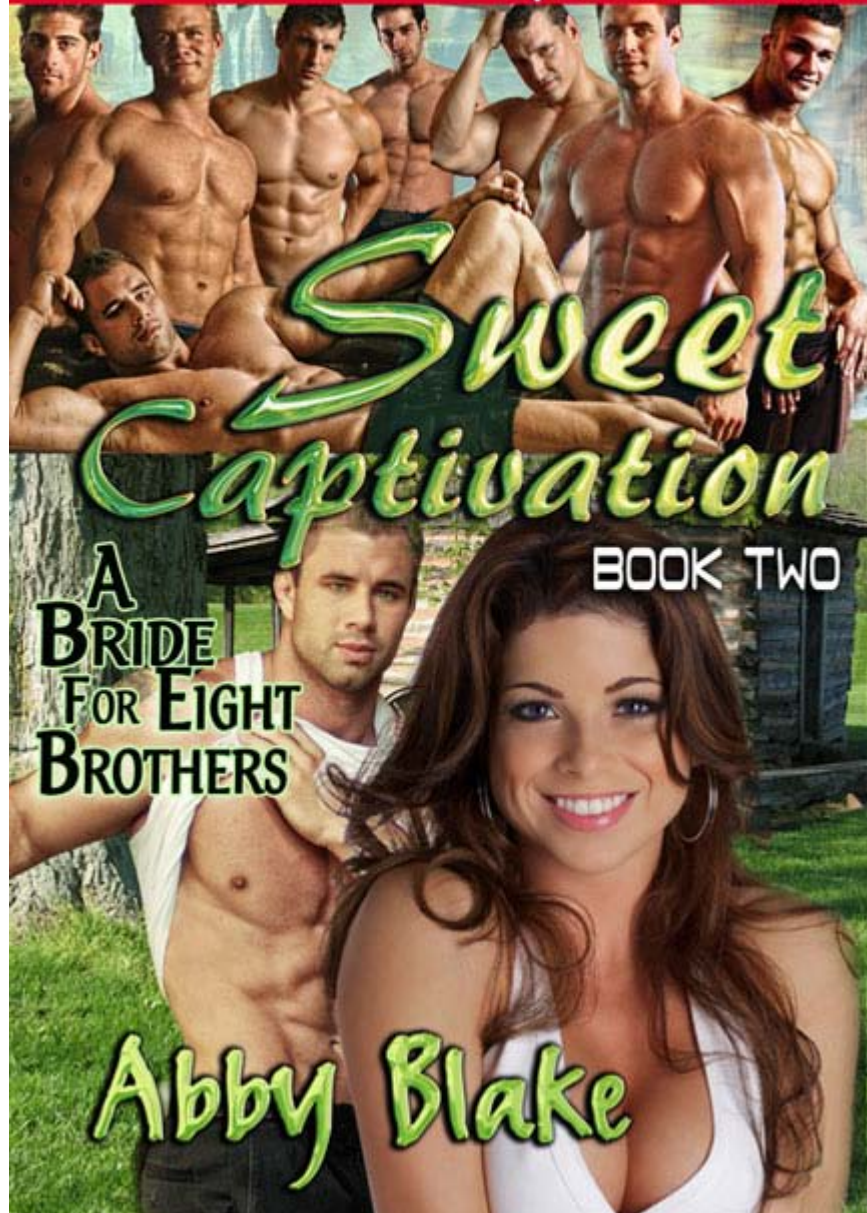


Siren Publishing

LoveXtreme Forever



Sweet Captivation

BOOK TWO

A
BRIDE
FOR EIGHT
BROTHERS

Abby Blake

A Bride for Eight Brothers 2

Sweet Captivation

Unable to return to the ice planet due to her pregnancy, Mikayla is left on Earth with Lachlan while the rest of her husbands complete their contract. But an unexpected midnight visitor causes concern. He's injured, frightened and offensive, but he's also Matt's twin brother, Bryce.

When Brock is injured and stranded at the bottom of a snow crevice, Lachlan is called back to the ice planet to help rescue his brother. He has no choice but to leave his wife's safety in the hands of a man he barely knows.

But when trouble comes looking for Bryce, will Mikayla end up in the line of fire?

Genre: Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Science Fiction

Length: 24,349 words

SWEET CAPTIVATION

A Bride for Eight Brothers 2

Abby Blake

LOVEXTREME FOREVER



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DEDICATION

For Alexandra

SWEET CAPTIVATION

A Bride for Eight Brothers 2

ABBY BLAKE

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Chapter One

“But I want to come with you,” Mikayla said, trying to hide the fact that she felt like a five year old throwing a tantrum. She was being unreasonable, she knew it, but somehow couldn’t seem to stop herself. “I don’t care about your contracts. I want to be with my husbands. *All* of my husbands,” she added when it looked like Peter was about to be the voice of reason. She didn’t want reason. She wanted her own way. She barely refrained from stamping her foot like a recalcitrant child.

It was very clear to her on an intellectual level that they were trying to protect her, but thanks to pregnancy hormones her intellect and swinging moods just didn’t seem to align. Hell, she should be grateful not to have to return to that horrible, icy rock laughingly called a planet. It may have been rich in natural resources but it was about as inhospitable as a place could get. So were the people. Add the fucked-up laws that outlawed pregnancy but not rape, and the three hundred to one ratio of men to women, and it was the last place she should want to go. Nobody had even bothered to give the planet a proper name. It was just known as M723gc.

“Honey,” Matt said quietly as he pulled her into his embrace. “I’m sorry that we have to leave you so soon, but we need to finish the job.

It's not just about the money. It's also a matter of honor. We signed a contract. We should see it through." She squeezed her eyes closed, trying to will away the stinging in her nose and the tears in her eyes. Damn it. She knew they wouldn't leave her behind if they had any other choice, but that didn't mean she had to like it.

"And besides," Lachlan said as he pulled her from Matt's embrace. "I'll be here keeping you so busy," he said with a wink, "that you won't even notice the others are even missing."

Mikayla saw Brock stiffen at Lachlan's choice of words. They'd all treated her like spun glass ever since she'd announced her pregnancy, and it was starting to grate on her nerves. Never had she felt so loved and protected and so goddamned frustrated in all of her life. Hell, maybe she should stamp her foot like a five-year-old. Maybe then she'd get one of Lachlan's heavenly spankings.

A shiver of arousal wound through her as memories—Lachlan's pampering, Brock's bondage play, John's amazingly talented tongue, Matt's need to be in charge, Ryan and Ty's playful lovemaking, and Peter's gentle devotion—wound through her memory. She wanted to melt into their arms and demand that none of them leave her, ever.

But even as the thoughts and memories and sense of impending loss conspired to bring her to her knees, Matt held her cradled against him, soothing her with his solid warmth and gentle touch.

"Sweetheart," Ryan said as he pressed up against her back and kissed her neck gently. "Let's not spend the next three days fighting. I can think of far more pleasurable ways to spend our time together." Matt kissed the top of her head, moving away to make room for Ty to take his place. Pressed between the twins, Mikayla felt a small measure of peace. It was only four months—four long, depressingly lonely months—but she'd survive somehow. She glanced at Lachlan, feeling a little guilty for her thoughts. He'd be here with her, but in some ways that made her worry more than anything. Of all the brothers, her relationship with Lachlan was the least comfortable. She loved him dearly, but their connection seemed more rooted in the

physical aspect of lovemaking and Dom-sub play than any sense of companionship. Considering that he'd yet to touch her, even casually, since she'd announced her pregnancy, she felt very unsure of his feelings.

"Hey," Ty said as he lifted her into his arms and began walking toward his and Ryan's living quarters. "Concentrate, darlin'. Ryan and I are going to make sure you don't forget who your favorites are."

She laughed then, the sadness lifting a little as Ryan pressed a kiss to her lips and then turned to open the door.

"Favorites, huh?" It had been a running gag for a while now. Even knowing that she loved them all individually in different ways, the brothers had been happily one-upping each other with claims of being her favorite husband. Ryan and Ty at least were willing to share the title.

Only a few weeks ago Ty would've dropped her unceremoniously into the middle of the bed, but of course now that she carried their baby, he placed her in the middle of the bed gently. She wanted to growl in frustration—she was pregnant, not dying—but was quickly distracted by Ryan as he slid onto the mattress and kissed her like there was no tomorrow.

Damn. Tears filled her eyes again, and she felt Ty climb onto the bed, spooning behind her and encouraging her to lay her head on Ryan's shoulder. They'd always slept this way back on the mining planet, and a part of her was both relieved and dismayed that they would pull away from the sexual release she desperately needed. Maybe if any of them had just fucked her like they'd done before her pregnancy, she wouldn't feel so off balance,

She had her eyes closed and her limbs entwined with the twins, so the soft click of a door closing had her sitting bolt upright quickly.

"Who?" she asked anxiously. They'd only been back on Earth for a short time, but it had become obvious that her husbands preferred to have their own living areas within a larger structure. None of the

brothers entered the others' suites without invitation. Only Mikayla was welcome to come and go as she pleased.

"Just Brock and Lachlan leaving," Ryan said as he ran soothing fingers through her hair.

"Why were they here?" she asked in confusion.

"To supervise us," Ty said with a snort. "It seems that they appointed themselves to protect you from our predatory ways."

"S-supervise?" Mikayla asked as liquid heat pooled in her groin and made her pussy tingle. She'd never considered it before, but making love to Ryan and Ty while Brock and Lachlan watched sent a secret thrill gliding through her veins.

Ryan must've seen the look on her face, or sensed the direction of her thoughts, because he wriggled off the bed and quickly opened the door. He whistled loudly, and a moment later Brock and Lachlan came barreling through the doorway. Their worried expressions morphed into confusion when they saw her safe and well.

"It seems that our wife is kinkier than any of us realized," Ryan said by way of explanation. Ty wriggled off the bed and began slowly peeling off her clothes. "It would seem that she is quite taken by the idea of being watched."

"Is that so?" Lachlan said with a broad grin. "Maybe we should consider joining the BDSM club while the others are working far, far away."

Brock actually growled at his brother, the noise low and threatening. Lachlan lifted his hands in surrender. "After the baby is born," he said on a sigh.

"Not even then," Ty said as he pressed a kiss to her slightly rounded belly and gently pulled her panties down her legs. Quite suddenly Mikayla realized she was naked in front of four men. Granted, they'd all seen her naked before, just not all at the same time.

"Open your legs," Brock said in his commanding Dom's voice. Mikayla shivered as her arousal spiked higher just from the sound of

his voice. She moved to comply, bending her knees slightly and letting her thighs fall open for all of the men to see.

“Beautiful,” Lachlan said as he crossed his arms and took a small step away from the bed to give Ryan room to crawl between her legs. Gentle hands kneaded the muscles in her thighs as he pressed his tongue against the place that ached for him. He lapped gently at the swollen lips, swirling his tongue around her pussy opening without actually penetrating her. He hummed against her skin and she writhed on the bed trying to get closer, trying to force his tongue onto her clit. Desperately she ran her fingers into Ryan’s hair, pressing him harder against her.

Strong hands wrapped around her wrists, removed her grip on Ryan and then stretched them above her head. Brock’s massive hand held both hers captive as he smiled down at her. She flexed her fingers, testing his hold, and he smiled even wider.

“Relax, baby girl. Ryan is going to make you feel good, aren’t you, Ryan?”

Ryan nodded his head between her thighs, tickling her tender skin with his hair and making her writhe even more. The bed dipped on either side as Ty and Lachlan each grabbed an ankle and pressed a hand against her hip bones, effectively pinning her to the bed.

She moaned at the feeling of being trapped, images of the bondage games that Lachlan had played with her swimming wildly through her brain. The way he’d made her feel, simply by restraining her and spanking, or even whipping her, had always been amazingly freeing. Ryan caressed her thighs harder as he speared his tongue deep into her pussy and found her clit with his fingers. Two mouths lapped at the hard nubs of her nipples sending heated bolts of electricity straight to her clit. She tried to jump away from the intense sensations, but they all held her still. She couldn’t move, not even an inch. Her pulse leaped higher, her breath catching as orgasm curled just below the surface.

But Ryan pulled back, and she growled in frustration. She opened her mouth to yell a thing or two about teasing, but Brock leaned forward and silenced her with the clever use of his tongue. Groaning into his mouth, she almost bit him when Ryan slid his erection into her throbbing pussy. Gently, too gently, he rode her to completion. Her orgasm swelled through her even as she tried to hold it back.

Brock stopped kissing her and lifted away. "Don't worry, baby girl," he said as he stroked her face with his rough hand, "we're only just beginning."

Ryan fell forward, careful to keep his weight off her, and kissed her gently. "I love you," he whispered. His words were so filled with emotion that she felt tears gather once more. She loved him with all of her heart, but was this crying over the littlest things going to be a permanent side effect of her pregnancy? Nine months of weeping didn't sound like a lot of fun.

Ryan kissed away her tears as she mumbled how much she loved him, too.

Then he moved away and Ty took his place. "Lift your butt, darling," he said. Lachlan helped to lift her slightly and Ty slid a pillow under her hips. Brock kissed her again as someone, probably Ty, slathered cool lubrication between her ass cheeks, working the gel deep into her back passage. No matter how many times any of them fucked her ass it still gave her a deliciously naughty feeling.

She felt the flared head of his cock press against her anal muscles, the sensation slightly uncomfortable, a moment of pressure, and then he slipped past the tight muscles and slid deep into her ass. Like Ryan, Ty set a slow pace, reverently gliding in and out of her body like she was fragile. She moaned in frustration again, this time managing to growl the words "fuck me" before Brock silenced her by filling her mouth.

But this time he used his cock.

She sucked on the thick rod in her mouth, running her tongue over and around the hard length, trying to drive him crazy, trying to make

him lose control. But the angle was awkward, and she struggled to keep him in her mouth.

Ty pulled out of her ass, removed the pillow from under her hips and turned her onto her side. Brock slid backwards, balancing on the edge of the mattress as he lined up his cock with her mouth. He pushed deep, hitting the back of her throat and caressing her face as she worked to overcome the gag reflex the way they'd taught her. As soon as she swallowed Brock groaned, and Ty slid his hard cock back into her ass.

They both moved a little more forcefully, and she moaned her appreciation as they set a faster pace, pushing into her body in tandem, ramping her excitement higher. She felt someone lift her leg and then a thick finger pushed into her pussy, fucking her as yet another hand found her clit.

Much better! Awash in sensation, Mikayla concentrated on holding back her excitement, determined to let her climax build. But the men fucking her had other ideas.

"Come for us," Brock demanded in the deep voice she'd never been able to disobey. Orgasm ripped through her, the men pumping, fucking, tweaking, tickling her into riotous sensation. Every muscle quivered with her release, the incredible feelings ebbing only slightly before all four of them pushed her into sensual overload again, and Brock and Ty released their seed into her body. She swallowed, licking Brock clean and savoring his salty taste, and then tightened her anal muscles around Ty's slowly softening cock. Both men groaned but neither tried to pull away.

"I love you, Mikayla," Brock said as he ran his thumb over her forehead and down the side of her face. "I'm going to ache every day until we get home."

She finally released his cock from her mouth, another plea to let her go with them almost escaping her wilting control. She'd demanded, she'd argued, and she'd pouted more in the last twenty-four hours than she had in the whole time they'd been together, and

she was sick and tired of her own unreasonable behavior. Mikayla knew the mining planet was a dangerous place—especially for women. Hell, if Matt hadn't found her that first night, she wouldn't even have known the brief time she'd enjoyed with them so far. And besides, they would be back quickly.

But every reasonable, sensible, obvious thought that went through her head was overridden by one reality—she'd miss them terribly. She was on the verge of crying again when she finally realized that Lachlan hadn't even gotten undressed.

"Lachlan?" she asked, feeling even more confused.

"Don't fret, little one," he said as he eased away from the bed and stood up. "We have plenty of time." She must've looked unconvinced because he winked and smiled devilishly. "Don't forget I'm going to get you all to myself for four months."

* * * *

Three days passed in a blur. Matt and John and Peter all managed goodbyes in their own unique ways. Only John treated her the same way he'd done before her pregnancy, but considering he preferred oral sex over everything else, there wasn't any real concern about hurting the baby. Even Peter who'd loved her so gently from the beginning had managed to be even more gentle, more caring, more loving.

She insisted on traveling to the spaceport to farewell them properly, but the moment they arrived in the crowded departures lounge she realized she'd made a terrible decision. The emotion of the moment combined with the heat and noise of the crowd conspired against her, making her feel faint. She'd just watched them all walk away when her knees wobbled a moment, and she slid gratefully into unconsciousness.

Chapter Two

Lachlan saw her face lose all color a moment before she stumbled. He already had her in his arms by the time she collapsed. He glanced back quickly, realizing that his brothers had already boarded the spacecraft and were unlikely to have seen their wife swoon. In a way he was grateful. The last thing he needed was six more opinions on what he should do first.

Making the decision quickly, he swung her limp form into his arms and headed straight for the exit. He knew it wasn't unusual for pregnant women to swoon, especially in the early stages of pregnancy, but he had every intention of getting her out of the crowd and to the doctor's office quickly.

She woke almost as soon as the cooler air hit her face. She smiled sleepily, looking adorably mussed, before panic filled her eyes and she stiffened in his arms. "The baby?" she whispered fearfully.

"Shhh," he said quietly, "you just fainted. But to be safe, we'll stop by your doctor on the way home."

She still looked a little pale, but already she seemed more comfortable.

Less than an hour later the doctor agreed with Lachlan's opinion, and so he led his much relieved wife back to the car and drove her home.

* * * *

Mikayla smiled sleepily as Lachlan tucked her into Brock's bed. She was a little disconcerted by the fact that he wasn't putting her in

his own bed but felt too wiped out to even consider asking why. The house felt so empty, but instead of the crushing loneliness she'd expected she actually felt a measure of relief that Lachlan was the only husband hovering over her. He kissed her forehead tenderly and then straightened and left the room.

He returned with a glass of water for her and then went to leave again.

"Lachlan, is everything okay?"

"Of course," he answered quickly, maybe a little too quickly.

"Then, will you hold me for a while? Just until I fall asleep." Mikayla had already figured out his reasoning for putting her in Brock's bed. Not only was it in the same suite as Lachlan's but was close enough for him to hear her call if she needed him. The only problem was she needed him always.

He looked a little discomforted by her request, but then he smiled that handsome smile he always used as a type of shield to cover his emotions and then slid onto the bed beside her. He didn't get under the covers, just lay on top, but when he encouraged her to rest her head on his shoulder, she forgot everything but her need to be held.

Hours later she woke alone for the first time in over a year. She briefly considered crawling into Lachlan's bed with him, but exhaustion pulled her back into sleep before she could figure out if it was the right thing to do.

* * * *

Three weeks later Mikayla was climbing the walls. Not in a literal sense—no doubt her overprotective husbands would have something to say about that—but rather in a boredom meets frustration meets worry kind of way.

Matt, John, and Peter had contacted her every day. Brock, Ty, and Ryan were off base and wouldn't be able to contact her for at least another week or so. But the daily contact just wasn't enough. She'd

gone from looking after the needs of seven men to twiddling her thumbs as Lachlan tried to ignore her.

As if she'd conjured him with her thoughts, the man himself wandered into the room. She saw him hesitate before continuing through the door, and he seemed to make a huge effort to look casual as he dropped a brief kiss on her cheek. Her cheek for fuck's sake? The man had gone from spanking and flogging her ass to pecking her on the cheek like some prudishly formal character in a historical novel.

"Lach?" she asked, deciding to take the bull by the horns. "Tell me what's wrong."

He looked surprised, but she refused to take her eyes off him, knowing it would irritate his dominant tendencies. Back on the mining planet she'd always pushed his limits, challenging him to take control. Brock had once explained to her that in BDSM terms it was called topping from the bottom, but Lachlan had seemed comfortable with her sassy attitude and more than happy to have a reason to spank her. Fortunately, she was very fond of Lachlan's spankings, so it worked out quite nicely.

But their time on Earth had taken a strange turn, and she now realized that not only was he acting differently but she hadn't really been the sassy sub she'd been before either. "Nothing's wrong, little one," he said dismissively as he turned toward the television and used the remote to flick through the channels.

Mikayla could feel her temper starting to rise. More than once, she'd snapped at him in the past few weeks, but he'd merely smiled indulgently and gone to fix or change or collect whatever it was she was throwing a tantrum about. Her own childish behavior was making her even crazier.

"Then why haven't you touched me since we landed on Earth?"

"I've touched you," he said, sounding amused. "In fact, I touched you a moment ago."

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it,” she said as she climbed out of her chair and stalked toward him. For a moment she caught a glint of worry on his face, but then that annoying, confident smile slipped back into place and his emotions were hidden once more. She stopped in front of his chair, leaned over, and made certain he looked directly into her eyes. “I want my Dom back. I want my ass spanked. I want my husband to fuck me the way he used to.”

“Mikayla,” he growled in the deep voice he used when she was pushing his buttons just a little too enthusiastically. It used to precede a ball gag and sensual flogging, but today she didn’t hold out that hope. Lachlan had been too restrained in the past few weeks for him to give in so easily now.

“Lachlan,” she said, trying to match his tone of voice. “I need you. Please, please, please spank me.”

He laughed quietly and pulled her onto his lap—trouble was she was still sitting upright. Lachlan cradled her against his hard chest for a moment and then went to pick up the television remote again. Mikayla saw red. She couldn’t have been more direct if she’d hit him upside the head. If pleading didn’t work, what the hell would?

Heat burned through her chest as humiliation, hormones, and downright frustration gathered together and melted her control. Damn, she was throwing a tantrum again, and she didn’t even know how to stop it.

She managed to hold the tears at bay for all of five seconds before a sob tore from her throat and the floodgates opened. She tried to climb off his lap, and for one horrifying moment she thought he was going to let her.

But then his arms tightened, holding her trapped, holding her still as he rocked her slightly in his arms. “I’m sorry, little one,” he said quietly as he ran his fingers through her hair and down the length of her spine over and over. “I just don’t want to hurt you.”

“You’ve never hurt me. Why would you think that?”

“Because of your pregnancy. Because I’d never forgive myself if something happened to our baby.” He stopped caressing her spine and ran his hand through his own hair, clearly agitated. “Because I want you more than ever, and I don’t think I can be gentle.”

That last admission went a long way to salving the raw feeling his apparent rejection had created. But it wasn’t enough, not for either of them.

“Make love to me, please, Lachlan. I promise that I won’t let you hurt me.” When he looked unconvinced, she reached up to graze her teeth against the underside of his jaw. “I’m barely seven weeks pregnant. The baby is smaller than my finger nail. Please, Lachlan, you won’t hurt me or our child.”

Feeling his capitulation—and the growing erection nestled under her ass—Mikayla tangled her fingers in his hair and dragged his head down for what she hoped was a control-stealing kiss. He resisted for a moment, but then groaned and thrust his tongue into her mouth. Over and over, he plundered her moist recess, relearning her shape, refueling her hunger. She writhed in his lap as she reached for the buttons on his shirt. Instantly needy, her fingers shook with her intense arousal, and she only managed to fumble a couple open before Lachlan lifted her away from him and arranged her on the sofa on her hands and knees.

He lifted the skirt she wore and dragged her panties to pool at her knees. She moaned as he caressed her ass with his warm hand. “Are you comfortable, sub?” he asked, the voice pure Dom.

“Yes, Lachlan,” she replied quickly. She was so turned on she could feel her juices already gliding down her legs. Her arms quivered with her excitement, and she could barely breathe, but she felt very, very comfortable, and oh, so fucking horny.

She wiggled her ass, trying to get him to spank her, but he chuckled and moved his hand down her thigh. Mikayla sighed quietly and tried to hide just how irritated she felt. She’d forgotten this part.

Whenever she'd pushed him just a little too far, Lachlan always responded by slowing down the love play.

He'd once tied her over a spanking chair and then sat beside her caressing her ass for at least twenty minutes while he finished the end of the book he'd been reading. By the time he'd taken his whip out of the cupboard she'd been ready to explode in more ways than one. Arousal shivered through her at the memory, and she felt her pussy squeeze tight and leak more cream down her thigh.

"What are you thinking about, Mikayla? You're on the verge of orgasm, and I haven't even smacked this delicious ass once."

She thought about lying but realized he would probably pick up on that—Lachlan was an expert in body language—so she settled for a half truth. "My last spanking, Sir," she answered quickly. As much as she enjoyed the bullwhip on her ass, she knew there was no way Lachlan would use it while she was pregnant, and she had no wish to break the mood at this particular moment. She was so close to being spanked she could almost taste it.

The first slap was barely a tap on her cheek but she stifled the sigh and waited for another. The second wasn't much better but the third made her squeak with surprise. It was much harder than the first two, maybe not as hard as usual, but certainly closer to what she needed.

"Lachlan, please," she begged, forgetting that he would likely slow the action even more in response. But today, for whatever reason, he gave her what she asked for and smacked her ass and thighs over and over until she was moaning in ecstasy and shaking with the need to come. Only the fact that Lachlan hadn't given her permission held the climax at bay.

Two fingers pushed into her wet pussy as a rough hand caressed the heated flesh on her ass. "You look so pretty like this," he said, moving his hands slowly. "Your ass is such a lovely shade of pink, and your pussy is swollen and weeping for my cock."

She moaned at his words, a sensual haze fogging her brain and narrowing her focus to only this one man. “Please,” she begged as he finger fucked her in slow, lazy motions. “Lachlan, please.”

She wriggled her ass, trying to force him to move faster. But he withdrew instead. She half-growled, but the hard slap on her thigh stopped the noise. God, the things this man could do to excite her. She quivered, her arms shaking, her breath catching, her pussy pulsing. Again he slapped her, and again. “Come for me,” he growled as two fingers squeezed her clit. She screeched as a powerful orgasm ripped through her. The pent up need, the weeks of restraint, the relief of finally being fucked properly burst from her, zinging every nerve ending, pounding every muscle, stealing every breath.

When the maelstrom of sensations finally settled into a quiet hum she finally realized that Lachlan had pulled her onto his lap and caressed the tender flesh on her ass and thighs. She tried to sit up, anxious that he wasn’t fucking her like he would’ve so many weeks ago, but Lachlan held her close and whispered, “Stay still, little one. Let me comfort my sub the way I need to.”

To anyone else those words might’ve sounded straight from the Dom’s handbook, but she heard the slight catch in his voice, the small tremor in his arms. She stayed still, giving him what he needed, relaxing into his chest the way he wanted her to.

She woke hours later. The television played infomercials for a gadget that seemed to be an item no one would ever want to live without. And if she bought it now, she could have two. She giggled as she remembered practically the same commercial playing twenty years ago. Some things just never changed.

Lachlan woke suddenly, his arms closing harder around her at the sound.

“Sorry to wake you,” she said, not really feeling sorry at all. She angled her head to try and kiss him, hoping to get back to what they’d been doing before she’d fallen asleep. He groaned as he took control of the kiss, his hands roaming over every inch of flesh he could reach.

Considering she still had her panties tangled around her knees he could reach quite a lot. His finger had just started stroking the slippery flesh of her slit when the door-chime startled them both.

Shit! That was way too loud in the middle of the fucking night.

Lachlan's grip tightened as he reached for the remote and flicked to the video feed from the front door surveillance camera. Mikayla tried to move to get a clearer look at the man who would visit in the middle of the night, but Lachlan held her against him even harder and she got the impression that he didn't want her to see whoever was at the door.

"What do you want?" he asked aggressively.

"Now, bro, don't be like that. Aren't you going to welcome me with open arms and all that, you know, prodigal son bullshit?"

Son? Lachlan was only early thirties, and the brief glimpse of this man suggested he was about the same age, so he couldn't mean son, not literally. Lachlan must've sensed the confusion swirling through her brain because he explained in an irritated sounding voice.

"Bryce is Matt's twin brother." Twin brother? Another brother? She'd been with them for over a year, and none of them had mentioned that Matt had a twin brother. She opened her mouth to ask a million questions, but Lachlan lifted her off his lap and onto her feet in front of him. He frowned when he realized where her panties were and then leaned over and slid them back up. "Go to bed," he said in the Dom voice he expected her to obey. "I'll deal with this and join you shortly."

"But," she started to say, but he cut her off with a finger over her lips.

"No 'buts.' Behave, little one, and I'll explain later."

He physically turned her around and sent her on her way with a soft tap on her ass. Confused and needing answers, she obeyed him... just this once.

Chapter Three

Lachlan opened the door, anger still riding him. He didn't want Mikayla hurt, and he realized he'd do anything to protect her from this spoiled, selfish asshole. Bryce was just about as opposite as one could get to Matt. Despite the fact that they were twins, they were nothing alike. Matt was loyal, steadfast, honest, and reliable. Bryce simply wasn't.

Hell, none of them had seen or heard from him in nearly ten years. Why the fuck would he turn up now?

A quick glance at the complicated looking brace wrapped around Bryce's leg answered that question. Looking more closely at his long lost brother, Lachlan realized Bryce's pale complexion and tight skin around his mouth were likely due to pain.

Damn.

Lachlan knew he couldn't turn him away. Family or not, asshole or not, Bryce was in need of assistance and Lachlan's instinct had always been to help anyone he could.

Double damn.

"Come on," he said gruffly as he stepped out the door and slid a supportive arm around the injured man. Sweat beaded Bryce's face by the time Lachlan had him settled on the nearest lounge. "Do you have pain meds?"

Bryce shook his head wearily, and Lachlan wondered why the hell Bryce wasn't still in hospital. It was obvious by the brace that he'd been injured quite severely and had most likely shattered or crushed his thigh bone.

In the end it didn't take a genius to figure out. Bryce had a small, battered duffle bag with him and was wearing clothes that had seen much better days. It was a good bet that he had no medical insurance, no savings, and nowhere else to go.

Lachlan left the room quickly, intending to grab the strongest over the counter painkillers he could find in his bathroom. He was so busy considering options that he nearly ran right over Mikayla.

"Bed," he ordered at the same time that he went to throw her over his shoulder. At the last moment he remembered her delicate condition and lifted her to his chest, encouraging her to wrap her legs around his waist as he walked them back to his living quarters.

"He's injured," she said quietly.

"I know," he said, feeling annoyed at how complicated the situation had become because of their unexpected visitor. Lachlan had wondered how he would get through four months alone with her—four months that he would've loved to have kept her naked the whole time if only she'd not been pregnant—but now he had to figure out how to protect her from the asshole who, despite everything he'd done, was still his younger brother. "Mikayla, please, just do as I ask. I don't want him anywhere near you."

"Why?" she asked quietly. If she'd been belligerent or petulant or demanding he might've stood his ground and demanded her obedience, but it was her concern and obvious compassion for a person she didn't even know that did him in.

"Because I love you too much to put you in danger. When Bryce left, he already had a criminal record and done time in prison. I have no idea how he was injured or why he's shown up here."

"But you still care for him," she said quietly. The way she said it made it obvious it wasn't a question. He nodded anyway and then kissed her softly.

"Okay, you go deal with your brother, and I'll wait for you to come to me."

He smiled, hoping it looked more sincere than worried, and then headed into the bathroom, found the meds, and left quickly.

* * * *

Cold sweat drenched Bryce when he heard a woman's voice. Shit! He shouldn't have come here. What the hell had he been thinking? He hadn't seen any of his brothers in more years than he cared to count, and it hadn't even occurred to him that things might've changed.

What if they had children?

Fuck. He needed to get out of here.

He leaned forward, trying to reach the brace on his leg. The awkward movement sent pain screaming along every nerve ending, and he gritted his teeth against the urge to vomit. He managed to wriggle halfway off the lounge before dizziness stalled his progress. He closed his eyes for a moment, but they flew open quickly when he heard someone enter the room.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Lachlan asked, sounding completely exasperated. It was the same question he'd asked Bryce the day before he'd walked out of their lives. Bryce hadn't been able to give him an answer then, at least this time he could say something.

"I'm sorry," he began as he tried again to get to his feet, "but this was a really bad idea. I should be going."

"Not a chance," Lachlan said, sounding like the bossy older brother Bryce remembered. "How'd you break the leg?"

"You know me. Give me a few beers, and I get really clumsy," he said in what he hoped was a dismissive tone. "Dude, look, you don't understand. I really shouldn't have come here."

"Why?" Lachlan asked as he handed Bryce two pain pills and a glass of water. Bryce gratefully swallowed the tablets and then leaned back, hoping that they could kick in quickly and he'd be on his way. Damn, he shouldn't have come.

"Where are the others?"

“Off planet,” Lachlan answered tersely. “Answer the question.”

“Why what?” Bryce asked trying to buy himself some time. He really hadn’t thought this through at all. He’d been wrong to involve his brothers in his problems.

“Why did you leave? Why did you come back? Why now? Why can’t you stay?” Lachlan started pacing back and forth but then seemed to realize what he was doing and stopped in the middle of the room. “Fuck, Bryce! Pick a question. Give me something here. Tell me anything.”

It hurt that Lachlan still cared. Fuck. Why would the guy care for someone who’d done nothing but cause him trouble? Bryce felt his chest squeeze as every regret he had rolled through him. He wanted nothing more than to ask for his brothers’ help, but he couldn’t be that selfish. Not now.

“Who’s the girl?” he asked, deliberately injecting his voice with disdain. Maybe if Lachlan didn’t care anymore, if Bryce managed to insult his brother enough, he would get out of here without putting anyone in danger. “Some pain slut you picked up from the club?”

“No, my wife,” Lachlan said as his eyes narrowed in anger. Wife? Oh fuck, it was a monumentally stupid idea to come here. Wife? God, he needed to get out of here. Maybe if he insulted Lachlan enough he’d be angry enough to dump his sorry ass in a cab and wave good-bye. Lord knew he wasn’t getting out of here under his own steam. If possible, his leg throbbed more now than it had the day he’d woken with it in the brace.

Trying to think clearly through the pain buzzing in his brain, Bryce came up with the only insult his overwrought mind could conjure.

“So you sharing her around or what? Isn’t that what you and Brock do? Find some little pain slut and beat her ass and fuck her until you get tired of her?”

The anger on Lachlan’s face was frightening. Hell, at this rate he was liable to strangle Bryce before he dumped him in a cab.

* * * *

Mikayla sat cross-legged in the middle of Lachlan's bed. Unable to relax enough to fall asleep and too anxious for answers, she'd settled into the uncomfortable position and waited. She had a million questions, but the one she needed to ask first was why hadn't anyone mentioned an eighth brother. It was possible that they'd all just assumed that one of the others had told her, but not even Matt had mentioned his twin. More questions rose to haunt her as she realized she'd married into a family she suddenly knew nothing about. It wasn't a pleasant feeling.

"Little one," Lachlan said from the doorway. "It's going to be okay."

"How is it going to be okay? I feel as if I don't even know any of you."

"That's not true," he said, sounding hurt, "you know us. We haven't changed simply because we left out one little detail. It's not like we ever expected to see Bryce again. He walked out on all of us years ago."

"Why didn't Matt say something?"

"I don't know why he didn't tell you, Mikayla, but I do know that he took Bryce's leaving pretty badly. They were as close as Ryan and Ty at one stage, but then Bryce started getting into trouble and things just got worse from there." Lachlan sat heavily on the bed and pulled her into his embrace. "I think in some ways Matt feels guilty for not being able to keep his twin out of trouble. I know he visited Bryce a few times when he was in prison, but something happened and Matt stopped going. When Bryce got parole he pretty much dropped out of our lives. Until today I wasn't even sure he was still alive. Although, by the looks of him, death came pretty close."

“How bad is his leg?” Mikayla couldn’t shake the feeling that there was more—much more—to the story, but without any basis for what was essentially a gut feeling she kept the observation to herself.

“Bad. I think he should still be in hospital. I doubt even the private system would release someone so badly injured, insured or not. At the very least he should be in a public hospital.”

Mikayla nodded in agreement but chewed on her lower lip for a moment before asking, “Do you think he discharged himself?”

“That’s my guess,” Lachlan said on a deep sigh. “Mikayla, I think he’s in trouble. Serious trouble this time but I’m not sure how to help him. I think taking him back to the hospital might be a very bad idea.”

“We need to call Matt,” she said decisively. “Maybe he can give us some insight. He might even want to come home for a while.” She tried to squash the annoying little thought that wanted Matt and the others home for her own selfish reasons.

“Come on,” Lachlan said as he helped her off his lap and onto her feet, “we’ll contact Matt right now.”

* * * *

Matt woke from yet another sexy dream of his wife. God, he missed her. They’d barely been gone three weeks, and already he wanted to say to hell with the contract and go back to his woman. He glanced down at the hard cock tenting his pants and wondered for about the millionth time on this trip whether it was worth risking hypothermia in an effort to deflate what seemed to be a constant erection.

He was so busy thinking of ways he could break their research contract and still keep the company financially viable that he jumped about a foot and a half in the air when his intercom buzzed.

“Matt?” Ryan’s voice was disgustingly enthusiastic, and Matt wanted nothing more than to ignore the summons and crawl back into bed.

“What?” he growled ungraciously.

“Mikayla and Lachlan are on the subspace channel and want to talk to you.” Mikayla, thank heavens. He may have spoken to her just yesterday, but he was more than happy to see her again. Lachlan, on the other hand, wasn’t such good news. In fact, Lachlan wanting to talk to him usually involved a business or contract headache that they could all live without.

Not bothering to get dressed, Matt moved quickly down the hallway and into the communications room.

“Good morning, honey,” he said, feeling in a much improved mood just knowing she could hear him. He moved to stand in front of the camera and tried to make out her image on the view screen. Damn snowstorms played havoc with reception again today.

“Matt,” she said, sounding more serious than he’d heard her in a long while, “we have a visitor that we thought you should know about.”

“A visitor? Who?” he asked, feeling dread roll through him.

“Bryce,” Lachlan said. That one single word drained all the good humor from Matt’s day.

“What does he want?” he managed to force past his clenched jaw as the familiar pain and anger churned in his belly.

“He needs help,” Mikayla said so sincerely he wanted to rage even more. Mikayla with her soft heart and willingness to forgive would be easy prey to the man he’d once called brother. Not anymore though. Bryce was as good as dead to him, and the guy should’ve had the sense to stay far, far away.

“Get him out of my house,” Matt growled. “Get him away from my wife. Get him the fuck out of our lives, and tell him never to come back. Lachlan, what the fuck were you thinking letting him in?”

Through the poor quality video feed Mikayla looked on the verge of tears, and Matt’s only regret was that he’d said the words in front of her. Bryce was dangerous. Hell, Matt had seen him at his worst.

There was no way in hell he was letting that man anywhere near his wife.

“I was thinking,” Lachlan growled almost as angrily, “that the man with a shattered femur wasn’t a serious threat in his condition.”

“Femur? Speak fucking English. No scratch that. I don’t care what language you speak. Just get him out of the fucking house.” Matt practically swelled as red hot temper spiked through him, but a moment later his wife’s voice cooled his rage quicker than a bucket of ice water over his head.

“Matt, Bryce needs us. He’s hurt, and he’s frightened, and he has nowhere else to go.”

“Honey,” he said pleading with her to understand. “Bryce is not what he seems. Please believe me when I say you aren’t safe with him. Mikayla, I don’t know what I’d do without you. Please, just stay away from Bryce.”

Fuck. Tears filmed his eyes, and he hoped like hell that the video feed on Mikayla’s end was just as fuzzy as his own.

“Matt,” Lachlan said, “I’ll keep her safe, but I really think you should consider coming home for a while. I know it’s going to fuck up the contract a little, but well, I don’t know how to explain it, but something’s not right. Bryce needs help, but the moment he realized Mikayla was here he did everything he could to get me to throw his ass back out the door.” Through the grainy image Matt saw Lachlan run his hand through his hair. He knew his eldest brother well enough to know that was a sign of extreme agitation. Lachlan was the most controlled individual he’d ever known, and the fact that Bryce’s appearance could rattle him so thoroughly was a very bad sign.

“I’ll be on the next transport. I’ll see you in four days.”

Lachlan left them then so that Matt could talk for a few moments with the woman he loved but the storm knocked out the reception before he could tell her anything important. Disappointed, angry, and frightened, Matt fell into the nearest chair and rubbed his face with both hands.

Hell. Bryce—the man Matt had witnessed murder someone—was back in their lives, and a very dangerous threat to their wife. Fuck, he should've told his brothers what he'd known a long time ago.

He'd explain it all to Peter and John, and then he'd get his ass home and protect his wife from the man he was ashamed to call his brother.

* * * *

Bryce swallowed the agony that came with every movement. Fuck. What he wouldn't give for his comfortable hospital bed, proper painkillers, and that softly spoken nurse who'd been attending him.

He closed his eyes, trying to will the pain away, but popped them open again as nightmare images replayed in his mind. He could still hear the nurse's high-pitched screaming. A noise at the doorway had him reacting quickly, but the pain in his thigh and hip threatened his sanity and he fell back onto the sofa. What did it matter anyway? If they found him and killed him, at least it would be over.

"Good, you're awake," Lachlan said in a hard voice as he came into the room. He glared at Bryce for a moment before the cold expression slipped, and Bryce saw concern peek through. Agony sliced through Bryce again, but this time it was centered in his chest. Hell, he knew Lachlan had no reason to give a damn about him, but even the thought that he still might lanced regret through him.

Lachlan stood in front of him, using his intimidating height and muscular build to best effect. "Explain," was all he said as he crossed his arms and waited.

Explaining was the last thing Bryce wanted to do, but his brother deserved to at least know how much trouble Bryce was likely to bring to him and his wife.

"What's her name?" he asked, hoping to avoid the whole someone's-trying-to-kill-me subject for just a few minutes longer.

Lachlan smirked like he understood what Bryce was doing, but he answered the question anyway. “Mikayla. Her name is Mikayla and she’s not just my wife. She belongs to Matt and John and Peter, Ryan, Ty, and Brock as well.”

“All of you?” Bryce asked, unable to keep the surprise from his voice. Even the pain couldn’t dull the fear that little tidbit of information provided. If the woman was married to all seven of his brothers, he could be very sure that she was special and absolutely irreplaceable.

Lachlan nodded and then waited for Bryce to answer his question.

“I need to leave,” Bryce said, grinding his teeth as he tried to sit up again.

“No,” Lachlan said in that voice that meant he wouldn’t budge an inch. “You need to explain what kind of trouble you’re in. Did you think I’d miss the bullet wound on your arm?”

Bryce had hardly given the injury a moment’s thought. The bullet had barely scraped the side of his arm, but he should’ve known that of all his brothers Lachlan wouldn’t mistake the burn mark for anything else. Lachlan’s army training could sure cause Bryce a huge headache. He didn’t want any of his brothers involved in his shit, but keeping Lachlan at a distance was going to be harder than he thought.

“So when do I get my turn to fuck your wife?” he asked, trying to inject as much disrespect into the words that he could muster. He hadn’t even seen the woman, had no intentions of messing with his brothers’ wife, but he had to do something to protect her.

Lachlan smiled. He *actually* smiled, and Bryce felt a surge of righteous anger pulse through him. Hell, if Lachlan wasn’t going to defend his wife, he didn’t fucking deserve her.

“I know what you’re doing,” he said amiably. “But it won’t work. It doesn’t matter what you say. I’m not kicking your sorry ass out. You’re obviously in trouble. I may even be able to help.”

Fuck, fuck, and fuck. Lachlan had always had a hero complex. Why couldn't Matt have been the one to answer the door? He would've kicked him to the curb the moment he laid eyes on him.

"Bryce," a soft, feminine voice said from the doorway, "please let us help you."

Bryce closed his eyes as tears filmed his vision. Damn pain. He felt rather than saw Lachlan head to the doorway. A swift whispered argument followed, but they both came back into the room. Shit, if the woman could win an argument with Lachlan, she was a hell of a lot stronger than Bryce had first imagined.

"Explain," Lachlan said again as he took up the same position and pose he'd held before. But this time Mikayla added in a soft voice, "Please, Bryce. Your brothers deserve an explanation."

Hell. They probably did. They deserved the truth, but Bryce's need to protect the wife they all cherished seemed to override that.

"Get her out of here," he yelled at Lachlan. "Tell your slut to get back in bed where she belongs. What sort of a Dom are you that you can't control your whore?"

Mikayla looked ready to kick his ass—something he thoroughly deserved—but instead of arguing like he'd expected, the woman burst into tears and ran from the room. Lachlan gave him a look that should've flayed the flesh from his bones and headed to the door. He turned back at the last moment and said in a resigned voice, "Well done, Bryce. You managed to make a pregnant woman cry. Are your secr—"

"Pregnant?" Bryce asked, cutting off his brother's question. "Jesus, Lachlan. Man, you've got to get me out of here. Just loan me some money and drop me at some out of the way motel. I'll lay low until my leg heals, and then I promise you'll never hear from me again."

Lachlan glanced over his shoulder, obviously concerned for his crying, pregnant wife. Fuck. Bryce watched the play of emotions on Lachlan's face, realizing with a jolt of hysteria that he'd never seen

his older brother anything but in control. Lachlan nodded stiffly and left the room.

Chapter Four

“Mikayla?” Lachlan said in his calming voice. She’d already stopped crying by the time she’d reached the bedroom, having realized that Bryce had said what he said to deliberately turn her away from him.

“I’m okay,” she reassured her husband as she climbed off the bed and into his arms. “It’s just the hormones. Any other day I would’ve realized what Bryce was up to, but with the pregnancy my emotions seem too close to the surface. I didn’t mean to worry you.”

He hugged her harder, and she took a moment to simply enjoy the closeness.

“Do you think he’s as dangerous as Matt says?”

“To be honest, I don’t know. Matt seems convinced.” She shook her head against his chest. Pulling away from him she took a seat on the edge of the bed and tried to verbalize the gut feeling she had.

“It just doesn’t add up,” she said slowly, trying to choose her words carefully and keep her emotions under control. “Matt says he’s dangerous—and he obviously knows something we don’t—but Bryce’s actions just don’t seem to be selfish enough.” Lachlan raised an eyebrow, clearly waiting for more information. “I mean if he was the self-centered criminal he pretends to be, why would he come here only to turn around and try to get us to kick him out?”

Lachlan shook his head slowly, and Mikayla tried desperately to find the words to explain. They’d been over this before. Bryce was obviously desperate enough to seek out the brothers he’d deserted so long ago, but the moment he’d learned of her presence everything had changed.

“What did he say when you told him I’m pregnant?” Lachlan looked surprised for a moment, probably having not realized that she’d still been in earshot when he said it, but he answered the question.

“He asked for money and a lift to a motel,” he answered slowly, as if he really didn’t want to tell her.

“Exactly,” Mikayla said, trying to control the little bit of optimism bubbling away inside her. “You said he has a fresh bullet wound on his arm, something that happened recently but sometime after his leg injury.” Lachlan nodded. “So he’s obviously running from someone very dangerous, and he turned to the only people he can still trust. But then he finds me here, and he does everything he can to convince us to get as far away from him as we can. That doesn’t sound like the actions of a soulless criminal. It sounds like the actions of a man trying to protect his family.”

Lachlan sat heavily on the bed beside her.

“With everything I know about the seven of you, I’m having trouble believing that Bryce could be so very different. I know I sound naïve, but I really think there is more to the story than anyone but Bryce knows.”

“Mikayla, I need you to pack some bags for us. We have a small hunting cabin in the mountains not far from here, and I think it might be a good idea to hole up there for a while. It shouldn’t be too cold this time of year, but make sure to pack at least one heavy coat. Grab some stuff from Matt’s closet for Bryce.” He turned to leave the room but came back to her and kissed her reverently.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“For what?” she asked, just a little bit startled.

“For reminding me that things aren’t always what they seem, and for verbalizing the feeling I have in my gut. You’re right. It doesn’t add up, and I’m not willing to abandon Bryce until I have unequivocal proof that our instincts are wrong.” He hugged her to him a moment

longer and then said, “I need to collect a few things and then we’ll get going.”

Once he left the room, she got quickly to work.

* * * *

Lachlan walked into the room holding what looked to be an old-fashioned hand gun. Not the plastic, electronic stun gun crap favored by law enforcement these days but a genuine Heckler & Koch P30 handgun, same as his grandfathers would’ve used a hundred years ago. Stun guns were fine if you wanted to stop someone, but old-fashioned projectile weapons were still preferred by the military because they made it that much easier to kill.

For a brief moment Bryce wondered if Lachlan was going to shoot him for upsetting his pregnant wife, but Lachlan merely moved past him and grabbed a couple of electronic hunting rifles out of a closet on Bryce’s right.

Feeling confused and more than a little foggy Bryce’s second thought was that there was trouble coming. He moved quickly, ignoring the pain lancing through his brain. “What’s happened?”

“Nothing. Yet. Just getting prepared.”

“Prepared for what?” Hell, panic threatened to engulf him. He’d been careful to make sure he wasn’t followed here, but with the pain messing with his head, it was entirely possible he’d fucked that up as well.

“You’re obviously expecting trouble to follow you, so the three of us are going to spend some time at Grandpa’s old hunting cabin.” Lachlan didn’t explain, but Bryce was already assessing the advantages of that tiny cabin in the middle of nowhere. Apart from being isolated and well away from any tourist areas, it was also wedged against a solid rock wall and easily defensible. It even had a hidden room that had been used by bootleggers to hide their illegal alcohol when the cabin was first built nearly three centuries ago.

“Th–thanks,” Bryce managed to force past the tight knot of emotion lodged in his throat.

“Don’t thank me, thank Mikayla. She’s the one who saw through your bullshit,” he said gruffly. “I was ready to kick your sorry ass out the door.” Bryce might almost have believed that if Lachlan had been able to say it without the relieved grin. Clearly, whether Bryce deserved it or not, he had two people willing to believe he was worthy of living, and he couldn’t have been more grateful.

* * * *

“How the fuck can I get off this goddamned planet if it won’t stop snowing?” Matt paced the small area of the communications room like a caged lion. He stopped several times to glare at the satellite images, but even faced with the full force of his anger, they didn’t change. Mikayla, Lachlan and Bryce were holed up in the old hunting cabin hiding from whatever disaster Bryce had brought into their lives.

Shit, if he could just get off this icy planet, he’d head straight for their little hideout and beat the living shit out of his twin. He had no right involving Mikayla in his mess. Lachlan should’ve grabbed their wife and run as far and as fast as he could in the opposite direction to whatever danger threatened Bryce. What the hell had Lachlan been thinking?

“No let up in the storm?” Matt glared at John, making it very clear he wasn’t going to answer that stupid question. Fuck, if the storm was over Matt wouldn’t be here. John gave him an irritated grunt and asked another question. “Have we heard anything from Brock?”

“Brock?” It took a moment for Matt to realize it was already Sunday. He’d been so focused on getting off this frozen rock he hadn’t given thought to much else. “No. When was he due to check in?”

“Yesterday,” John said, sounding really peeved. Matt could agree with the sentiment. The last thing they needed right now was one more disaster to deal with.

“Get Ryan and Ty up here. We have to assume that Brock needs assistance.”

* * * *

“I’m sorry, little one,” Lachlan said as he came into the room, “but the storm hasn’t let up, and Matt still can’t leave the planet.”

It was so stupid that her eyes filled with tears. She was safe here with Lachlan and Bryce. She had nothing to worry about, but knowing Matt was coming home soon had filled her with joy. But every delay messed with her hormones, and she dissolved into a miserable mess. God, she hated crying. She angrily wiped her eyes and forced herself to stop.

“Any idea when?” Bryce asked in a voice so like Matt’s that she wanted to cry all over again.

“Not at the moment,” Lachlan said as he sat beside Mikayla and hugged her close to his side, “but he’ll be here as soon as he can.” She could feel the tension in his arms, and fear wriggled its way into her mind.

“What aren’t you telling me?”

He seemed startled by her question, but then he blew out a deep breath and said, “Brock is late checking in.”

“Brock is missing?” Adrenaline flooded her system, and she tried to stand up. Lachlan held her back, and she hit out at him, slapping his hands away as she struggled to her feet. “How long has he been missing?”

When it looked like he was going to try and avoid that question, she growled again, “How long?”

“Three days.”

“Three days? Three whole days and I’m only hearing about this now! Who the hell do you think you are, Lachlan Davidson? Why did it take so long to tell me that one of my husbands is missing on a goddamned snow planet?”

“Mikayla,” he said quietly, not quite making eye contact with her. “We didn’t want to worry you. He’ll be fine. Brock knows the area. He’s got almost as much experience as I have.”

“Almost,” she ground out through clenched teeth. “Almost! He doesn’t have anywhere near your experience. You should’ve gone with him. Shit, you stayed behind to babysit me when you should’ve been working alongside Brock. You two always worked as a team on that planet. I should never have let you stay. You should be with him. Fuck.”

Her heart felt squeezed in her chest, like there wasn’t enough room for it to continue beating properly. Lachlan tried to pull her into his arms again, but she stepped away glaring at him angrily. She knew it was unfair to blame him. Hell, if she was truly honest she’d realize she was angry with herself, but temper, fear, and overwhelming sorrow demanded an outlet, and Lachlan was a convenient target.

“Mikayla, they’ll find him. I promise you, they’ll find him.”

“No they won’t,” she yelled belligerently, stamping her foot in anger. “You need to go. Brock needs you. You need to go.” Her knees wobbled as the realization that Brock may already be dead swept through her. “Please, Lachlan, you need to go find him.”

This time she did let him pull her into his arms. He shook with reaction almost as much as she did, and guilt washed through her. It wasn’t Lachlan’s fault. It was hers. If she hadn’t insisted they visit Earth to meet her in-laws, they would all still be on the mining planet, Brock and Lachlan would still be working together as a team, and Brock wouldn’t be lost god-knows-where.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled as she burst into tears once more.

“It’s okay, little one,” he said as he lifted her into his arms. “They’ll find him soon.”

“But what if they don’t? What then? Will you go find him?”

He seemed reluctant to answer but kissed her forehead and said quietly, “If they don’t find him by the time Matt gets here, I’ll go track him down.”

It wasn’t exactly the answer she wanted, but she held onto enough pre-pregnancy sanity to realize it was the best he could do. If Matt couldn’t get off the planet, then Lachlan wouldn’t be able to reach them anyway.

She closed her eyes and prayed that someone would find Brock before it was too late.

* * * *

Bryce stayed on the lounge, his leg resting on the chair in front of him and had never felt more helpless in his life. Even if he had the skills Lachlan possessed—which of course he didn’t—his shattered thigh bone wouldn’t let him do anything to help anyway. At the moment he was a useless lump endangering one of the brothers he’d tried so hard to protect and the woman who confirmed with every action and word that she was his brothers’ perfect match in every way.

They’d been at the cabin for three nights, and each day he’d learned a little more about the woman his brothers loved. She may have looked fragile, but she was pretty much the exact opposite. Even when she was yelling at Lachlan just now, Bryce could see that she was blaming herself for Brock going missing. It was also obvious that the hormone-induced crying was pissing her off, so it was a safe bet that she usually avoided tears.

Bryce closed his eyes as he silently admitted the stupidest part of his observations—he was falling for the woman himself. Even knowing that she was married to the seven men in this world with the most reasons to hate him, he wanted her in his arms. It had taken every ounce of self-control, and a good dose of pain from his leg, to

keep him from leaping up and comforting her when she'd slapped Lachlan away.

He was almost asleep when the communicator signaled an incoming transmission. Hoping that it was good news, he levered himself out of the chair, grabbed the crutches Lachlan had purchased at the local drugstore, and made his way to the console.

The mountains made it difficult to get a clear signal, so they'd resorted to sending recorded messages back and forth to the mining planet. Bryce damn near crossed his fingers as he hit the play button to see the message. He really wanted to be able to give Mikayla some good news.

Matt's image on the screen was a little disconcerting. Despite having not seen each other for nearly ten years, they both wore their hair the same way, and the expression on Matt's face was eerily similar to the one Bryce saw each morning in the mirror.

"Lachlan," Matt's message started, "the snowstorm has finally let up. I'll be on a transport within a couple of hours. It should take five days at the most to get to the cabin." Matt took a deep breath before continuing his message. "Unfortunately, that's the good news. We still haven't heard from Brock, and Ryan and Ty haven't had any luck tracking him down. They'll keep trying, but at this stage it doesn't look good. I don't have a clue what to tell Mikayla. With the baby and all, maybe we shouldn't tell her anything until we know for sure."

Matt rattled off the details of his trip and then ended his message with, "And make sure that asshole stays far away from Mikayla. I'll deal with him when I get there."

Well it was nice to know at least one of his brothers was thinking clearly. Matt had more reason than any of them to hate Bryce. And even though Matt didn't know the full story or the truth of what happened so many years ago, Bryce knew he deserved every ounce of anger aimed his way. He just hoped Matt avoided his broken leg when he threw him out on his ass.

* * * *

Three days later a small amount of good news finally gave Mikayla a reason to smile. Unfortunately, it also highlighted just how dangerous a job Brock had been doing. They'd finally been able to locate her missing husband, but that was where the good news stopped.

"We found him at the bottom of a sheer cliff face. He's broken his ankle pretty badly and is in a lot of pain, but he's alive." Mikayla glanced over to Bryce and noticed that he was looking more worried now than a few minutes ago. What did he understand that she didn't?

"Lachlan," Peter's message continued, "we need your help on this. None of us have the skills to get down there safely and get him back up." Lachlan was nodding at the screen even though it was only a recording. He glanced at Bryce and then over at Mikayla clearly torn on where he should be.

"Go," she said quietly. "Go and bring him home to me, please."

Lachlan looked at Bryce again for a moment before nodding his head. "Matt will be here day after tomorrow. Bryce, I expect you to protect Mikayla with your life. Do I make myself clear?"

His tone of voice was like none she'd ever heard from him before. He'd always been commanding, but this was the type of voice she imagined a drill sergeant might use before sending soldiers into battle.

It took less than fifteen minutes for Lachlan to organize urgent transport to the mining colony. He was booked on the next flight off Earth and would need to change transports twice, but it would get him to the mining colony in a little over four days.

"When do you need to leave?" she asked when he came back into the main room with one of his bags.

"Just under two hours."

Relief poured through her. It was probably silly, but she needed him to make love to her before he went. She felt so disconnected from him somehow. Even though she'd slept in his arms nearly every night

since Bryce's unexpected arrival, it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough.

She lifted onto her toes to press a kiss against his mouth. He groaned and pulled her closer. "I need you," he mumbled as he lifted her into his arms and carried her toward their bedroom. Mikayla caught a quick glimpse of Bryce turning away, but then her husband began kissing her and every other thought and concern melted away.

He carried her into the bedroom, kicked the door shut, and reverently laid her in the middle of the bed before slowly stripping her clothes off. She tried to help him undo his pants, but he pulled away. "Not now, little one. I want you to relax and let your Dom enjoy his sub. Put your hands behind your head and open your legs."

Smiling with relief Mikayla did as she was told, letting her thighs fall open so that he could wedge himself between her knees and dip his head to kiss her pussy. His tongue flicked over her sensitive flesh, but his movements quickly became more urgent, more needy. She gasped as his tongue thrust deep into her folds, his hands pressing her thighs open wider as he lapped at her cream and stroked her need higher.

She quivered, breathing harshly as he suckled her clit and stroked her swollen bud with the tip of his tongue. Gasping, she moved her hands, and he growled low in his throat, the vibrations pulsing through her. She put her hands back, whimpering as he fucked her harder with his tongue.

In, out, over, higher. She swallowed hard, her orgasm close, her breathing rapid, her nerves screaming. He held her there, engulfed with need, desperate for climax. Three little words, "Come for me," and then she was flying, shaking, gasping as release swept through her, and yet he stroked her higher, wringing every drop of her climax from her overwrought body.

He rolled off the bed, quickly shucked his clothes, and returned to his position. The look in his eyes was wild, the need in his movements obvious. But he held back, pressing slowly, carefully, into her

welcoming flesh. Just as slowly he pulled out. In and out in gentle rhythm. He watched her face closely, his love for her shining brightly.

"I love you," he whispered as he closed his eyes. She felt his cock swell inside her, then the sweet pulse of his seed entering her body. Gentle waves of climax rippled through her, the feeling overwhelming her emotions and making her cry.

He stilled immediately, trying to move away from her, but she held him close, refusing to let him leave. "I love you," she said with a wobbly voice. "Please come back to me."

Lachlan seemed surprised by her plea, and he smiled that confident smile once again. "Of course," he said. "I'll have Brock back here before you know it and then you can give him the third degree for being so stupid. Okay?"

"Okay," she said through her tears.

* * * *

Bryce tried not to listen, but considering the small size of the cabin and his position of the lounge, it was kind of hard to avoid. His cock had stirred at her first quiet moans, and his brain had gone into overdrive at the sound of her climax, but it was the words of love that stole his heart.

Mikayla loved her men equally. He'd seen her get excited at the sound of an incoming message not really caring which husband it came from, just happy to see them all. Bryce shifted restlessly on the sofa. His leg felt just a little better today. With the plate and screws the doctors had inserted, he was fairly certain that he hadn't done more damage the day he'd literally dodged a bullet, but the last few days of pain had made him worry otherwise. His physiotherapist would've been livid to hear that he'd practically run on the damn thing when he'd barely been cleared to move at all.

He closed his eyes, hoping to feign sleep if Mikayla and Lachlan came back into the room, but a soft sound from the communicator

signaled an incoming message. He glanced at the bedroom door but decided to check it himself rather than disturb the room's occupants.

He levered out of the chair and hobbled to the console. A few button presses and an image of Matt appeared on the screen. He looked frantic, and Bryce scrambled to turn the sound down. The last thing he wanted to do would be to upset Mikayla less than an hour before her husband left.

"Lachlan," Matt began, sounding even more frantic than he looked. "Don't leave Mikayla with Bryce. I should've told you this...before, I mean a long time ago when it all happened, but I didn't and I should've, but I wanted to tell you face to face." Matt took a deep breath on the recording as if he'd just realized he was rambling. "He's dangerous. I saw him kill a woman ten years ago. Please, just wait for me to get there. I'll explain everything, just don't leave Mikayla with Bryce."

On the recording Matt ran a hand down his face, clearly beside himself with worry, and then leaned forward and the message ended. Bryce glanced over at the closed door of the bedroom. It would seem that neither occupant had heard the quiet summons or its warning. Lachlan needed to rescue Brock. A couple of days' delay could literally be the difference between life and death. Making a decision, knowing his brothers would never forgive him despite his best intentions, he deleted Matt's message.

Shakily he limped back to the lounge and lay down. Adrenaline buzzed his veins, and his heart pounded wildly as memories of that night so many years ago rolled through his mind once more.

Chapter Five

How did a woman with seven husbands end up alone with only a mysterious brother-in-law to keep her company? Mikayla rubbed at the ache building behind her forehead and tried to think rationally. For the past several hours she'd bounced from sorrow to fear and anger and everything in between.

Despite the fact that they were all thrilled to be having a baby, the timing of her unexpected pregnancy sucked. If she hadn't fallen pregnant she would've been able to go back to the mining planet with them, and Brock wouldn't have had to do the job of two men by himself and gotten injured, or possibly die, in the process. If the contraceptive-vaccination that slimy little pimp had given her had worked as it should've, she wouldn't have fallen pregnant in the first place.

A protective hand hovered over her belly as her train of thought coalesced in her mind. Shocked at her selfish feelings she sent a prayer of apology to her baby and every deity she could think of. Her pregnancy was a blessing. They all wanted this baby. She wanted this baby and many, many more.

"Are you okay?" Bryce's voice was so similar to Matt's that she had difficulty answering that question without bursting into tears.

"I'm fine," she said quickly. "Just hormones."

Bryce didn't look convinced, but he nodded and continued his awkward hop-limp back to the sofa from the bathroom. She hurried to move the blanket that had half fallen on the floor, and he smiled his thanks as he slowly settled into the cushions.

“Where have you been?” She blurted out the question in an attempt to distract herself from her own concerning thoughts, but when she saw the fear on his face, she almost wished she hadn’t asked. But just like Lachlan, Bryce managed to hide the emotion behind a cocky smile.

“The bathroom,” he said very seriously.

“No, I mean, where...why, I...” She trailed off, unsure how to phrase what was essentially a direct question. It was clear by his answer that he would rather avoid explaining, but that was just too damn bad. At the very least she wanted to know why none of his brothers had ever mentioned him. “Where have you been for the last ten years?” She folded her arms and waited. The cocky smile was still in place, but he seemed to be running several answers through his head.

Damn it! She was a hormonal, pregnant woman missing her husbands, and she was going to get a straight answer from this man. He must’ve seen her building fury because he answered with a half truth.

“I’ve been around. I’m not in the same type of work as my brothers, so, you know, we don’t see that much of each other.”

“And your type of work,” she said, using her fingers as quote marks for the word work, “would be what, exactly?” When it didn’t look like he was going to answer, she threw another question his way. “Matt said you’ve done some time in prison. Why?”

He looked really annoyed at her questions, and a part of her was screaming at her to back off, but a larger part wanted to know details. She instinctively felt she could trust him, but she’d been wrong once before and self-doubt started to creep into her mind. God, what if he was as dangerous as Matt said on that first day?

She shook her head as Bryce went to say something. Judging by the wicked grin, it was probably pure bullshit anyway. “Don’t worry about it. I’m going to go lie down.”

* * * *

Bryce watched as Mikayla walked into her bedroom and quietly shut the door. He'd been on the verge of telling her everything, of spilling every dirty, ugly secret to a woman he barely knew but was starting to really care about.

That was wrong on so many levels he couldn't even begin to understand the impulse. She belonged to his brothers and certainly didn't need to be burdened with the confessions of the family black sheep.

For hours Bryce lay on the couch and thought over every possible scenario. Even though he had absolutely no intention of telling her anything, in his heart she was the one he wanted to tell.

Hours later he woke with a start. There'd been a noise. Something he couldn't remember, or identify, but a noise that should not have been there. Very slowly he reached under the pillow and retrieved the handgun Lachlan had left with him. Bryce flicked the safety off and then lay perfectly still hoping to identify the source of the noise that had woken him.

The low moan came again, and Bryce's heart beat double time when he realized it was coming from Mikayla's room. He got off the lounge but hesitated at the bedroom. The woman was pregnant and missing her husbands, she had a right to grieve if she wanted.

But then a gasping moan of pain reached his ears, and he couldn't stay away any longer. If she didn't need him, she could just kick his ass out. He limped to the bed as quickly as he could, almost falling to the floor when he saw her face.

Mikayla was pale, her skin almost translucent in the poor light. Covered in sweat she panted through her teeth and seemed to be trying to lie very still.

"Mikayla?" he asked as he reset the safety and tucked the gun into the back of his jeans.

“Hurts,” she managed to pant out. “When I move it hurts.”

Fear drenched him as he tried to quickly assess the situation. He didn’t know much about pregnancy but he knew abdominal pain and bleeding were very bad signs.

“Mikayla,” he said trying to sound calm, “I’m just going to lift the blankets and check if you’re bleeding.” Her eyes flew open, panic swirling in their depths, but she nodded once and groaned again from the small movement. Working as fast as he dared, Bryce untucked the blankets from the end of the mattress and lifted them away from Mikayla. She wore a modest but pretty white nightdress that thankfully didn’t seem to show any signs of bleeding.

“Okay,” he said reassuringly, “there doesn’t seem to be any blood, but I’m going to call an ambulance just in case.” She nodded her agreement, so he quickly placed the blankets back over her and stumbled to the communication console. He contacted the medical emergency number, and a confident looking woman wearing a nurse’s uniform filled the screen.

“How can I help you, sir?”

“My wife,” Bryce said, figuring it was the easiest explanation, “is having severe abdominal pain. She’s seven, nearly eight weeks pregnant.”

“Is she bleeding from her vagina?”

Bryce shook his head. “Not that I can see, but it seems to hurt more when she moves.”

The nurse nodded as she checked something on a board to her left. “Sir, I need to send an ambulance for your wife, but your details aren’t coming up on our system.” Damn, Bryce had disabled the call ID and location function the day they got here. Lachlan hadn’t been pleased, but he’d understood Bryce’s thinking. Unfortunately, his paranoid precautions were about to cost Mikayla precious time.

“We’re in a hunting cabin about two thirds of the way up Clyde Mountain.” He gave her the address, and the nurse looked thoughtful

for a moment. She pressed a few buttons on the console in front of her and then smiled with what seemed to be relief.

“Sir, we have a hovercraft heading your way. They should be there within twenty minutes. I need to get your wife’s details into the system.”

He didn’t want to delay getting treatment for Mikayla, so he rattled off as much information as he knew and then made up the things he didn’t. By the time he got back to Mikayla she seemed to be in more pain. She grabbed his hand in a tight grip, her eyes pleading with him to stay with her. They were the longest twenty minutes of his life.

* * * *

Agony tore through her abdomen every time she moved, so Mikayla held herself as still as possible, trying not to panic. It seemed to take forever for the ambulance officers to arrive, but they’d quickly assessed her, loaded her on the vehicle and sped to the nearest hospital. Even in her pain-dazed state she’d overheard words like *ectopic pregnancy* and *emergency surgery*.

“Don’t let them take my baby!” The words were barely there, but Bryce squeezed her hand in silent answer. The ambulance officers had given her something for the pain, but the tearing feeling in her gut seemed to be worse not better. She ground her teeth to stop from crying out. Somebody wiped a cool cloth over her face, and she shook her head angrily. It wasn’t fucking helping. “Get away from me!” Terror gripped her as she tried to remember why she was in so much pain.

“Matt,” she said as she realized he held her hand, “what’s happening?”

* * * *

Bryce swallowed hard. Mikayla was in so much pain she didn't even know who he was anymore. He needed to help her, and if she needed her husband by her side, then that's who he'd be.

"I'm here, honey," he lied smoothly. After all, lying was the one thing he was really good at. "It's going to be okay." He stepped to the side as the ambulance officers moved to unload her stretcher at the hospital entrance. He squeezed her hand to let her know he was still there even though she couldn't see him, and she held onto him like he was her only lifeline. As scared for her as he was, he felt the same way. Somehow, she was his anchor in a world suddenly too terrifying to face alone. The ambulance officers conferred with a woman for a few moments and then left quickly.

Another woman came into the small area around the bed and pushed some sort of medication into the drip in Mikayla's arm. Almost immediately Bryce felt her grip loosen on his hand. Even though she seemed to no longer be in pain, he refused to let go.

The first woman pushed a chair closer to Mikayla's stretcher, and even though Bryce didn't want to admit the weakness, he perched gratefully on the edge. The pain in his leg eased considerably even though it was the first time he'd noticed it.

"Mr. Davidson?" the young female doctor asked.

Bryce nodded in answer.

"When did the pain start?" He glanced around for a clock but realized he didn't really have any concept of time. She must've understood his problem because she rephrased the question. "How long was she in pain before you called the ambulance?"

He glanced down at the face of the woman who had quickly become the center of his world. Mikayla looked awful. Her skin was sallow and drawn, her hair seemed to have lost both its curl and luster, and her eyes were dull with medication and pain. He swallowed, trying to remember the question the doctor had just asked. Unable to tear his gaze away from Mikayla he said, "Only a few minutes, I-I

think. She was in bed, but I heard her groan. It was only a few...a few minutes.”

He’d been in terrifying situations before, some life or death, but none had left him feeling this helpless. Again the doctor seemed to read his fear, because she pulled a seat closer and spoke to him in a low voice.

“We’re preparing an operating theatre for emergency surgery. The ultrasound imaging that they did in the ambulance showed a ruptured fallopian tube—that’s the tube that runs from the ovaries to the womb. Basically the embryo has grown in the wrong place and Mrs. Davidson requires immediate surgery to repair the damage and stop the internal bleeding.”

“What about the baby?” Bryce asked. He suspected he already knew the answer.

The doctor shook her head slowly, and he felt every organ in his body squeeze in pain.

“The important thing to remember is that the egg was in the wrong place and would never have grown into a baby. Even with all our medical advancements, there are just some things we cannot change. We’ll try to repair the fallopian tube if we can, but most times it’s damaged too badly and we need to remove it.” The doctor looked at him with sympathy written all over her face. “As long as the other tube is undamaged, she should be able to get pregnant in the future.”

An older man walked into the area, introduced himself and starting asking questions about Mikayla’s medical history. Bryce was unable to answer most of them, and it quickly became apparent that he would need to contact his brothers. He hesitated over yet another one he couldn’t answer when the name of her obstetrician popped into his head. Bryce had seen the appointment card pinned to the wall in the cabin and thankfully was able to provide the doctor’s first and last name. The surgeon said he’d contact Mikayla’s doctor and assured him that she was in good hands.

Bryce stayed in the seat as they wheeled her into surgery a few moments later.

It was probably a coward's way out, but he convinced himself not to call his brothers until he knew for certain that Mikayla was all right.

* * * *

Mikayla woke to bright lights and strange voices. Memories of the danger that Matt had said she was in hit her full force and feeling panicked, she tried to sit up.

"Whoa," a deep, familiar voice said as a warm hand eased her back to the bed. "You've just had major surgery. You need to stay still."

"Matt?" she asked as tears filled her eyes. She couldn't see his face clearly, but he seemed to hesitate.

"How are you feeling?"

"The baby?" she asked ignoring his question completely. He looked like he wanted to not answer her question, but then he took a deep breath and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, honey."

She bit her lip, hard. A part of her had already known, but the loss of hope hit her hardest. Before the surgery she'd still had something to cling to, a miracle to wish for, but knowing her baby was gone and there was nothing she could do shattered her completely.

Strong arms wrapped around her upper body in an awkward hug. She clung to his strength, grateful to not be facing this alone. He held her through the storm of her grief, through the wracking sobs and retching that came with them. He stayed with her, lending his strength as hers failed, holding her steady as her world fell to pieces. And then he held her as she slipped into restless sleep.

* * * *

Bryce felt her exhaustion. Memories, fuzzy and painful, rose up to remind him of all the reasons he shouldn't be here. Mikayla wasn't his to hold, but he held her anyway.

"Mr. Davidson, she should sleep for a while now. Why don't you go grab something to eat in the cafeteria?" The nurse smiled kindly, checked Mikayla's chart, and left the room just as quickly as she'd come. Until that very moment Bryce hadn't even realized he'd come to the hospital without any credits. He leaned back in the chair and felt the gun he'd tucked into his waistband. Great. He'd come to the hospital with a gun and no money. If that didn't scream criminal, he didn't know what did.

He shook his head, trying to think rationally, when it hit him that without money, he wouldn't be able to use a public communicator to contact any of his brothers. It didn't help that all he felt was relief to be able to put off telling them about Mikayla and the baby for a while longer. Lachlan had trusted him to protect Mikayla, and Bryce couldn't help but feel he'd let him down.

He closed his eyes as he tried to figure out what the hell to do next.

"Bryce?" He had no memory of dozing off, but he woke to the sound of Mikayla's soft voice.

"I'm here, honey."

"I lost the baby." She said it with such anguish that he wanted to rage at the world for the unfairness. Mikayla was an amazing woman, and she deserved far better than what the universe had dished out.

"I know, honey. It's okay. It wasn't your fault." She didn't look convinced. "The doctor explained it very clearly to me. The egg was in the wrong place. It wasn't your fault. Nothing you did or didn't do would've changed the outcome." She shook her head as tears filled her eyes once more. "It wasn't your fault," he repeated.

She cried harder, and he held her hand, wishing he could hold her close, but figuring that with the surgery it wasn't really comfortable

for her. The fact that she was married to his brothers didn't seem all that important at the moment.

"It is," she said as she tried to get her crying under control. "It is my fault. I—I blamed Brock's accident on the baby. If I hadn't gotten pregnant, he wouldn't have been working alone, and Lachlan wouldn't be risking his life trying to rescue Brock. But I didn't mean it. I wanted my b—baby." A sob tore from her throat, and he stood up trying to get closer.

"I know you didn't mean it. Mikayla, look at me." When she finally raised her red, watery eyes to his gaze, he said, "This isn't your fault. Even if you thought that way, it didn't change anything. The doctor said this was always going to happen. Ectopic pregnancies don't survive." He wanted to tell her what the doctor had said about how it would never have grown to be a baby, but it probably wasn't something Mikayla needed to hear. Her baby had been real, losing it had been painful, and recovering from the experience emotionally would take time.

She moved away from him, and his heart squeezed at what seemed to be a rejection. But then she asked him to lie on the bed and just hold her. He could do nothing but comply. He lifted his injured leg onto the edge of the mattress, taking care not to bump her, and then wrapped his arms around her upper body.

Mikayla laid her head on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. Surprised by her strange words, he wished he could see her expression when he asked why.

"I'm sorry for putting you through this when you're already dealing with so many problems of your own."

He tried to keep his voice casual, but a strange knot had formed at the back of his throat and he had trouble forcing the words out. "Don't worry about me."

"But I do worry about you," she said quietly. "You're not the man they think you are. It's like you're pretending to be that man, the one they all hate, but it's not actually you."

He hugged her tighter, unable to speak at that moment. Not since the split with his brothers had anyone cared about him or his problems. Yet, this compassionate, caring woman who'd just lost so much could see him, the real person, not the criminal the rest saw, and for that he would be forever grateful. He'd told his brother he'd protect Mikayla with his life, and he'd meant it at the time, but now he knew the devastation his brothers would feel without her and realized he would protect them all. His life was worthless if he couldn't protect the people he loved, and as soon as Matt got here, Bryce would go face his troubles head on. No way would he bring any more agony to this beautiful woman or the men she loved.

Chapter Six

Matt rushed into the cabin desperate to see his wife. Silence greeted him, and he ran through the small area calling her name. When no one answered, anger boiled in his heart and mind. What the hell had Bryce done?

A quick glance around the room suggested that the occupants had left in a hurry, and a more thorough search turned up Bryce's meager belongings including his identification and a handful of currency. Matt growled in disgust when he noticed the identification photo was very clearly his brother with shoulder-length, scraggly hair, but the name was someone else's entirely.

Fear for Mikayla began to pound deep in his mind, and he fought to control it. He needed to think clearly. Methodically he searched the small cabin looking for anything that might give him a clue as to where Bryce might have taken his wife. He hated that his instinct was still telling him to trust the man. After everything he'd seen, there should be no way he could trust his twin, but somehow the part of his brain that obviously believed in fairytales kept telling him he should.

It was wishful thinking, plain and simple.

Realizing that the communicator was probably his best chance, Matt quickly brought up the call register. The last call had been made to the emergency number, and Matt's heart leapt into his throat. He quickly brought up the listings for local hospitals and began calling the admissions numbers hoping that Bryce had at least had the decency to give Mikayla's real name.

His second call yielded results, but the operator refused to give him any medical details over the phone. All he knew was that

Mikayla Davidson was a patient. He sent a quick communication to his brothers and then grabbed a few things and hurried out the door.

* * * *

“Bryce?”

“Yes, honey.”

“Why does Matt hate you?”

He really didn’t want to get into this. It had been two days since Mikayla’s surgery, and even though she seemed to be in less pain, the sadness in her eyes brought him to his knees. She’d been so lively, so energetic when she’d argued with Lachlan that now she almost seemed to be another person. Bryce would do anything to give her back that happiness.

“He saw something a long time ago that he probably shouldn’t have.” He knew he was avoiding giving her the direct answer, but it felt way too good just holding her in his arms like this. He really didn’t want to explain what had happened so long ago.

“Saw what?”

“He saw me shoot somebody.” The word *kill* was on his tongue, but he just couldn’t force the confession past his lips.

“Why?”

“Why did I shoot somebody?” She nodded against his shoulder, and he tried hard to control his reaction. Not even Matt had bothered to ask why—not that Bryce could’ve told him at the time—but it would’ve been nice if Matt had wanted an explanation before condemning him for his actions. “She was about to do something I couldn’t let her do.” Okay it wasn’t really an answer, but he’d spent the last ten years telling lies and half truths, so the habit was pretty much part of his personality these days.

“Did she die?”

He nodded as his vision blurred with tears. Yes, she’d died. He hadn’t meant to kill her, but that was the way it was with bullet

wounds. The difference between life and death was often counted in inches.

“Do you regret it?” Jesus, could this woman see into his soul? Even his boss hadn’t given him a chance to feel regret, but he’d lived with the *what-ifs* for so long, he knew that he’d done the only thing he could’ve under the circumstances.

“No,” he answered honestly. “I don’t regret shooting her. I wish she hadn’t died, but I don’t regret shooting her.” Mikayla lay in his arms quietly, seeming to consider his words carefully. His heart ached at the memories, but his brain couldn’t quite comprehend that Mikayla hadn’t yet pushed him away. Hell, his twin brother had condemned him without even knowing the facts, but Mikayla still lay in his arms willing to hear his explanation.

Again the sudden need to tell her everything gripped him hard, but he tried to force it away. When Matt got here, Bryce would leave. Simple as that. Mikayla didn’t need to hear his reasons for everything he’d done in the past ten years.

“Was that why you spent time in prison?” Her quiet question caught him off guard. He’d expected a demand to explain why he’d didn’t regret killing someone.

“No.”

“Mikayla!” Matt came rushing through the doorway, and Bryce flinched at the sound of his voice. It was obvious that his brother was scared for his wife, and Bryce started to move to get off the bed, but Mikayla held him tighter.

“Don’t go,” she said urgently to Bryce, obviously guessing his intent.

“I’m not going anywhere, doll,” he said with a wink as he awkwardly levered himself onto his feet.

Matt practically knocked him on his ass in his rush to get to Mikayla, and Bryce couldn’t even feel angry at the treatment. If Mikayla were his wife, he’d run over anything that stood between him and the woman he loved.

He hopped back a few steps and leaned against the wall as husband and wife kissed briefly. Matt asked her only one question, "Are you okay?"

She burst into tears as she told him about the baby, and every instinct in Bryce demanded that he go comfort her as she explained the circumstances of her miscarriage. He did the opposite. Looking down he was surprised to see his duffle bag. Bryce glanced at the bed where husband and wife cried together and then at the bag at his feet. Matt's wishes couldn't be clearer. He wanted Bryce gone.

Bryce grabbed his crutches, leaned over, and hooked the bag with his hand and turned before he could do something truly stupid. Without a backward glance he left.

* * * *

Matt held his wife as she cried, and he realized that she'd probably go through this six more times as she told each of her husbands the sad news. He wanted to save her from that but had no idea how to lessen the pain. They'd all been looking forward to the baby's birth, so he guessed they would all grieve in their own way.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here for you," he said sincerely. They should've found a way out of the contract. Money meant nothing when you didn't have your loved ones close by.

"I know you would've been if we'd known it might happen." She moved carefully, sat up a little straighter, clearly trying to get her emotions under control. "How is Brock?" she asked in a slightly rough voice.

"Lachlan should get to the planet sometime today. Ryan and Ty already have most of the equipment in place, so it's just a matter of Lachlan getting down there and bringing him back up." He was sugar coating the danger, but after everything Mikayla had gone through in his absence, there was no way he was going to add to her worries if he could avoid it.

Her gaze bounced around the room for a moment, and then she asked in a worried voice, “Where’s Bryce?”

“He left.” Matt didn’t want to talk about Bryce. He’d never felt more relieved than when he saw his brother pick up his duffle bag and disappear from their lives. If he never saw that man again, it would be too soon.

“What? No, he can’t leave. Matt, you can’t let Bryce leave.” She sounded really agitated, and for one second he hesitated. Did Mikayla know something he didn’t? But then the truth dawned on him, and even though he wanted to spare his wife the pain, he needed to tell her the full story. Whatever lies Bryce had been spinning had to be stopped. Mikayla deserved to know the truth.

* * * *

Bryce stood there, just stopped at the end of the hallway, unable to decide whether to turn left or right. He balanced on the crutches as he tried to deny the need screaming through his brain. He couldn’t leave them. Not only did he feel the need to protect Mikayla, but he wanted his brothers back. All of his brothers, but especially his twin,

For so long he’d managed to operate nearly completely alone, refusing to make close friends or keep contact with his family, but he couldn’t do it anymore. He couldn’t be that man anymore. Mikayla had given him a reminder of what it was like to be a part of something, and he didn’t want to live without love and family anymore.

He turned awkwardly, still undecided on what to do, and that’s when he caught a glimpse of a familiar person entering Mikayla’s room. At first he was confused to see the man, especially here, and then with dawning fear he dumped the crutches, and half ran, half hopped back to Mikayla and Matt. Adrenaline buzzed his veins with every step.

He pulled the gun from his waistband, grateful for the years of experience that made it a natural movement, flicked off the safety and barreled into the room. Two gunshots rang out simultaneously.

Heart pounding loudly in his ears, every sense heightened, his mind crystal clear despite the danger, Bryce stepped over the man he'd just shot. Trying to still the shaking in his fingers, he grabbed the man's gun, emptied it of bullets without touching the grip, and placed it on the cabinet beside Mikayla's bed. Then he headed straight for his twin.

Matt was slumped against the wall, the bullet having hit high in his chest. "I'm sorry," Bryce said as he checked the wound. Blood had already spread in a deep stain around the bullet hole and Bryce grabbed Matt's hand to place it over the wound. "Matt. Yo, Matt. Stay with me. I need you to press here." Digging deep for the ice cool personality that had gotten him through many situations like this one, Bryce tapped his brother on the face to try and get his attention. "Press here," he said again, pushing against Matt's hand. Matt nodded, sort of, and then pressed harder. Bryce released a shaky breath. It had never been this hard to stay in control. The fact that his family was involved was definitely messing with his head.

"Mikayla?" Matt managed to ask in a rough voice.

"She's fine," Bryce lied. She wasn't fine, she was spattered in her husband's blood and seemed to be going into shock, but she was alive, and that was what counted. But the stubborn woman also seemed determined to get to Matt, so Bryce helped her onto the floor beside her husband. "I'm going to get a doctor. Make sure he stays still." Mikayla nodded frantically, her fear and distress very obvious. Bryce glanced at his would-be assassin, bleeding and moaning on the floor, but knew the man was going nowhere so headed to the doorway. The hall was deserted, no doubt because of the sound of gunshots, so he limped to the nurses' counter and found two women crouched under the desk.

“I have two people with gunshot wounds in Mrs. Davidson’s room.” One woman looked absolutely terrified and probably unable to move, but the second woman nodded and crawled out from under the desk. She straightened to her full height, about a foot and a half shorter than Bryce, held her head high, and started gathering emergency supplies. As she moved quickly down the hall, Bryce glanced back at the pale woman still cowering from him. That’s when he realized he still had his gun in his hand.

Thumbing the safety back on, Bryce tucked the gun back into his waistband before telling the woman to call the police.

He didn’t look forward to explaining why he’d just shot a cop, but he needed to get this part of his life finished with. If nothing else, he wanted a chance to live a normal life. He headed back to Mikayla’s room, helped the nurse stabilize Matt, and then held Matt’s wife as she cried in his arms.

* * * *

“The bullet went straight through. The exit wound looks pretty ugly but Mr. Davidson should make a full recovery. He’ll spend some time in ICU, and we’ll let you know as soon as you can visit.” Mikayla nodded her thanks to the doctor and squeezed Bryce’s arm. The police had arrived soon after the gunshots, and of course the first thing they’d done was handcuff Bryce. It took several minutes of angry, exasperated conversation, but Bryce had given them a name and demanded that they bring the man here.

Surprisingly, the police not only did as he asked, they let Bryce sit with her while they waited. He couldn’t exactly hold her—they’d left the cuffs on him—but at least she wasn’t alone while she waited for news of Matt’s operation. Fortunately, even before Matt went into surgery, the doctors had been confident the bullet hadn’t hit anything important. A few inches lower and it would’ve been a very different story.

“Davidson!” A short, balding, angry little man waddled into the room and yelled at Bryce. “Where the fuck have you been?” He turned to glare at the police officer hovering near the doorway. “Who put fucking handcuffs on him? Jesus, take them off him for fuck’s sake.” Mikayla couldn’t quite believe her eyes when the uniformed officer jumped to attention and then did as the little man ordered. Within moments the room was empty but for Mikayla, Bryce, the little man, and another who wore a silver badge and appeared to be some kind of police detective.

“Apologies for the language, ma’am,” their taller visitor said quietly, “but we’d pretty much written this guy off as buried in a ditch somewhere.” He turned to Bryce and held out his hand. Bryce shook it and smiled. “Glad to see we were wrong.”

“Me, too,” Bryce said fervently. He tilted his head in her direction. “This is Mikayla. She’s my brothers’ wife,” he said by way of introduction. The short guy raised an eyebrow but didn’t offer any comment. “Did Kenshaw make it through surgery?” Bryce asked.

The detective smiled gleefully. “Yes, he did. He’ll even be able to fill in some details for us when he wakes up. I’m sure everyone in the department will be interested in how much money he got paid to betray his fellow officers. I suspect it will be a rather long conversation.”

Mikayla had about a million and a half questions, and she had no idea where to start.

“Who are you?” she asked, realizing she was being very rude and not caring one iota. She’d just seen two people shot, and if Bryce hadn’t come back, she might’ve been one of them.

“Sorry, honey. This cantankerous asshole,” Bryce said with a smile on his face and a tilt of his head toward the shorter guy, “is my boss, Henry Crane, and this smartass is my partner Josh Ryan.”

“Partner?” she asked. It didn’t feel quite real. Mikayla had been sure from the beginning that Bryce wasn’t a criminal, but she hadn’t even considered that he might be a police officer. She must’ve had a

dumbfounded look on her face because Bryce squeezed her hand and smiled. “I’ll explain later.”

“The short story is,” Josh interjected, “that Bryce has been working deep undercover for nearly ten years. He’s helped crack several high profile drug rings, but on this assignment his luck almost ran out.” He looked at Bryce, seeming to assess something in the man that Mikayla couldn’t guess at and then said, “Although, maybe his luck has just begun. I’ve suspected for a while that he’s ready to retire.”

Mikayla turned to look at the man beside her as he smiled and laughed softly. “I never could hide anything from you,” he said to his partner. He turned his gaze to his boss. “You’ll have my resignation as soon as I make sure Mikayla and Matt will be okay.”

His boss seemed disappointed, but he nodded and shook Bryce’s hand before turning to leave the room. Just before he stepped out the door he turned and growled, “Just make sure your damn report’s on my desk before you leave.”

Bryce and Josh exchanged a look, and then Josh followed their boss out the door.

“Undercover cop?” Mikayla asked with a certain amount of excitement bubbling through her. It was stupid really, but she’d believed all along that Bryce wasn’t the criminal he seemed and knowing that she was right somehow restored something that had been stolen when she’d been betrayed by Jet so long ago.

“I’m not a cop. Not anymore,” Bryce said decisively but the brilliant smile he gave her brought happy tears to her eyes.

* * * *

“Hey, Matt,” Bryce said quietly as his brother’s eyes fluttered open. “How’re you feeling?”

“Like somebody shot me,” Matt grumbled. He seemed to almost fall back into unconsciousness, but then his eyes flew open again and

he pinned his watery, bloodshot gaze on Bryce. “Why did someone shoot me?”

“Because he thought you were me.” It was the truth but it was also a conversation he’d been hoping to put off until Matt was more lucid. Although, considering Matt’s natural temper, maybe it was better to have this conversation when the man couldn’t raise his fists.

“Fabulous,” Matt said with a great deal of sarcasm for someone who’d just had life-saving surgery. “You get to be the criminal, and I get to pay for it. Jesus, Bryce, why the hell did you come back?”

“Matt!” Mikayla’s shocked tone did nothing to sweeten Matt’s mood. “If Bryce hadn’t come back, the guy probably would’ve shot me, too.”

Matt seemed to be grinding his teeth with irritation. A moment later he managed to growl, “If he hadn’t come back in the first place, you wouldn’t have been in danger.”

Mikayla seemed very angry on his behalf, but Bryce couldn’t really fault his brother’s logic. Bryce had placed Mikayla in the line of fire, and no one regretted it more than him.

“Matt, you don’t understand,” Mikayla said in a tone that brooked no argument. Matt argued anyway.

“No, Mikayla, you don’t understand. The guy is a killer. I saw him shoot a woman in cold blood. I saw it, with my own two eyes, I saw my brother murder somebody.”

Bryce ground his teeth together. Matt obviously hadn’t seen the two children the woman had been about to kill. The callous, drugged-out bitch had kidnapped the offspring of one of the major drug dealers in the country. She’d planned to hold the children for ransom, but when things had gotten too dangerous and she’d realized she was in over her head, she’d decided to just kill the kids and pretend she hadn’t ever been involved. The children had been four and six, and despite the risk of blowing his cover, Bryce had done the only thing he could do under the circumstances—he’d shot the woman, called her an ambulance, and then managed to get the children back to their

criminal father without getting himself shot, too. Ironically, the father's gratitude and trust in Bryce had given him the opportunity to bring down some of the biggest players in the drug dealing organizations.

Bryce had made many enemies over the years, and the fact that they'd paid another police officer enough money to assassinate him had proven that more thoroughly than anything else.

Mikayla argued with Matt for a short while, but it quickly became apparent that Matt wasn't quite awake enough to hold his own. A soft snore stopped the barrage of upset words that spilled from Mikayla's mouth.

"Come on, Mikayla, we'll get you back to your room, and then I'll call your husbands." He held out his hand and together, side by side they slowly limped back to her room. Mikayla seemed much improved, despite the events of the day, but it was obvious that exhaustion increased her pain. He helped her onto the high hospital bed, got her comfortable, and then turned to go find a public communicator that accepted credit squares. He didn't want to use his cards just in case someone else came looking for him.

"He's wrong, you know."

Almost to the doorway, Bryce turned and faced the woman in the bed.

"Matt's wrong. You should've come home the moment you were in danger. Despite what they think you did, your brothers care for you and would've wanted to help."

He dipped his head in acknowledgement, hoping that Mikayla's words were true. He needed his family, and if he could just get Matt to understand what happened and forgive him for the deceit, then he could move forward and make plans for the rest of his life.

Bryce finally found an older communicator that didn't rely on identification cards and sent a signal to the coordinates Mikayla had given him. John answered the summons quickly.

"Matt?" John said, sounding frantic. "Did you find them?"

Bryce nodded a half nod, but John's eyes widened as if he'd just realized he was talking to the wrong brother.

"Where is she?" he demanded. Strangely disappointed by John's demand for information even though he understood the motivation entirely, Bryce tried to explain.

"She's fine. Matt got to the hospital a few hours ago, but there was a problem. He just got out of surgery, but he's going to be fine."

John looked ready to jump through the screen and strangle Bryce, so he tried very patiently to answer all of his questions and fill in as much detail as he could. When he got to the undercover cop thing, John's verbal barrage stopped. After a moment of complete stillness, John asked quietly, "You're a cop?"

Bryce nodded slowly. Even though he'd basically been paid by the police department, he'd never really felt like a cop. Working so deep undercover, he'd usually felt as if he were closer to the criminal he pretended to be. It had been very difficult some days to keep his goal to bring the criminals to justice clear in his head.

"I'm a retired cop now," he said quietly. "I don't think I can work undercover anymore."

John looked at him with such admiration that Bryce was hard-pressed not to beg to be allowed back into his family. Swallowing hard, he tried to get back to the matter at hand. He still needed to explain about the baby and find out what was happening with Brock and Lachlan.

John looked a little pale by the time Bryce had finished explaining about Mikayla's ectopic pregnancy, but he seemed to set the grief aside for the moment. After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, Bryce asked about Brock.

"Lachlan got him up the cliff face without major problems. They're bringing him in on the snow skis as we speak."

"Mikayla will be relieved to hear that," Bryce said, trying not to acknowledge just how relieved he felt as well.

“Lachlan said Brock’s leg is broken, but the storms are rolling in again so we won’t be able to get him to proper medical help for a while longer. He’s going to be thrilled when he hears Ryan and Ty will be patching him up. They may be veterinarians and sort of qualified to set a broken leg, but I’m looking forward to seeing Brock’s face when he finds out.”

John grinned, and Bryce found himself grinning back. Sharing the humor with his brother made it feel like he’d stepped back in time and was suddenly part of his family again. They chuckled together for a few moments, and then John got serious again.

“Are you still in danger?” Bryce really didn’t know. Just because he’d managed to dodge one assassin and take down another, it didn’t mean they’d stop trying. Drug syndicates put a lot of emphasis on honor, and killing the man responsible for their leader’s incarceration might just be one of those things they felt honor bound to keep trying until they succeeded.

Bryce half nodded and then answered, “I really don’t know.”

“Sounds like you could benefit from getting off the planet for a while, and well, it seems we have an opening in our geological survey department. What do you say? Wanna come freeze your ass off with the rest of us?” Bryce couldn’t quite believe what he was hearing. God, after ten years of thinking the worst of him, John had learned the truth and offered him a job and his family back in less than ten minutes. It didn’t seem quite real, but John’s hopeful expression said it all. Bryce was ready to jump at the opportunity but at the last moment remembered Matt and Mikayla.

“I can’t leave Matt and Mikayla unprotected.”

“Not a problem. They’ll be coming, too.”

“I don’t understand,” Bryce said, feeling his anger rise on Mikayla’s behalf. “Why didn’t you take Mikayla in the first place?”

John let out a disgusted sound and said angrily, “Because of this planet’s fucked-up laws it’s not a safe place for women at all, so the

ruling council won't even let them on the planet if they're pregnant. But with the miscarriage..."

John's words trailed off and Bryce could feel his grief as keenly as if it were his own. Mikayla had been so devastated, and Bryce could only imagine that his brothers would feel the same.

"Okay," Bryce said as he tried to hold his emotions together once more. "I'll find out how long before Matt can travel, and I'll make the arrangements." John nodded and then looked a little worried. "What is it?" Bryce asked urgently. His gut told him John had a serious concern. His gut was rarely wrong.

"When you get here, make sure to keep Mikayla close. I mean arm around her, protective stance, gun at the ready, close. The men on this planet are animals, and they won't hesitate to grab someone as pretty as Mikayla." John looked positively green when he said the last part, and Bryce nodded decisively, his mind already playing through ways to ensure her safety until they could get to the research facility in the middle of nowhere.

"I'll protect her with my life," he said sincerely. It may have sounded overly dramatic, but it was exactly how he felt. He would keep his sister-in-law safe or die trying.

* * * *

It had taken three weeks to get back, but she finally had all her men in the one room—well, all of her men plus one. Since her return nearly a month ago, she'd watched each of her husbands welcome their brother back into their lives and slowly come to terms with her miscarriage. Mikayla still felt a very keen sense of loss, but her doctor's reassurance that she should be able to conceive again went a long way toward lifting the grief.

Mikayla laughed as Bryce joined the general boisterousness of dinner with all of her noisy men. Brock's leg had finally healed enough to remove the brace Ryan and Ty had fashioned for him, and

a trip into the medical facility in town had confirmed their diagnosis. It didn't stop the animal jokes, though. Brock had been given the nickname of just about every animal of this planet and then some.

The only sour note had been Lachlan's withdrawal. He'd been polite, caring, and understanding, but not the man she'd known back on Earth. It was as if he blamed himself for her miscarriage—despite the details Bryce, Matt, and Mikayla had provided—and wouldn't let himself too close. They hadn't shared a bed since her return, and no matter how much she goaded him, she hadn't been spanked by him, not even once.

Brock had happily obliged, and as much as she'd enjoyed her extra time with him while he recovered from his injury, she'd worried and missed Lachlan too.

"So serious," Ryan laughed as he slipped an arm around her waist and then pulled her onto his lap. "What, or should I say who, put the worried look on your face, sweetheart?"

"It's okay," she said, cuddling closer to Ryan and smiling when Ty straddled his chair sideways and pressed up against her back. "Time will sort it out."

Ryan nodded against her head and then whispered in her ear, "How do you feel about even numbers?"

Chapter Seven

Bryce watched Mikayla settle into Ryan's arms and envied his brother more than he thought possible. Falling for his brothers' wife had been the exact opposite of his plans, but he seemed to have gone and done it anyway. Considering that the contract on this planet was nearly done, and Brock was mostly recovered, they really didn't need Bryce anymore. They'd invited him to join them on their next contract, but considering the increasingly erotic fantasies Bryce was having about their wife, it would probably be best for them all if he went his own way for a while.

Memories of how awful life had been without his family zipped through his brain, but he ruthlessly shoved them aside. This time things were different. This time he could visit and keep regular contact. It wouldn't be quite as amazing as the last few weeks had been, but at least he wouldn't be causing any problems for Mikayla. Just like ten years ago, he would walk away because his presence would only cause pain for the ones he loved.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Peter said from his right. A little disconcerted to be caught staring, Bryce nodded and turned to his brother.

"You're a very lucky man," he said sincerely.

"So are you," Peter said seriously. Confused, Bryce glanced over to see Mikayla smiling at him, and his heart twisted just a little with concern. He hadn't exactly been able to hide his affection for Mikayla, but surely his brothers knew he'd never try to be anything more than her friend.

"I...um...guess so," he said, hoping that he was misunderstanding Peter's meaning. Surely he was referring to Bryce's close shave with two assassins.

"She loves you," Peter said, throwing Bryce straight back into confusion. Why wasn't Peter angry? Why were his brothers all grinning at him? And why was Mikayla coming around the table to sit on Matt's knee?

She kissed Matt, glanced around the table, making eye contact with each of her husbands before settling her gaze on him.

"Apparently, seven is not an even number."

"I-I don't understand," Bryce managed to force past a suddenly dry mouth. All of his brothers were watching him, and he had no idea why.

"Turns out," Peter said, "that eight seems to be the perfect number for Mikayla."

"What?" Bryce yelled when at least one possible meaning sunk into his brain. Surely they weren't suggesting...

"Bryce." Mikayla's soft voice drew his gaze back to her, and when she had his full attention, she leaned forward and kissed him softly. Not a friend kiss, not a brother-in-law kiss, but the type of kiss he'd seen her offer to every one of her husbands. Bryce fell into the sensual caress, momentarily forgetting their audience, but a couple of very amused chuckles reached his ears and he pulled away. Embarrassment heated his cheeks as he faced his brothers.

"Marry me," Mikayla said softly. It was more of an order than a request, but Bryce wanted to scream yes from the rooftops. He gazed at every smiling face at the table, wondering if he was dreaming or delusional, but in the end he whispered the word his heart desired.

Mikayla smiled and crawled from Matt's lap and onto Bryce's. She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him like there was no tomorrow. On and on her sensual assault ensnared his heart and stole his reason. He'd loved her since he'd met her, and he couldn't imagine a future without her, well, not a happy future anyway.

Mikayla finally released him from her magical spell, and he opened his eyes to find all but one of his brother's gone. Matt still sat beside them, grinning like a loon, his hand already caressing his thick erection through his pants.

"That is so hot," he said with a wide grin. "I'm starting to understand why Ryan and Ty like to share."

"I know why Ryan and Ty like to share," Mikayla said. Still sitting on Bryce's lap, she rubbed her bottom against Bryce's rock-hard erection and leaned over to kiss his brother the way she'd just kissed him.

Bryce could feel his eyes crossing from the incredible sensations.

"Mikayla, are you sure?" he managed to ask with his last shred of sanity. He'd dreamed of her for so long it seemed almost too good to be true. Did she really ask him to marry her? She turned and straddled his lap, her arms wrapped loosely around his neck. He glanced over her shoulder and saw Matt's smile and couldn't help but return it.

"Of course I'm sure. And my husbands are sure. In fact, it was their idea that you and I get married."

"Why?" He couldn't hold back the need to know. He didn't want to be the eighth husband simply because there were eight brothers. He needed to be loved for the man he was, not the family he was born into.

"Because you're a good man and you deserve to be happy," Matt said sincerely. "And you were there for Mikayla when she needed you the most." Matt rubbed his shoulder where the bullet had torn through him. "And you were there for me, when I needed you the most. And you spent years protecting people at great personal cost."

"And of course the most important reason of all," Mikayla said, rubbing her pussy against his hard cock. "I love you, and you love me, and all of your brothers want us to be happy together."

He kissed her then. Kissed her the way he'd been dreaming, laying claim to her heart the way he needed to. "I love you, Mikayla. I always have."

She glanced over her shoulder at Matt and smiled before looking back at Bryce.

“We know,” she said quietly. “I tried to love you like a brother-in-law, but they saw through me,” she said as she tilted her head to the doorway to indicate the brothers he’d thought had left them alone. It appeared they hadn’t gone very far. “They know that I’d never betray them, but this is what we all want.” She smoothed a hand over his face. “Will you stay with us?”

“Always.” The promise slipped out before he could even analyze it, but it was what he wanted more than anything. After so many years of being alone, he not only had his brothers back but they trusted him with the woman they adored. It was the most precious gift he could ever imagine, and he silently vowed to spend the rest of his life trying to be worthy.

* * * *

Mikayla watched the emotions play across Bryce’s face. For the past few weeks she’d struggled with her attraction to him, and no matter how many times she’d tried to put the emotions back into the brother-in-law category she’d obviously failed. The fact that her husbands had not only noticed but welcomed their brother into her heart and their marriage proved how amazing her men really were.

She glanced sideways to see the rest of her husbands standing in the doorway not even trying to hide their nosy eavesdropping now.

“I think maybe you should take me to your room,” Mikayla said with a laugh. “Otherwise our first time together is going to get a little crowded.” She saw the surprise in his eyes and then the dawning horror. She knew for a fact that he hadn’t been with a woman for at least three months—probably far longer—and living on the base with its paper thin walls and her seven horny husbands couldn’t have been easy.

Bryce looked a little bit panicked, but then he smiled at Matt and seemed to relax. Tears filmed her eyes at how quickly Bryce and Matt had rebuilt their relationship. Matt's angry reaction after his surgery had quickly simmered down when he learned the circumstances surrounding the woman he'd seen Bryce shoot. Once he'd heard the rest of Bryce's life he'd not only let go of all his anger but had gone out of his way to make sure his brother stayed with his family from now on.

Mikayla suspected that Matt's anger may have been based in fear. If Matt's twin could kill someone in cold blood, as he'd thought, then Matt may have worried for his own sanity. Knowing that his brother was actually a hero rather than the villain, may well have given Matt back something he'd lost. In fact, Matt's legendary temper had been rather subdued of late.

"I think," Bryce said as he lifted her off his lap and stood her between his knees, "that our first time together should be something special." She didn't quite know what he meant until Matt lifted her into his arms and headed toward the door. Mikayla glanced back to see Bryce grab his walking cane and follow. His leg had mostly healed, but the extra damage caused by avoiding assassins had left him with what would probably be a lifelong limp. There was a complicated reconstructive surgery, but Bryce had refused to consider it. He didn't want to be back in a brace, and she suspected he was very tired of being in pain. He also hadn't explained exactly how his leg had been broken, but considering it was around the same time his status as an undercover cop had been discovered, she suspected it had been a lot more horrifying than the simple, drunken fall he'd suggested that first day. She smiled as she realized that despite the small discomfort of his limp he had no trouble keeping up with Matt.

The rest of her husbands smiled and laughed, even grumbled a little about not getting to watch, but none of them looked unhappy. They had just a little over two more months on this icy planet, and

then they'd move to the next one. She couldn't wait to be somewhere warmer.

Talking of warmer...

Matt put her on her feet and then lifted her dress over her head and laughed quietly at the huge granny panties she wore. She'd begun wearing them to annoy Lachlan, but so far he hadn't reacted. Matt made short work of removing the oversized, flower-covered material and then pushed them into his pocket.

"I'll discuss this with Lachlan later," he said with a huge grin. She laughed in delight and said, "Please do."

Completely naked, she turned to face the man who would soon be her husband. Bryce seemed a little nervous, and Mikayla decided that maybe she could help him with that. Very deliberately she dropped to her knees in front of him, undid the fastenings on his pants, and wrapped her hand around his hard, thick cock. Bryce groaned as she caressed the hot flesh and nearly lost his balance when she flicked her tongue over his weeping slit. She sucked on the head of his dick softly, tasting his unique flavor, moaning her approval.

Rough hands threaded into her hair and held her still when she tried to take him deeper. "Mikayla, it's been too long for me" he said with a ragged moan. "If you don't stop, I'm going to come." She wrapped her fist around his hard length, pumping his flesh slowly.

"That's the idea," she said with a wicked grin and then took him into her mouth again.

* * * *

Holy shit. The woman was amazing, and he was so damned turned on, but he didn't want to hurt her. Hell, he had seven brothers who would probably pound him into the ground if he even looked like getting too rough. But Matt seemed to understand his dilemma.

His brother took a seat on the bed, caressing Mikayla's shoulder and neck as she sucked Bryce's cock.

“You won’t hurt her,” Matt said with absolute confidence as Bryce tried to hold himself really, really still. Kind of hard to do when the woman was doing amazingly wicked things with her tongue. “She likes things a little rough, don’t you, honey?”

Matt snaked a hand around to Mikayla’s breast and squeezed and twisted the nipple. Her small gasp of pain vibrated against Bryce’s cock, and he could no longer hold himself back. With his hands already tangled in her hair, he took over. Holding her still he pushed deep into her throat, moaning desperately as she swallowed around the head. In and out he thrust, struggling to retain his control.

But Mikayla moaned again as Matt did something Bryce couldn’t quite see and then he was lost. In and out, harder, deeper Bryce took her, need boiling in his belly, the need to claim, the need to mark her as his. His orgasm burst from him, his cum painting the back of her throat and he held her there, forcing her to take all of him. She swallowed, caressing his length with her tongue.

Slowly sanity returned, and he pulled his softening dick from her mouth. He dropped to his knees heavily, searching her eyes for disgust at his behavior, but she simply smiled. He caressed her cheek as he tried to understand how he could be so lucky.

“I love you,” he said again.

She pressed a soft kiss to his mouth and then burst into giggles when Matt grabbed her by the waist and lifted her onto the bed. “You’re overdressed,” he said to his brother, and Bryce finally realized that while he’d been getting the most amazing blow job of his life, his brother had stripped off his own clothes.

Scrambling to catch up, Bryce ripped his clothes off, almost losing his balance as he forgot about his leg. Mikayla lay on her back in the middle of the bed, Matt stretched out beside her, his hand drawing lazy circles on her tummy as they waited for Bryce. Bryce quickly crawled onto the bed and pressed against Mikayla’s side.

Already his erection was making a recovery. It had been a long time, but he suspected that his stamina had more to do with the woman he loved than any sort of time frame.

“Honey,” Matt said, “does it hurt you when Ryan and Ty make love to you together?”

She looked surprised by the question but was quick to reassure him that it didn’t. Bryce was still trying to understand why it would hurt when the full meaning of “together” coalesced in his brain. He groaned as his cock pulsed with excitement.

Matt trailed his hand lower, caressing her swollen pussy, spreading the wetness Bryce could see. “It would seem,” Matt said in a conversational tone, “that giving you a blow job turns our girl on. Feel how wet she is.”

Bryce slid his fingers through the slippery, wet flesh of her slit, the silky glide of her arousal making his cock throb even harder just imagining what her pussy would feel like. Mikayla opened her thighs wider, pressing against his fingers impatiently until he slid them inside. She moaned in approval, and he could feel her muscles caressing him as he pushed them in and out, finger fucking her as he watched her face. She was amazingly responsive, and he couldn’t wait to fill her with his cock.

“Please,” she whispered to him and lifted her arms. She welcomed him into her body with a soft sigh and gentle fingers through his hair. He stroked in and out of her slowly, enjoying the gentle rhythm and soothing glide, but need gripped him and she wrapped her legs around his hips. She was on the verge of coming, quivering, gasping, moaning his name when Matt tapped his shoulder.

Surprised but willing to follow Matt’s lead, Bryce moved away, and Matt quickly pushed into her hungry pussy. Over and over he drove into her heat. Bryce could feel his own orgasm rising just from watching his brother fuck the woman they both loved, but then Matt pulled away, too.

Mikayla growled and tried to hold him inside her but he laughed and moved away. “Lie on your back,” he said to Bryce, proving once and for all that Matt still liked being in charge. Bryce would let him lead—this time.

Bryce rolled onto his back and Matt helped Mikayla into position. Mikayla slid onto his cock with a sensual sigh, and he couldn’t help but grab her ass and pump her up and down. She gasped, tightening around his cock, nearing orgasm once more, but Matt pressed her down and held her still.

She wiggled against their hold, but he could feel her pussy creaming around his cock so he knew being trapped between them like this excited her. She squirmed even more when they heard the sound of lube being squeezed from a bottle.

* * * *

Matt caressed his wife’s ass. Despite how much the thought of fucking her tight, puckered hole turned him on, he’d never quite gotten around to trying it. He glanced at his brother and realized why. Without his twin he hadn’t quite felt complete. With Bryce here, the need to share and take her together overwhelmed him, and he couldn’t wait to be inside her.

He worked the lube into her dark hole, scissoring his fingers to loosen the muscle. She gasped and pushed back against him, obviously enjoying the caress. “Matt, now,” she groaned. He laughed and smacked her ass. When would she learn that he liked to be in charge?

Bryce looked at him with wild eyes, and Matt decided to give in to Mikayla’s demand just this once. He went to move but realized he didn’t quite have enough room. He chuckled as he realized this ménage business was going to take a little more planning.

He lifted Mikayla off his brother, tickling her when she moaned in frustration. “Swing around,” he told his brother, and Bryce moved to

a position that had his legs hanging over the bed. Mikayla quickly moved back over Bryce, greedily claiming his cock with her pussy. Matt pressed her down again, nearly coming himself when he heard her moan of delight. His wife truly loved being held immobile, and it was creating all sorts of kinky ideas in his mind.

Still pressing her against Bryce with one hand, Matt squeezed lube onto his cock with the other. He caught sight of his brother's intense expression as he pressed his cock against Mikayla's ass. Pressing forward he moaned at the incredible heat and overwhelming tightness. Slowly he worked his way into her ass, pressing balls deep and holding still.

"Are you okay?"

Mikayla's sweet smile dispelled every one of his concerns. Easing out slowly, he pressed back in as he felt Bryce withdraw. Slowly, steadily, carefully they built a rhythm. Gently he fucked his wife, amazed at the unbelievable sensation of sharing her so intimately with his twin.

But she groaned and moved and suddenly it wasn't enough. Heat built in his belly, arousal flooded his veins, need engulfed his thoughts, and he started pounding into her ass over and over. Breathing harshly, thrusting harder, his muscles pulling tighter, orgasm slammed him as Mikayla's climax hit. The throbbing, heated caress of her ass, her moan of delight, Bryce's groan and Matt's own need burst from him, pulsing and filling her ass as he slowed his thrusting and marveled at the incredible contentment burning through him.

He opened his eyes and saw Bryce's face. Rapture, wonder, and complete happiness filled his brother's expression and somehow left Matt feeling whole again.

Matt couldn't believe how close he'd come to losing his brother, and he planned to make up for every doubt of the past. The most incredible thing was that Bryce truly loved Mikayla, loved her the exact same way Matt did, and Matt found himself very grateful that

she would love his brother the way he deserved to be loved—wholeheartedly, unreservedly and forever.

He'd been blessed with an amazing wife and a second chance to know his brother. He was a very lucky man, and he had no intention of fucking that up, ever.

Epilogue

“There you are,” Ty said as he strode into the room. “I have a surprise for you.”

Oh, hell. A surprise. She tried not to shudder, but she hated surprises with a passion. Ty rubbed her arms and kissed the top of her head.

“You’ll like this surprise,” he said confidently. Not really convinced, Mikayla tried to smile. He gave her a quizzical look, so she wasn’t sure she managed to grin without it looking like a forced baring of teeth.

Trying to hide her anxiety, Mikayla let Ty lead her over to the same bench Matt had used so long ago. She giggled nervously when he carefully arranged her facedown on the countertop.

“No,” Ryan said as he entered the room, “her head was facing the other direction.”

“That’s true,” Ty said thoughtfully. He stepped over to her, moved her head carefully like she was some sort of life-sized doll and then stood back to admire his handiwork. “No, that’s not right either.”

He helped her to stand once more, lifted her dress over her head, and replaced it with the T-shirt off his own back. Then he arranged her on the counter once more. “Better,” Ryan said, “but she wasn’t wearing underwear.”

“True,” Ty said as he dragged the offending material down her legs and tapped her feet so she would step out of them. “Now you stay right where you are, sweetheart. We’re just going to remember back to the day we first saw this beautiful ass.” She shivered at memories of those incredibly erotic moments with Matt when six of the brothers had been watching.

Finally, Ryan stepped forward, stroking the skin on her ass softly as he reenacted that day. He pushed a hand between her shoulder blades, holding her down as he slid his fingers through her folds. She practically melted into the table as present and past memories combined, and she could almost hear Matt's rasping voice as he tried to frighten her into going home.

She'd refused, so he'd pushed her facedown on this very worktable and pressed a thumb deep into her pussy. Mikayla gasped as Ryan did exactly that, wiggling and swirling the digit in her slit as she lifted onto her toes.

"Remember what Matt said?" Ty asked as he stepped closer to the bench and caressed her spine. She nodded, the memory so vivid she was on the verge of orgasm already.

"H-He said that you and Ryan like to share."

"That's right," Ryan said as he pushed three thick fingers into her pussy then pressed his slick thumb against her anus. She'd had anal sex with her husbands often since meeting them, but somehow this almost felt like the first time, exactly the way it had that day with Matt.

She was panting, stretching on her toes, reaching for that elusive orgasm, when Ty leaned over and bit her earlobe. "Do you have any idea what we wanted to do to you that day?" he whispered. "You were so incredibly hot. Neither of us wanted to wait to get inside this beautiful body."

"Then why did you take off the next day?"

"Ah, now that, my dear Mikayla, is a story for another day. Today we are going to fulfill all of those fantasies that were created when Matt finger fucked and spanked you to orgasm on this very table."

She shivered as anticipation sent heat through her veins and goose bumps over her ass. Without warning Ryan removed his fingers and slammed his cock into her pussy so fast she could barely breathe. He pounded into her over and over, dragging her hips back against

him time and time again. She moaned as his fingers found her clit, squeezing the swollen bud as he rode her hard.

But then he was gone.

Ty's entry was just as hard, just as forceful. Mikayla scrabbled for a hold, trying to stay upright even as her lover dragged her off balance. Just as her orgasm broke, Ty pulled out of her pussy and slid into her ass. She pulsed around his cock, squeezing the hard flesh as the climax skittered through her.

Ty held her pressed against the countertop as Ryan hurried around the other side and rubbed his erection against her lips. She opened for him, tasting her pussy juice on his cock, running her tongue over his engorged flesh as Ty still impaled her ass.

They set a frantic pace, fucking her harder, faster, more urgently. Mikayla opened her mouth wider, taking Ryan deeper, swallowing around the mushroom-shaped head, trying to give him the pleasure they were giving her.

Ty squeezed her clit, and she tried to scream as another orgasm sent sensation thundering through her. But Ryan held her to him, fucking her face, refusing to let her go. Her climax pulsed, throbbed, sizzled through her veins as her men held still for a moment and then came, hurling their seed into her body at the same time. Mikayla sucked on the cock in her mouth, laving the soft flesh as Ty slowly pulled out of her ass.

Exhausted she lay flat against the counter until Ty cleaned her up and then gathered her in his arms. He sat down at his desk.

"Wow," Ryan said as he fell into the chair opposite. "As fantasy fulfillment goes that is definitely top of my list."

Mikayla giggled tiredly. "Next time you decide to *surprise* me, maybe you could give me a couple days' warning to build my energy." They both laughed with her, but then Ty sat a little straighter.

"That wasn't your surprise. That was just a golden opportunity. No, your real surprise is really a surprise." The more times he used the word "surprise," the faster Mikayla's heart rate accelerated. She

really, *really* didn't like being surprised. "You and I," Ty said in a conspiratorial whisper, "are going on holidays." She raised her eyebrow, waiting for the rest. Her husbands had already decided that she wasn't going anywhere without at least two of her men by her side. After her miscarriage they weren't taking any chances of her being left alone ever again. "Oh, all right," Ty said dramatically, then rolled his eyes, "Ryan and Peter are going, too."

"Going where?" She wanted to be excited, but fear of the unknown was churning through her gut. Ryan seemed to notice her stress rising because he hurried around the desk and clasped both her hands in his own.

"Wherever you want, sweetheart. When we start the new contract at the next planet we'll be really busy for the first few months. Before any of the other surveys are done, we need to identify any risks to the local habitat and its occupants, so we thought a holiday while the others get the base set up was a good idea."

"Okay," she said shakily, trying to rein in her nervous response. "That sounds like a great idea."

Now, if she could just make herself believe it.

End of Book 2: Sweet Captivation

**To be continued in
Book 3: Wild Fascination**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Abby Blake prefers to read or write romance over just about everything else—except maybe chocolate. Most days she can be found hurrying to do what needs to be done so that she can curl up with her laptop and her latest bunch of heroes.

Also by Abby Blake

Ménage Everlasting: *Fire*
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