

PASSION'S ESCAPE ASHLYNN MONROE



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Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this to brave women everywhere.

Live life aloud ladies!

Thank you for reading my work. You have warmed my heart today.

Prologue

Long ago, war made the planet called Earth inhospitable. The people of Earth left their birthplace to find new homes in a distant galaxy containing many life sustaining planets.

Every nation made a new world. A common language developed, combining all the languages. New ways began. Over time, men who craved power began to seek to rule not just their own worlds, but other worlds too.

Eventually one man rose to power, a galactic emperor, conquering all the worlds, ruling with fear and cruelty. His religion, his morality, his desire dictated to all the other worlds in the galaxy. Democracy was dead. To live without war most people allowed democracy to die as a sacrifice for peace. Sadly, had his first wife survived the birth of their son it might have all been so very different, for theirs had been a love

A few brave people who believed in freedom kept the torch of unrest burning. Many of them died for their defiance, including the procession of wives the emperor had imprisoned for plotting against the throne. The latest Empress was even now awaiting her fate in the palace dungeon.

The Emperor's only son was destined to rule and many noblewomen vied for the place at his side. However, he had seen the pain his father hid and had no interest in the intrigues involved in taking a wife, so had promised himself he would marry only when forced. The heir certainly received vigorous protection and was never seen without a phalanx of guards surrounding him.

In this new world, a person's destiny and future now determined by birth not skill, often resulted in unhappiness. If your father's father was a servant, you were destined to be a servant. Not everyone born to be a servant had the heart of a servant and these people joined the rebels or lived unhappily within the caste system and secretly harbored the desire for change.

Others found new homes, planets that were rough and uncharted and far from the Empire. Living apart from society, but free, these lawless places were given names that represented the hearts and wills of the people who carved them out of the lonely void of nothingness. Only the strong survived and only the brave flourished. These places took names representing the ideals of those who settled there.

Freedom Port is just one of these many strongholds of free will and free spirit.

One

"We're coming in too hot! Dammit all to Hell!

Dragon raged at the crew as he attempted furiously to recalibrate the ship in a desperate effort to save it. They were deep in uncharted space, not a good place for a major malfunction.

The ship pitched sickeningly to the left, knocking the crew off balance. One of the flight operators fell from his seat and slid into the wall with a nauseating crunch. The awkward angle of his head meant he wouldn't be getting up again. Dragon gritted his teeth as the right stabilizer died with its operator.

More red warning lights appeared on his console. *The* sudden release of the sensors must have caused an issue with the hydraulics. Dragon felt the ship lunge forward before he saw the pressure gauge drop dramatically. *This* was not good . . . not good at all!

For a moment, Dragon caught up in the memory of how he came to find himself moments from death.

"Come on, Hawk. I'm taking the ship father modified for hauling his wealth around and I'm going to go have some fun for once. I'm twenty-four years old! Father needs to remember that I no longer need a nursemaid. There's this great place just off the Sector X-delta-five moon. One of the diplomats Father had here last month told me about it. Girls, very naked and willing girls, as far as the eye can see. It can be your bachelor party. They have rare alcohol and every type of woman possible." Dragon was almost jumping out of his skin in excitement This'd be a real blast! However, not without my best friend . . . Seeing Hawk's indecision, Dragon changed his tactics." You know if you don't come I will be totally alone and unprotected," he wheedled. "As my personal bodyguard you have a responsibility to see to my safety. In addition, I don't want to hang around for all those matchmaking noblewomen to catch. Please?"

Hawk let out a put-upon sigh and looked very unhappy, but he agreed. "If Lady Sky or your father the Emperor blames me for this, I'm putting it all on you, Dragon. You know he only allows that place to exist so he can monitor who indulges in that sort of immorality."

Dragon felt so happy they would be adventuring together that he agreed without a thought. Excited, Dragon grinned and sauntered off to inform the crew they would be hauling the emperor's most priceless treasure, his only son and heir.

Dragon was beginning to rue the idea to rebel against his father by taking the ship into non-Imperial space. Now he found himself in a no-win situation in uncharted space! He looked over at Hawk, his best friend and most trusted commander and hoped he could get them both out of this alive.

Hawk glanced back with a worried expression on his face. "You do know if we survive, my fiancée will kill us, and if she doesn't your father will, right?"

Dragon shrugged, not wanting to show Hawk he realized he had messed this up royally. *Hmmmm* . . . *Royally. That was almost funny. By all the gods! Father will be in even more danger if I die!*

Fighting more furiously for his survival and that of his crew, he let his dark epiphany guide his actions. *I will not let this venture into disobedience kill my friend and the crew I shanghaied to serve my whim*, he vowed to himself, *or my father*. Having exhausted all options, in the end Dragon had begun to admit to himself the ship was lost, when a blip on the viewing panel brought a glimmer of hope burning brightly into his heart.

Small and uncharted, an outpost was just ahead. If he made a few minor adjustments with what was left of the ship's navigation, he might be able to make it. Badly damaged, the ship's landing would not be pretty and

probably cause their deaths anyway. However, if they survived it, big if, there would be oxygen, and hope, and at the moment even a slim hope was better than none.

* * * *

Passion, daughter of Vulture and younger sister to Raven and Eagle, was lying halfway under the wreck of a small class D transport. Her father kept the rusting piece of junk for parts, but Passion saw potential in the old girl. If she could just get the major problems fixed, the little beauty would be her ticket away from the dustbowl she called home, far, far away. Now that Passion was working on a *very* tight schedule, she spent most of her waking hours on it.

This sort of task was hard, and time consuming, but she'd done it so often she could let her mind wander, and did. At least that made it less monotonous.

If she weren't gone by the time her father and brothers returned home, one of two things would happen. Scenario One: he would have been able to borrow the funds he needed to keep his operation running and she would continue as miserably as she had been for the last twenty-four years. Scenario Two: her father would return desperate

for cash and would trot her down to the slave market to sell her for as much as he could get.

Passion knew she was still worth a great deal of money, virginity or not. A girl like her was rare on the market in a remote outlaw place like Freedom Port. She was young and attractive, plus she was in very good health. Passion would bring her father a very reasonable price. She was the only thing the bank didn't already own, and she knew her father would quite happily sell her. *Freedom Port is no place for the weak*, she thought.

Passion had figured that much out as a very little girl. If mother had survived, maybe things would have been different. Maybe. Death is so common in the port; mother was so sweet and soft. Her death was unavoidable. Famine and disease were common, but Passion had survived it all. Years of fending for herself in such conditions had given her an unusual strength of body and mind. Too bad it had not bothered to give her a ship! She'd learned more fighting tricks through the years than home-making skills, and as a tomboy by necessity, at times she forgot she was a woman. At least my adaptability kept me alive when many of the other women and girls have died.

Passion was working as fast as she could, doing her best to improvise parts, but she knew there were only another two weeks before her father returned, and the clock was ticking. If Passion wasn't finished and gone by then it would be game over. She would have no control over her future, ever again.

Born on the outlaw rock, Passion didn't have official papers. As a ghost in the system, she knew that if she could afford a decent forger she could create an impressive pedigree and pave her way to a better life. At least, that was her hope. Years of selling scrap and saving every penny she could find, steal, or earn had given her just enough money to feel confident that her plan would work. *Now all I need is the transportation*.

"Damn the gods!" Passion swore as she scraped her knuckles yet again.

Passion felt it was poetic justice to use the skills she'd learnt watching her father and brothers work in the little chop shop they operated out here in the back of beyond. Anything they could steal they could take apart and put back together again, in better condition than it had been in when they acquired it. They just had no idea she could do it too. None of the men had noticed Passion learning right along with her brothers, and she'd made sure to sharpen her skills until she was better than all of them.

Smiling to herself in smug confidence, Passion tightened another bolt.

Secretly doing small repairs jobs on the side, for a fraction of what her father would have charged, had earned her enough money to start afresh and the business skills to be able to set herself up anywhere. A frown crossed Passion's face as she allowed, to herself anyway, that by undercutting her father's earnings she had inadvertently put herself into this situation.

Passion looked out at dry dusty landscape of tans and muted browns. The planet was mostly sand and even the buildings were made out of it. Lonely and harsh, there was an ugly beauty to the land that Passion could see. She chuckled. Gods, she was well and truly sick of the color brown! Freedom Port was dry, but many plants contained water, and if you knew how to find them, you could survive alone in the wilderness. The only reason Passion hadn't just escaped into the planet's wide deserts was the fact her father would probably find her anyway. He didn't like losing what he considered his. Hating the port, she often dreamed of faraway lands, lands she had only seen on her viewer. Watching the viewer was her only source of culture, education, or entertainment, since Freedom Port had no time or resources for anything not directly related to survival.

Passion finished the section she'd been working on all morning and moved further 'round the engine. *If not for*

dear old Dad I would've been long gone by now! She mused. Everyone in the Port knew her father and his infamous temper. He'd killed men for less than aiding his run-away daughter. There'd been no luck trying to buy her escape either, since no captain thus far had the balls to help her. She knew better than to stow away. It'd mean certain death if she was caught, since any captain would have her thrown out an airlock, probably after she was raped by the entire crew. Passion shuddered in revulsion at the thought. That was not a risk she was ready to take. Not yet, anyway, she acknowledged. Getting the rusty antique in front of her into the sky was her best option.

She was so focused on the repairs and her wandering thoughts that when a screeching space vessel crashed landed on their private launch port she jumped and hit her head on the bulkhead. *Damn the gods forever!* Realizing the irritating sound was of a ship wing clipping the shop exterior, Passion crawled reluctantly out from under the wreck, wiping her greasy hands on her coveralls.

Straightening the cap that held her long russet hair hidden, Passion snagged the antiquated Phase-One laser pistol that was her only protection and moved closer to the front of the shop. Needing to know what was going on she cautiously poked her head around the corner.

A large, badly damaged cargo ship lay awkwardly on the launch pad. It was totally unremarkable as cargo ships went. *Hmmmm*. Huge doors along the side made the ship look like it could carry any type or size of cargo. *This is no small business freighter, definitely industrial. Looks like it's seen better days too*. Passion also noticed it was unmarked, *very illegal*. As she watched, the ship's hold doors opened slowly.

A man exited warily. Her breath caught. Never in my life have I seen such a magnificent specimen of hunkalicious! That stray thought actually said quite a lot about the male exiting the wreck since Freedom Port's population was eighty percent male. He was tall and lean, and his bronze skin was bare except for his leggings which showed he was large in other places too. He was built like nothing she had ever seen before. These days, so many men spent their lives in tight cargo ships that muscle men were a dying breed. This one reminded her of an athlete or manual-labor slave. It was obvious just from his stance this breathtaking male was no slave, and he couldn't be an athlete, since no wealthy man would travel in a cargo ship. Unfortunately, this conclusion left her at a loss in determining his class, and therefore her safety. She fearlessly activated her weapon, making it ready in case she needed to defend herself.

The next man out of the ship was almost more beautiful than the first. He was just a bit shorter than the first man, and his armbands were far more ornate. They told her this one was definitely wealthy, possibly even title. What could they possibly be doing on a cargo ship? It made no sense for a man of high-class to be in Freedom Port. Passion became even more suspicious. *Either this is a government bust, or these two are in a great deal of trouble.* Trouble she could handle, government . . . not so much.

Keeping her weapon trained on the strangers, she was afraid.

Passion hoped they were criminals because she could trust someone from the shady side of the law more than the ruling elite or a government official. Taught from the cradle to sniff out and distrust authority, Passion had a rebellious spirit. It was probably why she didn't respect her father. Passion always found it funny his rebellious teachings had backfired on him in such a way.

Nervous and watchful, she did not show herself, but stayed in the shadows of the store. Studying the men as they disembarked, along with a crew of four, she waited, trying to decide if they were friend or foe. A normal crew would've been eight men. Two were missing. She was smart enough not to jump out into an ambush. Twice before she had foolishly walked into a firefight. The scar on her

left shoulder was a permanent reminder friendliness could get you dead in Freedom Port. The first man out of the ship acted as a shield for the second man. *Some kind of bodyguard?* His actions confirmed her suspicions that this was no typical crew of bandits.

When the taller man called out to her, she jumped and almost shrieked in alarm.

"I see you there boy. Come out and bring your master to me."

My small stature and hidden hair must have led him to conclude I'm a young boy, she decided. Passion was glad for the protection the mistake gave her. In most cases, a young boy stood a better chance with strangers than a young woman would. She slouched a bit to disguise her ample chest. The baggy coveralls didn't display her feminine virtues anyway but she wasn't going to make them any more obvious than necessary. With her weapon in her belt but still charged, she walked out holding her hands up to show she wasn't hostile. If any of them decide to fire a weapon, they'll find out how fast I can fire on them. Passion was an amazingly quick draw. Although she'd never killed a person, she had shot more than one bandit and was not afraid to use her weapon again if she had to.

"I'm the only one here. I'm the apprentice and I do repairs. What can I do for you gentleman?" man one looked

offended. When he spoke, she fought the urge to shoot him.
"I am not going to deal with some child-in-training. I want
the shop-master. My ship needs to be repaired quickly and
well."

Definitely upper class with that tone of voice! "Then you had better take it down the strip, because I'm the only one here."

His expression darkened. "I am not going to play games. No Shop Master, even one in such a nefarious out post, would leave a child in charge. I want to see the master, *now!*"

"I'm in charge and the master is my father. He trusts me to see to repairs. If you want your ship fixed by someone else, drag it out of here! I'm the best that you'll do here!"

Gods men are assholes!

The tall men began rapidly to discuss the situation in a language that Passion had never heard before.

It was not Basic almost a High Basic with something else. The *something* triggered a memory that she couldn't quite put her finger on. *These guys are definitely not bandits. Bandits don't speak the language of the ruling class*. Frowning, she noticed the insignia on one of the armbands, and it made her want to shoot first and ask questions later. She now felt certain in her mind they belonged to the house of the Universal Emperor. The

Emperor had a heart of pure evil and was the most hated man in the galaxy. He'd killed democracy, and they wore his mark. People like Passion and her family were forced to immigrate to outposts like Freedom Port or else submit to the rigid rules of a caste system. With her heritage, she would have been no better off than a slave if she had been born on a charted world.

Her twitchy trigger finger must have made the bodyguard nervous, and before she realized what was happening, he sprang at her.

Passion drew as he moved, and when he came to a stop in front of her, the old weapon was pressed against his chest. He was fast but she was faster. The man looked angry, but also seemed to be grudgingly impressed.

Scowling into his face, she spoke quietly. "You'd be dead if I wanted to kill you. Back off and leave and I'll not kill you. Come at me like that again and you'll *not* get another warning."

His deadly look was not reassuring. "You are just a little girl! Woman, put that weapon down and I'll not hurt you."

Infuriated at the derisive tone she pressed her weapon further into his flesh. "You're the one who stands next to death. I'll not put my weapon down until you're on your ship and away from me and my people!" Their battle of wills was interrupted by the other man's laughter.

Neither of them willing to look away, Passion and the larger man stared each other down angrily, both of them ready to fight to the death. When the other man spoke the giant finally backed away. Passion did not lower her weapon.

"Hawk, it looks like the little warrior has you! I don't think she's lying about her abilities. Girl or boy, she is capable. Back away and if she can fix the ship quickly, we will pay accordingly. Let's give the little warrior a chance."

She watched the one that he had called Hawk back up. Physically he blocked his master from the potential danger of her weapon. Scowling she spoke with pride and determination.

"I'll fix your ship for only one payment. Safe transport away this world and without questions or papers. If I'm willing to travel in the ship after I repair it, you can be certain it'll be safe. Do we have a deal? I want to be out of here as quickly as possible."

They looked surprised by her request. She listened to them speaking privately and strained her ears to hear. She was sure that their language was a mixture of High Basic and ancient English. These men belonged to the Emperor and she hated having to trust them, but her options were limited. This was her best bet. She knew that she could definitely get their ship in the air before her little wreck.

They turned to her. Bravely, she did not flinch, or show just how worried she was. When the bodyguard spoke, she was relieved and terrified.

"Ok little warrior, you have your bargain. You must swear your fealty to Lord Dragon before you begin the task."

Two

It was much worse than she had suspected.

If this was the real Lord Dragon, he was the son of the emperor, one of the most dangerous men in the galaxy. Not wanting them to see her fear, she reluctantly gave her fealty. "I vow my allegiance to the emperor and the Galactic Alliance. I will vow my life and liberty to the emperor and his house." Her father would have killed her himself if he had heard her speak the words.

Satisfied Hawk questioned her and she heard humor in his voice. "Are you running from a husband or a lover? Alternatively, are you a criminal little warrior? Have you killed many men who were unfortunate enough to cross your path?"

"No questions, we agreed."

He nodded solemnly. Passion thought she might have seen just a hint of understanding in his eyes. With great relief, she relished the feeling of control of her own destiny. These men had royal principles and they would not back

out of the bargain. Passion could taste her freedom. She hurried to gather equipment and immediately got to work.

It was obvious the large guard called Hawk did not completely trust her. As she began her task, he was watching her like his namesake, the hawk. It annoyed her but she ignored him. He had no idea how important it was for her to get the ship fixed. She listened to the crew and the one called Dragon discussing going over to the tavern for a drink. Passion cringed, he would never come out alive and then she would lose her ride. She called out before they left. "My Lords, remove your armbands, they make your affiliation to the emperor obvious. You will live longer here without them. Not everyone on this rock is as ready to swear fealty as I am."

Hawk went over to Dragon and they spoke quietly. She noticed that he did indeed remove the telling accessories. She saw Hawk regretfully place both of their armbands bands in a pouch at his waist. Rolling her eyes, she was glad that she was not the man's bitch. She would hate having the emperor's progeny dictate her every move. It was obvious from the men's body language that if Dragon had not told Hawk to remove his armbands he would have left them on. *Foolish*, *prideful man!*

Crawling back under the ship she continued on with her work. Hawk remained behind, pouting. It was apparent that he would have rather been guarding his master rather than keeping an eye on her. Annoyed she could not help herself. She snapped at him.

"Hey, whatever you are worried that I'm going to do, just forget it. Do you know anything about engine repair?"

"No, I am a warrior, not a mechanic."

"Then back off. *I am a mechanic*, and I plan to ride off to freedom on this thing so no worries, it *will* fly. Go play with your friends. I'm not going to steal the ship, blow it up, or break it."

It was obvious that Hawk was unused to sassy women. He looked like he needed oxygen. *Was it normal for his people to turn red then blue then purple?* she wondered.

When he spoke, it was in outraged sputtered fragments.

"I . . . Women do not speak to a warrior like . . . You If you were a man I would kill . . . I . . . "

She cut him off before he said something that she would make him regret. "Cool it Hercules. Run along and let the grease monkey work. You go be a manly man somewhere that I don't have to see it."

He stormed off. She knew that she would probably pay for being flip later, but she was going to enjoy the peace and quiet while she had it. Hours passed.

Working with all the speed and proficiency that she possessed, Passion was impressed with her progress. It looked worse than it was. Other than an irreparable stabilizer she was going to be able to make the parts the ship had come with work fine, with a little tinkering of course. Her father had a right stabilizer that would fit, on one of his own personal ships. Feeling a little guilty, she removed it. Passion decided taking the stabilizer made them even for all the years of cooking and cleaning without any sort of 'thank you' or payment.

Resuming her work on the cargo ship, she barely noticed it become dark. Soon all the floodlights she could find were trained on the ship, and she was still working, ignoring the bug bites and her exhaustion.

The very drunk future ruler and his entourage returned. One of them tripped over one of her lights, causing it to go dark where she was and she hurt her hand. Swearing in a string of profanity that only a girl from a place like Freedom Port would know, she pulled herself out from under the ship.

An intoxicated Dragon was leering down at her. Scowling she shook her wrench at him.

"Don't even think about it my Lord, you promised me safety!"

Laughing he spoke in a slur. "I can promise you safe sex!"

"No, go to bed." She was annoyed. She was not letting some drunken noble paw at her, even if he was sex-able. Yummy, she would like to do him, sober. She never enjoyed sex with a drunken man; they just didn't have game.

Noisily, the crew boarded their disabled ship. Morning was soon enough to continue. She went to inspect the fallen light. Lucky for her, no damages, just disconnected, she noted distractedly. Putting away her equipment and locking the shop, she went out back to the tub. They had no indoor plumbing so she kept fresh water in a private tub that she had rigged up. She filled it each morning and let the sun heat the water all day. Then at night, she would wash the grime off her body so she was fresh for bed. She allowed herself this one feminine weakness. Passion enjoyed an assortment of scented body washes and shampoos. Often she would trade them for a small repair. When a few of her customers found out how cheap it was to trade them, she found herself besieged with the stuff. They were almost impossible for her to get otherwise, so she happily traded for it. Occasionally, one of her brothers would bring her such things when they went off-world. Her father had never allowed her to go with them, so she was happy for the small condolences and comforts she could get.

Basking in warm moonlight, her hat came off and her long hair fell free with a shake. Taking off her dirty coveralls and then the light leggings and tunic, she stood naked in the open air. Her pale body shimmered in the soft moonbeams.

Her home was on the edge of town, so there was enough privacy for her to step into the tub and clean off the grime of the day's work. Soft insect noises played a soothing melody as she let her body relax in the warm water.

Sighing, she felt the moment of indulgence from the tip of her toes to the top of her head. In that moment she thought it defined perfection, until the male voice made her jump to cover her body.

Three

It was Hawk, and he wasn't drunk.

It was obvious that he had too much control to indulge when duty called him. Allegiance to another was not something she witnessed often, even among family, and it annoyed her to see it now, even as she respected it deeply. Freedom Port was too hostile for it. *Take what you can, protect yourself, no one will have your back;* these were the typical mantras of the port.

Her arms covered her healthy breasts, but not before he'd enjoyed a good look at her. She blushed. When he spoke, she felt heat pooling in her pussy.

"You are beautiful naked in the moonlight, little warrior. I hear your tough words, but I see the fragile woman underneath I when I look at you. Floating in the water like a siren, calling me to drown in you. I don't think I have ever met a female like you."

"I thought you disapproved of me Lord Hawk." Passion taunted.

"Looking at your beauty in the moonlight I could not disapprove of anything about you."

Oh, he was a charmer. Most of the men who had been interested in her had not been so eloquent in their pleas for sex. Against her better judgment, she let herself feel desire for him. He was definitely a class above her usual fare, and she wondered if he would be as skillful in her bed as he was with his words.

He must have sensed her crumbled resistance because suddenly he was next to her, holding his hand out to her. If she took it they would have sex, she knew it. Commitment, marriage, etcetera, was not what she needed or wanted in a bed partner, but she was worried that sleeping with him might complicate her plans. For Passion, escape was all she could focus on. When she took his hand and rose, naked and unashamed of her body, she saw the heat in his eyes. There was a good chance that she was different from his usual fare as well.

Smiling she allowed him to wrap her in a dry towel and was surprised when he swept her up into his arms and carried her towards her home. He entered the nearest door and looked down at her questioningly. Wordlessly she pointed towards her humble bed. He quickly deposited her on the bed, and as all he was wearing was a pair of leggings, he was soon as naked as she was.

For a moment, she was unsure. It was all happening so quickly. When his lips descended on hers, the awkwardness of the moment left and she felt consumed with the sensation of his kiss. Sighing she enjoyed his practiced lips. *This guy could kiss!* Passion let the sensuality of it wash over her in waves of heat. She felt very wet; his kiss alone was making her want to fuck! Without conscious thought her arms wrapped around his neck and he deepened the kiss while pulling her to him with a firm hunger that left her panting. Hawk was good, very good!

Kissing him felt nice. His hand slid down her back and reached her buttocks, she gasped against his lips as he gave it a firm squeeze. Responding to him with a fervor that felt ignited by the fire of his touch, she moaned into his kiss. He growled against her lips and suddenly she was pressed against the mattress on her back. Passion opened her eyes and looked up at him and for a moment, her mind wondered why he was no longer lying beside her. His naked body pressed deliciously against hers, saturating her with his warmth. Blinking up into his deep chocolate brown eyes, she saw the heat there. He moved his mouth to the tender skin on her neck under her ear, kissing and sucking. Delighted shivers ran down her spine and she clutched the back on his head, twining her fingers in the mass of dark thick hair and gasping.

Smelling of sandalwood and tasting like spice, he was delicious. She became drunk with desire as her senses reveled in him and the exotic sensation of him. His mouth traveled down further and found her breast. Crying out with a gasp, her breath came in little pants. Absentmindedly, her hands splayed over the wide expanse of his tattooed back. When her lips skimmed his right shoulder, her eyes could not help but focus on the top of the large crest of the emperor's house on his back and shoulder, and she felt a twinge of guilt for sleeping with the enemy. As his mouth suckled hard, first on her right and then her left nipple, all thoughts except her consuming desire fled her mind. She let her lips brush against the hollow of his throat and breathed in his masculine scent. He moved and his lips trailed a wicked path down her pale stomach. Desire left her body hypersensitive to his touch.

Hawk was a very serious man and Passion could see he brought that intensity and focus to every minuscule detail of giving her pleasure. Strong fingers found her clit and began to rub it with a delicious rhythm. Using her moist heat, his fingers slipped across the nub in circles of joy that soon left her on the brink of an orgasm. She knew his eyes watched her body, watched what he was doing to her. Panting, she felt close to coming for him. Looking at his face, she knew that he was enjoying her reaction and it

made the moment surreal, but also meaningful. With a harsh cry, she felt her body clench as an intense orgasm blinded her with the electricity of pleasure. Crying out his name, she felt him increase the speed and pressure of his large hand until the last of her orgasm left her. Feeling the shuddering vibrations of her body pulsing with her need for his body she moaned. He chuckled, obviously pleased with her desire. Annoyed, Passion opened her eyes but when she saw the dark gaze of his desire, it fired her own need. He lay next to her now, lustful but not rushing the moment. Wanting Hawk more than she had ever wanted a man, the raw need without any emotional connection frightened her a little bit. She'd never just had sex for the sake of sex before, but was finding the experience freeing.

Passion's hand delicately slid down Hawk's body and found the base of his cock. Caressing in tentative strokes wrung a moan from him, and she increased her grip and the speed of her strokes. He was hard but the skin of his sex was soft. He felt like steel wrapped in velvet against her hand and she marveled at his length. He lay next to her watching her as she touched him and there was an intimate intensity to the moment that stole her thoughts. This was special, but it there was no need to make it anything except what it was, pure desire. Liquid passion that covered them and drowned them with pleasure, Passion felt the heat

pooling in her body like lava. Hawk's eyes were making her molten! She had never seen eyes quite like his, and the combination of his strong body and the forbidden passion was making her feel more alive than she had ever felt. Rebirth was the consequence of this amazing experience. She knew that she would never be the same, but it was so worth it.

Breaking eye contact with him she slid off the bed until she was kneeling on the floor. He seemed confused and sat up. Once he sat, she leaned forward and took his cock in her mouth. It was a well-known fact many common sexual acts now found themselves considered illegal in the emperor's house. Those laws did not touch places like Freedom Port; desire still governed sex in the Port and somehow

Passion instinctively knew no other woman had taken Hawk's cock into their mouth. It made her heart race with the added excitement. His reaction would be a complete unknown. She knew that this act, or a man putting his mouth on a woman's pussy, were two of the biggest taboos of the repressive religion the emperor followed. A woman could not ride a man's cock, or a man take a woman from behind. What she was about to do could lead to her execution, and for a moment the thought gave her pause, fear. Unable to stop herself she decided to ignore the danger, and pleasure this goliath in a way she doubted he

had ever enjoyed. Certainly even the court's courtesans would have been too afraid to do what she, a common woman, bravely attempted.

He was very surprised, but he did not stop her. Tenderly, Passion let her tongue stroke his cock up the channel of his shaft and then back down. He moaned, a long drawn out sound, and she felt his body relax a bit. Then she took the large swollen head into her small hot mouth and began to suckle it with a tenderness that slowly became more insistent. Increasing her suction, she began to take more of him into her mouth and he hissed in amazed pleasure. Delightfully, she felt his hands lightly grasp her long, still-damp hair. His large fingers tangled in the mass, and Passion found the sting at her scalp just a bit erotic. He gripped her slight shoulders while consumed with the pleasure her mouth wrought on his genitals. She tasted his essence and knew that he would soon come. Readying herself, she prepared to accept his hot essence, to consume his desire. With a strangled cry Hawk came in her mouth. She drained him as she listened to his rasping breath. Passion was afraid to look up into his eyes, afraid of his reaction. When she finally had the courage, the look she saw in the cocoa depths shook her to her core. A devastating tenderness filled his face and he grasped her face gently between his large hands as he brought her up to

him. Standing, she was eye-level to him seated. His eyes searched her face a moment and then he brought her to his lips, crushing her with the revelation of his newly discovered desperate passion. In that moment, she knew he would never forget her.

It suddenly felt as if all bets were off the table and the rules no longer applied. Passion knew Hawk wanted to love her as his body dictated. She wanted that too.

It was as if the dam of his secret fantasies had broken open and he was freeing the demon of his lusts. Need broke from him in a crashing wave and Passion was lost in the tide, ready to be consumed, happy to be washed away in the torrent of his forbidden desire. He handled her roughly, and it fit him just right. Passion loved the sensation of his strength and she reveled in his control of her body.

Hot and wet, his tongue slid swirling across her flat stomach, and dipped into her navel. Closing her eyes she let the sensation take her. She let Hawk control her pleasure. His whiskered chin grazed her sensitive skin as he trailed a delicious path lower and lower. He stopped just above her pussy and she felt his hot breath. Her need for his touch made her want to scream. When his tongue delved into the moist folds of her damp sex she arched her back and moaned, it felt good, so very good! His strong tongue flicked and rolled her clit until she was on the very edge,

ready to come for him. Nibbling at her clit with his teeth, scrapping lightly, she had never experienced another lover like him. Crying out his name as she came, she felt him increase the speed and pressure of his strokes with his skilled tongue until the last of her orgasm had left her with a final sigh of completion.

He was obviously not done with her and she was glad of it. Feeling her legs being raised she opened her eyes to see him placing her ankles nimbly on his shoulders and she felt him suddenly push a pillow under her ass. This was definitely a different approach to fucking for her. His thumb found her clit again, he wet it with her own essence and then he was rolling her, bring her close to the edge. She had never had so many orgasms in such a short period. Her worries were wasted. As she shattered and cried out, he slid inside of her and the pleasure intensified to a brilliant peak of impossible sensation. Keening out a wail Passion came and came. Intense confusion consumed her as her orgasm became so much that she hiccupped a sob-like noise. Screaming with release until she cried, she felt like he was killing her with his cock. How is it even possible for me to feel like she this? Passion wondered. Just as she thought she could take no more escalation of the sensation, the orgasm broke her and she tumbled down, blind and deaf, through the breathtaking joy. Hawk came and her name

was the softest of tender whispers. Her eyes opened at the sound and she watched his beautiful face light up with fulfillment. Oddly, she was annoyed with his perfection. He could have at least had the decency to have a silly sex face! Fabulous to the extreme he was beautiful as she felt his hot fluid of his orgasm inside of her. When he opened his eyes and looked down at her, she could not read his expression.

He settled next to her, looking at her face. Unsure of what to say or do she felt awkward and uncertain. Hawk must have sensed her anxiety, because when he grinned at her it broke the tension. He brushed his lips over hers and she could taste her essence on him. He whispered against her neck.

"Thank you for the gift of your body Passion. You are named well. I will not soon forget you."

He got up without another word he left her bed. She lay, a bit shocked, for a long moment before she got up and readied herself for bed. Sleep did not come easily.

Four

Several days passed, and Passion was both relieved and a bit disappointed that Hawk had not sought her out. It would have been nice to see if he could bring her to such amazing heights of desire again, but she knew that she was probably safer for his sudden disinterest. In addition, she was very busy with her work. She spent every daylight hour from dawn to dusk working, and then she worked under artificial light until the crew returned each night, ready to sleep. Each day left her exhausted, but closer to escape. She was sure she would finish in only one more day. She was ready to leave, but deep in her heart she still worried lord Dragon would recant his promise.

It was already late; she had turned on the lights because of the growing darkness. The very man who held her future in his hands soon interrupted her train of dark thought.

When Dragon spoke, fear made her feel sick to her stomach.

"My trusted Hawk tells me of your propensity to sin, Passion, finish this work for now and come out." Fear held her motionless. Had Hawk turned her in?
Would the future emperor of the galaxy have her killed?
She hoped she could convince him to at least allow her to finish her work. Then she could find a way to sneak off into the wilderness until they had left. She would lose her escape, but save her life. Putting down her tools, she slowly and quietly got out from under the ship and looked up at the handsome man. He looked at her, but his face was devoid of any censure.

"Come with me onto the ship Passion."

Unsure of what she should do she followed him. Her feet felt like they were made of lead. What was his purpose? When she was on the ship, he closed it up. No one from the outside would be able to enter it. No one would be able to help her. Fear gripped her until she could not think or speak. Had she made a fatal mistake? He must have noticed her fear because when he turned to her in the dim corridor, his eyes were soft. Dragon's voice sounded strained.

"Hawk told me of what the two of you shared. I am a powerful man, but none, not even my slaves would dare do what you did. I want that daring Passion. I want you to give me all you are. I want you to share your body with me and Hawk, together."

Passion would not have been more shocked if he had informed her that she was doomed for her transgressions. He was asking her to do something dangerously forbidden. Passion felt the wetness in her panties. She knew she wanted it too. As much as she hated what Dragon stood for, her pussy was wet for him. His strong body begged for her touch, her fingers itched to explore it.

"My lord, I am covered with grime . . . Would it not be better to wait until later in the evening?"

"No I want you now Passion. Worry not about my crew, they will not return until morning. Hawk and I plan to take our pleasure of you, but I have considered your need. I have a cabin readied for you when we leave. It is yours now to prepare, and I have left something I would very much like you to wear."

He directed her to a room to the end of the crew corridor. Passion touched the door and it opened for her. He did not enter with her. As the door closed behind her, she realized he had given her a very nice cabin. There was a private cleanser and a large bed. All ships had transfer docks and Passion could see that Dragon had ordered many items transferred to the ship. He had obviously had her comfort deeply considered when he had the room prepared for her. On the lush bed, she saw a traditional courtesan costume that was in her size. It made her wet just knowing

that he'd thought of her wearing it. Stepping into the cleanser, she let her clothing and body be stripped of any dirt. It took only moments, but when she stepped out she stripped off her clothing, and for good measure she stepped back in naked. Her body felt refreshed and clean, it was not as relaxing as her daily bath, but she felt cleaner than she ever had in her life.

Stepping into the bedroom, she slipped on the thin silk panties with tassels hanging from them and the glimmering robe that did not hide her nudity. A pair of light sandals awaited her feet and she slipped them on, surprised with how comfortable they were. Everyone knew that courtesans put their hair up when they were experienced but a new courtesan left one side of her hair down, while piling the other up. Finding pins in a drawer, she quickly emulated the style of a new courtesan and left the room.

Walking out into the chilly corridor, she realized that she had no idea where to go. A soft sound caught her attention, music. She followed the sound until she was at the captain's cabin. It was a lushly appointed domain. Hawk and Dragon reclined on plush cushions on the floor, speaking companionably. They wore only lounging pants and were obviously waiting, for her. It made Passion both hot and nervous. She felt her damp pussy tingling with the possibilities of what they would do with her. Passion had

never been with more than one man at a time and the idea of both of these hunkalicious men fucking her made her knees go weak!

Knowing that she was going to be pleasured by two of the most powerful men she'd ever met was exciting, but she wanted to give as good as she got.

They stood as she cautiously entered the room. Her cheeks instantly felt the heat of the blush that stained them. Both of the men bowed in the courtly fashion of their more civilized, but restrictive, world. They were responding to her as they would a royal courtesan who'd trained for years for the privilege of giving either of these men pleasure. It was a bit intimidating. Awkwardly, she returned the gesture as was custom.

They immediately seemed to notice her hair. Her blush deepened when she saw the obvious approval shinning in their matching cocoa brown eyes. Her hands wanted to touch them, starting with the soft raven's wing black hair, a trait the men shared due to their royal heritage. Hawk would need to be a distant relation of the prince to be so close to the emperor's court. They were certainly handsome men, and it overwhelmed her a bit. Biting her lip, she glanced up into Dragon's face. His normally playful expression was gone, replaced with sexual intensity. His look made her body ache.

She wanted their hands on her, but she had no idea how to begin or what to say. She was not a professionally trained courtesan. She was also not there because she had to be. She was with them out of her own consuming lust. What was the proper way physically to love two of the galaxies most powerful men? They were both smiling. Obviously they eagerly anticipated her first move. Passion honestly had no idea what they expected. She was not a trained lover or refined woman. She had grown to womanhood in a place that killed softness or weakness and so it wasn't something she understood.

With her own small grin and a sweet blush, she decided to jump right in and do what she knew Dragon wanted. Kneeling in front of him on a plush floor pillow, she began to undo the tie on his lounging pants. They slid easily off his slim hips and ass to pool around his ankles.

His cock was already hard. Passion glanced up at Hawk and gave him a small, shy smile. He smiled back, enjoying the show. Tenderly and with careful precision, she took the large smooth head of Dragon's cock into her mouth. Her ruby red lips wrapped around it and she began to suckle him with sweet force. The quick intake of his stomach muscles told her he certainly liked what she was doing. Taking as much of him into her mouth as she could, she then wrapped her small, soft hands around the rest of him.

She began to suckle and stroke in a rhythm that left him moaning. He took a hold of her bobbing head, wrapping her hair around his large hand, pulling it back from her face while at the same time encouraging her to increase her speed. Passion smiled around the mouthful of cock and increased the pressure of her suction. Dragon moaned a long low throaty sound of pleasure. Her teeth gently scraped his flesh, causing him to release a hiss of pleasure. He was one of the most powerful men in the history of the galaxy and she held him in her power, it was an intoxicating sensation.

While she pleasured Dragon, she felt Hawk's presence coming up behind her. His large hands brushed her remaining hair from her face with amazing tenderness. Those hands began to caress her jaw and neck and then traveled down past her collarbone to rest on the front of the robe. Hawk parted the garment softly. One of his large hands dipped down to take her breast out of the robe as his other hand followed the same journey, and soon he had freed both her breasts from their confinement. Each of his hands were busy kneading and then his thumbs and index fingers found her large pink nipples. He rolled them gently and then pinched them just enough to cause pain/pleasure that coursed through her to pool in her womb and make her pussy even wetter. Then his hands skimmed up to her

shoulders and he began to massage them with loving tenderness. Restlessly, his hands soon returned to her breasts and began to play with them once more. The combination of his tender touch and the knowledge that she was performing a forbidden act sent a thrill of pleasurable excitement into her that bore no comparison. She knew that no other woman had done this to the men and it made the experience deeper and richer.

Dragon groaned and Passion tasted a drop of his essence. He was close. Her tongue ran up and down his cock while she maintained a steady rhythm with her sucking. He seemed especially to like the way she ran her tongue down the center of his cock. She felt the channel where his essence would soon flow with her tongue.

Hawk was hovering over her now, kissing her neck. She felt his hands slid down her back and he gently cupped her ass. The feel of Dragon tugging on her hair, and Hawk's tender caresses elicited a primal response from her.

A small cry escaped her as Hawk's fingers reached down and began to rub her clit through the panties she wore. She felt the chill, knowing her excitement left the garment dripping with desire. Dragon threw his head back and a shout akin to that of triumph left him as he filled Passion's mouth with his essence. When she had drained him of his desire, she pulled back and looked up at him.

An oddly tender expression passed over his face. She had not seen an expression in his eyes before. Hawk stopped playing with her body and Dragon pulled her up off her knees. Hawk stood also. Dragon began to untie her robe as she felt Hawk catch her panties and begin to slide gently them down her legs. It felt wonderful and terrifying at the same time.

She stood naked in front of the men, but felt no shame, only wonder. Her need for them was intense. She had never really had sex for the pure sake of sex, there was always some kind of emotional connection. But with these men, it was different. She suddenly felt a deep affection for both of them, and it was more than enough. Her mind and body felt free and unburdened as she embraced the honesty of their lust. Hawk let his lounge pants fall away and now they were all completely naked. Her hand unconsciously went to Hawk's swollen cock and he groaned as she gave it a gentle squeeze. Dragon held out his hand to her in a very formal gesture, and she knew enough about the court to know that if she took his hand there was no going back. She would be consenting to accept him as her lover. Hesitantly, she took his hand and he flashed his most brilliant smile at her. Infectiously, she smiled back. Hawk held out his hand and she readily took it in her free hand. The men walked her ceremonially to the bed, where they indicated they wanted

her to sit down. She did. Hawk pushed her back and got on the bed so he all but straddled her head. Dragon opened her legs widely and stepped between them.

Dragon knelt between her thighs and began to flick her clit with his tongue. Gasping with the joy of the feeling, Passion could not stop her soft feminine moan. Dragon seemed encouraged by the noise because he increased the ferocity of his mouth and tongue on her pussy. Hawk leaned over and took one of her breasts in his mouth. He sucked the nipple until it was a taunt peak. His cock bounced just above her lips and Passion began to flick it with her tongue. Hawk swapped breasts and lowered himself just enough that she was about to swirl the tip of her tongue around the head of his cock.

Dragon's hard work began to pay off for her. Passion arched her back, crying out as she began to shudder in orgasm. She felt two of Dragon's fingers slide inside her tight pussy. As the remnants of her orgasm shivered through her, she felt intimate muscles gripping his large fingers as he fucked her with his fingers until a second orgasm shook her. Panting and gasping, Passion's tongue stopped rolling over Hawk's penis. He moved away from her and he joined his friend near her wide spread thighs. The men whispered briefly and then she felt Dragon move her to her hands and knees. Her body was still languid with

her release and she was happy to find herself molded by their strong capable hands.

She felt long fingers sliding into her pussy, collecting her wetness and then she felt other fingers firmly rubbing her clit. The sensation was indescribable. She had no idea who was doing what, but it did not matter. With abandoned wantonness, she eagerly enjoyed all that they had to offer her.

The hand rubbing her clit never stopped while other fingers gently began to work themselves into her anus. With a keening moan, Passion relished the sensation. She felt the bed dip. One of the men's cocks was sliding inside of her tight pussy. Somehow all of the fingers continued what they were doing. Letting go of her self-control, Passion wailed loudly as she shattered, screaming as the intense orgasm rocked her, making her feel as if the pleasure should be pain as it went on and on. These men had wrung every ounce of sensation out of her body and she was lost in them.

Just as the last of her orgasm was rippling through her, she heard Hawk moan. He came inside of her. Once he stilled and both their orgasms had subsided, Dragon pulled her farther up on the bed and rolled her to her back. Hawk lay down beside her and he began to kiss her very tenderly. Passion wrapped her arms around his neck and was lost in

the tenderness of the moment. She felt his hands on her breasts and to her surprise she felt her desire building again. Dragon's fingers flicked and pinched her clit and soon she found herself moaning against Hawk's lips. She could feel him grinning, the kiss never broke through any of it until the beginnings of yet another orgasm gripped her and she arched her spine and threw her head back with a long moan. Dragon was suddenly between her legs, parting her thighs. She felt his cock sliding into her as he began to pump his hips in a frantic rhythm that she fought to match. Hawk began to kiss her again and the combination was mind-numbingly perfect. Hawk lay down beside her and she felt him take her into his arms as she came for Dragon. The future leader's harsh cry mingled with her own tiny cries of pleasure.

Slowly she opened her eyes. Passion felt Dragon slide into the bed on the other side of her from Hawk. Both men held her and she was surprised to find it wasn't at all awkward. Sighing, Passion felt deeply satisfied. It had certainly been the best sex she had ever enjoyed in her entire life.

They lay like that for a very long time, and she felt Hawk absentmindedly caressing the soft skin on her back. Yawning she was very close to falling asleep. She knew genuine courtesans would have left by now and she started to get up, but the men pulled her back to lie between them. Dragon spoke against her hair.

"You will sleep here, with us. The others will not return tonight. I want to wake with you in my bed, Passion."

She had no idea how to respond. When she had imagined this taboo encounter, she'd never thought about afterwards. It would not have occurred to her. Honored by Dragon's request she tilted her head up and captured his lips in a sweet kiss. Hawk placed his own kiss between her shoulder blades. Strangely, it all felt very right. Her feelings were not of romantic love, but her lust had caused in her a deeply intense connection to the men that seemed somehow to transcend romance. Passion closed her eyes and fell deeply asleep in the men's arms.

* * * *

Fogged with sleep, it took her mind a moment to realize where she was. Blinking rapidly and trying to make sense of the disorientation of waking in a strange bed, Passion tried to sit up. Strong arms wrapped around her and she felt herself pulled against the hard mass of a male chest. Hawk whispered in her ear.

"Lovely, do not stir. Our prince still sleeps."

Hawk's lips found the crook of her neck. Passion could not help the tender sigh that escaped. This man knew his way around a woman's body. Looking up into the dark pools of his beautiful eyes, she blushed when he smiled down at her. Wrapping her arms around his neck she pulled him to her lips. His kiss was intense. Passion felt his erection pressing against her thigh. Hawk wanted her, again. Kissing him back with all the depth of emotion and need that she could muster caused him to groan. Hawk's large, warm hands ran over her body, rekindling the burn of desire inside her. She wanted him inside of her.

Dragon still slept.

Subtly, Passion looped her leg over Hawk's waist and slid down his strong body. She felt the tip of his erection and with only a slight wiggle she was able to impale her wet pussy on it. Hawk groaned softly as she slowly began to slide up and down the tip of his diamond-hard cock. She began to increase her pace, but then he took her hips and with a quick twist he impaled her completely on his cock. She was still riding him. Passion cried out. Using his hands to control her speed he guided her climb to orgasm. Hawk moaned her name softly as his essence poured into her.

When they had finished the sound of Dragon clearing his throat caught their attention. Sheepishly, they both glanced at the man. Dragon smiled and when he spoke, his voice was husky. "Waking to your passionate cries, dearest Passion, was a sweet good morning."

He all but pulled her off his guard and friend. Passion found Dragon kissing her with dark intensity. Her sexual desire once again met the challenge that these men presented it. She wanted Dragon, too.

Feeling his hands in her hair, she sighed with contentment as he pulled it away from her face. Dragon tugged her away from his lips just enough to look into her face. He seemed to be searching for something. It was an odd moment but it quickly passed. He kissed her again as his hands roughly held her slim hips. Feeling him position her over his cock and gently impale her on top of it, Passion cried out. Dragon's hands played with her breasts, increasing her pleasure. Wildly she bucked against his cock, sliding herself against him. In only moments, her hypersensitive well-loved body was clutching at him in the whirlwind of her orgasm. Her muscles clenched around him as she came screaming his name. In the back of her mind, she knew that he was watching her come. He did not find release until the last of her cries and gasps had subsided. She felt the warmth of his essence entering her body and then his arms were around her, pulling her down between them.

Hawk joined him in holding her, both men looked at her, and she could not stop her blush. They both chuckled. When Hawk spoke, she could not mistake the tenderness behind his words.

"Passion, you are named well. I have never been more satisfied by a woman. Thank you Sweet One, you are a treasure."

His words did nothing to help her control the heat staining her cheeks. When Dragon spoke her blush only deepened.

"I have enjoyed some of the most sought after highly skilled and trained courtesans of the galaxy, but none of them could compare to you. Passion, I will never forget being inside of you."

Staying silent, she had no idea what to say to these men. They had given her pleasures that she too would never forget. They must have noticed how overwhelmed she was because Hawk suddenly swept her into his arms and carried her to Dragon's own cleanser. She noticed her clothing hanging on one of the wall hooks. These men had been meticulous in their preparation of her corruption, and it made her smile.

She was quickly clean and dressed, and when she stepped back into Dragon's bedchamber both he and Hawk wore their discarded loungewear. Hawk led her to the ship's exit. Soon the crew would return. Just as she was about to press the release to admit her out into the early morning sun, Hawk grabbed her upper arm. She turned in surprise to look at him. When he spoke, she could not read his expression in the dim corridor.

"Thank you Passion, I have never felt like you make me feel. You are the most amazing female that I have ever known!"

Passion's smile stayed with her words. "I guess you've changed your opinion of me?"

His words held humor, but also a trace of worry.

"Women in the civilized world do not go around threatening big men with guns and doing the work of men. I was raised to expect women to need my protection, not to worry that I need protection from them. Do not forget that you are female, Passion, and no matter how brave, smart, and strong you are, you are still a beautiful woman. I want you to be careful."

Strangely, she was touched by his concern as opposed to angered. When she replied she could sense that her words did not alleviate his fears. "I'm always careful Hawk. I've been taking care of myself for a very long time. I've been doing just fine without a champion. Hawk, the uncharted regions are different from what you expect. I'd

already be dead or worse if I didn't know how to survive.

Thank you for thinking of me enough to worry."

She felt his eyes on her as she casually left. Her coveralls and ponytail made her look as if she had been working inside the ship, instead of playing. Still she grabbed a nearby toolbox, just in case anyone saw her leaving the ship at the early hour.

Her motivation to be free led her to immediately get to work. She was only a day, maybe less, away from completing the work. Her bags were packed, and as she worked, her mind finally rested on the future.

In the past her worry about getting away left her little time to think about what she was moving towards. Her plans had never moved past getting an identity that would help her slide into the society of the charted planets easily. This new connection to Hawk and Dragon would certainly be a benefit in starting a new life. If they were willing to help her, she would have an easy time transitioning. They might want to fuck her, but that did not guarantee that they would happily help her out. Hawk's concerned words made her wonder how much help either of the men would ultimately be. Help from them would be her plan "A" but Passion knew better than to leave plan "B" to chance.

When thirst made it impossible to continue with her work she went inside and on her private channel used her father's communication hub to call a few of her favorite customers. She had done a few free repairs in exchange for the promise of future forgeries and database tampering. She gave them the link to her unregistered mobile communicator so that when she contacted them they would be able to send her the requested items. For now, she held off. Dragon had access to provide her with her any kind of identity she wanted. Still, she knew that shared pleasure did not automatically warrant his help. When she had finished with her refreshment and making her links, she went back to work.

It was well past midnight when she saw the finish line ahead of her. A few more hours and she would be done. Pushing the exhaustion away, she forged on. Dragon's crew was returning from their night of drinking and carousing. She ignored their desire for quiet and continued. She was not going to go to bed until her work was finished. She was going only to spend one more night in her childhood home and then the future was hers.

Five

Passion woke early and gathered the last of her things. It was early and she anxiously waited for Dragon's crew to wake. When she finally saw the door open, she rushed out to give them all the good news.

"We can leave today! It's done."

Celebration began and Passion knew that they wanted to return to civilization as badly as she wanted to join it.

Dragon was the first to speak. "Thank you Passion. Gather your things, we leave in one hour."

The crew gave a shout of joy in unison. Passion felt lightheaded. *Escape*, it seemed too good to be true. She had wanted to leave for so many years that now that the opportunity loomed near Passion could not shake her fears and anxiety. What would she do if it suddenly were snatched away?

She took her bags to the cabin on the ship that she knew to be for her use.

Hawk followed her. When he spoke, his voice held a strange tone. "Do you have any goodbyes to say, Passion?"

"No, most of the girls that I played with, as a child, have died, married, or were sold. None of my friends are left here."

"What about men you have tender feelings for . . . ? Is there anyone you will be missing?

"No Hawk. There have been men that I cared for, but my father made sure that none of them are still here either. I have no goodbyes to say. I left my brothers and father a note. It's enough."

He nodded and she got the feeling that her answer pleased him. Was he worried that she was in love with someone? Shrugging, she decided that she was reading too much into his question and tone.

Her things were in the ship. She had hidden her money away. Time was creeping by, closer and closer to the moment of her escape. Passion anxiously paced on the ship, too afraid of being left behind even to leave it for a moment. Now, all she could do was sit and wait for her freedom.

She would have waited in her cabin until the ship left her home world if the sound of laser fire had not erupted outside. Passion ran to the door and was just about to open it when Dragon stopped her. "Do not go out into the danger! Hawk is there and will take care of the problem."

Panic made her heart miss a beat. For a long moment, she thought she was going to burst into hysterical tears.

Hawk was in danger. "We can't leave him out there alone!

Does he have anyone backing him up?"

"He is a royal guardsman. He has no need for back up."

Passion pulled her arm free and rushed passed Dragon.

She went to her bags and she retrieved her antiquated weapon. Dragon tried to stop her but she rushed past him and off the ship.

Laser fire snapped so close by she quickly used the landing gear on the craft for cover. Hawk was across from her and she saw his anger when he noticed her. She gave him a little wave and indicated her weapon. He was not happy. Someone fired at them again. Passion noticed a movement behind where Hawk had taken cover and she turned enough to fire at the blur of moment. A male scream let her know that she had hit her target, and the target's fire missed Hawk. Scowling Hawk gave her a dangerous look, but even as angry as he was she saw a look of respect cross his face. More fire erupted. Passion counted the shooters as her father had taught her to do. There were at least six left. Two of them against six mystery shooters, the odds sucked. Passion spared a glance at Hawk and she knew that he too

worried about the disparity in numbers. A blur of movement caught her eye and she saw two men moving in on Hawk's more exposed side of the ship. Passion knew that if she did not at least take out one of the threats Hawk was as good as dead! Staying low, she targeted the closest shooter, Hawk turned and he killed one of the men, but the other was able to shoot before her fire ended the threat.

Passion smelled the singed fabric and flesh before she felt the white-hot burning pain. Screaming she fell back. Hawk barked at her to get to cover and she quickly complied. The wound was painful, but not fatal. An ugly scar would remain, but she knew that if it was the worst she received she could live with it. A shouting man suddenly held her attention and she was horrified.

"Give me my daughter. We will let you leave if you release my daughter!"

Hawk glanced and Passion and she knew from his expression how pale hearing her father's voice had made her. As angry as she was with him, and as little love as she held for the man, she still would not want him to die. Hawk called back firmly.

"She is not a prisoner. Passion as earned her passage on our vessel and she is leaving of her own free choice."

Her father barked a laugh at the words. "She is my unwed daughter. Galactic law, even in a lawless place, states that she is mine to do with as I choose until she has wed. I do not choose for her leave. She is mine, send her out and no one will be hurt."

Passion felt the tears in her eyes. Freedom had been just within reach and now it was lost. She looked at Hawk and all of her anguish shimmered in her expression. Her voice shook when she spoke. "Goodbye Hawk. I can't let you die for me." She called out. "Father don't shoot I am coming out."

Hawk harshly demanded that she stay put. "Passion, you do not have to go to him. You have earned the right to leave with us. I will fight for your freedom."

"No, Hawk. I will not see you die for me. Thank you Hawk, I will never forget you." She stepped out of the shade of the ship into the heat of the mid-morning sun, defeated.

Her oldest brother, Raven, the one who loved her the most, rushed to her and took her by the arm. His face bore genuine concern for her. He was not rough, but he was definitely not willing to let her go.

Passion let her tears fall freely. She glanced back at Hawk, and she could see that he looked torn. She knew he genuinely wanted to help her and somehow the thought gave her a slight measure of comfort. When she looked at her angry father, she heard Hawk calling out.

"What will it take for you to release Passion?"

Passion saw her father's eyes light up. She knew in that moment that he had not gotten his loan.

"If you want her it will cost you. Two hundred thousand credits and you can do with her as you please."

"Done."

Hawk's reply startled her. *Did he just buy her?* Outrage battled uncertainty. She did not want to be sold. Even to a man she held a measure of caring for. Passion wanted papers stating that she was her own woman, a widow of consequence, a free woman. She did not want to trade the rule of one man for the rule of another. Her tears fell freely and she looked up at her brother. They had all lived under their harsh father and weakness never tolerated, but the look of sorrow in her brother's eyes pierced her heart.

He suddenly put his arm around her and squeezed her close to him. Her brother Raven whispered brokenly. "My heart loves you little sister. I'm so sorry."

Her brother was not going to help her. She had not expected it, but the verbalization of the slim hope's death made her heart bleed. No one could help her. If Hawk bought her, she would be his to do with as he pleased. A small ember of hope flourished. Perhaps, he planned to give her freedom. He would have fought for her freedom. She only had five thousand credits, but she would happily

trade them for her freedom. He had connections, he certainly had wealth, and if he let her pay him over time, she would return his money to him, in full.

Her father called out to her brother.

"Raven, take your sister inside. When he pays the credits he can have her."

Raven led her back into the small home attached to their hanger. Soon her father joined them. His paid thugs remained outside. The bodies of the ones that she and Hawk had killed remained ignored in the sand. When her father looked at her, she could see his rage. She had betrayed him and he was not a forgiving man.

"Daughter, I've given you a good life here. How could you run away with trader scum?"

"I saw the look in your eyes when Hawk asked you how he could help me. You didn't get your loan, did you father?

He backhanded her and she tasted blood. Truth hurt.
Unfortunately, this time it hurt her! Vulture's eyes sparkled with his anger and darkness enveloped his words like smoke.

"Don't worry Daughter. Once we have his money we'll kill him, and the entire crew of his ship!"

Her father had no idea who was on that ship. If she told him, would it protect them or complicate the situation? She had no idea what to say. Passion bit her lip in frustration. As she watched her father loading fuel cells into his weapons and activate the exterior security systems she made her decision.

"The prince is on that cargo ship. If you harm anyone, the emperor will kill us all. Make a fair bargain father. If you must sell me, do it, but don't let everyone here die because of your greed!"

His hands stopped what they were doing. She watched his fingers hover over the fuel cell. She was sure she saw them shaking. Whatever he was thinking, she felt a sense of dread. She wanted to save the men she cared for, but she also wanted her freedom. Her best hope lay with Hawk, but she did not want anyone to die for her. Life was important, as important as freedom. Her heart was breaking and her dreams were dying. Frantically, she tried to think of some way to warn Hawk and to tell them to leave her behind. As much as she wanted to go with them, she would not want to live with selfish deaths on her conscience.

Time seemed to drag by slowly. Finally, her father's communicator twittered its shrill call and things started to move forward. Worried, Passion listened and watched as her father scheme began to unfold.

She saw Hawk and Dragon exit the ship. Why in the galaxy would Hawk allow Dragon to walk out into danger?

He had to guess that there was still a chance that her father would try to kill him. Did the man have no commonsense or did he also have some sort of scheme? All Passion could do was watch and worry. Laser fire erupted around her. Her father and his guards were under attack from the ship. Cargo ships never had weapons; this one was a big surprise. Raven pushed her under a table. When he moved to shove her out of the way of laser fire, she saw him hit. Passion screamed and crawled to her brother.

His arm would never be the same, but the laser had made a clean cut. It had not gone through enough of his arm for it to make the arm a loss. With some surgical microbots and time, the muscle and skin could be regrown. Raven groaned and Passion pulled him under the table with her. He was unconscious from the pain and she would not leave the big man to suffer more injuries.

The firing subsided for a moment, Dragon called into the damaged house.

"Let the girl go and you will have your credits!" Vulture responded.

"Seeing as the buyer has the resources to pay more for such top quality goods the price just increased. I won't let her go for less than two million credits!"

Passion's mouth fell open. Did her father just request millions for her? As much as she hated the thought of

slavery, she would have been alright with it if she had had hope of paying it back and buying herself free. Two million credits was an impossible sum of money. If she was going to be sold to someone, Hawk or Dragon would be better than the gruesome slave traders in the port. She would be lucky to live a year with any of the slavers. Her death would most likely be from a social disease or a violent john, not a pleasant outlook. Hawk seemed like a fair man who appeared to have some respect for her, and her hope now lay with him.

Passion called out to her father. "You are asking too much! A hundred thousand is three times what you could have gotten in the port. Don't let your greed cheat you out of the money you need. Take the first amount, let me go, and stay alive."

Vulture looked like he was considering what she said. His response killed her hope that he had any commonsense. "Two million and lifetime immunity from the emperor and she's yours."

"Done." Dragon shouted loudly and with authority.

Had she just been sold to Dragon? It had never occurred to her that Dragon would be the buyer. For some reason she feared for it to be him. Hawk just seemed more real and noble. Hawk would respect her desire for freedom. Dragon

would never comprehend it. Dread filled her. She tried not to cry as she pleaded to her father.

"Please father if you want to sell me, sell me to Hawk. I don't want to belong directly to the emperor's household. Please father, if you are going to do this awful thing to me, show me a small kindness." Tears finally broke free.

Something passed over her father's face. Regret or sadness, it didn't matter because his words proved that his pocket book was more important to him than his blood.

"Two million and immunity, I see it and the girl is yours."

Passion felt light headed as she watched her father and Dragon in the yard. The realization she did not want to belong to him hit her with force. Fear spurred her to move. She ran through the house and was out the back door before anyone realized that she had fled. Passion knew the hills. She knew how to survive off the land. Her legs carried her swiftly through the tall grasses and sand. It was a harsh place but Passion knew how to find water and food. She could easily live in the wilderness for months. When she had been a teenager, she had done that very thing.

She was almost up the hill, a little farther and she would be out of the city. Freedom was in sight. A large body tackled her. It was Hawk. Passion struggled. He held her immobile and when he spoke, she wanted to laugh. "It is done. You can leave. Dragon gave your father what he wanted. This was the most expensive repair work in history. Come Passion, Dragon will let no harm come to you . . . I will let no harm come to you."

He let her up and did not expect her to run from him. She ran as hard as she could but soon Hawk had caught her again. Genuine confusion laced his words. "Why are you running from me Passion?"

"I don't want to belong to Dragon. I want to be free."

"The deal is done. You belong to Dragon now. Come, I will not let you run away to die in the wilderness."

Hawk gave her no choice. He threw her over his shoulder and carried her to the ship. Passion gave up screaming and kicking after realizing how useless it was. She let her weight collapse in despair.

He stopped.

She felt him feel for a pulse. Satisfied that she was alive he kept walking. Passion began to kick and scream again, it was not helping, but it made her feel better.

Shoes suddenly appeared below her and as her eyes trailed up the filthy pants. She realized that they belonged to one of her father's men.

He spoke nonchalantly to Hawk. "Let me take care of the kid."

Pain quickly radiated through her skull. Blackness enveloped her into its terrifying inky embrace.

Six

Groggy, Passion woke up with a terrible headache. Darkness was the first thing she noticed. *How long have I been out?* she wondered grumpily. Rubbing her eyes, she realized that she was in her cabin on Dragon's cargowarship. Had night fallen already? She went to the small observation window and looked outside. Gasping Passion realized she was on her first fight into space! She was going to kick someone's ass!

Her clothing was still bloody from her brother's wound. Her flight into the wilderness had left her grimy too. She looked for her things and found them just as she had left them before her father's ill-timed return.

Smiling she went into the small cleanser and cleaned herself and her clothing. She went through her things until she found her lone feminine outfit. The top was a band of rare silk that only one planet in the galaxy produced. It looked to be dyed a dark purple and with her tan skin, it looked great. It basically wrapped only around her breasts, leaving little to the imagination. The skirt was denim and

fitted her ass and thighs like a second skin before flaring just above the knees. She looked hot! This ensemble, out of fashion in the civilized world, would have been trendy and sexy as hell on a place like Freedom Port.

Once she had fixed her hair, being careful with her still-sore head, she put on a bit of lip-gloss. Looking at herself, she wondered who she was trying to impress. What was the point of dressing up for Hawk or Dragon? She assumed she belonged to Dragon now. Her delicious lovers had gone from hunkalicious to evil in zero point six seconds! Would they truly consider her a slave, or had they helped her out because of the connection that they shared?

They had become her masters with one monetary exchange, but they had become her lovers when she had given them her body freely. Which would mean more to them? What should she say about it? "Hi, thanks for the purchase I come with a lifetime warrantee." Yikes, I think I'll just hide for a bit longer! She let her dark thoughts wander as she hid in the room.

Finally, enough was enough and she decided to just give into her curiosity and go looking for the explanation that she desperately wanted. Leaving the room, she encountered one of the crewmembers. He looked down and refused to meet her eyes. *That was so not a good sign!* Picking up her pace, she soon found herself on the bridge.

For a moment, she just stood awkwardly. Dragon turned and when he looked at her something hot but dark lived in his expression. *So not a good sign*, Passion was really starting to freak out.

Hawk glanced at his friend and Passion watched the men exchange something wordlessly. Her hope for freedom was sinking lower and lower. Dragon nodded to Hawk and he was next to her in only a few powerful strides. He took her by the arm and they were out in the corridor, out of earshot.

"Come with me love."

She walked with him because she was at a loss for what to say or how to respond.

When they returned to her room, Dragon gently sat her down on the bed. He looked into her eyes and she saw the depth of his desire reflected in his needy expression.

"Passion, you are mine. I'm never letting you go. I know that you want freedom. I know you think you are ready to live on your own without protection. You have no idea how my world works. I know you think you know, but you don't. Your money will not last forever and without a way to support yourself life will not be very nice to you. My world may sound more civilized than Freedom Port, but it works the same way. Women need men, Passion." He took a moment to search her face for understanding. When

her expression did not change, he continued. "You need me Passion. I can give you so much more than any other man can. I have never felt about another woman like I feel for you. I want you in my bed. Every night. You will want for nothing. Never again will you have to fear for your life. I want you to be my concubine. I want you to be the mother of my children and the woman in my heart. Passion I care for you far more than is wise." When he finished he was panting and a bit out of breath. He waited, as if he expected her to rejoice.

The anticipation on his face made her a little ill. She spoke quietly but with resolve, voicing the horror filling her. "Dragon, I will not be your whore! I am not going to trade my body for a comfortable life. I don't want or need protection. I want to be me. I want to make my own choices. I have never had the kind of pleasure I found with you and with Hawk, but that is not enough for me. Just looking into your eyes is making me hot, but I don't want such an empty trade. I want to live or die according to my own decisions. Thank you for taking me away from the port, but I want to be free. I know you paid far too much for me, but I can pay you back over time. You may never see it all, but I will pay you back!"

Anger sparkled in his eyes. Her words were obviously not the ones he had wanted her to say. When he put his

hands on her shoulders she thought he was going to shake her.

Instead, he wrapped his arms around her and whispered in his brandy velvet voice. "Passion, the pleasure we will have is not empty. You fulfill me more than I have the right to. I will give you a happy life Passion. I need you. You are going to be my consort, and you will have a proud place at my side. I am not going to throw you into a random stable of courtesans. You are so much more."

She was irritated. He was not getting it. She did not want a man dictating her life. She was not looking for a lush existence of pampering and leisure. She wanted to build a life that she could be proud of. 'Royal whore' was not the destiny that she had in mind.

"Dragon I am sure that someday you will find a woman worthy of your sweet offer, but it is not going to be me. I want a life that I can be proud of. Being a *kept whore* is not what I want. Think of how painful it would be for a girl like me if I accepted you offer. I would be a placeholder for a wife. You would have to take a royal wife and I would have to stand back and watch you marry another woman. The values of your class are not the values I believe in. I have been raised to defy authority, not cater to it! Let me go Dragon, everyone will be much happier."

He looked torn.

Holding her breath, she hoped she was wearing him down.

When Dragon spoke, again his voice was hard. "You are mine Passion. I will tell you what you will be proud of and what you will do. You will be in my bed."

Hoping to make him angry, Passion spat out her words like sharp jabs, she wanted them to hurt. "So how many of your men will I be fucking? Will it just be Hawk? I want to fuck Hawk again too. So when I am your wife in practice but not name will you watch as I let Hawk fuck me until I scream?"

When he smiled, it worried her. He looked angry and his smile was not a happy one.

"If you want to bring Hawk back to our bed I will happily let you do that. Other men would probably not be an option, but time will tell. I will have you please me, Passion, but I want you to be pleased too. I will not give you freedom, but I will give you your way in my bed!"

His words made her pussy ache and she bit her lip. She hoped he did not know how much she wanted him. She hated him but she wanted to feel him inside of her again too.

Dragon suddenly lunged, claiming her mouth with his own. Groaning Passion clung to the kiss. She felt the dampness of her desire and when she leaned closer to

Dragon she felt his very erect cock. Passion was gasping against his lips as he chuckled and pushed her back on the bed.

Slowly he began to remove her clothing and she allowed him to. When his hot look raked over her naked body, she spoke and her voice steeled in its firmness.

"I want you. You don't own me. I am going to fuck you. You are not going to fuck me."

She managed to flip him onto his back and she knew that he was happily allowing her to dictate to him sexually. She slowly began to remove his flight suit. Never once did his beautiful, dark eyes leave hers. When he was naked, Passion began to rub her clit against his cock until the motion elicited a groan from him. Dragon's hands reached up to touch her ample breasts, but enraged, she slapped his hand away. Instead of making him angry, he chuckled, which only served to provoke her further. As much as Passion would have loved to feel his hands on her breasts, she would not let him control her. She wanted to prove that he might own her body, but he could never really own her.

She impaled herself on his thick, hard cock and slowly slid down him. His long, low moan told her that he liked her hot, tight pussy. Picking up speed she let the delicious friction spur her onward. Gasping and panting, she felt her body clench around him and at the same moment she felt

him come inside of her, his back arching as her name slipped from her lips.

Her orgasm was nothing compared to what he could have given her if she had allowed him to caress her, but she was sated. Passion hoped that she had proven her point. She got off him and quickly dressed.

Acting as if she could have cared less about him, she turned away and tried her best to look distracted. He did not play into her ploy and it irritated her. He followed her cue and left without a word.

For the next week of travel, she stayed in her room as much as she could, alone.

Seven

Her hurt and angry attitude did not last long after they reached the capital planet of Vargos. Every sight and sound had her as intrigued and animated as a child. After having lived her whole life in the dry colorless world of Freedom Port this vibrant planet was a miracle to her.

They arrived in the city of Desmenia, Dragon and Hawk's hometown and where the palace stood. Passion hated what the emperor had done to her people, but she respected the beautiful city he had created. Dragon seemed to take particular delight in her wonder. She even forgot her anger as she let him show her his world.

Colors were everywhere. The sky was a gorgeous, surreal lavender that made Passion want to cry, but she did not know why. It was such a soft color she ached when she looked up. Puffy grey clouds floated overhead. They weren't storm clouds, but the color made her think they should be. The planet was green. Passion took off her shoes and let her bare feet feel the cool green grass that was

everywhere. She wanted to embrace every texture and sensation.

Hawk stayed close to them as Dragon showed Passion a vender who sold creatures his people kept purely for pleasure. It was an odd concept. If the creature were not useful or edible, people on Freedom Port had no time or resources to devote to it.

Laughing at the furry little creature, she was fascinated. Its large pointed ears seemed to twist and turn with every sound. Rings went all the way down its dark grey body and the rings alternated between black and brown shades. It had small little legs and the front paws were almost like hands. It was no bigger than the vendor's large fist. The finger-like appendages on the paws gripped the vendor's thumb tightly. When the vendor sensed a potential sale, he started to get a little pushy. Passion jumped back when the man stuck it out at her for her to touch. She just shook her head. Looking at the strange creature was one thing but touching it was another. Hawk taunted her.

"A woman who would hold a gun on me and willingly jump into the middle of a fire fight is too afraid to touch a harmless Mesacat?"

Sticking out her tongue, she darted her hand out quickly to touch the animal. It made a funny little cooing noise and she pulled her hand back again, making the men laugh. Dragon insisted that she try a cold sweet food from another vendor. It was delicious, but gave her a terrible headache, so she only ate a few pieces. Hawk finished it for her and his boyish smile made her chuckle. She sensed that Dragon was dragging his heels about taking her to the palace. Thinking of him setting her up as his prisoner made her frown. No matter how nice a cage, it was still a cage.

After experiencing the market place, she knew Dragon was right. She had never seen so many people. The rabble of the multitude of voices at the market had honestly frightened her at first. His world was a mystery to her. She needed to learn more about his world before she could honestly stand a chance at escape.

Dragon's crew was long gone. She gathered her things from the ship and the men lead her into the grand home of the Universal Emperor.

It felt wrong to be in the home of a man she considered evil. She wanted to run but instead let the men lead her inside. They entered via a secluded entrance and Passion wondered if they were hiding her or themselves. Even the obviously disused stairwell was beautiful and lavish. The entire building seemed to be made out of pink and grey marble, and the walls were smooth and cold. Everything smelled fresh.

Dragon opened a door to reveal a lavish suite of rooms. Precious metals and delicate fabrics glimmered all over the room. He spoke with sincere feeling. "This is my private domain. It is yours too, now. I have never had a woman in this room. I have never shared this space with another. Please make yourself at home, this is your new home Passion."

She chuckled darkly and when she spoke, her words held an edge. "Why is it I feel like a pet your father won't like? Free me now Dragon! Save yourself the trouble of being found out."

He was quiet a moment but when he spoke his voice sounded tired. "Everything is not always about you, Passion. I was never supposed to have taken that shuttle. When I see my father, he will not be a very happy man. Come with me and meet my father. Keep your tongue still; my father has no love of insolent women. Just ask the stepmother who lives in the dungeons, if she is still alive."

His words had the desired effect. Passion shuddered.

Hawk only smiled and Passion wondered how he could smile as such a grizzly statement.

When the three of them entered the Emperor's meeting hall the room's buzz of voices stilled. Everyone turned to stare at them. Dragon looked nervous. Passion let her body

shrink behind the men. Hawk put his arm around her and she was actually glad for the comfort.

Passion had seen the Emperor in transmissions but never in person. He was actually much scarier in person. Standing, the scarred and damaged emperor spoke, and his voice reverberated with dark authority. "I am glad that you still live my son. I would like you to join me in my private rooms. Bring Hawk as I have words to discuss with him too." A hint of familiar was in the man's voice as his son had a similar timber when he spoke. He paused and craned his neck enough to see around Hawk, to where Passion was cowering. "What do you have with you Dragon? Did Hawk find a new toy?"

"No father. This woman is Passion, she is my consort."

His father looked angry. He spoke with subtle menace. "Leave the whore and join me."

Passion really did not like Dragon's father!

When they left, she stood alone in the center of the room. Shaking, she was unsure as to what she should do.
All the men who were the emperor's staff and advisors just looked at her.

Jutting her chin in the air she reminded herself that these men did not know her or how she had come to be there against her will. A large table was in the center of the room and at least fifty men sat around it. The only empty chair was the one that belonged to the vacant emperor. This room was a huge lavish cavern. It was dark but lit with a thousand small lights that strung across the ceiling on strings. Beautiful art hung from the walls. It was one of the most glorious rooms she had ever seen. Other men, servants and slaves rushed about attending to the many men.

Slowly the organized chaos of the men began again, and her presence was forgotten until a young boy ran over to her and whispered that the emperor wanted to see her. She followed the boy and carried herself with all the pride and dignity that she could muster. She would not let the man intimidate her.

Dragon's voice, arguing, was the first thing that she heard. Some of his words she could hear and from what she could tell he was trying to defend his decision to bring her home.

"Father . . . She is no threat . . . unique . . . love her . . . mine . . . is not a spy."

Every other word was too muffled to understand. What she had understood did not make her feel better. Closing her eyes, she stood reminding herself to be brave. She would tell the emperor that she was not a spy and that she would happily get her bag and walk away.

When the door opened, Dragon and Hawk left the room. They both looked stricken. Not good at all, this was not going to end well. The frightful man motioned for her to enter his domain. Cautiously, Passion entered the private office.

"So, girl, my son thinks he has chosen you. How did you manage to convince him that his choice was his own? You must be a very good actress. I've taught him not to trust the fairer sex; you must really be something to undo all my teaching."

Anger clouded her vision and she spoke recklessly. As the words poured out of her she wondered when the last time anyone had screamed at the emperor had been, maybe she was the first. It would be an interesting fact for her memorial. "I did nothing to convince them to bring me here. I want to be free! I want no man telling me what to do! You have all the freedom you want so you have no idea what it is like for a woman. I just want to find a place in the civilized world and make a quiet life for myself, alone! Dragon is amazing, but I will not belong to anyone. I want to leave so just say the word and I'm so gone!" When she had finished she was breathing heavy. She was sure that he was going to order her swift execution. Instead he laughed. She was more terrified than she would have been if he had been angry.

He spoke and a little warmth covered his words. "I see why you suit my son. I believe you girl. Somehow, I don't think that a spy would be foolish enough to yell at me. I will let my son keep you, but if you betray my house I will kill you myself."

She did not think of her safety when she quickly spoke.

"I don't want to stay. Please, free me. I just want to be free and build a life that is my own. Good or bad I want to wake up in the morning and know that the entire day is my own!"

He just looked at her for a long moment. His words held finality. "You belong to my son. If he frees you, he frees you. Your happiness is not my concern. There is a fine line between being brave and being stupid, remember to look for that line in the future."

He waved his hand at the boy and she was quickly ushered out of the emperor's room. Both Dragon and Hawk stood by the door, looking pale.

"Don't ever yell at him again. You could have been killed!" Hawk's voice held disbelief.

Dragon stepped forward and took her into his arms.

She tried to push him away.

Ignoring her actions, he took her into his arms and held her tightly. When he spoke, his voice was only a whisper. "Being a woman will only provide you a small amount of protection. He has killed others for less. Please Passion don't throw away your life just because you are angry with me."

Gulping back her fear, she was beginning to see the magnitude of the danger she was in just by being in the emperor's home.

* * * *

Days passed and routine began.

Dragon was a very busy man and Hawk was always at his side. The men would be gone most of the day. In the evening they would retire to Dragon's private rooms and usually the night ended with the three of them together in Dragon's bed. Some nights Dragon would return alone and when he took her, the desperation of his need to feel her in his arms broke her heart.

She liked both men, but she hated what the emperor stood for and she did not want to spend the rest of her life in fear of him. On the few occasions she crossed his path, she refused to look away and held her head high and fearless. His reaction was always the same. He saluted her like she was one of his generals with his arms over his heart. She would just nod and he would laugh. It had become a game between them. Dragon seemed worried

about his father's interest in her. She did her best to avoid the man.

During the day, left alone to wonder the streets of the city and to explore, she began to learn. Dragon set an account up for her to shop, but other than necessities she did not spend the man's money. Instead, she went to the library to learn or the market to absorb culture. She noticed that someone always followed her. Once she tried to catch the man who tailed her, but he was crafty. She had no idea if it was Dragon or the emperor who had sent the man after her. Since she had nothing to hide she ignored the spy. It irritated her anyway. She just wanted freedom, but it seemed that until she was free of Dragon she would never have it.

After several months of being followed, she received a formal request to go to the emperor for an audience.

Dragon was away, and it requested her immediate presence, so she placed the request where Dragon would see it and left.

"Come in and sit down dear girl."

She obeyed warily. Whatever the man wanted she doubted that it was good. She didn't speak and instead waited for the emperor to lead the conversation.

"My son doesn't know it, but the whole time he was on your home world I had a spy watching over him. Places like your Freedom Port think that they are not under my control, but they are wrong. You have to give your animals a little leash to make them think they are in control. Nothing is what it seems in the world, Passion. I control it all. Here try this you will like it."

He shoved a round bread lathered in a thick cream onto her plate. Sniffing it delicately, she decided to take a bit. It was good. She nodded her approval. Still, she did not speak. Her silence encouraged her host to continue.

"I have been watching you. I know that you know it, but I thought I would tell you before I caused my poor boy a lover's spat. He really should have you watched himself. Ah, young love, foolish but sweet. You are a surprise. I find myself regretting that I like you. I think you are planning an escape. Are you going to run away, Passion?"

The food stuck in her throat and she started to choke. A servant ran up to her and started to pat her on the back. She tried to drink some water but she just choked on that too. When she had recovered, Passion decided that she had better talk.

"If I am going to run away it is not because I don't care about Dragon. If I wanted a man to control me, I would be delighted to live like this forever. I want a real life. This

just does not feel real. I am sure you understand. I am a simple woman with simple desires. I just want freedom. It is so little to ask for, and yet I have never had it. Yes, I will run away, someday. Please don't tell Dragon it will only hurt him."

"Don't you think it will hurt him when you leave?" His question surprised her.

"I care about him, but I can't just give up on my one dream. I want to find a way to support myself and chose where I live. I want be able to go when I want to go and stay when I want to stay. If Dragon is hurt it will be the one thing that will cloud my joy that day, but I have to do this for myself. If that is selfish, then I am selfish. I do not agree with many of your rules, but I am no anarchist. The world will go on as you chose, but I want to control my little piece of that world. As a man you will never understand."

He smiled and it was a genuine smile.

"Passion, I was not always emperor. I fought a battle to overthrow my uncle because I too wanted to control my piece of the world. I risked my life for my dream. Others might not agree with my dream but I happily live it. I understand you girl. You are foolish, but usually the foolish are the dreamers. I will say nothing to Dragon. If he can't hold you that will be between the two of you, I will not have you followed again."

"Thank you."

After her one word reply, they ate in silence. A strange understanding had passed between them.

* * * *

Several days later when she was in the market, she realized no one followed her. Dragon had left that morning on business that would keep him away for several days. Before she left her room she had taken her money and a picture of her brothers along with a carved animal her father had given her as a child and her mother's hair clip. She also had a jeweled necklace that Dragon had given her in memory of a particularly special night of passion. Nothing else was irreplaceable.

She had worn as many layers of clothing as she could without looking conspicuous. Passion was ready for her escape. It was a long time in coming but freedom was finally at hand. A quick look behind her assured her that no one followed. With her new identification, recently purchased, she used all but a few coins on the ticket.

Her last look goodbye left Passion feeling a little choked up. She was finally on her own, but she would miss the men she had come to care for. Their memory would always be special in her heart.

Eight

Running left her exhausted.

Looking over her shoulder, she saw the tall man who'd been on the last two transports smile at her sinisterly. Fear made her pant. Was he an agent of the emperor or just a random sicko? In the week since leaving Desmenia, and Dragon and Hawk, she'd had very little sleep and even less to eat. Those kinds of conditions could cause hallucinations but she knew her feeling about the slimy man was not just paranoia.

Casually, Passion got up and left the section of the transport where she was sitting. The good thing about not having luggage was that it made switching destinations quick and she was able to board without paying. Each day she felt a little safer. Maybe she thought too much of herself. Maybe Hawk and Dragon would not go looking for her. Certainly, they could choose any woman in the galaxy.

When the transport stopped in a small, out of the way mineral mining town for the night Passion got off the to explore. It seemed that the transport was going to be staying for the night. She decided to see if this was to be her home. She would know her fated home when she saw it. Destiny had set aside a place for her; she just had to find it. Walking through the cold night, she saw poor beggars and the dirtiness of the mines. Shuddering, she knew that this was not home.

Sighing wearily, Passion counted the few credits that she had left. *Not even enough for a little room of questionable cleanliness*. Turning she began to re-board the transport.

She never made it.

Suddenly rude hands had her and she was unable to break their hold. Her mouth was held completely shut, she couldn't even scream. Struggling, angry tears began to fall. Did the creepy man from the transport have her? Whoever had her was not letting go! After a few more minutes of struggling, she found herself dragged up the stairs of the transport station's tavern inn. Her attacker had obviously already gotten a room. That meant he was not from the transport.

She tried to bite his hand and kick his legs, but it was no use. In a very short time with minimal effort on his part he had her inside a room. All the rooms opened from the outside. No one noticed her struggle. When he let her go

Passion would have called for help, but his face caught her off-guard. The scream wedged in her throat.

Hawk?

"You are a hard woman to catch! Great job covering your tracks, but I did have the entire empire at my disposal. Dragon is in a very foul mood and so am I. What were you thinking?"

"Hawk, let me go. Walk away and say you didn't find me. I just want peace and freedom. Please Hawk, be my friend and let me be on my own."

"I can't do that Passion. I care about you too much. You have no money, and nowhere to go. If I let you walk away you could be killed or worse. I can't just let you go off alone without any protection. Dragon has never been so obsessed with a woman. I have never seen him like he was when we returned to find that you had been gone for days. He even confronted his father. It was ugly. I think the emperor likes you. He knows everything that happens on this planet and could have found you in a minute, but he refused to help. He told Dragon to take better care of his treasures if he wanted to hold on to them."

Smiling Hawk enveloped her in his arms. He kissed her and she kissed him back. Even if she wanted freedom, she still wanted Hawk and Dragon's bodies too.

Pulling back, Hawk winked and left. When Passion tried the door, she found it locked. Pounding and screaming would be useless; it was obvious that she would just have to wait. How had she let herself end up caught? She had been so careful! If she had just stayed on the move and not have left the transport maybe they would not have found her. She might have made it.

The door suddenly burst open she fell away from it.

Looking up in stunned silence all she could do was gaze up at Dragon. He looked terrible. He was unshaven and his clothing looked rumpled. What in God's name had happened to him? He was always so meticulous with his appearance.

Dragon pulled her up off the floor so quickly that her breath caught in her lungs. What was he doing? He pulled her close. His lips devoured hers in a hungry kiss. She actually heard him groan. For a long moment, he kissed her with such a depth of feeling it invoked a primal response from her soul. Clinging to him, she was only half-aware when he spoke.

"Don't ever leave me again Passion! You are mine! I will not let you go. You belong to me Passion. I should chain you to my bed. Foolish, you could have been killed. You are my consort and it puts you in danger from my enemies . . . my father's enemies. You cannot just go

running around without a guard. I should have been having you watched. My father was right. I should never have trusted you!"

His words splashed freezing water on her desire and she pulled away. Looking up at him with anger Passion spoke with quiet menace. "I am no one's property! I refuse to be a prisoner . . . a slave. I am a woman, not a lamp or a table. You can't just own me. If you have me watched, I will never forgive you! Dragon if you care about me *let me go*. I want to try life on my own terms. I don't want to hurt you, but I can't let you hurt me either!"

Dragon's hands tightened on her shoulders. She could see the battle in his eyes. It looked like he either wanted to shake her or kiss her, but he let her go instead.

As he turned from her he was breathing heavily.

Passion stepped towards him and put her small hand on his shoulder. The simple act seemed to break whatever restraint he had. In a heartbeat, she found herself back in Dragon's arms, being thoroughly kissed.

As angry as she was, she had to admit she missed his body. Letting her desire rule, she felt him pick her up and she allowed it. Dragon took her to the bed and he fumbled with the many layers of clothing. She saw the disbelief in his eyes as he peeled layer after layer off her body.

Chuckling nervously she hoarsely gave a simple explanation. "I travel light."

Growling he began to destroy the final layers of her wardrobe. Soon she was bare before him. Dragon growled again but this time it had nothing to do with frustration. Falling on her ravenously he began to suck her nipples, and kiss her neck and collarbone as he rushed to remove his clothing. Passion gasped and arched her back as he bit her nipple.

The bed dipped again and she turned, startled. It was Hawk and he was naked. Passion smiled. She had so missed these men. As much as she wanted her freedom, she wanted their hard cocks. Dragon continued to play with her breasts, and kiss her face and neck, while Hawk nestled between her thighs. Her hot wet pussy ached to be touched and when his tongue flicked across her clit Passion gasped. The simple touch was enough to put her on the edge of orgasm. The three of them were wild with an abandoned desire that left them panting and needy.

Dragon whispered in her ear. "Lovely, tonight we are going to love you in a way that we have not done before. Are you ready for us to make you scream, Passion?"

His words sent a strange thrill through her body. What could he mean? They had been committing forbidden love acts for months. What could they do that had not already

have been done? It made Passion a little bit light headed just knowing that they had been planning something new. Her pussy was dripping and aching.

Groaning she replied. "Please, show me Dragon."

Her words wrung a moan out of both men and she looked up to see them exchange a nod of silent communication. They both had smiles on their face and it made her grin. Anticipation made her so desperate.

Dragon lay down on the bed and Hawk positioned Passion so that her Pussy hovered just above his cock. Hawk's fingers rubbed her clit. Passion moaned with the wonderful sensation. Hawk pushed her down so that just the tip of Dragon was inside of her. Dragon moaned. Hawk put one leg up on the bed and suddenly Passion felt him touching her anus with something cool, she flinched. Hawk chuckled. Her quick reflex made Dragon moan again.

Hawk pushed her just a little lower on Dragon's cock and then she felt her anus stretching as Hawk's cock gently slid inside of it. His fingers never left her clit. Hawk pushed her down completely onto Dragon's cock. Passion cried out. Hawk put more of his cock in her ass. Passion screamed with the invasive pleasure. She felt filled with these wonderful men entirely. Dragon bucked up and slammed inside of her with wonderful force. Hawk tenderly worked himself inside of her and only stopped when he had

filled her completely. Passion was panting. Hawk's cock was a beautiful painful pleasure that brought tears to her eyes. It was the most amazing feeling.

Dragon wiped away one of her tears and smiled, somehow she knew that he knew that she was having a deeply emotional experience.

Hawk groaned and he whispered. "Passion, I want to fuck your tight little ass. Can you handle it?"

All she could do was nod. She was beyond words. She looked down at Dragon. He had a look on his face that startled her. The hard, sarcastic look had fled and in its place was a tenderness that broke her heart.

Hawk spoke to Dragon. "How are you holding up down there my friend? Do you think you can hold back for a bit longer?"

Dragon hissed out the word yes in a subtle moan.

Hawk laughed with jubilation and then he began to pull his cock back slowly. His fingers left her clit and he used his hands on her hips to shove her up and down on Dragon's cock as he thrust inside her anus. Passion screamed, coming with a force that left her panting and crying. Her keening wail of pleasure was so loud she worried that someone might come to investigate. Hawk thrust a few more times until he came. He slowly and tenderly slid out of her. Dragon hadn't come. Hawk stood at

the foot of the bed watching the two people he cared most deeply about with a smile on his face. Dragon laid Passion under him and when he growled in her ear, she could not mistake the meaning of his words.

"You are mine Passion. I am going to fuck you until you say it."

Anger and denial blazed in her eyes.

Dragon began to flick and pull at her clit. She was so close to coming again. Panting, she wanted him to make her come again. Dragon smiled and slammed his cock inside of her. Passion cried out, on the edge of an orgasm. She would not say what he wanted to hear.

He slammed her repeatedly, and then he stopped and played with her clit. Just as she thought she would orgasm he stopped and slid out of her. She had never seen his cock so engorged. She knew that he was as close and as desperate for release as she was.

"Say that you belong to me. Tell me that you are mine." She shook her head no. He looked angry.

"Tell me that you want me and that you will never leave me again."

She shook her head no. He looked angry.

"Tell me that you belong to me Passion!"

She spoke cautiously. "I will never belong to you, but I will let you have me for now." Her words were obviously

not what he wanted to hear. When she spoke, again her voice was small and soft. "Dragon, please, I want you so badly."

Growling he pinched her clit until she cried out. He put his fingers inside of her and she felt like she was going to die if he didn't let her orgasm.

"Please Dragon; I'm yours . . . fuck me!"

He did. He fucked her hard and until she screamed his name and clung to his wide shoulders. She felt his sweat and smelled the tangy scent of sex in the air. Crying out she shuddered in his arms as the last of her orgasm rocked her body and left her pussy clutching his cock.

Panting with exertion they lay down, her arms wrapped around Dragon. He held her to him with a fierce tenderness. Hawk lay down next to them and began to rub Passion's back. For a long time none of them spoke.

Finally, Dragon broke the awed silence. "Passion, I will never let you go. You fulfill me. I haven't been with another woman since I met you. I want you to be my consort. Hawk's union to Lady Sky is a noble connivance. He is always welcome to join us. I will never take another lover, if you will just promise to accept that you are meant to be with me. Accept me Passion."

"I care for you so much Dragon, but I just cannot. I am betraying my values just by caring about you. You stand

for everything that I hate. Your father killed democracy. I cannot live in luxury when I know the others of my class are nothing but slaves and outcasts. With you I will never be anything except your whore. Consort is just a nice word for mistress. I am better than that, Dragon. I am my own woman and I will not accept being the enemy's whore!"

Hawk kissed her spine.

Dragon spoke with quiet determination. "You and Hawk are the only two people that I would trust enough to speak plainly to. I love my father, but I'm not him. I will not rule as he has. He would kill me himself if he believed I was not going to carry on his legacy to perfection. When I rule there will be changes, Passion. Accept that I want a different world, but without you, I can't see that world as clearly. I need you by my side when I begin to create that world."

"You are just telling me this so I will stay with you. I'm not stupid Dragon. I know you aren't going to want to give away your power when it's yours."

"I love you Passion, but I have felt like this for a very long time. Hawk knows my feelings."

Hawk spoke quietly. "He speaks the truth Passion.

Dragon is definitely not his father. He will be a much more democratic leader. It will never be as it was, but I think

Dragon will make the galaxy a better place. There will be no political bickering, but many freedoms will return."

Passion was quiet. When she spoke, there was wistfulness in her voice. "What about the Refugee class, my people? What will change for them?"

"There isn't going to be a caste system. I'm going to let all men make their way based on skill and intelligence.

There will be no more marking of class. My own generals will probably want to kill me . . . but that is why I need a warrior woman at my side." Dragon chuckled.

"How about women, what kind of freedom will we have?"

"Passion . . . Algora Town wasn't built in a day. Women will not have a class either, but I cannot make them men. They will have the same rights as men. I will no longer allow that only widows can own property. I need you Passion. I need you to help me build utopia."

"Dragon, as long as there is a ruling class and an emperor the worlds will never be free."

"Passion, I will be emperor. I hope you will be at my side to remind me of your values. You have the chance to help change the galaxy. Will you be my consort?"

"No I'll not be your consort Dragon. I still want my freedom, but I'll be your lover."

A strange emotion passed over his face and he sat up and began to dress. Hawk called for a private transport on his communicator.

Passion dressed in just one of the outfits. She folded the rest of her undamaged clothing. Several items were beyond salvaging and she tossed them in the trash. Quietly she followed the men and got on the transport.

She decided she had lost this round, but tomorrow was a new day.

Nine

Dragon had assigned a young servant girl to her, and she knew that the girl was his "spy". It had not taken her long to grow fond of the teenager. Dragon knew Passion would not have been able to run knowing her little companion would most certainly be punished for it. He had been very crafty in his decision. Passion loved children, and Dragon used that love against her.

Soon Passion and Joy, her servant-spy, were the best of friends. Watching all her female friends die or be taken away had left Passion with a longing for female company. Her very harsh life had left her with strange skills for a woman. She did her best to pass on these skills to her young friend.

Each day Dragon seemed more and more desperate to make her happy.

Passion had never received many gifts growing up on Freedom Port. When he gave her jewels and rare items on a daily basis, it annoyed her. He was devaluing the joy of receiving gifts. Frowning as couriers brought in dozens of bouquets of flowers, she was irritated. If the man could just take a moment to think about what he did, he would see that bringing her one single flower personally would be so much better than filling their rooms with the things! She loved the colorful blooms, Freedom Port had never had flowers, but he had really overdone it. Fighting her way through the jungle of flowers, she finally found the door.

* * * *

One morning Dragon had a free block of time and decided to spend it with Passion. Looking everywhere, he finally found Passion and Joy in the courtyard. When he saw what they were doing, he was both impressed and horrified.

Passion was teaching Joy how to throw knives. They had made a target out of his clothing and stuffed it with hay from the stables. Passion seemed to be very patient with her young student and Dragon smiled as the girl made an excellent throw. She clapped her hands and threw her arms around Passion. When Passion spoke to the girl, he almost choked on his tongue.

"If I can get my hands on a laser pistol I will show you how to shoot it. There are places to aim that will slow down

an enemy and places that will kill them. I'll teach you how to do both."

Dragon cleared his throat. The women turned to look at him.

"I am glad that isn't my favorite shirt. There is no way that I am going to let you two shoot guns!"

* * * *

Passion was angry. She shouted at Dragon.

"I am so sick of living in your damn cushioned box. If I want to teach this girl about guns so she can protect herself from men . . . I will! I am done putting up with you Dragon. We're done. I am leaving. If you won't let me leave the palace then give me my own room!"

He looked surprised, and angry. She didn't notice Joy back away.

Dragon marched over to Passion and they stood toe to toe. Passion was the only person in the galaxy that Dragon could not intimidate. It was at that moment that the emperor rounded the corner. He and his entourage stopped to watch the fireworks. They were so busy yelling at each other the audience went ignored and unnoticed.

Loud clapping finally broke the battle of wills when the emperor applauded the show. Both of them turned to look

at him. Passion felt ill with terror and when she glanced at Dragon, he looked green around the gills.

"Oh, young love . . . I am so damn glad I'm too old for that! What has he done to upset you my dear?"

Passion was shocked when he addressed her with casual humor. She found her voice after a moment but only managed to stutter.

"I . . . I . . . He . . . Uh . . . He won't let me show Joy how to use a laser pistol."

This made the emperor laugh until his attendant rushed over with a chair and his oxygen. Sitting, the emperor leaned forward on his cane and looked at Passion with a touch of affection. "You remind me very much of a girl I knew a very long time ago, sweet Passion. I understand my son's . . . issues with your . . . hobby, but I give you my permission." He snapped his fingers and a short man came running over to him. He whispered in the man's ear and the man looked shocked. Running away, the man returned quickly with a decorated box.

Dragon looked angry.

Opening the box the emperor showed Passion an ornate laser pistol. He spoke with affection and humor. "It's loaded, Passion, and it's yours. If you want to show the little girl how to shoot it I would very much enjoy watching her lesson."

Dragon was turning purple with anger.

Joy began to cry in terror.

Passion took the weapon and tried not to let her nervousness show. Standing less than a foot away from the emperor with a loaded weapon left her feeling lightheaded and shaky. Raised to hate the man, he was the embodiment of demonic evil to her people. She now had the chance to kill him if she chose. It was an odd realization. Shaking she turned from the emperor and her dark thoughts and went over to the weeping teenager. Passion whispered in her ear. "It's going to be alright Joy. Just pretend we are alone, like with the knives. I want to show them that women can learn to protect themselves as well as any man!"

Joy nodded.

After thirty minutes, the girl was able to shot the target with impressive accuracy.

The emperor spoke with respect. "That is very good girl! You have earned your very own laser pistol." He snapped his fingers and a servant came running out with a shiny new laser pistol. Joy received the weapon and nervously curtsied to the emperor, unable to look him in the eye.

"You are a patient teacher. It is obvious that you have used a pistol on more than one occasion, and I would guess with lethal intent. Thank you for the demonstration." He

turned to Dragon and when he spoke his words were laced with genuine humor. "Son, it's always good to know your adversary. I would recommend that you make sure you know where she is keeping her pistol the next time you argue with her." He laughed as he hobbled off and his entourage left with him. Dragon did not look happy. He yelled at Passion, ignoring her loaded weapon. "You are mine! I will not let you hurt yourself to prove a stupid point. What if that girl had missed and the shot had deflected and come back at you? I don't want to watch you die for foolish pride and stubbornness! Give me that damn pistol!"

"I won't! It's mine. Joy is keeping hers too."

Joy looked awkwardly terrified. She quickly handed her pistol to Dragon and mumbled. "I really don't want to have a laser pistol."

Passion blew her bangs out of her face in annoyed anger. When she spoke to the teen, her voice was sharper than she had intended. "Whatever . . . Just go, run along and hide from the big bad Dragon!"

Joy did run. She was obviously unhappy to be in the middle of the heated lover's quarrel.

Dragon held out his hand expectantly. Passion refused to give him the gun. Suddenly Hawk was behind her and pulling her arm back. He tugged the gun out of her grasp before she could fight him off. Passion rubbed her sore arm. Turning she slapped Hawk, hard, across the face. With as much grace as she could muster, she marched back towards the palace.

* * * *

The men watched her go.

Hawk spoke the Dragon with quiet sincerity. "You love her very much, don't you?"

All Dragon could do with give one hard curt nod.

Hawk continued. "You have to let her go Dragon. She will never just accept you as her master. She wants to live life on her own terms, not yours."

Dragon gave his friend and incredulous look.

"Let her go Dragon. Woo her like a woman instead of holding her like a slave. She is the kind that will struggle all the way. The tighter you hold her the harder she will fight you. I care for her too, Dragon, but she is not happy here. I think she loves you, but she will never admit it until you let her go. Give her freedom and then ask her to be your consort, or better yet . . . wife."

"The barons would never accept a refugee class woman as empress. They will be unhappy enough with her as my

consort. If I let her go, she will never come back to me. I can't just let her go. I love her."

Hawk clapped Dragon on the back and when he spoke, there was sadness behind his words. "My union with Lady Sky has taught me the value of real love, and how much a union without it can hurt. I tell you, my friend, don't lose Passion. Sky and I have a connection, but it is nothing like what you have with Passion. There is not a woman of our class as fine as she is. Forget the barons. Make her your wife, my friend. Can you imagine how much a woman of our class would pale next to Passion? Your wife would be very unhappy and so would Passion. She would never be happy as your consort. Give her papers and money. Let her go, but take time to woo her. Let her get to know you as an equal and not as your servant or property. Show her that she needs you."

Dragon heard what his friend said, but did not acknowledge it as he stalked off towards the palace. He found Passion just where he suspected that he would. She was taking her few personal belongings out of drawers and piling them on the bed. Her anger and pain was real and serious. He watched her beautiful rage for a moment and then spoke quietly.

"I want you to be happy Passion. Pack your things. You have your freedom. I will have papers giving you class

distinction and widow status drawn up. I am bestowing a small fortune upon you. I love you Passion but I will not keep you. If you want me, I am yours. Your place at my side will always be here."

Passion stopped, shocked. Was it a joke or a trick? Cautiously, she questioned his words.

"If I leave you're not going to have me followed or spied on?"

"It will be as if we have never met. Do you want your freedom more than you want me?"

"I will always care for you Dragon. I think I love you. I just can't live here as your kept whore."

He nodded and it was just as he had said. Within the hour Passion and her things were loaded onto a transport. She had papers and credits. She left without a goodbye to either of the men.

Dragon watched the transport leave and he felt his heart ripping in two.

Ten

Smiling at the man selling fruit in the market, Passion splurged and bought extra from him. He smiled back. She had built a business in only a few months.

Blushing Sea was a quaint little village far from the capitol. It reminded Passion of a civilized version of her home. She had felt immediately comfortable, content, and welcome. Walking up to her small, modest home and business, she brought her food inside.

One table held nothing but her current work in progress. She had started slowly. When word of her skill reached other women, they took their appliances to her to fix. Her work was good and cheap and the other woman respected the fact she just wanted to make her way in a man's world. It was not long before men started bringing things to her too. She charged the fairest price in town, and she was efficient. She ran her small repair business quietly. Her life was modest and she was happy, yet there was something missing. Passion could not put her finger on it, but there was a hole in her comfortable new life.

It had been months since she'd seen Dragon or Hawk. Slowly she was beginning to realize that she missed them. Sighing she wondered how they were doing without her.

A loud commotion in the street outside of her home caught her attention and interrupted her thoughts. Rushing to her small window, she watched a massive crowd running to the middle of the town square. She stepped out and found herself swept into the wave of people, unable to do anything but follow the flow of the crowd.

A man stood screaming about change and rebellion.

Passion shuddered.

His words sounded like anarchy. What did the crazed man hope to accomplish? His next words froze the blood in her veins.

"Friends, fellow members of the 'verse, it's time to take back the galaxy!" Cheers followed his words.

"As I stand before you I want you to know that the resistance is taking back our world! Our emperor and his household are being killed as we speak . . . Victory!"

Choking back a sob, Passion tried not to black out.

Dragon, dead? *Could it be true?* Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath. What could she do? As much as she loved the idea of freedom for all, she hated the idea of Dragon or Hawk being hurt.

Passion rushed home and gathered her weapon and a few necessities. Within the hour she was on a transport headed for the capitol.

She sat alone in the deserted automated transport. She was the only person foolish enough to be rushing *into* a war. Nervously, Passion chewed her lip. Hoping that it wasn't already too late, she sent a prayer to all the gods and goddesses. Dragon was in her heart and the moment the maniac in the town square reported his possible death, she'd realized the truth. Something had changed, long before she had left him. *She was in love with him!* It wasn't just sex. She cared about Hawk and craved having sex with him, but with Dragon she wanted so much more.

When she first established her life, he had come around. Like a beau, ready to court her. She had pushed him away, afraid that he would restrict her freedom. Passion regretted her actions deeply. Now it might be too late to love him, to let him love her.

When the transport stopped, she felt horrified by the chaos that she saw. Normally peaceful and bright the city did not look like she remembered it. Desmenia was under siege. Explosions rocked the streets and the sound of screams and crying were everywhere. The emperor's utopia was now a Hell. Passion stumbled off the transport and

rushed towards the palace. Each city block seemed to display terrible scenes of battle more violent than the last.

Passion was weeping with the horrors by the time she was able to see her destination. A tall man with a laser rifle suddenly grabbed her and pushed her up against a building. She recognized him as one of the emperor's guard but her relief was short lived. He had obviously switched sides and recognized her too. His weapon pressed against her temple and she saw hatred in his eyes. To him she was Dragon's whore, and deserved death. Passion knew she was going to die and regretted never having told Dragon she loved him. Closing her eyes, she bravely waited.

Death did not come.

She heard the man who held her scream, and when she opened her eyes Hawk was there. Gasping with relief, she clutched him in a joyous hug. He patted her quickly and spoke with anger.

"What are you doing in the city Passion?"

"I just thought I would come for a visit." She showed him her small laser pistol and spoke again.

"I thought that you might need a wing man . . . I didn't do so bad back in the Port."

Scowling he grabbed her and together they made their way towards the palace. Passion fought right alongside

Hawk. When they finally arrived inside of the palace he turned and spoke quickly.

"Stay here for the sake of the gods, Passion! Dragon will kill me himself if you die! Just stay out of trouble."

She watched him go back into the dangerous fray and her heart fell. Would she ever see Hawk again? A sound caused her to turn. It was Dragon. For a very long moment, they looked at each other without speaking. Passion ran to the man she loved and threw herself into his arms. He held her tightly. When she spoke, her voice was wistful.

"Dragon, I love you. I should never have pushed you away. I . . . I just wanted to be sure you are okay."

"Hell of a time for you to come to your senses Passion!

I love you too. Stay behind me, I hear the gates being

breached."

A loud crash reverberated in the hall and Dragon pushed her behind him. Passion held her weapon ready. She was not going to die without a fight! They stood together back to back, ready for whatever was coming. Passion felt the warmth of Dragon's body and took comfort in knowing that if she was going to die he was with her. A loud explosion rocked the palace. Her heart roared in her ears with the adrenaline.

Dragon held his large ceremonial blades and she had her laser pistol. Watching him wield the blades impressed her with his mad wicked skills, but her pistol only had twenty shots before it needed to recharge. A mass of rebels flowed into the room. She knew she had to make every shot count. Clashing blades resounded behind her as he deflected laser fire. Passion could not spare a look at him and she hoped that he was doing alright without a gun. Rebels were converging on them and they were quickly surrounded. It looked like hope was lost.

Jubilation squeezed her heart as she saw the palace guard fighting their way into the room. It was too late for her, her weapon needed to recharge. A tall man aimed his laser rifle at her; a wicked light filling his face. He discharged his weapon and she closed her eyes waiting for the pain. After a moment she opened her eyes in surprise, looking up Dragon was in front of her, protecting her, deflecting the laser fire. He was shirtless and his tan skin glistened with exertion. A fluid animal, he was pure beauty in motion. With a dry throat, her heart constricted with the full depth of her realization. She loved him. In that moment she loved Dragon the man, she would deal with Dragon the prince later.

Hawk was leading the guard to them. It was obvious the rebellion had calmed. Passion's weapon finally recharged and she continued to fight beside Dragon. Time held no quantification and she just paced herself breath-by-breath

and moment-by-moment. Her adrenaline-fueled energy did not want to stop when the insurgence stopped. Dragon looked at her and smiled. Hawk put his arm around her shoulders and whispered.

"I should really like to punish you for this later." His teasing brought home the fact that it was over and they were all alive.

Dragon was suddenly holding her face in his hands. Before she could grasp the magnitude of the look in his eyes, she was in his arms. His tender kiss became a bruising force and he devoured her desperately.

One of the guardsmen came running into the room and skidded to a halt next to Dragon. He awkwardly cleared his throat. It was obvious that he was impatient to tell Dragon his news.

"What is it?" Dragon pulled away from passion and growled at the man.

"Your father, sire . . . Your father is dead!"

Shock showed clearly in Dragon's eyes.

"Take me to him!" Dragon commanded.

He followed the man without a word. Passion and Hawk exchanged a worried look. With the large number of wounded men, Passion soon found herself triaging injured soldiers and was too busy to worry about anything but the task at hand.

Hours passed and it was soon dark. Night had fallen silently.

Hawk found her and requested that she follow him. Being covered with the blood of the many men she had helped made her a grizzly sight, but she just nodded and followed him, ignoring the blood.

Arriving in the emperor's chamber Passion could not help the tears that filled her eyes. As much as she disagreed with the man, she did not want him dead. Growing up she had thought the emperor was a devil but after meeting him, she saw that he was just afraid of losing his hold on the world.

Seeing Dragon's pain was a sucker punch in her stomach. His pain was almost too much for her to bear. He looked up and his voice was resolute, but sad.

"He's dead. I'm in charge now. I'm the emperor?"

Passion felt terror at his words and tone. Nevertheless, she did not understand why. Noticing the uncertainty in his handsome face made her heart race. Dragon would be the new target of hate. Ultimate power corrupts completely; she could not bear it if he lost himself to it. She staggered and Hawk helped her sit down. Dragon stood and he looked pale. It alarmed her. Passion jumped up and glided over to him. She loved him and it was killing her to see him like this!

Putting her arms around him, hoarsely she whispered.
"I'm here for you."

His hand went to where hers sat on his shoulder and he squeezed it. "I love you." It was all he said to her before he stood and started to give orders, darkness filling his eyes. Passion saw his hunger for revenge in his words and actions. It made her ill.

Feeling her heart go cold, she rushed after him. When she touched his sleeve, he turned. There was no softening in his expression when he looked at her. "What do you want Passion? What do you really honestly want?" he gruffly demanded.

"I want you to look at me. I want you to accept that I've realized that I love you. I want the entire galaxy to be a place of peace and freedom. I want you remembered as the man who returned democracy. I want to have babies with you who will have a legacy of pride not hate! I don't want any child of mine to look on your dead body and know you died because of the anger and pain your laws caused. I want the people to love you Dragon, as I do! I love you Dragon!"

He paused. She had never told him that she loved him before. Her words left their mark; she knew it when she looked into his eyes. Looking down at her, sadly, Dragon began to pull away. Passion grabbed on to him and before he could push her away, she was holding him around the waist as tightly as she could. He did not move and she did not look up. Time lost its importance as they clung to each other taking comfort from the shared worry and grief.

When Passion finally had, the courage to look up she saw that some of the white-hot vengeance had left his expression.

Her next words shattered his remaining hate. "Dragon, I will never leave you again if you show me that you will build a new world for me . . . for us. Give the galaxy their freedoms back. Pull back your father's spies and military police." Passion's eyes were wet when she finished with her plea.

"I will not kill his legacy! His body is not eve cold yet, for the sake of the god's, woman! You want me to throw away everything he worked for his whole life, for a dream and an opinion; *your* opinion of what is right and wrong." Fire had rekindled in his eyes, beautiful eyes, as his words tumbled out.

"No, of course not Dragon, I would never ask you for that. You can slowly give people what they want, fair rule. You're a good man and I know you will be a great leader. Give your greatness to your people. Strengthen your father's legacy by making things better, right. Make the people want to fight for you not against you!" She was breathing heavily when she finished.

No one spoke for a long time. Dragon pushed her away and stalked out of the room.

Looking up at Hawk she finally spoke in a small voice.

"Did I come on too strong or too fast?"

"Your name fits you so well. Everything you think or feel comes out passionately. Give him time. His father pushed him hard and away. Dragon loved him and just craved acceptance, pride. This is going to be hard for him. He is angry. I would not want to be one of those captured rebels right now! Dragon has been taught since the cradle to rule with fear. His father believed strength came from fear. He was only partially right. Dragon knows what his father did and he knows what he would like to do. Yet he is afraid. I can see it. If he fails and loses the galaxy he would never be able to look at himself in a mirror again. His father captured and ruled all the known worlds in just one lifetime, alone. That is a big pair of shoes to fill."

Passion nodded. Her heart constricted with the pain of knowing there was nothing she could do to ease Dragon's heart and suffering. She would not want to be in his position. She wanted him to have mercy on the rebels, but she understood that as a man he needed vengeance.

Thinking of Dragon killing the rebels made her heart break and before she thought about what she was doing, she was running in the direction he had gone.

Hawk did not stop her.

Dragon already had his guard lining the men up. Passion rushed towards them screaming.

"No Dragon, please don't do this. You can never take this back. These men deserve a trial, if nothing else!"

He turned on her with angry eyes.

"Passion leave, get out of my sight before I have you added to the execution. This is men's business. Just leave me and forget this. If you truly love me, let this alone."

"Kill me if you want to Dragon. I am not going to stand back and let you make this terrible mistake. These men will respect your mercy. They will live to tell others that the new emperor is fair and just. They will go home to wives and children who will be grateful to you. These men will want to stand beside you not against you. Start fresh, today, for me Dragon. Please, you are breaking my heart."

He looked at the rebels. Most of them showed genuine fear. Some just showed their pride. He walked up to one of the prideful ones and spoke. "You heard my foolish woman. Is she right? Do you have someone to return home to? Speak now or condemn yourself and the others to death."

"I have a wife and son."

"If I let you walk away are you going to teach your son to hate me? Will you be grateful for your life or will you join those who hate my empire the next time they want to attack me?"

"You are not your father. Will my son be a slave in your empire or a freeman? I am of the servant class. I want more for my son. I want my son to have a choice."

"If there is no caste, who will serve and who will lead?"

The rebel did not speak for a moment. When he did,

Passion wanted to clap.

"There will always be those who are suited to serve, and want to serve. I am not one of those people. If I had a choice I would have been a happy and loyal guard to your house."

Dragon thought about his words for a moment.

Motioning for his guard, he spoke quietly to the men. They began to unshackle the prisoners. Passion did not want to hope, but seeing what was happening gave her hope nonetheless. When Dragon spoke, she forced herself to stay quiet.

"You are free. Amnesty is yours, if you swear allegiance to my house. I want you men to have the same passion for my empire as you did to see it fall. There will be changes, but they will be slow. I promise you that the caste system will be the first thing to change. You are my

witnesses to this promise. Swear your allegiance and go, or refuse and I will see that you get a fair trial."

Of the two hundred men captured, only a dozen chose the trial. Dragon saw them put humanely in his prison. He also personally dictated they receive excellent meals and treatment. Passion watched it all in joyous amazement. When it was all been finished, he walked up to her and took her by the arm. Dragon turned her to face him.

"Help me rebuild the world. Be my wife Passion, not my mistress or concubine. I want you by my side and only you."

"Yes." She breathed as his lips claimed hers.

Epilogue

Bright and colorful, the city was dripping with beautiful ribbons.

Passion walked the streets of their city. Jubilation was almost a tangible fragrance in the air. Looking at the happy people warmed her heart. When the people saw her and her children, they cheered. Dragon had rebuilt the world for their family and yet he was still able to hold onto his power.

Nothing is perfect, and there were still squabbles and arguments in each individual planet's government. Yet, for the most part, a harmony filled the galaxy that never existed before. Dragon often found himself called upon to help resolve disputes. His decision to give the people self-rule left him very busy. His fair and unbiased judgments became legendary. Passion was so proud of him. Twenty years had passed in a blink of the eye. Dragon's birthday was a celebrated holiday and his people genuinely loved him. Looking at the way they had decorated the capitol for him made her smile.

Her teenage son and husband were very close. It made her heart ache to see Dragon teaching his son to take his place someday, a reminder of his mortality. It was a reminder that no matter how much they loved each other, someday death would part them. Pulling herself away from the morbid thoughts, she focused on the holiday again. Everyone in the galaxy took a day off to celebrate with them. His father, the first emperor, never had the love of the people.

Dragon put his arm around her and ruffled their son,
Raptor's, hair. Raptor looked annoyed and went ahead of
his parents. Passion laughed. Her husband stopped and
wrapped his arms around her. He looked into her eyes and a
quiet moment passed between them. They didn't notice the
many eyes watching. Dragon put his hand in the hair
behind her ear and pulled her to him. Looking deeply into
her eyes he spoke with a quite intensity that rocked her
soul.

"You are my peace and my joy. Passion, you and you alone have given me the strength to be a good leader and a good man. I love you."

Touched she managed to whisper hoarsely. "Happy birthday Dragon, I love you."

A loud cheering interrupted Passion looked up. Her four daughters had finally finished their primping and

decided to join the family. Passion laughed as her husband scowled. He whispered angrily. "What are they wearing?"

Patting the overprotective father on the back, she chuckled. "It is a new style, a trend. They look beautiful."

He did not look happy. "That is the problem!"

Sighing she put her arm around his waist to distract him from his troubles. They walked and she thought about how her man, who had the entire galaxy to worry about, still took the time to worry about his children. He made her love him a little more each day. Passion was glad he had thwarted her escape with his love. He was her home.

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