



Alien Mate 3

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Chapter One

“Congratulations. By decree of the oracle, I am here to announce that your accomplishments on behalf of your clan and our world have won you the highest honor. You are to be mated.”

Stunned, Reg gaped at the message bearer. Panic took root in his stomach and made him feel slightly ill at this unexpected and unwanted turn of events. He wanted to rail against the injustice. Plead for mercy. Then sanity prevailed along with a deep seated need for self-preservation. “Never. Not happening. I’d rather get sucked into a black hole.” To punctuate his stubborn words, Reg crossed his arms and glared at messenger of bad news on the view screen.

The light blue face of the oracle’s attendant creased in puzzlement. “You are refusing the prestige of being chosen worthy enough to claim a mate?”

“That is correct. I have no interest in shackling myself to a female.” By his ancestors, he’d rather die first. Mating would mean no more space exploration and discovery. No more adventures. Binding himself to a female and, in turn, planet side was an abhorrent thought he refused to entertain.

“But—but—” The attendant seemed at a loss for words. “Your ancestors are already seeking your perfect match. No one ever says no. This is supposed to be your reward for all your hard work.”

“I am saying no and if you want to reward me, give me a raise. Now, if that is all, may I return to my current mission?”

Flustered, the servant to the Oracle opened her mouth, probably to argue again, when suddenly, she disappeared. In her place, the veiled form of the Oracle herself, the spiritual leader for his people—a diminutive female who ruled the various clans with a titanium fist—appeared.

“First class warrior Reg’iantros Vel Veratu, have I heard correctly? Do you refuse the gift we bestow upon you?”

Reg was now the one caught off balance, face to face with the woman who had started and stopped wars. He ducked his head in respect, not daring to look her in the eye, or the veiled area he assumed hid her eyes. “Sorry,

Oracle, but the idea of settling down is repugnant to me. I appreciate the gift you would bless me with, but I would prefer to continue as I am.”

“I see.” Two simple words, which held a wealth of meaning—one he didn’t understand. The covered head of the Oracle tilted to one side and when she spoke again, Reg thought he heard mirth in her tone, impossible of course. The Oracle never joked, or so he assumed. “Very well then, we will pass the prestige on to another. Now, before you resume your mission, though, we require you to perform a small task. Nothing too taxing. We need you to divert from your current course and head instead to the orbit around the planet known as Earth. The ancestral spirits are asking that we rescue an earthling who is about to be killed by a stray asteroid. The ancestors claim she is excellent Xamian mate material and is to be protected until such time as a lucky male is chosen for her.”

Poor sap. Now that he’d slipped the noose of matrimony, Reg felt sorry for others caught in the trap. As to the mission, it seemed simple enough, if odd. “Why do her people not save her themselves?”

“They find themselves in quandary as the female in question is in a vessel orbiting their planet and they cannot reach her before the asteroid hits and destroys the habitat in which she currently resides.”

“How can they have achieved space travel and not mastered rudimentary space protection?” asked Reg baffled.

“They’ve evolved differently than our own people no matter our physical similarities. Now, will you rescue the woman?”

“Sure, just send me the coordinates.” Any excuse to stay in space longer was welcome. Besides, he was curious about the earthling. He’d seen a few from afar on his home planet on his few visits and they’d appeared exotic to him with their pale, almost pink skin.

“Excellent.” The Oracle seemed well pleased with herself and, once again, Reg could have sworn he heard laughter in her voice when she signed off saying, “Good luck with your new mission.”

Reg didn’t need luck. As a first class space warrior, he never failed in his duty and his skills were without compare. Rescuing a female in distress would be simple.

But as he redirected his vessel to the earthling's location, he couldn't shake a sense of foreboding. *Why do I feel like my life is about to change? And worse, why does it seem like I can still hear the Oracle laughing in my mind?*

Chapter Two

“Oh fudge. I’m going to die.” Even upset as she was, Penelope couldn’t swear with real words, her upbringing with a strong emphasis on manners too strongly instilled. Her lack of strong vocabulary had made her an object of ridicule among her peers in the space program she’d signed up for, but she’d borne their jokes with gritted teeth and stayed true to herself.

Her breath came fast and hard as panic clawed at her. She dropped her face into her hands, too shocked to cry at the news NASA had just relayed. Sure, when she’d undertaken this quest, she’d understood there were risks and filled out the proper forms including a will—not that she had much to give, or anybody to give it to. *I wonder what they’ll do with my collection of glass cats.* What a stupid thing to think of at a time like this. Who cared? She was about to die.

NASA’s life changing words played over and over in her head like some sick joke.

“...regret to inform you that a small asteroid is headed on a collision course with your pod. Impact is unavoidable and will occur in less than fifteen minutes. We regret that computer simulations give you no chance at survival. Sorry. We’ve already downloaded all your latest observations so that your work is not lost. Would you care to relay any last words to family and friends?”

Instead of replying, she’d switched off the communicator. Somehow, she didn’t think the crew at Cape Canaveral would appreciate hysterical screaming. Penelope pressed her face up against the porthole window and squinted at the darkness, wondering if she’d even see the small rock coming to blow her into galactic bits. *I wonder if my remains will fall to the ground in a bloody Penelope rain, or will I orbit earth forever in frozen chunks?* Gross thoughts, but she couldn’t help the macabre humor. It was that or give in to the hysteria bubbling inside.

And to think I was so proud I’d beaten out everyone else for this job. Hundreds had jumped at the chance to be sent into space to live for one year in a pod alone with only the stars and NASA staff on the intercom for company. They wanted to conduct a study on the effects of space on a person both mentally

and physically. And Penelope had won. In a rapid blur and before she could realize what it really meant, she'd found herself examined, inoculated and given a crash course on space pod living and repair. Then, wham, she'd found herself weightless in space.

Reality, of course, differed from the simulations. For one, it was much harder to pee without gravity than she'd expected. There were a few incidents before she re-learned to use the potty without having to clean up floating drops of urine—so gross. And the food, freeze dried rations, were so unappetizing she would have ended up a skeleton had she been able to exercise without bouncing off the pod's instrument panels.

However, small irritants aside, to her surprise, she discovered she enjoyed the quiet peace of space. Her living quarters were small, most of the habitat space taken up with environmental needs such as air and temperature control, but she survived in her cramped home. She used her time to read and took notes on the experience. She'd written a hundred pages for her thesis already. When she found herself getting lonely, she cheered herself by imagining her name and picture on the front page of all the major science magazines. This was to be a crowning achievement for her and a dream come true. What a nightmare instead.

She'd definitely make the news now though, probably with headlines of "Asteroid Kills Geek Girl." Pity she wouldn't live long enough to enjoy her infamy. Penelope stamped the floor in frustration and the impact shot her up to bump her head on the ceiling of the pod as she forgot the gravity situation. The light whack didn't actually hurt, but she rubbed her head anyway as tears brimmed. *It's not fair! I don't want to die.*

Agnostic, she didn't believe in a god or religion, but she dropped to her knees—kind of, if you counted bent knees while floating in a gravity free zone kneeling—and suddenly converted. With her eyes clamped shut and her hands clasped together, she prayed fervently.

"Please God, Yahweh, Aslan, Buddha or whatever name you prefer, it's me, Penelope. I know we've never talked before probably because, according to science, you don't exist. But if, by chance, research is wrong and you are

actually real, I don't suppose you'd find it in your heart, if you have a heart that is, to save me, somehow. I'd be ever so grateful."

"I am here to answer your prayer, earthling. Consider yourself saved."

At the sound of the deep voice behind her and the hand that touched her shoulder, Penelope screamed, and in a very illogical move, especially for her, passed out.

* * * *

Reg stared at the female in the silvery jumpsuit floating facedown in the barbaric craft and wondered why she'd reacted so strangely.

He spoke aloud, switching back to his mother tongue instead of the crude language earthlings used. "Ralph, is the Earthling ill?"

Alpha 400, the newest AI model for his spacecraft—intelligent and imbued of enough personality to demand a name—replied via ear transmitter. "I believe you frightened her."

"But I heard her request to be saved. Why would she be scared when I have arrived to grant her wish?"

"My records indicate that females of all species tend to react in unexpected ways even when given what they've demanded. Now, if I might suggest, you should gather her that we might teleport off her vessel. The asteroid is due to impact in less than five hundred lunar millicycles."

Reg leaned down and turned the female over onto her back. He sucked in a breath. *What a lovely creature.* Her skin was the white of the snows on Lentarra Five. Her hair the rich red of the fires on Altykia. Her full mouth was slightly parted and soft-looking, tempting him for a moment to kiss her awake.

With a mental slap, he reminded himself she wasn't a space doxy in some galactic brothel—if she were, she'd probably demand a high price. Bringing his mind back to the situation at hand, he slid an arm under head and gave her a light tap on the cheek. Her delicate lashes fluttered and she opened her eyes. Instead of screaming, she smiled dreamily at him.

“What do you know, there is a heaven. How extraordinary, but I have to say, I didn’t expect angels to be blue.”

“I am not an angel, whatever that creature might be. I am a Xamian warrior here to rescue you.”

“A Xamian what?” Her green eyes widened. “Oh sweet baby corn, you’re an alien.” She flailed in an attempt to right herself in the gravity-free space. “You’ve come to abduct me, how grand!”

“Rescue,” he corrected. “Now hold on tight, we’re going to transport back to my vessel before this one disintegrates.”

The female flung her arms around his neck and Reg wrapped his own arms around her slight frame, not understanding the instant interest his cock took in this female. Pretty face or not, her frame was slimmer than he usually preferred, but his shaft, turgid in his own jumpsuit didn’t seem bothered by it. “Ralph, we’re ready.”

A heartbeat later, he found himself back in the decontamination chamber of his ship. He unwound the female’s arms from around his neck—reluctantly.

She looked around with bright-eyed curiosity, thankfully not yelling like she had earlier. Reg, in the more natural light of his ship, found her even more enchanting, her exotic coloring making her appear as a fragile bloom, one he longed to pluck. He said nothing as she explored, waiting for her to speak, but when she finally did, he almost choked.

“Now that you’ve abducted me, does this mean you’re going to strip me naked and probe me?”

Chapter Three

The alien who'd kidnapped her—or rescued her like a knight in a tinfoil jumpsuit—began to choke. Startled that her blue captor might die before she'd asked him some questions—and studied him—she thumped him on the back, hard.

“Are you okay? Is it the atmosphere? Do you need some mouth to mouth?”

The hacking cough turned into a wheeze, then rumbles, which suspiciously sounded like laughter. Moving to stand in front of him, she looked up—and up some more—into his face and saw yes, indeed, he was chuckling.

Penelope, who preferred Penny, stuck her hands on her hips and glared at him. Not that it had any effect. The blue hunk continued to laugh. And the more he guffawed away, the longer she had to study him, and as male specimens went—wow!

Not very scientific, she knew, but never before had she encountered a male who stirred her libido's interest like this alien. He towered over her, a veritable giant, and even though his silvery jumpsuit covered him, it did nothing to hide the thick bulging muscles that strained the material. Broad of chest, tapered in the waist, thick in the thighs and bulging in a place that made her blush, he was the epitome of maleness. She wondered if his kind perhaps emitted a pheromone of some kind to attract females for she could find no other explanation for the coiling warmth in her sex, the tightening of her nipples and the wild urge she fought to jump on him and suck on his blueberry lips.

For the sake of science, of course. How she wished she'd thought to grab her notebook so she could document her findings so far on her first extra-terrestrial meeting.

Finally, the ET calmed his mirth and, with a twinkle in eyes that she would have sworn glowed said, “Female Earthling, that was vastly

entertaining. But I fear, pleasurable as probing you might be, that was not my purpose in rescuing you.”

“Why kidnap me then?” Penny’s cheeks reddened with his rejection, polite as it had been. How foolish of her to think for even a second he’d be interested in a geek like her. Her time in space might have corrected her minor chubby issue, but it still didn’t mean she’d suddenly become attractive to the opposite sex. Glasses or not—eye surgery having corrected her vision issues before her trip—with her pale skin, fire engine red hair and unremarkable features, her geeky exterior packaging just didn’t scream ‘Ravish me’. A fact she lamented as butterflies danced in her tummy.

“I didn’t abduct you. I saved you from this.” He swept his hand outwards and a portion of the wall suddenly lit up with a movie, make that a live video of what she recognized as her habitat in orbit around Earth— more recently known since NASA’s message to her as Penelope’s Final Folly. As she watched it tumbling around, a boulder came out of the blackness of space and hit it. With a lovely explosion that sent minor shockwaves through the alien vessel, her home for the last eight months disintegrated into space junk. *And if my blue hero had arrived a few minutes later...* She swallowed back tears of relief, thankful she’d escaped the violent death.

The screen switched off with her still staring and she startled when he touched her lightly on the shoulder.

“Are you all right, Earthling?”

“My name is Penelope Stanton, but my friends call me Penny.” The words came out automatically as she struggled to regain her composure. *I didn’t die, so I need to stop blubbing like a ninny and start paying attention to the most amazing thing to happen to me ever.*

“Greetings, Penny. My name is Reg’iantros Vel Veratu, but you may call me Reg,” he said with a brilliantly white smile. She was relieved to see his shiny choppers didn’t include razor sharp points or extended canines. *Fingers crossed, this means he didn’t snatch me for dinner.*

“I can’t believe I’m meeting a real alien,” she exclaimed, her fear fading as excitement over this monumental find enveloped her. “I want to know

everything about you. Do you live in this galaxy? Do you come here often? Are you alone on this ship? How big is it? Do—”

The more she spoke, the more his violet eyes widened, and he even took a step back from her. Surely it wasn't fear that creased his brow?

“You are certainly inquisitive. Unfortunately, I don't really have time to answer all your questions. I have another mission I must now attend to. If you will give me a location to deposit you on your home planet, I will send you there and be on my way.”

He's trying to get rid of me. Penny thought fast. If she went back to Earth without proof, no one would believe her, even if she suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Knowing the jealous nature of the academics, they'd declare the entire habitat in space project a hoax. No, she had a much better idea, which her curiosity—and not her aroused libido—encouraged her to voice. “I can't go back to Earth now.”

He frowned in incomprehension. “Why ever not? It is your home.”

“But how would I explain my escaping the pod? In case you hadn't noticed, they left me to die. By now they would have seen the habitat explode and news of my death will already be making the news.”

“Then we must get you back quickly that you might dispel the falseness of these reports.”

“And how do I explain how I got away? We don't have teleporters on Earth. And if I tell them an alien saved me, they'll lock me up in a loony bin. I'd much rather go with you. I mean, you did, after all, kidnap me.”

“I did not kidnap you.” He almost yelled his reply.

Penny hid a smile and made a mental note—*Alien subject has emotions.* “Fine then, you rescued me. But now you have to take responsibility. I can't go back home. It would be academic death for me as I'd probably be accused of faking the whole living in space thing. And even if my the folks back home did believe me, they'd probably lock me away forever in some lab to quarantine the planet from alien diseases. Heck, they might even dissect me. So, since my current dilemma is kind of your fault, I think it only fair that you take me with you.”

“Take you with me?” He looked at her with glazed eyes.

Penny nodded. “Yes.”

“But why? No, wait. Don’t answer that.” Reg rubbed a hand over his face and his shoulders slumped in defeat. “I will need to inform the Oracle that her simple rescue mission is coming with me.”

“Who’s the Oracle? And what do you mean rescue mission? Are you saying you didn’t kidnap me on a whim? What interest does your Oracle have in me? Is this some kind of alien plot?”

Reeling from the onslaught of questions she couldn’t halt in her excitement and nervousness, his gaze darted around as if searching for escape. He’d soon learn Penny was like a terrier. Once she got her teeth into something, she didn’t stop until her curiosity was satisfied. “So where do you live? Is everyone blue like you?”

He didn’t reply. Instead, he turned and removed something from a drawer, which slid open from the wall. With a quick turn, he came striding toward her and she suddenly gulped. He was awfully big and he looked rather frazzled with all the questions. She shut her mouth—possibly a tad too late judging by his countenance. Her sealed lips didn’t last long when she saw he held something odd-looking in his hand. “What’s that?”

“Peace and quiet,” he replied, poking her in the arm with some kind of Star Trekkyy needle. A pinch later, and she found her eyes closing without volition, and only briefly registered big arms catching her as she slumped down.

I wonder if he’s gonna probe me n— Thought vanished into the blackness of unconsciousness.

Chapter Four

Reg looked down at the unconscious female—Penny—and cursed his luck—and raging erection.

“Ralph, what am I supposed to do with her? I can’t keep her on board. She’ll drive me insane with her questions. Can’t you find a location on her planet I can deposit her?”

The voice of the AI sounded pensive. “The human raised valid points. The Oracle did say to keep her safe. If putting the female back on her planet causes her harm, then you will have failed in your mission. I see no option but for her to accompany you. We’ll be back at Xaanda in approximately twenty full moon cycles. Since she is destined to be a warrior’s mate eventually, we’ll have just saved them a trip. Surely you can tolerate her for that long. If you wish, I will answer her questions. According to the files I dug up on an Earth network, she is a scientist and researcher. It is natural she would have many questions, and being the most knowledgeable entity on this ship, I will undertake her education.”

Relief flooded him when Ralph offered to answer her seemingly infinite questions. “You speak sense, Ralph.” The only problem with the plan, though, was Reg himself. Not only did he find himself unmistakably attracted to the female, even given her skinny state, an unfamiliar anger enveloped him at the thought of passing her on to another male. Surely, he did not wish to keep her? He barely knew the female and, besides, not even a moon cycle ago he’d made it quite clear to the Oracle and her staff that he had no interest in a mate.

Reg froze. *Why am I thinking in terms of mate?* Attraction to the woman was simply hormones. Easily cured with naked, sweaty sex. No need to bond.

He lay Penny on the floor and spread her limbs quickly before stepping away as if she carried the plague. Proximity to her seemed to affect his brain function. Perhaps she carried an alien Earth virus, in which case he’d better decontaminate her while she was docile and quiet. By the moons, he’d never heard one small woman speak so much, and without seeming to take a breath.

Reg felt the familiar tingle of the decontamination waves moving up his body, cleansing him of dangerous microbes he might have picked up. They stopped, though, before they'd reached mid-thigh.

“Ralph, is there a problem with the ship cleanser?”

“Sort of. The female's clothing is made of an odd material that the decontaminating rays can't penetrate. You'll need to strip her and throw her outfit into the incinerator.”

Strip her? Reg's mouth went dry as all the moisture in his body collected in his cock. She remained unconscious, unable to disrobe herself, which left him with the task. With shaking hands, Reg found an odd metallic tab, which when pulled down, split open her silvery ensemble, revealing creamy white flesh. Reg tried averting his eyes from the perky breasts topped with red berries and from the curly red thatch covering her mound. But he couldn't help feeling how silky her skin was when he peeled her jumpsuit down off her body. By the time she was nude, he was covered in a sheen of sweat and trembling. Never before had he wanted a woman so bad. *I think it's been too long since I visited my last brothel.* Something he'd definitely have to rectify, for even slim as her figure was, he found himself aroused to an insane pitch at the sight of Penny's naked form.

Ancestors help me find control for my lust.

The decontamination procedure recommenced, the tingling of the waves titillating his already throbbing shaft. He was thankful that she slept and could not see the state she'd placed him in. One he'd rectify before she awoke.

He knew when the sightless lasers touched her, for she sighed in her repose, her lips curving into a sensual smile and her nipples hardening into erect points. Dressed, the cleansing process was pleasant, naked, the tickling sensation could be quite arousing.

Cursing, Reg impatiently waited for the cleansing to be done and fled the chamber as if the hordes of Talkutta chased him. Out in the corridor, he leaned against the wall, unable to erase the image of her body—her beautiful and exotic body.

“Ralph, how long until she wakes?”

“At least two moon cycles?”

“Excellent. If her status changes, let me know. I need to take care of something.”

“Yes, commander.”

Reg ignored the laughter in the computer’s reply. He had more urgent things to take care of. Reaching his sleeping chamber, he stripped quickly out of his jumpsuit, breathing a sigh of relief as his turgid cock sprang from its confines.

He flopped on his back onto the bed, his hand immediately gripping his shaft. It pulsed in his hand, thicker than he ever remembered it being, and all because of one noisy, scrawny human.

Reg groaned. The image of her perfect, puckered nipples appeared clear in his mind and his mouth watered with the urge to taste them. He could imagine so easily sucking on them, her breasts a perfect mouthful.

He slid his hand up and down his rod. The tip glistened with fluid and he rubbed a thumb over that pearly drop, smearing it over his bulbous head, the perfect lube for him to penetrate her with.

He still couldn’t believe she’d asked him if he would probe her. He now wished he’d said yes. How would she have taken him? She was so tiny compared to him. Would he lie her down and plunge between her creamy thighs? Perhaps, on her hands and knees, her buttocks spread for him to watch as his cock rammed into her damp pussy? Or, perhaps, he’d perch her atop his prick and watch her sweet face as she rode his shaft, her small tits bouncing? He squeezed his cock tight with his hand, imagining her cunt around it, velvety wet and welcoming. Faster he fisted himself, his balls tightening as he let his erotic fantasy push him closer and closer to orgasm. When he imagined her keening cry, as her pelvic muscles crushed him in waves of bliss, he bellowed and shot his load.

Panting, he let go of his limp cock. Turgid problem solved, he now felt ready to face her again. He dressed in loose britches and no shirt as he planned to go exercise for a bit after Penny woke and he settled her somewhere on the ship.

Scrounging through his clothes, looking for something of his for her to wear, for he definitely didn't want her wandering around naked—or did he?—Ralph suddenly spoke. “I've clothes for the female in the decontamination chamber.”

Reg frowned. Why would his vessel be stocked with woman's clothing? His ship wasn't one of the ones designated for mate retrieval.

As if sensing his question, Ralph answered him. “All ships are stocked with female garments in case an emergency retraction of a future mate is required. The Oracle is always thinking ahead.”

“Indeed she is.” Discomfort tickled him and paranoia reared its head. Coincidence that he happened to be in the right galaxy at the right time to save a female slated for mating and just happened to have clothing for her? And this right after he'd turned down the offer to mate? Reg wondered how far the Oracle would go to ensure her wishes were followed. Forewarned to the Oracle's possible tricks, Reg steeled his resolve to stay away from the human.

I'll not be shackled, intriguing female or not. Reg strode back to the room where he'd left the unconscious Penny and walked straight in.

A piercing shriek met him and he cringed at the sound even as his cock immediately swelled at the sight that greeted him.

So much for taking care of my lust. By the three moons, I'm even hornier now than I was.

Chapter Five

Penny awoke on a floor and blinked. She stared up at the curved ceiling, the very unfamiliar ceiling. It didn't take her long to remember her encounter with Reg, the big, blue alien who'd abducted her. She also remembered he'd injected her with some kind of sleeping agent, the jerk.

Sitting up, she gaped down at herself—her very naked self. Her first thought wasn't who undressed her and why but, *Don't tell me he probed me and I wasn't awake for it.* Just thinking he might have touched her made her blush, but there was no denying she was curious about her rescuer, scientifically, of course. As a woman possessed of a logical mind, she knew love and like and those other curious emotions people ascribed to were nothing more than a chemical reaction in the brain caused by a desire for the human race to band together for protection and procreation.

It did surprise her that an ET, even one who seemed to resemble a human male, would trigger the hormonal instinct in her to mate. It made her even more curious to explore the sexual attraction she felt. She wondered if his manly equipment was like a human male's or if he was specially endowed. In the name of science—and to quench the fire in her sex—she'd have to find out. She wondered if he'd agree if she asked him to participate in a sexual romp as part of her study of him and his race. Penny bit back a giggle. How should she ask him? *Excuse me, but would you mind having sex with me so I can compare your body and technique to that of an Earth man?*

Speaking of whom, where had Reg disappeared to? And where were her clothes? She stood and checked her body to see if she'd been injected with anything while out. She didn't find any sign of punctures from needles, nor did she feel any soreness in her pussy or bum. Oddly enough, this disappointed her somewhat. Apparently, her human shape hadn't incited extreme lust in her alien abductor.

A door slid open suddenly in the wall in front of her and through it stepped Reg, whose eyes briefly met hers before traveling down the length of her unclothed body.

Regardless of her earlier thoughts, modesty prevailed and she shrieked. “Don’t look! I’m naked.” Penny tried to cover herself, but with only two hands, she didn’t get very far. The embarrassment in her cheeks burned bright and she wondered if they matched her hair. To his credit, Reg only looked for a moment—a tummy wrenching, arousal pooling moment—and then turned away, but not before she saw his cheeks turning an interesting violet color, an alien version of a blush with his blue skin.

Reg shuffled sideways into the room toward a compartment that popped open in the wall. Penny knew she should say something, but her tongue was stuck in her dry mouth and, truthfully, she found it hard to concentrate. The reason? Her blue abductor was shirtless and while she’d assumed him muscled, the reality of it was jarring to say the least—not to mention crotch wetting.

Penny squished her thighs together as tight as she could so the moisture seeping between her nether lips wouldn’t be apparent. Her brief glimpse of his front was burnt into her retinas—rippled abs, flat, dark blue nipples, and a light dusting of hair that led down his chest to his tapered waist. His back, also muscled, was just as attractive when he turned. She found herself riveted by the sight of a black, swirling tattoo on his back.

“What’s the tattoo on your back stand for?” she asked.

“Space, which is infinitely winding.”

“Oh.” She didn’t know what else to say, so kept quiet as he rummaged through drawers. Fluttering cloth came flying through the air and landed at her feet.

“Please put the garments on.”

Penny picked up the silken mass and shook it out. *He’s got to be kidding.* The outfit was made of some sheer material and looked like it belonged in a sex shop window. She was a scientist. She couldn’t wear that. “Where’s my spacesuit?”

“The decontamination unit could not cleanse it of alien microbes so I disposed of it. The outfit is the one the females of my world wear.”

Lovely, I’ve been kidnapped by an alien culture who dresses their women like sex kittens. On second thought, this might advance my plan to explore further physical

intimacies between our two races. Certain she would look foolish in such an erotic getup, Penny, nevertheless, draped herself in it. The material hung somewhat loosely around the waist, obviously made for a larger-sized woman and, as suspected, made her look like some kind of harem girl instead of a serious researcher.

“May I turn around now?” he asked politely.

“Yes, I’m dressed.”

Reg turned around and Penny waited for his mirth, sure she looked like an idiot dressed in such provocative gear. He seemed at a loss for words as he took a few steps toward her, his hand outstretched. He snatched his hand back before he could touch her and cleared his throat before saying, “We must go to the infirmary and complete your inoculation.”

Penny’s shoulders drooped. Foolishly enough, she’d hoped for a compliment. Silly really. She wasn’t the type to inspire lust. But at least he hadn’t laughed at her. “Inoculations for what? And why did you put me out in the first place? You said something about decontamination.”

He held up a hand, stalling her questions. “How about I speak for a bit and explain what is going on, and if after I’m done you still have questions, then you may ask them.”

Penny bit her lip to stall her tongue and nodded.

“My people have been galactic travelers for some time. One thing we’ve discovered in our years of exploration is that, while we might often come across beings who resemble us physically, physiologically we can be quite different. Common diseases or illnesses for one race that are easily vanquished can be deadly to another. This being the case, the first thing we do after encountering another race is go through a decontamination process. Using invisible particle lasers, our bodies and clothing are cleansed of strange microbes and other debris.”

Penny couldn’t help herself. “You mean this is how you bathe, as well?”

Reg gave her a stern look at her interruption. “Yes. Unlike many planets, the use of water for cleansing is prohibited by mine due to its scarcity. Your planet has not yet realized the preciousness of this resource and uses it in an appalling manner. When your world reaches a crisis, your people will more

than likely follow suit and devise methods of cleansing not involving the use of water. Now, if I may continue?” He arched a brow at her, which made her blush and drop her chin. “The decontamination procedure is not the only process needed by visitors new to space and encounters with others. In order to protect you, we must also inoculate you against disease. There are a series of vaccines that you will have to submit to in order to prepare your body to fight the illnesses you will encounter since you are bound and determined to come with me. Now, do you have any questions?”

“Will it hurt?” she blurted.

“Nothing more than a pinch and I will not administer them all at once as we must watch you for adverse reactions.”

She peered at him suspiciously. “What kind of adverse reactions are we talking about?”

He averted his eyes and shrugged. “It differs from race to race. Never fear, our medtech unit is first rate so you won’t die or suffer permanent damage.”

And with those encouraging words, he signaled for her to follow him. Penny did so slowly, wishing now he’d kept his mouth shut and not answered any of her questions, or at least less thoroughly. *I need to buck up. Surely it can’t be any worse than the shots I got back home in preparation for this mission.*

The medic room was smaller than the decontamination one and rather barer than she would have expected. It consisted of only one bed, which resembled a masseuse table on Earth. Where was the high tech equipment? The real, live doctor?

Reg rifled through a tray, which slid out from the wall. Finding what he wanted, he turned and addressed her. “Hold still. I need to insert this in your ear.”

Penny’s eyes widened as he came at her with tweezers holding something small and buggy-looking. “Just a second. What are you trying to shove in my ear?”

“A translator.”

“For what? I can understand you just fine.”

“As part of my galactic training, I was taught your language, however all sentient beings who’ve mastered space travel have these installed in their auditory sensors. Not all languages can be learned due to physical differences that make it impossible for our bodies to recreate certain sounds and pitches. If you are to accompany me, it is standard procedure that you be implanted with one. When you sleep, the device will also teach you languages that you are capable of comprehending and speaking as an additional backup should the device fail.”

Penny’s head swirled, and not just in fear. The technology he so casually spoke of seemed almost magical, its very existence light years ahead of the strides she knew others had made in the field back home. Biting her lip, she turned her head to give him access to her ear. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to blank her mind from the crazy thoughts racing through it, such as, *please don’t be some kind of brain-eating parasite*. To her surprise, other than a brief cold touch of the tweezers as he poked her ear canal, she felt nothing else.

He turned away and busied himself in another one of those odd drawers that slid out of what looked like a seamless wall. She stood on tiptoe and tried in vain to peer over his shoulder, but broad and tall, he blocked her view better than a wall.

“Please lie on your stomach.”

Penny eyed the table and, for a fleeting moment, wondered—hoped—he would give her a massage. Such a flight of fancy and for a man, er alien, she’d just met shocked her. Disturbed at the direction her mind and body kept turning in, she did as told and lay on the flat bed. She stuck her face through the hole in the head rest and stared at the floor. At the feel of his hands on the fabric covering her butt, she protested faintly. “Hey, what are you doing?” *Mmm, is this where the probing begins?*

“I’m giving you the first vaccine. Please stay still.”

Penny bit her lip and scrunched up her eyes. She was a real baby when it came to pain. *Please don’t let me scream if it hurts. I don’t want him to think I’m a wuss.*

* * * *

Reg looked at the smooth skin of her backside, his cock, already semi-hard from seeing her nude, hardening even more. He shook his head, trying to regain control of his libido. He needed to do his job and right now that meant poking her ass with the first shot. She'd clenched her cheek tight, though, and if he gave her the shot now, it would hurt more than necessary. Taking a deep breath—and telling his cock to stop trying to escape his pants—he placed his hand on her ass and massaged her soft flesh. His erection grew at the innocent touch and strained mightily at the fabric restraining it. *Oh, by the three moons, since when does the touch of a female's flesh affect me so?*

"That doesn't feel like a shot," she said, her voice sounding soft and breathy.

"You need to relax," he said, his voice gruffer than usual. The more he stroked her butt to relax her, the more the urge to probe her like she'd suggested grew. With a sigh, he poked her loose cheek with the injector and pushed the plunger to give her the meds. What he really wanted to do was poke her with his rod and give her a different kind of injection—a cream filled one.

Reaching behind in the tray, he grabbed the second set of meds and frowned when he saw it. The computer had mistakenly given him the fertility shot for the treatment of alien mates to make them more receptive to their seed.

"Ralph, I think you gave me the wrong set." He tried to whisper, but he should have known Penny's sharp ears would hear him.

"What? Have you poisoned me? Am I going to die? And who's Ralph? I thought you said we were alone." She tried to struggle upright, but he placed a heavy hand in the middle of her back and held her down.

"We are alone," Reg said through gritted teeth. "Ralph is the computer. Now would you hold still? Ralph, answer me."

"No mistake, commander. Oracle's orders. She is to be given the full treatment."

Reg's brow drew together. He knew what that meant. The Oracle had plans to mate Penny with someone. Not that he cared. She was a noisy female and he couldn't wait to get rid of her. What he was more interested in was had the Oracle relayed these orders to the AI before or after he'd rescued Penny? His paranoia tried to escape, but Reg squashed it. The Oracle simply wanted Penny ready to bond. This didn't mean they expected him to be the one.

Annoyed and unsure of the reason why, he jabbed her with the inoculator, not bothering to massage her rigid backside first, and she cried out.

"Ouch. That hurt. You said it wouldn't hurt." Her accusing tone ate at him and he immediately felt contrite.

He rubbed her abused cheek to ease the pain and when she relaxed, he gave her the last set of shots for that cycle. He reluctantly tugged the material of her outfit over the ass his body begged to get better acquainted with and helped her to get up off the table.

Penny glared at him while she clutched at her sore ass. "Okay, buster. Care to explain again, starting with who Ralph is?"

"I told you, Ralph is the ship computer."

"Allow me to introduce myself," interrupted the AI. "I am the Alpha 400, artificially intelligent super computer, but you may call me Ralph. I will be in charge of making sure your voyage on the ship is a pleasant experience, well, if you can ignore the commander, that is."

Penny giggled while Reg glowered. He'd never understood why the computer needed a personality, never mind previous to this he'd enjoyed talking to him—er it.

"Nice to meet you, Ralph. I would love to talk to you about, well, you. On Earth, there've been forays into AI units, but they've yet to fully come to life, so to speak."

"Yes, I am pretty magnificent, if I say so myself. It is nice to meet someone who can finally appreciate my abilities."

Penny continued to babble to Ralph, who flirted shamelessly as Reg led her to the lounge area. While he didn't follow a regimented schedule for

meals, it had been a few cycles since he'd last eaten. As he keyed in two meals to the food replicator, he scowled as Penny continued to laugh and talk animatedly to the computer. He didn't understand his ill humor. Surely he didn't care if she enjoyed conversing with a computer more than him. But much as it galled him to admit it, he was jealous of the AI. Which made no sense. Her questions were endless. He should be happy that he no longer needed to make an attempt to answer them.

Logical or not, he slapped their food trays down on the small table flanked by two seats, disrupting Penny's avid attention to Ralph's comparison of Earth computers to himself.

Big green eyes focused on him and then down on the tray he'd placed in front of her. Her nose scrunched up. "Eew. What is this?"

Reg looked down at their meals and saw nothing wrong with them. "It is a Xamian meal favorite."

"What's in it?" she asked, poking at it with a utensil.

"Heronian tentacles in a Jelaxian mount heart sauce with sautéed snails."

Penny's face turned an odd greenish shade and she clapped a hand over her mouth.

Reg frowned at her. "Are you ill? Perhaps experiencing side effects from the shots? Have a bite to eat and see if it settles your stomach."

Penny shook her head. "It's the food. I can't eat this. Don't you have any human food?"

"Probably." Reg grabbed her tray and dumped it in the ship recycler and, using the food replicator menu, pulled up a menu for Earth dishes. "Name a food dish."

"Lasagna."

The food processor slid out a new steaming plate with a gross concoction of red sauce, lumps and some kind of white slime over top of it.

Penny smiled when she saw it, though, so Reg withheld his misgivings. She took a bite and sighed. "Oh that's yummy. I missed food so much when I was on the pod. Stupid freeze dried rations. I swear, it's not the loneliness of space that will kill people. It's the food."

"What were you doing in that small habitat?"

“I was researching the effects of space on the body and mind. The government has been planning space missions to other planets, but there is, of course, concern over the effects of long space voyages on astronauts. I volunteered to go up in the pod to document how the lack of human companionship and lack of gravity affects a person’s wellbeing. I’d just finished eight months with only four more to go before extraction when you kidnapped me.”

“I can say with assurance that physically, you need artificial gravity if you are to ensure the continuing health of your body. Our medtech until will luckily be able to repair some of the stress to your internal organs and musculature caused by your sojourn.”

Penny blushed. “Thanks. Like I said, they needed to study what would happen. Our scientists haven’t quite found a way to recreate gravity in space yet.”

“Then they shouldn’t have been experimenting.” Reg found himself angry that they would treat Penny no better than some animal, running tests on her that were detrimental to her health. Even worse, they’d left her to die.

“Why are you scowling?” Her innocent question startled him and he looked at her, startled anew at her beauty. How exotic she seemed with her fresh skin, bright green eyes and even brighter red hair.

He could no more stop himself than he could stop a meteor shower. He stood and pulled her with him. She tilted her head to look up at him, her lips parted and, for once, silent.

He lifted her to meet his lowering head and kissed her.

Chapter Six

Penny melted at the first touch of his lips. Firm and tasting sweet, they caressed hers intimately and sent a jolt of liquid desire roaring through her body. Her hands crept up and clutched at his shoulders. He felt so good, his solidness and strength increasing her arousal.

He slid his hands from her waist to her bottom and his thigh nudged her legs apart to push itself insistently against her mound. She moaned against his mouth as she rubbed herself on his firm thigh, the friction creating pleasurable shocks. At the insistent press of his tongue, her lips parted and he swirled it inside, slipping along the length of hers and drawing her tongue into his mouth to suck.

Penny's head swirled with sensation. Never had a man's touch set her on fire like this. Made her feel so desirable and wanton. With one arm curled around her waist and his thigh supporting most of her weight, he slid his free hand up her rib cage to cup her breast. Penny gasped when his thumb brushed the erect peak through the thin material of her harem outfit. A simple touch that drove her desire up even higher. If he were to place his mouth on her, she'd probably come. *Oh, please.*

"Sorry to interrupt dessert, but we've arrived at Soturia. Docking permission has been granted and commenced."

Reg pulled himself away from her clinging mouth, breathing harshly. For a moment, she thought he would ignore Ralph's interruption and continue with his plunder of her mouth, but instead, he set her from him and took a deep, shuddering breath.

"I apologize for my sexual advances of a moment ago. I have long been without a female and did not mean to maul you."

Penny wanted to protest she didn't mind, but his words stung. *And here I thought he was overcome with lust for me. He's just horny from being in space too long.* Taking a shaking breath of her own, she waited a moment to rein in her hormones before she followed him out of the lounge.

With Ralph guiding her, she entered a room that finally corresponded with her Star Trek induced image of what a spaceship bridge should look

like. Reg, looking the part of a commander—if shirtless and sexy—sat in a chair in front of a large window. She approached the screen, staring at the swirling smoky mass.

“What is that?”

Ralph answered. “We are entering the outer edge of the gaseous planet your people call Jupiter. We are scheduled to rendezvous with the space station harvesting the hydrogen.”

“Why?” The question popped out much like it had since she’d learned it at the age of two. Penny’s curiosity needed to be sated.

“We are delivering some computer upgrades, which our planet produces, to the miners here. Keep an eye on the screen and you’ll see the station docking arm in a moment.”

Sure enough, out of the murky fog, something appeared, a boring metallic structure similar to an offshore oil rig. The spaceship glided along a projecting arm and, with a small shudder, docked.

Mundane or not, this was an alien construction. Penny whirled to face Reg. “Are we going to meet some more extraterrestrials? Do they look like you? Do I need to wear a space suit?”

“*We* aren’t leaving this ship. The computer has already loaded the cargo into the transfer chute and it’s being transferred as we speak.”

“Oh.” Penny’s bubble burst. She’d hoped for a moment that she’d get to expand her suddenly new and widening horizons.

As if sensing her disappointment, Reg said, “There will be other planets on our route that will be safe for you to visit and I promise you’ll get to meet lots of species. Also, keep in mind,” he said with a smile, “that who you call an alien is a matter of perspective. To most you will meet, you will be the alien one, for your race, having not yet achieved interplanetary travel, is not often seen unless they’re visiting our planet.”

Penny’s eyes widened. Her, an alien? The thought seemed ludicrous, but thinking it over, she could understand it. Perspective was everything. But something he said caught her attention.

“Are you saying there are humans on your planet? Why? How?”

“Would you like me to explain?” Ralph interjected.

Reg looked at Penny and sighed. He scrubbed a hand through his hair. “No, I’ll do it Ralph. You take care of the shipment.”

Rising from his chair, he beckoned her to follow and led her back to the lounge. Seating herself, she watched him pace, his face thoughtful.

“I’m not sure where to start,” he finally said.

“How about the beginning?”

“Very well, bear with me as I need to give you a bit of a history lesson. As I mentioned, my people have long been space farers and explorers, but we are first and foremost a warrior caste. In order to expend some of this aggressive energy, we’ve, over the millennia, become involved in many planetary skirmishes for other races who were being subjugated by violent outsiders.”

“So you’re like space knights?” The blank look on his face told her he didn’t understand. “Someone who defends the weak.”

He smiled, but it was a chilly look that made her shiver. “Sometimes we fight for honor, sometimes we are hired as mercenaries, and other times we fight because we like it.”

“Oh.” Great, kidnapped by blood thirsty barbarians with technology. The idea should have frightened her, but, instead, it made heat pool in her cleft.

Reg continued with his history lesson. “We intervened in a certain war generations ago and, of course, won. The losers did not appreciate our meddling and retaliated in the form of a deadly virus. This virus was unleashed on our home world and had only one purpose—to kill all our females.”

Penny gasped. Biological warfare was a word often heard on Earth, but to know such a horrible weapon also existed in space with advanced extraterrestrials was just downright scary. “Did it kill them all?” she whispered, appalled.

“Almost. Over ninety percent of our females died and, of the ones left, most were barren. It devastated us.”

“No kidding. What did you do?”

“Our ancestors killed the race that struck down our women. Every now and then we come across a stray one we missed and rectify the situation.”

Penny swallowed at his dark smile. Vengeful. Another fact to note about his people. “How long ago did this happen?” she asked.

“Three generations. We are still rebuilding our female population, which is where humans come in. Well, female ones, that is. When the males finished their war, they came back to a world with almost no women. A lot of infighting ensued as battles were fought over the right to mate. In order to protect our dwindling numbers, the Oracle issued a decree.”

She couldn’t help asking. “Who’s the Oracle?”

Reg sighed. “You truly are the lady of a million questions. The Oracle is the spiritual leader of our people. She can divine things with the help of our spiritual ancestors and guide my people.”

“So, she’s like a fortune teller?”

Reg’s brows drew together in an annoyed frown. “Nothing so crass as that. She is a powerful being who has always been. Some of her power comes from the knowledge and aide that those who’ve passed on give her.”

“Hold on a second. Are you telling me she supposedly talks to ghosts? I so need a notebook to write this all down,” she mumbled. She couldn’t believe an advanced society like his still held archaic views about spirits and whatnot. Apparently, religion and intangible beliefs weren’t a human only domain.

“All that I am telling you is documented if you should wish to educate yourself instead of making insulting remarks.” His brusque tone made her finally shut her mouth. *Oops. I think I offended him. But seriously? Ghosts and a woman who talks to them?*

“Sorry. This is all very different from what I’m used to. I’ll be quiet so you can finish your story.”

“I highly doubt that,” he grumbled. “In order to rebuild our population, we needed women. The spirits of our ancestors went questing throughout the galaxy looking for beings seeded from the same master race as us.”

Penny’s hand whipped up and she bounced in her seat, biting her lip so as to not blurt out her next question.

Reg rolled his eyes. “What now?”

“What master race?” Could this be the elusive answer to God humans searched for?

“Our progenitors were superior sentient beings who were humanoid in appearance. No one has ever encountered them, but it is well known they seeded many planets in the galaxies. Each race has, of course, adopted different characteristics depending on their environment, but biologically, we share many traits. Due to this shared genetic heritage, it is possible for our people to mate with yours.”

“Back up a second. I want to know more about these guys who supposedly created life. Surely there is more known about them? I mean, did they all, like, disappear? Didn’t they leave instructions?”

“I am not a historian. These are questions you will have to ask Ralph. I am just giving you the basics. Now, if I might finish before we both expire of old age?” He arched a brow at her and Penny smiled at him sheepishly. “The females of your world are capable of bearing our children. Thus, when a warrior acquits himself well, he is accorded the honor of bonding with a mate and settling down to raise a family. It used to be the male filled out a questionnaire to aide in the selection of his female, but many of the Earthlings banded together on my home planet and protested this practice, claiming it was demeaning. So now, while the ancestors might guide a warrior in the selection of his female, they no longer just give him a name so that he might properly abduct and—”

“Probe her!” Penny blurted out, and then felt the heat rise in her cheeks.

“What is it with you and probing?” Reg moved across the room until he loomed over her.

Penny ducked her head. “Slip of the tongue?” she said hopefully.

Abruptly, she found herself yanked upright. Startled, she opened her eyes and saw his peering back at her and, yes, this time she was sure—they were glowing.

Chapter Seven

Reg fought with his desire to kiss her again. To feel her sweet, responsive mouth opening against his that he might taste her. “I’ll give you a slippery tongue,” he murmured, losing the battle with reason—and his body. He kissed her. The result was even more electric than the first time he’d embraced her.

She instantly melted in his arms, her pliant body molding to his. He rubbed his hands up and down her back, the thin fabric of her outfit frustrating him, for he wished to touch her skin. Her mouth parted eagerly under his and her tongue boldly ventured to find his. He groaned, her caresses enflaming him. His cock throbbed painfully, begging for relief. He walked her backwards until she came up against the wall. Using it as a brace, he lifted her high enough for him to press his turgid shaft against her hidden core. Her legs wrapped around his waist, holding him even closer. He ground himself against her, enjoying the soft mewling sounds she made as she clutched tightly at his shoulders. Still shirtless, the simple skin to skin contact of her hands set him aflame. *If this is how an innocent touch affects me, how will it feel to have her naked body pressed to me, skin to skin?* He longed to find out.

He tore his lips from hers and trailed hot kisses down the edge of her jaw to the pink shell of her ear. He bit her lobe lightly and she responded with a shudder. He sucked the spot he’d nibbled before moving his lips down the graceful column of her neck. Silken smooth, her skin tasted so sweet and encouraged him to seek even more delights. The material of her top impeded his progress, but when he pulled back slightly, her desire was evident in the sharp, excited points of her nipples protruding through the cloth.

He leaned forward and caught the hard buds in his mouth, one by one, sucking them through the fabric. She keened and shuddered in his arms. Reg was close to losing control, something he’d never had happen before with his usual iron control.

He needed to plunge his cock inside her. Claim her and make her his, body and soul.

Reg froze. *By all the moons, have I lost my mind?* He needed to put some space between them and think about what was happening. Examine—and squash—these strange feelings he found himself feeling in regards to Penny. He forced himself to release her delectable puckered berry, so clearly visible through the damp cloth of her top. His mouth watered, aching for another taste, and he clenched his jaw against the temptation.

He might have won the fight had Penny not whispered, “Oh please, don’t stop. It feels so good.”

With a groan of surrender, he found her lips again and claimed them in a torrid kiss. To the moons with it, he knew he was fighting a losing battle. Penny’s allure was much more dangerous than he’d anticipated, but at least his loss would be pleasurable. But not here. No, he had a comfortable bed to cushion their soon-to-be pumping bodies.

He took only one step with her clasped around him when the sound of Ralph clearing his throat loudly stopped him.

“Once again, sorry to interrupt, but Reg, you have an incoming communication from the Oracle.”

Those words took care of his erection and arousal, effectively dousing them. He let Penny slide down his body until her feet touched the ground. She swayed when he stepped away from her, her eyes heavy lidded and her lips swollen with passion.

Reg tightened his jaw as he resisted the urge to sweep her back up and continue with his plan of seduction. *Although I have to wonder if perhaps she is the one seducing me, for never before have I so completely lost myself.*

“Umm, the Oracle is waiting, commander.”

Duty called him, rescuing him from the madness that seemed determined to claim him. “If you’ll excuse me. I must take this call. Ralph, could you please guide Penny to the stateroom that she might find some rest?”

For once, Penny was silent, although he could see troubled questions in her eyes, ones he had no answers for. This was uncharted territory for him, and he didn’t like it one bit.

Reg grabbed a shirt on his way to the command center, still able to feel Penny’s tentative touches. He growled at himself. *Why can’t I stop thinking of*

her? Why must she plague my every thought? Here less than a full day cycle and, already, I am mad.

Upon entering the control room, the view screen lit up with the image of the veiled Oracle. He quickly dropped his head in deference. “Greetings, Oracle.”

“Greetings, my child. I thought I would check on your mission status in person. According to the report we received, you rescued the female without incident and she is now currently traveling with you.”

“That is correct. The female claimed she would suffer hardship should I return her to her kind.”

“This is actually perfect. We have plans for her.”

“If I might ask, have you found a mate for her?” Reg held his breath, awaiting the answer. It wasn’t like he cared. Just because he wanted her body with a furious passion didn’t mean he actually liked Penny and her talkative ways. Nope, he was eager to get her off his ship. The only odd thing he couldn’t understand, though, was why the thought of her leaving made his stomach sink.

“A few possibilities have popped up so the spirits are looking into it further. Of course, the final choice will be up to her. I’m sure things will have resolved themselves by the time you return. In the meantime, continue on with your missions.”

Reg fought the urge to punch something at the words that several possible mates had cropped up. It was what he wanted. Now, if only he could convince his body—and his emotions—that this was the right decision.

The Oracle cut the communication and Reg sat in his command chair, his face buried in his hands. Without the Oracle to distract him, he found himself aroused again and fighting an insane urge to find Penny and finish what he’d started.

But therein lay the path to madness. She was just about promised to someone else. It was just a matter of time before the Oracle and the ancestral spirits settled on a soul mate, one whom Penny would be unable to resist. It wouldn’t be fair to her for him to seduce her, pleasurable as it would feel.

Or I could always claim her for myself. The Oracle did say I could have a mate.

The treacherous thought, so contrary to what he wanted, glued him to his seat better than any order. No matter what, he wouldn't be trapped—delectable Earthling or not.

* * * *

The bed Ralph guided her too was comfortable, but Penny found it hard to fall asleep. Confusion and arousal swirled in her mind and body. She couldn't understand her strong attraction to Reg, and not just that, but she was pretty sure she was developing feelings for him. She'd only known him a day, but he fascinated her. And it wasn't because he was an alien. *Am I falling in love?*

She scoffed at the idea. Love was just a chemical reaction of the brain. Reason or not, though, she wished he'd join her in this bed and finish what he'd twice started now. For science, of course. After all, hadn't she originally decided that having sex with him would make an interesting research subject? Of course, her justification would probably be more believable if she'd actually taken some notes on what had occurred so far. Maybe putting down her thoughts would explain what was happening to her, why she felt so drawn to him.

Perhaps it was her isolation that had her feeling this way. After all, she hadn't had any contact with other people in a long time and even longer since she'd had any sexual pleasure. Although NASA assured her the pod had no internal cameras to spy on her, she didn't quite trust them and so, even though the urge occasionally arose to pleasure herself, she'd held back.

She was tired of being frustrated, though. Ralph had turned off the light so it was dark in the room and she was under the covers, hidden. There was no one to see her, unless Reg was secretly spying on her using a camera that could see in the dark. The idea titillated her enough that she slid her hand under the silky covers and under the fabric of her top. Just thinking about Reg possibly watching had her nipples tightening into hard points. She

pinched the erect peaks, remembering how good his mouth had felt sucking them. Heck, they were still damp, the fabric having not yet dried.

She tweaked and rolled her nipples, but the true heat that begged for relief lay lower. She left off toying with her breasts to slide her hands over her stomach down to her thatch of curls. *I wonder if alien females shave like we do on Earth?* She'd never actually shaved hers bald, being too afraid of looking stupid, but she knew from the media that a lot of women did. Would Reg mind her red thatch? Should she inquire of Ralph about his people's customs? Was it brazen of her to think of being with him in such an intimate way?

She had known him for only a day or so, but given the obvious sexual attraction, she thought it just a matter of time before they made love. She wondered if he'd mind her taking notes so she wouldn't forget what was sure to be the most erotic experience of her life, one she doubted he'd repeat. She had a funny feeling once he sated his curiosity with her, the attraction on his part would be satisfied.

Knowing she was just some sort of exotic alien treat for him didn't diminish her desire for him. He was still the sexiest male she'd ever seen. As she touched herself, her sex's cream moistening her fingers for slick penetration, she wondered if he'd take a woman in the popular missionary style. Or would his kind have more exotic positions or preferences?

Just thinking of his hard body smothering her with his masculine weight while his hard shaft ploughed her channel made her quiver and pant. She plunged her fingers into herself while the fingers on her other hand rubbed slickly over her clit.

But her orgasm remained out of reach, frustratingly so.

* * * *

“Commander, the Earthling is showing an elevated heart rate signaling possible distress.”

“Is she hurt?” Reg sat up straight in his chair where he'd slumped looking for slumber, not daring to even attempt sharing his stateroom with Penny.

“I cannot tell definitely, but my auditory sensors did pick up a whimper.”

“I’d better check on her then. I’ll be back in a moment.” Reg subconsciously knew there was nothing wrong with Penny, but Ralph had provided him with the perfect excuse to see her. And despite his vow not to touch her or think about her any further, like an addiction, he found himself unable to stay away.

He entered the dark stateroom without announcing himself, but a brief flash of light from the outer corridor momentarily lit the room. In that glimpse, he saw Penny, her eyes shut tight, her cheeks flushed and her white pearly teeth biting down on her lower lip. He also caught the movement under the blanket and, guessing what she did, he almost dove on her to taste what she played with.

Swallowing and still pretending to himself that his check on her was benign, he asked, “Are you all right?”

“No,” she answered honestly. “I’m horny.”

Her claim shocked him, but even worse, made him rock hard. “Penny, tell me to go,” he growled at her, hoping she would have the sense to stop him.

“Why?”

“You are not meant for me.”

He heard more than saw her sit up in the bed, the rustle of fabric giving it away. “I’m not asking for commitment. It’s crazy, we barely know each other, but I can’t seem to help wanting you. Maybe it’s because I’ve been alone for awhile. Honestly, I don’t really care, for once, why I feel this way, I just know I want you to touch me and I want to touch you.”

Her soft plea ripped through his armor of good intentions. The right thing to do right now would be to walk away. Instead, Reg bit back several curses and gave in to the inevitable. Truly, who was he trying to fool? There was no way he was going to make it through the remaining missions and the trip back home without touching her.

Screw fighting it. Maybe if they both indulged in a little pleasure, they’d be able to think more clearly.

He slid under the covers already warm from her body. Somehow, he found her lips in the darkness and they kissed, mouths open and breath mingling. Somehow, even with their bodies pressed tight, he divested her of her clothing. The darkness hid her beauty from his eyes, but he could feel it with his touch, deliciously so. He let his hands travel the smooth skin of her body, enjoying her cries of pleasure and the way her whole body vibrated under his touch. She clung to him, her nude body pressed against his, and it was only the fabric of his breeches that stopped his aching cock from plunging into her sex.

He traced his way down her body with his mouth and hands, tasting first the soft skin of her neck, then the indented valley between her breasts. Her cry when he took her erect nipple in his mouth was sweet music, but her scream when he bit her soft flesh and then sucked it hard almost made him come. His hands kneaded her breasts, pushing them together while his mouth tortured the erect tips. Her body was unbelievably responsive to his touch. He rolled his body so that he lay between her legs and sucked in a breath when the bulge in his pants pressed up against her molten core.

Oh, by the three moons, she was so hot and ready for him. He thrust against her mound and groaned when she pushed back. He was so close to losing control and taking her like a brutish animal. He rolled onto his back, trying to regain a measure of composure.

She followed, though, straddling his waist, her wet sex burning against him. She touched him tentatively, her hands stroking over his chest.

Reg groaned. "Stop, you're going to kill me."

She instantly froze. "I'm sorry. Am I hurting you?"

If she only knew how his cock and balls ached. Actually, on second thought, he decided to show her. He plucked one of her hands from his chest and moved it down to place it on his cock straining in his pants. "I'm sore with wanting you."

"Oh." She removed her hand and her delicious weight disappeared from his lower stomach. He thought for a moment he'd frightened her with his boldness, but she sat right back down on him further up on his body. Her hand skimmed his hidden erection lightly at first, then more boldly. His

seeking hands found her body and he realized she'd turned around on him so that her backside faced him, which put her face above...

Reg bucked before he finished that thought for she scooted suddenly, her slick sex sliding up his chest so that she could lower her face and nuzzle the fabric at his crotch.

He held onto his orgasm by a thin thread. *Please don't let me shame myself by coming before her.* He needed to regain control of the situation and fast. He found and gripped her thighs with his hands and pulled her back even further until her mound bumped his chin.

Penny stilled, her hot breath steaming through the fabric of his breeches and making him go almost cross-eyed with arousal. He lifted and positioned her over his mouth, then he tasted her.

Oh sweet moons, she was the most decadent dessert he'd ever had the pleasure of tasting. Her slick folds parted beneath his questing tongue and he probed her with his tongue, her cream a heady aphrodisiac. She moaned as he explored her in the dark, using only his tongue and lips. He discovered her sensitive clit and flicked it, enjoying the way she shuddered against him.

But she paid him back. Her hands fumbled with the closure of his pants, but when she finally managed to open it, his cock sprang out, right into her waiting grasp.

It was his turn to buck and gasp as she stroked him with two hands, sliding them up and down his length. He worked her sweet nub faster, sucking and nipping it. She replied by taking his swollen cock head in her mouth.

Reg cried hoarsely, the molten feel of her mouth sucking him wetly the most intense thing he'd ever experienced. Never mind he'd done all this before. For some reason, doing it with Penny was different, more intense, more pleasurable.

He could feel his body tightening, ready to blow. Not before she came, though. He brought one hand up and inserted two fingers into her tight, wet sex. Her pelvic muscles quivered at his penetration and she sucked him faster. He slid a third finger in and pumped her while his tongue flicked quickly against her nub.

With a scream that vibrated against his cock still in her mouth, she came hard, her channel spasming in decadent waves around his still pumping digits. Her sweet surrender pushed him over the edge and his body went taut as he finally found his own release, his rod shooting his cream into her mouth. To his shock—and intense pleasure—she swallowed his juices even as she trembled from the aftershocks of her orgasm.

She rolled off of him and he heard a rustle as she righted herself in the bed. Her slight frame snuggled up against him and Reg curled an arm around her, more content than he could ever remember being.

He'd had sex before—many, many times—but what he'd just experienced went way beyond. Her breathing evened out and he realized she slept, snuggled against him. Her trust in him brought out strange feelings of protectiveness and he hugged her closer. He wouldn't allow any harm to come to her. She was his. And he couldn't wait to mate with her again, and claim her this time with his cock. To claim her forever.

Reg eyes widened in the dark. *I've lost my mind.* He needed to escape now before the afterglow of good sex made him do something stupid. He snuck out of her bed, ignoring the voice that screamed at him to go back.

He wouldn't be caught in the mating trap like so many other good warriors before him. No matter how good she tasted, no matter how right she felt in his arms, no matter how much he longed to probe her with his cock, he wouldn't give up his freedom for sex, no matter how mind blowing it promised to be.

Chapter Eight

Penny woke and stretched, alone in the big bed. She frowned, wondering when Reg had slipped out. She'd kind of hoped for a morning wake up probe. While their oral pleasuring had made her explode, she still desired him.

"Lights." Better than a clapper, the illumination for the room came on, not too bright so her eyes adjusted quickly. More clear headed than the previous night, she peered around with curiosity. The size of the room surprised her. She would have thought guest quarters would be modest, however this room seemed quite opulent from the overly large bed to the silken sheets and soft, cushiony floor.

"Good morning, Penny," said Ralph from hidden speakers, startling her. "I trust you slept well."

"Yes, thank you."

Ralph snickered. "That makes one of you then."

Penny scrunched up her nose. "What do you mean? Didn't Reg sleep?" She assumed he'd gone to find his own bed. Apparently, he wasn't a snuggler. Penny knew she should be excited to be discovering so much about her alien, but instead, she found herself disappointed. She had so many questions still, like what kind of recuperative powers did he have? She knew his cock was thicker and longer than any she'd ever experienced so how would it feel sheathed inside her? She really needed to change her train of thought, for her body was becoming flushed with arousal and she hadn't even brushed her teeth yet.

"Oh the commander slept, of a sort," answered the AI evasively. "I don't think he found his chair as comfortable as his bed though."

"Why was he sleeping in a chair?" Penny still didn't get it.

Ralph chuckled again. "There's only one bed on board."

Penny almost slapped herself for being so dense. This was his room. Spooner or not, it seemed kind of dumb of him to choose to sleep in a chair instead of sharing the mattress. The bed was big enough, after all, for the two

of them—especially if she climbed on top of him. Penny blushed at the direction of her thoughts. And then an even worse one hit her.

Maybe he'd left for a reason other than the fact he didn't like to snuggle. *Maybe he snuck out of bed because he didn't want to have sex with me.* He'd gotten off and assuaged his curiosity about making out with an Earthling. And apparently, it hadn't inspired him to have a repeat performance.

Penny sighed. *What did I expect? He's hot and I'm just boring old me. If only I didn't want him now more than ever.*

"Are you hungry? I can have the food replicator prepare you a meal in the room if you'd like," Ralph offered.

"I'm not hungry. Just confused."

"About the commander I would assume?"

Penny bit her lip. She felt kind of stupid talking to a computer, but who else did she have to talk to? She didn't even have a journal anymore. "Am I that obvious?"

"To one with my superior intellect and observation skills—yes. If it's any consolation, the commander seems to find himself just as befuddled."

"I doubt that," she grumbled.

"Take it from one who has known him many cycles, I've never seen the commander so uncertain and out of control with his emotions."

"Well, he could have fooled me. I mean, we are talking about the man who snuck out of bed to sleep in a chair so he wouldn't have to wake up beside me, right?"

"Proving my point," said the AI. "A man who didn't care would have taken advantage of what you offered without remorse."

"So, because he left me and didn't try to probe me, he likes me?" Penny tried to follow the AI's logic, but as usual, convoluted emotions escaped her. She'd always had a hard time following human behavior. Throw in an alien element and she was completely lost.

"Correct."

"I'm not sure I believe you, but let's say I do. Then what do I do next? I know I've only known him a short time, but he makes me feel things, Ralph. And I know it's just a chemical reaction in my brain, but I have to say it's

even better than chocolate. So how do I get him to admit he feels things for me too?" Penny found talking to the AI remarkably easy. Perhaps the fact he didn't have an actual face helped. He was like a diary that talked back.

"I think perhaps you need to understand more about his people and their ways to find the solution to your dilemma. Reg is a warrior descended from a long line of warriors. They don't speak of feelings and, believe it or not, until they met humans, had never heard of the emotion you Earthlings call love. Now this isn't to say they never felt it. I'm sure many have. With them, mating with a female is a ritual that results in a mental harmony that transcends the need for words."

"But the females of his world died. I guess mating with other species like humans isn't the same." In other words, her geeky self might have been a letdown regardless of what the AI thought.

"Yes and no. While human females might require special fertility drugs to procreate, when it comes to mental harmony, they are more than compatible if matched with the right male. The spirit ancestors of his people are quite adept at finding the perfect female. And in the past, once a warrior was given permission to mate, he would abduct his Earthling and perform the mating ritual."

"So they get married?"

The computer paused. "It's more than marriage. From the written studies on it, apparently during the bonding, the souls of the two join and become one."

A society that believed in soul mates. That surprised Penny given their technological advances. "This is all really interesting, but what's it got to do with Reg and me? I'm not looking for commitment." *Just hot sex, regardless of what the organ known as my heart thinks.*

"Reg was given permission to mate by the Oracle."

"Oh, so he's already got some girl lined up to marry then." Penny's heart plummeted. It would explain why he tried for aloofness. *I guess I was just a fling before he settles down.* Which was perfectly fine because she wasn't looking to get married. She just wished the thought of him mating with someone else didn't give her an urge to have a hissy fit.

“No, the commander refused the honor.”

Penny’s head shot up. “Why?”

“When a pair bond, they return to the home planet where they are given a home and the male is given a job planetside while the female tends to the babies she is expected to have. The commander thinks this is a fate worse than death as he prefers to roam the galaxies.”

“Can’t say as I blame him. I wouldn’t want to be stuck barefoot and pregnant. I’d much rather be out in space, too.”

“Exactly his opinion.”

“But I still don’t understand what that has to do with me.”

“The Oracle has informed him that the spirits have chosen several males suitable as your mate.”

“Whoa. Back up. I don’t want to get married. Not to him or anyone else. I’m a scientist. Now that I’ve discovered there is life out here, I want to see it, and not just on some video screen, but in person. I’ll just have to tell your Oracle I’m not interested.”

Ralph chuckled. “Now that I would like to hear.”

“I’m glad you think it’s funny. I don’t think it’s amusing at all that some ET who talks to ghosts thinks she can arrange my future for me. But that’s getting away from the point. If I understand you correctly, Reg doesn’t want to get married and because he thinks I’m supposed to get married, he wants nothing to do with me.”

“Exactly.” Ralph sounded pleased she’d summarized the situation, but understanding did nothing to help.

“Well that’s just dumb.” And she intended to tell Reg just how stupid the entire situation was. That was if Ralph was correct in his assessment and Reg had pulled his disappearing act out of fear they’d end up shackled together or that he’d be cheating on one of his kind.

Penny still wasn’t 100% sure that Reg’s disappearance wasn’t because he’d had a taste of her charms and not found himself impressed.

* * * *

Reg worked the kinks out of his body shadow fighting with a computer simulator. The thrusting and running at his fake opponent helped clear the fogginess from his mind as well as ease his aching muscles.

I should have stayed in the bed. It was stupid of me to sleep in the chair. But he knew if he'd stayed in bed with Penny, he'd have crawled between her legs and pounded into her sweet flesh until she clawed his back and screamed his name. And then he had a feeling he would have started all over again for, like a drug, he didn't think Penny was a craving he could vanquish with just one probe. *By the moons, I can still taste her on my tongue and I am so hungry for more.*

Growling, he threw a flurry of punches.

"Feeling a little frustrated, are we?" said Ralph with chuckle.

"Shut up."

"I just thought I'd let you know Penny is awake."

"Why would I care?" Reg's fist flew in a flurry of blows at his shadow opponent.

"She was wondering where you were. She was hurt you left her alone. For some reason, she likes you."

"What?" Distracted, Reg forgot to pay attention. The animated boxer struck a blow and snapped Reg's head back. "Simulator off." Rubbing his face, Reg tried to tell himself it didn't matter if Penny liked him. He didn't want a wife. He wanted his freedom. And besides, she was just as good as promised to someone else.

"She's just as opposed to marriage as you are. Says she'd rather travel the galaxies than stay on the home world to birth babies."

Reg found himself listening and eager to know more, even if he'd decided during his sleepless sojourn that he would do his best to avoid her until he could deposit her planetside. "She said that? What else did she say?"

"You know maybe the two of you should try talking to each other directly. I think you both have more in common than you think."

For a moment, Reg allowed himself to dream of roaming the universe, Penny at his side, sharing adventure—and his bed.

The Oracle would never allow it. Females were safer at home. Besides, the Oracle already had some warriors in mind for Penny.

Suddenly enraged, he needed to hit something. “Simulator on,” he barked. The ship might be small, but he knew it well. Avoidance was his best option, no matter how his cock and balls ached—and even stranger, his heart.

Chapter Nine

“You will stay on board while I conduct my business here.”

“Why?” This was the third such stop he’d given her specific instructions to stay out of sight. It was getting annoying, especially considering it was one of the only times he talked to her voluntarily. In the close confines of the ship, it was hard for him to avoid her completely, and when she did manage to corner him, she’d attempted to engage him in conversation, to baffling effect. She’d discovered smiling at him or laughing made his face tighten, almost as if he suffered pain, and then he’d make an abrupt u-turn and just about run to get away from her. On other occasions, he pretended to not see her at all, avoiding her like she had the plague. Ralph tried to reassure her that it was because Reg was afraid of his feelings for her. Penny disagreed. *If he liked me, he wouldn’t be so aloof.*

“You will stay on board out of sight because the place we’re docking at is too dangerous.”

Penny bit back the words ‘Yes, Daddy’ at his condescending attitude. However, having glimpsed their docking location on an honest to goodness asteroid, riddled with buildings and covered tunnels, she couldn’t resist trying again. “I promise I’ll do whatever you say. I just want to observe. And besides, you’d be there to protect me.”

He ignored her, to her annoyance, and finished suiting up. She didn’t cringe when he wrapped a belt around his waist and holstered a gun. She did, however, swallow hard when he also added two long, gleaming knives. *Okay, so maybe he’s telling me the truth and this place really is dangerous.*

“Our next stop will be more suitable. Now be a good girl and go study or something.”

His dismissive words made her flush. *What else am I supposed to do with my time when he practically ignores me?* She wondered what he’d think if she divulged that her current notes were all about him—and the diagrams she kept tearing up were amateur scribbles of his nude body. She’d tried to lie to herself that she was simply researching him as a new species. The truth was, she found comfort—and titillation—in remembering what they’d done together.

Not that it helped the pain in her psyche since he so callously avoided her after their one and only intimate encounter. She had tried to view what had happened dispassionately. After all, emotions were chemical reactions in the brain and thus unreliable, but it was cold comfort when she slept alone, her thoughts centered around him. Even worse, she existed in a constant state of arousal.

Penny fell back on what she knew best to fight the hormonal imbalance that caused her to feel irrationally—research. Ralph proved to be an invaluable fount of information about Reg. She knew all about his accomplishments as a space warrior, both in battle and during planetary off-world business. She knew he was an only child, his father a full blood Xamian and his mother a human/Xamian born mix. She'd browsed images of him kept on file, which Ralph pulled up for her and she studied them intently. Her interest in him, almost obsessive, made no sense, and neither did her emotional turmoil. Given his treatment of her, logic said she should hate him. Instead, she wondered what she could do or say to get him to skip the banal conversation and visit the stars he'd shown her before in bed.

Oblivious to her thoughts, without a backward glance, Reg left, his big black boots thudding as he headed toward the decontamination chamber and the door that led off the comfortable ship that she'd mentally renamed her prison.

Penny ran to the command center and hit a series of buttons to pull up the cameras outside the ship. Bored, she'd learned a lot from Ralph about the ship and Reg's world and his people and...

Simply put, she now knew a heck of a lot of facts, none of which helped her, or chased the boredom away. She watched Reg as he strode tall and confident down the tube connecting them to the docking port. She fidgeted as she waited, the empty corridor on the view screen mocking her. Seconds ticked by while she drummed her fingers. Surely it wouldn't hurt if she took a little peek. She wouldn't go any further than the end of the connecting tunnel. How was she to learn anything if Reg kept her sequestered everywhere they went?

I'll just poke my head out for a minute and be right back. He'll never even know.

Of course, she hadn't counted on Ralph.

"And just where do you think you're going?" the AI asked as she placed her hand on the door control to slide it open.

Penny jumped like she'd been caught by her mother sneaking out. But there was a big difference. Not only was she a grown woman, Ralph was a machine. Titling her head regally she replied, "I'm just going to look. I'll be right back."

"The commander told you to stay on the ship."

"Oh please, I'm not going far or long. Come on, Ralph, I promise, one tiny look and I'll be back before you know it."

"The commander wouldn't like it."

"Please, Ralph."

Machine or not, apparently he couldn't resist her plea and the door slid open. "Make it quick. I'd rather not become intimately acquainted with a scrap heap."

"You're the best, Ralph." Penny scurried down the narrow hall. At the end was a closed door. Slapping her hand on the control panel, the door slid open and she stuck her head out to look.

From space, she'd seen buildings embedded into the asteroid surface, appearing tiny and far between, but looking around wide eyed, she now realized what she'd seen was just the tip of the asteroid, so to speak. The reality of the place was a lot bigger than she'd given it credit for. They'd dug into the mini world rotating around the gaseous purple planet it orbited and if the hangar was any indication, built quite the city underground.

All around there was movement from machinery moving pallets and machine parts to beings—real ET's!—striding about purposefully. Penny's excitement made her forget her words to only look quickly and return. How could she with so much to study? She stepped out of the tunnel to look around better. *Pinch me because I can't believe I'm standing in the presence of honest to goodness aliens.*

Just a few feet away an eight foot lizard waved stubby arms while his long tail thrashed on the metal grate floor. In front of her, on fluttery gem-colored wings, a pair of chubby creatures flitted past, so cute to look at if you ignored

the sharp teeth and claws. Tall and short, fat and skinny, beings of every color went about their business. Her inner researcher, always on the lookout for interesting things, noted how the aliens mostly followed humanoid lines and where bipedal. *I wonder if they were also seeded by that master race Reg told me about?* The scientist in her was positively giddy with wanting, make that needing, to know.

“And what have we here?” The words sounded harsh and guttural, but the translator allowed her to understand clearly. How marvelous. Penny whirled in excitement, eager to meet another ET. She recoiled slightly when she saw a creature that surely had porcine ancestors leering at her. Not as tall as Reg, the warty speaker was thick with an olive green skin tone that glistened either with sweat or slime—it was gross either way. Beady eyes squinted at her above a nose that could easily be termed a snout. A pair of small tusks flanked his mouth and, when he smiled grotesquely at her, she noticed his teeth all ended in points. She sucked in a frightened breath and almost gagged for he also really stank.

“Um, hi. I was just leaving.” Suddenly realizing she might have overstayed her peek, Penny took a step back toward the tunnel to the ship. She was brought up short, though, by a rancid smelling body at her back. *Oh, this can't be good.*

“But we were just getting acquainted,” said the boarish-looking ET, showing his sharp teeth in what might have been a smile.

In the off chance she was wrong about his intentions, Penny smiled weakly. “Gee, I really wish I could stay and chat, but my very big boyfriend is waiting for me so I'd better get going.”

The ugly beast chuckled, a wet sound that made her gorge rise. “I think you lie, for no male would let his female wander this place, especially unguarded.”

Okay, screw playing nice. Time to run. Penny tried to dart away quickly, hoping to catch phlegm voice and his smelly friend off guard.

A pinch at her nape, though, gave her a nanosecond to realize how stupid she'd been.

Curiosity killed the cat, but I think my fate is going to be a lot worse.

Chapter Ten

Penny came to on a cold metal table, naked. With a squeal, she rolled off and peered around frantically. A wet chuckle from behind had her whirling to see her porcine abductor, still just as ugly, holding out scraps of material to her.

“There is no escape, female. Now, dress.”

“Or else what?” she asked in a squeaky voice with a bravery she didn’t feel.

“Or else instead of auctioning you off as a concubine, I’ll eat you for dinner.”

Given the options, she snatched the clothing and began to dress. Once she was done, though, she had to wonder if her naked body might have been less alluring. Dressed like Princess Leia visiting Jabba the Hut—in other words in a very skimpy outfit that left not much to the imagination—Penny was led through a series of corridors until she and the pig who dragged her by one wrist emerged onto a small raised dais.

She blinked in the bright lights but almost wished she’d remained blind when she saw what was around her. She seemed to be in some kind of bar—a very crowded bar. Surrounding the dais on three sides were tables packed with aliens of all types, most of them leering at her. Odors of all kinds assailed her—rancid, unwashed, totally gross—and made her slightly nauseous. She really wished she’d listened to Reg. Once again, her curiosity had landed her in a royal mess. *Maybe I’m overreacting.* Her captor’s words did nothing to quell her fear, but she did almost pee herself.

“Looke here, varmints and mates. I’ve got a lovely unclaimed human here with enough holes to satisfy even those of you with multiple appendages.” Penny swayed, trying not to swoon in terror.

“I thought they was illegal,” shouted someone in the crowd.

“Illegal to any but Xamians to poach from their home planet, but if found off world, there ain’t no laws against them offering themselves up.”

Loud guffaws echoed in the room.

“Now, she ain’t a virgin, but she’s healthy. Her hair is real and matches her woman’s hair. Now who’s gonna start the bidding for this choice morsel?”

Penny bit her lip to keep it from trembling as shouts of credits rang around the room. Bidding was steady and rapid, dashing her hope that nobody would want her.

“Come on ye cheap bastards,” said her kidnapper, coughing something gooey onto the floor. “With skin like this, imagine how well the whip marks will show up.”

Penny almost fainted as numbers were thrown out with a speed that would have been flattering under less life threatening circumstances.

“She is not for sale.”

His voice rang clear and loud, and the clamor died down. Penny lifted her head to see Reg standing tall and furious amidst the scum who would buy her.

Hope bloomed in her. Despite her logic telling her it was impossible, she knew Reg would save her.

* * * *

Reg heard the clamor as he headed back from his successful transaction to his ship. He meant to bypass it, not interested in the type of entertainment found in a place like this, but when he heard the words ‘red hair’, he stopped dead, forcing those following behind to divert around him.

“Ralph,” he said aloud, knowing his embedded communicator would put him in contact with his ship. “Please tell me Penny is still on board.”

“Yes, well, she—that is—” the AI stuttered, and a cold finger of fear traced its way up his spine.

“Stubborn Earthling. I am going to beat her ass right after I save it.” Reg did an about turn and strode back to the galactic bar that served not only the vilest drinks in all the galaxy, but the worst patrons, too.

Trepidation and anger battled for supremacy in his body, especially when he caught sight of Penny cringing on the platform at the back of the smoke filled and putrid smelling bar.

“Damned foolish woman,” he muttered under his breath as he pushed his way through the leering crowd that impeded his path to her.

The amount of credits being shouted out for the purchase of Penny staggered him. Apparently, he wasn’t the only one who found her to be a rare beauty. Of course, they hadn’t heard her talk yet.

When he got close enough to be heard, he spoke. “She is not for sale.” His voice came out louder than expected, obviously amplified by Ralph, and while the crowd surrounding the dais quieted, the announcer continued on as if he was deaf to his claim. Penny, however, heard him and fixed him with hopeful eyes. In the face of her despair, something in him groaned. Odds against him or not, he wouldn’t leave here without her. What was that Earth expression that Ralph had told him using some kind of odd accent? Ah yes, *it’s a good day to die*.

“I said, she’s not for sale.”

At his booming words, bidding came to a stuttering halt and the pirate running the auction finally squinted at him. He spat on the floor before saying, “And who are you to say she isn’t?”

Reg spoke without thinking. “She’s my mate.” Oddly enough, the words didn’t make him cringe or want to run for the stars. Instead, they felt...right. But he’d have to analyze that—as well as have a panic attack over it—later.

The filthy slaver snorted. “She bears not the mark. You lie.”

Reg shrugged. “My mate wished to become accustomed to me and my world’s ways before saying the words. She is mine, though, and as such, you have no right to her.”

“Prove it. Speak the words.”

“What?”

“If she is truly your mate, then conduct the ritual. If you speak true, then her mating band will mark her. If you speak false, well, you die and she will go to the highest bidder.”

Reg was surprised that the slave auctioneer's requirement to bond with her didn't anger him. Surely he didn't want to be mated? What had happened to being free and roaming the stars? *Ah by the moons, her life isn't worth the price of my freedom.*

He leapt up onto the dais and Penny threw herself at him, hugging him and whispering in a choked voice. "I'm so sorry. I should have listened to you. What are you going to do?"

"Marry you, apparently, and pray the spirits are watching. You're not hurt?"

"No. Just feeling stupid and cold in this outfit. So, how are we escaping?"

The sharp prick of a knife made him turn his attention away from Penny.

The pirate sneered. "How touching. Now, say the words and let us see if you spoke true."

Reg turned back to Penny and held up his hands. "Usually, we'd do this naked, but I think your outfit has shown quite enough of your flesh off already to this bunch. Put your hands on mine."

Penny held his gaze and placed her smaller hands against his. A tingle jolted him where their skin touched, an electrical current he'd heard of but never thought to experience. Penny sucked in a breath and her eyes widened, but, for once, she kept quiet. Damn, it looked like regardless of his feelings on the matter, Penny was his soul mate, which meant the mating ritual would work. In the off chance he was mistaken, he did have a plan. Escape the hard—AKA bloody—way.

"Hurry it up," said the impatient slaver with another jab of his knife.

Reg debated for a moment fighting his way out, but looking at Penny so frail and trusting, he knew he had to try to get her out without violence if possible. "I need you to repeat after me." Reg took a deep breath and prepared to change his life forever. "My life, my soul, I pledge to thee."

Penny swallowed, her eyes flicking between him and the knife. Her hands against his trembled, but finally, she spoke. "My life, my soul, I pledge to thee."

"Forever joined for eternity."

Penny repeated after him and as soon as she said eternity, it hit them. With a loud crack, energy thrummed into him and then out into Penny. Back and forth, mystical power spun between them, joining them irrevocably, melding their souls forever more as one. Reg only had a moment to sense her emotions—fear, hope, and something warm, something sweet he could put no name to. He'd figure it out later. First, to find out if the pirate would keep his word for, as per the bargain, Reg was now mated to Penny and she bore the mark.

Reg twined his fingers through her left hand and pulled her arm up for all to see the smoky mating band that now moved in sinuous patterns around her wrist.

“What is that?” she asked, staring at it in fascination.

Instead of answering her directly, he spoke to the slaver. “As I told you, the woman is my mate and bears my mating band. Now, if you don't mind, my wife and I would like to retire to our ship for some privacy.”

Reg had known it wouldn't be this easy and, as soon as the pirate's face squinted into something even uglier than his usual mien, Reg tucked Penny behind him and drew his knives.

“Get th—” The ugly slaver's word were cut off as Reg sliced across his throat, almost decapitating the brute with the sharpness of his blade. One down, a horde to go.

Chapter Eleven

The dark blood that spurted from the slaver's neck made Penny blanch. She'd never seen or experienced violence firsthand. And apparently, she wouldn't have the time to come to terms with it for Reg pushed her toward the door at the back of the dais. She stumbled along, hearing numbly the roar at her back as the bidders expressed their displeasure at the turn of events.

She still couldn't believe Reg had arrived to save her, and in the nick of time, too. And he'd married her! An event she'd love to analyze when he stopped dragging her through the maze of corridors.

"Ralph," he barked aloud. "Prepare the ship for immediate departure."

Penny didn't hear a reply and assumed Reg wore some kind of transmitter. "Are we close?" she whispered loudly.

"More or less, but I expect we'll have to fight our way on board."

"Why not teleport?" she asked as he tucked her behind him to peer around a corner.

"The whole asteroid is shielded against it," he replied, tugging her along again.

Once again at an intersection, he stopped, but instead of scouting around the corner, he turned to face her with serious eyes.

"Here, take this. The safety is off so just point and shoot."

Penny looked at the gun he shoved in her hand and offered it back. *He wants me to kill people, um beings?* "I can't use this."

"You will if you want to live. Or would you rather end up a prostitute in a galactic brothel?"

Put that way... Penny grasped the gun tight.

"Stay close to me. When you see an opening, you run for the ship and don't look back."

"But what about you?" she asked.

"Don't worry about me. I have no intention of missing our wedding night, *wife*." He followed up his words with a fierce but brief kiss that made her tingle from head to toe. "Don't hesitate if you see someone coming at you. Shoot."

And with those final words of comfort, he dragged her out into the wide hangar area. To Penny's relief, there wasn't a blood thirsty crowd waiting for them. Actually, the place was surprisingly bare except for a handful of porky-looking miscreants standing in front of a docking door. Of course, it happened to be the one door they needed to escape and while there for only about five thugs, they were big and nasty-looking—not to mention smelly even from where she stood.

They grinned in welcome, their pointed teeth making her shudder. Reg didn't even pause. With a battle cry that both chilled and thrilled her, he ran toward the pirates. Penny could only watch, stunned, as he danced among the beasts, his silver blades flashing. The flying blood was kind of gross and distracting, but to her amazement, against all odds, Reg was winning. *And I would never have thought it, but it's kind of arousing to watch.* Reg moved with a fluid grace that astonished her. His body twisting and bending to thrust, dodge and slash, not a movement wasted in his deadly dance.

One down, two down, three. He prepared to dispatch a third when she caught movement to her left and she turned to see another dirty pig approaching stealthily with a pistol rising to shoot. Without even thinking about it, Penny swung her gun up in his direction, vaguely aiming it. She squeezed her eyes shut even as she pressed on the trigger. There was no recoil, just a sizzling sound followed by a faint cry. She opened her eyes to see the sneaky pirate lying on the ground. *Oh sweet niblets, I killed him.* But there was no time to freak out about her new murderous capabilities for Reg, having dispatched the last of the slavers, called her.

“Move it, Penny. Now!”

Penny ran for him and the door to their ship and, hopefully, freedom. Reg watched warily as she ran past him into the tunnel. She'd just reached the safety of the ship when she heard him pounding up the connecting tube behind her.

He slipped into the decontamination chamber and the door swished shut.

“Get decontaminated,” he barked at her and ran out of the room.

Penny frowned at his back, tempted to ignore his order and follow him. But the fact he'd thought it important and, admittedly, the idea of being

covered in possibly dangerous alien germs, made her decide to delay for the few minutes it would take to cleanse herself.

Besides, she wanted to be clean for he'd promised to give her a wedding night. The thought was enough to make her wet. *It's about time he probed me.*

* * * *

“Get us out of here, Ralph,” Reg said, breathing hard. He threw himself into the command chair and with lightning quick taps, pulled up the defense systems for the ship.

The sound of the docking clamps releasing sounded faintly and with a slight shudder, the ship lifted.

Reg drummed his fingers, waiting for signs of pursuit. Only after they'd reached the edge of that particular solar system with no alarms or signs of other crafts did his tension leave him. Another tightness took its place, though, as he thought of what had almost happened to Penny, his wife. “Ralph, I'm off to see to my mate. Notify me immediately if there's trouble.”

Reg stalked to the decontamination chamber, his body taut with anger. He wasn't furious at having been tricked into getting mated—which surprised him—but he was livid that Penny had disobeyed him and put herself in so much danger. *She could have died.*

When he didn't find her in the cleansing room, he went to the bedroom next and found her quite calmly reading a vid screen. For a moment, he just looked at her, still wearing the slaver's provocative outfit. The top, two triangular scraps, revealed a decadent amount of creamy flesh while the slitted skirt hung low on her hips and gaped over her thighs. It stunned him to realize, *she's mine now to touch whenever I want. And by the moons, I want to touch her, kiss her, fuck her...*

She raised excited eyes to him and shook her wrist with the mating band. “I was curious about the smoke bracelet that appeared after your marriage ritual. It's quite fascinating. Did you know, scholars on your world believe it's created from the actual spirits of your ancestors?” As he stood there

glowering at her, her smile faded and uncertainty pooled in her eyes. “Is something wrong? Didn’t we escape?”

“Oh we got away all right, no thanks to you.”

Penny put aside the tablet and sat up straight in the bed. “I said I was sorry. I just wanted a peek.”

“After I told you to stay in the ship.” Reg needed her to understand the danger she’d put herself in. A danger they’d escaped by some miracle.

She stood in front of him, bristling. “I am not a child. You can’t tell me what to do. And besides, we got out all right.”

“Barely, and that’s not the point. You’re my wife now, and as such, you will do as you’re told.”

Her jaw dropped then her green eyes flashed with ire. “Ha! Not for long. I want a divorce.”

“A what?” The word divorce wasn’t one he could translate.

“Divorce. It means I want the marriage annulled.”

His brows shot up. “Impossible. Once a Xamian mates, it’s for life.”

“Well, I don’t want to be married to you,” she said, stubbornly crossing her arms under her bosom, which only drew attention to them. Reg’s cock twitched. However, much as he wanted to claim her body, first he needed to punish her.

“If you didn’t want to be married then you should have listened to me. It’s too late now. But don’t worry, you won’t have to suffer me for long. I’m making a straight course for my home planet to drop you off.”

“What do you mean drop me off? Where are you going?”

“I still have missions to complete and, apparently, since I can’t trust you to listen to my orders, then I need to put you somewhere where you can’t get hurt.” She looked at him with a wounded expression, one which caused a sharp pain in his chest. *I really need to see the medtech unit about that.* “You brought this on yourself. Which brings me to the next thing. Your punishment.”

She laughed. “What are you gonna do? Ground me to the ship? Dump me on a planet alone with nobody I know? Wait, that’s already your plan. Do your worst,” she said, tossing her head imperiously.

“I intend to.” He grabbed her by the wrist and yanked her along with him as he crossed the short distance to the armless chair in the room and sat in it. He dragged her down and pushed her over his lap.

She struggled against him, but he held her over his thighs with a firm hand. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m punishing you for disobeying.” He ripped away the fabric covering her buttocks, exposing her pale skin. For a moment, lust almost overtook him, making his thoughts of punishment fade. But then, he remembered the fear he’d felt when he saw her standing in front of all those scum.

Crack!

Chapter Twelve

Penny squealed at the first spank on her bottom. Fiery pain shot through her and she struggled in earnest on Reg's lap. But his muscles were more than just hot to look at. They also contained strength. He held her bent over his lap effortlessly and proceeded to paddle her bottom, turning deaf ears to her pleas and tears.

"You meanie," she railed. "Stop it right now!"

When threats didn't work, including a rather inventive one about what she'd do to him and his manparts with a beaker of acid, she resorted to bribes.

"I'll be a good girl. I promise. Let me prove myself." She proceeded to recount in embarrassing detail what she would do to his cock, and while said rod poked her ribs solidly, he didn't falter.

"I'm doing this for your own good." Penny wanted to retort, but deep down—really deep where she would never admit it—she knew she deserved it. Funny how getting spanked forced her to reconsider her decision to flout his command. *In the end, he was right. It was dangerous and I guess, much as it galls me to admit, I should have listened and never left the ship.*

She stayed quiet after that realization, of a sorts. She still yelped and whimpered as he punished her. She wasn't sure when the slaps stopped hurting so much and instead ignited desire. All she knew was suddenly, instead of cringing away from his hand, she arched into it and her cries of pain turned into moans of pleasure. A change came over him as well, for his smacks became lighter and he stroked her burning skin between slaps. When his hand slipped between her buttocks and stroked down her damp cleft, she whispered his name.

The spanks to her bottom stopped and, instead, he delved between her nether lips, probing her aching sex with his fingers. Penny panted, aroused and wanting more. She squirmed against his touch, unable to stop the gush of fluid as her desire lubed her channel.

"Stand," he ordered gruffly.

Penny stood, the torn remains to the bottom of her outfit puddling on the floor at her feet. She looked down at him, for he'd remained seated, and found him gazing at her, his eyes glowing violet. It made her even wetter. His hands reached out and grabbed her thighs, spreading them. He pulled her forward until she straddled him, but his goal remained out of reach. He pressed and held a concealed button on the underside of the chair's armrest until his seat sank down, bringing her mound level with his face. With a groan, he buried his face against her pubes. He nuzzled her curls before moving lower and found her clit with his mouth. At the hot wetness of his mouth on her swollen nub, Penny hissed in pleasure. She grabbed at his hair to steady herself, her knees wobbly. She needn't have worried. His hands held her steady as he licked and sucked between her thighs. His tongue probed her sex hotly. Penny gasped and swayed, hot pleasure building in her.

He finally stopped his oral torture after driving her to the brink and stopping several times. He let her sink down to sit on his lap, but when her sore bottom came in contact with his thighs, she winced. In a nanosecond, he had her on her knees on the floor with her hands braced on the chair he'd vacated.

His mouth brushed hotly against her abused backside, the pleasure/pain of it making her twitch. "Please, Reg."

His mouth disappeared and she felt the hard head of his cock sliding between her thighs to rub against her moistness. Slick with her juices, he probed between her plump lips, taking it slow. It was exquisite torture.

Finally, he sheathed himself inside her, his long, hard length driving deep and striking a sweet spot inside that had her body tightening. With his hands on her hips, he pumped her, his hot mouth seeking and then sucking the hot skin of her nape.

Penny gripped the chair for dear life, welcoming the thrusts of his cock and only hissing once when his body came into slapping contact with her burning backside.

Pleasure swirled inside her, a rapture that coiled tight as a spring. Her tension burst into a screaming orgasm when his hands slid from her waist to cup her breasts and his thumbs brushed her nipples.

She quivered and shook, the intensity of her orgasm making her mindless. Eventually, her body finally calmed and she found herself cradled in his arms, somehow in bed. He brushed her temple with his lips and Penny smiled, but it wasn't in her nature to be quiet, even after great sex. Her anger over his treatment of her had faded, especially since the spanking had turned into something so decadent. But, she needed to make him understand that while she appreciated he'd been frightened for her, she refused to be treated like a child. If they were, in truth, married, then she wanted equal status in their relationship. About to give him a lecture on the rights of women in society, she changed her mind when he rolled her on top of him and she felt something hard nudging at her soft belly. *Maybe later...*

"Ready so soon, husband?" she asked, almost giggling at the word husband.

"Warriors are always ready to please their women," he teased back, then grabbed her ass cheeks.

Penny reared up as the heat in her posterior flared up.

"Ow!"

* * * *

At Penny's cry of pain, Reg found himself submerged in remorse. While he'd meant to punish her, he'd not intended to cause her lasting harm. It would seem, though, that his Earthling wife was of a more delicate constitution than he'd realized. He dumped her onto the bed on her stomach, and naked, jogged to the infirmary to retrieve a jar of lotion to ease her abused buttocks.

He returned to the bedroom and found her watching him when he strode in. She gave him a half smile that made his heart stutter oddly. He'd have to run himself through a medical later on and see what was the matter with him for he'd suffered these heart palpitations since he'd met Penny. While he'd balked at marriage, now, suddenly wed to his exotic human, he realized he wanted a long life with her. But forget his funny heart problems, he could now see the brightness of her ass and his chagrin grew.

“I’m so sorry,” he apologized, sitting beside her on the bed and opening the jar. “I didn’t mean to punish you so harshly.”

“I’m sure it looks worse than it is. With my skin, it doesn’t take much to get some color. Just don’t do it again.”

Scooping the lotion on his fingers, he replied, “I will devise a better punishment for next time.”

Penny choked as he rubbed the healing cream on her fiery skin and he hated he caused her more pain.

“Next time?” she finally screeched. She reared up on the bed and twisted her body to look back at him. “There will be no more punishing, buster. We’re married now, as in partners for life. That means you can’t treat me like a slave.”

Reg returned her gaze calmly. “You are fragile and must be protected. As such, if I give you an order that pertains to your safety, I expect you to obey it or face the consequences. But don’t worry, soon I’ll have you at my home planet where the only danger will be if you trip on your own feet.”

Penny gaped at him and Reg smiled, well pleased he’d finally managed to render her speechless.

“No.”

Reg’s smile faded at the anger he could see flashing in her narrowed eyes. “No what?”

“No, I will not become some meek little housewife while you go off and have adventures. There’s no reason I can’t come with you.”

“A women’s place is on the home planet.” Where he’d probably be grounded in short order too as a mated male. The idea of no longer roaming the stars stuck in his craw, but Penny was sure to liven things up. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad.

“I think I’m going to have to teach you about women’s lib,” she said, moving to sit on her bent legs. “But before I do, what the heck did you put on my bottom? I can’t feel the pain at all anymore.”

“See, there are many things for you to learn about on my planet. It won’t be as dreadful as you fear.”

Penny cocked her head at him and smiled. “Or I could prove to you what an asset I’d be with you in space. Starting with this.” She placed her hands on his chest and leaned up to kiss him.

Her boldness enflamed him and his cock swelled to press up against her lower belly. She pushed at him and he complied, lying on his back. She remained kneeling beside him and her gaze devoured him hungrily.

“What are you thinking?” he asked when she bit her lip, her eyes locked onto his cock.

“I wish I had a notepad right now.”

Reg’s brow creased. “I’m probably going to regret asking, but why?”

She tore her gaze from his shaft and smiled at him seductively. “I would love to do a sketch of your penis and take a few notes on the oral techniques that most arouse you.”

Reg almost choked. He wasn’t sure if he should laugh at her strange urge or beg her to find a notepad and do what she said. Sanity prevailed at the thought some of his warrior friends would find out his new wife liked to draw pictures of his cock. “No notepads, but feel free to experiment with my body all you want. I’d be really interested in the effect of your mouth sucking me while your hands massage my balls.”

Penny smiled, but instead of diving on him with her mouth, she grabbed his rod in her hands and squeezed him tight. His cock, already throbbing hard, pearled at the tip. His naughty mate pounced on him, her lithe tongue lapping at the clear drop, making him hiss in pleasure. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the sensation of her laving the head of his cock. He expected to feel her mouth at any moment, taking his prick deep into her throat, but, once again, she surprised him. She kept her hands on his rod, but her wet tongue flicked across his balls. Reg shouted. “Sweet moons!”

Penny didn’t reply. She couldn’t for she’d taken his sac into her mouth and sucked him. Reg clutched at the sheets, his body trembling with effort as he forced himself not to buck. She explored him intimately, sucking his testes one at a time, then taking both into her mouth. She played with them and Reg almost came, so pleasurable was her foreplay.

When she finally stopped teasing him, he panted as if he'd run a mighty distance on a thin atmosphere planet. She gave him no reprieve though. She straddled him and her hot sex sheathed his cock. Reg couldn't stop himself from thrusting up into her, his poor, overly teased cock seeking her sweet spot.

He felt her hands brace on his chest and he opened his eyes to see her staring down at him, her face flushed with passion. She looked so beautiful to him, and even more arousing. *She is mine.*

He gripped her waist with his hands and helped her rock on his shaft. She gasped in pleasure as her clit rubbed against him and her channel muscles quivered around him. Faster, he slid her back and forth, increasing the friction between their bodies. When she would have closed her eyes, Reg growled. "Open them."

She opened them, her eyes glazed and heavy lidded with passion. Reg found himself hurtling toward the edge of pleasure and he pumped faster, bringing her with him. He thrust up into her, his cock finding her sensitive place and spearing it. Her body tightened, her muscles squeezing him tightly, and Reg let go, joining her in rapture.

"I love you," she cried out, throwing her head back, her orgasm sweeping her.

Reg didn't reply for he didn't know how. Instead, he let his body speak for him, holding her tenderly as she quaked with pleasure in his arms. He might not know what this Earthling emotion love was, but as a warrior, and now her husband, he would never let anything happen to Penny. *I will cherish and protect you, my sweet human wife.*

Chapter Thirteen

Penny awoke with a smile, her body sensitized from the all night lovemaking. She'd orgasmed more times than she would have ever thought humanly possible. She hoped she'd also managed to change Reg's outdated ideas on women's roles. She'd lectured him at length on the advance of women's rights back on Earth in between bouts and he'd listened to her even if his gaze tended to stray to her naked body parts. She was pretty sure she'd managed to make him understand logically the reasons why they should stay together in space, and then to add sugar to sweeten the deal, she'd shown him physically.

I can't believe he expected me to become some kind of Suzie homemaker popping out babies. My research on the effects of space travel on pregnancy and children, rare as those cases seem to be, don't lead me to believe there's any reason why we can't continue on to travel the galaxy, which is where I know Reg wants to be.

Speaking of whom, where was her sexy blue husband? She dressed and went to find him. Not seeing him in the lounge area, she headed next to the command center. She paused just outside when she heard Reg speaking. She knew she should announce herself and go in, but instead, she surrendered to her curiosity and eavesdropped.

"Greetings, Oracle," she heard Reg say. "I regret to inform you that the human Penny is no longer eligible for mating," he said in a serious voice.

A female voice replied, "Explain yourself, first class space warrior. Your mission was to bring the Earthling back here safely."

"The female is safe, but due to unforeseen circumstances, I was forced to bond with her to keep her unharmed."

Penny bit her lip as disappointment flooded her. She'd known he wasn't keen on marriage, but he'd shown himself more than eager to bed her. His words, though, seemed to say otherwise.

"Mated, you say? That is not such a calamity. What are your plans now?"

"We should be arriving home within three full cycles. I will drop off the human as per custom and then with, your permission, I will return to space to complete my remaining missions."

Penny clapped a hand over mouth as tears brimmed in her eyes. She'd heard enough. She ran back to the bedroom.

How could he want to abandon me like that? I thought after last night that surely he'd change his mind. Apparently, she'd guessed wrong.

Penny scrubbed at her tear-stained face and her mind raced furiously, analyzing the situation and coming up with a solution. *Fine, he doesn't want me, then I'll make sure he doesn't have to see me anymore. I refuse to give up my dreams and to live alone just because he thinks women don't belong in space.*

Penny didn't take long to plan even as her heart ached. She couldn't believe she'd allowed herself to succumb to the hormonal imbalance known as love, especially since she knew better. Heartbreak or not, she knew what she needed to do. *Leave my husband.*

* * * *

“We should be arriving home within three full cycles. I will drop off the human as per custom and then, with your permission, I will return to space to complete my remaining missions.” Reg said the words to the Oracle with a heavy heart. After last night's long talk with Penny where, for once, her loquaciousness hadn't driven him nuts, it occurred to him to take Penny along with him as she wanted. But policy with alien females was very clear. They needed to be brought planetside for their own safety, something he could understand after the terror he'd felt when he'd seen her in danger and knowing now just how delicate she was. The thought of her coming to harm made his blood run cold with dread.

“I realize that usually it's protocol for females to reside here at home, however we have great need of you in space. I also have a confession to make. Penny was chosen long ago to be your mate.”

Reg stared at the screen and the veiled Oracle. “What do you mean? I told you I had no interest in mating.”

“You only believed that. We knew you would change your mind once you met the right female.”

“We? What do you mean we?”

“Myself and your spirit ancestors, of course. They’ve been looking for a long time for the right female and then had to manipulate certain situations to put the female in a place where you would have to rescue her.”

“You’ve manipulated me this entire time just so I would mate with Penny?” Reg waited for the anger over the Oracle’s actions to hit, but when it didn’t, he realized something. He didn’t regret meeting or even marrying Penny. She might have given him a heart condition, but she also made him feel alive. *And gives me more pleasure than I ever imagined.*

“Manipulate is such an ugly word, my child. Think of it more as nudging you in the right direction to ensure your future well being and happiness.”

Reg wasn’t about to let the Oracle off that easy, even if he wouldn’t give Penny up for anything. “And how is grounding me planetside by mating me supposed to make me happy?”

“Who said anything about forcing you to live planetside?”

Reg dared not breathe, certain he’d misheard the Oracle. “But that is custom when a warrior mates.”

“For other couples, perhaps. We need your experience in space, but at the same time, it would be unfair to deprive Penny of her mate by forcing her stay at home. Then there’s the fact that she’s an intelligent scientist whose fresh outlook might provide our own researchers with unique insight. Your ancestors didn’t just choose any female for you. They chose your soul mate, one who will join you as a partner on space missions.”

Reg wanted to whoop with joy. *I can stay in space and have Penny too!* But then a sobering idea hit him. “But what about if she becomes pregnant?”

“Unless there are grave health issues, there is no medical reason why you shouldn’t have healthy children. Of course, we would like to see you planetside when the time for the birth approaches just in case complications arise, but the medtech units on board are well equipped to deal with most situations. Now, shall I assume then that you and your new mate will continue your work in space together?”

He only remained stunned for a moment before beaming. “It would be our great pleasure to continue on as galactic travelers for the empire. However, if I might make one small request. I believe that perhaps it might

be more prudent to assign us less risky missions, especially given Penny's curious nature." Let some other unattached warrior visit the dangerous outposts. It was a compromise he could live with to keep Penny safe and both of them happy. He couldn't wait to tell her.

Reg signed off with the Oracle and drummed his fingers, wondering how to tell Penny without making it sound like he'd caved completely to her demands. *Maybe I should make her convince me a little more. Make it seem like I'm giving in reluctantly and, at the same time, wring some promises from her to keep her safe.* The thought of a repeat of last night's attempt to change his mind made him hard and eager to seek out his wife.

"Ralph, where's Penny?" The AI didn't reply, which made Reg frown and he went to call for him again when the object of his thoughts spoke.

"I'm right behind you," she said.

He turned to see her looking fresh and beautiful, her hands clasped behind her back. His body reacted like it hadn't just spent several intimate moments with her just a short cycle ago. With a smile, he bent to brush his lips across hers.

Her arms came around him and she pressed herself against him, her lips hot and eager against his.

Amidst his building arousal, he felt a prick in his shoulder. He pulled his head back and looked down at her with incomprehension.

"I'm sorry," she said, her green eyes swimming in tears. "But I refuse to be some baby making machine stuck on an alien planet by myself." As Reg felt his consciousness slipping and his knees sagging, he heard her whisper, "I love you."

Chapter Fourteen

Reg regained consciousness on the command room floor, his head pillowed and his body covered in a blanket. With a curse, he jumped up.

“Ralph, where’s Penny?” The AI still wasn’t replying and Reg took off jogging to check the ship. It didn’t take him long to determine Penny was gone.

He returned to the ship’s command center and paced the area in front of the view screen.

She left me! He’d known she was upset, but to do something this drastic... Why couldn’t she have waited? He now wished he’d told her immediately about the Oracle’s permission for them to travel together. Not that Penny had even given him a chance.

No matter, he’d find her. “Ralph? By the moons, computer, I know you must have helped her. Speak to me, dammit.”

Silence reigned, but across the view screen, words appeared.

Penny disabled my auditory function so that I couldn’t warn you of what she planned. That human is much too smart for her own good. She managed to override my controls and teleport herself off ship.

Reg laughed. He couldn’t help himself. Both he and a super computer outwitted by a wisp of a female. *And to think I thought she lacked the strength to survive in space.* Immediately on the heels of that thought, though, was the realization that she wasn’t on this ship, but somewhere on a strange planet—alone. Unacceptable. For all he knew, she could be in danger at this very moment.

“Ralph, do you know where she is?”

Not exactly. She wiped the records of planetary halts and transports, but she was unaware of my separate backup system. You’ll have to manually connect me to it that I might upload the information missing from my databanks. While I do that, I don’t suppose you would restore my vocal abilities?

“I’ll get right on it.” He needed something to distract him while Ralph pinpointed his mate’s location. He just hoped he arrived before danger found her.

* * * *

Penny awoke to a hand clasped over her mouth. The inside of the survival tent was dark, but she'd recognize those glowing violet eyes anywhere. Her husband had found her.

I should have known I wouldn't get away that easily. Well, if he thinks I'm going to let him drag me back to his ship just so he can dump me, he's got another thing coming.

She bit him. With a curse, he pulled his hand away.

“Go away.”

“No,” he said calmly, pulling her from the tent.

She breathed in the fresh air of the sentient pink planet she'd chosen as a perfect place to hide and research while waiting for another alien vessel to pass by and hitch a ride on. When she'd first arrived, she'd sighed in relief when she hadn't convulsed at the first inhalation of the strange atmosphere. Her research had claimed the air wasn't harmful, but she'd had her doubts. With nothing more dangerous than four eared bunnies, and with tantalizing reports that the planet itself was alive, she'd thought the strange world would act as a salve to her bruised emotions, but now, seeing him again, even annoyed as she was, she couldn't deny she was glad to see him. But that didn't mean she'd willingly go back to a life of genteel slavery. She prepared to tell him so, but before she could speak, he'd scooped her up—caveman style. He flung her over his shoulder so that her head and arms dangled down his back.

“What do you think you're doing?” she said in a disgruntled tone—an attempt to hide her mounting elation.

He smacked her lightly on her bottom. “Silence, woman. I am abducting you that I might probe you as all aliens do to their captives.”

Penny gaped at his back, stunned speechless, then she giggled. “Don't you mean rescue me?”

“I tried rescuing last time and all it got me was a lot of headaches and questions. This time, I'm doing it my ancestor's way. I'm kidnapping you for

my mate, so now be quiet that I might get us safely to my ship to have my way with you. Well, right after we get the punishment out of the way.”

Penny remembered her last punishment and her cheeks—facial ones this time—burned with heat. She squirmed half-heartedly, moisture pooling in her sex as he slapped her ass again, then caressed it.

“I didn’t do anything wrong,” she stated stubbornly. “I told you I wasn’t interested in being some stay-at-home wife.”

“And I should have listened to you.” His reply stunned her into silence. “I’m the one who should be punished for trying to force you to be someone you aren’t. I’d come to that realization after our talk, even if I didn’t know what to do about it. Even better, the Oracle realized it, too.”

“What are you saying?” She was afraid she’d misunderstood. She still couldn’t believe he’d come back to find her. *He wouldn’t have done that if he didn’t care.*

“Congratulations, my wife, you and I are now both officially in the service of the Oracle and Xaanda.”

“You mean we’re both going to travel the stars and see...everything?” Penny grinned.

“Yes, now be quiet that I might properly abduct you. It has been a whole cycle since I probed you and I find myself in great need.”

And he isn’t the only one, she thought, her cleft already damp with arousal.

Moments later, they found themselves in the dimly lit decontamination chamber. Reg let her slide to the floor, but held her loosely in his arms.

“I am sorry,” he said seriously. “Please don’t ever run from me again. It made my heart condition even worse.”

“What heart condition?” she asked with concern.

“Since I have met you, my heart has this strange tendency of racing or stopping, and when you disappeared, I thought it had shriveled up and died.”

Penny grinned at him. “Gee, it sounds just like what my heart has done since the day you rescued me.”

“Abducted,” he corrected. “I wish for our children to think we met in a time honored fashion.”

“Speaking of babies, I think you’re going to have to show me, naked of course, just how a big alien like yourself impregnates a woman. I think it might take several tries.”

“Really?” His smile beamed brightly and before she could laugh at his eager look, he’d torn her clothes from her body and stripped himself. Then, he did something surprising. He knelt on the floor in front of her, head bowed.

“What are you doing?” she asked. “Is this another type of ritual?”

“I am awaiting my punishment, wife. Do as you will.”

Penny bit her lip to hold in a giggle. “Get up. Why don’t we call ourselves even and forget about this punishing stuff? Well, maybe not the spanking bit. That part is kind of fun.”

She’d no sooner spoken than she found herself lifted in the air. Reg held her up effortlessly, his swollen cock probing at her damp sex. With a thrust, he sheathed himself and his fingers clutched at her buttocks to balance her. Penny wrapped her legs tight around her husband’s blue waist.

“I love you,” she said before kissing him.

“You are mine,” he replied against her mouth. His claim, while not a declaration of love, warmed her. She hugged him tight as he pumped her.

As the decontamination chamber cleansed them and heightened her pleasure with its tickling touch, she visited the stars with Reg, twice.

Epilogue

Reg watched his mate on her hands and knees examining the silken pink grass of the sentient planet they'd come back to visit. He never tired of watching her, and he'd even become used to her endless questions. He especially enjoyed her inquisitiveness in the bedroom, where she delighted in exploring his body over and over, as well as experimenting with techniques. Although he did draw the line at her taking notes during the act. He instead allowed her to videotape them, although he wasn't sure what value the videos had from a scholastic point of view, for whenever she watched them, the result was the same. They both ended up naked and fucking wildly. Not that he was complaining. He didn't mind sacrificing himself for science.

Ralph's voice crackled in his ear piece. "So, when are we upgrading to a bigger ship? I've got my eye on that new luxury model with the improved warp drive."

"Bigger ship? What for?" Reg replied absently, smiling when Penny, with a giggle, threw herself on the tickling grass and rolled.

"Why, for the baby, of course. It's going to need its own room and a nanny bot. Did I mention I met an AI one last time we were planetside?"

"A baby? What baby?" Reg grinned when Penny began flinging clothes in his direction.

Ralph interrupted the visual strip tease. "Surely the two of you didn't think with all the sex you were having that she wouldn't get pregnant?"

Reg's smile froze on his face and he fought the panic that tightened his throat. "But..."

"And just so you know, the baby is perfectly healthy. I can't believe I'm going to be the first AI uncle. Wait until I brag to my predecessor, Alphie."

Reg tuned out the computer and worked on controlling his breathing so he wouldn't hyperventilate. Penny, pregnant? By the moons, it would explain several oddities, like her sudden liking of his native food and the fullness of her breasts and waist. Dear moons, a baby with blue skin and red hair and...

Suddenly, Reg grinned. He and Penny were going to be parents.

“Wife,” he shouted, striding toward where she lay in the grass now fully naked, a blissful look on her face.

She opened one eye and peered at him. “Shh. I’m researching,” she said, ruining her serious mien with a giggle as the grass tickled her again.

“I’ve just received news that you’re about to embark on a huge research project.”

“I am?” She sat up, eyes wide with anticipation. “Are we going to go native with some indigenes? Discover a new solar system? Examine some ancient ruins?”

“Even more exciting,” he said, grinning. “And you even get a title.”

“I do. Stop teasing me. Tell me.”

“Your new title is…” Reg drew out the moment. “Mother.” Her jaw dropped and she said not a word, just stared at him bug-eyed. “I think you should title this project ‘The Effects Of Alien Probing.’”

Instead of replying, her eyes rolled up in her head and she fainted. It was quite illogical given she had to know this would happen, but vastly entertaining. Reg sat beside her and pillowed her head in his lap, brushing her red hair from her face.

It still amazed him that a simple rescue mission had changed his life, all for the better. To his wife’s amusement, he’d finally discovered his heart problems were nothing more than a case of human love. And having had a taste of that addictive emotion, he’d give up even the stars to be with his Earthling soul mate, forever.

The End

About the Author

Eve Langlais, who is in her mid thirties, has been married 11 years to a wonderful man who gave her three beautiful, but distracting children aged ten, seven, and four. A military brat, she was born in British Columbia but ended up living all across Canada. She now resides with her family, that also includes two cats and a guinea pig, in the historic town of Bowmanville, Ontario. If you want to get to know her better visit her website at <http://www.Evelanglais.com> or friend her on Facebook.