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# SARAH'S PIRATE

Rachel Clark

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**Rachel Clark**

**EROTIC ROMANCE**



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# Letter from Rachel Clark

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# SARAH'S PIRATE

**RACHEL CLARK**

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## Chapter One

“Come on, baby. Come on, baby. Come on, baby.”

Okay, so the fervently whispered mantra didn't actually help her ship go faster, but at least it made her feel like it might. She glared at the red warning light as it flashed annoyingly in front of her. Yep, she knew the engines were being pushed, but seriously, considering the alternative, she'd rather be exploded into a bazillion little bits than suffer at the hands of the pirates currently pursuing her. The stories travelers shared crowded her mind and sent a horrified shiver down her spine.

“Sarah,” her only other crew member said in her strange sing-song voice. “They are jamming our long-range communications. We need to find somewhere to hide.”

Sarah glanced at the woman sitting beside her, trying hard not to roll her eyes in exasperation. G'ntriel had come highly recommended, but her ability to state the obvious had quickly started to grind on Sarah's nerves. Of course they were jamming communications! They were bloody pirates!

Searching the star chart in front of her, Sarah quickly calculated the time they would need to reach the nearest nebular, and just as quickly discarded the desperate idea. It was too far away and every nebular held its own set of dangers, not the least of which may be



more pirates. Their only hope seemed to be rescue, and considering how far they were from commercial shipping lanes, that seemed unlikely.

“The ship is gaining on us. We must find more speed.”

Sarah growled under her breath. Seriously, at the next port she was finding a new off-sider. G'ntriel's musical voice had been so fascinating at first, almost like listening to someone speak the Earth language in song, but combined with the fact that they were running for their lives and the woman was still *singing* the obvious, Sarah almost hoped the pirates would catch them. At least then, she might get some peace.

She slammed her hand against the console in front of her, trying to kid herself that she was at least doing *something*.

“Sarah, the engines are failing.”

*And the red flashing light didn't give me a clue?* Biting back the sarcastic retort, Sarah did the only thing she could think of—she cut all power.

The ship's momentum meant that they drifted in space, no control over their direction, no way to defend themselves, but they would effectively be invisible to the pirate ship's sensors. That's assuming, of course, that these pirates didn't have the ability to scan for life signs and, considering how expensive those parts were, she crossed her fingers and hoped that these pirates weren't technologically superior.

“Sarah, are you aware that you have turned off life support?”

*Oh, for fuck's sake!* “Yes,” she whispered “breathe shallow. Be quiet.”

G'ntriel stilled, leaving Sarah to wonder how long a G'trobian could survive without oxygen. Probably something she should've checked before she left port.

Without power, she had no way of knowing where the pirate ship was, so they sat in the dark and waited. Sarah figured they had about two hours worth of oxygen for two humans before they needed to

switch the power back on. Well *hopefully* switch it back on. After the way she'd shut down the engines, chances were the damn things were going to refuse to start anyway.

She tightened her seat belt as the artificial gravity failed and the weightlessness of space lifted her long auburn hair to swirl around her shoulders. The last thing she needed was to float away from the console and not be able to get back before she passed out from oxygen deprivation. She shivered as the cold also made itself known.

Damn, why on Earth did she take this assignment?

Because children on a little backwater planet called Heltor in the Flengorian system were dying and needed the medical supplies she carried. *Duh.*

She was a sucker for a good sob story and so she'd taken this run, even though she'd known her chances of success were practically zero. Man, she'd be pissed if there weren't suffering children. *Shit*, she thought, apologizing to whatever gods might be listening, that wasn't actually the way she meant it. No kids dying would be a good thing, but she'd be awfully angry if she'd been conned. She patted *little darlin'*, making sure that her favorite piece of technology was still safely in its holster. It was set to stun, not kill, but her *little darlin'* had left quite a few bad guys with a hell of a headache.

Well, dying children or not, she wasn't going to do anyone any good if she froze to death. Ten more minutes and she'd start this hunk of junk and pray that the pirates had gone away.

The absolute dark was starting to get a little unnerving, as well. Not actually having a window in a spaceship had seemed like such a good safety idea until, of course, you were floating without power, without lights, without engines...*oh, fuck...*two more minutes and then she'd start this tin can.

Her fingers drifted towards the console just as something hit the outside of the ship and everything jolted sideways. *Shit*, the pirates had found them and were probably reeling her little ship into their cargo hold. No way in hell could this be a good thing! She gripped her

seat tighter and tried to start her ship. Internal lights flickered as she worked to get essential systems back online. With the inertial dampeners off, they'd feel every twist and turn of their journey into the pirate ship. And, of course, if any speed was applied, they'd both be splatter on the wall. Absently, she wondered what color G'ntriel's blood was. Would the woman be a pink stain beside Sarah? Or would she leave a different color behind as proof that she'd once existed?

Pushing *little darlin'* more firmly into its holster, Sarah glanced over to her companion. G'ntriel was sitting in her chair looking exactly the same as she had for the entire trip. No emotions played on her face, no body language to suggest that she was concerned or frightened, nothing. Surely, the woman knew the reputation of these pirates. It was really weird to be shitting bricks while her companion sat like a mannequin.

"G'ntriel?" she asked, tentatively, as the thought that she had no idea what a dead G'trobian looked like slipped into her head.

"Yes, Sarah?" she answered in her usual trilling voice.

"Oh, um, just checking," she said lamely, as her eyes avoided the other woman and her hand reached to *little darlin'* for a reassuring pat.

Now that she had the inertial dampeners back online, they could no longer feel the ship's movement. The external sensors she'd been able to start up showed only the forward view, which wasn't much help, since they seemed to be going backwards. She fiddled with a few more controls, glad to see that the environmental and life support systems had survived her desperate stunt. If she ever got out of this mess she wanted to be sure her ship, her baby, was going to get her back to a commercial port.

The view on the screen was almost peaceful until the outer doors of a massive ship entered the picture. Sarah's blood pressure kicked up another notch as the doors closed behind her.

Sarah nearly jumped out of her seatbelt when she heard what she could only describe as a polite knock on the outer hull. The forward

view screen showed several human men and quite a few humanoid males of various species milling around. All of them wore a type of uniform—dark coveralls, thick black boots that almost reached the knee, and long jackets that hung open at the front. She spied several weapons holsters filled with guns that she'd only ever seen carried by Earth's military. Curiously, none of them had their weapons drawn.

The knock sounded again, louder, more insistent. She thought she heard a voice through the metal, but considering that her heart was beating louder than a drum in a brass band, it was quite possible that she'd imagined the whole thing.

"Sarah, they have a can opener." G'ntriel's voice sing-songed as casually as if she was ordering a coffee and not facing a dozen heavily armed pirates.

"Can opener?" *What the fuck?* "Oh," she said, dismayed as they watched the men on the view screen move a large piece of equipment across the cargo bay. *That* sort of can opener—the type that pried open little ships like hers and sucked out the juicy center.

"Get ready," Sarah told her strange companion. "I'm going to open the airlocks. I can't let them rip apart the ship."

Sarah felt relieved when G'ntriel nodded in agreement. She was absolutely certain that she couldn't take anymore of her companion's inappropriate cheerful singing without using *little darlin'* to help the other woman sleep a while.

Flipping the airlock switches, Sarah released her seatbelt and folded her arms so that her left elbow hid her right hand as it rested on *little darlin'*. Using a stun gun in this type of situation was probably suicidal, and she was far from that, but it made her feel better knowing that she had it in her hand.

The side cargo door opened slowly, the whirring noise smooth and even until it hit the deck with a loud thump. Unfortunately, it didn't stop. The door continued to open until it began to lever the little ship off the ground. Sarah scrambled for the console, hit the stop button,

and reversed the controls until the small craft sat firmly on the deck once more.

“Er, sorry,” she called sheepishly to her unseen captors. “I thought I had that fixed last time I was in space port.”

The men who moved into the open doorway looked menacing, to say the least, and seemed much, much taller and broader in person. *Wow, they breed big pirates in this galaxy.* Sarah slid a quick look towards her companion before making eye contact with the guy closest to them.

“Ah...hi,” she said, trying for friendly but sounding just scared and pathetic instead. The big guy in the middle crooked a finger at them, grinning around broken yellowed teeth as he beckoned them forward.

G’ntriel rose gracefully from her seat and walked calmly towards the men, seemingly unconcerned if Sarah followed her or not. She walked straight over to the big guy, wrapped an elegant arm around his neck, and pulled his head down for a kiss. She laughed as the guy built like a mountain lifted her in the air and wrapped her legs around his waist as they enthusiastically made out.

*Hmmm...was this a G’trobian greeting or did they actually know each other?* Sarah ground her teeth together as her agitation grew. She’d almost convinced herself that it was simply a strange G’trobian greeting custom when she heard the words—“Welcome home, baby.”

*Great I've been fucking conned,* Sarah thought angrily as *little darlin’* leaped into her hand and shot at the rejoicing couple. She had a brief moment to consider just how stupid a reaction that was before several stun shots hit her and she fell face-first onto the deck.

## Chapter Two

Captain Jordan Bowman shook his head as he chuckled. The woman was as fiery as her hair and judging by her actions so far, probably not too bright. She lay sleeping on the cot in one of his holding cells, the black eyes from her broken nose contrasting sharply with her pale skin. He'd been worried that after so many stun hits she might be permanently damaged, but the ship's medic had assured him that she was fine and would sleep off the worst of it. She'd probably wake with a killer headache, but well, he could probably use that to his advantage.

He honestly looked forward to the temper tantrum that would surely follow. The medic had offered to heal her broken nose, but the ship's medical resources were scarce, and besides, Jordan believed in keeping his options open. At least this way he'd have something to bargain with—give him her co-operation and he'd fix her face.

Laughing softly, Jordan turned to leave the room, but the woman groaned, and he spun back quickly. Swollen eyes blinked heavily against the light, and another moan escaped as she tried to sit up. He knew the moment she realized her gun was gone. Deep blue eyes locked onto his as a deep growl issued through her clenched teeth.

“Give me back my gun,” she ordered as she straightened to her full height of five-foot-five. He grinned at her audacity. Locked in a cell, weaponless and injured, and still, the woman thought she could boss him around.

“Sorry, sweetheart,” he laughed, loving the way her eyes narrowed with her anger. “Poor G'ntriel still has a headache. Lucky her husband is around to kiss it better.”

“Husband?” she asked, bewilderment clearly written on her face. “That big guy was her husband?” He watched with amusement as she tried to hide the shiver that pulsed through her body.

He laughed at her again. “He’s much friendlier than he looks. Are you hungry?” he asked, trying to get the conversation back onto a saner topic.

“Of course I'm hungry,” she growled. “I've been trying to get the shipment of medicines to Heltor in the Flengorian system so that children’s lives will be saved. Not that you’d give a rat’s ass about dying children, but I haven’t slept or eaten properly in three days, trying to get to them as fast as possible.”

\* \* \* \*

He pinned her with his stare as his face turned angry, twin spots of color slashing across his cheekbones. “I care more than you understand.” The words were spoken quietly, leaving Sarah to wonder if he hadn't really wanted her to hear them, and then he turned and left the room.

*Okay, mental note: When a man offers food, get said food BEFORE pissing him off.* Sarah rubbed her stomach as it rumbled loudly, reminding her yet again of how often she let her temper override her common sense. It felt like she’d been here forever, but in reality, it was probably only an hour or two. Still, food would’ve helped pass the time and shut up her stomach.

It growled again as a different man entered the room carrying a tray of food. It didn’t look very appealing, but the semi-edible smell made her stomach grumble even louder. He stopped several feet back from the force field that held her captive.

“Well, Sarah. I’m the closest thing we have to a doctor on this ship. Now we can do this the easy way or we can do this the hard way.”

“Just give me the damn food.” The man chuckled a little too happily at her grouchy tone.

“Captain said you had a temper,” he gloated as he dropped the food tray onto the bench beside him. “Looks like we get to do this the hard way.” He turned on his heel and headed back to the doorway, stuck his head into the hall, and nodded to someone. As he came back into the room, Sarah noticed three big ugly pirates follow him in.

“Okay,” the first man said calmly. “I’m going to fix that broken nose first and then you can have something to eat.” He nodded to the men behind him. The smaller one of the three stood back to level his stun pistol at her as the other two moved into the cell when the force field switched off.

Sarah’s entire body tensed for what could follow, and her breath caught in her throat at the realization of just how vulnerable she was. Hulking pirate number one grabbed her right hand as he entered, forcing it behind her back in an effort to subdue her. Instinct and temper overruled common sense yet again and she lashed out with her foot, kicking hulking pirate number two in the balls. She had a brief moment of satisfaction before hulking pirate number one twisted her arm so forcefully that she felt the muscle pop in her shoulder, a sure sign that the joint was about to dislocate.

Sarah tried to slow her breathing, tried to play it smart, tried to stay conscious through the pain as she held up her left arm in supplication.

“Okay, okay. I’ll behave. I promise.”

The pirate with the damaged package still rolled, moaning in pain on the floor as the “nearest thing they had to a doctor” helped him to stand. He grinned at the man’s obvious pain. “Shake it off Kingsley, unless, of course, you’re not man enough to hold down one little female.”

The man in question rose to his full, very imposing height, but he still looked a little green under the deep red stains on both cheekbones. Sarah tried really hard to concentrate on deciding



whether the deep red blush was from pain, embarrassment, or both—anything to distract her from her own arm and the pain emanating down her back into her hips.

She watched almost in fascinated slow motion as he grabbed her ankles roughly, lifted her off her feet, and pushed all of her weight onto her trapped and twisted arm. She wasn't really sure, but she may have screamed in pain as her arm broke and the shoulder dislocated. Heat exploded through her body just before she very gratefully passed out.

\* \* \* \*

“Put her down,” the order growled through gritted teeth.

Both men holding the now-unconscious woman glanced at him before they dropped her onto the small cot, clearly unconcerned if she sustained further injuries. Jordon's anger raised another notch and his phase pistol appeared in his hand so quickly that the men had little reaction time before he dropped them both. *Bloody pirates*, he thought, glaring threateningly at the two remaining men before he stepped into the cell to check the woman's condition.

Jordon dropped onto one knee and opened the upper half of Sarah's jumpsuit to reveal a badly dislocated shoulder, swollen forearm, and some already vicious bruising. He carefully levered the jumpsuit off her shoulders and pushed it down to her waist. Glad that she was already unconscious, he gripped her slim arm in his large hand and pushed the joint back into place.

“Heal her now!” Jordan glared at the medic, then stepped back and folded his arms across his chest. He'd spent the last half hour debriefing G'ntriel on her successful mission, learning all he could about the woman before him.

Even hung-over from Sarah's stun shot, G'ntriel had spoken of her with great respect and admiration. Considering that G'ntriel didn't really like other women, the praise had been nothing less than

shocking. What could this small slip of a woman have done to impress someone as *un-impressible* as G'ntriel?

He watched the medic as he used precious resources to heal an injury that never should have happened. Damn, that was the problem with being a pirate. Quite often, the men surrounding you had their own ideas about what they could take. Every time something like this occurred—and it occurred with sickening regularity—Jordan reacted like any other Pirate Captain, ruthlessly and efficiently.

The men at his feet groaned as he kicked them both solidly in the ribs.

“Get up,” he ordered, standing over them aggressively as both men dragged themselves to a standing position, swaying in front of him like two drunken sailors on shore leave.

“Try that again and I will shove you out the airlock. Do we understand each other?”

“Yes, cap'n,” they both mumbled, squinting as they tried to focus their eyes.

“Report to waste disposal until further notice!” They both looked ready to complain, probably something along the lines of warriors don't do cleaning duties, but considering that neither had recovered sufficiently from his stun gun to string together more than a few words, they both seemed to think better of it. Wobbling on unsteady feet, they shuffled towards the door.

“One last thing,” Jordan said, making sure that they both had to turn to face him before he continued. “Take special notice of how the ship's waste grinder works. Wouldn't want you to have an accident now, would we?”

Jordan couldn't even remember the name of the guy on the right, but judging by the way the man's eyes widened, the message and barely veiled threat was received loud and clear.

He turned his attention back to the medic as he heard Sarah groan. She remained unconscious, but it was obvious that she was also in a

great deal of pain. He again dropped to one knee, grabbed her cold hand, and warmed it in his own before he could think better of it.

The medic glanced down at their joined hands but wisely said nothing. Jordan wasn't even sure why he was offering comfort to a woman who would most likely try to lodge his balls somewhere in his throat when she woke up, but still he held her small hand and rubbed his thumb over the soft calluses on her palm and fingertips.

He turned her hand over and noticed the blunt finger nails and small scars from dozens of little nicks and scratches. It would seem that not only was she the captain and pilot of her little ship, but she was probably the engineer and maintenance crew as well. Jordan grinned as he realized that this woman was no stranger to hard work.

He ran his hand up her smooth skin to her elbow and now-healed shoulder and was lost in his appreciation of her toned physique when the ship's intercom sounded loudly.

"Captain to the bridge," his first mate's voice boomed throughout the ship.

Reluctantly, Jordan placed Sarah's hand back to the bed, careful to position it somewhere comfortable so that she wouldn't hurt her newly healed shoulder again. He rose to his full, intimidating height as he eyed his medic. He'd known Jonas for a lot of years now, but he was starting to wonder if he actually knew the man at all. He wasn't sure what had happened here before he'd entered the room, but he'd seen the result and he wasn't pleased.

"When she is healed, bring her to my quarters," he ordered, his voice rough with anger. Jonas glanced up, almost insolently, but said the words a captain expected to hear from all of his crew when he gave an order. "Yes, captain."

## Chapter Three

She woke slowly as her head tried to make sense of her surroundings. Well she wasn't in her own bed and now, as clarity began to return, she realized that she wasn't in a cell, either. She shifted a little, testing the muscles of her shoulder before she noticed that her face and nose no longer hurt.

Not willing to risk discovery that she was awake, she cracked her eyes open just a fraction as she tried to see around the room while still looking asleep. She needn't have bothered. She was alone in a large room that was furnished sparsely but comfortably.

Levering herself off the bed, Sarah only then realized that she'd been stripped of her jumpsuit and stood in only her underwear, a pair of grey panties, and matching stretchy singlet top with a built in bra. Glancing down at her unclothed state, she lowered her hand to her groin and gently probed the area for unfamiliar pain. She breathed a sigh of relief when she felt none. She wasn't exactly sure what had happened while she'd been out cold, but she preferred to believe that rape hadn't been part of it.

Although, glancing around the cabin, she realized that in the future she may not be so lucky. She rifled through what appeared to be personal belongings and found an old fashioned electronic photo frame. She turned it on and watched the pictures scroll through as gentle music filled the room. The pictures seemed to be of a young happy couple as they progressed through life's milestones, a wedding, a new baby, another new baby, and then photos of the boys as they grew. One of the young men in the photos looked a lot like the captain

of this vessel, and she wondered if the happy couple was, perhaps, his parents.

“My parents and my younger brother,” a voice confirmed from the open doorway.

She turned around, startled that she hadn't heard the door open. She'd been so engrossed by the picture display, so enthralled with the life story that seemed to flow from it that she hadn't given her own safety a thought. *Way to go Sarah*, she thought derisively. *Why not throw yourself at the man while you're at it?*

Instinctively, she grabbed the closest thing to her and threw it at his head. Instead of ducking, the stupid man reached out, caught the photo display awkwardly, and jammed a finger in the process.

“Ow,” he complained loudly. “For fuck's sake, could you just control that rabid temper for five minutes?”

He stalked towards her with the frame held carefully in his hand. She backed away from the desk, unintentionally moving closer to his sleeping area. She sat heavily as the forgotten object hit the back of her knees and dropped her onto his bed.

He watched her impassively, his eyes flicking briefly to the pouty lips of her sex and then back to her face. He placed the frame gently back onto its place on the desk and continued to move towards her, anger riding him.

“Just relax,” he said impatiently. “No one is going to hurt you.”

She crawled further onto the bed and pressed herself against the wall, angling her body towards him, ready to attack if she had to.

“Yeah, well, after having my shoulder ripped out by your thugs, I'm not really inclined to believe that.”

He sat heavily on the bed and his hand reached out to briefly touch the side of her face. “I'm sorry about that. It wasn't supposed to happen. My men were supposed to be healing your injuries, not making them worse.”

“Sure they were.” She forced herself to pull away from his warm touch. “Looks like your men don't like taking orders very much.” She

gave him her best glare, but her temper dissipated a little as he made no move towards her.

“I am the captain. They will do what I say or they’ll find themselves out the airlock.”

He said it with such quiet menace, such anger glittering in his eyes, that she had little choice but to believe him. She cringed closer to the wall, hating herself for her weakness. Where was her kickass attitude now when she needed it the most?

“Sarah,” he said quietly, waiting for her to look at him. “I will protect you with my life.”

“Oh, yeah? For how long? Until you get tired of me and then pass me around the crew? Isn’t that what pirates do?”

His head snapped back as if she’d punched him, and a hurt look flashed across his face before it quickly morphed into cold anger.

“I suppose that’s all you would see,” he said quietly as he turned his back to her.

*Okay Sarah, here's your chance, she thought. Take it. Hit him hard and get moving.* But something held her still. Something about the way he sat tore at her soul and stalled her need to escape. She licked her lips nervously and lifted away from the wall, her body noticing and reacting to his masculine physique even if her mind refused to acknowledge it.

“Tell me what I should see, then,” she said softly. He turned towards her, his eyes so flat and emotionless that she almost cringed away from him again. The way he watched her felt very unnerving.

“It doesn’t matter what you see. There are clothes in that trunk” He lifted himself away from Sarah and pointed at a footlocker at the base of the bed. “Get dressed,” he ordered as he left the room without a backwards glance.

Sarah sat on the bed, uncertain what had just happened, but she tried to sort through it in her head. She wasn’t meant to be his play thing? Okay so that was good, wasn’t it? Or did he find her disagreeable enough to want nothing to do with her except pass her

around the crew before shoving her out the airlock? But he wouldn't really do that, would he? Regardless of these pirates' reputations, she felt certain that he was an honorable man. She shivered at the confusing thoughts. Hell, she wished she knew something about anything at this stage. This pirate was very confusing.

\* \* \* \*

The door slid closed behind him as he left the room. He then turned to the control panel and quickly punched in a series of numbers, locking the door to all but him. As angry as he was, he wouldn't risk her safety, and he would protect her with his life, whether the wild woman appreciated it or not.

God, what had he been thinking? Just because G'ntriel believed she was a good person, it didn't mean that Sarah would somehow recognize something in him and be able to heal his tortured soul. He really was losing it if he thought that scrap of female fury could somehow offer him redemption.

He growled low in his throat, very aware that thoughts like that could get a captain killed on a pirate ship. Any show of weakness could precipitate a mutiny, and he sure as hell wasn't prepared to defend both himself and the woman in his quarters from the entire crew. He'd try, but he'd die trying and she would be left to suffer at their hands, a fate worse than death if their past actions were anything to go by.

Straightening to his full height, he stalked through the corridors, projecting the ruthless personality he'd worked hard to cultivate.

"Andrews, sit-rep," he commanded loudly as he entered the bridge.

His first mate quickly stood, his body language conveying his willingness to serve his captain.

"We've just reached the Flengorian System. ETA to Heltor approximately three hours."

“Good.” Jordan barked. “Have we got a rendezvous point yet?”

“We haven’t been able to contact him yet, but it could be the distance. I don’t think their sub-space communication equipment is all that reliable. I’ll keep trying,” he added when he saw the look on his captain’s face.

“I’ll be in my dining room. Call me when you get confirmation of our rendezvous point.”

“Yes, captain.”

Jordan entered the captain’s private dining room, glad for the first time that he had the choice to eat his meal away from the prying eyes of his crew. He often enjoyed their company, but today he couldn’t quite shake his melancholy. The fiery redhead was uppermost in his mind, and it wouldn’t do anyone any good if he was caught mooning over her.

Hell, when had he turned into such a sap? He’d made hundreds, maybe thousands, of difficult decisions since taking over as captain. What was it about the ball of fury currently occupying his bed that had him so on edge? He should’ve just shoved her back into that tin can she called a spaceship and sent her away. If the damn thing was no longer space-worthy, well that wasn’t really his fault. She’d made the choice to cut power the way she had, not him. Well, except that she wouldn’t have pulled such a dangerous stunt if his pirate ship hadn’t been stalking her, and of course, she’d honestly thought that she was delivering medicine to ill children.

Irritated with this line of thought that seemed to take him around and around in circles, Jordan stalked over to the food cabinet, quickly selected a condensed meal, and placed it in the rehydration unit. Within seconds, the delicious smell of braised beef and vegetables filled the room. Too bad it was synthetic beef. He could’ve used some real meat to sink his teeth into today.

He attacked the food with relish, savoring the mixture of flavors and textures and heartily enjoyed the captain’s privilege of choice. The mess hall was serving some type of pasta dish today and the rest



of the crew had to like it or go hungry. A small niggle of guilt assailed him as he thought of Sarah sitting in his quarters going hungry, but there was no way he could let the crew see his ridiculous emotional attachment to her without putting her at risk. Several men in his employ wouldn't think twice about using her to manipulate him.

He finished his meal as he pondered his next move, realizing that the only choice he had was to pretend that she was his play thing and when he tired with her, he'd happily share her around. He shuddered at the thought of that happening to any woman, but the ruse just may buy them some time until he could find a safe spot close to civilization where he could help her to escape.

He felt fairly certain that he could rely on G'ntriel's help and he figured that before this was over he was probably going to need it.

He selected a drink from the cooler, downing the beer in just a few deep swallows. He'd really meant to savor it, being *actual* beer and not that synthetic crap the space ports sold, but he'd been too busy solidifying his plan. The wild woman in his quarters was not going to like it, but well she hadn't liked anything thus far, so why should he fret over her reaction?

His lips rose in a smirk as he envisioned the battle that was about to ensue.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah was almost asleep when the door to the cabin slid open. A huge, grossly overweight man ambled in carrying a tray of food and something blue and silky in his other hand. He tossed the scrap of fabric at her.

"Cap'n says you gotta put it on before I lets ya eat," he said amicably, turning his back politely so that she could change in relative privacy. "Oh and he says I gotta make sure you take off the rest. Just the lingerie he says. Nuthin' else."

Sarah's eyes widened in horror as she held up the scrap of fabric—barely enough material to cover her breasts and groin at the same time—and opened her mouth to argue, shaking her head in agitation.

“Sorry, luv,” the man said as he set a plate of food on the desk next to the photo frame. “But he also says that if ya wouldn't follow mys instructions that he'd send them guys from the cell to make you change.”

Her blood ran hot and cold through her veins as memories of the pain from her dislocated shoulder assailed her. She fought back a whimper as she hurried to change. She pushed off the oversized jumpsuit she'd found in the footlocker and quickly removed her underwear. She pulled that scrap of silk and lace over her head and worked quickly to make sure she was covered in all the right areas.

“That's much better, luv,” he said approvingly as he turned and gathered her clothes from the floor. “That color really suits ya. Brings out the color of yer eyes.”

Sarah blushed but was relieved to see him turn towards the doorway—even if he did carry her clothes under his arm. He was about to unlock the door when another thought occurred to him and he turned and waddled back into the room.

“Almost forgot,” he said sheepishly as he removed a link of chain and an ancient looking lock from his pocket. Sarah held her breath, wanting to fight him but terrified of what could happen if she did and failed. Thankfully, he walked past her, awkwardly lowered himself to his knees, and locked the footlocker at the base of the bed.

Sarah sighed in dejection. Her plan to pull on more clothes from the locker seemed quite successfully thwarted but at least he hadn't chained her up and for that she was more than grateful. She watched him leave as she moved towards the food and lowered herself to the captain's desk chair. She tried unsuccessfully to pull the scrap of fabric underneath her bottom but in the end she gave up the futile

attempt and lowered her bare backside onto the seat. The cool fabric touched her flesh as heated thoughts danced through her head.

Damn, she must be freaking crazy if she was entertaining erotic thoughts about the captain. The man was most likely going to use her and then discard her like yesterday's garbage. Wasn't that what the scrap of lace, the dressing her for his pleasure thing was all about?

She ate the meal quickly and angrily pushed away any and all sexy thoughts, determined to be as strong as she could if and when an escape opportunity presented itself.

\* \* \* \*

Jordan checked the ship's chronometer. He'd sent the cook over to his cabin almost an hour ago, a good long time for her to build up a really good temper. Not that the woman needed time. She could get good and mad with only a moment's notice, but it worked into the ruse if she was spitting venom at him when he opened his cabin door. He'd made sure to have several witnesses on hand, so the crew could see that their captain was behaving as they expected.

He keyed in the code and then changed the access numbers again since he'd given the last code to the cook. He doubted the guy was a danger to her, his advanced age and obese body probably a hindrance when it came to arousal, but he wasn't taking any chances.

The door slid open and quick as a flash, his cabin guest flew past him, using the element of surprise to push her way into the hall. He only just caught her wrist as she tried to slide by him, but barely managed to duck the fist that flew at his head. He twisted and deflected the viscous knee aimed at his groin as hauled her into his arms.

Laughing loudly, he pulled her squirming body against his, flattened his hand against the side of her face as he pressed her head into his chest and tried to hide how close she'd almost come to escaping him. The spitfire in his arms growled and screamed defiance

at him, managing to attract even more attention than he'd been hoping for. Several of the crewmen moved closer, their facial expressions clearly showing their enjoyment. This little stunt couldn't have gone better if they'd choreographed the whole thing together. Well, except for the whole nearly besting him part. Hell, she moved faster than anyone he'd ever seen.

He watched the faces of several of his men, and judged by their reactions that the scrap of lace she barely wore had ridden up her legs, exposing her ass to their salivating attention. One pirate even caressed his obvious erection as he slowly moved towards them. A little worried that the show was getting out of hand and would create the exact situation he was trying to avoid, he bent and hoisted her over his shoulder, her bare ass exposed to their audience. He slapped her hard, the noise reverberating around the hallway as she stopped wriggling and growled her annoyance. He slapped her again as he stepped into the room and quickly closed the door on their audience. Harsh male laughter flowed through the door as it slid across.

He stalked to the bed and dropped her roughly onto the mattress, angry at her for attacking him, but more irate at himself for not anticipating it. He was truly pissed off, of course, that she'd moaned in arousal the second time he'd smacked her. Even now, her cream rolled down the smooth flesh of her thighs. The sweet scent of her arousal sure wasn't helping his peace of mind.

She scrambled to the other side of the bed and pressed herself against the wall, her anxiety seeming to override her body's sensual reaction as he stood and glared at her.

"Don't look at me like that," he growled, annoyed at himself for caring how she looked at him. He'd set this up to protect her, but he didn't expect a thank you.

She watched him warily as her eyes darted around the room, no doubt selecting objects to brain him with. He released his breath with a loud whoosh, suddenly more tired than he could ever remember. He turned and walked over to his desk, loosened the top button of his

jumpsuit and slid the zipper part way down. What he wanted was another cold beer and about twelve hours worth of solid sleep, but with his fiery house guest he wasn't going to hold out too much hope.

He heard her whimper behind him and he turned to see true fear flash across her face just before she managed to hide it behind a sarcastic sneer. Acting on instinct, he crossed the room to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Sweetheart," he said softly. "I'm not going to attack you. I just had to make the crew believe that so that you'd be safe from them for a while. As long as they think they might get their chance later, they'll leave you alone. I just haven't figured out how to get you out of here yet."

She couldn't hide the relief on her face and the tears that she'd held in check in the midst of her terror tipped over her eyelids and slid down her face.

"I'm sorry if I scared you, but I was running out of time and had no way of telling you beforehand," he said, stretching the truth just a little. It hadn't really occurred to him that she would be genuinely frightened of him. He'd honestly expected her to kick him in the balls and laugh as they turned blue. He supposed that they'd both misread each other.

"Hey," he said softly. "Please don't cry." He reached over to her, breathing a relieved sigh when she didn't flinch from his touch. He smoothed a callused finger carefully over her cheek. She whimpered again and gulped air into her lungs, words obviously impossible.

Unable to control his protective instincts anymore, he grabbed her under the arms, hauled her onto his lap, and pressed her face against his heart as he rocked her back and forth. She clung to him as she slowly regained control, her tears no longer flowing quite so fast.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled as she burrowed deeper into his arms, her own slender arms wrapped tightly around his waist.

"Sweetheart," he said, "I'm the one who's sorry. I wish I'd handled that very differently. I'm sorry for putting you through that."

She sagged against him, exhaustion seeming to claim her as she finished crying. He wriggled more fully onto the bed and lay back against the pillow so that he could pull her pliant body over his as she slipped into sleep. He held her close, willing his body not to react to her nearness. The last thing she needed was to wake up and feel his hard cock pushing against her exposed flesh.

Jordan ground his teeth together trying to reign in his body's reaction. Sure didn't look like he'd be getting any sleep tonight. She snuggled closer and a small breath escaped from her tear swollen lips. Aw hell, sleeping was overrated anyway.

## Chapter Four

Sarah woke as the man beneath her moved carefully, trying to slide out from under her without disturbing her. He kissed her forehead as he resettled her on the pillows.

“Please, don’t go,” she said quietly. He smiled down at her, his hand smoothing an errant curl back behind her ear.

“I didn’t mean to wake you,” he said, a small smile on his face. “I’ll be back soon. I’ll lock the door so you’ll be safe.”

“I don’t even know your name,” she said anxiously, as sudden, unexpected fear for his safety gripped her. What the hell was wrong with her? She should’ve been planning her escape, not worrying for this man's wellbeing.

He sat back on the bed, gathered her into his arms, and kissed her gently.

“My name is Jordan Bowman,” he said with a genuine smile on his face. “And I’m very glad I met you, Sarah Kaydel.”

Her full name? G'ntriel had obviously been busy filling him in on all the details she'd garnered. Sarah knew she should still be pissed that the woman betrayed her, but instead she smiled at Jordan, enjoying the tender moment more than she would admit, even to herself. He bent once more and captured her lips with his own, kissed her sweetly—reverently—as if she were precious to him.

“I’ll be back as fast as I can,” he whispered before he levered himself off the bed and headed to the door. She heard him punch in the unlock code and then the door closed behind him. The lock engaged a moment later.

Sarah fell back onto the bed and took a moment to gather her wits. Being captured by pirates had been such an emotionally draining experience. She couldn't honestly remember being so frightened for so long, despite her checkered history as an interplanetary courier or her life before that. She'd found herself in more than one dangerous situation, facing her own mortality, but on each occasion, she'd managed to extract herself without help, without having to rely on someone else.

But this situation was so very different. Here, she faced something far more frightening than dying. She had zero chance of escape without help, and she really didn't want to leave without her cargo. *Damn.* She'd nearly forgotten all about the medicine until now. Were children dying even as she lay here contemplating her unknown future? She felt tears well again. Hell, when had she turned into such a weepy mess? She wasn't even sure if there *were* dying children. It was quite possible, considering G'ntriel's involvement, that she'd been conned right from the beginning.

Sarah closed her eyes against the headache that had begun to pound behind her forehead. She needed to ask Jordan about the medicine, and she should ask him about G'ntriel, and she really wanted to know how she'd ended up in the middle.

Lost in her worry, Sarah was startled when the door slid open and Jordan stalked in, not bothering to lock the door behind him. He threw clothes at her and his eyes watched her intently as he tried to convey something she didn't quite understand.

"Get dressed, woman. Now!" He stood over her aggressively, raising his hand as if to strike her. Sarah flinched away as her mind whirled with confusion. They were alone in his cabin, why would he suddenly be this angry? Could she trust him or not? Was this the same man who'd held her while she slept?

Her heart beat erratically, fear beginning to pound through her until she saw that several very large crew members stood at the door. Witnesses? Was he trying to protect her from them? Or was he about



to prove that he was the last person in the universe she should ever have considered trusting? She nodded carefully. Did she really have a choice? She reached for the jumpsuit that he'd thrown at her and managed to pull the clothes on, not really caring if she exposed herself to the audience at the door.

"Hurry up," he said, grabbing her arm and dragging her to the door. "We haven't got time for this. Grab your damn boots. You can put them on when we get there."

He shoved the boots into her arms, grabbed her upper arm again, and dragged her out the door.

"Captain?" his first mate asked. "What if she blows your cover and tries to escape?"

"Not a chance," Jordan proclaimed arrogantly. "She does what she's told or she gets punished. My belt stings against that pert little ass, doesn't it woman?"

She nodded warily, still trying to catch up with the situation. He was treating her like a possession, pushing her around as if he had a right to, but he was referring to punishment that had never actually happened. When he'd first opened the door her newfound trust in him had wavered, and the sight of all of those pirates on her doorstep brought back all the fear she'd felt just a few hours before. Still off balance, and fluctuating between abject terror and absolute trust in the man, Sarah sucked in a deep breath and fell back on her training. She quickly decided to play whatever game he was playing and see where it led. It sounded like they were getting off the ship and she was definitely all for that.

They stepped through the door, Jordan's grip on her arm punishingly tight, and headed away from the cabin and into the docking bay. She managed to mask the soft sound that she made when she saw her tiny vessel. It seemed that it hadn't moved since they'd landed on board fewer than twenty-four hours ago.

"Get in," Jordan growled loudly, pushing her towards the open cargo door of her little ship. "Andrews," he said, turning to his first

mate. "Keep the ship out of sensor range of the planet. I'll contact you as soon as I know more."

His first mate nodded his understanding and stood back as Jordan stepped into the ship. "Start the engines and close the damn door!"

Sarah rushed to follow his orders, her hands shaking, either from fear or excitement or both. She was in her ship and she was leaving the pirates behind, so things were definitely looking up, but she was careful to hide her excitement, lest the man beside her wasn't the honorable man she'd begun to believe him to be.

So many questions, so few answers. Geez, her head hurt.

She started the ship, relief pouring through her when all systems registered as functional, and she was able to maneuver out of the larger ship's cargo hold.

"Where are we headed?" she asked him as she tried to swallow against her dry throat.

"Heltor," he said, looking at her calmly for the first time since they'd left his quarters. "Our buyer failed to make contact, so you and I need to find him." She input their course into the helm and then turned to give him a quizzical look.

"The medicine?" she asked, still confused. "Why not just give it to the children it was meant for?"

"Sweetheart, that's what I'm trying to do."

She shook her head, her confusion growing as she tried to understand what he was saying.

"Sarah, the government on Heltor is corrupt. They'll take the intergalactic aid and give it to a selected few and either stockpile or sell the rest. The children it's meant for will never see it."

"So that's what this is all about? You're selling it on the black market so that it actually reaches those who need it."

"Something like that," he hedged, clearly uncomfortable with the conversation.

She glared at him and held his gaze until he shrugged and told her the truth.

“I’m not selling it. I’m giving it to them.”

She shook her head in denial. Surely she must have heard wrong. Pirates don't give, they take.

“But hang on,” she said, still trying to find her balance. “How do you make money, keep the ship running, and the crew fed if you give away your stolen booty?”

He laughed at that, a rich rolling sound that bought a smile to her face.

“I didn't say we were angels, sweetheart. We work on an ancient Earth principle. Have you ever heard of Robin Hood?”

“I think so. Is that the guy who stole from the rich and gave to the poor?” He nodded as a wry smile split his face.

“Well, we’re a little more discerning than that, but it’s kind of the same principle. We do a lot of research and target only corrupt governments and criminals. We retain enough for ourselves to keep the crew loyal and interested, and we make sure that those who need help, like medicines, can get it.”

“So what’s the plan?” she asked, very eager now to help. “How will we find this guy?”

“First, your ship wasn’t registered as carrying the medicines, was it?” She shook her head. Another ship had been registered as a decoy. The only people who’d known about her cargo had been her and G’ntriel. “Good, Heltor relies heavily on the tourist trade, so you and I are going to pose as newlyweds and try to track down our missing contact. Is that okay?”

“Absolutely,” she smiled at him, lifting her hands as if to weigh her options. She bounced her right hand. “Honeymoon resort,” and then glanced at her left. “Ship full of menacing pirates. Uhm...no contest.”

Jordan leaned over and pulled her onto his lap, his lips meeting hers in a searing kiss. She didn’t think that he’d meant for it to be anything other than a brief celebration, but her small sigh and soft acceptance had his cock swelling inside his jumpsuit, the hard rod

pressing against her thighs. He speared his tongue into her welcoming mouth, sliding it against hers in a sensual dance as he tangled his hands in her hair.

She squirmed on his lap, trying to get closer, rubbing against the hard cock pressed against her bottom. Her breath came in short gasps as he pulled her across him until she straddled his lap, then unzipped her jumpsuit and snaked a hand around to her ass. He pushed the silky fabric of her lingerie aside so that he could grip her cheeks in his big hands. She moaned into his mouth, so he squeezed her again, kneading the flesh with his strong fingers.

Sarah wrapped her arms around his neck and held on tight as his clever fingers played over her ass and then crept up her back as he kissed the sensitive skin under her ear. Moist, soft kisses rained down her neck, over her shoulder, and down to the lace that covered her breasts.

With a strangled sigh he pushed the lace aside, sucked one of her nipples into his mouth, and bit down gently. She moaned her excitement as her clit began to tingle and her pussy pulsed with cream. The smell of her arousal filled the small cabin as she held his head to her breast and urged him on, implored him to suck harder, bite her, possess her in the most primitive of ways.

His hands pressed against her lower back and pushed her dripping pussy against his thick erection, rocking her clit against his strong body. Electrical currents zinged through her blood. Her breath came in ragged gasps as warmth spread through her.

“Oh, sweetheart,” he said. “We don’t have enough time to do this properly, but I need to watch you explode in my arms.”

She shook her head as she squirmed against his cock. Her hands tried to undo the buttons on his suit, tried to find the zipper, tried to release his cock so that she could impale herself on him and they could ride the storm together.

“Shhh. It’s okay, sweetheart,” he said as he gathered her hands, pushed them behind her, and pressed them into her lower back so that

her breasts were forced closer to his mouth. "You are so beautiful," he whispered as he pushed his other hand into the front of her suit to find her swollen clit and rub the sensitive nub. "Now come for me."

Her world exploded as heat coursed through her and he pushed two fingers into her body. Her pussy muscles grabbed greedily at his hand, sucking his fingers deeper as her anus puckered and pulsed, throbbing with her release. She shook all over as the most powerful climax she had ever felt continued to pound through her. Wave after wave of ecstasy flowed as the man responsible kissed her senseless.

As the tremors slowed, Sarah inhaled a ragged breath, exhaustion claiming her as she sagged against his hard body.

"That was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen," he said as he kissed her face, her eyes, her mouth. "Thank you, Sarah," he whispered as he helped to rearrange her clothing. He lifted her heavy breast in his hand, kissed the dark beaded nipple before he pulled the lace back over her, and then grabbed the zipper to do up her jumpsuit.

He pulled her fully clothed body back into his arms as she clung to him, her desire sated but another emotion hitting her hard. She wanted this man. She wanted him in every way a woman could have a man, and now, unexpectedly, she wasn't sure she'd be able to walk away afterwards.

\* \* \* \*

"Okay, sweetheart. It's show time. Ready to act like a newlywed?" He held his arms open for her, and Jordan felt a small kernel of tension unravel as she smiled at him and happily walked into his embrace. Despite what had happened just moments before they landed, a very small part of him worried that she was just playing along until she could escape from him. He was a pirate after all, and she only had his word for it that he wasn't like the rest.

He anchored his arm around her waist as the door to the little ship swung open, painfully aware that his cock was still throbbing and

probably evident to anyone who glanced in his direction. *Aww hell*, he thought as he tried to adjust himself yet again. At least the honeymoon ruse seemed plausible.

She lowered her head against his shoulder, the perfect image of a new bride who adored her husband as they entered the customs area and waited for processing. When they got to the top of the line, he grabbed the passports his forger had made before they'd left the ship and pressed the top button of each to turn them on. False passports were hard to come by now that they'd been made with a combination of electronics and biological neural pathways. They were almost living entities except for the fact that a very complex computer program controlled what they did and how they did it. Jordan had been very lucky to find his master forger and had spent a lot of time and money making sure the woman was happy and comfortable.

He smiled again as he thought of G'ntriel. She'd been such a surprise, first with her freakish abilities with machinery and computer code and then how she'd fallen in love with the biggest, ugliest, and most dangerous-looking pirate he'd ever known. But maybe the biggest surprise had been her heart, her ability to make sense of the universe, and somehow always find a way to help those who needed it most. Governments and other organizations meant to help the people had failed miserably for too many decades, and so like him, she'd become a pirate because there had been no other way.

Jordan handed over their passports and concentrated on staying calm, making sure that he breathed normally and tried to look like a man on his honeymoon. The woman in his arms sighed and then melted against him. Her relaxation in this situation almost made him laugh. If he'd known how relaxed she would be after a mind-blowing orgasm, he might've considered it sooner.

"How long will you be staying on Heltor?" the bored customs worker asked, clearly uninterested in his answer.

"Just a few days," he answered, hugging his 'new bride' closer.

"And what is the purpose of your visit?"

“We’re on our honeymoon.” Sarah answered for him, her eyes shining as she smiled at him. The woman was amazing. Everything about her screamed glowing new bride. Jordan hugged her closer as pride welled in him at her acting ability. At the same time he wished it was for real, that somehow they were really newlyweds and that they really were here for a honeymoon.

He tried to thrust the unfamiliar longings away. Hell...where had that come from? The whole idea of bringing her with him was so that he could give her a chance to escape—not to make her his wife. He barely controlled the urge to growl in irritation. He was happy with his life, wasn’t he?

The customs worker rattled off a few more questions and then let them through, pointing half-heartedly to an information kiosk when Jordan asked for a recommendation on a good hotel.

When they approached the kiosk, Jordan felt the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. He glanced around quickly as he tried to look casual but couldn’t find a source for his anxiety. He quickly grabbed a brochure for the nearest hotel and guided Sarah to the exit. He’d feel a lot better once he could get them into a hotel room and he could reassemble his gun. Being unarmed always made him antsy.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah had felt him tense as they approached the kiosk, and she’d used her own eyes to try to pinpoint any danger. The only person who seemed at all suspicious had been a woman with a pram that had no baby. It was possible that someone else had the child and she was waiting for their return, but Sarah had been in enough dangerous situations to know that you don’t assume anything and you go with your gut. It’s what had kept her alive so far.

They walked casually, feigning a calm that neither of them seemed to be feeling anymore. Fortunately, the hotel was less than two minutes away by cab, so they climbed into the nearest vehicle and

punched their destination into the console. The little yellow vehicle moved almost silently as it pulled into the traffic and took them to the hotel.

Jordan's arm snaked around her again, and she breathed a sigh of relief. The need to hold her wasn't all for their audience. At least that's what she told herself. Intellectually she knew the poor man still sported a raging hard-on, despite the danger they were in, so it seemed quite possible he was just horny and attracted to her on a purely physical level. For now, at least, Sarah chose to believe the former.

In the emotional rollercoaster ride of last few hours, she'd begun to reassess her life and had realized she'd suddenly begun to want so much more. She'd thought she was happy before she met Jordan, but now she found herself fantasizing that they really *were* on their honeymoon, her ability to project adoration for this man having nothing to do with her acting abilities. She wanted him, all of him, but she'd take whatever he could give her—even if that was just a quick fuck.

He opened the door to the suite, glanced down the hallway to make sure no one was watching, and then he moved into the room, keeping her close, but angling his body in front of her in case there was any danger awaiting them. He turned to lock the door behind them and dropped a quick kiss on her mouth.

“Stay here while I check that we don't have any uninvited guests.”

A little miffed that he was treating her like a helpless female, Sarah nonetheless did as she was told. He was being careful and was trying to protect her, and she loved him all the more for it. *What the fuck? Love? Where did that thought come from?* She didn't love the man—she hadn't known him long enough to love him—but the whole time she berated herself she was more than aware of the little voice in her head whispering the truth.



“All clear,” he said, walking back into the room. “I need to find one of my contacts on this planet,” he said, settling at the computer console and pressing a few keys. “And then we’ll order some food.”

She nodded in agreement as she wandered over to the lounge and lowered herself to its warm leather surface. She knew it wasn't leather from Earth, probably leather made from another animal from a different planet, but it was warm and comfortable and somehow reminded her of home.

“Okay, now we need to wait for a reply, so I’ll order some food and get the gift shop to send up a change of clothes for us both. Why don’t you get cleaned up while I’m at it?”

“Aaah alright, I’ll be quick,” she said as she headed for the door that seemed to be the bathroom.

“Take your time,” he said, smiling. “They have actual water here, so you might enjoy an old-fashioned shower.”

A little thrill of excitement coursed through her. Showers had been banned on Earth long before she’d been born and everyone used a cleaning system based on sonic technology, but she had visited several planets since and had found a true appreciation for warm water running over her body.

“Okay.” Her smile widened as she headed for the shower.

\* \* \* \*

Jordan sat at the computer console, staring at the selection of women’s clothing. He’d never really noticed before just how many choices women had to make. He scrolled through the myriad selections and eventually chose a comfortable outfit for her consisting of a blue shirt and matching jacket. He hovered over the matching pants but changed his mind and ordered a skin-tight pair instead. The woman had a fabulous ass, why hide it under layers of clothing?

He ordered heaps of food, certain that Sarah would be hungry. His cock throbbed as he thought about her standing under a stream of

warm water, the liquid running in rivulets over her gorgeous pert nipples just begging to be sucked. He was on the verge of joining her in the bathroom when he heard the water turn off. He stood up, tried not to pace, but failed miserably as he imagined her taut athletic body as she dried with a large towel. He imagined how she'd rub her hair dry as the movement jiggled her luscious breasts.

He groaned aloud at his own thoughts and turned back towards the computer console, intent on finding a distraction. That's when he saw her. She stood at the bathroom doorway, a towel wrapped around her, her long auburn hair slicked back as her blue eyes studied him intently.

As he watched, she dropped the towel, exposing her entire gorgeous body to his avid gaze. He groaned again, this time in sensual surrender. He was definitely a goner.

## Chapter Five

She'd watched him pace and realized with more than a little feminine pride that he was most likely thinking about her, his hard cock evident in the way he kept adjusting himself inside his pants. When he'd finally seen her, the look of longing on his face had nearly stopped her heart. She'd dropped the towel on pure instinct, pure lust, her need to belong to this man overwhelming.

He stood still as she walked over to him, her hips swaying enticingly with her own arousal. She could already feel her own juices between her legs as her clit began to tingle with the thoughts of what was to come. As she reached him, he held his arms open and she walked into his embrace, sighing contentedly when his arms wrapped around her and pressed her body tight against his. He grabbed her ass and lifted her a little as he ground his rigid cock against her soft heat, even with the barrier of his clothing she was about to explode.

He walked her back onto the lounge and lowered her into a sitting position as he stepped back to remove his clothes. As he lowered the jumpsuit, she could see his thick cock bulging against the stretchy material of his underwear. She slid off the couch, her hand grasping his prick as she fell to her knees. She pulled the material lower as she took him into her hand and raised her mouth to lick the salty pre-cum from the mushroom shaped head. His groan emboldened her and she lowered her head fully over him, took him deep into her mouth, and ran her tongue over the underside, licking the thick vein.

His hands tangled in her hair as he gently guided her and gave her a chance to brace her weight against his thighs as he set the pace.

“Oh, sweetheart, you look so beautiful with your lips wrapped around my cock.” He groaned loudly. “It feels so fantastic. I don’t think I’m going to last long.”

She looked up at him and watched his face as she sucked harder and massaged his balls with one hand. He threw his head back and groaned at the same time that the buzzer on the door sounded.

“That’d be our food,” he said as he tried to gently set her aside. She clamped on harder, sucked him deeper, and relaxed her throat so that she could swallow around his hard cock.

“Baby, if I don’t answer the door,”—he was almost panting—“they’ll let themselves in.” Once again, he tried to pull away from her, but she wrapped her arms tight around his thighs and sucked him with abandon. His masculine scent filled her, and her arousal heightened at the idea of getting caught in such a position.

“Okay,” he said. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

He grabbed her head tightly between his hands and pumped into her harder and faster. She braced herself against his thighs again as she relaxed her throat and let him fuck her mouth. She heard the door open but was fairly certain that she couldn’t be seen from this angle. Though judging by Jordan’s movements it wouldn’t be hard to guess.

She felt him swell in her mouth and his thick cock bump the back of her throat one last time before his seed jettisoned onto her tongue and she swallowed greedily. He groaned as she continued to suck him, licking him clean and fondling his balls as she heard the door close again.

Finally, she let him go with a soft pop, licking her lips as he put his arms under her and lifted her against him.

“Time for me to eat,” he said wickedly, placing her onto the table next to the newly delivered food. “And you, sweetheart, are the first course.”

He spread her across the table and lifted her legs over his shoulders as his fingers delved in between her thighs and spread her juices. She was so wet, so ready for him, that she was already on the

verge of orgasm, and he'd barely touched her. Large hands pressed her thighs tightly against the tabletop and Sarah had no choice but to submit to his ministrations as his tongue slid into her heat. She tried to buck against him as his mouth found her clit, and she groaned in sensual abandon when he bit it gently.

He pushed her legs further apart as his strong hands gripped her ass and pressed her against his face at the same time that his blunt finger circled her back passage. She cried out as he pressed a finger deep into her ass, the pleasure pain bringing her to the brink.

"Come for me," he said against her clit and then he bit her once more.

Sarah's pussy pulsed and then exploded in orgasm. Her ass dragged against the finger impaling her as her entire body shook with release. Three fingers delved into her pussy, finger fucking her as she came all over them, her juice coating his hand and dripping down her ass cheeks.

He held her there, his fingers still embedded in her ass and her pussy as she slowly regained her breath. He kissed her stomach, her breasts, her throat, and then carefully extracted his fingers and wrapped his arms around her and gathered her close.

"Let's get cleaned up," he said softly. "And then we can have something to eat."

\* \* \* \*

Sarah's brain seemed to have been short circuited. Never, ever, did she remember being this satisfied, this relaxed, or this comfortable. Okay, so she wasn't exactly the most experienced woman in the universe, but she did have enough knowledge to know that Captain Jordan Bowman was a master craftsman in the bedroom.

For the second time in an hour, Sarah stood under the hot spray of water, but this time Jordan washed her down. His soapy exploration made her knees wobble and her breath catch. He stood behind her and

smoothly massaged her shoulders and breasts and swirled his slippery fingers around her nipples. She stretched languidly against him, reached over her head to wrap her arms around his neck, and pulled his head down for a lingering kiss.

Jordan deepened the kiss as his hands moved lower, one moving to separate her pink folds and circle her clit, the other sliding down the crease of her ass, a knuckle pressing against the puckered flesh, sending heat rushing into her womb and weakening her knees further.

“Not this time, sweetheart,” he whispered into her ear before nipping the sensitive flesh with his teeth. “This time I need to be inside you.”

“Yesssss,” she hissed. Her body melted as he pressed her against the wall, the tiles cold against her overheated breasts. He lifted her easily and spread her ass cheeks as he pressed into her swollen pussy. She felt the thick mushroom head press into her before he groaned and pulled her against him, skewering her onto his thick cock. She grunted with the impact, her feet off the ground, and her body pressed between the cold tile and his hard, muscular frame.

She moaned again as he pumped into her a few times and then sank his teeth into her shoulder, biting the sensitive flesh. Heat coursed straight from the sting and into her clit as his clever fingers still toyed with the throbbing nub.

“Oh, sweetheart,” he growled, pulling out of her and turning her around so that he could wrap her legs around him as he thrust into her again. “I want those sweet tits in my mouth.”

He bent forward to kiss her lips and then slid his tongue into her mouth to thrust in time with his cock. He broke the kiss, bit her lower lip, and then soothed the sting with his tongue, unable to hold back his groan as her pussy tightened around him.

He lowered his head to her breasts, grabbed the taut nipple between his teeth, and nipped and tugged at the flesh as she bucked wildly against him.

“That’s it, sweetheart,” he said against her breast as she began to shiver and her body throbbed all over. The muscles drew tight as she soared towards release. “Come now,” he ordered, biting her breast hard enough to mark her.

Sarah screamed as her orgasm broke. Her body pounded against his as he thrust into her harder, deeper, and she flew into a million tiny pieces. He held her tightly while her body shook against him. He pressed two fingers straight into her ass and stretched her cheeks open with his big hands.

The delicious sensations exploded again. Her heart stuttered as her body shook violently. His cock jumped in her swollen pussy as her second orgasm sucked him dry. He groaned as he jetted his cum deep into her body and crushed her to him in a fierce hug.

He pulled back a little, their bodies still joined, and smiled into her eyes.

“Sarah, that was incredible,” he said, between gasps, trying to regain his breath. She nodded, trying to swallow against her dry throat, but found herself unable to articulate what she was feeling.

“I know,” he said as he looked at her tenderly.

\* \* \* \*

“So how long have you been the Captain?”

They’d eventually found their way out of the shower and had both fallen on the food that had been delivered earlier. Now they lounged naked on the sofa, talking idly as they waited for Jordan’s contact to reply to his message.

“Six years,” he said, frowning a little. Did he really want the conversation to go there? Hell, no! But did he have a choice? Probably not. The woman sure knew how to extract information. He’d already told her about his parents and younger brother and had somehow spilled far more information to her than any of his crew knew.

He leaned over, grabbed her around the waist, and hauled her naked body onto his lap. He pressed his lips against her smiling mouth and grabbed her thighs to spread her legs so that she straddled him.

“Hmmm,” she said, laughter in her voice. “I have noticed that anytime I ask a question you don’t want to answer, I somehow find your swollen cock pressed against my pussy.”

He pushed her harder against his throbbing groin. Never before had he been so enthralled by a woman and until just a few hours ago, he wouldn’t have believed it possible. Somehow, this red-headed bundle of energy had stolen not only his heart, but his mind and his common sense, as well. Intellectually, he knew he had to let her go, but, well, he wasn’t quite ready.

He laughed at her observation, but it didn’t stop him from capturing her lips with his own as he pressed his cock deep into her waiting pussy. He groaned at how wet she was for him already. Her breath caught in her lungs as he pushed deeper.

“Don’t think you can distract me,” she said, the shake in her voice betraying her brave words. “You will answer my question.”

“Is that so?” he asked as he pressed her shoulder blades forward so that he could capture a tightly beaded nipple in his mouth. He flicked the dusky pink nub with his tongue, her breathless groan a sure sign of her weakened resolve.

“Oh, hell,” she said on a gasp as he changed their angle and her over-sensitive clit rubbed against his hard muscles with each stroke. He watched her face as she came apart in his arms. Her cheeks flushed, her head tilted back, and her eyes closed. Her inner muscles grabbed at him as he thrust harder. He lengthened his strokes, almost pulling out of her before slamming back in as her orgasm rolled on and on through her body. He ground his teeth against the urge to come hard and fast himself.

She collapsed against him, their sweaty bodies slicked together. He held her to him with his cock buried deep in her body, and his



pulse jumped as she wiggled her hips to encourage his fingers to slip into her ass. He smiled as he circled the puckered flesh and pressed against her tight muscle but denied her need to press onto his fingers.

“Have you ever had a man in your ass?” he asked as he pushed a single digit past the tight ring of muscle.

She shook her head against his shoulder and then gasped as a second finger delved into the tight coil. He pressed deeper as she creamed around his cock even more and moaned in abandon as her body once again raced towards orgasm. Feeling his own body react to her tightening pussy, Jordan lifted her off his cock, his fingers still buried in her ass.

He pushed her face-first against the back of the sofa as he continued to fuck her ass with his fingers. Her body began to convulse around him.

“Sarah,” he whispered as he leaned over her. “Do you want me to fuck your ass?”

“Yesssssss.” She moaned against the cushions and wiggled her bottom harder against his invading fingers. He stood behind her kneeling form and pressed his cock into her dripping pussy again. He gathered her moisture and made sure that his cock was well lubricated.

He continued to press his fingers in and out of her tight hole, added a third, and stretched her for his cock as her body shook with arousal. He carefully eased his fingers from her ass and then slowly pressed the tip of his throbbing dick into her waiting flesh, holding himself still as he allowed her body to adjust.

Sweat dripped down his face as he controlled his entry, holding her hips tight as she tried to push back onto him.

“Sweetheart, I don't want to hurt you. Stay still.” he ordered, grinding his teeth as her silky tight hole accepted him. He eased in all the way, his stomach pressed tightly against her ass cheeks as she whimpered beneath him, her orgasm already about to break.

“Move,” she ordered him, her voice a deep growl in her throat as her body writhed against his strong hold.

His control snapped as he pulled out and thrust back into her ass. Her entire body shook in his arms as she screamed her release. Her tight hole pulsed around his cock as he slammed into her over and over.

With a roar, he came and spilled his seed deep into her body. He held her tight against him as she collapsed, exhausted. His cock still throbbed as her ass puckered around him and they both fought for breath. He lifted her backwards as he lay down on the sofa, his cock still buried deep in her ass as he arranged her limp body over him so that they both faced the ceiling.

“That,”—she said, still panting for breath—“was incredible.”

“Agreed,” he said, grinning. He’d never taken a woman like that before. His mind still reeled from the incredibly heady feeling of them giving each other something that they’d never given before. He stared at the ceiling as emotions swirled through him and he realized that he wanted her with him always, that he wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to let her go.

God, how fucked up was that? He was a Captain on a pirate ship, and she was in danger if she stayed. Too many of his crew were the *exact* type of men that gave pirates their reputation, and even *he* wasn’t sure who he could trust to help keep his woman safe.

She squirmed against him, obviously uncomfortable with his silence.

“Jordan,” she said softly.

“Yes, sweetheart,” he said, grinning.

“How did you become Captain of a pirate ship?”

Fuck! The woman was like an ancient Earth canine called a pit bull. Once she sank her teeth into a conversation, she didn’t let go.

“Shower time,” he announced, lifting her carefully so that he could pull his softening cock from her ass. He helped her to stand and turned her in the direction of the shower. He smacked her bare ass

playfully when she tried to turn back to him with another question on her mind.

Eventually he gave up trying to guide her and simply lifted her into his arms. He kissed her fiercely as he walked into the bathroom.

\* \* \* \*

Jordan held her close as they stood under the warm spray of water, and Sarah snuggled against his strong chest. She felt small and feminine and safe in his arms. Asking him to fuck her ass had sent all sorts of emotions flying through her, and she'd tried desperately to get her mouth moving so that she could distract herself from the unsettling thoughts.

It just wasn't possible to be in love with a man in a little over a day. Seriously, it was lust plain and simple, and considering how the man was built, hey, she'd have to be dead not to notice. But then, why did she let him take her ass when she'd refused every other man she'd ever slept with, including her ex-fiancé? Hell, she was in deep. He'd bought her here to help her escape from his ship and his crew, but she wasn't sure she ever wanted to leave him. What a fucking mess!

Her ass still throbbed pleasantly as she remembered the incredible sensations. Her body thrilled again when he pressed his tongue into her mouth and thrust hard into her welcoming warmth before biting her lips with his strong, white teeth.

The water was heavenly, but it didn't compare to the tender way he washed her down, his care and concern for her clear in every movement. She turned in his arms as need clawed at her to show him the same love, the same concern, as she washed him down. She kissed him gently over and over as he held her to him.

For a long while they stood under the water as they simply held each other, but then real life intruded as a message alert sounded from the computer.

“I’ve got to get that,” he said apologetically, as he reached for the taps to turn off the water. He grabbed a large towel, wrapped it around her, and then grabbed another to dry off her hair. She stood still in his embrace as she sensed his need to pamper her, to cherish her, but all too soon, he lifted her in his arms and carried her back to the sofa.

“Rest,” he ordered with a mock growl as he kissed her lightly and then turned to the computer. She watched the strong muscles in his back as he walked away from her, the skin still glistening with water. He pulled on a pair of pants in a soft comfortable material and then sat at the computer. She knew the moment he read the e-mail that something was wrong. The muscles contracted in his back as his body stiffened, and he rolled his head tiredly on his neck.

“What is it?” she asked as concern laced her voice and her fear for him leaked through. He held his arms open to her and beckoned her forwards. She almost ran into his embrace and fell onto his lap as her fear multiplied substantially.

Holding her close, he tried to reassure her.

“It’s probably nothing.” She smiled when he sighed, seemingly resigned to the fact that he had to tell her. Did he already know her well enough to know that she wouldn’t let it go lightly? “I don’t think this reply is actually from my contact. I suspect that someone is trying to set a trap to catch me.”

She shivered in his arms, the thought of losing him turning her blood cold.

“So don’t go. We can head back to the ship and rethink our strategy.”

His body stiffened under her and his entire being stilled as anger seemed to boil in him.

“You are not coming back to the ship, ever. Do you understand me?”

She nodded slowly, but hid her face against his shoulder as she tried to control the sobs that threatened to break free. Hell, she was such a sucker. Somehow, she’d confused lust with caring and

fabulous sex with something more. She tried to lift herself off his lap, tried to gather her shredded dignity, tried to hide her breaking heart, but he held her to him and rocked her gently as he made soothing noises.

“Sweetheart, that’s not what I meant.” He tried to lift her head so that he could capture her gaze. “I want you with me—more than I can explain—but I also want you safe. The men on my crew are dangerous, and I won’t put you at risk just because I selfishly want you by my side.”

She relaxed a little as understanding flowed through her. He wasn’t actually saying that he loved her, but he was admitting that what they had between them was something special for him as well. She wanted more, a whole lot more, but she set aside her emotions as she tried to get back to the matter that had brought them together—sick children with no way to access the medicine she’d been delivering.

“So what do we do now?”

“I meet whoever replied to my message at the rendezvous point and you stay here to get some well deserved sleep.” He said it so arrogantly, so self-assured that his orders would be followed that she barely restrained the urge to punch him in the face.

“Stay here? No fucking way! I came here to help you and help you I will,” she yelled, wriggling off his lap and getting to her feet. Anger pulsed through her, and she had the absurd urge to stamp her foot or do something equally ridiculous. *Absolutely fucking great.* He was treating her like a child, and now she was acting like one.

“No. I brought you here so that you could escape and head home in that tin can you call a space ship and I could find my contact and get the medicine to the people who need it. Simple as that.” His eyes sparkled as his temper flashed.

“No way,” she yelled as she tried to control her own rising temper, “I have a stake in this, too. I didn’t risk my life trying to deliver the stuff just to tuck tail and run now.” She planted her feet,

hand on hips, in front of his seated form. “You need me,” she said angrily.

He grabbed her wrist and yanked her back onto his lap. “You have no idea how much I need you,” he said, just before his lips claimed hers in a soft, sensual kiss. He slid his tongue over her surprised gasp and captured her next words as he tugged on her lower lip with his teeth and then thrust his tongue into her heat. She groaned into his mouth. Her body already tingled with renewed desire as her breasts grew heavy and her breathing quickened.

His hands found her naked breasts and he dragged his thumbs over the distended nipples as he caressed the soft mounds. She couldn’t help but melt against him as she felt his hard cock press against her engorged sex. He shifted her so that she straddled him as his hand sought her wet heat. He pushed her lower against his lap as she pulled his thickening cock from the confines of the pants. He pressed her back a little and then lowered her onto him. He stroked deeply as he controlled the rhythm and captured her heart and soul as he loved her slowly, reverently. He carefully brought her to climax over and over. Heat flooded through her in gentle waves, the orgasm more intense than any other simply because of his caring, his worship, his gentleness. With him, right at this moment, she felt loved.

## Chapter Six

Jordan watched her beautiful face as her body tightened and released over and over and her skin flushed prettily as her orgasm claimed her. He'd started this as a way to distract her, but somehow it had backfired and he'd felt himself falling farther and harder than he had ever done in his life. There was no hiding it from himself. He loved her with everything in him. He would die for her. He would kill to protect her and he'd keep her safe—even if it meant she would hate him.

His cock throbbed as he stroked in and out of her glorious heat. His heart thumped hard, beating a tattoo that shouted his love for this woman. She gasped one final time as another climax hit her. Her pussy pulsed around him and tipped him into his own release.

He held her close and cradled her gently against his chest, but couldn't stop the single tear as it escaped and rolled down his face to drip into her hair. He'd finally found a woman he could love for the rest of his life, and she would most likely end up hating him for what he was about to do next.

She stirred in his arms as he stood, lifted her against his chest, and strode towards the bed. "Shhh. It's okay, sweetheart. We're just going to get some rest. We have time," he reassured her as she stiffened. "Our rendezvous isn't for several hours yet."

He felt almost guilty as he laid her on the bed and settled beside her to pull her back against his front, spoon style. "Sleep. I'll wake you when it's time to go."

He held her for almost an hour, listening carefully. Eventually he heard her breathing deepen and felt her body relax in his arms, but he

held her for a moment longer before he carefully moved away and reached for the tie on the hotel's complimentary robe.

Gently, he looped the material around her left hand and carefully tied several tight knots before he twisted it around the bed head and then tied it to her right hand. She barely moved as he eased away from her, her body still soft and relaxed and her breath deep and even. He watched her for a moment. Regret rolled through him as he took a last look at the woman who would always own his heart but could never be part of his life. He'd contact the hotel management in a few hours so that someone could help her get untied and she could leave this pathetic little planet without him.

He left the room quietly and pulled on his clothes as he gathered his supplies. He checked that his stun pistol was fully charged and made sure the room was secure. Jordan was almost at the door when he hesitated and turned back to the bedroom to take one final look. From the doorway, he memorized every curve, every feature, every inch of flawless skin as he tried to prepare himself for a very lonely future. Yesterday that wouldn't have bothered him. Today he felt like his soul had been cut from his body, leaving a wound that would never heal.

He stepped to the bed and carefully lifted the covers over her nakedness. "I love you," he whispered as he turned and left the motel suite, quietly locking the door behind him.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah held still a moment longer as she listened intently to make sure he was actually gone. Stupid man! If you loved someone, you didn't leave her tied to a bed while you went off to risk your life. Satisfied that she was indeed alone, she moved quickly and used her teeth to untie the knots, grateful that he hadn't thought to bind her legs, as well. That would've made following him just a little bit harder.



Releasing herself, Sarah strode into the main area, collected her clothes, and emptied the pockets. She chuckled at how easy it had been to grab and hide all of the pieces while she maneuvered her little ship on the way here. If she'd really wished him harm, the man would've been in a whole lot of trouble. She moved confidently from years of practice and assembled all of the different little pieces back into a stun gun and tracking device. She laughed again as she remembered how she'd timed it perfectly. He hadn't even felt the sting when she'd injected him in the back of the knee with the subcutaneous tracer. *Well, she laughed to herself, men did tend to be a little preoccupied when a woman held his cock in her mouth.*

Switching on the device as she quickly pulled her clothes on, she watched the little blip move across the screen. If they'd been on Earth, she would've been able to co-ordinate with global satellites and essentially watch his every move. On this planet, however, she needed to follow the little blip, and, judging by its slow movement, he was still on foot. She gathered her stun gun and tucked it into her pocket. It wasn't *little darlin'* but it would still be better than walking around unarmed.

\* \* \* \*

The hairs at the back of his neck prickled as he watched the entry to the store where he was supposed to rendezvous with his contact. The very fact that Oberon had set their meeting indoors had been unusual in and of itself, as he usually preferred the anonymity of a large market area or food court. What really had Jordan on edge had been the way the message had been phrased. Oberon had always, *always* left two spaces between the third and fourth words in any communication as a verification of his identity to anyone reading the messages. It would've appeared as a simple typing error if someone had noticed, but to Jordan the missing extra space was a red flag that couldn't be ignored.

“No sudden moves, pirate,” an overconfident voice said from behind him as he felt the barrel of an ancient projectile weapon pressed against his head. “We’ve been waiting for y...”

He never finished the sentence and after a moment’s hesitation, Jordan moved slowly and turned to see the young man crumpled at his feet.

“Didn’t your Momma ever tell you to watch your back?” Sarah asked, a broad smile on her face. “Lucky I came along,” she said as she pocketed the man’s weapon and hauled him further into the shadows.

“What are you doing here?” Jordan growled, panic for her safety overriding his common sense. “You can bet your ass he’s not alone.”

She glared at him. “You mean the guy on the roof across from us? Or the woman down the road without a baby in her pram?”

His gaze zoomed to both locations as fear for her pounded heavily through his system. He saw no one, so he glared back at her until she shrugged and patted her little stun gun before sliding it back into her pocket.

\* \* \* \*

If she hadn’t been so angry with him, she probably would’ve burst out laughing at the comical look on his face. God, men were stupid sometimes. He’d been so busy trying to protect her that he hadn’t even considered asking her what skills she might have. He’d just assumed that because she was out of her depth on his ship surrounded by nasty pirates that she’d be a cowering female who needed his protection, no matter where they were.

“I worked black-ops for seven years, you moron. I’m more qualified than you when it comes to this stuff, so quit looking at me like that and grab this guy. If we can get him somewhere secluded I can interrogate him and find out where your contact is.”

## Chapter Seven

Still a little stunned, but more than grateful for her timely arrival, Jordan nodded and then bent to haul the young man to his feet. He threw an arm around the guy's middle and held him up in a fairly believable imitation of helping a drunken friend. He took a step forward and then stopped, turned to her, and said two words that seemed to surprise Sarah.

"I'm sorry."

Black-ops for seven years? No wonder the woman had a kick-ass attitude. As far as he knew, black-ops were deadly undercover missions for elite Earth military personnel, and they included everything from hostage rescue to assassinations.

Sarah led him to a dead-end alley. Tall concrete-type walls surrounded them on three sides, and he took their unconscious guest deep into the shadows. He stood back as Sarah tied the unconscious man using a long slim piece of cord that she'd withdrawn from her pocket. Jordan spared a moment to wonder where or how she managed to have so much stuff with her but decided to shelve the question for another time. He winced as he watched her wind the cord around their prisoner in an intricate pattern, including a loop around the man's penis and another around his testicles, with nothing but a thin scrap of material between the cord and the guy's sensitive flesh.

Jordan almost felt sorry for the guy. His own balls ached in sympathy for a fellow male, but he managed to shake off the strange feeling by reminding himself that moments ago this guy had pointed a lethal projectile weapon at his head. Satisfied with her knots, Sarah

stepped back, holding both ends of the cord as she slapped him solidly across the face.

“Wake up, baby,” she said sweetly, her fingers caressing the pink outline of her hand print on his cheek. “I want to have a little chat.”

The man woke slowly, groggily looking around as he tried to get his bearings. Jordan knew the exact moment he realized his predicament, the guy’s face morphing into horror as he glanced down at the cord between his legs. He began to struggle against the knots that bound his arms behind his back but stilled almost immediately when the action pulled the cord tighter around his genitals.

“Now that I have your attention,” she began pleasantly. “I’ll explain the rules of this little game. I’m going to ask you a question and if you answer me truthfully, I pull this end.” She pulled the cord in her right hand in demonstration. “It releases the tension a little.” The man almost smiled as he felt the cord slacken a little, but it was short-lived as she continued her demonstration. “But if you lie to me, I pull this cord.” The man’s face tightened in fear as the cord pressed harder against him.

“Now, do you understand the rules of our little game?” He nodded fiercely, his eyes darting between her face and his own balls. “Good boy,” she said, giving the right cord a small tug so that the pressure on his cock eased slightly.

“Who do you work for?”

“The government,” he answered immediately, expanding on the information as he saw her right hand twitch. “I answer directly to the Prime Minister.”

“Good,” she said, nodding. “So you should know where our friend is.”

“Oberon?” he asked as sweat ran down his brow and dripped onto his eyelashes. She caught Jordan’s quick nod out of the corner of her eye as he confirmed his contact’s name.

“Yes, Oberon. Tell me where he is and I will consider letting you keep your balls. Are you any good at singing?” she asked. “Lie to me and I’ll make sure you can hit the high notes.”

\* \* \* \*

Jordan still reeled from what had happened in the alley. The guy had literally spilled everything, even going as far as offering his access card to the facility where Oberon was being held and promising to find a new career.

Millions of questions flew through Jordan’s head, but one could no longer be contained and he found himself blurting it out before he’d had a good chance to decide if he really wanted to know the answer.

“How many times have you done that?”

“What, the cord thing?”

He nodded mutely, his eyes not daring to leave her face as his hands unconsciously moved in front of his groin and shielded his favorite appendages.

“A few times. Why?” she asked, looking at him curiously.

“I was...uhm...just wondering how many men...er...you...uhm ...castrated?” he asked, his blood running cold at the thought. She stopped to look him directly in the face and smiled at his confused expression.

“Actually, none. It seems that males of all species are more than willing to talk when their equipment is under threat.”

He laughed at her response as he acknowledged the truth of her statement. He didn’t know a man alive that would’ve willingly risked his package just to keep a few measly secrets. He shook his head in approval. She sure was one hell of a woman.

“Sarah, if you worked black-ops for seven years, how come you don’t have better control over your temper?” he asked before he thought better of the question.

“Yeah, well, seven years of rigid control—hell, it was gonna explode sooner or later,” she said, smiling. Jordan noticed the flippant way she answered and was sure that there was more to the story, but he set aside his curiosity for the time being.

He grabbed her hand, giving into his need to touch her, his need to renew their connection. Only hours ago he’d thought he’d never see her again, and now they were headed to a high security facility to try to free Oberon. He tried to concentrate and follow her lead.

As they neared the outer wall, Sarah turned into his embrace, tucked her head against his shoulder, and whispered instructions on what he should be looking for. She asked him detailed questions about the number and placement of guards, doors, and windows. He gazed down at her lovingly, their appearance nothing more noticeable than other honeymooners wandering the streets. Except, of course, that they were deep in discussion on the best way to infiltrate a high security government facility.

“Seven guards that I can see. No visible windows on the ground floor from this side, but the second level looks almost like an office block—at least twenty windows about two feet apart. Only one door guarded by two sloppy guards.”

“Sloppy I can work with,” she said confidently.

“What about the others? Do they look like professional soldiers or hired hands with guns?” He watched as one of the guards swung his rifle from side to side as he spoke to another man.

“I’d hazard a guess and say hired hands,” he said, barely able to contain his amusement. If appearance was anything to go by, even *he’d* be able to slip past these guys. Sarah should be able to do it with her eyes closed.

“Kiss me,” she whispered, and he obliged immediately as he wondered whether they were being watched or whether she’d just needed to kiss him as much as he needed to kiss her. Her lips met his, her tongue thrusting deep into his mouth as she pressed herself closer.

She whimpered as he pulled her tighter, grinding her against his thickening cock.

She broke the kiss, gasping for breath. “We have about three hours until full dark. Take me back to the hotel,” she ordered as she stroked him through the material of his pants.

“Yes, ma’am.” He laughed as he threw an arm over her shoulders and turned her around to lead her towards their room.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah lay on the floor, sprawled across Jordan’s exhausted body as they tried to catch their breath. They’d barely made it into the room before their passion had overcome them and they’d stripped each other bare. Her need had nearly overwhelmed her as he’d lifted her against the door and plunged into her hot depths, his moan echoing her own as he’d pounded into her again and again.

She’d screamed and bitten his shoulder as her climax rocked her body, taking him with her as she convulsed around him. She had no idea how long they’d been lying collapsed on the floor, but the shadows in the room had lengthened and she was fairly certain that nightfall was approaching.

“Sarah,” he said quietly. “I think we need to move.”

“I know,” she said softly. He seemed a little alarmed at the sadness in her voice and he moved so that he could sit with her across his lap. “Sweetheart, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Everything. Oh, crap. I don’t know,” she said tiredly. “A lot has happened in the last couple of days...” she said, trailing off, unable to find the words or the courage to say what was on her mind. Was it really fair to burden him with her feelings? He might believe he loved her—after all, he’d said it when he thought he was leaving her behind—but that didn’t mean he wanted or needed her love in return. They’d already proven that a pirate ship was no place for a human woman and it was his pirate activities that made sure that

sick children had a chance at getting the medicine they needed. The two simply weren't compatible. She couldn't stay with him, and he couldn't give up his calling and stay with her. Jordan was brave and noble, almost the exact opposite of the scoundrel he was supposed to be, and she had no right to wish he could give her more than he already had. She would somehow find the courage to let him go simply because she loved him.

"Come on," she said as she crawled off him and headed to the bathroom. "We have time for a quick shower and then it's back to the real world."

\* \* \* \*

The real world. *That basically sums up the problem*, Jordan thought as he dried her with a big fluffy towel. In the real world, their lives simply weren't compatible. Only here, in this small bubble of time, could they truly love each other. He'd made slow, exquisite love to her again in the shower and passionately told her with his body how much she meant to him.

She'd moaned over and over as he'd taken her with gentle care, loving her with every emotion, every pound of his heart, every molecule of his being. She'd responded in kind, her lips never muttering the words, but her body language saying it loud and clear. She loved him. He could feel it as it flowed through him and healed his lost soul, filling the loneliness that he'd lived with for so long.

He watched her as she dressed, painfully aware that it was probably the last time he'd see her beautiful body, except of course in his dreams. The thought of going on without her after all this was done made his chest ache. A black void of empty days stretched before him and almost robbed him of his sanity. He pulled her into his arms, trying to imprint the memory of her feel, her scent, and her love in his head and his heart. Then he gathered his equipment, and with a heavy feeling weighing him down, followed her out the door.



\* \* \* \*

They'd watched the guards at the front door fall asleep and awaken several times in the past hour, only problem was that the two of them didn't do it at the same time. Almost like it was coordinated, the other guard seemed to rouse as the first one fell asleep.

"Okay. New plan," she whispered. "You create a diversion, and I'll slip past them."

He nodded as several ideas raced through his head.

"How about I stun one of the guards around the corner? Hopefully that will have the other two running to his aid."

She nodded. "Just make sure you're quick and you get the hell away before they get a chance to use their weapons. These are ancient projectile weapons, that shoot a small piece of metal called a bullet, and if they hit you, the wound is most likely fatal. You could bleed out long before I could get you medical assistance. So stay down, stay hidden, and if they find you, shoot them first. Are we clear?"

He nodded again, a big goofy grin on his face until she rolled her eyes.

"Okay, okay. I get it. But be careful, *Pirate*."

He kissed her quickly and then moved from their hiding space and made his way carefully towards the corner of the building. He glanced back to where she'd been, no longer able to see her, and idly wondered if she still watched him or if she was also moving into position. He rounded the corner but found the guard asleep at his post. Damn, what was that they said about the best-laid plans? He made the decision quickly and used his stun gun to make sure the guard went right on sleeping so that he could go in search of another. He knew Sarah would be waiting for his signal, so he moved quickly, worried what she might do if she thought he wasn't able to create the distraction she'd requested.

Jordan rounded another corner and found two tired-looking guards leaning casually against the wall. One seemed to be sleeping while the other moved restlessly. He stunned the moving guy and expected the other to raise the alarm, but when he failed to stir, Jordan shot him, as well.

He almost laughed out loud as he went looking for yet another guard, wondering whether he would be able to find anyone competent enough to do their job. As he approached the next corner of the square building, he glanced around the edge only to see the guard slump as a stun blast hit him from the corner near the front of the building.

Jordan stepped back into the shadows and held his breath as he strained to hear any sounds of an approaching assailant. In a strange moment of clarity, he realized that the unknown person heading this way was most likely Sarah and if that was true, he was in a whole lot of trouble. She'd probably stun him first and then ask questions later. He was supposed to be creating a diversion on the other side of the building, not taking out guards as he wondered around.

"Sarah," he hissed quietly. He figured that if the person approaching him wasn't her, he'd at least cause the distraction she'd asked for, albeit on the wrong side of the building. He waited, listened carefully, and then slowly released the breath he'd been holding when he heard her surprised sound. He stepped from the shadows a moment later.

"Sit-rep," she whispered as she pushed him back into the shadows.

"Three guards. All stunned. You?"

"Same here. That means we have one missing." She spoke so quietly that he had to lower his head to her face and couldn't help but breathe deeply as he smelled her unique scent. He wanted to haul her into his arms, but he held fast as he tried to concentrate on where the seventh guard could be. "Maybe he's inside." She shook her head, a movement he felt more than saw in the dark. "I don't like it, but we

need to get in now, find Oberon, get back out, and hope that guard number seven called in sick today.”

She moved towards the back door where the guards were slumped against the ground. She grabbed one and maneuvered him into a sitting position so that he looked asleep, not stunned. Jordan followed her lead and pushed the other guard into the same position. They needed as much time as they could get now that the distraction idea had failed. She glanced up at the window on the second floor.

“Up there.” She pointed to a partially-open window. “Give me a boost,” she said as she grabbed his shoulders.

“Okay. I’ll stay out here and make sure our exit is clear,” he said as he realized that she had no intention of letting him follow her. Every protective male instinct roared against the idea, but she had already proven she was more than capable and there was no way he was going to disrespect that or underestimate her again. Besides, he wasn’t going to fit through that tiny space, even if he had a way to get up there, and going through the door was probably the more dangerous option. Chances were, guard number seven was inside and probably guarding both the front and back doors from somewhere in the middle of the building. She was the more experienced of the two of them when it came to this sort of thing, and he would probably just slow her down anyway.

Unfortunately, no amount of calm reasoning stopped his gut from tightening as he watched her slide through the narrow opening. He held his breath as he waited for some kind of sound or alarm to go off, but nothing happened. He slipped into the shadow of the doorway as he nervously waited for something to happen.

## Chapter Eight

Sarah dropped lightly onto the carpeted floor. She'd stepped into what looked to be an administrative office where several computer terminals blinked in their stand-by state. She touched the nearest screen and the computer powered up quickly, so she searched the database for some kind of floor plan or indication of what was waiting downstairs. *Bingo*, she thought triumphantly as she opened a prisoner list that showed a floor plan of the cells below with each prisoner's name overlaid on their cell.

Gerald Oberon was being held in cell B7. Sarah quickly scrolled through the other names, but none stood out among the many. It was a fairly safe bet that most were political prisoners, captured and jailed for their beliefs rather than any actual crime they'd committed.

She skipped through several more files before she ran across a reference to the medication her ship had been supposed to deliver. She opened the file, curiosity momentarily overriding her need for haste. What she found almost made her vomit. The medication had been pre-sold to another world even though the file contained documents and images outlining the desperate needs of this planet's own people. Images of sick and dying children filled her screen and a sudden flood of anger filled her. Those kids would get the medication. No way was she going to stand by as governments did this to their own people.

She was headed out the door and into the hallway when she heard voices, so she carefully crept towards the staircase in the middle of the building.

\* \* \* \*

Jordan moved around the building, re-stunning the guards before they could fully wake. Moments ago he'd followed a young man, barely more than a boy, around the building, not sure who he was or what he was doing and had watched him check the physical status of each of the guards. He'd been unarmed and not dressed in a uniform, so Jordan had begun to think he was just some kid with too much curiosity and not enough brains. Jordan swore a silent blue streak when he'd watched him use an electronic key to open the front door and quickly enter the building.

Shit! Five more minutes and then he was going in after her—even if he had to knock on the damn door.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah crept closer so that she could hear the conversation more clearly.

“All six of them, sir,” a nervous voice said.

“Where are the intruders now?”

“There's no sign of them, s...s...sir,” the nervous voice stuttered.

“Is the alarm still working?” The anxious guy must've nodded because the other voice spoke again.

“Good. At least one thing is going right tonight. Call for reinforcements while I check on the prisoners.”

Slipping down the steps quietly, Sarah chanced a quick glance around the edge of the wall. Both men stood in the middle of a long, narrow corridor with their backs to her, so she watched them as they moved down the hall. She figured that the older man was the one in charge and she watched him turn right at the end of the hallway and the younger man step through the last door on the left.

Sarah moved quickly as she ran down the hall, careful to keep her footsteps light so that she could get to the younger man before he had

a chance to call for reinforcements. She slipped into the room just as the young man glanced up and his expression turned to panic. He crumpled at the knees as her stun shot hit him and she moved forward to catch him so that he fell to the ground quietly. He was barely more than a kid and, Sarah admitted silently to herself, she really didn't want to hurt him.

Sarah stepped back into the hallway as she turned to follow the direction the other man had taken. She moved carefully through the corridor, noting the numbers on each of the doors all began with G. It didn't take a genius to realize that the numbering system meant that the cell she was looking for, B7, was in the basement. She could see the steps ahead of her and could hear faint noises coming from the bottom of the stairwell.

She almost jumped out of her skin when she heard the doorbell ring. Shit! Who the fuck would be knocking on the front door in the middle of the night? Reinforcements? Unlikely. They'd have an access card. Government officials? Probably not. Space Scout Girls selling cookies? Hey, at this point anything was possible.

She stepped into what looked to be a supply closet and pulled the door almost closed so that she could watch the man who came up the stairs.

"David," he called, his voice tight. "Stay where you are, son. I'll find out who it is."

Okay, now she felt a little less stupid about catching the kid as she stunned him. It sounded like he was this man's son and not even part of the operation. Didn't mean she couldn't shoot his daddy, though.

He fell to the ground as soon as her shot hit. He crumpled first to his knees, then his waist, and slid gracefully to the floor. It looked like daddy wasn't going to have any bruises either.

Moving quickly to the stairs, Sarah paused a moment and listened for sounds of other guards, but heard none. Stun gun at the ready, she moved carefully down the steps, watching the light and shadows for any signs of movement. The smell in the basement was very

unpleasant and reeked of a mixture of urine, sweat, and decay. Carefully, Sarah stepped into the hallway, noting blank walls at both ends of the long corridor with a dozen solid metal doors on either side. She followed the numbers and quickly located B7, but kept moving down the hall to make sure that none of the rooms were administrative or duty stations for guards.

Satisfied that the only people here were the prisoners, Sarah made her way back to the door marked B7. As electronic locks went, this one was fairly simple, and it took her only moments to pry off the cover to the panel, hack into the computer, and override its codes. The door swung open with a soft pop.

Inside, a man lay curled up on the cot, both eyes swollen and bruised, clearly in a lot of pain. He moved as she approached him, but gasped as his pain increased.

“Oberon?” she asked. Jordan had given her a physical description and shown her an image of the man’s face, but as banged up as this guy was, she wasn’t sure his own mother would be able to identify him.

“Oberon?” she asked again.

“Go away,” he mumbled. “I won’t tell you anything, so you may as well just kill me.”

Well, that was good enough for her. Even if he wasn’t Oberon, there was no way she was leaving this guy behind.

“Oberon, my name’s Sarah. Jordan sent me to find you.”

“Jordan?” he asked, trying to open his swollen eyes. “Where is he?”

“Outside,” she said. “Though I doubt he’ll stay there much longer. He wasn’t really keen to let me come in by myself. Is there anyone else being held here that we need to rescue?”

He nodded. “Two others were arrested with me. I’m fairly certain they are on either side of me. I could hear the sounds of them both being beaten and asked the same questions as they asked me. I don’t know if either is still alive, or even if either of them talked.”

“Can you walk?” she asked, concerned at the pain she could hear in his voice.

“I’ll bloody well walk out of here.” He groaned quietly as he sat up, but the color bleached from his face as he fought the pain. She nodded once, turned from the room, and set about releasing the locks on cell doors B6 and B8

Minutes later she crept through the halls with two injured men and a badly-beaten woman following clumsily behind her. The going was slow, but she managed to get all three up the steps from the basement and onto the ground floor. The doorbell had rung several times while she’d been down here, but so far, no-one had come through the door or opened it from the inside. She re-stunned the older man she’d left lying face first in the hallway and moved quickly forward to the room where she’d left his son.

The boy lay curled on his side, his deep snoring filling the room. She considered stunning him again but decided against it, unwilling to put someone so young at risk—regardless of who his father was. Too many hits from a stun gun could cause permanent, even fatal, injury regardless of how safe the technology claimed to be. Sarah had seen it too many times in her black-ops days. She never wanted to see it again.

She decided that the back door was probably their best chance, so she led her little group through the long corridor as she stayed alert for movement. She heard none. She just hoped Jordan had been able to keep all the guards out cold. She’d been inside almost twenty minutes, and she figured her pirate lover was probably about ready to tear the walls down to get her out.

\* \* \* \*

He’d spent the last ten minutes playing *ring-and-run* and he was beginning to feel really stupid. Jordan had been trying to get the



attention of anyone inside so that they'd open the door and then he'd stun them and storm his way inside.

Well, since no one wanted to oblige him, it was probably time for plan B.

He glanced around the yard and noticed for the first time a small vehicle parked beside a shed. If he could get it started and override the safety mechanism, plan B just might work.

\* \* \* \*

The ragged little group finally reached the back door. Sarah pried off the cover to the control panel and quickly set to work overriding the code. She glanced up to check that her escapees were still lucid and capable of following her instructions, and then stepped through the doorway, expecting to see Jordan. What she saw instead was the missing guard, just before he shot her.

## Chapter Nine

Jordan watched the whole scene as it unfolded in front of him. The seventh guard had appeared out of nowhere and had been shaking the two stunned guards in an effort to wake them. Jordan circled around the perimeter, trying to get a better angle so that he could stun the guy before he could raise the alarm, but the door had opened unexpectedly and the guard had lifted his gun and fired.

Time stood still as Jordan's throat clogged and his veins flowed with dread. He jumped from his position and ran full pelt, shooting several times before he finally hit the man with a stun shot. His breath jammed in his lungs as the woman he loved fell to her knees, holding her side. He barely noticed the people behind her. If she died, his life was worth squat, so his own safety meant little.

"I'm okay," she said as he fell to his knees beside her. "We have to get out of here."

His eyes searched her face as he sought the truth to her claim, but he could see only pain. A hand touched his shoulder and a familiar voice spoke from behind him.

"Jordan, carry her to safety. We'll follow you."

Noticing Oberon for the first time, Jordan nodded and lifted his woman into his arms. He cradled her slight body against his chest as his heart pounded in fear.

"Vehicle." He indicated with his chin, pointing at the car he'd just stolen.

They all squashed into the tiny vehicle. Jordan handed over Sarah's care to Oberon when he realized he was the only one fit

enough to drive. He hated it, but it was his only chance to get her out of here.

“Drive.” She growled breathlessly when he hesitated to leave her, so he kissed her quickly on the forehead, took one last look at the blood seeping through the fingers that held her side, and then slid into the driver’s seat.

It had been years since he’d driven such an old vehicle, but he managed to get it moving. He’d disabled the safety features earlier so he would be able to maneuver the vehicle off-road if that became necessary.

“Oberon, tell me where to go. She needs medical help. You all do. Who is the closest?”

“Turn left at the next junction and head south for several miles. One of our contacts is a surgeon. We’ll find him there.”

Jordan nodded his understanding, careful to keep the vehicle on the road. He didn’t want to attract attention or alert any authorities that the vehicle’s safety features had been switched off. Even on this backwater little planet, driving without safeties was a big no-no.

Jordan noticed that they were driving away from the built-up areas of the city and they were now headed into a region with a more rural feel. His body relaxed fractionally when he realized that on this deserted road, there would be less chance of being followed without their knowledge.

“Turn at the next street. It’s the last house on the right before the road dead ends.”

Jordan followed his instructions as he glanced over at Sarah’s pale face, relieved to see her eyes watching him. “I’m okay,” she said again quietly, her voice still breathless. Finally, they reached the house Oberon had indicated and Jordan stopped the car out front.

“Wait here,” Oberon said as he pressed the release for his door. “I’ll get him to open the barn so that we can hide the vehicle. His surgery is in a hidden room off the back, so when you see the door open, drive in, and we’ll be right behind you.”

Jordan nodded again in understanding and watched Sarah's face pale further as Oberon slid out from under her and settled her slim form carefully against the seat. He reached for her arm, needing the connection, needing her. Her hand was cold, but she squeezed him back and her eyes opened tiredly as a smile ghosted across her face. She opened her mouth to say something and he laughed quietly.

"I know you're okay," he said softly. "I'll just feel a whole lot better when the doctor agrees with you." He saw the barn door open and the door roll up mechanically, so he moved the car towards it. He stopped the vehicle inside the large area and glanced up at the two men who entered through the smaller door from the left.

Oberon pulled Sarah's door open, squatting down to talk to her.

"Sarah, this is Dr. Foster." An older man bent at the waist so that she could see his face. "He's going to help you. Okay?"

Sarah nodded carefully, but she ground her teeth so loudly against the pain that everyone in the vehicle heard her. Oberon stepped back to let the doctor get closer.

"Just relax, Sarah. I need to see where the bullet hit you before we start moving you around."

"Lower right side. Just above my pelvic bone. The bullet went right through, which is why I can't stop the damn bleeding. I don't think it hit anything other than muscle, but I can't see the blood properly in the dark, so I'm not sure."

The doctor chuckled reassuringly.

"Sounds like you've done this a time or two before. Can you move?"

"Yes," she hissed as she moved her leg to lever herself out of the vehicle. The doctor helped her, wrapping an arm around her waist and lifting her up and out and into Jordan's arms. Doctor Foster pressed a wad of cloth against her back, pushing hard enough to make her grunt as Jordan held her close.

"The bleeding isn't too bad," he said confidently, moving Jordan's hand to press against the cloth. "But I want to have a good look in my

operating theater. Oberon, show Jordan where to go while I check your companions.” Oberon led the way towards the back of the barn while the doctor moved to the backseat of the vehicle to check on the other two people Sarah had rescued.

Jordan strode into the surgery and held Sarah in his arms while they waited for the doctor. He didn't want to put her down, as fear and relief flowed through him in equal amounts. He still feared for her life, but he was relieved to hear the doctor's assessment. Of course, he'd be much happier when they knew for sure. He couldn't lose her now and, well, there was no way he was ever letting her go. He stood there, processing the multitude of emotions when one solidified front and center. He wouldn't leave her. Ever. He'd do whatever he could, whatever he had to do, to make sure he was with her always. He wanted her beside him for the rest of his life, and come hell or high radiation, he would make sure that happened.

\* \* \* \*

“Hey there, beautiful,” he said as her eyes fluttered open.

Disorientated at first, Sarah went to sit up, but a restraining hand held her down.

“Don't move,” Jordan ordered, his concern for her etched on his face. “The doctor wants you to lie still for a while to give the stitches a chance.”

She relaxed back onto the pillow as his familiar voice washed over her. Calm stole through her just knowing that he was still close. Her head ached as the pain inhibitor wore off and her side had begun to burn once more, but he was here, he was beside her. The nightmare she'd been having lingered, though, and she held his hand tighter than she intended.

“Sweetheart,” he said, concern lacing his voice. “Do you need more pain inhibitor?”

“No,” she answered quickly as she sucked air into her burning lungs and tried to control her emotions.

“Sarah, let me take care of you,” he said steadily as he watched her face closely.

“Okay,” she said quietly. The nightmare images receded as he rubbed his thumb over her hand. “I’ll take some more pain inhibitors as long you as you promise to be here when I wake up.”

He smiled then, his first genuine smile since they’d begun the rescue mission.

“Sweetheart,” he said firmly. “I’m not going anywhere.”

\* \* \* \*

He watched her as she slept, his resolve solidifying as he considered his future. He couldn’t take her back to the pirate ship without putting her in physical danger and since he had little else, he didn’t know where their future lay. His only sure knowledge was that he would be by her side, wherever that was.

If it wasn’t for the medicines that he was trying to facilitate a delivery for he wouldn’t have even bothered contacting his crew again. He would’ve happily dropped off the edge of the universe without a backward glance. Sarah was his world now, his future, and he was never going to regret the decision.

The doctor came over to check her, but frowned as he saw her color. He pressed a tiny machine to her forehead that beeped alarmingly when it touched her skin.

“Damn! Her temperature is rising,” he said, moving around the bed quickly to adjust the saline drip he’d inserted into her skin. The medicine on this planet was ridiculously out-dated, and the doctor used methods Jordan had never seen before. His voice wavered as he asked the question he feared the most.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that she’s likely got an infection in the wound and needs antibiotics. I don’t have any suitable for humans. They’re a scarce commodity on this planet—even for its citizens,” he said as he shook his head in disgust. “Do you have any on your ship?”

Jordan shook his head uncertainly as panic filtered through him.

“Will she survive without them?”

“I don’t know,” the doctor said truthfully. “It could go either way. She’s healthy and in good physical condition, so chances are her body could fight off the infection, but it will take her longer to recover and there is always the chance that the infection could lead to more serious complications.”

Jordan nodded his understanding, his eyes never leaving her flushed face.

“We have medical supplies onboard, equipment capable of healing this injury within minutes, but her safety is at risk there. I’ve been half-expecting a mutiny ever since she was bought on board. Many of my crew live up to the pirate reputation, and I’m finding it harder to keep them in line.”

Jordan ran a hand over his tired eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose as he made his decision. Either way was a gamble. Here she could die from an infection. On his ship, she could die in much more violent circumstances. He tried to imagine what she would want and realized that he already knew. She was a soldier and she would rather go down fighting than succumb to an insidious and preventable illness.

“I’ll take her back to the ship,” he said, his voice clear but tight in his throat.

The doctor nodded sadly, understanding and sympathy showing on his face.

“Can you give her something to get through customs? I may have trouble leaving the planet with an ill woman with a gunshot wound.”

“I will see what I can find in my supplies,” he said as he turned and left the room.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah woke suddenly as heat rushed through her veins and her energy level increased.

“Sweetheart,” Jordan whispered. “You need to wake up so we can get through customs.”

She nodded her head, unsure why they were going through customs, but willing to trust Jordan with her life, as well as her heart. She gathered her thoughts and concentrated on moving out of the vehicle so that he could walk her into the space port. The line at the desk wasn’t too long and she vowed to herself that she would get through anything as long as Jordan was beside her.

“Well that’s a new one,” the customs officer said as he processed their passports. “The new bride is usually blushing before the honeymoon, not after.” He was referring to the twin spots of heat high on her cheekbones caused by her fever. Jordan tried not to overreact to the casual observation.

\* \* \* \*

“It was a very good honeymoon,” Sarah said in a husky voice as she laid her head against Jordan’s shoulder. Just the sensual quality of her voice had his cock leaping to attention, but the customs officer merely smiled and waved them through.

He hurried her towards the area where her ship was stored and helped her into the small cabin, almost deliriously happy when he was able to close the door. He lifted her onto the seat next to the helm and held her hand a moment longer as she gave into exhaustion and her body once again shook with fever.

He moved about the cabin, quickly making sure that all systems were functional and impatiently waited for clearance to leave. Within moments, a message flashed on the console indicating their



permission to take off. Jordan wasted no time getting the ship into the planet's atmosphere and charted a course for the last-known whereabouts of his ship.

He watched her closely as she slept, his concern for her deepening as she shivered in her delirium. Once he had the ship on course, he rummaged through her cabin, looking for anything that might resemble a medical kit. He found nothing, so he walked back to her and pulled her into his arms, loosened her clothes a little, and changed the environmental settings to a much cooler temperature. He was almost shivering from the cold himself, but he relaxed a little as her face lost its glowing red color.

As they got closer to the ship, G'ntriel's musical voice filled the cabin.

"Captain, do you require assistance?"

"Yes, G'ntriel, we do. Please have the medic meet us in the docking bay," he asked, glad to hear her voice and amazed, as always, at her perceptiveness.

"I'm afraid that's not possible. He is unavailable, but I have another person on board that will be able to help Sarah."

"How did you know it was Sarah who needed the help?" he asked before he realized he already knew the answer.

"I can feel her lethargy and her pain even from here, Captain. Is she going to be alright?"

"I hope so," he said as he cut the connection.

He landed the ship easily, quickly released the valves, and let the door swing open. A woman stepped immediately into the doorway, the medic kit held in her hand, and G'ntriel barely a step behind.

"Sarah," G'ntriel said in a voice that had lost its musical quality for the first time since he'd met her. "Tee-ani, anything this ship has is available to you. Help her, please."

Tee-ani nodded, but didn't turn around, all of her attention focused on her patient. She turned to the bag and withdrew a small cylinder that she pressed against Sarah's neck. Sarah flinched as the

metal touched her briefly and then relaxed again as the medication flowed through her veins.

“Where is the injury?” Tee-ani asked, glancing at Jordan for a moment before turning back to her patient. Jordan tried to remember Sarah’s description to the doctor on the planet.

“Lower right side, just above the pelvic bone. A projectile weapon hit her. The bullet passed straight through, but it’s the infection she’s fighting right now.”

“I’ve given her a wide-spectrum antibiotic synthetic agent, but considering how heavily the infection has affected her, it may take an hour or two for the synthetic antibodies to work. She needs the original wound treated in the medical bay.”

Jordan moved to lift her into his arms, but the concerns about his crew leaped to the forefront of his mind as he stepped from the ship.

“Where’s Andrews?” he asked, noticing the absence of his first mate. He should’ve been here. It was the first mate’s duty to be on hand as the Captain boarded his ship.

“That, dear friend, is a long story, and one I’d be happy to entertain you with once Sarah is making her recovery.”

He nodded once and set aside the curious comment, hoping that G’ntriel could keep Sarah safe. Then he led the way to the medical bay. He lowered Sarah onto the treatment table as her eyes fluttered open.

“Welcome back,” he said, smiling into her eyes. “How are you feeling?”

“Better,” she croaked, her throat sounding dry and sore, remnants of the fever.

“Hello. Sarah. I’m Doctor Tee-ani and I’m going to fix this wound so that your body can fight the infection faster, okay?”

“Absolutely,” Sarah whispered, closing her eyes again tiredly.

“Okay, Jordan, er ...I’m sorry, I mean, Captain. Can you pass me the cutting laser?” she asked, blushing slightly at her gaff. Jordan smiled at her, the friendly gesture trying to convey his lack of

annoyance. Nobody on the ship called him Jordan, except for G'ntriel and, quite frankly, considering her skills, she was more than welcome to call him anything she wanted. Judging by his new doctor's confident actions so far, it looked like she'd deserve the same treatment.

He turned to retrieve the laser and handed it to her as he said, "Jordan's fine. No need for the ship's doctor to call me Captain."

"Okay," she said carefully as she glanced over at the encouraging smile on G'ntriel's face. The doctor worked efficiently, her hands moving smoothly as she cut away the material that covered Sarah's wound and then peeled back the soiled dressing. Underneath, the wound looked puckered and weeping, angry red and white streaks surrounded the hole and the stitches pressed into the swollen flesh, giving it an overstuffed look.

"Help me turn her onto her side. I need to see the exit wound."

Sarah grunted as Jordan slowly moved her onto her side. His hand rubbed soothingly along the length of her arm as he held her still for the doctor. Tee-ani used an array of instruments he'd never seen before to assess Sarah's condition.

"Okay. Hold her still so that I can heal this side first and then we'll clean up the front of the wound."

She grabbed a small stylus, checked the setting, and then placed it carefully over the wound. Jordan watched as the skin knit together quickly, the obviously expensive medical instrument accelerating the body's natural healing exponentially. When the wound healed completely, Jordan lowered her back onto the table so that Tee-ani could heal the front.

Sarah opened her eyes as the instrument finished the job and the intense pain that had held her face rigid receded.

"Jordan, where are we?"

"On my ship, sweetheart. You need to get some rest, so go back to sleep while I get a situation report from G'ntriel."

She nodded and a small smile curved her lips as she fell into a relaxed sleep. For the first time in twenty-four hours, Jordan worried about something else besides Sarah dying from an infection. He signaled to G'ntriel to follow him into the hallway and then stepped from the room.

"G'ntriel, what the hell is going on? You know I can't guarantee Tee-ani's safety, anymore than I can guarantee Sarah's. There are men on this ship that won't care that she's a doctor. They'll only see a human female." He rubbed tired hands down his face, his anxiety levels increasing as he worried for both women's safety. "G'ntriel, you are the only female on board because you are stronger and faster than most of the males on this ship. Since you married Judge, none would be stupid enough to try anything, anyway. You know human females don't have your skills."

"Jordan, much has changed since you left the ship," she said, stepping closer and placing her hand on his left cheek. "You love her, don't you?" He nodded, knowing that her empathic skills would've noticed his deep emotion and caring for Sarah probably before they even landed onboard.

"What has changed here? How can I keep her safe?"

Just then, the biggest, meanest looking pirate ambled around the corner, grasped G'ntriel from behind, and pulled her into his embrace. She smiled in delight and then let her husband, Judge, finish telling the captain about the past twenty-four hours onboard.

"Seems Andrews wasn't quite happy with the way you were running the ship, so he staged a mutiny," Judge said, his voice gruff. "But, well, he didn't find the kind of support he was expecting." The big man grinned, his yellowed and broken teeth making his face less attractive and far more dangerous looking. "Poor fellow found himself out the airlock almost as soon as he took over. Turns out that pirates who are willing to stage a mutiny aren't the most loyal types, if you know what I mean."

"How many of the crew did we lose?"

“Seventeen,” G’ntriel told him, a grim expression on her face. “All mutineers. I have two in custody, but considering their age and general intelligence, I doubt they will be making any trouble.”

Seventeen! That was nearly half the crew. How was he going to keep the ship moving with so few on board?

“Where did Dr. Tee-ani come from?”

“While we were cleaning up afterwards, we received an emergency hail from a ship not far from here,” Judge said, grinning. “When we went to investigate we discovered a badly-damaged transport full of human female prisoners. The guards told us that they were criminals, but my lovely wife here could sense no such thing. We spoke to the women and discovered that they had been abducted and were probably being sent to the slave markets in the Benorian system.”

“So we rescued them, made transport arrangements for those who wanted to return home, and invited the others to stay here,” G’ntriel finished with a smile.

“Will they be safe here?” Jordan asked, his concern about the danger his crew may represent still uppermost in his mind.

“Absolutely,” G’ntriel assured him in her musical voice. “There are none left among the crew that wish to harm them. In fact, I have sensed a need in most of the males to protect them.”

Smiling broadly and taking a full breath for the first time in he didn’t know how long, Jordan felt himself relax as his thoughts strayed to the future he wanted with Sarah. Was it really possible to have a future with her now that his ship was no longer dangerous to human females? Would she even want to stay? Somewhere she had a life, maybe friends and family waiting for her return. Could he let her go if she wanted to leave? Somehow, he doubted it, but he steeled himself against the possibility.

G’ntriel stepped forward again and touched his face with her warm hand.

“Talk to her before you make any decisions,” she said and then stepped back into her husband’s embrace and changed the subject. “Were you able to find Oberon?”

He nodded as he made an effort to push his own jumbled thoughts aside so that he could concentrate on their original mission—the delivery of medication to children who desperately needed it.

He glanced at the ship's chronometer. “We have a rendezvous point in about eleven hours. I have the co-ordinates, but we need to modify one of the shuttle pods or Sarah’s ship so that we can hide it from the planet’s radar network.”

“I’ll get to work on that right now,” G'ntriel said confidently. Judge nodded to Jordan and turned to follow his wife towards the docking bay, but turned back to grin at him once more.

“Oh, and Captain? Welcome back.”

Jordan stepped back into the medical bay and shook his head at all the things that had changed in the last two days. Only forty-eight hours ago, he’d been the captain of a dangerous crew, struggling to maintain order and protect one tiny slip of a woman. Now he had a different crew, including many women who had chosen to stay because they had something to offer to their main mission—protect and help those who needed it using any means necessary.

He sat beside Sarah as she slept on the narrow medical cot and pulled her hand into his as he lowered his head to the mattress. Suddenly tired beyond anything he’d ever known, he closed his eyes and fell into a deep slumber, his hopes for his future following him into his dreams.

## Chapter Ten

Sarah woke slowly, the exhaustion of the last few days difficult to shake off. Tee-ani hurried over to her and used several medical instruments to check her temperature, blood pressure, and other vital signs.

“Looks like you’ve made a full recovery,” she said quietly as she tried not to wake Jordan as he slept beside Sarah. Sarah reached out to run her fingers over his face. He had tired shadows under his eyes, but he looked happier that she’d ever seen him—well, except maybe when he was buried deep in her body, smiling into her eyes.

“He’s been here for hours. I couldn’t convince him to go back to his cabin. Maybe you can,” she said quietly. “You can go with him, if you like.”

Sarah smiled up at the doctor. “Thanks, Tee-ani. I really appreciate your help.”

“No problem,” she replied happily. “I suspect you won’t be my only projectile weapon injury on this ship.”

Sarah smiled at the doctor, sensing that she’d missed a lot while she’d been sleeping, but turned to give Jordan a gentle shake.

“Jordan,” she called softly. “Wake up and take me back to your cabin, please.”

He roused almost immediately, his attention on her clear and undivided. His concern melted from his face as he smiled at her.

“You’re looking better,” he said.

“Yep. Tee-ani said I can go if I want to.”

He stiffened slightly, barely masking the pain that crossed his features.

“Of course, I’ll just go check that your ship is in working order and stocked with supplies.”

“You want me to leave? Now?” she asked, shocked that he’d be so keen to let her go.

“Don’t you want to leave?” he asked, his voice gruff, his expression unreadable.

“Hell, no,” she said. “I want you to take me back to your cabin and make love to me.”

He shook his head briefly, but smiled and said, “Yes, ma’am” as he lifted her into his arms.

\* \* \* \*

He’d wrapped a blanket around her naked body before they left the medical bay, but as he lay her down on his bed, he opened the covering and gazed lovingly at her.

Carefully, as if she were breakable, Jordan lowered his head and captured her lips. His hand cradled her face as he deepened the kiss. He pressed harder against her mouth as all of the fear of the last few days bubbled to the surface. He felt her hands on him, eager fingers fumbling as she tried to push his clothes off. He stood for a moment as he discarded the rest and carefully slid onto the bed beside her. He’d almost lost her, almost had his one chance of redemption taken from him and he couldn’t wait another moment to claim the woman who was the other half of his soul.

She sighed into his mouth as she pulled his body over hers and wrapped her legs around his middle, urging his stiff cock towards her pussy.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he said in a low, urgent voice.

“You won’t,” she reassured him. When he hesitated, she wriggled against him and whispered, “Roll over, then, and let me make love to you.”



He rolled, holding her carefully as she squirmed onto his chest, quickly aligned her pussy with his engorged flesh, and impaled herself on his cock. They both groaned as he entered her slick channel, the flesh contracting around him even before she began to move. He held her hips, controlling her pace and slowing down her frantic movements.

He loved her then, reverently, like he'd made love to her in the hotel, telling her with his body how much he cared for her. She was the most important thing in his universe and he would never let her go. He rejoiced in his heart, even as her body began to pulse around him, her climax building rapidly, even with the slow pace.

He felt her body respond and his movements grew faster as his own body tightened, sending them both spiraling higher. Soon he was slamming into her, lifting his hips to meet her downward movement as she moaned in ecstasy. Her orgasm broke over her like a wave and pulled his cock deeper into her body. He pumped into her one last time and then held her tight against him as his seed jetted deep into her welcoming body. For the first time in his life, Jordan wished that their joining would result in a child.

Pulling her pliant body higher up his chest, he kissed her forehead softly as her face settled against his shoulder.

"Sarah, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever known, inside and out."

She laughed at that. "Well, I supposed you did get to see more of my insides than I intended to show you," she said, rubbing over the area where her injury had been.

His face turned serious as his hand joined hers.

"I've never been so scared in my life as I was when I thought I might lose you."

She smiled, unsure how to reassure him. They both lived dangerous lives, so she had no way to guarantee him that she wouldn't die any time soon. But she could promise him she'd be here as long as he wanted her.

She lifted her head to look into his eyes and threw caution out the airlock as she bared her soul. “I love you, Jordan, and I never want to leave. Please tell me we’ll find a way to be together.”

He grinned, kissed her fiercely, and hugged her harder.

“Sweetheart, I want the same thing. I love you, too. Wherever you are, that’s where I want to be.”

She smiled and closed her eyes as she relaxed into his embrace, but then another thought crossed her mind. She levered herself off his chest in agitation.

“The medicine,” she burst out. “Did we get the medicine to the children?”

He pulled her into his arms and rubbed her back as he spoke.

“We have a rendezvous point and G’ntriel, her husband, and the new doctor are currently working on modifying your ship so that we can enter the planet’s atmosphere without being detected.”

“Good,” she said, calming a little. “When do we meet Oberon?”

“I don’t suppose I can convince you to stay here while I deliver the medicine.”

She lifted her head and looked at him with such irritation that he laughed and pulled her back into his arms.

“Didn’t think so,” he said. “We leave in a few hours.”

“And then after we finish the delivery, what do we do? Where will we go?”

“I don’t care where we are, as long as I’m with you,” he answered truthfully.

“Too bad we can’t stay here,” she said. “I kind of like the idea of being a pirate.”

“How about being the wife of a pirate?”

She smiled and then kissed him soundly.

“Is that a proposal?”

“Yes,” he said, his eyes bright as he waited for her answer.

“Yes, Jordan. I would love to be your wife.”

“And, sweetheart, about where we’re going to live—a few things changed up here while we were on the planet...”

**THE END**

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Clark loves a great romance.

Born and raised in Australia, she happily lives a *romantic* story all of her own with her *wonderful* hubby and *precious* teenagers and menagerie of *perfectly behaved* animals...and, well okay, for the real story you'll need to replace *romantic* with *hectic*, add *mostly* before *wonderful* and you can probably guess about the teenagers and animals.

Seriously though, Rachel loves a great romance.

She loves good triumphing over evil, the hero saving the day, the bitch getting what she deserves, the alpha male claiming his woman and loving her forever...and well the only time that happens consistently is in romance novels. So...Rachel loves a great romance.

She also loves hearing from her readers. If you want to share your thoughts, ask a question or maybe send a recipe for chocolate cheesecake, you can email her at

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