyll place his hand on Three's arm. Three shook him off and Lucy knew she'd just made a bad situation a whole lot worse.

Before Three reached them, Caled put her down. He pulled off her goggles and hood, and laughed. Wow, he had a mouthful of enamel. Was his mouth big or his teeth small?

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"You hurt Vonda, kicked a woman, that's disgusting. I don't like cowards and bullies."

Caled caught Vonda's wrist. "Are you damaged?"

"No."

"You hurt her," Lucy insisted. How could a kick in the ribs not hurt?

"Ah—hurt." Caled laughed again and kept on laughing.

Lucy put her hands on her hips. "What's so funny?"

"The Worker Bs can't feel pain."

"Yes, they can," Lucy snapped.

"They're biobots," Caled said. "They're mass produced, programmed to be Worker or Pleasure Bs. They don't feel pain, they don't feel much of anything. They work hard and as a reward they have sex with the Pleasure Bs. Though not all take advantage of that." He glanced at Three and then turned to Hyll. "Deactivate."

"No," Lucy gasped.

But she realized she'd misunderstood. It wasn't Three that Hyll was to deactivate, but her.

"Workers restrain Three," Caled ordered.

"No." Lucy moaned as he was swamped by a group of white suits.

She dodged away from Hyll. "What are you going to do to me? Dissect me?"

"How tempting," Caled said. "Our usual procedure in dealing with unwanted contaminants is to isolate, investigate and then incinerate."

"Ummph." A muffled protest came from the center of the group who'd overpowered Three.

"But with you, I might make an exception." He grinned.

Those teeth again. Distracted, Lucy felt something touch her neck. Oh, she was falling. The floor looked –



## Chapter Sixteen

*Brown spots over the surface of a rose leaf occur through stress in hot weather when the sun has magnified water droplets and burned the foliage.*

Hyll caught Lucy before she hit the ground. He laid her down and looked up to see Three struggling to get free from the Bs and big, dark-haired trouble heading in their direction. Hyll didn't hesitate. He darted past Caled, searching for Three's neck amid the mélange of *hazsuits* and flailing limbs. Hyll might have imagined it—he had only a moment to let the thought register, but it appeared as though the Bs had maneuvered Three so that Hyll could apply the *stezen* and incapacitate him. But then why shouldn't they? Caled was King-Queen of the colony. His protection was prime.

Three slumped and Hyll breathed a sigh of relief. He was far safer unconscious. The *sepat* brain would get himself killed.

"What the *zimpra* shit is happening?" Caled demanded.

Hyll opened his mouth to find his brain had frozen. How could he explain any of this?

Caled moved back to Lucy, flat on her back, and stared down at her face. "What are those marks?"

Hyll hadn't noticed any marks. He bent over her and bit back his smile. *Ah, freckles.* He'd looked up the word after Three used it. Hyll sucked air between his teeth, shook his head and said in his most serious voice, "Could be something infectious."

Caled reared back. "Could she have infected Three? Would that explain his behavior?"

*Thank you, Gods.* Hyll made a show of stepping back. "Quite possibly. I'll investigate."

Caled reversed at high speed. "Why bother? Incinerate her."

The temptation to agree surged into Hyll's brain. Why should he turn down a chance to permanently dispose of his rival? He opened his mouth and in the periphery of his vision watched a group of Bs move between him and Lucy, forming a tight circle. Their astonishing behavior enthralled Hyll.

"I respectfully request the opportunity to examine her first," Hyll said. "If she has infected Three or anyone else, I'll need to develop an antidote."

"Agreed. You'd better do a thorough check of Three. I was pressured into accepting him as a Collector and his behavior from the outset has concerned me. Keep them secured in separate medbays." Caled beckoned Hyll closer and pulled him over to the

door. "Have the Worker Bs in this biodome analyzed. Reset their behavior chips. Get them back the way they were."

Caled walked out and Hyll turned toward a sea of uniform faces. "Transport Three to medbay one and Lucy to medbay two." Not one Worker B moved. Hyll gave a quiet snort and then tried again. "You, you and you get a hover B and take Three to medbay one."

He gave a sigh of relief when they did as he'd ordered and loaded Three onto the transport unit. Hyll chose another three Bs. "Take Lucy to medbay two."

None of them moved but when Hyll stepped toward her, two Bs slid in front of her. *Protecting her. Oh Gods, what's happening?*

"I'm not going to hurt her. I need to restore her to consciousness. Take her to medbay two."

Another two Bs moved between him and Lucy.

"Why are you doing this?" Hyll asked.

"She brings us joy."

"She sang to us."

"She taught us to dance."

"She cares for the plants as we do."

"And talks to them."

"She learned our names."

Hyll glanced from face to face. He wouldn't have thought this possible if he hadn't witnessed it. Bs thinking for themselves, caring about a stranger, acting for themselves.

"We don't want to be back the way we were. We like the way we are now."

Hyll wasn't surprised they'd heard Caled's whisper but he was surprised they could express an opinion.

"Help me look after Lucy," he said. "Help me protect her."

"She wants Three," said a woman at his side.

Hyll took a deep breath. "Take her to medbay one."

They did as he'd asked.

\* \* \* \* \*

She was so light, Hyll thought, as he lifted her to remove the *hazsuit*. The freckles stood out on her pale cheeks, as though she'd been splattered in tiny drops of *jav*. A genetic defect had saved her life. For the time being anyway. Hyll ran a finger down the strap of her flimsy upper garment and along the top of her breasts. He'd intended to remove the top but changed his mind. He could work with it in place. Small breasts and her sharp nipples tented the thin material. His cock stirred and he gave a short laugh. First time for *yanos* he'd reacted to a female and it had to be this one.

The pads attached to her chest, the *bloodjig* wrapped around her arm and Hyll activated the *biosync* machine and settled on the seat in front of it. He tapped in requests for a variety of tests and checked the screen. Hyll was disappointed to see no appendage attached between her upper and lower intestine. Could it have been removed? He applied the *stezen* to return her to consciousness. Her eyelashes fluttered and she groaned. As she opened her eyes it belatedly occurred to Hyll that he ought to have at least restrained her.

Too late.

Lucy's little fist smacked him straight in the face. She was on her feet in a second, ripping pads away, tossing the *bloodjig* to the floor. She wobbled and Hyll went to help her but she staggered back, her fists raised in defiance.

"Is Three safe?"

Her first words were not of concern for herself but for Three. Hyll put his hand to his face and checked for blood. She had a hard thump for a small woman.

"What have you done to him?" Lucy demanded.

"He's fine. He's sleeping."

"You haven't...deactivated him permanently?"

Hyll shuddered. "No."

"You swear? Cross your heart and hope to die?"

He released a short chuckle. "I swear."

"What does deactivate mean? Well, I know what it means but what does it mean? The Bs...Three. I don't understand."

Hyll reached for the *stezen*. "This deactivates. It sends an oscillating electromagnetic pulse into the central nervous system and closes the body down. Reverse the charge and the person wakes up. It can be used for humans or Bs."

"The Bs aren't human?"

"No. They're bioengineered to a level of humanity considered acceptable."

"Acceptable to you, but maybe not to them."

Hyll laughed. "They accept what they have."

"Three's not like them."

It wasn't a question, Hyll noticed. "No, Three's not like them, but he *has* been bioengineered in order to save his life."

"Where is he?"

"Nearby."

She looked around. "What is this place? What were you doing to me?"

"I'm the senior science officer. I was conducting tests to ensure you're healthy."

"I don't have any diseases. How do I know I won't catch something from one of you?"

He smiled. "Unlikely. Let me introduce myself. I'm Hyll and you're Lucy Brilliant Sunbeam Pineapple Princess Ferze."

She narrowed her eyes. "Knowing that doesn't mean you're a friend. Vile woman tricked me. It won't happen again."

"Vile...Vileda?" Hyll laughed.

"What happened in the dome? One minute I was kicking Caled in the butt, the next I was falling." She wrapped her fingers around the edge of the table. "Are you sure Three is all right?"

Hyll nodded.

"He's going to be in trouble for bringing me on board, isn't he?" She stood a little taller. "I stowed away. He didn't know. It's not his fault. Blame me." She chewed her bottom lip for a moment. "Maybe it would be better for him if I wasn't here."

Hyll could almost see her brain flicking through ideas.

"Okay, I...how about you deactivate me. Painlessly. No tearing me limb from limb or giving me to students practicing vivisection. But...I wouldn't mind if I just went to sleep. I don't want to but... It might be nice to see Three—no, better not, unless he's asleep. I could say goodbye then and—" She gulped.

Hyll stared at her. Was she saying what he thought she was? Not easy to follow her train of thought. "Why would you do that for Three?"

"I love him."

"Love?" Hyll didn't know the word. "Have you made that up?"

She bristled like a Parsil *dinopod*. "No I haven't bloody well made it up. I *do* love him. I might not have known him very long but—"

"You misunderstand. I don't know the word—love."

Her eyes opened wide. *Pretty*. Dark blue flecked with light green. Like the sea on Ventris.

"Oh. Well, it means when you care for someone very deeply. Love is an intense passion you feel for people. A feeling that you can't live without them, that you want to spend the rest of your life with them." Lucy sighed. "There must be an equivalent to the word in whatever language you speak. I'm speaking English, right? Your translation chip translates what I say to whatever you talk?"

Hyll nodded and settled back on his seat. "Tell me more."

"You never know when you're going to fall in love but I'm a great believer in love at first sight—ever since I saw Three." She grinned.

"Love at first sight," Hyll said. *Oh Gods*.

"When you fall in love with someone, you give them part of your heart and they give you part of theirs. Ooh, not literally. That would be a bit messy."

Oh, she was funny. Hyll saw what Three liked about her. "How do you know you're in love?"

She chewed her lip for a moment. "Love makes you happy and you don't have to be with the one you love to feel it. The happiness is there whether you're together or not."

Hyll's heart beat a little faster. "Do all Earth people love?"

"Not everyone is so lucky."

"Good sex makes me happy, so does a tasty meal or praise for work well done. What point does love have? Just to bring happiness?"

"It's more than that. Love completes you. Places and things don't matter, only the way you feel about each other." She lowered her voice. "No one can take that from me no matter what happens."

"What *does* happen if you lose the one you love?"

She trembled. "Some people find another they can love, and some people's hearts break and never mend."

Hyll frowned. "Hearts break?"

"Not in a medical sense. It just seems that way."

"But what's the point of feeling like that?" he pressed.

Lucy sighed. "It's hard to put this into words. We need love because when life goes wrong, love makes it right. When you have someone to love, you can put up with anything because even the thought of that person makes your day brighter, your food tastes better, your heart sings louder. When you're in love, you're never lonely, you never despair – you always hope."

*Oh Gods.* Maybe Earth people were hardwired to fall in love. Was it born out of a need to feel valued by another, a reassurance that someone would want you in spite of your flaws? Or from a fear of being alone?

"How do you know when you've found the right one?" he asked.

"Because that person will care for you when you least deserve it, and that's when you need their love the most."

"And perhaps you know it's the real thing when you want that person to be happy even if you won't be part of that happiness."

Lucy smiled. "You got it."

Sadly, Hyll thought he had. "What happens if the one you love doesn't love you back?"

"You have to get over it and keep looking, though it might take a long while to make your heart whole again."

"Does Three love you?"

Her smile faded. "I...don't know."

"Perhaps males don't love."

"Oh they do. I read once that men fall in love faster than women. Three out of four people who kill themselves over love, are men."

"Would you die to save Three?"

Lucy ran her fingers along the edge of the examination table. "I don't want to die but I'm a long way from home. This isn't my world. I don't want Three to suffer because of me. Have you ever felt like that about someone?"

"That my life is brighter with them in it? That I can't contemplate a world without them? That when I see them my heart does things I can't explain. My stomach clenches. My mouth goes dry. My cock goes hard." Hyll gave a short laugh. "Yes. I love."

"Have you told her?"

"No."

"You should. Life is too short. Maybe she loves you back. You won't know if you don't ask."

*You won't know if you don't ask.* He didn't need to ask. Hyll knew Three didn't love him. "Will you get back on the table and let me do the tests? Caled will be reassured if he knows you're not going to infect us with some devastating plague."

"You'll let me wake up again?"

"I'm not going to put you to sleep."

"Okay." Lucy climbed back up and lay down.

Within moments Lucy was asleep. Hyll smiled. He hadn't lied. She'd fallen asleep on her own. Maybe the *stezen* worked differently on people from Earth. He moved a curl of hair from her forehead and she shifted toward his touch. Everything she'd said was seared into his memory and the one thing *he'd* said echoed in his mind. That love meant wanting the person you loved to be happy even if you weren't part of that happiness.

Hyll thought he'd find it incomprehensible that someone would sacrifice themselves or their happiness for another. But he didn't. Part of him felt angry that she'd known Three for so short a time and had what he so wanted. Another part of him felt happy for Three.

When he looked at her bio readings on his vid screen, Hyll sighed. The intestinal attachment wasn't there but... Hyll exposed the skin of her lower stomach and saw the scar. He hadn't needed to see it. Things he thought had been engineered into Three were present in Lucy. How much more evidence did he need? He was a science officer, for the love of *zimboots*, why hadn't he seen?

He went into the adjacent room, put his *stezen* to Three's head and then moved out of reach. Three opened his eyes, gasped and sat up fists swinging.

"Calm down." Hyll stood at the side of the room.

Hyll found himself slammed against the wall with Three right in his face. "Where is she?"

"Safe. Sleeping."

"Caled?"

"Wanted her tested in case she was infectious. She isn't. Wanted you tested because he thinks you've lost your mind. You haven't—well, if I don't count the moment you decided to drag her on board the shuttle."

"Is she all right?"

"She's fine. I've been talking to her."

Three smiled. "You mean the little chatterbox has been talking to you."

"Chatter...box? Ah yes, I understand."

"Sweet and kind and soft. Oh Gods." He stared at Hyll. "Do you like her?"

"She's very...lickable. Likable." Hyll felt heat sweep his face.

Three's eyes narrowed. "Not by you."

"Caled wants a report on both of you. I can delay it for a few *milos*. The pools are closed now. Take Lucy there. Use the service corridors. I've turned off the cameras."

"But what—?"

"Take what time you can with her, while you can."

## Chapter Seventeen

*Every plant species has a cold tolerance threshold related to both length of exposure and temperature. Below this point permanent damage or death will occur.*

Hyll's behavior seemed strange to Three. He'd knocked him out and yet now let him go. Three didn't want to waste time finding out why. The situation remained the same and he was under no illusions as to the eventual outcome. This might be all he and Lucy had. When Three saw her lying on the examination table, curled up on her side, still wearing her pajamas, her hands tucked under her cheek, the lump in his throat threatened to choke him.

He dropped his mouth to her ear. "Lucy."

"Be careful...ah too late," Hyll said.

Lucy's fist caught the edge of Three's chin. Then she flung her arms around his neck and gripped him tight. "Sorry."

Three swept her into his arms. "Remember I threatened to paddle your behind," he whispered.

Lucy widened her eyes. "No, did you?"

"One more punch to my face and it will no longer be a threat."

He walked to the door and then turned to look at Hyll. "Thank you."

"Be back here by lightshine."

"Where are we —"

Three dropped his head and shushed into Lucy's mouth. "Keep your mouth closed."

She could have walked but he wanted to carry her, wanted to keep her safe in his arms as long as he could. The route to the pools was longer through the service links but the only traffic they'd encounter would be transport Bs.

Once they were in the outer disrobing room, Three put Lucy down.

"Mmm mm mm mmm?"

"What?" he asked.

"Can I talk now?" she asked out of the corner of her mouth.

He laughed. "Yes."

"What are we doing here?"

"Having fun." Three pressed the door control, took Lucy's hand and pulled her into the Pleasure Dome.



"Wha...wha...wha," Lucy gasped.

"Don't tell me you're speechless."

Three supposed the dome was impressive. Ahead of them stretched a large rectangular blue pool with a series of smaller ones grouped around the sides, landscaped with imitation rocks. The centerpiece was a mountain of waterfalls. Overhead the sky blue ceiling featured two suns, though neither of these declined toward failure. Everywhere stood trees, plants, bushes—none of which were real. Three hadn't wondered why before, now he did.

As Lucy ran toward the water, she yanked her top over her head and threw it aside. She pulled down her drawstring pants, hopped on one leg and then kicked the pants away.

"Is it deep enough to dive?" she shouted.

"Yes."

"Wheeeee."

Three watched her perform a flawless dive into the sparkling water of the pool. Maybe he ought to have warned her.

Lucy came up like a *Grigus* shoot, bursting from the water, her breasts bouncing, her nipples instantly hard. "Yayayayayaya," she yelped.

By the time she'd swum back to the side—and she was fast—Three was naked. He was faster. He reached down and hauled her out of the water.

Lucy's teeth chattered. "W-w-warm me up."

Three pulled her over to the vents.

"W-why is the w-water so damned c-cold?"

"It's the exercise pool."

The vents opened the moment they stood beneath, warm air brushing every part of their bodies. Lucy twirled in the jets and Three remembered watching her doing the same in the shower. He groaned on behalf of his aching cock. It had been rigid since he'd seen her curled up on Hyll's examination table. Three wondered if cocks could break. His looked harder and thicker than he'd ever seen it. He wasn't sure how much longer he could wait.

"I need—" Lucy began.

He stopped her mouth with a kiss and he felt his cock spasm when she released her breath between his lips. Her mouth was so soft, as delicately textured as the wings of *pabus* moth. The sweet, moist contact of her lips pressing against his triggered a switch in his brain. Turned *full on* to *desperate*. He'd wanted to savor every moment but he really couldn't wait. One brush of her hot, little tongue against his and Three lost every thought but one.

*Get inside her now.*

He caught Lucy's head in his hands and held her so he could taste her more deeply. His hips pressed her into the wall and he ground his cock against her. Dimly aware in the remnants of his last functioning brain cell that he might be hurting her, Three slid his hands around her back to protect her. Then he shoved forward again, the hot length of his erection lacking guidance from his overwrought brain, clearly trying to find a way through her belly.

Her hands roamed his back, stroking, soothing, petting as he kissed her harder and harder. Oh Gods, too hard, but he couldn't pull back, couldn't stop, couldn't lose her. A nip from her teeth and some sense seeped through his thick skull. Three allowed her loose with a wet *pop*. One second to let her breathe and he was back, eating her, consuming her.

His hand slid to her bottom to pull her tighter against him, to pull *her* inside *him*. She was part of him, as he was part of her. He would not lose her.

*Don't.*

Three cut off that thought process. He wouldn't ruin the gift of this time by thinking of what was to come. Her breasts pressed against him, so soft and lush. He dragged his mouth down the length of her throat.

"I was...going to say...I need—" Lucy began.

"Me."

He tangled his fingers in her hair as he pinned her against the wall.

"Mine," Three whispered. "You're mine."

Then he was in her. He wasn't sure how he'd done it so fast and he didn't care. Lucy's legs sat around his waist and his cock was buried deep inside her hot, tight depths—all that mattered.

"Mine," he repeated, staring into her beautiful blue eyes.

One thrust and she came, her muscles clamping around him, squeezing his cock, teasing his balls and it took every ounce of restraint not to explode. Lucy's head tipped back and she gasped with each spasm, her teeth sinking into her lower lip as she struggled to keep her eyes open. *To look at me!* His breath stalled in his lungs.

The need to spill himself inside her tugged hard at the slim control he maintained. Three *had* to move, his hips flexing as he pulled back and plunged deep in long, hard strokes, his hard, hot cock driving home inside her soft, wet channel. Over and over and over. United in the ageless rhythm, they moved in perfect symmetry, matching pace and thrusts as the tightening friction boiled in them, winding them together in spiraling flames.

Three's mind fogged. Nothing mattered but what they did now. The ship could be about to explode, collide with a planet, drop into a wormhole and all he wanted was to be inside Lucy, to come inside Lucy, to spread his seed all over her body. His pistoning hips shifted in a wild madness that she matched, their juices mingling until the wet slap

of flesh sounded louder in his ears than Lucy's little moans and groans and cries that he loved so much.

"Oh God," Lucy gasped and wailed as she came again.

He wanted her to scream. The irony didn't escape him. Three wanted to make her scream with joy because that's what he felt like doing. He couldn't let go, couldn't stop. Three wanted to come, but at the same time he didn't. Passion burned so fiercely between them that he could feel its heat spreading, running along his veins. For a moment Three was scared he couldn't stop as his hips bucked and his cock jerked inside her. Then she caught his head, whispered, "Let go," and melded her mouth to his.

Three drove deep one final time with his cock and tongue. He felt the pinpoint detonation in his head, the flash down his spine, the pulse in his balls, the race along his cock and his cum jetted into her, electric shocks of long, hard wrenching spasms as he emptied himself inside her tight passage. The exquisite sensation blew his mind and he shook with the intensity.

When the last spurt had died away, he pulled back from her mouth. Her kiss-swollen lips panted into his face. "Lucy," was all he could manage. He'd lost his brains as well as his juice. Three pressed his face into her hair and rubbed his cheek against her silky locks.

As his heartbeat slowed, thoughts piled into his mind. Could he steal a shuttle? Could he learn fast how to pilot one of the larger ones? Maybe, but he wouldn't get far. Caled would send Vasp in a G-class interceptor. Vasp would just love that. If they didn't turn back, they'd be destroyed. Could he delay Caled finding Lucy until the mission to Kirt? Only that would get Hyll into trouble. And the likelihood of Caled still letting him go to Kirt stood at zero.

Three tightened his hold on Lucy. Hyll knew this would be over soon. That's why he'd given them these last few hours. The pain in Three's heart made him flinch.

He unwrapped Lucy's legs from his waist and she slithered down his body, heading for the floor. He caught her and pulled her up.

"What the hell was that?" she whispered.

*Oh Gods, did I hurt her?*

Lucy sighed. "I've lost the use of my legs. I've already had out-of-this-world sex and I thought that was great. Now I find you've been holding out on me with out-of-this-galaxy sex. Oh God, if you want to try out-of-this-universe sex, I need a lot of warning. Hours. All right, minutes."

Three laughed.

"Can we look around? Is there any water warmer than that ice pond?"

"That's for exercise. Come and try the bubble pool."

Lucy put her hand in his and squeezed his fingers. She wanted to tell him she loved him. The words teetered on the tip of her tongue but she couldn't do it. The chances of her and Three being able to stay together were slim. If she told Three she loved him, wouldn't that make matters worse? Maybe Three, like Hyll, didn't know the word love. But Lucy felt he did in the way he touched and held her. Perhaps that had to be enough.

Three led her to a cloverleaf shaped pool hidden behind a screen of imitation rock. The water seethed with billions of tiny bubbles. He stepped in but Lucy hung back.

"What is it? It doesn't quite look like water."

"It's hot and relaxing. I promise you'll like it."

A dip of a toe and Lucy moaned in delight. It was like fizzling bursts popping against her skin. Three stood waist deep a few feet away and she smiled.

"Catch me," Lucy said and let herself fall.

The bastard didn't. She went under the surface but this wasn't water. Three pulled her up and brushed the hair out of her eyes.

"What *is* this stuff?" Lucy asked. She dipped her hand into the bubbles but it came up empty.

"*Halo gelgas.*"

"Not water?"

"No. You can float in it and relax in it. It's a derivative of the substance in the pool you leapt out of."

"That had to be water. It tasted like water."

Three's eyes widened. "You didn't drink it?"

"Not on purpose. I gulped. Does it matter?"

"Probably not. The main pool contains a compound that at the touch of a button will turn the water to gel. Then a screen slides out to cover it. It's too large a body of free-moving material to have on board a spacecraft without some means of solidification. But if the ship turned upside down, the bubble pool would stay as it is."

Lucy put her hands under the surface and pressed the bubbles against her legs. It felt liquid but dry at the same time. Three pulled her against his chest so she lay with her back to him. His arms slid down her body and he locked her in place.

"Don't panic."

"What—"

They slipped below the surface. Lucy clamped her lips together. She could hold her breath for forty two seconds. She'd timed herself.

*Nine, ten.*

Oh God, she had to breathe. *Now.* She struggled to get out of Three's grasp. He didn't let her go but he allowed her to spin around so she faced him. Lucy stared at him in desperation. He looked all misty under the...water. The bastard was smiling.

"Open your mouth a little and breathe."

*Open her mouth and die.* He could speak under water as well as breathe? He must have gills. Pain sprang up behind her eyes, her lungs burned and Lucy gave in. She opened her lips a fraction and sucked in the tiniest amount of bubbles. No bright lights beckoning so she took a proper gulp. It was like breathing in thick mist. *Hmm, quite nice.* Three let her go and Lucy swam a little deeper. This was so weird trying not to hold her breath. Once her brain had adjusted, she began to enjoy herself, bathed in liquid satin, the warm swathes wrapped around her limbs, only they made her tingle when they popped. She didn't have to make any effort to float, she just did. Lucy explored the bottom of the pool and came up to find Three's backside under her chin as he swam down.

She kissed his butt and when he tried to wriggle around, she went with him, holding onto his hips. Her fingers brushed his cock. *Jeeps, he's getting hard again.* Well, he was hard all over. His strong, firm thigh muscles felt as though they'd been chiseled from granite. Lucy maneuvered until her mouth was against his groin. Lust coiled low in her belly and she slipped and sucked her way down the seam of his lace-veined cock and over his soft balls to the triangle of flesh beyond.

Whoa, this was so much easier when you floated. She could tilt his hips so he rested at just the right angle. Lucy pushed his butt cheeks apart and looked through the haze at the puckered ring of his anus. She stroked it with the tip of her finger and his legs tensed against her shoulders. Circling and pressing, Lucy worked her finger into his ass and at the same time licked the base of his balls. The bubbles seemed to work as a natural lubricant and her finger slid easily past both muscle barriers until she was as deep as she could go.

Maybe two fingers? Above her head, Lucy felt Three's hand grasp the base of his cock. She nuzzled below his balls and turned the one finger in his body into two. Was that walnut-sized lump his prostate? Lucy massaged it gently and felt the vibration run through his body. She peeled his hand away from his cock and wrapped her mouth around it. Lucy sucked and at the same time pumped and twisted her fingers in his anus.

A drop of pre-cum seeped from the tip between her lips and Lucy's mouth watered around his cock. He tasted so good. Three began to move, pumping his hips, dipping his cock into her mouth in short pulses. Lucy could feel the bubbles popping around him in her mouth and guessed it had to feel good. She let him take control and opened her throat. His fingers stroked her neck and his cock twitched and bucked in her mouth as he thrust hot and hard between her lips. Lucy wrapped her tongue around him, teasing as he fucked her. His cock pulsed and a moment later, hot thick semen filled her mouth.

He might have only just come but Lucy thought for a moment she might drown. She laughed and found she couldn't stop.

Three hauled her to the surface.

"What's so funny?" he demanded.

Lucy couldn't speak for laughing. Three grabbed her hand and knocked it against his chin.

"Wha...wha..." Lucy choked out.

"Remember what I said I'd do if you hit me again?"

His eyes darkened. Lucy gulped.

Three growled. "Run."

## Chapter Eighteen

*Entomophily is a process by which pollen is distributed by insects, particularly bees. Entomophilous plants have evolved to become bright colored or highly scented to enhance their appeal. Entomo refers to insect and phily means – that which is loved.*

Hyll turned off the vid screen. He couldn't watch anymore. He shouldn't have been watching in the first place but he needed to know what he'd missed, to understand what Lucy had told him. That was his excuse anyway. He'd watched the two of them play and there seemed little difference from the way the others interacted in the pools. Bs and crew alike splashed and had sex, and had sex and splashed. But the difference was there, in Three's eyes, Lucy's touch, her smile and Three's protective embrace.

More than sex.

He spun his chair around and faced Zend who stood behind him. "What did you think of that?" Hyll asked.

"She's...different."

"In what way?"

"Not expert, not fluid, not experienced."

"No." Hyll looked at the bulge in Zend's pants.

"She cares without asking," Zend said.

"What do you mean?" Hyll ran his finger around the outline of Zend's cock.

"Pleasure Bs bring pleasure. Do what is needed. She took him in her mouth without knowing what he required, yet it *was* what he required."

"Do I bring pleasure to you?" Hyll asked, stroking the ridge beneath the thin material.

"Yes. Sometimes."

"Do you want me to bring you pleasure now?"

"If it pleases you."

"*Zimpra* shit." Hyll jumped to his feet and stalked across to the door. His hand hovered over the release and then dropped. He leaned his forehead against the wall. Why should he expect Zend to care when *he* didn't? The Pleasure Bs were programmed to respond to anyone.

Hyll felt Zend's breath on his neck before the B spoke. "I like you."

He turned to face the biobot. "Why?"

"Because you want to like me."

Hyll let out a huff. "What makes you think that?"

"You want Three but you can't have him. I want something I can't have too."

Hyll swallowed. Was he actually having this conversation or imagining it? "What?" he croaked out.

"I want you to like me, not just use me."

"Oh Gods."

"You choose me, time after time and not others. Why? Am I more cooperative? More physically appealing? More supple? Quieter? Is there something you see in me that's different?"

Why did he pick Zend? Hyll had started off like all the others on board, a child in a toy store, wanting to try everything. Many of the crew continued to swap and change but some had settled on a few Pleasure Bs they used exclusively. As far as Hyll knew, no one had chosen to stay with one. The Worker Bs simply took the nearest Pleasure B. Hyll had tracked their choices, recorded the randomness. Purely for scientific interest.

He looked into Zend's face.

"I can listen. I can talk," Zend said. "I want you to like me."

He lifted his hand and stroked Hyll's cheek. Inside Hyll's chest, his heart began to canter. Zend's eyes did look different but what was it Hyll saw? Did the sexual sheen indicate lust or something more?

"When you decide what you want, you know where I am," Zend said and walked out.

Hyll looked at the floor, expecting to see his jaw lying there. Maybe Lucy *had* brought an infection on board. Hyll pressed his palm to the door release and looked down the corridor. In the distance Zend walked away. *Walked away!*

"Hey," Hyll called. "Wait."

Zend kept moving.

"What the...?"

Hyll ran. When he saw Zend about to step into a *zubetube* transport, Hyll shouted, "Stop." He squeezed his hand into the gap as the door closed and forced it open. Four other Pleasure Bs stood inside. They regarded him with as little interest as if he'd pretended to be a *huro* ape. But not Zend. A soft smile curled his lip. Hyll kept one foot in the door to stop it closing.

"I'd like to please you," Hyll said. "But if you don't want that to happen, I understand."

Zend reached out, wrapped his fingers around Hyll's and let himself be pulled from the transport. The door closed and they stood staring at one another. Hyll opened his mouth and Zend spun him around and slammed his face to the wall, pressing his body tight behind him. Teeth sank to nip at his neck and Hyll almost came in his pants. Zend's fingers flipped open Hyll's buttons and reached to grasp his cock.



Hyll's deep groan matched Zend's. Hyll hovered on the brink of imminent eruption. *Oh zimpra shit, we're in the main corridor.* They weren't supposed to do this outside of their quarters or the Pleasure Dome. Only he didn't care. His pants fell to his ankles and he felt the brush of Zend's pants going the same way. The hard, hot length of Zend's cock pressed against the crease of his backside. Zend's teeth still gripped his neck.

As Zend's body moved away from his, Hyll moaned. The cold squirt of lube down the seam of his butt brought back the reality of the situation. Hyll hadn't been fucked since he'd come on board. He'd stupidly been saving himself, hoping that Three – He let out a long sigh as strong fingers massaged the slick gel down the line of his backside. He willed his body to open and let Zend in. A finger slipped inside his anus and Hyll bit back a whimper. Zend released his neck and at the same time, worked a second finger in beside the first. His chin rested on Hyll's shoulder and Hyll turned his face from the wall to look at him.

Hyll gasped at the burn as muscles were persuaded to spread. Zend stared into his eyes and then kissed him, feathering his lips against Hyll's until his mouth opened. As Zend's tongue pressed inside, so his fingers began to move, shunting in and out of his asshole. Then his fingers were gone and Hyll wanted them back. Instead he felt hands part his cheeks and the blunt head of Zend's cock press against his hole.

Oh Gods, he knew how big Zend was. He wouldn't – ah, yes he would. Hyll exhaled and pushed out and Zend's cock slipped through the tight muscle barrier. He began to move, gentle thrusts that dragged whimpers from Hyll's throat as he lost himself in the burn of the drive and the relief of the pull. Not deep enough and Hyll knew Zend was playing, teasing. He tried to push back, force the pace but Zend wouldn't let him. His fist clenched against the wall as he waited for the moment Zend would bury himself inside him.

"Want me?" Zend whispered.

In Hyll's lust-soaked brain, he had enough reason left to wonder if Zend would stop if he told him to. A waste of a thought because that was the last thing he wanted.

"Don't stop," Hyll groaned. "Gods, do it now."

Zend pulled back and thrust hard, driving himself up until his balls slapped flesh and hips were tight against Hyll's butt.

"Oh you feel so good," Zend groaned. "Hot, tight, perfect."

Hyll thrilled at words he'd never heard Zend say before, words he'd never let him say.

"I wish I had a longer cock," Zend said.

"I don't."

Zend laughed and Hyll felt the vibration run down Zend's cock and into his burning channel.

"Move. Please," Hyll gasped and squeezed down on the hard flesh inside him.

Zend flexed his hips and shifted more quickly, bucking his pelvis, dragging his cock through the nerve-rich tissue. Hyll pressed his forehead against the wall and tried to shove back but Zend plunged in and out, driving Hyll's swollen shaft against the wall. Hyll dropped one hand and grasped himself, knowing his climax was moments away. Zend moved faster, surging backward and forward, each stroke more forceful and rough than the last.

Hyll gripped the base of his cock as tight as he could, but Zend changed his angle of entry and hit Hyll's gland. His already tight balls grew tighter, separated and drew up to the base of his cock. Hyll cried out as nerve endings sizzled and fire caressed his groin. His back arched into Zend's up-thrust. Heavy bursts of cum sprayed from the tip of his cock, spattering his hand, the wall, the floor. Hyll felt Zend stiffen at his back, his cock swelled in his tight channel and Zend's hips shuddered as he jetted into him.

How they got back to his work station was a breathless blur to Hyll. But as they cleaned up, his pants were no longer around his ankles and Zend was ripping away their shirts, kissing him, feeling him, mauling him. Then they were naked on the floor, fighting but not fighting, humping each other, nipping, squeezing, biting. Zend pinned him down, knees on Hyll's thighs, hands around his wrists pulled up above his head and Hyll realized how much more there was to Zend that he hadn't seen.

Zend lowered his head and plunged his tongue into Hyll's mouth and Hyll had no choice but to let him, to allow this wildness to infect him because he didn't want Zend to stop. Not ever. Their tongues tangled and fought and while they tussled, their cocks grew hard again. Zend released his wrists to fist Hyll's shaft, dragging his pre-cum moistened hand up and down as he speared his tongue into his mouth.

When Zend kissed a path down the center of his body, Hyll grabbed his shoulders. "Me too."

Feral eyes Hyll had never seen before stared back and then Zend blinked and nodded. Hyll slid down to press a tender kiss to Zend's lips and then blazed a trail of wet sucks to his cock. Zend swiveled around so they lay head to toe and they began to play with each other, licking, slurping, sucking, their hands working with their mouths. As Zend's lips settled around his cock, Hyll copied him. A silky tongue explored the dip below the crest and when Hyll did the same, they laughed around each other's cock. Hyll felt the ripple in Zend's body and hoped Zend had felt the one that ran through his.

The quiet room filled with the sounds of moist flesh slipping between wet lips, punctuated by groans and moans and gasps that grew louder and louder. Hyll wondered if he'd ever been this desperate, ever felt this level of excitement. He teased the tip of Zend's cock, fluttering his tongue over the silky head, tasting the drops of pre-cum that seeped out as he tightened and relaxed his grip at the base. Every groan from Zend's lips wound him tighter. Every spurt of salty pre-cum that hit his tongue made his cock spurt in response.

Hyll slid his hands under Zend's muscular backside and held him tight, drawing him up into his mouth as he jerked his hips down to drive his cock between Zend's lips. A perfect match, no need to twist into some crazy shape, Hyll took him deep, swiveled his tongue as he pressed his finger into Zend's asshole and Zend came, pouring into his mouth like a raging river. The intense sensation triggered Hyll's climax and for a moment, they pulsed in unison.

It was Zend who moved first. Zend who pulled Hyll back to the wall so they could sit leaning against it, and then cradled him in his arms. Zend who stroked his face with the light touch of a *ulnis* feather. He looked at Hyll with his deep, dark eyes and said nothing. Hyll had no idea what to say. He wasn't sure if he could still speak but he knew this moment was special and he shouldn't mess it up.

He opened his mouth and then closed it again. Did that twice and Zend smirked. *Smirked!*

"How?" Hyll gasped. Oh Gods, that was smart. What was he asking?

"I watched you. I heard what you said. I saw what you hid."

Hyll's heart rate doubled as the over-stressed organ panicked. Zend put his hot palm over it.

"You...love Three. Maybe you can love me too."

\* \* \* \* \*

Caled's balls ached. He sat with his pants undone in front of a bank of vid screens, his eyes flicking between them. Four different angles of a naked Three standing with his backside resting on a rock ledge. He held Lucy upside down by her hips, her mouth wrapped around his cock, his mouth pressed between her legs – a position Caled hadn't tried, not whilst standing anyway. He licked his lips.

Hyll had made a mistake disabling the cameras. Caled frequently watched what went on in the pools, so the moment the link had been severed, Caled's com informed him. Easy enough to re-enable. He was commander of the ship, he could do anything.

Well, not get the sound activated for some reason but the visual was enough.

On the other four screens Caled saw Hyll and one of the Bs rolling over the floor, cocks in each other's hands, mouths plastered together. Caled smiled. Maybe he'd have that B tonight. He looked enthusiastic. He'd ask Hyll who it was.

When they'd done, the B held Hyll and stroked him. Hyll's cheek looked wet. What the *zimpra* shit was that? A tear? Caled's astonishment made his cock wilt. He was missing something and he wanted it. He'd deal later with the fact that Hyll had disobeyed him. Right at that moment, he wanted to come like they had, breath shuddering from their lungs, limbs trembling, cum flying. And he wanted to do it now.

Caled switched off the screens and activated his com. "Juse. To my quarters, bring Fisk. You don't need clothes."

Caled stripped. No point wasting time. His engorged cock was dark purple and leaking pre-cum. They'd hardly have to make an effort.

Juse and Fisk strolled in naked, Fisk's cock already primed, Juse's nipples tight pink buds atop her perfect breasts. Juse walked to Caled's bed, lay on her back and spread her legs. Caled leapt on her and impaled her with one thrust, shoving himself as far inside her as he could. One thing about the Bs, they were always tight. Though not always wet. He felt the squirt of lube fall into the crack of his bottom, and then Fisk's cock pushed until he was seated inside him.

Caled thrust into Juse, and as he pulled back, Fisk drove into him. The female's hands caressed him but Caled felt irritated rather than aroused. Her muscles clenched around his shaft and he jetted into her. *Zimpra shit. Too fast.* He pulled out and pushed Fisk off before he'd come.

"Get out," he shouted. "Pathetic. You need an overhaul. Book yourselves in."

When the pair had gone, Caled threw himself down on his back. That had been a waste of time, done no more than scratch at the surface of his itch. He needed more. But what? A slow smile spread over his face.

Lucy.

## Chapter Nineteen

*Killer bees, Africanized honey bees, will viciously attack people and animals who unwittingly stray into their territory. They attack even when unprovoked and pursue their perceived enemies over great distances, inflicting serious injury or death.*

"No more," Lucy groaned.

Three raised his head from between her legs. "You want me to stop?"

"No more stopping."

He laughed. Three wasn't sure he could stop. He was bewitched by the scent of her, the taste of her, the feel of her. He was afraid to stop because he feared any moment might be the last time he touched her.

"What's that noise?" Lucy asked.

"The waterfalls have started."

She sat up. "Waterfalls? What else haven't you shown me?"

Three stood and tugged her to her feet. "The *suo* tub, the *frisha* room, the —"

"Start with the waterfalls."

Lucy gasped when she saw them. "Good grief, they're beautiful. Look at the water. The steam makes it look like it's breathing. Oooh, silky material but with much more power."

Three saw the falls through different eyes. He'd never wanted to play in them before, now he wanted to enjoy them with Lucy.

"How do we get to the top?"

"Over there."

A *rapitube* carried the swimmer to the top of the dome, then a series of pools and falls cascaded back to the base.

"Can I have a go?" she said, already heading for the tube.

Three heard her shriek as she shot up and he stepped under to follow her.

Lucy waited at the top when he emerged. "Oh my God, that was amazing. Like a waterslide in reverse. I had a bit of a panic that I wouldn't stop. What now?"

"Now we jump."

He grabbed her hand and pulled her into the fast flowing water. They were carried over the edge of the falls to drop a short distance into the pool below. Lucy came up laughing.

"They get steeper and steeper," he warned her.

"Last one down gets spanked," Lucy said, and threw herself over the edge.

Gods, she was fearless. Three dove after her.

Fearless and fast.

He splashed into the base pool expecting to see her waiting and the water was empty. Three spun around. "Lucy?" He smiled. So she wanted her behind paddled. "Lucy?" he called. There was no answer. Three decided to go to the top again. Maybe she'd hidden behind one of the falls.

The moment the squashy ball went into her mouth, Lucy panicked. Some sort of gag? But she couldn't spit it out. *Not funny, Three*. Then her arms were yanked behind her back and Lucy really panicked. Underwater, unable to breathe and not Three who held her.

She kicked out and connected with something, which gave her enough leverage to reach the surface. Lucy dragged air through her nose. An attempt to bring her hands to the front of her body failed. Tied? What the fuck? The water was too deep to stand. Lucy struggled to the sloping side and half-squirmed, half-threw herself out. She tried to roll away, expecting that whoever had attacked her would try to drag her back under, and saw Vileda emerge from the water. A trickle of blood oozed from her mouth.

*Oh God, Three, where are you?*

Lucy tried to get to her feet but it was Vileda who hauled her upright.

*Fuck, this woman is strong*. She slung Lucy over her shoulder and stalked off. Lucy struggled as hard as she could but found herself flying through the air.

*Shitshitshit*.

Lucy landed head first in the arctic pool and at that point realized Vileda was trying to kill her. Where the hell was Three? Lucy popped to the surface, kicking her legs to stay afloat, trying not to panic about the small amount of air reaching her lungs. The water was too deep to stand so she tried to swim to the other side of the pool, but it wasn't easy with her arms tied behind her back. Then all of a sudden she wasn't in water at all but jelly.

A hard ball of fear grew in Lucy's belly. She couldn't swim in this. She could only suffocate. She struggled to push the gag from her mouth but it was impossible to dislodge. Lucy thrashed around, kicking out, trying to stay above the surface but she could feel herself sinking. In the midst of her desperation she thought of quicksand and despite every inclination to keep struggling, Lucy stopped and lay back into the viscous slime.

*Oh God*. Tears rolled down her face as she desperately dragged air through her nose. Her body sank in the blue jelly and Lucy wished she'd told Three she loved him before she died. Then with just her face above the surface, her descent stopped. Lucy

hung there like fruit in Jell-O. Fearful of moving a muscle, she risked shifting only her gaze as she looked for Three.

Where the hell was he? Oh God, had the mad woman killed him? Lucy tried a breaststroke leg kick and moved a little way without going any deeper. The sudden noise made her jump. When she realized what it was, she whimpered. The cover was moving over the pool.

Three searched behind every waterfall on each level, expecting to find Lucy hiding but he didn't. When he reached the base pool he climbed out and wondered whether he should go to the top again.

"Lucy?" he called. "You're really are going to get your behind paddled now."

No response. Only what was that noise?

Three wandered to the other side of the waterfalls and stared in surprise at the cover moving over the main pool. Had there been some sort of alert? There would have been a warning over the com. More likely Lucy had touched something she wasn't supposed to.

He ran to the lap pool and gasped in horror when he saw Lucy trying to move through the gel, away from the approaching cover. He raced to slam his hand over the emergency stop and then flipped the gel back to water. Lucy dropped like a *neit* rock and Three dove into the water.

As he hauled her to the surface he realized she had something stuffed in her mouth and he yanked it out. A ball of *benus*. She coughed and gasped. What was wrong with her hands? Three's blood froze in his veins. Someone had tried to kill her. He lifted Lucy onto the side of the pool and hoisted himself out. She slumped in a quivering heap, gulping air into her lungs. Three snapped the ties at her wrists and pulled her into his arms.

"Who?" he asked.

"Vileda."

*What?* How could a Pleasure B do something like this? Someone must have instructed her. Caled? Three looked around. Was the *fyth* still in there? He moved and Lucy grabbed his arm. "Don't leave me."

Three held her tighter. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"I don't think I like it in here anymore." Her teeth chattered.

"Neither do I."

Three picked her up, carried her to the vents and stood in the warm air flow with his lips pressed against her head. He'd almost lost her. He'd lose her anyway when he took her home, but this was different. She'd almost died because of him. Guilt surged around his bloodstream. What in the Legolian void had he been thinking when he dragged her into the shuttle? The sooner she was away from him the better.

Warm and dry again, Three carried her back to where they'd dropped their clothes. Lucy still trembled with shock. He dressed her and then dressed himself. He didn't miss the fact that Lucy always kept a part of her in contact with his body. Three's guilt multiplied.

"Will you take me someplace safe?" she asked.

*Oh Gods, that would be nowhere on this ship.*

"Is there anywhere safe?" Lucy asked in a little voice.

She could read his mind now? Three tugged her into the corridor.

"Three?" she whispered.

Take her to his quarters? To Hyll? To the Worker Bs in Biodome One? Three's brain ran through the possibilities. Caled loomed at the end of them all.

"You're hurting my hand," Lucy said.

"Sorry."

They turned the corner and Three growled.

Vasp walked toward them. "Gods, so it's true."

Three pulled Lucy behind him.

"I thought no one would be stupid enough to bring an alien on board but I'd forgotten about you, *sepat* brain. Though you did pick a pretty one. Think you're too good for the Bs or couldn't you get it up for them?"

"One of the Bs just tried to kill her," Three said.

Vasp laughed and then came to a choked halt when Three stepped toward him. "You're serious?"

"Vileda tried to drown her."

Vasp frowned. "Why?"

"She's jealous," Three said.

"The Bs aren't jealous."

Lucy peered around Three's chest. "That one is. She tied my hands behind my back, stuffed something in my mouth and threw me in the pool. The water turned to jelly and she activated the cover."

"What had you done to deserve that?" Vasp asked.

Lucy glared. "Breathed."

"Where is she? Have you reported her to Caled?"

"I don't know where she is."

Vasp shook his head. "Bs are docile. They're not aggressive. Are you sure she—"

"Vileda won't leave me alone," Three said. "She's become more and more persistent each time I refuse her."

"Then why refuse her?" Vasp asked.

"Because it's not her that I want."



Vasp stared at Lucy. "What does she have that the Bs don't?"

Three wanted to hit him. *Why not?* He took a step forward and Lucy darted in front of him.

"Hey guys, is there any way of me getting a nice cup of tea?"

Vasp laughed. "Ah, next to water, the most commonly drunk beverage on Earth. Sorry, no tea on board."

Three tugged Lucy down the corridor.

"Do you think any of the others have gone crazy?" Vasp called.

"Who knows? Better watch your back," Three shouted.

Lucy padded along beside him for a while without speaking. She gave a heavy sigh.

Three squeezed her fingers. "What is it?"

"Is all this my fault? I mean, I know I've upset the equilibrium on board."

Three tightened his grip. "None of this is your fault. It's all mine."

Lucy's heart still pounded. When she'd had that thought that maybe it would be better if she was dead, she'd been wrong. It wouldn't be better for her. Lucy wasn't ready to die. Nearly dying had made that very clear. Only she didn't know how to stop it from happening.

Three took her into his room and Lucy frowned. It didn't look much different to the room he'd first put her in. The lack of anything personal made him seem more fragile and in need of protection. When he released her hand, she whipped around fast in case he was about to disappear, but he leaned against the wall and stared at her.

"Don't they let you put pictures up?" she asked, looking at the ultrasmooth plain surface.

"I don't have any."

"Photos?"

He shook his head.

She sat on his bed then looked underneath. "No girlie magazines?"

He gave a little smile.

Lucy frowned. "No mini fridge loaded with Budweiser?"

"I prefer Corona." Three stood up straighter.

"Ooh, Corona. You like a slice of lime in the neck of the bottle?"

"I...I don't know."

"Did you find out why you keep recalling all this stuff about Earth?"

Three nodded. "Before a mission, Collectors have a memory implant to provide information about the planet we're visiting. The knowledge about the songs...and the beer must have been part of the pack. Just like Vasp knew about the tea."

She patted the bed beside her. "Come and sit down. You're making me nervous."

Three joined her.

Lucy placed her hand over his. "Don't feel bad. I don't regret any of this. I'm glad I had the chance to meet you. I don't want to...die but if it happens, don't be sad."

"Lucy –"

"Smile because you knew me. Remember the fun we had and be happy for tomorrow because of what we had today."

Three released a little gasp.

Lucy cupped his cheeks and made him look at her. She knew she shouldn't say it. She told herself not to, but frightened she might not get this chance again, she couldn't push back the three words bubbling inside her, welling from her heart. "I –"

Three's mouth landed on hers, his big hands spanned her waist and he propelled her backward onto the bed, his body pressed alongside hers. He kissed her gently, feather-light brushes, the teasing trail of his tongue tickling along her lips until she opened to him. White-hot pulses ricocheted through her body and centered on her core, and Lucy melted into his embrace. Her pulse rate soared as her heart pounded out its message of love. Three wouldn't let her say the words so she had to show him before it was too late.

He pulled back and looked into her eyes. "Lucy." He sighed her name like a summer breeze. He kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her eyes, her nose, along the curve of her chin and down the side of her neck. Tiny kisses, long wet licks, little nibbles – everything wound her tighter.

"Lucy." He whispered the word into her shoulder and the wisp of his breath against her skin made her vibrate with need.

He kissed her breasts through the thin fabric and her nipples puckered. Three pulled away long enough to wrench his top over his head and then dispose of hers, before he settled back next to her, his body pressed tight against hers, long fingers trailing over her nipples that grew more sensitive with every touch.

"My beautiful Lucy," he said, his dark eyes smoky with desire, and Lucy's clit pulsed like a little heart.

His knee nudged her thighs apart and he leaned into her, lips descending to one nipple, fingers playing with the other, his muscular legs entwined with hers. He explored her whole breast with his mouth, wetting it, curling his tongue around her tip, running it along the crease where her breast met her ribs, sliding up to gently pull as much as he could into the warmth of his mouth. Lucy could hardly bear it, but he wouldn't let her move.

Three kissed his way to her pants as his hands worked to remove them, pulling them over her hips. Then they were gone and so were his. They lay naked against each other and Lucy felt the heavy beat of his heart alongside hers.

"My Brilliant Sunbeam," he whispered.

He stroked the hair at the junction of her thighs, twined it around his fingers as he nibbled the corners of her mouth.

"Sweeter than pineapple," he murmured.

How did he know what pineapple tasted like, she wondered. Then his tongue pushed into her mouth and Lucy lost herself in his kiss. Her hands curled over his back, sliding over the rippling muscles before she opened her fingers to draw on his skin, writing the words she hadn't had chance to voice, and knew somehow he didn't want her to.

Three slid a finger along her wet folds and teased his way inside, twisting as he pulsed in and out in a slow steady rhythm, driving her along the path toward oblivion. He'd never been this slow, never been this gentle. She was already slick but his movements made her slicker. Lucy trembled with pent-up arousal and felt Three shaking too. One pulsing finger became two driving deeper and Lucy's muscles clamped around him as she shuddered against him, gasping into his mouth.

"Oh God, God, God." She moaned, groaned and panted as her chest tightened and her mouth went dry.

Three pinned her on her back and lay his head on her belly. Two of his fingers sank into her pussy and one slipped into her mouth. Fingers worked together, worked apart and as she clamped around the two, she sucked hard at the one, kept sucking when she felt his hot, wet tongue between her legs as well, pushing inside her, licking and sucking until stars exploded in her head. The world tipped and a wave rolled her, rolled over her, under her, tumbling her to release in a flood of warmth before slowly drawing back to leave her lying exhausted on the shore.

Lucy tried to speak and couldn't, tried to move and couldn't. She wondered for a moment whether she still breathed. Three wasn't done with her. As her world righted itself and reality returned, his finger circled the nub of her clit, rubbing and stroking before his mouth settled around it. Three tugged it softly between his teeth, pressed with his lips, teasing her so perfectly as if he'd discovered the secrets of her body long ago and not just hours. Lucy threaded her fingers through his hair as he pulled her back into a river of bliss.

She thought herself too exhausted to come again but she was wrong. Spirals of need bit harder as they tightened until Lucy could do nothing but *feel* what Three did to her. She gulped air, her breathing ragged and choppy.

"Please." She forced out the words. "Want. You."

Three shifted to position himself at the entrance to her body and, looking into her eyes, he pushed straight into her. Lucy arched her hips to meet his, feeling this first thrust touch her heart.

"Gods, Lucy." Three grimaced as he held himself immobile.

The muscles in his back flexed beneath her hands as he began to move. Each plunge of his cock triggered a cascade of rippling pleasure. Each withdrawal drew a moan from her throat. Her pussy clenched to keep him inside her and the drag of his cock through

tightening muscles sent tingles of electric heat zapping along her veins. When he increased the speed of his thrusts, Lucy matched him, driving her hips up to kiss his.

Her eyes kept closing but whenever she forced them open, Three stared at her.

*This is the last time, Lucy thought. I'm never going to hold him like this again.*

"Come. With. Me." Three gasped out each word.

Lucy would go anywhere with him but she knew that wasn't what he meant. His hips jerked faster in a firestorm of motion and Lucy had no hope of moving with him. He was driving her to the edge of the world. His cock bucked inside her and with the first spurt of cum, Lucy's climax threw her into space. The spasms bit so hard, she thought her bones would crumble. A scream erupted from somewhere deep inside and escaped before she could close her mouth. How could this get better every time? Any more and she'd die of ecstasy. Every one of Lucy's cells welcomed each hot burst of Three's seed and just for a moment she wished he *could* make her pregnant.

He sank onto her and she welcomed the weight, wished she could carry him forever. Three's head rested by hers and he gulped while his body trembled above her. Lucy stroked his damp skin, kissed the salt from his cheeks.

"Now I know what out-of-this-universe sex is like," she said.

"You screamed very loudly," Three whispered.

"I thought I saw a rat."

His shoulders shook as he laughed.

## Chapter Twenty

*Being pricked by the thorns of a rose makes the acquisition more rewarding.  
But it hurts.*

Caled sprawled in his chair, legs outstretched, looking deceptively relaxed. Hyll knew he waited to pounce. Hard to resist the impulse to run, but having no place to go made the decision easier.

"Well," Caled said and smiled. Hyll didn't manage to suppress his shudder and pretended he had an twitch. "Like to explain why you don't have Three, the Earth woman and the Worker Bs from Biodome One under investigation?"

"I've completed a number of tests. Lucy is disease free. She carries no virus or bacterial infection." Though she did carry something else.

"The marks on her face?"

"Birth defect."

Hyll had been tempted to tell Caled she had some horrific sexually transmitted disease but that would've seen her launched from an airlock before Hyll got out of the room.

"Explanation for her behavior?"

*She was just being Lucy,* Hyll thought, his mouth clamped closed.

"I'm waiting." Caled tapped his fingers.

An idea shot into Hyll's head and he wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. "Antagonistic pheromones."

The fingers stopped tapping.

"They're a naturally occurring chemical found in all insects, humans and animals," Hyll said.

"I don't need a lecture on pheromones."

"Syobwoc women living in the same dwelling, match each other's bio-cycle. My mother and my sister —"

"Yes, yes, of what relevance is this?"

Hyll took a deep breath. "The dedication and cooperation of the Bs are achieved largely through balancing artificial hormones and pheromones. I think Lucy has accidentally disrupted the equilibrium of their environment."

Caled nodded. "She's stopped them from working?"

"On the contrary, they appear to be working harder." Hyll had no idea whether that was true but seemed the best chance he could give her. "I'd like to test it out by only allowing her access to one biodome and compare productivity with the others."

That was a great idea. Hyll's mind raced with ways to measure the —

"What effect would she have on the Pleasure Bs?"

Hyll's stomach lurched. "I have no idea."

Caled grinned. "Let's find out."

"But if Lucy has a positive effect on the Workers, then surely..." Hyll gulped. Caled looked as though he wanted to eat him. Not in a good way.

"She goes in with the Pleasure Bs. Now what about Three?"

"Three..." Hyll had no idea what to say.

"Seems Three can't stop having sex with her. She's the only one he's shown any interest in since he came aboard. I thought he was a freak, some byproduct of his accident and rebuild, but he pounds into her like a *kenta* drill. Quite impressive."

Hyll wondered how many times Caled had watched them. He was a little surprised his first thought hadn't been sorrow that Three wouldn't pound into him.

"I tested Three extensively. There's nothing to worry about. All crew data is downloaded to Syobwoc and analyzed there. If there had been anything to be concerned about, they would have told us by now."

Caled didn't seem to be listening. "Looks like her pheromones have affected Three, stimulated his sex drive in some way. Before the Earth woman came aboard, the Pleasure Bs were on a downward spiral. I've noticed a number of lackluster performances recently. Maybe she can spice them up." He pressed his com. "Vasp. Take a team to Three's quarters. Have the woman you'll find there brought to me. Put Three in the T cell. Restrain him. Hmm...take two teams." Caled clicked off the com and narrowed his eyes. "Now — you."

Ice trickled down Hyll's back. He kept quiet. If he spoke, he was fairly certain he'd squeak.

"You disobeyed orders. You allowed Three and the woman to leave the medbays. You switched off the cameras in the pools. You're encouraging them to have sex."

"Like you I...I've been concerned about Three's lack of interest in anything other than work. I felt he needed a push. I tried stimulating a particular Pleasure B in an attempt to trigger a response. It didn't work." Hyll had stopped Vileda's hormone pump operating several *milos* ago.

"Encouraging him to have sex with the Earth woman hasn't worked either. It's raised all sorts of other issues. Protectiveness. Aggression. Insolence. He threatened me. Unacceptable. He stays in the T cell until I'm satisfied he's no risk."

"We need him for the mission to Kirt."

"Vasp can fly double."

"We have a problem with the gravitational pull in that system. We can't stay too long in the vicinity."

"Fine. He can fly the mission. Until then, he stays under guard. We can use the woman as leverage."

Hyll almost got out of the room when Caled called, "By the way, who's the B who had his cock in your ass in the main corridor?"

Zimpra *shit*. Hyll shrugged. "I lose track. When was that?"

"The same B I saw stroking your face a few *milos* ago."

"I didn't ask his name."

"Find out and send him to me. And Hyll?"

"Yes?"

"Don't even think about speaking to Three."

\* \* \* \* \*

When Three collapsed on the floor and didn't move, Lucy stopped struggling. Vasp pulled her closer to his body.

"So you do have some intelligence. More than him." He kicked Three in the side and Lucy started wriggling again.

"Don't," she shouted.

"You're hopelessly outnumbered. Why bother?"

Three's small room was full of men. They'd burst in and overpowered them moments after they'd dressed. Three had been about to call Hyll when the door slid open to reveal Vasp and a group of yellow-jacketed men behind. Three jumped up and stood in front of her but hadn't stood a chance.

Vasp was right. No point fighting.

Two men picked Three up and carried him into the corridor.

Lucy sagged. "Where are you taking him?"

"The T cell."

"What's that? Termination cell? Torture cell? Don't hurt him."

Vasp dragged Lucy in the opposite direction, and as Three disappeared from view, she wondered if she'd ever see him again.

"You don't need to yank me around. I'll walk," Lucy said.

But when he let her go, her legs wobbled. Two other men were with him. Lucy had nowhere to run even if she could.

She wasn't surprised when she found herself in front of Caled. When he stepped toward her, she backed into Vasp's chest. He wrapped an arm around her waist and held her firm. Caled bent his head and sniffed her. When he buried his face in the side

of her neck, Lucy brought her knee up into his groin. A hand saved his nuts. *Damn, he's fast.*

Caled laughed and his eyes brightened. "Yes, yes, yes."

*No, no, no.* Lucy did not want to excite this guy.

He furrowed his brow. "I can't smell anything different about you."

"Should I be pleased or insulted?" Lucy snapped.

He brushed his palm over her breast. Lucy stiffened and then struggled. Vasp's grip tightened.

"Touch me again and first chance I get, I'll show you how different I am."

Caled cocked his head on one side. "What does Three have that I don't?"

"How long have I got?" Lucy glared and then gave a little smile. "He's honest and kind, caring and fun. Besides that he's gorgeous with beautiful hair, muscles that ripple under my fingers, smooth skin and a great smile."

"I'm all those too. You can test out my muscles."

"No thanks."

"Are all Earth women so...awkward?"

He touched her cheek and Lucy pressed back into Vasp. "Don't."

Caled frowned. "You don't want me?"

Lucy was pretty sure she knew the right answer here but it wasn't one she would give him.

Caled walked away from her and then turned back. "Three made an unfortunate choice. When I asked him to select a replacement Pleasure B, I had hoped for someone more...amenable."

Lucy pressed her lips together. *Didn't work.* Words sprang out. "What do you mean?"

"We started the voyage with one hundred Pleasure Bs. Sadly one expired. Everything is finely balanced on the ship. I requested Three to find a replacement on Earth."

"No," Lucy said.

"Did you ask him why he brought you?"

"He said he didn't know. It just felt right."

Caled nodded. "An implanted order. Don't blame him. He had no choice."

"I don't believe you." *Oh God, but a little bit of me does.*

"As commander, I'm responsible for breaking in the new Bs. Three wanted you himself. He disobeyed orders."

Lucy's heart jumped. "What will you do to him?" she asked in a quiet voice.



Caled grinned. "He'll stay in the T cell contemplating his mistakes for as long as I please, then I'll wipe his memory and he'll be good as new. Alternatively, in view of his insubordination, I could eject him from the Colonizer."

"No," Lucy gasped.

At her back, Vasp tensed.

"Please don't do that," she begged.

He really did look like a great white shark, Lucy thought. She imagined sharp points on his teeth and trembled.

"Well," he said, "if you behave yourself, I'll give Three another chance."

"Behave myself how?" Though she already knew.

"Join the Pleasure Bs. I want you to seduce me."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy hadn't moved far down the corridor with Vasp before she knew she was going to throw up. One gurgled retch and he pulled her into the nearest bathroom. Lucy dropped to her knees and vomited. When she struggled back to her feet, Vasp caught her elbow and handed her a glass of water. Once she stood steady, he released her.

"Sorry about that," Lucy mumbled. "I don't think Caled agrees with me. Left a nasty taste in my mouth."

She heard a chuckle behind her and turned to see Vasp smiling.

"I haven't got this wrong, have I? He expects me to entice him into having sex with me. If I don't, he'll kill Three." She shuddered. "Just because I have to do as he says, doesn't mean it's not rape. The thing is, I can't even be sure he'll keep his word and not hurt Three."

"Caled needs Three for the next mission. We only have a short window to get on and off Kirt."

Vasp stared at her. Was he trying to tell her something? She was safe from Caled until Three returned from Kirt? Or that Three was doomed once he'd flown the mission?

"I would take with caution the suggestion that Three was sent to collect a replacement B," Vasp said.

Lucy didn't know who to believe but she was still glad to hear that.

"If anyone had been sent, it would have been me. I have seniority."

Lucy didn't miss the underlying venom. Vasp lead her back into the corridor and she padded along at his side, the two men following.

"Why don't you like Three?" she whispered.

A muscle in Vasp's jaw ticked. "He was chosen."

And Vasp wasn't? "Chosen for what?"

"To be saved."

Had someone died because Three had been saved? "Your friend?" Lucy asked.

"My father."

He didn't say anything else. Lucy took his hand in hers and squeezed his fingers. Vasp looked at their enjoined hands in astonishment.

"What happened?" Lucy asked.

"The surgeon had produced a suitable heart. My father was next on the list. Then Three appeared out of nowhere. He got the heart. My father died."

"Oh Vasp," Lucy whispered. "That's so sad. I feel terrible for you."

A tear slipped down her chin and she wiped it away with her knuckle.

"Why are you crying? You didn't know my father."

"I'm crying for you, because you lost him. I lost my father too, not so long ago. He had an illness called Alzheimer's. He stopped remembering things like where he lived, what day it was and whether he'd eaten. I could sort of cope with that but then he forgot me. There was nothing I could do. He'd become the child and me the adult. One day I went upstairs to take him his breakfast and found he'd died in the night. And I wished...I wished I'd been there with him at the end."

"Do you...miss him?"

"Yes, of course I do. I'll never forget him, but I'm doing what he'd want, which is to smile and go on."

Vasp stumbled and then took longer strides.

"It's not Three's fault, you know," Lucy said. "Not the surgeon's fault either. Things happen out of our control. Life's not fair but it's the only one we get and we have to make the best we can of it. There's nothing you can do to bring your father back. You have to let your anger go." *Blimey, where did I get so philosophical?*

Vasp pressed a door release, ushered Lucy inside and stepped back. "Good fortune, Lucy," he said. She watched the door close behind her and sighed.

"Welcome to the Pleasure Dome."

Lucy turned to see Vileda smiling at her.

*Oh shit.*

"This way." Vileda gestured with her hand.

No way would Lucy turn her back on this woman. She pressed her backside to the wall, slid along in the direction Vileda pointed, through another door and then let out an unladylike squeak. Naked women. Naked men. Lots of them. All staring at her and she was the one with clothes.

"Hello," Lucy said, sidling around the wall away from Vileda.

Oh God, every single one of them was beautiful. Perfect breasts, perfect cocks. Not a pubic hair in sight. Hopeless trying not to look, but that didn't mean she intended to touch.

Two women with waist-length blonde hair walked up to her. One stroked her face, the other tugged at her top.

"What does she have?" one asked.

One of the men came up behind them.

*Don't look down*, Lucy told herself. *Oh what a big –*

She jerked her head up. When he reached toward her face, she gulped and shied away. They'd surrounded her, bodies pressed together as if they were one entity, getting closer and closer. Lucy suddenly feared they'd suffocate her. She dropped down and shot through their legs, springing to her feet and dashing – no, not toward Vileda – to the other side of the room where she pressed her back to the wall.

"What's the matter?" asked the man who'd tried to touch her face.

"I'm frightened."

They buzzed quietly then, just like the Worker Bs.

"We don't wish to harm you," one said. "We wish to prepare you."

"What? For Caled to eat? Got any poison I can smear on my body?" Actually, that wasn't a bad idea. Would her Worker B pals help? Maybe there was a plant extract they could use.

"It is a great honor to serve our commander," Vileda said.

Lucy rolled her eyes. "Fine, you do it."

"Why does he want you?" a woman asked.

"Probably because I don't want him. Nothing more enticing than something you can't have." *Like cream cakes*, Lucy thought. She licked her lips and sucked in her stomach.

"Your nails are –"

Lucy stuck her hands behind her back. Her nails weren't beautiful. Too much gardening and sculpting.

"We could give you a manicure."

"Pedicure."

"Facial."

"Massage."

They all looked so anxious to please, Lucy gave in. "Fine. But Vileda doesn't get to touch me."

More humming while Vileda glared.

"She's a threat," Vileda snapped.

One of the men stepped between Lucy and Vileda. "Caled wishes her."

Vileda stormed out and there was a collective sigh as they all breathed out at the same time.

Lucy wished she could laugh. Vileda wanted to kill her. Caled wanted to fuck her. "I'm stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea," she said.

"What does that mean?" a woman asked.

"Caught between a rock and a hard place."

Blank faces.

"When there are only two options and neither are good. Like staying on a planet that's going to freeze or travelling to one that's heating up. Like choosing to let Caled fuck you to save someone's life only knowing that by doing so, you'll probably lose them anyway."

"Choosing?"

"High heels or flats. Ice cream or chocolate. Top or bottom. Bed or floor. The floor is not a good idea. Much too hard and if it's covered in carpet you can get nasty burns. I once got a mark on my butt that took weeks to disappear, though his knees were probably worse. I didn't actually see him again after that. Maybe that was why." She grinned.

"High heels," said a woman.

"Bed," said a man.

"Bottom," said another man as the guy beside him said, "Top."

Lucy laughed and their faces began to change, mouths twitched up, dimples appeared and eyes crinkled.

"Do I get to choose the color of the polish?" Lucy asked and held out her hands palms down.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three sat naked on the floor of the T cell, leaning back against the wall, his arms outstretched and fastened. He'd wondered why it was called the T cell and now he'd found out. He was fortunate they'd allowed him to sit. The restraints could have held him in a standing position. His wrists were bloody but already starting to heal. Pointless pulling against the metal ties but he'd done it anyway out of frustration, fury guilt. He'd probably do it again in a moment.

The pain made him feel a little better. His clothes had been torn from him and his com device removed. He had no way of contacting Hyll, of warning him about Vileda. Vasp knew, but the guy hated him. If Vileda hurt Lucy, Three would rip her apart. If Caled touched Lucy, Three would do the same to him. If it was his last act, so be it.

The door hissed open and Three stiffened. Hyll walked in and put his finger to his lips. From his pocket he took a circular field disruptor and set it on the floor. No one would be able to listen in.

"Lucy?" Three asked.

"With the Bs."

"Which Bs."

Hyll winced.

"Oh *zimpra* shit," Three hissed.

"Caled hasn't touched her yet but she's intrigued him. I'm not sure whether he wants her to learn from the Bs or the Bs to learn from her. Probably both."

"Vileda tried to kill her."

Three watched the blood drain from Hyll's face. "What?" Hyll gasped and sank down by Three's side.

"She tied Lucy's hands behind her back, threw her in the lap pool, turned on the solidifier and activated the cover. She nearly drowned."

"Oh Gods. It's my fault."

Three narrowed his eyes. "How?"

Hyll kept his gaze down and concentrated on wiping the blood from Three's wrists.

"How?" Three repeated.

"I switched Vileda from submissive responsive to aggressive reactive and linked her to your scent."

Three stared at him in confusion. "*You* made her come after me? All this time I've been complaining to you about her harassing me and it's your fault? Why would you do that?"

"It was an experiment. I reversed it *milos* ago. Well, I thought I had but something must have gone wrong."

"An experiment?" Three felt chilled to the bone. "I thought you were my friend. I thought— Get out of here."

"Three—"

"Get out."

## Chapter Twenty-One

*Viruses can be spread by direct transfer of sap. Infected colonies of the more vigorous species either mutate and flourish or find a means to repel the invader.*

"Relax."

"Ohhhh. Ahhhh. Mmmm." Lucy groaned and moaned as strong fingers rubbed warm, silky lotion over her skin, pressed deep into her muscles and kneaded the kinks out of her spine and legs. She had no idea how many Bs worked on her and she didn't care so long as they didn't stop. She lay naked, facedown on a soft bed with her masked face resting in a dip.

*Only, what about Three?* Her shoulders tensed.

"Relax."

Someone filed the nails of one hand, someone else worked on the other. And her feet.

*Oh God, I've died and gone to heaven, except Three isn't in heaven.* She gave a deep sigh.

"Relax."

No way she could stop thinking about Three, who wasn't being pampered, who might even be undergoing torture. Had he really been sent to Earth to get a sex slave? Why should she believe Caled? Lucy believed Three, only he said he didn't know why he'd taken her so maybe —

"Relax."

If Three had been ordered to find a female sex slave, whether his actions were conscious or not, she hoped he'd just seen her and wanted her for himself, a spontaneous gesture of—well, okay maybe not love, but interest, desire, even lust. Anything other than because piranha-mouth Caled had commanded him to.

"Relax."

*What are they doing now?* It felt as though feathers trailed over her body. Lucy was so boneless she was surprised she hadn't slithered off the table to puddle on the floor. Yet still her mind flipped back to Three. And Caled because he was the whole point of this...preparation—the Bs getting her ready for sex with him.

Lucy shuddered. Not going to happen—willingly.

But what if it was the only way to save Three? Then, would she? Could she?

"Turn over when you are ready."

Lucy turned. The hands slid back onto her skin, smoothing warm lotion along her arms and legs, over her breasts. *Oohh*. Down her stomach. They wouldn't...yes they would. Lucy yanked the mask from her face and gasped. *Bloody hell, are they all here?*

"Do we not please you?" asked the man with his fingers in her pubic hair.

*Oooh shit*. Lucy grabbed his hand and moved it off her. She sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed.

"That was lovely, thank you." Good manners were never a bad thing, particularly when outnumbered.

"But you didn't obtain release."

Dozens of disappointed faces. Lucy felt her cheeks flush with embarrassment. Bad enough when one guy complained – all right, two boyfriends, and Lucy didn't see how it was her fault anyway, they'd come like lightning, but to disappoint a whole room full of men and women? Mortifying.

"What can we do?" a woman asked.

"Nothing. I'm absolutely fine. Really. No problem. Very nice anyway. No need for..." Lucy could feel herself beginning to babble. "Really fine."

"Where do you require our fingers?"

"Mouths?"

"Tongues?"

"Nowhere," Lucy choked out.

"But we have to bring you pleasure."

"That's our role."

"Can't you play among yourselves?" she asked.

Silence.

"Can't or don't?"

Silence.

"You mean you aren't allowed?" Lucy gasped.

"We only bring pleasure to the crew and the Worker Bs."

She looked at all the lovely long, thick cocks and the beautiful big-breasted women. What a waste. Her mouth twitched. "Ever heard of a game called *Spin the Bottle*?"

Clearly not. The number of people proved a challenge to Lucy's organizational skills but once she'd learned a few names and roped them in to help, she had several circles of Bs sitting on the floor with a bottle of lotion lying on its side in the middle.

"Take turns to spin and whoever the top of the bottle points to, you have to kiss. I'll show you."

She spun the bottle in the center of the nearest circle unsure if she wanted it to point to a guy or not.

A woman.

Lucy gulped. She'd never kissed a woman other than on the cheek—facial that is—and wasn't certain she wanted to experiment further now. Time for a rule change.

"What's your name?" Lucy asked.

"Genda."

Lucy crawled across and took Genda's nipple into her mouth. As she teased it with her tongue, it hardened and the woman groaned. Lucy's heart thumped hard and fast. She wasn't enjoying this, but then to be honest, she wasn't not enjoying it either. Wow, it felt really interesting in her mouth, soft and sort of nobbly at the same time. Fingers threaded her hair, holding her in place as she sucked. Lucy suddenly became aware that she'd been doing this for rather a long time and dragged her mouth away. She looked up into Genda's smiling face and the next moment Lucy was being kissed on the lips. Whoa, soft, wet... She hadn't meant to linger but it was quite nice. More than quite nice. Ooh, wet between her legs and—

*Three.*

Lucy jumped to her feet. "Well, that's the idea. You can kiss any part of the body. The one spinning gets to choose. But the one who's kissed has to ask a question first. Anything at all." She handed the bottle to a man called Mand. "You go first."

It was as if she'd pulled cork out of a champagne bottle. Within minutes the room was filled with the sound of laughter, squealing, sucking, slurping and even animated conversation. Lucy sidled away, slipped her pajamas back on and helped herself to a little bottle of oil.

\* \* \* \* \*

Before he reached the Pleasure Dome, Hyll had a computerized alert calling him to Biodome Seven. When he got inside, he looked around in disbelief. Humidity was hardly an issue when there were no plants growing. Where were the specimens that had been brought back from Earth? He strode to the storage room. No seeds, no fertilizer, nothing. Hyll grabbed the nearest Worker B.

"What's happened?"

The man gave him a blank stare.

"Where are the plants from Earth?"

"Not here."

"Where?"

Another B came up. Tomat. "Dead."

Hyll gasped. "What—all of them?"

"Yes."

"Then where's the fertilizer and all the seeds?"

"No longer required if the plants are dead," Tomat said.

"So you dumped it?" *Zimpra shit*. How was he going to explain this to Caled?



"Disappointing as the specimens were most promising," said another B.

"So how come they died?" Hyll snapped.

Tomat spoke. "Water valve malfunction."

"Which valve?"

"It's been repaired."

Hyll took a deep breath. Light slowly dawned and yet he still found it hard to believe the Bs could connive to do this. He suspected the plants and the rest had been stored somewhere secure. He hoped that was the case. A check of the air balance should tell him one way or the other. Unless the Bs had interfered with the sensors. Were they capable of that? Hyll swallowed hard. Yes, he thought they were.

"So you think it's a good idea to go back to Earth to collect more?" Hyll asked.

Every B gave an energetic nod.

"I don't understand," Hyll whispered. "Why don't you want her on board?"

"She can't thrive on the Colonizer. She has her own home. She must return there," Tomat said.

Hyll sighed. "I'll try to persuade Caled." Shoulders down, he walked to the door.

"Hyll?"

He turned. "Yes, Tomat?"

"She *must* return."

Outside the biodome Hyll leaned on the wall, his brain struggling to compute what was happening. Bs thinking for themselves. Caled putting his pleasure above the success of the mission by sending Lucy to the Pleasure Bs and not to the Workers. How hard could it be to persuade Caled to take the Colonizer back to Earth and return Lucy to her home?

Very. To the latter anyway.

"Hyll?"

He looked up to see Zend coming toward him. Hyll threw himself into Zend's embrace. Zend's arms tightened around him as Hyll buried his face in his neck. Just holding Zend made him feel stronger. Then Hyll pushed him away. The confusion on Zend's face hurt.

"Caled saw us. He wants your name. I won't give it to him but we have to be careful."

Zend gave a slow smile. "You won't give it?"

Hyll shook his head. Zend's hand slid to the front of Hyll's pants. His cock thickened and Hyll groaned.

"You don't wish to share me with Caled?" Zend asked.

"I don't wish to share you with anyone." *Ever.*

Zend's fingers caressed the hard ridge of his cock.

Hyll caught his wrist. "Much as I adore what you're doing, I have to find Lucy. Caled sent her to the Pleasure Dome but Three just told me that Vileda tried to kill her."

"Impossible."

"A lot of impossible things seem to be happening since she came on board. I need to speak to Caled and persuade him to return to Earth for more plants."

"I'll find Lucy and look after her."

Hyll smiled. "Put her in the T cell with Three." They might as well have every moment together he could give them.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where is she?" Caled demanded.

The Pleasure Bs stayed silent.

He strode around the room staring at the entwined couples. "What's going on? You're both Pleasure Bs. And you. And you. You're not supposed to have sex with each other."

"Why not?" a male voice asked.

Caled spun around. "Who said that?"

What in the Legolian void was happening? Bs didn't answer back. The look on the faces of some of these was...hostile. Impossible.

*Lucy.*

"Where is she?" Caled repeated. He strode to the nearest woman and grabbed her wrist. "Tell me or I'll break her arm."

"We suppress pain. We can be repaired," said the woman.

"Not if I have you disassembled," Caled snapped, but he thrust the woman aside.

A severe flaw in their construction. How could he threaten them? But then, he hadn't needed to until Lucy came aboard. Had they all moved closer to him? Caled swallowed hard. He strode toward the door and breathed a sigh of relief when it opened. Once the door had closed, he activated the command lock so they couldn't get out and called Vasp on his com.

"Vasp, find and secure the Earth woman. Call me the moment you have her."

He clicked on to Hyll. "Hyll. The bridge. Now."

Caled didn't feel safe on his own ship. Intolerable. Once Vasp had the woman, she was going to the airlock. The sooner she was off the Colonizer the better.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three was lost in a dream. Before he met Lucy, he didn't think he'd ever had a dream, now she filled his head whether he was asleep or awake. He was desperate to remember every tiny thing about her, the way she tasted—her lips, her arms, those

delicate, delicious petals between her legs. He wanted to hold onto the memory of her touch—the feel of her fingers tracing patterns on his skin, the way her mouth moved around his cock, the teasing tickle of her tongue. He remembered the way she made him smile with her chatter, made him tremble with her moans and groans when he filled her body.

Because that was all he would have. Memories. He shouldn't have taken her from Earth. Her life was in danger. His heart ached to the point that Three wanted to tear it out of his chest. Her fault he felt like this. And he loved her for it.

*What?*

Three opened his eyes and thought he must still be dreaming, that his imagination had conjured Lucy to stand before him. He waited for the thunder in his chest to fall away and cold reality to smother him.

But when she touched his leg, he knew she was real. And Three was so happy and yet in despair at the same time.

"What have they done to you?" she whispered. "Can I get you free?"

"No. It requires a device."

She cuddled up against him, wrapped her arms around him, pressed her head to his chest and held tight. He kissed her silky hair and laid his lips against her head.

"Zend says they're looking for me," she whispered. "I was lost and he found me. But I think...I think when the yellow jackets find me, that will be the end." She raised her head and looked at him.

A moan welled up from his gut.

"At least I got my nails done." She showed him her hand. "They started to stick on falsies, but I could see they were going to annoy me so I only have the one."

She wagged her finger in front of his nose. Three smiled at the bright blue polish on one long nail.

"I've already chipped it. Very hard nail though. I don't know what they're made of. I picked blue because it's my favorite color...well, my favorite today."

"Gods, Lucy, I'm so sorry."

She glared at him. "No. Don't you dare be sorry."

He closed his eyes and leaned back against the wall. "I wish—"

"No. Open your eyes and see what you have now." Three opened his eyes and she smiled. "Were you sent to Earth to get me? Well, to find a replacement B? Before, you didn't seem sure."

"The honest answer is that I don't know. It would be easy for me to say yes, then I'd not feel so guilty having dragged you into all this but my heart tells me that there was no implanted order, that I saw you and wanted you in my life. I just failed to think through the consequences of taking you away from your home. I'm sorry."

She put her thumb against his lips. "Please don't say you're sorry. It makes me think that you think all this has been a mistake. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Lucy straddled his lap and her hot breath tickled his skin. When she brushed her lips against his, Three's already thick cock grew firmer. She nibbled at his lower lip until he opened his mouth and allowed her inside. Her hands slid around his shoulders and she deepened the kiss. He tugged in frustration at his restraints.

She kissed with her whole body, rubbing herself against him, arms and hands caressing, fingers stroking. All the time his cock grew hard between them. When she moved away, Three gave a quiet groan but she stripped off and returned to his lap, threading her fingers at the back of his neck, tugging at his hair, brushing her nipples against his.

"Guess what I've got?" she said.

"An extremely hot body?"

"Mmm."

"A drive-me-insane body?"

"Better."

Three laughed. She reached for her pajamas and brought back a bottle. *Juba* oil. Lucy squirted it onto her palm, spread it between both hands and began rubbing it into his shoulders. Three sighed at the scent of *juba* root. Sighed again as he relaxed under her touch. Her hands trailed to his chest and his nipples flared to life under her touch. Three couldn't take his eyes off her. Intent on what she was doing, Lucy spread the oil with slick hands, the slow sensual swipes leaving a trail of fire in their wake. He forgot about the ache in his arms, stretched out either side of his body, forgot about the ache in his heart and cherished her.

More oil but this time it was her breasts she touched and a pearl of pre-cum oozed from the slit on his straining cock. He watched mesmerized as she drew lazy circles on her skin. When her fingers rubbed her nipples, a growl sounded low in his throat.

"Let me taste you," he whispered.

"Won't I be a bit oily?"

Did she honestly think he cared? "*Juba* root oil is edible." He didn't give a *zimpra* shit whether it was or not, though he thought it was. Lucy bent forward and Three wrapped his mouth around her nipple. He dragged a series of gasps and moans from her throat, each sound winding him tighter. She writhed against him, his cock pressed between their slick bodies. His groans dissolved against her breasts until he had to pull back before he spurting all over her belly.

Then her weight was off him, and her hands stroked his legs, rubbing in more oil, soothing aching muscles. She took her time torturing him, working her way up his calves, over his thighs and back to his stomach.

"You missed a bit."

"Saving the best until last."

"I can tell you had no brothers and sisters. I had..."

His mind whirled in confusion. Why did he suddenly think he'd had siblings? If you saved the best part of your food until the end of the meal, it was likely to disappear from your plate. One brother distracting while the other slipped his fork to the treat. That had happened to him, he was sure. Then Lucy wrapped her oily hands around his sac and his brain turned to *poolah*.

She pulled his cock through the funnel of her fingers, dragging the tip of her long manicured nail over the swollen, bulbous head. He clenched his jaw. Lucy laughed and took her hand away.

"More oil," she said, and drizzled it over his crown. It trickled down his length and Three trembled at the sensation.

When she eased down and wrapped her breasts around his cock, he gasped. He could see the dark purple tip slipping in and out of sight between the soft pale globes, feel the pressure building in his balls, feel the silky slide of skin and oil. Three tried to distract his brain with something else and failed at each attempt. When Lucy's mouth settled around his cock head, he gave in. The sooner he came, the sooner he could do this again.

His thighs quivered as she sucked. He wanted to touch and yet he was turned on by the fact that he couldn't. Three was captivated by the sight of the shiny head of his cock slipping between her lips, by the network of veins that bulged along his length and the way they disappeared into her mouth as she bobbed her head over his lap.

Her tongue swirled around him, pressed, teased and twisted until all that filled his world was Lucy and what she did to his body. His chest tightened along with his balls. Her hands worked with her mouth, pumping, twisting his excitement, winding it to fever pitch. His hips jumped as he jerked inside her mouth. Too hard but he couldn't stop. Then he hit the back of her throat and the pressure on his crown tipped him over.

Three's spine arched in a rigid bow and his eyesight wavered as he came, jetting long pulses of cum into her mouth. Caught in the path of lightning, he exploded in ecstasy and released a long cry of delight.

Lucy suckled him as he came down, licked him clean, licked a path to his groin, over his belly, up to his chest to his lips.

"Did you scream?" she asked.

"That was a manly howl."

"Damn. I'll have to try again."

## Chapter Twenty-Two

*Worker bees will not allow other queen bees or other bees in their hives. If an alien bee is found, it is thrown out. But if the intruder resists, the guarding bees will sting it to death.*

Lucy lay snuggled against Three's chest, her hand curled over his heart, feeling the firm thud beneath her fingers. She'd decided to tell him she loved him, though having to explain what the word meant would sort of spoil the moment. But first she needed to ask him about what Caled had said, that Three had been ordered to bring someone back to the Colonizer.

She pulled back a little to look him in the face. "Why did you take me away from Earth?"

He winced. "I wish to Gods I hadn't."

Lucy waited for him to add that part of him was glad he'd done it. He didn't. So, he wished he hadn't brought her on board and he might only have done it because he'd been ordered to do so. Great. Except it made no difference to the way she felt. Three was the most exciting—the best—thing that had ever happened to her and wasn't it better to live life to the fullest, no matter if it was for a short time, than to never have experienced love worth dying for?

"What is it about you?" Three whispered. "When I'm not with you, I feel as though part of me is missing. Your smile warms my heart. Your touch makes my knees tremble. When I'm buried inside you, it feels so perfect, I think I'll die if I lose you. I only have to think about you to want you."

Lucy slipped her hand to his groin and laughed. "Ah, thinking about me now."

"I'm always in control—*was* always in control." He groaned as she straddled him and rubbed her body against his.

"I like it when you're not in control," she whispered, trailing her nipples over his mouth.

"Gods, Lucy."

She held herself over him, letting the tip of his cock kiss her damp folds, then painted them with his juice until he moaned. When he lifted his hips, she pulled out of reach.

"Let me," she whispered.

She positioned him at the entrance to her body, pressed down and pulled back, did the same over and over, each time taking a fraction of an inch more into her body. Three's face was taut and strained as he held himself still while Lucy slipped up and down until their bodies were united. Tight, hot and wet. She circled her hips and

ground herself against the base of his cock. His cock twitched, a hard contraction seized her uterus and they groaned in unison.

He looked as though he wanted to swallow her whole. Lucy's breasts ached, her nipples tingled. She wasn't doing anything but her breathing was ragged. She rested her hands on his shoulders and licked her dry lips.

"Move," Three grunted.

"In a minute."

"In a second or I move."

Lucy lifted her hips and drove herself down. Like a fairground ride, she started in a slow and steady rise and fall, taking his thick cock deep into her body, pushing down until she could feel his balls press against her flesh.

"Faster," Three gasped.

Lucy squeezed hard with her pussy muscles as she pulled up and Three's eyes closed as he pressed himself against the wall.

"Lucy," he whispered.

Her hips rocked more swiftly, segueing into a rhythm that launched her along a whitewater river of bliss. Lucy put her hands on the wall above his shoulders, driving her pelvis down, while her muscles clenched around him and his cock surged deeper inside her. The burning friction drove her wild. Her orgasm curled inside her like a seed – waiting for exactly the right moment to spring to life. She slid one hand down to her clit, stroked herself three times and then reared up, flung back her head and screamed.

As her muscles clenched around him, she felt the warm spurt of Three's juice flood into her as he bucked his hips up to thrust deeper.

*I want his baby.*

She pleaded with his sperm to be fertile, to be strong swimmers, hoped she had a receptive egg waiting beyond the red tape to greet the winner. Oh God, she'd never wanted anything so much in her life and yet even as she wished it, she snatched the wish back, because it mustn't happen. When she died, so would their child.

\* \* \* \* \*

After Hyll told Caled the plant specimens from Earth had gone, he feared Caled would spontaneously combust. His face turned a vivid shade of puce, his eyes narrowed to splinters and he clenched his fists so hard, every vein stood out on the back of his hands. Those in his neck looked like little purple snakes ready to burst through the skin.

"Three did this," Caled ranted. "He's trying to get me to go back to Earth so he can return the woman. He's deliberately destroyed plants. He's lost his mind."

Hyll shook his head. "He's spent the last several *milos* restrained in the T cell."

"Then she did it. It must have been her. Explain how," Caled snapped.

"But you put Lucy with the Pleasure Bs. She had neither opportunity nor means."

Caled glared. "She made the Bs do it. It has to be her."

Hyll kept quiet. The plan of returning to Earth for more plants and seeds had to come from Caled. The fool would get to it eventually.

Caled's jaw ticced so fast, Hyll wondered if he'd trapped a nerve. The commander slumped in his chair and spoke to the computer. "Set a course for Earth. Fastest possible speed."

Hyll's heart did a little leap for joy.

"I want her off the ship," Caled said.

"She could be put back on her home —"

"No. I want her off now."

"But —"

"Look, *sepat* brain." Caled activated the vid screens. "Look at the Bs. They're talking as they work. Singing. Not just in Biodome Seven but in every biodome. It was an error putting her with the Pleasure Bs. Why did you suggest it?"

Hyll knew there was no point denying it. Caled was busy making his own history. But Hyll would send a report to Syobwoc at the earliest opportunity to give his version of events.

Caled spoke into his com. "Vasp. Have you found the Earth woman?"

"No, Commander."

"When you do, take her to the jettison bay and call me. My finger goes on the button. I want to be sure she's really off the ship." Caled turned to Hyll. "When she's gone, her influence will be gone too and the Bs will return to normal. I want everything back the way it was before that human disaster set foot on my ship."

Spittle flew from the sides of his mouth and Hyll wondered if enraging him further would bring about a cardiac arrest. No, he wouldn't be that lucky. How in the Legolian void was he going to get this mess sorted out? Was there a chance of delaying things until they got within shuttle range of Earth so Three could take Lucy back?

"Vasp? I've changed my mind. Take Three to the jettison bay and broadcast what you're doing. That will draw her out."

"I'll go and —"

"No, you're coming with me."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy heard the door open behind her and pressed herself tighter against Three. Forget that she was naked. They'd have to drag her off him.

"You need to move quickly. Vasp has been ordered to take you to the jettison bay."



Lucy spun around to see Zend standing in the doorway.

"Jettison? As in off the ship?" she gasped.

"You need to split up and hide," Zend said. "The Colonizer is heading toward Earth to collect more plants. You can go back."

Lucy scrambled into her pajamas. Zend dropped clothes on the floor and then held a machine to Three's restraints. They fell away and he groaned as he lowered his arms.

"You must go now. I'll take Lucy to a biodome. The Bs will protect her."

One long kiss. One last look and Lucy left with Zend.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy wondered if Zend was communicating with someone because he kept abruptly changing the direction they were going, reversing their route, circling around.

"What's wrong?" Lucy asked.

"There's danger and I can't protect you on my own. The others won't get here in time."

"Can I hide?"

"The yellow jackets approach from three sides. Caled is coming. Hyll is with him."

"I'll run so I'm not caught with you."

Before he could stop her, Lucy sprinted down the corridor, whizzed around two corners and slammed into Vasp. His arms wrapped around her. She kicked and struggled. It seemed wrong not to try even though she realized it was futile.

"Stop it, *sepat* brain," Vasp hissed.

But it was the sight of Caled storming toward them that froze her in Vasp's arms. Lucy's breathing turned to heaving gasps as adrenaline surged. Vasp and his men stood behind her, Caled loomed ahead which left her nowhere to go. When Vasp released her, Lucy locked her trembling knees and stood her ground.

The blow across her face sent her reeling back into Vasp. She bit back her yelp but — *ouch that hurt*.

"How can one woman cause so much trouble?" Caled glared at her. "One tiny, pathetic, insignificant piece of *zimpra* shit and you manage to disrupt the entire vessel. Because of you, the Bs are unsettled and distracted. Because of you, I'm about to lose a Collector. Because of you, I have to return to Earth to get more plants."

Lucy glared. "Not very good at your job, are you?"

His jaw dropped and he gaped at her.

*Keep going.* "Guess what, *sepat* brain? I was put on board by your superior to observe your skills as a commander. All this has been a huge test. You failed."

*Not going to work.* He only had to ask for —

"My superior's name?"

Hyll mouthed syllables behind Caled's back but Lucy had no idea what he was trying to tell her.

"Bastalon," Lucy guessed and Hyll winced.

Caled opened his mouth, showed her his zillion teeth and howled with laughter.

Behind him, Lucy watched Three being dragged along by more yellow-jacketed men. Vasp's hold on her tightened.

"Vasp, don't," Lucy whispered. "Think. We're not the bad ones here. Please."

"Shhh. Be patient."

Bs filled the corridor around them. Some she recognized, others she didn't. Three wrenched one arm free but before Lucy had chance to take another breath, Caled had pulled her from Vasp, wrapped his arm around her waist and pressed a long, slender blade against her throat. The tip pierced her skin and a trickle of blood slid down her neck. Lucy whimpered.

"Caled, there's no need for this. Send her back to Earth," Three shouted.

Three swung his fist, gained a foot and Hyll struggled to pull him back.

"Three's right. You're overreacting. Let Lucy go," Hyll said.

Caled pressed the tip of the knife harder against her neck and Lucy tipped her head back against his shoulder.

"Vasp. Control this situation," Caled snapped.

The buzzing, humming, talking from the Bs grew louder as they crowded in to push the yellow jackets. The man holding Three bent double and Three lurched forward, his gaze pinned on Caled.

"Three, don't," Hyll yelled.

Lucy sank her teeth into Caled's arm and jammed her one sharp nail into his side. Caled gripped her tighter and everything suddenly became chaotic. Bs propelled Hyll backward as he tried to reach Three who in turn fought his way through to Lucy. More Bs swarmed over the men in yellow. As Three struggled, Vileda ran past him toward Lucy.

"Stop Vileda," Vasp yelled from the middle of a group of Bs. "She has a weapon."

Vileda raised her hand and time stuttered. Lucy looked for Three, wanting his face to be the last thing she saw and as the knife came straight at her, she gasped. But it was Caled who stiffened behind her. He let the blade fall from Lucy's throat. As his hold on her relaxed, she pulled free and saw him stagger back against the wall, Vileda's hand still holding the long, thin blade that stuck in his neck.

*Oh God, she missed me and hit Caled? Lucky Lucy.*

"What...have...you...done?" Caled gasped.

"Protected the queen," Vileda whispered and sank to the floor.

Three swept Lucy into his arms and pressed his face into her hair. "Gods, I thought I'd lost—"

"No," Hyll cried out.

Three jerked against her and Lucy's hands on his back felt warm and wet. All his weight pressed against her and Lucy tried to hold him up but Three slid to the floor. She went with him. Only then did she see the knife in his back and Caled holding his hand to his neck, blood gushing over his fingers.

"No," Lucy wailed.

Hyll had watched events unfold in mounting horror. He tried to reach Three as Three struggled to get to Lucy, but the Bs wouldn't let him. They blocked his way, held him back. He'd found Zend clutching his arm working with the other Bs against him.

*Mutiny?*

Hyll's heart thundered as Bs wrapped themselves around his body. He saw blood on Lucy's neck, watched Vileda thrust a medbay laser scalpel into Caled's throat and then Caled pulled out the blade to stab Three in the back. Hyll still couldn't believe it.

Then the Bs let him go and he stumbled as he raced to Three's side. Lucy cradled him in her arms, his blood pooling on the floor. Hyll's medical pack appeared from somewhere. How the hell had — Then he stopped thinking and started working, resting Three on his side, ripping away his shirt, attaching life support, scanning all functions, pumping fluid in to replace what he was losing. Hyll pushed Lucy away and out of the corner of his eye watched Zend pull her into his embrace.

"Help him," Lucy pleaded. "Please."

Hyll would do everything he could but he feared it wouldn't be enough.

"Take him to medbay one," he said.

"Is he going to be all right?" Lucy asked. "Why haven't you taken the knife out?"

"Hyll knows what he's doing. We'll go with Three," Zend said, helping her stand.

Hyll turned to Caled. He wanted to stamp on the *etah* shit's head. Only he held himself partly responsible. Why hadn't he seen what was happening? He should have stopped Caled. He didn't care about him but Hyll dropped down and did his duty, secured him into systems support and scanned his body. It was of some satisfaction that he noted Caled was already dead, which saved Hyll having to kill him.

Once Caled was on his way to the medbay, Hyll stood up and looked at the expectant faces surrounding him.

"Vasp," Hyll said with a sigh.

"Yes, Commander."

Hyll started. *So I am.*

"I'll talk to everyone in the Pleasure Dome once I've..."

*Three.* Hyll's heart hurt so much he couldn't speak.

"What shall we do with Vileda?" Vasp asked.

"T cell with no restraint."

Hyll hadn't missed her comment. She'd been protecting Lucy from Caled. Why had she done that? Hyll couldn't deal with any of this now. He had to save Three.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy couldn't stop shaking. This was all wrong. She was supposed to be the one who died, not Three. Zend supported her all the way to the medbay as her steps grew slower and slower. Lucy wanted to hope but feared the worst. Three had been so still and gray. Oh God, and she hadn't even told him she loved him.

"I don't want him to die," she whispered.

"Hyll will do everything he can. Come in here and let me clean you."

"I want to be with him."

"And you can be, but let me help you first."

Blood had trickled down over her top. Three's blood and hers mingled together. Lucy's lungs locked. Zend wiped her neck and then shone a light over her. The blood disappeared from her pajamas.

"Whoa, what did you do?"

"A *sirradiated* cleanser."

The technology was so advanced, surely they could do something for Three. A flicker of hope surged inside her, a tiny shoot pushing to the surface.

Zend led her into the medbay. Three lay on his side, the knife still in place, and fear swamped her flimsy hope. Hyll looked up and when his gaze dropped, Lucy sighed.

"Why haven't you taken out the knife?" she asked.

"I can't without killing him."

"No, no. There must be something you can do. You're so clever. Three has all these special parts inside him, you must be able to help him."

"I...I want to but there's nothing I can do."

Hyll's hand fastened around Three's, his thumb stroking gently, and Lucy saw what she'd missed before. Hyll loved Three. He hadn't been talking about a woman he loved, but Three.

"What are you going to do?" she whispered.

"Do what you both wanted and take you back to Earth."

"I didn't want to go back. I wanted to be with Three." Lucy gulped back a sob. "Can I touch him?"

Hyll nodded.

"Can he hear me?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, though he's deeply unconscious."

Lucy took the few paces to his side and wrapped her hand over his. "I should have told you that I loved you. Even if I did have to explain what I meant. Three words I

locked away that I should have given to you. It's the biggest gift, trusting someone with your love and I trust you. You gave your life to save mine and...I'll never forget you. My sweet, gentle alien. You'll never leave my heart." She stroked his fingers. "I love you."

## Chapter Twenty-Three

*We can learn a lot from plants. They have an admirable ability to adapt to the world around them and survive against all odds.*

Hyll called the Bs to take Lucy away. She didn't want to leave Three but Hyll insisted. Her face white with shock, her breathing unsteady—she needed to sleep. Hyll slipped her an *interdermal* sedative and she didn't even notice.

When the door closed behind Lucy and the Bs, Zend rushed to Hyll and slung his arm around his shoulder. "This is not your fault."

Hyll stared at Three's gray face, his motionless body, the machines that kept him alive and he trembled.

"Yes it is, in so many ways. Gods, I've never felt so helpless. What were the Bs doing? What were *you* doing?"

"Protecting the head of the ship. If you'd got yourself killed, where would we be?"

"What the *zimpra* shit has happened? I mean, I guessed that Lucy exuded some sort of pheromone that triggered a response in the Bs, but even if I'm right, that can't be all it is."

"No."

Hyll looked into Zend's eyes. "What do you know?"

"Talk to your mother. Maybe there's a way to save Three using Caled's heart."

"My mother? How do you—"

"Call her."

"But I'm not a transplant surgeon."

"Maintain Caled on full bio support and talk to her. You're in command now. The Colonizer is yours."

Hyll shuddered. "I don't want it. I don't like to be in charge."

Zend smiled and stroked Hyll's cheek. "I know. I'll strike a deal. In bed, I'll take charge but you must be our leader on this ship. There is no one else the Bs trust. Apart from Lucy." He paused. "And Three."

Hyll looked at Three and sighed.

Zend pressed his face into Hyll's hair. "Lucy knows."

"Knows what?"

"That you love Three."

A fist squeezed Hyll's heart. "I can't save him."

"You can choose to try."

*And fail.*

"I'll go and check what's happening on the ship. Talk to your mother."

Zend left and Hyll looked down at his hand still holding Three's. He didn't want to let him go. Another thought came fast on that. How did Zend know about love?

\* \* \* \* \*

The moment the Bs took her away from Three, Lucy wanted to go back. Maybe he'd wake and even if it was just for a moment, he'd see her and she could smile at him for the last time. Not cry. No tears to send him on his way. She'd shed those now while he couldn't see. Lucy broke out into noisy sobs. The Bs moved closer and closer until she was no longer walking. They carried her cocooned in their collective embrace, hummed to her and Lucy let herself fade away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hyll gulped when he heard his mother's voice. He wished he could see her face but the distance was too great for vid. He missed her.

"Greetings, Hyll. How are you?"

"Not good."

"Why not good?"

"Three."

"DIP?" snapped Astra.

Their family code. "Yes." The disruptor was in place.

Hyll told her everything – about Lucy, about what he'd done to Vileda, the change in the Bs, the death of Caled and Three. Almost everything. Not about love, not about Zend or his own feelings of suffocating guilt.

"Transmit the med scan for Three and Caled," Astra said.

Hyll pressed a few buttons and waited.

His mother gave a heavy sigh. "Caled twisted the knife as he drove it in. The heart is badly damaged. If Three were here, I might be able to do something but you don't have the necessary skill or equipment."

"Could I transplant Caled's heart or parts of his heart into Three? Is it possible?"

"Three would be unlikely to survive."

"If you helped me, I could try." Oh Gods, was he mad?

His mother's response was slow in coming. "You could try."

Hyll gave a silent groan.

"You wish to do this for yourself?" Astra asked.

"For Three...and perhaps for you."

His mother stayed quiet but Hyll knew he was right. "I want to send him home to Earth," he whispered.

She gave a low sigh. "How did you know?"

"Mother, your manipulative skills are undiminished but I've grown up. You ensured I took this job. You knew I would be intrigued by him."

"I thought perhaps..."

"Yes," Hyll choked out. "I love him but he doesn't love me. He loves Lucy."

"Love. The word is forbidden, you know."

Hyll snorted. "Who made such a stupid rule? It needs to be changed."

His mother laughed. "You were always my number one troublemaker."

Hyll smiled and then the smile slipped. "And my sister is good child number two."

"Three is the child I was forbidden. Three the alien. I thought you two would be friends."

"Where did you find him?"

"Collection trip to Earth."

"*Zimpra* shit, you collect humans?"

"A short-term policy no longer in operation. You know the reproduction rate of Syobwocs is falling. Research suggests it's linked to temperature change. With the problem of our failing sun and lower growth rates of plants, a smaller population might not appear such a bad thing, but it was decided we needed to look for compatible species who live in cold climes, those whose breeding rates appear unaffected by or adapted to the low temperatures."

Hyll was astounded.

"That experiment continues though no more humans have been taken. Perhaps that work is of as much value as the missions of the Colonizers. But Three was not chosen. He had fallen from a vessel in Earth's southern ocean and was about to freeze. I plucked him from the sea."

"And saved his life."

"Though not his memory. The others had their memories removed but I couldn't remove what wasn't there."

"Others?"

"Those selected were bioengineered to live with us on Syobwoc, to work with us...and fly with us."

"How do we tell one from another?"

"You don't. That's the whole point."

"But Three —"



"Is different. Something about him touched me. He reminded me of you. I implanted memories but he didn't trust them. He was the only one who'd ever questioned. *Where was the explosion? Why did only I survive? What were my parents like? Why are there no pictures of them?* I thought he deserved another chance so I made sure both of you were on the Colonizer. I thought his memory might return when he saw his home planet. Your reports showed me it did, in part."

"He thought you'd blocked his emotions."

"He has the same blockers as everyone else on Syobwoc but his response was different, his sexual behavior a strong indicator that something was wrong. Or maybe that something was right. I've always been intrigued by what we Syobwocs are missing."

Hyll stroked Three's hair. "Why didn't you give him a proper name?"

"I felt it would be wrong. He already had a name, he just needed to find it again. For me, he'll always be Three."

"How am I going to explain what's happened?" Gods, had he whined?

"You're now the commander. You'll find a way. Think about the whole mission not just about Three. We might all have to leave Syobwoc but you could find the answer. You have responsibilities beyond this man. If you let Three pass on now, there will be no blame attached to you. If you operate, you could be held responsible for his death, possibly for engineering Caled's death. The risk is high that Three will die during surgery or shortly afterwards. Don't give the Earth woman false hope. When you have decided what to do, we'll talk again."

Hyll cut the link. He thought his head was going to explode.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Hyll walked into the Pleasure Dome, all noise stopped and every face turned his way. His heart thumped and bumped as if it were trying to escape his chest. He took a deep breath. Whether crew or B, everyone on board now depended on him.

"Everyone knows what took place a few *milos* ago. Pointless debating what brought us to this point." Gods, he hoped no one wanted to. He closed his eyes for a moment. "All that matters is how we proceed from here. Caled's behavior had been giving me increasing cause for concern. Even before the arrival of Lucy his treatment of the Bs and crew was unpredictable."

A buzz went around the room.

"Lucy appears to be some kind of catalyst. Her presence triggered behavioral changes in not just the Bs but the crew as well. In one respect, Caled was right. Lucy's continued presence on board could be detrimental to the mission. But whereas Caled wished her dead, I wish her safely home."

The sound of humming grew louder.

Hyll took a deep breath. "I rule that Caled died by Yeba's hand in an accident."

Astonished gasps came from every direction. Yeba was the B killed by Caled. Hyll would have to alter the log but he didn't want Vileda blamed for something that ultimately wasn't her fault. She might have tried to kill Lucy in the pool but she'd stabbed Caled to protect "the queen". Interesting phrase, Hyll thought. Did she consider Lucy the queen? Was Lucy a threat to him?

"Caled's body will be cremated and his ashes retained for his family."

Then no one would know Hyll had taken his heart.

"Three?" someone called.

"Three...died saving the woman he loved."

For a moment, Hyll couldn't speak. He sensed Zend at his shoulder and straightened his back. "The mission continues but with one additional focus. We look for an uninhabited planet that could sustain life. If any crew or Bs wish to settle there and not return to Syobwoc, I'll do everything I can to ensure your success. Any questions?"

There were a few and Hyll answered them as best he could. Finally he dismissed the meeting. Only Vasp and his yellow jackets were left. They'd acted as Caled's guard. Would they now be his?

"You have our full support," Vasp said, and Hyll tried to keep the relief from his face. "It would be my honor to return Lucy to her home."

"I've already agreed to do that," Zend said.

*What? When?* Hyll forced himself not to look at Zend.

Vasp frowned. "You're a Pleasure B. You can't fly a shuttle."

"I'm trained to fly the Colonizer," Zend said. "I'm working undercover for the Cadre."

Hyll's jaw hit the floor and bounced. Vasp raised his eyebrows, but then nodded and he and the others left. Once the door was shut, Hyll turned to Zend. "Working undercover?"

"Caled was under investigation following questionable command choices in his last mission. His father's influence allowed him control of a Colonizer but the Cadre wanted him watched. The destruction of the Pleasure B confirmed they were right to worry about him."

Hyll gulped. "But I thought you were a Pleasure B. Oh fuck." Zend smiled. Hyll glared. "B for bastard. Why did you let me think —"

"I had no choice. Not at first. Then things changed. I changed. The mission changed." He ran his thumb over Hyll's lips.

"Can you really fly this lump of *etah* shit?"

"Yes and no. Is there a manual?" Zend asked.

Hyll let out a short laugh. "I need one on how to do a heart transplant."

Zend's eyes brightened. "You're going to try?"

"Once Lucy is off the ship. The chances of Three surviving are not high. I don't want her to expect too much."

"Is Three stable?"

"Yes."

"Your presence is not required in the med lab?"

Hyll shook his head. "No, he and Caled are being monitored."

"You need to relax."

"I do?"

Zend took his hand and pulled him through to the pools.

"We shouldn't," Hyll muttered.

But as soon as Zend began to remove his clothing, Hyll managed to be the first one naked. He dragged Zend over to the showers. Hyll's butt hit the cold wall while Zend's hot body heated his front. Hands all over each other, they thrust themselves against the other, kissing, fighting, mauling until Hyll thought he would explode with lust.

"You know how much I want you?" Zend pressed his mouth to Hyll's ear.

The rush of warm air sent Hyll weak at the knees. The rasp of Zend's tongue lapping at the column of his neck dragged a gasp from his throat. Then his chance to breathe was gone because Zend claimed his mouth, made it his own, speared into it with his tongue while he rubbed his cock against Hyll's thigh.

The sudden deluge of icy water made them both gasp.

"*Zimpra* shit. Did you know we stood under the wrong shower?" Hyll asked.

Zend laughed and pulled Hyll into the next bay. "This will be hot."

He spun Hyll around so Hyll's back rested against his chest and Zend's back pressed against the wall. As the warm water poured down, Zend ran his hands over Hyll's body. Hyll laid his head against Zend's shoulder and reached behind to cup his backside. He massaged the muscular glutes and pulled Zend's rigid length tight against him. Hyll's cock throbbed and pulsed, desperate for Zend's touch, pearls of pre-cum washing away under the flow. Zend kissed his way along Hyll's shoulder while his hands slid lower and lower.

Hyll's throat clogged with lust. He twisted his head to capture Zend's lips and dipped in and out of his sweet heat. Their tongues glided together as they held each other tight. All the emotion of the last few *milos* began to seep away. The only thing that mattered was this moment. Zend's hand closed around Hyll's cock and he dragged his oily fist up and down. *Where'd he get lube?* Hyll wondered and then gave himself up to the sensation, arching his hips into Zend's thrust, feeling Zend's stiff cock rubbing the cleft of his backside.

"I need to come," Hyll said with a moan.

"Not yet." Zend maneuvered him until the water sprayed over his cock head.

Hyll swallowed a whimper as pain and pleasure rode side by side. Hand over hand, fist over fist, Zend pumped and squeezed Hyll toward release. He nibbled along the line of Hyll's collarbone and Hyll felt the familiar tightening in his balls. His fingers sank into Zend's buttocks and the muscles of his chest quivered in excitement. Fiery jolts flashed along his spine as his breathing quickened.

"Oh Gods," Hyll gasped.

Zend gripped him tighter, pumped him harder, bit down more sharply on his shoulder and Hyll's eyes closed. Electric spasms jumped from his spinal cord to his balls.

"Zend." Hyll cried out his name as his cum flew from his cock. He sagged back into Zend but didn't fall. His lover cradled him with his body. *Lover!*

"I love you," Hyll whispered. One lesson learned from this mess.

"I love you too."

Zend spun Hyll around to face the shower wall and his mouth blazed a trail of hot kisses down his back and along the crease of his backside. When he spread the cheeks of Hyll's butt and ran his tongue around his anus, Hyll shook. Zend gently licked and then pressed with his tongue, applying pressure over the whole area. Hyll's toes curled and he turned his face to the water. When he felt a hand on his cock he groaned, took in a mouthful of water and coughed.

"No more."

But his cock had other ideas and it stirred in Zend's grasp. Zend moved his mouth to the strip of flesh between his anus and his balls and Hyll began to moan and buck his hips. Then Zend's mouth was gone and his finger played there instead, circling around the center, stroking and nudging as Hyll willed his body to relax.

Zend gave a quiet chuckle. "You're so beautiful. You've no idea how much I want you. Weak but very strong. Cool and yet passionate. Funny and kind."

His deep voice lulled Hyll into pushing down and a finger slipped inside his asshole, gliding though the ring of muscle with little resistance. Hyll groaned as his cock grew under the ministrations of Zend's fingers. A second finger joined the first in his anus and Hyll sucked in a breath at the burn. When Zend swiveled his fingers in a scissoring action, Hyll's cock burst back to life.

"Zend," Hyll gasped.

Zend plunged his fingers in and out of Hyll's anus and each driving thrust sent Hyll's knees into collision with the shower wall.

"Now," Hyll pleaded.

Zend withdrew his fingers, washed them under the flow of the shower and stood leaning against Hyll's back, panting into his shoulder, his cock pressing at the entrance to Hyll's body. Hyll sighed at the almost painful pressure of the rounded crown slipping through the muscle barrier. Zend buried his face in Hyll's neck, his breathing fast and choppy. Then he thrust home.

"Ah Gods." Hyll panted while his body adjusted to the intrusion.

Zend held himself taut, up to his balls inside Hyll's channel, his fingers dancing over the hard disks of his nipples while he nibbled Hyll's neck.

"Move, you piece of *zimpra* shit."

Zend laughed and the vibrations rippled into Hyll.

"Now," Hyll begged.

Zend bent his knees and thrust up as Hyll drove his hips down. Hyll moaned and whimpered, squeezing down on Zend's cock. Hyll felt every burning inch of Zend's thrust, every inch of his withdrawal through the nerve-rich lining of his anus. Zend's thighs encased his, the friction of their bodies sliding against each other forcing Hyll to tighten harder around Zend's cock, while his fingers pressed into the shower wall.

He shouldn't be able to come again so soon but the ache in his balls was unmistakable. Zend jerked faster and faster, each stroke stronger, deeper, rougher.

"Feels so good," Hyll mumbled.

He wanted to tell Zend exactly how it made him feel but the words clogged up his throat. Zend was gasping and gulping at his back, then suddenly he was gone and Hyll found himself turned so his back was plastered against the wall. Zend raised Hyll's arms to the ridge above their heads, bent his fingers over the edge and smiled.

"Hang on."

Zend lifted Hyll's thighs, positioned his cock over the eager entrance to Hyll's body and thrust back inside him. They stared at each other as their hips kissed, water sluicing down their bodies, the sucking, slapping sound growing louder.

"Hold tight," Zend said and released his hold on Hyll's hips to grab his cock.

He squeezed as he thrust up, and when Zend's cock brushed his gland, Hyll gave a low growl. Zend had the hips of a snake, twisting, turning, driving Hyll insane. He left his gland alone for a few thrusts but when he canted his hips and squeezed Hyll's cock, the end was inevitable. Hyll's balls caught fire, his muscles locked down and as Zend's cock swelled inside him, Hyll came and came and came.

It was a while before either man could speak.

"*Zimpra* shit," Zend whispered. "What was that?"

"I think we're stuck," Hyll said.

Zend laughed and pressed his lips against Hyll's ear. "I've something important to tell you."

Hyll's heart slumped into his stomach. He always feared the worst.

"I don't like sugar in my tea," Zend said.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

*The flowers of the Bleeding Heart are delicate pink hearts that hang from arching stems.  
While inside the pods of the Heartseed plant lie three perfect white heart seeds.*

Lucy opened her eyes and sat bolt upright. Alone in bed. Her room. Everything looked the same. Picture on the opposite wall still hung askew. Dirty washing draped everywhere but the laundry basket. Her collection of Care Bears heaped on the chair. Was it a dream?

She still wore her star pajamas and a little part of her never wanted to take them off. Lucy checked the alarm clock. Six in the morning. She clambered off the bed, heart racing ahead of her and flung open the curtains.

No spaceship but the devastation was still there. Not a dream, though she'd never believe it was. Three had taken her to the stars and died so that she could come home. If Three lived, Hyll wouldn't have returned her to Earth. Swamped by a deluge of grief, Lucy's lungs locked and her eyes filled with tears. While she was still on the Colonizer, she'd hoped. Now she was home, all the hope had gone. Lucy wanted to be happy she'd known Three, wanted to take comfort from all he'd given her, wanted her heart to be full of the love they'd shared—even if he didn't know it was love—but all she felt was empty and lost.

She padded downstairs and into the kitchen. The plate he'd used lay on the table, the knife and fork neatly placed side by side, and the lump in her throat threatened to choke her. Lucy ran her finger along the handle of the fork then brought her hand to her lips.

When she turned to the window, she saw a clear globe sitting on the blue tiled sill. It was about twelve inches tall, the bottom third filled with earth and growing in it were the two little plants Lucy had put together in the biodome. The gift from the Bs touched her deeply. The blue flowers were out, heads leaning toward each other. Lucy unscrewed the top of the globe and leaned over.

"Welcome to Earth, little guys," she said. "You have any idea how special you are? Don't listen to anyone who tells you otherwise. Weed on one planet maybe but you're the only two of your kind on Earth." She furrowed her brow. "God I hope you don't run rampant once I plant you and overpower the native species. Try to control your urges."

She made herself a cup of tea and decided to go back to bed. After Three had been stabbed, Lucy had spent her time in a daze. She'd known Hyll had given her drugs but she didn't care about a world without Three.

They'd flown her back while she slept and Lucy was sad she'd not had chance to say goodbye to everyone, but maybe it was for the best. As she walked through the hall toward the stairs she saw the computer was on in the study. It hadn't been on when she'd left. She pushed open the door, ready to greet a burglar with a splash of hot tea, but the room was empty.

Lucy took a shaky breath. Not hard to figure that whoever had brought her back from the Colonizer wanted her to see something. Lucy leaned against the bookshelf, swallowed hard, then took the three paces to the computer and slid onto the chair. She put her tea down before she looked at the screen. The item was a BBC news report from four years ago about a yachtsman who'd gone missing in the Southern Ocean. Peter Prince had been sailing solo around the world in a race and his yacht had been found with no one on board. He was missing, presumed drowned. Her heart thumped so hard, Lucy could feel the echo all over her body.

His name was Prince? It had to be him. She did a search for an image, pressed enter and squeezed her eyes shut. Could this be Three? Had all those things he remembered been real memories and not implants? The fish and chips with vinegar, the tea with three sugars, the songs?

When Lucy opened her eyes, she gasped. Three stood on the deck of a huge white-sailed yacht, the wind blowing long dark hair into his eyes. The prince her father had promised her, with a broad smile on his handsome tanned face, one hand on the wheel and—*oh shit*—his arm hanging over the shoulder of a dark-haired young woman. Girlfriend or wife? Lucy thought then about his parents. They'd lost a son and Lucy had found him, and lost him again.

A little more research and she had their address. They lived twenty miles away. She gulped. So close. Was that why he'd skidded across her lawn? Had he remembered something about his home? Lucy could have phoned but thought she knew what the response of his parents would be. Better to do this face-to-face when she had a chance of persuading them she wasn't crazy. Better to do this now while she still held her nerve. Only what should she tell them? *You thought your son was dead and he wasn't, but he is now?* Maybe better not to tell them at all. Only if it were her, she'd want to know.

Lucy ran upstairs and stripped off her pajamas. She showered and dressed in her floaty pink skirt and cream T-shirt. It felt strange to wear clothes again. Even stranger to wear shoes.

Part way toward her car, Lucy realized it was a little early to go calling. She went back inside and paced until she'd rubbed her heels raw.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the door of the house opened at her knock, Lucy gasped in astonishment. "M-Mrs. Prince."

The smartly dressed gray-haired lady furrowed her brow.

"Er, you probably don't remember me. I'm Lucy Ferze—well, you probably remember the stupid name but not me. I'm not very memorable. Though I'd really like to be. Maybe one day..." Lucy broke off. *Stop babbling, idiot.* "You were my art teacher at Bentley Park School."

"Of course I remember you, Lucy."

Lucy smiled. "You do?"

"How could I forget a girl who flooded the art room twice, set fire to the kiln three times and posed nude for the eighth graders. You also made me laugh harder than anyone I've ever taught."

Oh God, now Lucy really didn't want to do this.

"So what brings you here on a Sunday morning?"

"It's...about your son, Peter."

"How did you know Peter?"

He hadn't been to Lucy's school. Probably went somewhere private.

"You weren't a girlfriend."

"No. Well..." Lucy had no idea how to say this. "I have something important to tell you."

The hope that shot into his mother's eyes sent a shockwave of pain through Lucy's heart. Thoughts ricocheted in her head as she tried to imagine what the woman was thinking. If he'd faked his death? For money? To escape from the police, two wives, drug dealers? Had he been held prisoner all this time by some off-course cold water pirates? Had she imagined he'd one day walk back into her house after regaining his memory? Lucy saw in that one look that Peter's mother had never given up hope. And Lucy knew she should have let her keep that hope alive.

"Come in."

*No run. Run away. Now.* But Lucy's feet went the wrong way and she stepped inside.

Peter's father stood at the end of the hallway. Unmistakably Three's dad, he looked just like him, only an older version. Gray hair, lined face, wrinkled skin, Three's dark eyes. Lucy had to stop herself running into his arms.

"This is Lucy Ferze, Michael. She wants to tell us something about Peter."

No hope in his father's face. Anger, Lucy thought. Distrust. Cynicism. She trembled. Lucy didn't want him to hate her.

"Well?" he asked. "Are you another quack come to give us a message from our son? Some words from the grave about how much he misses us and how much he'd like us to give money to some stranger?"

"No message," Lucy mumbled, though she could have made one up about how much he loved them.

"You've seen him?" his mother whispered.

Lucy eyed the door and then sighed. "I think you better sit down."



She followed them into an airy lounge. Photographs of Three lined the mantelpiece. Three running, skiing, sailing. Lucy tore her gaze away. She sat on the nearest chair, perched on the edge and his parents sat on the cream leather couch, holding hands.

*Mistake, mistake.* But too late. She knew she had no chance of convincing them but she wouldn't lie.

"Peter was abducted by aliens."

His father laughed, though there was no joy in it. "Well, we really have heard everything now. This is a new one, I'll give you that. What's in it for you? Newspaper article? Guest spot on a TV talk show? You get off on interfering in people's lives?"

"How do you know?" asked his mother.

"He landed his spaceship in my garden and then took me with him."

Michael Prince leapt to his feet. "Out. Now."

Lucy jumped up. She hadn't thought this through. How stupid could she be? "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I just wanted you to know how brave he was and how much I loved him." A tear slipped down her cheek and she brushed it away.

"Brave?" his mother asked.

"Judy, don't listen to her." He put his arm around his wife's shoulders and turned to Lucy. "Get out of our house and don't come back. You should be ashamed of yourself."

As Lucy rushed past, his mother caught her arm. "Is he dead?"

"Judy! Don't be so stupid."

Lucy nodded her head. "He died saving me. I'm sorry."

Then Lucy did what she should have done before she opened her mouth—she ran.

Once she'd driven out of sight of the house, she pulled up and sobbed against the wheel. Of all the insane things she'd done in her life—and there was a long list—that had to be the worst. How could she have thought she'd bring comfort? Instead she'd dragged up the tragedy all over again.

She could have mentioned the things that Three had remembered—the tea with three sugars, fish and chips with vinegar, the songs, only they didn't prove anything. His DNA would have been on her pajamas but when they'd been cleaned of blood, Lucy suspected they'd been cleaned of everything else as well. His fingerprints would be on the cutlery but—Lucy sat up straight. She had to let this go. Nothing would bring Three back.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy was in the middle of her second tub of cookie dough ice cream and her third romantic comedy DVD when the phone rang. The ice cream had made her feel ill and she hadn't laughed once at the films. Life was tasteless, meaningless and empty. Weeks had gone by since she'd been to see Three's parents and nothing had changed. Well, one

thing had. She wasn't sure she could stand to be this unhappy. Lucy knew in time that life would improve but it didn't make it any easier now. The phone rang again. Lucy hauled herself to her feet and snatched up the receiver.

"Hello?" she said.

"This is Love calling Earth."

Lucy dropped the phone. That ice cream needed a warning. Eat too much and you'll hallucinate with your ears. Or maybe it was the movies. Watch too many and you'll think they're real, that there's always a "happy ever after". The phone lay on the carpet. Venomous spitting cobra or unutterable, inestimable, unimaginable bliss? She picked it up, took a deep breath and said, "This is Earth calling Love."

"Lucy."

"Wha...what...wh-where...h-how..." She gave up.

"It's me."

"I...I don't need the drive paving or double glazing."

"*Zimpra* shit and I was in the neighborhood. I could offer you a good deal on a conservatory."

"In the locality?"

"Not far away."

"How far?"

"Outside your back door."

Lucy clutched the phone as she walked across the room. "Keep talking."

"What do you want me to say?"

"That you're not dead. That you've come back for me. That you don't have a bulbous suppurating rib cage bristling with eyes."

"Maybe you better not open the door."

She laughed. Her heart was so full she feared it would burst. Lucy wasn't sure she'd remembered to breathe since she'd picked up the phone after she dropped it. She slid back the bolt and opened the door.

"Ah, still in pajamas," Three said.

"Different ones." This pair was blue, covered in clouds. "Oh God." Was she imagining this? Had she missed him so much she'd conjured him up? Her knees buckled and Three caught her.

Three couldn't believe he held her, wouldn't believe it until he was buried inside her and had his cock wrapped in her soft warmth. He kicked the door closed behind him and carried her to the stairs.

"Put me down," she shrieked.

Three dropped her.

Lucy glared up at him from the floor. "Gently would have been nice. I was worried about you. You don't want to strain anything."

Three knelt at her side. "I'm fine." Thanks to Hyll's skill and a quick recovery, he was almost as good as new. He tugged her top over her head and sighed at the sight of her breasts. He swallowed hard. Now, he was fine.

"Hyll told me you were dead."

"I was as good as dead but Hyll maintained my bio systems and then operated on my heart. His mother, back on Syobwoc, guided his hand. She's the surgeon who's saved me three times. Once from the ocean, the second time on Syobwoc and the third time on the Colonizer."

"You know who you are?"

"No, but it shouldn't be difficult to find out. I was on my own on a yacht and I'll have been declared missing, presumed dead. There'll be news reports. I remember some things. Hyll told me as much as he knew. I don't remember everything about life on Earth. Not yet."

Lucy pulled his shirt over his head. She chewed her lips when she saw the scar on his chest.

"Hyll could have got rid of it but I couldn't wait. Can't wait." He trailed his finger down her breast to her nipple.

Lucy tsked. "Oh dear, you're not perfect anymore."

He laughed. "I was *perfect*?"

"Your body was. Still, now it's beautiful. How delicate are you?" Lucy asked.

"Not delicate at all."

"So you're up to sorting out that mess you made in my backyard?"

"Come to think of it, I need to go to bed and be looked after."

He scooped her into his arms and stood up. "Where's the bedroom?"

"Up the stairs. I could walk."

"No. I never want you out of my arms again."

"That could be tricky when I need to use the bathroom. Or the Ladies. How would you explain that? Or when I go to work, I—"

Three stopped her lovely mouth with a kiss. Lucy wrapped her arms around his neck and his cock made a desperate attempt to break through the fastening of his pants. He picked a partly open door, kicked it wider and stopped kissing her as he looked at the mess.

"Is this yours? Remember you're not going to get away with telling me you have some incredibly untidy housemate. I know you live here alone."

"I've been—"

"No, you haven't been burgled."

"I've been waiting."

Three laid her on the bed and tugged on the bottoms of her pajamas. Lucy lifted her hips to help.

"Waiting for what?" he asked, tossing pajamas aside. His gaze fixed on Lucy's slender body.

"Waiting for an incredibly tidy housemate to share my life."

"Wait's over."

He toed off his footwear, kicked them aside, shucked out of his pants and launched them across the room. Lucy rolled her eyes. His cock wavered and then seemed to point straight at her.

"Homing device?" she asked with a grin.

He laughed and lowered himself on top of her, keeping his weight from crushing her by resting on his forearms.

Three brushed kisses across her cheeks and the tip of her nose before he hovered his mouth over her lips. He still couldn't believe he was here, that they were together. They traded air as they stared into each other's eyes and his heart squeezed in his chest. Caled's heart. He didn't want to think about that. Not all Caled's, Hyll had told him, part his, part engineered.

"Are you going to take all day to kiss me?" Lucy asked.

"Thinking about it."

"You...you are here for good? You don't have to go back? Or have you come to collect me? I'd go with you. If you wanted me to. Only this time, I want to pack some clothes and shoes and a few thousand books. I've already counted all the dimples—"

He pressed his lips against hers and she moaned into his mouth. Her arms curled over his back and pulled him down. Three felt as though he was discovering her for the first time, as crazed with lust as that first time. Maybe he ought to have emptied his balls in the shuttle before he got to her door. Only he suspected it wouldn't have made any difference. Lucy drove him insane with desire. He explored her mouth, nibbled the fleshy pad of her lower lip, traced the line of her teeth, teased with his tongue.

His cock ached, straining at the leash like a pit bull. How could he ever go anywhere with her? She induced a permanent erection. He'd get arrested.

Long jackets.

Then he stopped thinking and dropped a line of kisses along the curve of her neck to her breasts. Her nipples were already hard rosy tips and when he rolled over them with his tongue she let out a series of little moans and cries. He loved making her do that. Three dropped lower. He needed a taste of everything. He needed to make her come now because it was only going to take one thrust in her wet heat and his balls would explode.

Three trailed a wet tongue down her belly as she ran her fingers through his hair. He reached to cup her breasts as he licked and sucked her sweet cream into his mouth.

When he touched the little nub of her clit, Lucy arched her back and unraveled against his face and Three buried his tongue inside her, swallowing her nectar.

He wanted to keep his mouth there until she came down but he was in danger of spurting on the bed. Hardly the way to impress her. Three shifted up her body, held himself braced on his arms, his hips pressed against her and he slid home. Lucy released a long, satisfied sigh as she stared into his eyes.

"If you move one muscle, I'll come," Three choked out.

She winked.

He was undone. "*Zimpra* shit."

## Chapter Twenty-Five

*Roses are symbols of friendship, peace and love. The Lucy Brilliant Sunbeam Pineapple Princess  
Rose is one of a kind. Scientists are still trying to figure it out.*

Three rolled to his side and held Lucy tight. "I love you."

Not the time to ask if he knew what it meant. "Good." Lucy kissed his nose.

"But."

She pulled back on the pillow to look at him. "There's a but? How can there but a but? No, no butts."

"Shhh."

"Don't tell me to shhh."

"You're going to have to learn to do as you're told."

She narrowed her eyes. "I don't think so. You're not the boss of me."

"Didn't I tell you not to move a muscle?"

"Yes, but —"

"Talking of butts." Three whisked her around and before Lucy knew was what happening, she lay sprawled across his lap. "I always keep my promises. Well, at least the ones I remember." He slapped her backside.

"Hey."

Three pushed her head down.

"That was one," he said.

Lucy squirmed. She hadn't thought she'd like being smacked but Three hadn't hurt her and somehow every one of her nerve endings had zipped to a state of high alert verging on excitement.

The flat of his palm came down again and Lucy yelped. Oh, she was wet.

"Two," Three said. "Oh Gods, your butt's gone all pink and rosy."

Lucy felt rosy all over as though she'd lowered herself into a hot bath after she'd been out in the cold. She tingled as her body warmed.

"Three."

His hand came down to make contact and Lucy lurched against him, her toes curled and her fists clenched.

"Now the best bit," Three said and maneuvered her until she lay facedown on the bed. "I get to kiss your lovely backside better."

"Maybe I better tell you what I've done because you might not have finished with the smacking," Lucy mumbled into the pillow.

Three turned her head to face him. "What could you have possibly done this time?"

"Tell me you love me again first. Just in case I never hear it anymore."

He frowned and Lucy sighed.

"I love you, Lucy. I loved you from the moment I saw you run your fingers along my shuttle—and I'm not sure I can ever repeat that to anyone and not have them snigger—only I didn't know it was love. I do now. I still can't believe that out of Earth's six billion inhabitants, I was lucky enough to crash-land in your garden."

"I've been wondering about that. What exactly did Hyll tell you?"

From the puzzled look on his face—not a lot.

"Thing is, I know who you are," Lucy whispered.

"Th—"

She put her finger on his lips. "Your name is Bon Jovi Keanu Brad George Johnny Orlando Denzel—"

He put his finger on her lips. Lucy licked it away.

"Peter Prince," she said.

He laughed. "Try again. That was a rather pathetic attempt to get the prince your father promised you."

"No, that really is your name—Peter Prince."

She watched his face for some sign of recognition but there was none.

"Peter. Peter." He repeated the name and furrowed his brow.

"Four years ago you were sailing solo around the world and you went missing from your yacht. You must have fallen overboard. You were rescued by aliens."

"Hyll said his mother saved me. She was the one who bioengineered me."

Lucy nodded.

"Hyll told me a little but... Oh Gods. God." He gave a choked laugh. "She called me Three. Hyll said she called him One and his sister Two."

"Ah, it was a term of affection. The best name she could give you when she didn't know your real one."

"Hyll said his mother made sure I was on the Colonizer because she knew I'd fly one of the missions to Earth."

"I think she even made sure it was the one to Yorkshire. This is where you come from."

Lucy watched the Adam's apple in his throat move up and down.

"I crashed because I was distracted." He took a shaky breath. "Did I know you from before?"

She shook her head. "I tried to brain you with Eros, remember."

"That—I haven't forgotten. " He gave her a mock-glare.

Lucy's heart thundered. "Only there *are* people you know who live nearby." She took a deep breath. "Your parents. I checked to see if you had a girlfriend or a wife. You don't." She'd belatedly read everything she could find about him, not that there was much. "You have three sisters. One brother."

"And I have parents?"

She nodded.

"Who think I'm dead. They all think I'm dead. Family. Friends." He rolled onto his back. "What will I tell them?"

Lucy dragged her chewed nail from her mouth. Nothing left of the false one now. "The truth?"

Three snorted with laughter. "I'm not idiotic enough to do that. I'd get locked up in a mental hospital."

She cringed. "I went to see your mum and dad."

Three rolled to face her. "Oh Gods, Lucy. You didn't tell them I'd abducted you in my spaceship?"

"I might have."

He glared and tickled her under her arms.

"Yes, yes, yes, I did."

"What did they say?"

"Your dad told me to get out. Your mum wanted to believe me. Only I told her you'd died saving me."

He gave her an anguished look. "I don't remember them."

"Maybe you will when you meet them. You remembered some things about Earth—the songs and liking three sugars with your tea. I think you'll remember everything in time. I can help you. You can live here with me. I'll look after you, feed you, water you...um...have sex with you."

"Until you said that last part, I was wondering if you thought I was a plant."

"You do have a hard woody stem filled with rising sap." Lucy wrapped her fingers around his cock. "And I do have a way with plants."

His eyes twinkled. "Really? I don't remember."

She lowered her head and licked the glistening head of his erection.

"Remember now?" she asked.

"Not yet."

Lucy ran her tongue down the length of his shaft and then took it into her mouth, letting the silky cock head rub against the inside of her cheek while she teased further down with her tongue.

Three growled. "Don't stop. I'm starting to remember."



Lucy stroked the line down the middle of his balls with her thumb and pumped his cock between her lips, tightening her mouth as she dragged his shaft out.

"Aarrgghh."

Her tongue delved into the salty slit at the head of his cock and as she pulsed her tongue, Three's hips bucked.

"I remember, I remember," he choked out and pulled her up to straddle his body. "Is it okay if the first fifteen times are fast if I promise to go slow on the sixteenth?"

Lucy laughed.

"I hope you can't count," he whispered and lifted her so he could ease her onto his cock.

Lucy rode him slowly, pushing down to take all of him inside her and then pulling up until only the very tip of him remained inside.

"You're going to turn me into a babbling idiot," he said with a deep groan.

She moved from a rising trot to a canter, squeezing him hard with her pussy muscles and her thighs as ribbons of heat began to wind through her body. Her breathing quickened to match Three's and when he grabbed her buttocks and slammed her down on his balls, Lucy's chest tightened. She dropped flat to kiss him, and as he drove her body down onto his, their tongues met and dueled, met and played, met and caressed.

Lucy was overwhelmed with a flurry of sensations. Three's balls colliding against her soaked swollen lips, his hands gripping her hips, thumbs pressing into her skin, his hot mouth stealing her air, feeding her air. Tightening spasms seized her body and as his tongue speared her mouth more violently, his cock shifted into a frenzy and Lucy's world exploded. Her vision gone, she flew into a dark abyss, falling in ecstasy. She let out a long, echoing wail and felt his cum rush into her as he cried out beneath her.

Three cradled her in his arms. Lucy could feel his heart hammering. This was almost too much to believe.

"What are you thinking?" he whispered.

"How lucky I am. Thanking God or Gods and Hyll and his mum for saving you."

"You missed out the most important person."

Lucy thought for a moment. "Oh yes, Vileda. If she hadn't missed me and hit Caled, I might not be here for you to be brought back to."

"Vileda was aiming for Caled. It's not clear if it was you or Hyll she wanted to save. Because she said 'queen', Hyll wants it to be you." He sniggered.

Lucy lifted her head to look at him. "Me?"

"I'm sure it was. They saw you as their leader, their teacher, their champion. Even Vileda was eventually convinced by her co-Bs that you and everything you stood for had to be protected. You gave something to the Bs they didn't have. A capacity to have fun and to care. You gave something back to me that I'd lost. My humanity. I'm the lucky one."

Lucy smiled. "I suppose our lives are going to be boring now stuck here on Earth. We'll have to make do with sex, sex and more sex."

Three laughed.

"I sort of miss the Bs," Lucy said with a sigh. "Is Hyll going to be all right? You do know how he feels about you?"

"He'll be fine. He has a lot to keep him busy."

Lucy raised her eyebrows.

"When the Colonizer allows him to breathe, Zend takes his breath away."

She smiled. "I'm glad. I didn't want him to be lonely."

"Turns out Zend has something in common with me and you."

Her eyes widened. "He's addicted to sex?"

Three laughed. "He's from Earth."

"Oh my God." Lucy's brain slipped right into gear. "Does he want to come back? Does he have someone we should tell? I'd let you do it. They'd probably believe you. But I don't mind if you want me to tell them. He —"

"Shhhh." Three put a finger over her lips. "No he doesn't want to come back. Not at the moment anyway. He *does* have relatives but he doesn't want them to be told anything. So you have to keep quiet. Unlike me, he remembers everything." He moved his finger. "Hyll sent you a present by the way."

"Oooh, I love presents. Where is it?"

"Outside, in the garden."

She jumped up and ran for the door.

"Lucy. Clothes."

"No need. The garden's private."

As she ran downstairs, she heard Three coming after her. He bumped into her back as she stood at the door. A bush sat in a pot. It was smothered in roses and every one was a different color.

"Oh my God," Lucy gasped. "How did he do that? Has he grafted them in some way?"

"Hyll said that any cutting from this bush will produce a clone. Another plant with the same multicolored flowers."

"My dad would have..."

"Loved it?"

Lucy laughed. "No, he'd have hated it but I love it. I love it, love it, love it. Love you."

She turned and kissed him.

"There's something else," Three said.

Lucy turned to look. "What?"

"I mended Eros."

"Ha, so you did." The statue stood at the side of the garden. Not where she normally had it. "I'll just go and put it on its plinth."

"Lucy!"

She ran down onto the lawn.

"Stop," Three shouted.

"Why – *oomph*."

He ran to her side, reached down and pulled her up.

"Oh my God," Lucy whispered. "They let you keep one?" As she touched it, the shuttle materialized in front of her. "Did I do that? No you did it. How did you do it? You're not wearing any clothes. Where did you hide the remote? Did I turn it on?"

She looked at his swelling cock and Three chuckled. "You turn me on but the ship's linked to my brain. I can think it visible or invisible." He paused. "Just to be clear, I mean the ship, not my cock."

"So life's not going to be boring at all," she said with a grin.

He pulled her back against his chest and slid one hand between her legs, the other over a breast. "I quite like the sound of the sex, sex and more sex."

"But now we can have it anywhere in the world. Even Hawaii."

"Even among the stars."

She sighed. "We can't tell anyone otherwise they'll take the shuttle and they'll split us up for years for debriefing. And then they'll pretend the shuttle never existed and that we're crazy and we'll get locked –"

"We won't tell anyone." He tapped her lips.

Lucy groaned. "Your parents are going to think I'm a lunatic."

"I think we could trust them with our secret, only I'm going to have to remember more about me first so I can convince them of who I am."

"One look and your mum will know. She wanted to believe me. I think we should go there right now."

"Not yet." He tugged her back toward the house.

In the kitchen Three stopped to look at the flowers on the windowsill. "Aren't they –?"

"They're not weeds," Lucy said. "They're two very special plants."

"No, there are three."

Lucy leaned over. Nestled in the soil at the foot of the two larger plants was a tiny shoot. Her heart did a little skip and jump. She squeezed Three's hand. "Come and lie down. I've got something exciting to tell you."

As Lucy walked out of the kitchen, she glanced through the window. There really was a spaceship in her garden. She'd turned out to be extraordinarily out-of-this-world lucky.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

Lucy stood at the bottom of the stairs, tapping her fingers on the banister. "Three. Hurry. We're going to be late."

"One minute," he shouted.

She knew he was nervous. Three months since he'd come home and he still hadn't contacted his parents. In the beginning Lucy understood his reticence. He didn't even remember what they looked like. How the hell could he explain where he'd been? Even if he told his mum and dad the truth, what did he expect them to tell their friends and neighbors? What could he tell the authorities?

The ball of truth unraveled slowly. He'd left no house waiting for him when he'd gone on his round-the-world yacht trip. There was no job to come back to. No bills left unpaid. He'd sold off most of his belongings and left the rest with his parents. Three hadn't been declared dead. Unnecessary for seven years to pass if the circumstances were such that he couldn't have survived but there had been no application to list him as deceased. His mum's doing, Lucy guessed. His life insurance had never been claimed, which avoided the issue of fraud but his reappearance after he'd gone missing presumed drowned would have the press sniffing at his heels from the moment he resurfaced.

She looked up to see him walking slowly down the stairs, his face paler than usual. He wore dark pants and a white linen shirt and Lucy's heart did a wolf-whistle at the sight of him. She wrapped her fingers around his and squeezed.

"Hello, handsome Earthman."

"Hello, gorgeous Earthwoman."

"It will be fine," she said.

"What if they don't believe me?"

She rolled her eyes. "We've been over and over this. One look at you and your mum will know. Come on." Lucy tugged him through the door and over to the car. "I'll drive."

Three snagged the keys from her fingers. "No, I'll drive. I'm nervous enough without driving from the passenger seat trying to depress an invisible brake every few minutes. I have no idea how you passed your driving test."

He opened the door for Lucy to get in, then went round to the other side.

Lucy pouted when he sat beside her. "What's wrong with the way I drive?"

Three raised his eyebrows. "Listening to you say – passenger pavement – every few minutes so you remember which side of the road to drive on, doesn't do much for my confidence."

"Good job you don't hear me say ABC then."

"I hardly dare ask."

"Accelerator, brake, clutch. To make sure I have them in the right order only I sometimes forget which side to start."

Three shuddered. "Once I get access to my bank account, I'm buying you an automatic. One less pedal to remember." He reached over to click her seatbelt into place and patted her stomach. "Remember you have my son in there to take care of."

"Daughter."

"Son."

Lucy laughed. His memory had come back in fits and starts. He'd been glued to the TV for days, then devoured the internet. She'd enjoyed taking him out and watching his eyes light up when he remembered something. Food was the big one. He drooled over fish and chips, salivated over roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and he even liked cabbage. Weirdo. He remembered what he'd done for a living before he'd gone missing—boat designer, and more importantly remembered how to draw boats—she'd made him try, so he could earn a living doing it again. Strangely enough he couldn't remember how to iron or wash dishes. Lucy had told him to learn fast or else.

She hadn't enjoyed his teasing when he'd pretended to recall he had a wife and four kids, though Lucy hadn't realized she could punch that hard. Maybe it was where she hit him.

"What are you grinning about?" Three asked as he pulled onto the main road.

"That time I thumped you."

"A lucky shot."

"Which you deserved."

"Absolutely."

Lucy had ensured Judy and Michael Prince would be at home that morning by ringing a week ago and setting up an appointment. She told them a sailing institute to which their son had belonged was considering setting up a memorial and would like to discuss it. Lucy tugged Three up the path to the front door and then pushed him to one side.

"Your mum might faint. Let's see if your dad answers."

She knocked and took a step back.

Michael Prince opened the door. Lucy thought again how much Three looked like him.

"You probably don't remember—" Lucy began.

"How could I forget you? You're the lunatic who claimed my son was abducted by aliens and was killed trying to help you. You upset my wife. What is it now? He didn't really die and you want money to launch a rescue attempt?"

"No need. She did it all on her own." Three stepped to her side. "Hello, Dad."

Lucy looked between the two of them. Neither took their gaze from the other.

"Peter?" his father whispered. "Am I seeing things? Is—is this a trick? W—what—I—oh God." He staggered against the doorframe.

"Michael, don't keep our visitors standing on the doorstep. Invite—" Three's mother came into the hall and a sound came from her mouth that Lucy had never heard before. A strangled gasp of shock, fear and utter joy.

Judy swayed but thanks to her son's fast reflexes she slumped safe in his arms and then his dad was hugging them both. They all cried and Lucy smiled.

This was one of the best moments of her life. She'd had a lot of those recently. All featuring Three who was the best thing in her life. She wondered what she'd have done if her mum and dad suddenly knocked on her door after all these years and said they hadn't drowned but had been taken into an underwater city. Ooh, that was one she and Three hadn't thought of to explain his disappearance. There could be an Atlantis-type world under the South Pole.

She shuffled her feet and leaned against the wall. Three's mum held his face, her fingers brushing tears from his cheeks, his lips, his chin. His father clutched his hand as if he feared his son would suddenly disappear.

"You're the people coming to talk to us about a memorial, I take it," said Michael.

Lucy nodded. "We needed you to be in."

"Come and sit down. Talk to us," said Judy.

Three held his hand out to Lucy and she let herself be pulled into his embrace.

"Where have you been?" his father asked as they went into the lounge.

Three tugged Lucy onto the couch. He waited until his parents were seated before he spoke. "I was abducted by aliens."

Silence. Even the shocked clock on the mantelpiece stopped ticking.

"This unfunny joke's gone on long enough, Peter," said his father. "Whatever happened, we can help you deal with it. Tell us the truth."

"I really was abducted by aliens." He clutched Lucy's fingers.

His father narrowed his eyes. "You'll have to come up with something better than that."

Three opened his mouth and then closed it again. Lucy had told him they wouldn't believe him but he'd insisted they would. Idiot. Her idiot.

"What would be easier to believe?" Lucy asked. "That he was kidnapped by pirates and lost his memory? Perhaps he was sold into slavery. Or maybe he joined an obscure religious cult and has now seen the light. Or that he was dragged to an underwater kingdom."

"Where did that one come from?" Three asked with a laugh.

"Well all those sound plausible, except the last. Which was it?" Michael asked.

"He was abducted by aliens," whispered Judy. Her eyes opened wider. "Oh my God." She looked at Lucy. "You told the truth but I thought he was dead."

"So did I," Lucy said.

"Have you all gone stark staring bonkers," snapped Michael. "What's this mad woman done to you? Brainwashed you into believing this tripe? Maybe you're not our son but some lookalike and the pair of you have cooked up a scam between you."

Three sighed. "I trod on my first hamster and we agreed never to tell Mum."

"Oh God," his father gasped and Lucy knew he at least believed Three was his son.

"Listen," Three said. "I'm only going to tell this story once. You must never tell anyone else, not even the family. All our lives will be ruined if the authorities find out. We can say I was rescued by a ship but I was badly injured and lost my memory. In a way it's true, except it was a spaceship that picked me up."

Lucy held his hand tight as Three told his story. Tears rolled down his mother's cheeks, while his father sat pale-faced and silent.

"You know, it doesn't matter, any of it. You're home," said his father. "Your mother never gave up hope you'd turn up one day. I thought she was wrong. Now I know better." He put his arm around his wife and hugged her.

"If it hadn't been for Lucy, I'd still be on the Colonizer. She brought me back to life and I came back to Earth for her. When my yacht began to sink in freezing water, I thought I was the unluckiest guy in the world and it turned out to be the luckiest thing that's ever happened to me."

"If you don't count me braining you with Eros after you crashed in my garden."

Three smiled. "That was the moment I fell in love with you."

"Snap," said Lucy.



## **Epilogue**

“Definitely a habitable planet,” said Hyll.

Zend threw his arm over Hyll’s shoulder. “Home.”

*Colony Collapse Disorder is a strange phenomenon in which worker bees suddenly vanish from a hive. New evidence suggests they have not died off, but for reasons not yet understood may have started a new life elsewhere.*

## About the Author

Barbara Elsborg lives in West Yorkshire in the north of England. She always wanted to be a spy, but having confessed to everyone without them even resorting to torture, she decided it was not for her. Vulcanology scorched her feet. A morbid fear of sharks put paid to marine biology. So instead, she spent several years successfully selling cyanide.

After dragging up two rotten, ungrateful children and frustrating her sexy, devoted, wonderful husband (who can now stop twisting her arm), she finally has time to conduct an affair with an electrifying, plugged-in male – her laptop.

Her books feature quirky heroines and bad boys, and she hopes they are as much fun to read as they are to write.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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