

SIREN  
Publishing

*Ménage Everlasting*

**SOLD**

WICKED MISSIONS **4**

**ELIZABETH RAINES**

## Wicked Missions 4

### Sold

Lyrianna Seebré steals black market vaccinations from a drug kingpin to aid dying children. Captured in a raid, she's wrongfully convicted and sentenced to forty years of hard labor. Upon arrival at the penal colony, she's selected to be auctioned off to the male settlers of the newly colonized ocean planet, Pagonna. What is she willing to sacrifice for her freedom?

Settlers Carter Verdel and Brandon Hunt have created successful water-pod and island farms on Pagonna. The only thing missing from their lives is a woman. Able to afford only one concubine even when they pool their funds, they attend the annual auction, hoping to find someone to share their beds—and perhaps even their lives.

The men purchase Lyrianna, but can they overcome her resentment and win her love? And when the kingpin comes to Pagonna, seeking revenge against Lyrianna, can Carter and Brandon protect her?

**Genre:** Futuristic, Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Science Fiction

**Length:** 35,669 words

**SOLD**

***Wicked Missions 4***

**Elizabeth Raines**

**MENAGE EVERLASTING**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
**[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)**

**ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:**

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the U.S. Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

If you find a Siren-BookStrand e-book being sold or shared illegally, please let us know at **[legal@sirenbookstrand.com](mailto:legal@sirenbookstrand.com)**

**A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK**

IMPRINT: Ménage Everlasting

**SOLD**

Copyright © 2011 by Elizabeth Raines

E-book ISBN: 1-61034-565-7

First E-book Publication: June 2011

Cover design by *Les Byerley*

All art and logo copyright © 2011 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED:** This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

**PUBLISHER**

Siren Publishing, Inc.

[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)

## **Letter to Readers**

Dear Readers,

If you have purchased this copy of *Sold* by Elizabeth Raines from BookStrand.com or its official distributors, thank you. Also, thank you for not sharing your copy of this book.

### **Regarding E-book Piracy**

This book is copyrighted intellectual property. No other individual or group has resale rights, auction rights, membership rights, sharing rights, or any kind of rights to sell or to give away a copy of this book.

The author and the publisher work very hard to bring our paying readers high-quality reading entertainment.

This is Elizabeth Raines' livelihood. It's fair and simple. Please respect Ms. Raines' right to earn a living from her work.

Amanda Hilton, Publisher  
[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)  
[www.BookStrand.com](http://www.BookStrand.com)

## **DEDICATION**

To Melissa—Thanks for donning that tiara and touring Disneyworld with this fellow princess. It's a memory I'll always treasure.

# **SOLD**

## ***Wicked Missions 4***

**ELIZABETH RAINES**

**Copyright © 2011**

## **Chapter 1**

“I’ll kill you for this!” Syrus Graveland shouted as he turned his bloated face to watch the small ship take off.

Lyrianna Seebré laughed right in his face, relieved that her mission had been a success now that the ship was on its way to the Rhotan System. He might have slammed her up against the wall and wrapped a beefy hand around her throat, but her pulse pistol was poking into his stomach. All she had to do to save herself was pull the trigger. She could probably even squeeze off shots fast enough to take down the two men who flanked Syrus, especially since they both seemed breathless from chasing her. “Just try,” she croaked, her throat constricted from his squeeze. “You’ll be dead before your fat carcass hits the ground.”

“Those vaccines were mine! They would have gotten me a fortune!” he screamed, making little drops of spittle hitting her cheeks. She refused to cringe, despite the fact that everything about the drug kingpin sickened her. His sweaty smell. His disgusting looks. His repulsive job. Nor would she ever waste her inborn empathic abilities to try and get a read on the man. Belusians were taught from childhood to use their gift only for good. Wasting it on a man with no soul would violate her upbringing.



Living on the hellhole that was Rozale, she should have known one day it would come to this. Kill or be killed by one of the scum of the universe who used the planet to run their nefarious enterprises. Black marketing. Prostitution. Drugs. Hell, there were more thieves hiding out on the planet than anywhere else in the galaxy. She'd have enjoyed a much better life back on Belusia being a school teacher. Yet fate had set her on Rozale, giving her connections that helped her turn some of the bad things happening around her into good, such as swiping stolen vaccines and making sure they ended up in the hands of the people who desperately needed them.

"Well, now they're heading to Fraiqua instead," she replied. "You'll have to comfort yourself that thousands of children will survive now. Pity they couldn't pay your black market prices. Now let me go, or I'll blast your ass to—"

"Freeze!" a masculine voice shouted as light flooded the area. Dozens of officers from the Rozale Enforcement Agency started pouring into the landing area, pointing their weapons at Lyrianna, Syrus, and his cohorts.

"It would seem, Syrus," she practically purred, "that you are caught."

Two officers grabbed him by the shoulders and jerked him away from Lyrianna. She breathed a relieved sigh and smiled. "Thank you, off—" A third officer hit her arm with a baton, knocking her pistol to the ground. Then the black-suited man whirled her around and pressed her against the wall. Her arm throbbed like a son of a bitch, but it didn't feel broken. Their "greeting" seemed to indicate they didn't understand she wasn't with Syrus's gang. "Hey... C'mon, now. Easy there, buddy. I'm on your side."

"By order of the Rozale High Counsel, you're under arrest for drug trafficking," the officer said as he slapped restraints on her wrist, dragged it behind her back, and secured her other wrist.

She tried to get him to understand her role in the vaccine swipe. "Wait, wait! You've got it all wrong!" Lyrianna said, trying to turn

back to face the officer. “I was just getting those demise pox vaccines to some missionaries to take back to—”

The officer grinned as a man in a suit with a badge hanging from the breast pocket strolled over. His smile was chilling. “So you confess you were in possession of black market virus vaccines? Should make the trial a helluva lot easier.” He elbowed the officer. “And I didn’t even have to beat that confession out of her.”

\* \* \* \*

*Four weeks later...*

The ancient judge stared down at Lyrianna from the enormous wooden bench. His blue eyes were hard as steel, his mouth was fixed into a hard line, and his gray hair spoke of a lifetime of enjoyment at passing sentence on the citizens of this fair planet. She didn’t even bother trying to get an empathic read on him. She was already resigned to her fate—had been from the moment they threw her in the jail cell and slammed the metal door shut.

While Rozale might have modeled much of its society after twentieth-century Earth cultures, on this planet, arrested was the same as guilty, especially if the accused wasn’t a Rozale citizen. So many of the things in the courtroom reminded her of the things she’d seen in the old books from Earth she loved to read. The big bench, wooden tables, and padded chairs. The judge’s black robe. The man who worked for the government and wanted to put her in a penal colony on one of Rozale’s moons. The one thing missing was the person who was supposed to be representing her best interests. No one defended her, and she’d not even been allowed to speak on her own behalf. They played back her confession that had been captured by the arresting detective, and only prosecutorial evidence was considered.

And now, she would be told her punishment for helping steal those demise pox vaccines right from under the noses of Syrus

Graveland and his black market smugglers.

Four weeks in a cell in Rozale's women's jail had left Lyrianna bruised, thin, and dirty, but not broken. God knew that the penal moon wouldn't be any better. Probably much, much worse. She'd been naïve to suppose the government would have mercy on her for getting the vaccines to the Fraiquan children intended to have them rather than make parents pay smugglers to save their children from that horrible, deadly sickness. No, nothing in the Rhotan System had ever been remotely fair, even now that the civil wars had ended.

"Lyrianna Seebré," the judge's voice boomed from on high, "you have been found guilty by this court. I intend to make an example of you and of all the other smugglers who seem to believe this beloved planet is a free-for-all for every type of illegal activity. Black marketeering and drug smuggling will not be tolerated on Rozale."

She snorted a small laugh, not even caring what the judge thought of the disrespectful reaction. He hadn't even considered what she was doing with those vaccines or why. He was lumping her together with people like Syrus Graveland, and *that*, she couldn't allow. "This planet *is* a free-for-all for every type of illegal activity, and you damn well know it!"

"Young lady, you should show more respect for this court, especially when it is about to pass sentence on your crimes!" His face had grown ruddy, and she sure didn't need to be an empath to know he was enraged.

So was she. "I committed no crimes. I took those vaccines from thieves who have operated as freely here as any legal business, and I gave them to Fraiquan missionaries who will use them to save thousands of children's lives. If you want to send me to prison for that, fine. But don't you *dare* say I'm a thief! I'm a...a...Robin Hood."

The judge frowned down at her. "A what?"

"A Robin Hood. A figure from Earth's history. A legend to his people. He stole from the rich to give to the poor. I stole from thieves

to give those vaccines back to the people who truly needed them.”

The judge looked less than impressed. He grabbed his gavel and shook it at her as he shouted down her sentence. “What you are, Lyrianna Seebré, is a Belusian expatriate who has befouled our society and become nothing but a common criminal. I sentence you to forty years hard labor on the women’s penal colony on Delta moon.” He banged the gavel on the desk as the prosecutor and detective pounded each other on the back in some kind of show of masculine congratulations.

*Forty years.* She’d be an old woman when she was paroled, assuming she’d last longer than a year or two on that godforsaken wasteland. Most women didn’t. The average life expectancy on Delta was less than five years, but Lyrianna was twenty-five, healthy, and strong.

She swallowed her fear and prayed that she’d find a way to raise the average.

\* \* \* \*

The shuttle landed on Delta, making the women in the compartment bounce. Not the smoothest landing, but at least they’d all arrived in one piece. A male guard in a gray uniform came walking into the compartment followed by a thin but imposing woman in a black business suit who carried a touch screen organizer. The warden? A ranking officer? She tapped away at the screen as she passed each inmate, probably checking them in by the number stenciled in white on their navy blue jumpsuits. When she reached Lyrianna, she stopped and stared.

Not a surprise. Lyrianna didn’t look much like the other women on the shuttle. She was, by far, the youngest. At least she appeared younger than her fellow inmates. Her hair was still shiny and vibrant blonde, while many of the other women had cut their hair short or had filthy, matted tresses. Several of the women were Amazons—

members of a women's gang that ran rampant on Rozale, terrorizing anyone who crossed their paths. They shaved their heads and sported tattoos on their faces that proclaimed each of their crimes. The Amazons on the shuttle had very little unmarked skin, their numerous and hideous designs announcing them as people she'd want to give wide berth while on Delta.

"What the fuck are you staring at, princess?" one of the largest Amazons shouted at Lyrianna. Judging from her face, the woman had committed more than her share of crimes.

Knowing there was no good answer, she decided to try some bravado. If she didn't establish herself as a badass from moment one, her small stature would make her ripe for torture by stronger inmates. "Seems to me I'm staring at one ugly gorilla who might have been a female once upon a time."

The Amazon tried to jump up, but her chains immediately dragged her back down. "Oh, princess. You picked the wrong person to fuck with. I'm gonna scratch those pretty blue eyes out and rip that ponytail off your skull with my bare hands."

"If you had an ounce of brains in that thick skull of yours, you'd see my eyes are gray, not blue. I'm Belusian and proud of it. And you're a fucking idiot if you think I'm just a *princess*," Lyrianna replied, grateful her voice didn't quiver. "Try laying a hand on me, and you'll pull back a bloody stump." She was probably going to have to endure several nasty fights before she showed them she might be short in stature, but she knew how to protect herself. And in any scuffle, she always gave as good as she got.

The lady in the black suit continued to stare at her. "A pathetic bunch. Not much profit here. Except..." She punched a few things into her organizer and then nodded at Lyrianna. The guard came over and started unlocking her shackles. "This is the only one going to auction. Get her off the ship and get her ready."

"Auction? I beg your pardon?" The woman didn't answer her. Tossing a glare at the guard, Lyrianna tried again. "What does she

mean ‘going to auction’?”

A knowing laugh was the only answer from the guard. “Stand up.”

Lyrianna obeyed, but only because the guard had pulled a small stun-stick from his belt and pointed it at her. That, and he outweighed her by a good thirty kilograms. He shoved her between the shoulder blades to move her toward the exit hatch. “Where am I going?”

“Not fair!” the Amazon she’d insulted cried out. “That bitch deserves this place. Send me to auction! I’m strong. I’ll get you a good price!”

The lady in the suit laughed aloud. “You? A good price? Hardly. There isn’t a man in the world who’ll pay a single universal-credit for you. No, she’s the only one worth picking. The rest of you are moving on to the prison.” She stalked to the door and followed Lyrianna and the guard out of the shuttle.

Several meters away, another shuttle, this one with no identification markings, sat waiting. Just as Lyrianna turned to ask what was happening, the guard jabbed her in the neck with a hypospray. The world started turning, and her knees suddenly gave out. Everything went black before she hit the ground.

## Chapter 2

“Get up!” The angry voice had been barking the same thing at her several times, growing louder with every bellow. Each occasion, Lyrianna tried hard to ignore it, wanting to drift back into the oblivion that blocked the horrible thoughts nibbling at her returning consciousness. The trial. The prison. Something about an auction.

“I said, get up!” This time, the holler was accompanied by a splash of cold water in her face.

Sputtering, she sat up, trying to get her bearings. Everything was still a bit fuzzy, and all she could figure out was she was on some kind of ship. Her hands reached for the side of wherever she’d been lying. A bed? A bunk? *No. A stasis pod.* She tried to talk, but her mouth felt as if it had been stuffed with sand. Dry. Gritty. Shit, but she hated stasis. How long had she been out? And where in the hell was she now?

“Get up!” A middle-aged man dressed in a military gray jumpsuit walked down an aisle that contained at least another twenty stasis pods. His salt-and-pepper hair had been buzzed short, and his brown eyes showed not an ounce of kindness. He set down the bucket and glass he’d clearly been using to rouse the people who were slow to wake. “All of you, get the fuck up. Get some chow and something to drink. Then we’ve got to get you purtied up for the auction this afternoon. Up! Get up!”

Looking around, she saw several other young women, all sitting up in their stasis pods and appearing as confused as Lyrianna felt. Memories came flooding back. The shuttle trip to Delta. The near fight with the Amazon from hell. And someone hitting her with a

hypospray. That was where her memory just...ended. She ran her hands over her face, wiping away the rest of the water that she now wished had reached her mouth. She could have used a drink rather than a wet alarm clock.

“Up and at ’em, ladies!” the man shouted again. He walked among the pods and banged on the ends of them with a policeman’s baton he’d just pulled from the black leather utility belt strapped to his waist. “Up! Up! Up!”

Stretching her legs over the side, she stood with muscles that trembled, trying not only to get her space legs but to regain some of the strength stasis had drained from her. As the pseudo-sergeant passed, she found the temerity to ask, “How long were we in stasis?”

A reptilian smile spread across his face, revealing two gold teeth, front and center in his mouth. “Well, well. One of my little ladies finds her voice. You wanna know how long you been in stasis, *sweetheart*?”

She wasn’t sure whether to nod or run, but she refused to show him her fear. Straightening her spine, she met his gaze head-on. “Yes.” She followed quickly with a, “sir.”

A flicker of respect flashed through his eyes before they grew hard again. “Four months. You multiply that by the speed this ship can travel, and you ain’t never going back home again. Hell, sweetheart, you ain’t even in the same quadrant of space now.”

Two girls burst into tears, and Lyrianna had to resist the urge to either hug them or give their ponytails a good, strong jerk—whatever it took to shut them up. No way would she *ever* let someone see her lose control of her feelings that way. Sure, she was an empath and open to knowing what others felt, but she sure as hell didn’t want anyone else to know what emotions tumbled through her, especially tumultuous emotions. Whether that made her a hypocrite or not, she honestly didn’t care.

A small brunette who appeared much younger than Lyrianna found some courage. “Where are we going?”



The man whirled on her, his smile dropping to a frown. “Fuckin’ women. Think you can question a ranking officer...” His voice dropped to unintelligible muttering as he shook his head.

So he *was* ex-military, which explained a lot. Lyrianna had no doubt he wanted to scream in the young woman’s face and almost admired his self-control.

Straightening his shoulders, he marched over to glare down at the brunette. “You, little lady, are going to a concubine auction for all those horny pod-farmin’ Pilgrims on that godforsaken water planet, Pagonna.”

One tall woman on the far side of the room spoke up. “Pagonna? But that’s in the Tadoorni System.”

Several of the women gasped.

*No wonder.* Few ships could travel that far that fast. They had to be going at least warp nine—a speed restricted to military and government ships—to get them to the Tadoorni System in four months. He’d been right when he said they might never go back home again.

“Well, well,” the man said with a smug chuckle. “Looks like someone here knows her stellar geography. You’d get an extra cookie at chow, sweetheart, if we had any fuckin’ cookies.” He marched to the middle of the room. “Listen up! All of you women get to fuck all those lonely farmers for the next five years to earn back your auction price. Then you can start earnin’ back your freedom. Prob’ly take you another five years at least. And good luck findin’ a transport back to the Prime Sector even if you make that kind the money, which ain’t fuckin’ likely.” His gaze raked the brunette from head to toe, returning to rest on her full breasts. “They like you well enough, one or two of ’em just might marry you once they pork your brains out.” Turning back to the rest of the women, he put his hands on his hips. “Be sure and make up those little faces purty, ladies. This trip ain’t cheap, and you need to bring in some money to make it all worthwhile. Now get some chow and get ready!” The bark in his

voice made a few of the women jump.

Lyrianna picked up the pile of clothes resting on the end of her stasis pod and followed the rest of the women heading to the sonic showers.

\* \* \* \*

Chow ended up being nothing but protein mush and synthesized vegetables—shit Lyrianna wouldn't have fed to a hungry dog. Her stomach was so empty, she choked down as much as she could anyway, not sure when she'd be able to eat again. The "sergeant" came back around with a big vinyl bag. He unzipped it and poured powders, face creams, and makeup of all kinds on the table.

"Listen up, ladies! Get yourselves all purty, and get ready for meeting the new men in your lives," he snapped. "You gotta take turns painting each other up since we ain't got any mirrors.

The brunette who'd been so afraid of the man sat down next to Lyrianna. "Hi. I'm Simone. Want me to help fix your face?"

If the women's brown eyes hadn't been so kind and full of innocence, Lyrianna would have told her to bug off. She had no intention of trying to look "purty" for a bunch of sex-starved Pilgrims who were going to be throwing away good money, thinking they were buying themselves a woman to fuck. Instead, she simply shrugged.

Then it dawned on her that these women might all be in the same situation—prisoners who'd be abducted against their will. What kind of crime could this sweet girl have committed?

"I need some help," the young woman said with a sheepish smile. "I never used much makeup back home. Mama didn't like it much. Said only...bad girls..." Her voice cracked, and she started nibbling on her lower lip.

Lyrianna was almost swept away by the despair pouring through the woman. *Woman?* Hardly. She reached out to lay her hand over the girl's. "How old are you?"

“Eighteen.”

*Sweet Father have mercy...* She swallowed hard, trying to hide her sympathy. Or was it empathy because her own situation was every bit as bleak?

No. No, she'd find a way to escape. Surely, she could get a message to Hannah Bates. Her friend owed her a favor, and since she was a bounty hunter, Hannah knew ways to get in and out of places undetected and had connections. Perhaps she could even find a way to travel at restricted speeds.

*I'm not spending my life on Pagonna.*

Lyrianna picked up a pale shade of powder, rubbed a small brush over it, and took Simone's chin between her thumb and finger to hold her still. She gently applied the powder, added a touch of blush to her high cheekbones, and then gave her a dusting of light blue eye shadow. “There. Nothing too showy. Clean and pretty.”

“Pretty? Really? Will one of...*them* think I'm pretty? Pretty enough to buy?”

“Yeah, honey. Pretty enough to buy.” Her heart was near to breaking for the fear and longing inside that young woman. *Please let someone kind buy her.*

“Now, I'll do you!” Simone reached for a bottle of thick, beige liquid.

With a shake of her head, Lyrianna said, “You can do my face, but only the way I did yours. Okay?”

Simone nodded as Lyrianna took the bottle from her fingers and handed her the powder.

\* \* \* \*

Simone hadn't let go of her hand from the moment they'd been ushered off the ship like animals being herded into a stockyard. Normally, Lyrianna avoided a lot of physical contact because it made the other person's emotions next to impossible to ignore. But right

now, she was clinging to Simone's hand every bit as tightly as the girl gripped hers.

They were pushed aside to wait in a large fenced pen just off an enormous wooden platform. "Can you see anything?" Simone asked.

Lyrianna craned her neck, trying to get a glimpse around the taller girls. "There's a big crowd. All men. The auctioneer is on the platform. He's speaking English." Were most of the Pilgrims from Earth? She'd heard that once upon a time but couldn't remember where. Earth was a hell of a long way from the Tadoorni System.

Two men opened the door to the pen, reached in, and grabbed the arms of the woman closest to them. The other girls started fleeing, shoving and pushing to the other side of the pen, and Lyrianna feared some of the women would be crushed. "Stop! Ladies, please! Just stop!"

As the first woman was dragged out of the pen and the door was shut, the rest of the women stopped shoving. Dozens of pairs of eyes fixed on Lyrianna. Someone had to take charge here. The fear she saw in those faces washed over her in a wave threatening to drown her. She thrust their emotions aside, trying to dredge up something resembling courage.

Taking a deep breath and squeezing Simone's hand, she tried to bring some calm to the situation. "We can't stop this, but we can keep our dignity. Are you going to let these men see your fear? Are you going to give our captors the satisfaction of knowing they've broken you?" She straightened her spine and raised her chin, pleased to see Simone copying her actions. "Show them you are not easily tamed. Show them that you are not what they think they've come here to purchase! No matter what these men believe, we are *not* whores."

"That one." The "sergeant" was back and pointing his gnarly finger right at Lyrianna. "She's next." When the two men came for her, the women backed up, clearing a path directly to her.

Once the men stood in front of her, she directed her hardest glare at them both, daring them to touch her. They didn't. Instead, one

motioned with his hand. Trying to keep herself as composed as she could manage, she walked the path to the platform.

\* \* \* \*

Carter Verdel sucked in air for a good five seconds when he saw her. As she turned to face the crowd, her smoky eyes settling on each of the male faces shouting their approval, he couldn't breathe at all. One by one, the rowdy men quieted as her gaze settled on them. When those eyes caught his, his heart kicked into a higher gear, slamming against his rib cage.

Did that incredible creature stare at him a little bit longer than any of the other men? Perhaps that was just wishful thinking.

Her ivory skin was clear and clean, her hair the shade of honey and long enough to reach below her slender shoulders. Her back was straight as a lance. She bore herself like a conquered queen—captured but not broken. Dressed in tight black leggings and a black tank top like the rest of the women, she wore them like the latest fashion, each gentle curve of her lithe body there for all to see and admire. Full breasts. Rounded hips. A tight backside. She glided across the auction platform, almost as if her tiny, bare feet floated above the wood. Her chin lifted in defiance, she was practically daring the men in the crowd to claim her.

Carter would take that dare. Even if it cost him every single coin and money card he'd brought to the auction. Even if he had to borrow or steal more.

Glancing around, he noticed several of the men were such cowards, they couldn't even hold her gaze before they looked away. A woman like that was not what they came here for. They came for the women who were afraid and willing to do anything to survive on Pagonna. They sure didn't bargain on a strong and independent creature like this.

He strained to listen for the auctioneer, pushing his way forward

in the crowd. While he and Brandon had held quite a few discussions about what they were seeking at the sale, Brandon had left the ultimate choice in Carter's hands, telling him he trusted his mate to find the woman to complete their perfect lives. Probably because Carter always led with his head rather than his heart.

The moment he saw the blonde, his heart took the reins.

Whether she was a criminal or not, he wasn't leaving that auction without her.

*Breathe. Be patient. See what they drive her price up to.*

"Gentlemen," the auctioneer shouted, "seems we've got a tempting one here." He reached out to cup her ass, and her hand shot out to slap his face before he could even react. The sound was so loud that it echoed through the field, making most of the crowd burst out in guffaws in response. The auctioneer scowled at her as he rubbed his reddened cheek, but he quickly regained his aplomb and gave her a leering smile. "A feisty one, though. More than enough fire to keep you warm at night."

"It's plenty warm here already!" one of the men shouted back. "That much heat'll burn ya!"

That response boded well. Carter had been right. Some of the men were actually afraid of her. *Fools, the lot of them.*

"I'll give you a hundred uni-credits!"

"Hundred twenty-five unis!"

And so the bidding began while Carter waited patiently, calculating and ready to pounce as soon as the enthusiasm waned. Since the first woman was passably pretty and sold for the inflated price of five hundred universal-credits, he feared he might have to pay twice that much for this woman. He looked at her face again. Her eyes were now the color of the clouds before a lightning storm. Anger? Fear? Would they turn the same stormy gray when she was in the throes of passion?

Pay twice as much for her? *Three* times, if he had to.

"Holding at four hundred-fifty unis, gentlemen. Hard to believe a

specimen like this'll go that cheap. What happened to your balls, boys?"

"'Fraid she'll cut 'em off if I let her have a kitchen knife!" one man called back.

"What'd she do to get thrown in jail?" another asked.

"Now, boys," the auctioneer cautioned, "you know the rules. You can't ask that. Everyone who comes to Pagonna gets a fresh start."

"That means she murdered her husband!" a laughing voice shouted, setting more hilarity through the crowd.

The beautiful woman's chin rose, and a small smile tugged at the corners of her pink lips.

"Five hundred," Carter said, just loud enough to be heard but with no emotion or enthusiasm at all. A hard task considering that his cock was now standing at attention, wanting him to promise anything and everything to secure this woman in their bed.

Her gray eyes settled on him, capturing him and holding him in her grasp. He wanted to sweep her into his arms, take her back to the farm, and make love to her until neither of them could move. Shit, he'd have a hard time waiting that long. He'd probably fuck her on the boat trip back.

What the hell was wrong with him? When had he been reduced to paying for sex with a woman?

When he and Brandon immigrated to Pagonna where there were no single women, they'd pledged themselves as life mates and become Pilgrims, figuring it would always be the two of them. They'd quickly discovered they both missed the softness of a woman more than they'd ever imagined.

There was a fortune to be made on the planet. Covered mostly by freshwater oceans, the uninhabited planet was ripe for pod-farmers—people who grew their exotic plants directly in containers of water. The constant tropical climate gave them the perfect growing conditions. If a farmer was wise and planned well, he could be harvesting practically all year. Since he and Brandon had laid claim to

over ten acres of the rare terra firma, they had their own island they'd turned into a farm. They grew their own food and raised their own animals, generating all their power by wind turbines, resulting in some primitive technology like lights inside the house and water purifiers. They were well ahead of most of the people on Pagonna.

Both men were frugal by nature, and they'd spent little on making their home anything but functional. Instead, they'd stashed away their money, hoping to one day return to Earth with enough wealth to live however they liked. Funny thing was now they liked life on backward little Pagonna and knew they'd remain for the rest of their lives. All that was missing was a woman. Sure, the sex between them was great, but both men were bisexual. Both missed the softness of a woman, the feeling of their cocks being planted deep inside a wet pussy. They loved each other, a tenderness that was clear in each glance, each touch. But he and Brandon both felt something important for their true happiness was simply...absent.

Which was why—frugal or not—Carter was here to spend some of their hard-earned money on a woman. Someone they could have at their beck and call every day and every long, lonely night.

He'd thought about tripling the price. Fuck, he'd quadruple it. *For her.*

"Five hundred unis, boys!" the auctioneer shouted. "That's Carter Verdel gonna buy her. Think he can tame this woman? Are y'all gonna let him steal this beauty away for five hundred?"

"We'll find his dead body floating in the ocean within the week!" a voice called back.

The auctioneer ignored the laughter. "Five hundred. Going once."

Carter held his breath.

"Going twice."

*Please. Please. Please.*

"Sold!"



## Chapter 3

The man who now “owned” her wasn’t at all what Lyrianna expected. When she’d figured out exactly what this auction was for, she’d anticipated some kind of pathetic man, one who had taken himself away from the universe to settle on this water world because he couldn’t fit in with other people. Especially women. She’d pictured the kind of man who could only get a woman in bed by purchasing one against her will.

Instead, the man who now stood at her side was handsome enough that he’d probably have to beat women off with a stick back on Rozale. He was so tall the top of her head barely reached his shoulders. His hair was a dark brown as warm as well-polished wood, and she had to resist the urge to reach up and touch the ends that curled around his ears to see if they were soft or coarse. As he turned to stare at her, she realized his eyes were the same dark, inviting brown as his hair. A smile curved his full lips, making her heart leap into a faster rhythm.

Oh, no. He wasn’t *at all* what she expected.

*Carter Verdel*. That was the name he gave the record keeper who sat at the table with the only technology she’d seen outside of the transport ship since she’d arrived on Pagonna. The overly thin man was probably typing the sale information into the computer while the man sitting next to him collected the funds. After the first woman was checked in, she and her new “owner” were ushered behind a curtain. The fact that Lyrianna could hear the sound of the woman cursing behind that red fabric wall didn’t bode well. She tried to swallow her apprehension and take each moment one at a time. It was the only

way she'd survive this experience.

"Name," the man behind the ancient computer asked, drawing her attention.

Since she wasn't sure if he was asking her or the man who'd just wasted his hard-earned money on her, she started to answer. Her "owner" reached out to grab her hand and give it a mild squeeze. A censure? A desire to take the lead? She frowned at him and let him call the shots. *For now.*

"Carter Verdel," he said in a rich, deep tone that sent shivers down her spine. Her core tightened, and that odd response to his voice and the fact that his big hand still cradled hers threw her mental balance off kilter. Was she reading his lust for her or was she feeling her own for him? Either way, that entirely sexual and far-too-strong response of her body to his touch frightened her.

Or did it excite her?

"Your name?" the recorder asked, staring at Lyrianna.

She contemplated lying, simply making up some stupid name. Perhaps she could call herself Maid Marian. That notion made her snort a small laugh.

Carter stared down at her. "What's so funny?"

"Right now, my life," she drawled in response.

"Name," the recorder asked again.

A lie almost spilled out until she realized that if she used her real name, perhaps it would help Hannah find her when or if her friend ever came searching. "Lyrianna Seebré." She spelled it, knowing few people ever did so correctly.

"Lyrianna," Carter repeated. "Very pretty."

Carter Verdel was a stupid man if he thought a little bit of sweet talk would be all it would take to get her pants off. "You don't have to flatter me. You *own* me. Remember?"

"I don't flatter. I say what I think." He shrugged his broad shoulders. "Might as well get used to it. Brandon and I never mince words."

The mention of another man's name made her eyes widen. "Brandon? Who's Brandon?"

"The other owner of our farm. He owns you too." He turned back to the recorder. "Be sure and add Brandon Hunt to her papers."

*Two men?* She was now supposed to give two men she didn't even know sexual favors because they'd bought her like a piece of meat at the marketplace? Before her anger could swell, Carter squeezed her hand again.

"You'll like Brandon," he whispered close to her ear. The heat of his breath washed over her skin and sent electricity down her limbs. "He's got a wicked sense of humor."

Her own body was a traitor, responding to the man against her will. Yet she quickly forgave herself. What woman wouldn't respond to a masculine specimen like him? His body was perfection, all muscle and not an ounce of fat. The first two buttons of his loose, short-sleeved shirt were unbuttoned, probably due to the heat of the day. A small amount of crisp dark hair peeked out of the V. When he reached out to pay the man sitting next to the recorder, she got a glimpse of his strong forearm. Damn, but she was a sucker for men with strong arms. "If he's so great, you don't need me. Why don't you just fuck him instead?"

"I do. Often. But we both want a woman, too." He winked. "Trust me, you'll like Brandon."

Pride compelled her response. "Doubt I'll be around long enough to get to know him. Or you, for that matter."

The snorted laughs from Carter, the recorder, and the man taking payment raised her concern a notch. She *would* escape, no matter what they believed. She would find a way home. One day.

"Next!" Another man, this one wearing a white coat, had pulled aside the red curtain and was waving them forward.

Carter dragged her toward him and Lyrianna planted her feet. "Where are we going?"

"We have to finish processing," Carter replied. "Then I can take

you home.”

She pulled her hand back. “My *home* is on Rozale.”

“My sweet Lyrianna... One day, I promise, you’ll call Pagonna home.”

\* \* \* \*

This had been the part he dreaded. While he didn’t doubt his and Brandon’s abilities to keep Lyrianna on the farm, he also knew they couldn’t watch her twenty-four-seven. They spent far too much time in the ocean, working the pods. She’d have ample time to get into mischief, and since she didn’t know Pagonna and its dangers, the men had decided a behavioral inhibitor was for the best. They would never use the punishment aspect against her. They simply wanted the tracking device that accompanied the implant.

Not that he was worried she’d escape and leave them—he was worried she’d escape and get hurt. She couldn’t leave the farm and get too awfully far. Their island was an eight-hour boat ride away from anywhere, and even if she could manage to reach a neighboring farm or make it back here to Pagonna City, no one would help her find a transport off the planet. She had no money, no political connections. Whoever found her would bring her back for the reward offered for all escaped “property.” It was simply the Pagonna way of life, designed by the men who’d settled it and outnumbered the female population nine-to-one. Once purchased, a woman belonged to that man. *Forever*.

But just in case—for Lyrianna’s own good—he and Brandon agreed to let them plant the “tracker.”

“C’mon, honey,” Carter coaxed, noting how her wide, beautiful eyes narrowed to angry slits at the pet name. That’s what he thought of her as though—sweeter than honey, from her beautiful hair to the soles of her small feet. He’d just have to wait to call her that endearment at the right moment so she’d see it as it was intended as

affection rather than condescension. Then he smiled, thinking that the right moment would be when he was buried balls deep inside her hot, wet pussy.

Shit. If he didn't get his thoughts under control, he'd have a perpetual hard-on until that moment arrived. At least he'd worn a loose shirt that wasn't tucked in his waistband, so the shirttails covered the very stout proof of his attraction to her.

The doctor—at least Carter hoped the guy was a doctor—patted the wooden table. “Hop up here, young lady. Let's get this over with. Only take a few minutes if you're a good girl.”

Lyrianna folded her arms over her full breasts. “Not until you tell me what you're planning to do.”

The doctor patted the table again. “Standard auction procedure, missy. We implant contraceptive and behavior controls—”

Carter had never seen anyone move so quickly. One moment, Lyrianna was standing by his side, and the next, she had left the curtained area and was sprinting back toward the transport ship. “Wait! Lyrianna!” he shouted.

“Better get that behavior control set on high!” the doctor called as Carter ran after her. “That one's gonna keep you hopping!”

He caught her before she reached the entrance hatch. Snaking his arm around her waist, he dragged her back against his chest, letting her feet dangle, suspended several centimeters off the grass. “Where exactly do you think you're going?”

She thrashed against him, getting a few good kicks against his shins before she must have realized she wasn't getting away. Then her body went as limp as a rag doll.

“Did you think I'd just let you go after I paid five hundred unis for you?” he asked, trying to ignore how right she felt with her body so close to his. Could she feel his hard dick between those delectable cheeks of her bottom? He couldn't help himself. He had to taste her.

Gently pressing his lips against the soft skin of her neck, he savored the feel of her, the taste of her, the wonderful feminine smell.

Gooseflesh rose where he'd kissed, and he was glad she couldn't see his smug smile. She might not be here because she wanted to be with him, but she wasn't entirely cold to him, either. With kindness and coaxing, he had no doubt that she'd come to their beds willingly. *And soon*. "Relax. Please. This is for your own good."

Her body stiffened, becoming as rigid as a board. "Behavior control is for my own good?"

"Brandon and I won't use it to punish you. I promise you that. What we want is the tracking device that goes along with it."

"Afraid I'll run away, Mr. Verdel?"

"Call me Carter. Please." Then he chuckled. "And I'd be a fool not to believe you'll give escape a try."

"I will, you know. Tracking device, behavior control, or not. I'll get away."

"Oh, Lyrianna. Don't you understand?"

She shook her head.

"We'll never let you go."

\* \* \* \*

### *A promise or a threat?*

Lyrianna hated giving in to his wishes, fearing it would make her appear weak in his eyes. Then again, if Carter thought she was weak, he might not feel the need to ever use the behavior control. She knew what the device was—the black market on Rozale sold it to people who wanted to "handle" wayward spouses or children. The gizmo offered different levels of shock as a way to keep a person in line.

"Besides," Carter continued, "you don't want to get pregnant when... Well, let's just say Pagonna isn't meant for too many people to raise families. Not many other children. Brandon and I don't want children. At least not now."

"I won't sleep with you," she vowed. "Ever."

He set her back on her feet and gently turned her to face him.

“We’ll see.” His smug smile told her he liked a challenge exactly like the one she’d just handed him. And why that made her smile in return was beyond her. “Brandon’s a handsome devil,” he added with a wink. “You might not be able to resist him.”

The way Carter spoke of Brandon made Lyrianna wonder about their relationship. After all, they were two men who lived alone for heaven knew how long. Deciding she’d be better off knowing all she could about them, she asked the blunt question that was crowding out all her other thoughts. “Are you and Brandon married? I mean...you said you were lovers. I still don’t get why you needed me.”

“Most people on Earth are still prejudiced enough that the United Continents doesn’t allow same-sex marriages. So, no, we aren’t married, and we’ve been so busy trying to make our farm a success, we haven’t taken the time to marry here on Pagonna. Sure, we both love each other, and sucking cock or getting your ass nailed is nice. But pussy?” His grin was devilish. “We both miss pussy something awful.”

Although she didn’t want to grin, she did, because she’d deserved that equally blunt answer.

Ten minutes later, Lyrianna sported a microchip that controlled her reproductive cycles and her behavior, and Carter had possession of the small remote that now governed her life. At least the injection procedure hadn’t hurt much. Now, she stood next to Carter as he talked softly to another man who was still watching the auction. Something drew Lyrianna’s attention to the platform. She gasped when she saw Simone standing there, her arms wrapped around herself as she trembled.

The poor girl looked utterly terrified. Her eyes were wide, and when they locked on Lyrianna, she immediately read her overwhelming fear. She tried to will some of her strength to Simone, giving her a curt nod and a wan smile. Simone nodded in return, straightened her shoulders, and let her hands drop to her sides, although she kept them in tight fists. *Good girl.*

Carter tried to pull her away, but she laid a gentle hand on his arm, trying to ignore the wonderful heat of his skin against her cool fingertips. "Please." She turned her gaze to Simone and then back to Carter. "May we see where she goes?"

"Sure. We'll wait." He dragged her closer to the stage while the bidding finally came down to two men—an older man with rotting teeth and a dirty face and the younger man who was now standing next to Carter. Lyrianna gave a quick prayer that the younger man would win the auction.

"Six hundred uni-credits!" the older man shouted.

"I've only got six twenty-five," the younger man whispered to Carter. "What should I do?"

Carter looked over to Lyrianna, his gaze holding hers. She wasn't sure what emotion she read there, but he asked her, "What do you know about that girl?"

"She's only eighteen," she replied.

"What did she do to get here?"

"I'm not sure," she replied, "but she's an innocent in many, many ways. I'm sure of it. Please trust me, I'm an empath."

The fact that Carter did little more than raise a curious eyebrow to her pronouncement came as a surprise. Then he turned to the man at his side. "I can loan you more, Tyler," Carter replied, "if you want this one."

"Six-twenty-five!" Tyler bid.

"Six-thirty!" the older man shouted back, throwing a nasty frown at Tyler.

"Six-forty," Carter whispered to Tyler who immediately shouted the bid.

Narrowing his beady eyes, the older man scowled at Carter and Tyler before he shook his head, turned, and started walking away.

"Six hundred forty unis," the auctioneer called. "Going once. Going twice. Sold to Tyler Honeycutt for six hundred forty."

Carter handed some money to Tyler and slapped him hard on the



back as the young man accepted enthusiastic congratulations from the other men who had quickly gathered around them. Lyrianna stepped back, not wanting to be around all of them, desperately needing some distance. After a few moments, Tyler all but ran to get Simone, and when the two young people gave each other tender smiles in greeting, Lyrianna felt tears spilling over her eyes.

“Lyrianna?” Carter was now standing in front of her.

She bowed her head, not wanting him to see her losing control. At that moment, the weight of the entire universe seemed to be settling on her shoulders, and the relief that Simone had obviously been sold to a kind man was making her too emotional to hold back her feelings any longer. Especially when she realized she was now the property of a kind man as well. “Thank you,” she managed to mumble before a sob slipped out.

Carter wrapped his arm around her shoulders and walked with her until they reached a line of boats on a small wooden dock. He helped her board a medium-sized sailboat and guided her to take a seat. In short order, he’d released the boat and raised a sail to catch the good, strong wind. They were far enough away from the city that the noise had died to nothing but the sound of the breeze in the sails and the call of birds.

“Feeling better?” Carter asked as he tied off the sail and came to sit next to her.

She nodded, still not wanting to look in his face. Her emotions were too raw and too close to the surface.

Warm fingers gripped her chin, forcing her head up. “Lyrianna... Are you okay?”

“Thank you,” she whispered as she met his gaze. Since her own emotions were running rampant, she didn’t even bother trying to read his. She did, however, see a compassion there that made her give him a weak smile. “Thank you for helping Simone. Who was that young man you gave the money to?”

“Tyler Honeycutt. He’s the oldest son of the Honeycutt family.

Just turned eighteen. He's buying Simone as a wife, not a... As a wife. His family gave him the money to get him to stay on Pagonna. One day, he and Simone will run their farm. Don't worry. He'll treat her well."

*Such a wonderful future for Simone.* Lyrianna smiled.

"That's better. Damn, honey, but you're pretty when you smile."

She tried to turn her face away. He wouldn't let her. Then she read the emotion glowing brilliant in his dark eyes.

*Lust.*

Or was that her own emotion?

Since she was going to have to spend some time in the man's company before she could find a way out of this hell, Lyrianna decided to at least be kind to him. Perhaps he'd relax his guard that way, and after his compassion to Simone, she wanted to give him a small token of her appreciation.

Leaning in slowly, trying to find a hundred ridiculous reasons for why she was doing something so bold and possibly foolish, she gently pressed her lips against his.

*Mistake!* A flood of desire threatened to drown her in its intensity, a mixture of the attraction she had for him and the draw he clearly felt to her. A low growl rumbled through his chest as he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her hard against him and then onto his lap, forcing her to straddle his hips. His tongue slipped past her lips as he took control, demanding more of her.

She gave him more. His delicious taste made her whimper, and the feel of his tongue gliding over hers was heavenly. She squirmed against the hard cock she could feel through his thin shorts and her barely there leggings. He was a big man, but his erection didn't frighten her. It made heat flood her pussy as she opened her legs a little wider to press harder against him.

The mixture of their passion was impossible to resist, especially with a touch of desperation and long-denied craving she felt from somewhere deep inside him. Her mind kept trying to intrude, to tell

her that she should push him away. She simply...couldn't. She wanted to taste him, to feel him. Her hands slipped under the hem of his shirttail, and she smoothed her fingertips over rock-hard abs up to weave through the patch of soft hair at the center of his chest.

Carter broke away from the kiss to growl again before he started nibbling the tender flesh behind her ear. "You're so soft. So perfect," he whispered between nips that he soothed with long licks of his velvet tongue. A hand settled on her breast, followed by a gasp—his—as her nipple instantly hardened against his palm. "You're not wearing a bra."

She saw no reason to comment on the obvious when she wanted to be kissing him again. So she simply did just that as he tried to jerk her tank top over her head. "Now. I want you now, honey."

His words hit her like another splash of cold water in the face. She squealed as she tried to yank her shirt back down and crawl off his lap. His hands settled on her waist to hold her in place. "What's wrong?" he asked. "I mean...I want you. You want me. Why—"

"You don't want *me*! You want *sex*!" she shouted despite the fact that her face was still close to his. "You may own me, but if I do this, I'll be nothing but a whore."

## Chapter 4

Carter was having a hard time clearing the desire away from his thoughts long enough to have a coherent conversation with Lyrianna. Everything about her had been screaming how much she wanted him—probably as much as he wanted her. Every sweet moan. Every squeeze of her slender thighs. Every stroke of her tongue. Her desire wasn't the obstacle. The true barrier became clear the moment she screamed those words at him.

*I'd be nothing but a whore.*

He'd pushed too hard too quickly. She was going to have to get past the circumstances of their meeting, but that was going to take time. She would need to be around them and get to know the kind of men they were deep inside to realize that he and Brandon didn't view her as their "purchase" or their "property." If she couldn't let the auction go, she would never accept it if they ever developed true affection for her, as he hoped they would. Yes, they would want her to share their bed. Hell, he'd wanted to fuck her the moment he saw her, and Brandon would surely feel the same the minute he laid eyes on Lyrianna. That beautiful face? Those gorgeous tits? That perfect ass? What man wouldn't? Hopefully as they all worked side-by-side on the farm, and judging from her kind nature, stronger feelings were likely to develop. Maybe even love. Some day. Carter didn't want her questioning the men's true motives and constantly believing they saw her as something less than an independent and spirited woman.

All his lust vanished when her knee connected with his groin as she tried to scramble off his lap. Probably a good thing to let her go because he didn't want things between them to get off on the wrong

foot. Lyrianna was going to be with him and Brandon a good, long while, years and years, if not the rest of their lives. That thought gave him pause as he watched her move out of his reach.

*The rest of my life.*

Somewhere in the time since he'd moved to Pagonna, he'd made it his home. For good. And Carter knew Brandon felt the same. They'd turned that lovely little island into a profitable farm with the work of their own hands and the sweat of their brows. No way either of them could ever leave it to return to Earth. What would be waiting there for them anyway? *Nothing*. Their lives were here.

If they were never leaving, that meant Lyrianna wasn't, either. He might have purchased her like any other piece of property on the farm, but that's not how he viewed her. Nor would Brandon ever see her that way. She was a *gift* that would make their lives on Pagonna perfect, and he hoped she would fall in love with the planet the way he and Brandon had.

And maybe, just maybe, she might even fall in love with them.

Which meant he needed to start fresh with her. They'd have to win her over before they got to indulge themselves in that delectable little body of hers. He just hoped to hell he'd have the patience to wait until she came around, because he really, *really* missed pussy, which meant he'd be likely to say or do something stupid simply to get her in bed. At least her passionate response to their kissing predicted that wait might not be too awfully long or tormenting.

"I'll tell you what," Carter finally said. Lyrianna looked up at him, a frown fixed on her lips. Those lips were still rosy and wet from where he'd kissed her, and damn, but he really wanted to kiss her again. "Let's back this whole thing up."

"You're taking me back to the transport? Will...will they give you your money back? Could they take me back to Rozale? No. I'd have to go back to prison. How about Earth? Would they take me to Earth?" Her gray eyes showed a spark of hope that rapidly put a damper on his mood.

“Whoa there, honey,” he said, holding up his hands. “That’s not what I meant.” Then he heaved a sigh. “I meant us—to back up to the beginning of where and how we met. Let’s start over. Hi. I’m Carter Verdel. I own a nice-sized pod farm here on Pagonna with my lover, Brandon Hunt. Problem is—something’s missing.”

Her mouth twitched into a small grin at his teasing. “So what, exactly, is missing?”

“A beautiful woman to share it with us. Would you be interested, Miss Seebré?”

The grin turned into a full-blown smile that took his breath away. Unfortunately, that smile quickly became a yawn that shook her whole body. “God, I’m tired.”

Carter stood up, opened the compartment he’d been sitting on, and frowned when he saw the yellow life jackets. Picking one up, he held it up to show her. “I’m so used to it only being Brandon and me, I forgot to ask. Can you swim? Brandon and I are like fish, so we don’t wear one of these on our boat. I sure don’t want you to drown.”

“I swim. Very well. So thank you, but no on the jacket.”

With a nod, he set it aside, reached in his pocket, and held out a breather to her.

She stared at the little white disc. “What is it?”

“A breather. We have a bunch of them around. Buy ’em by the case since we tend to lose them. You’ll probably find them all over the house.”

“What’s a breather?”

Carter decided to show her. Turning the disk, he held it flat against his nose as it started to quiver. As always, a few moments later, it spread, shaping itself to cover his nose and mouth before hardening again in a clear shell.

“What does it do?”

Since he couldn’t talk—or breathe air for that matter—with the breather in place, he peeled it away and set it back in the palm of his hand. As it slowly went through its transformation again, shaping

itself back into a flat disk, he explained how it worked. “Underwater, it draws the oxygen out of the water so we can breathe it in. Much better than old-fashioned diving equipment, except we can’t talk to each other. Brandon and I use gestures when we’re working on pods. Our own sign language.”

“I’ve never seen one of those.”

“Another Pagonna settler invented it. He’s made a fortune making and selling them here. I don’t think he wants to share it with the universe yet.”

Her shocked expression didn’t surprise him. “What’s wrong with him? He could make himself the richest man in the sector.”

Carter shrugged as he offered her the breather. She patted her hips, and he realized why she didn’t take it. Her clothes were skin-tight with no pockets. He nodded and slid it back into his own pocket. “He likes it here. Most of us do. We don’t really care much about being rich, just having what we need. I suppose he could sell the idea, but... He likes tinkering with making them himself. Besides,” he added with a smile, “he makes plenty off all of us. Promise me you’ll always carry a breather with you.”

“Why?”

“Look around, Lyrianna. We’re surrounded by water. We practically live in it. If you make habit of carrying a breather, you always know it’s there if you need it. Promise?”

Her smile was prettier than the rainbows that appeared after the seasonal hurricanes. “If any of the clothes you have for me have pockets, I’ll carry one. Promise.”

“Clothes... yeah.” Carter rubbed the back of his neck. “About that...”

She glanced down at her black tank top. “This is all I have.”

“For now, you’ll have to share what Brandon and I wear.”

“You want me to wear your clothes?”

He felt lower than a bottom-feeder. “We didn’t know... Look, we didn’t know what size the girl we bought would be, so we didn’t buy

any clothes yet.” A frustrated sigh slipped out as Carter realized they’d made a lot of stupid assumptions.

“Why didn’t we grab a few things back in the city?” she asked.

He felt even worse for having neglected her needs. “Sorry. I just didn’t...think about it.” He should have taken the time to buy her some clothes or other things a woman might like to have. Perfume. Makeup.

He and Brandon been thinking with their dicks, figuring they’d buy some horny pickpocket who wanted to stay out of prison and would be glad to come to their farm, run around naked, and fuck their brains out. Thank God, all of that testosterone-laden bullshit was a hundred and eighty degrees from what Carter was bringing home. Although he wasn’t sure what crime Lyrianna had committed to end up on that auction block, he had no doubt he was bringing home a *lady*.

Her gray eyes were studying him. Hard. The intelligence there was breathtaking. In those eyes, he saw a woman who had the strength to not only survive life on Pagonna, but thrive here. In those eyes, he saw someone who would help them solve the problems that popped up daily. And in those eyes, he saw someone he knew he could learn to love.

If only he and Brandon hadn’t had to purchase her to get her to come to them. Now, they had to not only try to win her affection, they had to clear that nearly insurmountable hurdle.

*Might as well start now...*

“Brandon and I pretty much wear nothing but shorts.” That softened the truth. Hell, they ran around naked ninety percent of the time. “We spend a lot of time in the water, and the rest of the time in the sun.”

Lyrianna smiled. “Explains that tan. Isn’t that much sun bad for your skin?”

Her curiosity boded well, and Carter was thrilled to teach her about the world he loved. “Not here, it’s not. No UVA or UVB from



our sun. The temperature here is always around twenty-two or twenty-three degrees.”

“Fahrenheit? Don’t you freeze your balls off wearing shorts?”

He blinked a couple of times, hardly believing she was teasing him. Then he laughed, freely and happily.

Perhaps things would work out after all.

She yawned again, and he remembered how this whole discussion had started. He pulled a pillow out of the bin. Dropping the lid, he set the pillow down on top. Then he sat down next to it. “C’mon over here and sleep for a little bit. We’ve got a long trip to get home. I can keep an eye on you if you’re close to me and make sure you don’t roll overboard in your sleep.” He patted the pillow.

She still eyed him warily before she cautiously stood up, came to stand in front of him, and stared down into his eyes. “You won’t touch me?”

“Can’t guarantee that, but I won’t rape you, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Her eyes narrowed.

“Look, Lyrianna... I’ve never forced a woman in my life, and I never will. Yes, I own you. *Technically*. But that’s not what I want. It’s not what Brandon wants.”

“Then what *do* you want?”

Carter took her hand in his. “What we want is a woman to share our lives, a woman who loves our land and our waters as much as we do. And, yes, a woman to make love to. But we don’t want her in our beds because she feels she owes us anything. We want her there because she wants to be there.”

\* \* \* \*

“Carter!” the voice shouted from the distance. “Hey, Carter!”

Lyrianna sat up so fast that she got a little dizzy, especially since the bunk she was in seemed to be moving. Side to side to side to... A

wave of nausea caught her by surprise.

“Oh, shit,” Carter said. He slipped one hand around her waist and used the other hand to hold her hair back as she leaned over the side of the boat and vomited up what little she had in her stomach.

How humiliating to get seasick on a planet of mostly oceans.

After the spasms died down and her stomach settled, she tried to push his hands away. He wouldn’t let her. Instead, Carter helped her sit back down. Fishing a linen handkerchief from his pocket, he grabbed the bottle of water next to him, poured some on the handkerchief, and then gently bathed her face. “Better?”

Lyrianna nodded.

“I should have known you might get seasick for that long a trip.” He handed her the bottle.

She took some in her mouth, swished it around, and spit it over the side. As she glanced up, she realized the sun was still high in the sky. “How long was I asleep?”

“A good eight hours.”

“Seriously?”

Carter nodded. “You were exhausted. We sailed through the night.”

She glanced up to the sky, but if she trusted her judgment, the sun was in the same place. How was that possible?

He must have noticed what she was looking at. “Days here are different. We have seventy-five hours of light, then seventy-five hours of dark.” He fished inside a small compartment, and he produced another bottle full of blue liquid. “Want some?”

“What is it?”

“A homemade mouthwash.”

She decided to give it a try, sniffing the stuff before deciding it was nothing more than peppermint. After swishing some around, she spit it over the side as what he’d said about the sun rising and setting registered. “How can you handle being up three days at a time?” She handed him back the bottle, and he dropped it back into the

compartment.

“We aren’t. Our internal clocks keep our days around twenty-five hours. We have three days where it never gets dark, then three days when it’s just dark. But even the dark isn’t bad. Three moons light up the night pretty nicely.” His smile was warm, genuine, and far too appealing. “You’ll get used to it.” His gaze shifted to the dock where a tall man stood waving. “That’s Brandon. And this is our island. Welcome home, Lyrianna.”

\* \* \* \*

The island was magnificent. A dock jutted out from a boathouse, and another boat the same size as the one Carter now guided bobbed tied up on one side of the wooden dock. One for each man, she supposed.

There wasn’t a beach, at least not on this side of the island. Instead, the water lapped up against rock walls that looked to have been constructed rather than nature-made. Several tall palm trees rose in the distance, and she could see the roof of a house sheltered within the grove. Much of the area was grass-covered and fenced in, and several chickens and some goats roamed around inside that fencing. Had the men brought all those things with them from Earth to create this little haven?

A sharp whistle drew her attention as Carter tied the boat on the dock and then helped her step onto the platform. “Damn, Carter. You did good!”

Lyrianna felt a warm flush on her face when she realized it was Brandon whistling, and he’d been talking about her. Her legs trembled, but she refused to show any weakness to these men.

“She must have set us back at least a thousand unis,” Brandon said, coming to stand in front of her.

“You’d be surprised,” Carter replied as he stepped up next to her.

“Please don’t tell me you had to go higher than a thousand.” His

gaze raked her head to toe. “Although, she’d be worth it.”

“Nope. Five hundred. She scared the shit outta the rest of those idiots, especially when someone started a rumor she’d murdered her husband to get sent here.”

*So that was why no one wanted me!* Not that she gave a damn what they thought, but the notion that none of those men had found her appealing enough to bid on had been a pinch to her pride.

Lyrianna almost gave Brandon the same whistle he’d given her when she finally found the nerve to give him a good, long look. His hair was a shade darker brown than Carter’s, but longer. With another couple of centimeters, it would brush his heavily-muscled shoulders. A neatly-trimmed goatee framed a mouth that was so tempting, Lyrianna literally licked her lips before she realized what she was doing and stopped herself. His responding smile told her he’d caught the action.

He was wearing nothing but a pair of lightweight shorts. Every inch of his skin was a golden tan. A thatch of brown hair fanned across his chest, thinning to a line that trailed over a firm abdomen and disappeared below the loose waistband of his pants. When Brandon laughed, she realized she’d been staring at his groin.

“What’s her name?” he asked Carter. “Does she speak English?”

“Her name,” she replied, “is Lyrianna Seebré. And yes, she speaks English.”

Even his smirk was handsome. “I’m Brandon—”

“Brandon Hunt. Yes, I know.” She turned to Carter. “May I please have a bath and some clean clothes?”

“Of course,” he replied. “Then we’ll get you something to eat.”

Just the thought of food made her want to heave again. “No...no, thank you. I’m not hungry. Just dirty.”

“Well, then,” Brandon said, grabbing her hand and walking toward a break in the trees. “Let’s show you your new home.”

## Chapter 5

Brandon had to resist the urge to take Lyrianna into his arms as he led the way toward the house. His cock was hard as granite, and all he wanted to do was toss her over his shoulder like a sack of grain, throw her on the bed, and fuck her until the sun set two days from now. Everything inside him desired her—and not simply because she was a woman and he hadn't slept with a woman in just about forever. No, he was responding to Lyrianna.

She was exquisite. The long, blonde hair. The heart-shaped face. The perfect curve of her full lips. Every inch of that tight body. He'd never seen eyes that enchanting color—not truly blue, more of a gray. As they walked side by side, he caught her scent on the light breeze. Feminine. Delicate. Arousing.

Damn, but Carter had done well.

"You built all this?" Lyrianna asked as they walked up the stone path that led from the dock to the house. He didn't worry about her bare feet. The whole compound had been designed for them to run around without shoes. Smooth paths. Warm sand. Soft grass. Her eyes were wide, and he could hear the admiration in her voice, making his chest puff with pride.

"Sure did. With our own hands," Brandon replied. "And damn proud of it."

Her slender hand rose as she pointed toward the turbine on the roof. "What's that?"

"Wind power. We generate our own electricity. That one powers the house." He pointed to the barn. "That one gives us power to the barn. And those..." He inclined his head toward the tree grove where

two larger windmills spun. "...keep the power going to the pods."

"Pods? You mean the underwater pods? What do you grow there?" Her curiosity was a good sign. Most women would be bored to tears even thinking about pod farming let alone talking about it.

"Mostly exotic herbs for pharmaceutical companies," Brandon replied. He couldn't resist the urge to touch her, needing to see if her skin was as soft as it appeared, so he smoothed his fingertips over her shoulder. Damn if she didn't shiver, making his dick twitch. "Once you get acclimated, we'll take you diving tomorrow and show you the pods."

Carter opened the door to the house, put his hand against the small of Lyrianna's back, and guided her into the house. As Brandon tried to follow her, Carter put a hand on his shoulder. "We need to talk. She's not at all what you think."

How was he supposed to respond to that statement? They hadn't been sure what to expect and only hoped they bought a woman who was clean, young, and liked sex. Everything else about Lyrianna was simply a bonus. "Fine." Then Brandon joined their new woman as she stood in the middle of the kitchen, staring around their open-concept home.

"This is so... I didn't expect...this..." Her voice dropped away as she stepped toward the accordion doors that were open on three walls to allow the breeze to flow through the house. The only solid wall was the one behind the bed, and it was made of cinderblock to withstand hurricane season. The other three were made of doors that could be shut to hold back the winds and rains. Most of the time, the men left them open to allow the tropical breeze access and keep the house comfortable and cool.

Since he and Carter didn't spend much time inside, it probably wasn't nearly as nice as what she'd hoped. Basically nothing more than one enormous room. The kitchen took up one side, the bedroom the other. Most of their lounging furniture was on the tiled veranda as was a nice grill where they cooked most of their meals. He knew the

moment her gaze settled on the bed because her eyes widened enough, it had to be painful.

“Brandon? What the hell?” Carter asked, nodding at the new bed.

Feeling uncomfortable but not exactly sure why, Brandon rubbed the back of his neck. “I...um...decided it might be nice if we had a bigger bed, one for all three of us. I made that while you were gone.”

“Why?” Carter’s face had flushed an angry red.

“I figured...with a woman coming...and...” *Oh, fuck it.* Having a woman in their place wasn’t going to change the fact that Brandon was always honest. Brutally honest. “I figured we’d all be so busy screwing around that we’d be better off with one enormous bed. The one we had barely fit us. I mean, that’s why we bought her, wasn’t it? Because we both wanted to have a woman join us?”

“May I have a bath now?” Lyrianna asked. Her voice remained soft despite the fact Brandon had been practically shouting. “Please?”

“Sure,” Carter answered, throwing a withering scowl at Brandon. He walked over to his closet, jerked the door open, and grabbed a button-down shirt from the hanger hard enough the hanger was still swinging as he slammed the door shut. Then he opened a drawer on his bureau, fished out a pair of boxer shorts, and shoved the drawer closed. He held the garments out to Lyrianna. “Here. It’s the best I can do for now. We have to take a trip into the city again soon for supplies, and we can either buy some things for you or get some material if you want to sew your own.”

“Where’s the bathroom?” she asked, her eyes roaming the room again. “I don’t see—”

“We don’t have an indoor shower,” Brandon replied. “We bathe in the ocean. It’s fresh water and clean as it comes.” Since he knew he’d already fucked up royally and had no idea why, he decided he could at least try to help with this, maybe smooth things over. “I could design you a shower, if you’d like. Wouldn’t be too hard.”

She gave him a smile that hit his gut. “I’d like that. Thank you.”

Grabbing a towel from the large pile of clean ones, he tossed it at

her. She caught it mid-air and frowned. Then he grabbed his shampoo and soap. "You can use these. They don't smell girly or anything, but they work." He held them out to her before realizing her hands were full. "I'll carry them down to the water. Could use a bath myself, I suppose. Mind if I join you? You want a shaving stone?"

"A what?"

"A pumice stone. We use them to shave instead of razors. They work great."

When her eyes locked with his, he felt like someone had punched him in the stomach. God, she was so beautiful he wasn't sure he'd ever tire of looking at her. "Why don't we all go get cleaned up? Might be a good way to break the ice. A little time naked, and maybe nature will just take its course." Maybe she wouldn't be so shy when she saw that she'd already made his cock stand at attention. Wasn't swimming together supposed to be romantic? It had been so damned long since he'd interacted with a real woman that he'd lost all his subtlety. Not that it mattered. She was theirs now, and he wanted her. Desperately.

"Oh... I thought I could bathe..." Her gaze dropped away. "...alone."

Carter was at his side, wrapping his hand around a bicep and dragging Brandon away from Lyrianna. "I told you," he said through clenched teeth, "we need to talk. She's not...what we expected." He glanced over to her. "Why don't you go on out and bathe? We'll be out shortly." He gave a nod toward the veranda. "Head out through those doors. You'll see the beach right there."

A shy smile crossed her lips as she tucked the towel under her arm, and then she was gone.

Frustration made Brandon turn on his friend. "What the fuck's going on, Carter? What do you mean she's not what we expected? We bought a woman to sleep with. My nuts are turning blue! I figured you'd nailed her at least twice in the boat on the way home! Did you forget the birth control or something?"



Carter shook his head. "We're not fucking her, Brandon. Not yet."

He blinked in shock. Twice. "Have you lost your mind?"

"Look... I got to know her a little on the ride home. She's a *lady*."

Setting his hands on his hips, Brandon gave Carter a rueful chuckle. "*Ladies* don't end up in prison. What did she do, anyway?"

"I don't know. We weren't allowed to ask." Carter shrugged. "Doesn't matter anyway. She's ours now."

Brandon clapped him hard on the back. "Exactly. Now let's go down there and take advantage of our good luck at the auction."

Carter grabbed his bicep again as Brandon tried to walk away. "Just stop and listen to me. I think we've got a shot at something more here... Something really good."

"Fuck, yeah, we've got something really good. She's hot."

"Can you stop thinking with your cock for one minute?"

A slow mental count of ten kept Brandon from punching Carter in the nose. The need to make love to that beautiful creature bathing in their ocean was twisting his gut into furious knots he wasn't sure would ever be unraveled. "Fine. Explain. Quickly."

"I think we've been given some kind of gift by the universe, a chance for us to maybe get more than some woman to keep us from going insane for lack of pussy. I think we've got a shot at another mate—a wife for both of us. Someone who can love us as much as we love each other. She's so much more than what I'd ever thought we'd find there."

"But she knows why we bought her, doesn't she?"

"That's the problem," Carter replied. "She feels like a whore. If we don't win her over, get to know her for who she is instead of just sleeping with her because we bought her, we'll lose any chance at anything more permanent."

That gave Brandon pause. "I suppose that's kinda what she is, but we won't treat her like one."

Carter pointed at the bed. "And what message do you think king-sized plus there gave her?"

Brandon held out his palms. “Fine. Fine. I fucked up with that. I was just excited.”

“Can we try to treat her like a lady for a while? You know, treat her like a woman we want to win over instead of one we purchased? I think she’ll be happy here if we just give her a reason to be. I also think there’s an attraction there already. I don’t think she’ll play hard to get if we let her know we want her for who she is.”

Rubbing his fingertips against his temples, Brandon tried to stop the dull ache building in his head. He’d figured his cock would be balls deep in pussy by now. Instead, all he had was a new houseguest who would probably drive him stark raving mad since he couldn’t touch her.

His own fault, he supposed. Carter got to make the trip into the city and had already spent hours and hours with her. He obviously knew her better. He was, after all, the more sensitive of the two. Brandon was no-nonsense and blunt to a fault. He’d just laid eyes on Lyrianna, and her beauty in addition to the hours and hours of fantasies of what he’d do to a woman once he got her here made him too horny to even think straight.

With a heavy sigh, he finally got a tenuous grip on his libido and started using his brains. “Fine. But we’re finding some alone time tonight or I’ll lose my mind.” Another sigh. “What do you want me to do about her?”

“For now, follow my lead,” Carter replied as he started walking toward the beach.

\* \* \* \*

The water felt like heaven. At least it would have if Lyrianna had been brave enough to take off her tank top and leggings.

Standing waist-deep in the surf, she turned to look back at the house. The men were talking, judging from how closely they stood. Brandon was rubbing his head as if he’d developed a headache. Not

surprising. Her sister had always told Lyrianna that she was capable of giving a screaming migraine to almost anyone.

Was he angry they'd bought her now?

She'd seemed to create an easy truce with Carter, but she wasn't at all sure what to think of Brandon. The man certainly spoke his mind freely, and the big bed declared exactly what he expected of her. Sex was, after all, what she'd been purchased for, no matter how she tried to spin it. The men had put a good deal of money on the table to get laid. If they weren't the kind men they seemed to be, she'd already be flat on her back—whether she wanted to be there or not.

Carter and Brandon were considering her feelings and not forcing her. She found that endearing and not at all what she'd expected. Having read far too many old Earth books, she'd immediately thought of tales of the Old West, a place where men outnumbered women the same way they did here on Pagonna. She'd feared the men who purchased her would be middle-aged gold miners with long, unkempt beards and ragged clothing who hadn't seen a woman in decades. She'd imagined men with rotting teeth and absolutely no manners. She'd feared uneducated brutes.

Instead, she'd won the interstellar lottery when she got Carter Verdel and Brandon Hunt.

Now she needed to figure out what she was going to do with them.

Brandon wasn't as refined as Carter. Perhaps that was a personality trait or a by-product of not being around other people often. He was every bit as handsome, though. The goatee that framed his full mouth tempted her to trace the lines with her finger. He had eyes that were as dark as the semi-sweet chocolate she always craved but seldom found anywhere except Earth or Belusia. His emotions were right there for her to read, and they didn't come as a surprise. Lust. Passion. Longing. The loneliness he felt touched her heart.

The farm was wonderful. A paradise, as Carter had described it. Lush. Tropical. The house was much more than she'd expected,

although she'd never even considered there might not be a real bathroom. Where did they relieve themselves? Her eyes wandered, settling on a small building just to the side of the house. Perhaps that held a toilet...

Absorbed in her surroundings, she hadn't heard the men approach. Both were standing on the beach, letting the waves wash against their bare legs. Thank heavens, they were both wearing shorts, although Carter's shirt had been abandoned.

She couldn't help but stare. What woman wouldn't? Everything about them was perfect. Their dark hair. One clean-shaven face, one with just the right amount of beard. Broad chests, both with small patches of dark hair that made her mouth go dry as she pictured her fingers touching them. Narrow waists and hips set on deeply muscular legs. And their cocks were hard and big enough that she could see the outline on the front of their shorts.

*Perfect.*

Brandon held the bottle of shampoo as Carter cradled the soap in his hand. "You forgot something," Brandon called, his voice teasing.

"A couple of things," Carter added with a wink as he raised his hand and wiggled the bar of soap.

Here was a chance to start over, just as Carter had said. They were keeping their distance, probably concerned about pushing her too much too quickly. Why not be more open to getting to know them? It was clear she was going to be with them for a good, long while. Lyrianna decided to make the best of it. "Why don't you both bring them to me?"

They ran into the water, splashing and laughing. Her heart did a little cartwheel at the joy they clearly received from such a simple errand. She waded closer and held out her hands. "Thank you."

Brandon's eyes fixed on her soaked tank top. "How are you going to bathe in your clothes?"

All she did was shrug in response, afraid to tell them she was too shy to show her body in front of them in the clear light of day.

“Can I ask a favor?” He took another step closer until she had to tip her head back to look up into his eyes.

“You own me,” she replied, modeling his bluntness and hoping he’d appreciate that tack. “You can do whatever you want and I can’t stop you.”

Brandon closed his eyes and tilted his head back for a few moments as if gathering some patience. Then he settled those dark eyes on her again. “Lyrianna... We can’t change how you came to be here. We can’t erase the past. I’m sorry about that, but I’m not sorry you’re here.”

“What are you saying?” She hoped in her heart he was as willing as Carter for them to have a fresh start.

“I’m saying that we’re going to be together for a long time. Can’t we just take some time to get to know each other and stop worrying about the fucking auction? You’re here. We’re here. Let’s make this farm a success. Together. I won’t deny that I want you, more than you could possibly know. *But*...I’ll never force you. When I make love to you, it will be because you want me to.” His reached out to brush his knuckles across her cheek, his touch surprisingly gentle from such a strong man. “Let’s learn to get along. Deal?”

Her whole life, Lyrianna had been convinced that luck had never been on her side. The day she’d been sentenced to the penal colony on Delta, she’d been convinced it never would be. Today, she realized she’d been wrong. Because by ending up in the hands of these two wonderful men, she had a chance at a new life. She was attracted to them, to both of them, and suddenly felt no reason not to explore that attraction.

Luck had finally come to her.

“Deal,” she replied. “Now I need a bath.”

“Well, then,” Brandon said, “would you like some help with your hair?”

“My hair?”

He took her hand in his. “What I’m asking is if you’ll let me help

wash your hair. It's been ages since I spent any time with a woman. I just want to touch you, to run my fingers through your hair. It's so beautiful." His lips curved into a shy smile as he reached out to rub a tress between his fingers. "I promise I won't attack you or anything."

Lyrianna smiled back, empathically picking up on his sincerity. She also read the concern for her feelings and couldn't help but be touched by it. With another smile, she sucked in a deep breath and turned to dive into the water. She swam beneath the surface a few yards away and then a few yards back before popping back up to her feet. Giving her head a shake that sent the wet tendrils flying, she grinned at Brandon. "Well, it's good and wet. Think you can work some shampoo through it for me?"

His hands trembled as he tried to open the cap on the bottle. She finally took pity on him, flipped the cap open, turned her back to him, letting her head fall back so her wet hair hung away from her body, and closed her eyes.

Brandon was tender as he worked the shampoo through her hair, rubbing his fingers over every inch of her scalp and combing them through the strands. He acted as if he thought she was delicate and in need of gentle handling. Since her eyes were closed, she never knew where he'd touch next. Soon, she began to gasp each time his hand brushed her shoulder or her neck. She caught his hushed growls, and each one sent a wave of longing through her. Such a mundane task, she'd never once considered that the sharing of it could be so intimate, so exciting. Every touch of his hands on her scalp or his fingers threading through her hair sent a jolt to her pussy.

She let out a squeal and opened her eyes when he suddenly swept her into his arms.

"Close your eyes again," Brandon said. "I'm just going to help get the soap out."

Lyrianna obeyed, wrapping her arms around his neck as he tilted her down until she felt the water lapping against her scalp. A second set of hands worked through her hair. Carter had joined them.

A wet hand smoothed over her forehead. “Just wiping away the suds so you can open your eyes,” Carter said, his voice a bit hoarse. “Okay, Lyrianna. We’re done.”

Her eyes fluttered open as Brandon cradled her hard against his chest. Since her hair was done, she should probably tell him to set her back down. But she didn’t want him to. Being held in his strong arms felt so...right.

“Can I...can we...?” Carter seemed nervous. “Can we bathe you too, honey?”

Hearing the endearment this time didn’t raise her temper. It raised her libido as the nickname rolled off his tongue as if he really felt something for her. “Bathe me?”

Brandon pressed his lips to her ear, sending shivers over her skin despite the heat of the water. “We want to touch you, to put our hands on that gorgeous skin.”

“I thought you wouldn’t force me...”

“No force.” Carter gently stroked her arms. “Just touching. Just helping you wash. No sex.” An appealing smile made a dimple crease his right cheek. Shit, but this one was too charming to ignore. “Unless you want it.”

As if two horny men could run soap over her body and not want to have sex when they were done.

On the other hand, they could simply *take* what they wanted, and she would have no way to stop them. Instead, they were asking permission before they put a single finger on her, and that kindness reached something inside her. These were not ordinary men—at least not like the “ordinary” men she’d known back on Rozale. Her own fault for dealing with black marketers and smugglers. These were men of value, of character, and of honor. If bathing her would give them pleasure until she could find the courage to offer them more, it was the least she could do to thank them for the wonderful way they’d treated her.

Lyrianna looked up at Brandon. “Could you please put me

down?”

The disappointment on his face made her bite her lip to keep from giggling. When she was back on her feet, she reached for the hem of her tank top and started peeling it up her body.

“Wh—what are you doing?” Brandon asked, his dark eyes growing wide.

“If you’re both going to bathe me, I should probably get rid of these awful clothes.”



## Chapter 6

The groan that came from both men made her smile. As she tugged the shirt off, wadded it into a ball, and tossed it at the beach, their groans turned to deep growls. If they liked her tits, she wondered what they'd think of her cunt.

The leggings were next to impossible to remove, and right when she was getting frustrated, a strong arm snaked around her waist, lifting her hard against a broad chest. "Let us help," Carter whispered in her ear. His breath brushing against her sent a flood of heat to her pussy that heightened as his tongue traced the ridges and then tickled the little ear canal. Her giggle made him do it all over again.

Brandon stepped forward, put an arm under her knees, and lifted her out of the water. With the other hand, he peeled the leggings down her body and pitched them at the beach. "Nice," he said in a husky voice as he stared at her black panties. "Very nice." His eyes caught hers, and she smiled at how much they'd glazed with desire. He wanted her, and not just because he owned her. He wanted *her*. Lyrianna. "May I take these off too? You're so beautiful, I'd like to see *all* of that gorgeous body."

Tugging her bottom lip between her teeth, she realized that last lacy barrier was the only thing keeping her entire body from them. It might only be a pathetic scrap of material, but it represented so much more. If she let Brandon remove them, she was crossing a bridge and burning it behind her. She'd be giving in to what they wanted, what they'd bought her for.

Lyrianna realized what a hypocrite she was being. Now that they were alone, now that the auction had been put aside and her anger and

fear from it had faded, she finally admitted that she wanted these men, that under any other circumstances, she'd already be kissing them. The only thing keeping her from making love with Brandon and Carter now was her stubborn pride.

With a nod to Brandon, she swept her hesitation away and gave in to what she truly desired. Yes, she would sleep with them—*both*—before this whole thing was over, but she'd tease them into a frenzy first. She'd be the one holding the reins. "Take them off, Brandon."

He didn't have to be told twice, roughly dragging the panties down her body and shoving them in his pocket before setting her back on her feet. His hands were palms out, hovering over her tits as if unsure of whether he should stretch forward those last few centimeters. She showed mercy, grabbing his hands, and pressing them against her breasts. The feel of his rough palms against her nipples made them instantly harden into pebbles, and his responding growl sent a surge of want straight to her clitoris. What woman wouldn't be excited at seeing a man as handsome as Brandon with such naked desire in his eyes? His passion fueled her own, making her blood heat, flowing like lava through her veins.

Carter pressed his chest to her back, the heat of his body seeping into hers, his desire blending with her own. Both guys still had their shorts on, which for some odd reason made her feel more vulnerable than she would if they were all naked. Perhaps because they'd be on equal footing that way. She wiggled her ass against the erection she felt as he wrapped his arms around her waist and hugged her tightly. "Maybe you should both...um...take off your shorts?"

Brandon was already reaching for his waistband when Carter said, "Lyrianna... We told you before, it's okay. We don't expect—"

She stopped his words by turning, threading her arms around his neck, and covering his mouth with hers. For a few very awkward seconds, he didn't respond, not moving a single muscle. She was about to back off when he went off like fireworks, roughly grabbing her waist and tugging her against him as his tongue swept into her

mouth, rubbing against hers and making her toes curl.

Brandon came up behind her, rubbing his cock against her bottom, then sliding it down the cleft between the cheeks until he gently pushed between her upper thighs. She cuddled him against her core, loving the feel of his erection against her pussy lips. How foolish was it to believe she could be here alone with these two men and not let them fuck her brains out? But how much sweeter it was knowing they were doing this because they wanted her, not because they thought it was their right!

Lyrianna tangled her fingers through Carter's hair and flattened her breasts against his chest. Brandon's lips found a sensitive spot where neck met shoulder and nipped the skin before his tongue ran over the bite to soothe it. She tilted her head, giving him a little better access, and purred into Carter's mouth.

Brandon cupped her buttocks as he slowly and gently pushed his cock against her pussy, mimicking the act she knew they all wanted. Fearing he was so starved for sex that he'd simply grab her hips and thrust inside from behind, she decided to slow things down a little.

Pulling away from the kiss, she took her arms back and tried to side-step the men. They both groaned, which made her smile. "I believe we have baths to get done first." She held out her hand. "Who brought the soap?"

"I don't know. Maybe I dropped it?" Carter fished through his pockets. "Oops. Here it is." He plopped the bar on her hand, and she closed her fingers around it.

"Get those shorts off," Lyrianna said with a wink. "I'll start on Brandon, then I'll wash you, Carter. After that, the two of you can help me get clean."

While Carter tried to get out of his shorts so quickly she feared he might drown, she turned to Brandon. Where they stood, the water was at her waist. With his height, it hit him right at groin level, making his enormous cock bob in the little waves lapping against his stomach. She smiled at him as she rubbed the cake of soap between her hands,

working up a lather. “Ready?”

He nodded and wiggled his hips, making his dick surf in the waves. “Want to start there?”

She laughed, loving how free she felt now that the rules had changed. The soap slipped out of her hands, so she let it float away, concentrating on Brandon and the intensity of his stare. “How about...” She took a step closer. “I start...” Another step. “Here.” Lyrianna smoothed her hands over his chest, rubbing suds through the patch of hair she’d been dying to touch. Massaging her palms over his nipples, she giggled when they turned to hard little nubs as she pinched them.

“You’re killing me.” Brandon gaped down at her, looking near to pain until his mouth bowed into a smile. “But you know that, don’t you? You *love* driving me insane.”

“I have to admit—” She ran her hands over his shoulders and down his arms, loving the way his muscles felt like knotted rope under his smooth skin. “—that it’s a bit intoxicating to have such a big, powerful man at my mercy.”

His hand covered one of hers. He dipped it below the surface of the water, smoothing away what remained of the suds from her skin with his thumb. Then he raised her hand to his lips and kissed the back of it before dragging her index finger into his mouth and giving it an easy suck. His gentleness made her feel cherished, and she somehow knew that Brandon and Carter would never hurt her. He brushed a kiss over her palm. “I’m at your mercy, beautiful lady. Whatever you ask, I’ll give you.”

Since Carter’s kiss had been so incredible, she wanted to know Brandon’s taste as well. Her world had become surreal, and she wasn’t sure she’d ever get accustomed to having two men there with her, both wanting to make love to her. At the same time. Her sister would be appalled and would probably tell her just how depraved she’d become. Belusians did have very high sex drives, so perhaps Callinda would understand...especially considering the circumstances

that brought Lyrianna to Pagonna.

Instead of feeling at all ashamed for standing there entirely nude in front of Brandon and Carter, Lyrianna was more aroused than she could ever remember. Each time one of them fixed a passionate stare on her, her gut tightened and her pussy clenched in desire. The heat actually increased when they gave a loving glance to each other. Who would have thought the idea of two men coming together would be so fucking sexy? “What I want is for you to kiss me.”

Subtle wasn't Brandon's strong suit. She'd realized that from the moment she met him, and the way his arms wrapped around her now as he lifted her almost out of the water to bring her face level with his only confirmed the fact. Then he kissed the daylights out of her, his tongue wild, giving her nothing to do except reply in kind. He made love to her with his mouth, their tongues mating in a dance of give and take. Thrust and parry. She never wanted him to stop.

Carter's hands were suddenly on her hips, stroking upward until he brushed the undersides of her breasts. Brandon didn't seem to want to let her move away, not even enough for Carter to fit his flattened hands between them to get to her tits. His frustrated growl roared in her ear. Having never been in a sharing situation before, she wasn't sure exactly what to do to ensure there was no jealousy and that she pleased both men so neither felt cheated or left out. She tore her mouth away from Brandon's and turned her head. Finding some bravado, she said, “I love it when a lover touches my ass.”

Carter's smile was brighter than the sun. “And are you telling us we're going to be lovers, Lyrianna?”

A sarcastic retort at how obvious the answer was, considering she was already naked, tickled her tongue, but she bit it back. “Yes, baby. We're going to be lovers.”

“Are you sure?” That question coming from Brandon seemed surprising.

She turned her head back to stare into his dark eyes. “I'm sure.”

“Then wrap those gorgeous legs around me,” he ordered. And

then he was kissing her again, wading out of the surf as Carter followed close behind, constantly running his palms over her ass or up her spine.

When they reached the veranda, Brandon set her back on her feet and grabbed a towel he'd left over a wicker chair. He started rubbing her hair with it while Carter picked up another towel and gave tender attention to her arms before gently patting her breasts dry. She watched his face, and when he licked his lips, her pussy spasmed and flooded with fluid at the pure desire she saw in his eyes. Before she could offer herself to him, he dropped the towel, wrapped an arm around her waist, and arched her back.

He buried his face between her breasts and inhaled deeply. "Damn, Lyri. You smell wonderful."

"Can we call you Lyri?" Brandon asked, rapidly drying himself with the towel he'd been using on her.

"Sure," she replied, "Hannah always..." Her words turned to a moan as Carter ran a tongue over her nipple before drawing it deep into his mouth. Heat raced to her cunt as more moisture rushed out. She tried to keep her legs tightly together to keep from drenching her thighs.

"Can we take her inside to the bed?" Brandon asked, staring down and looking like a kid left out of a game as Carter feasted on her breasts. "At least that way I can eat her pussy while you're having fun with her tits." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Sorry, Lyri. I shouldn't be so...blunt."

As she tangled her fingers in Carter's hair, wanting to keep him right where he was, she managed to say, "I like it when you talk dirty."

A groan rose from Carter as he pulled away from her breasts. "Fuck, I think you're the perfect woman." He swept her into his arms, walking into the house in long strides as Brandon followed close behind. "Maybe the big bed isn't such a bad idea," Carter said over his shoulder.

"I like it," Lyrianna said as he laid her on the sheets. She scooted to the middle as Brandon walked to the other side. The men stood on opposite sides of the bed, doing nothing more than staring at her. She stared back, taking in the cocks jutting from their muscular bodies, when it suddenly dawned on her that these men—these perfect men—were hers. All she had to do was call, and they'd give her anything she wanted. Her heart swelled with affection as she held up her hand and crooked her finger. "C'mon, boys. Make love to me."

Brandon hadn't realized he could move that quickly. He got to Lyrianna first and tackled her to the sheets, covering her body with his. He gave her one hard kiss on the mouth before working his way down her body, wanting to taste every inch of her soft skin. Taking little, nibbling bites and long licks, he followed the line of her collarbone to the center of her chest. As he palmed her full breasts, loving the feel of the hard nipples tickling his hands, he inhaled, remembering what Carter had said about how wonderful she smelled. His mate had been right—she was the perfect woman for the two of them. Clean female with a whiff of musk from her arousal. His cock was already spurting out pre-cum, and he didn't care. The first time was going to be quick, probably embarrassingly so, but fuck it. He'd rebound fast enough to make love to her a second time tonight. And maybe a third.

If they weren't careful, he and Carter would wear her pussy out.

*Pussy.* That was what he'd been craving. He kissed each of her nipples as Carter scooted closer and started kissing her lips. Her hands tangled in his hair, and she moaned. Brandon figured he'd give her something to *really* make her moan. Dragging his tongue down her flat belly, he loved watching the gooseflesh he raised in his wake. One kiss on each hip bone, then he reached between her thighs.

Gently spreading them, he buried his nose in the tight, blonde curls and inhaled. "Shit, Lyri. You smell so sweet." Running his fingers between her lips, he spread them, baring her pink jewel. With no warning, he leaned down and sucked her clitoris.

When Lyrianna almost bucked off the bed, Carter smiled against her mouth. All Brandon had talked about ever since they'd made the decision to go to the auction was eating pussy. *Looks like he dove right on in.*

Carter captured her moans with his mouth, rubbing his tongue across hers. Her hand reached out to brush his thighs, so he guided it to his cock, wrapping her fingers around the shaft. Her skin felt like silk against his, and he feared he'd shoot his wad like some damned kid just from the way she was touching him. Her thumb found the drops of fluid on the crown, and she smeared it around at the same time she coaxed his tongue into her mouth and gave it a hard suck.

Fuck, he wasn't going to last long.

When he pulled his mouth away, he was panting for breath. He looked into Lyrianna's face and realized whatever Brandon was doing down there was pleasing her. Her cheeks were flushed red, and she was breathing as raggedly as he was. Her eyes had darkened to the most beautiful shade of gray.

"Brandon!" she shouted. "I'm going to..." The word turned into a throaty scream as she arched her back and tugged on his hair.

All Carter could do was stare at how beautiful she was in the throes of her orgasm. He smoothed her damp hair away from her face and leaned in to kiss her parted lips. In that moment, despite the logical part of his brain telling him he was a fool, he fell in love with her. "Can I make love to you?"

Lyrianna slowly opened her eyes, a sexy smile curving her lips. "I'd like that."

"And I'll watch," Brandon said, crawling back up her body before flopping to his side.

"No, you'll let me suck your cock," she said as she rolled to her side and leaned over to lick the pre-cum dripping from the slit on the head of Brandon's erection.

Carter grabbed her hips, moving behind her so he could fuck her while she blew Brandon. Although his body was screaming at him to



just slam into her, he stopped as he pressed the crown of his dick against her sheath. “Lyri? You ready?”

She glanced over her shoulder. “Oh, yeah. Do it.”

He slid into her body, gasping at the pleasure of feeling her tight, wet heat surrounding his cock. “Oh, fuck...”

Rocking back against him, she wiggled her hips and then squeezed her internal muscles hard enough he gasped again. This was going to be a quick ride.

Lyrianna ran her fingertips from root to crown on Brandon’s dick, tracing the veins and then leaning forward to lick away the fluid leaking from the tip. Just as she took him in her mouth, swallowing as much of his length as she could, Carter’s cock filled her completely. She had to close her eyes for a moment to keep from climaxing again. This time, she wanted her guys right there with her. She teetered on the edge of release, hoping that they would respond to her quickly so she could bring them the same kind of joy they were bringing her.

Brandon tugged hard on her hair as she alternated between licking his length and deep-throating him. Blowjobs hadn’t been something she normally enjoyed, but his cock was so proud, so handsome, she simply had to taste it. His tangy essence made her tongue tingle, and the way he started pumping his hips, she knew he was close to release.

Carter’s fingers were digging into her hips as he started pounding into her pussy. The rhythm was fast and rough, bringing her closer and closer to release. About the time she thought she couldn’t hold off her orgasm any longer, Carter pushed into her one more time and shouted her name. The heat of his semen bathed her insides, setting off her own orgasm. Just as she sucked on Brandon one more time, hoping to drag him along for the ride, his fingers clenched in her hair as he groaned. Hot fluid spurted into her throat, and she swallowed, loving the taste of his release.

Carter gently withdrew, dropping on the mattress like a limp rag doll. Brandon gently untangled his fingers from her hair, combing it

back into some order as she knelt in front of him. Then he kissed her gently and patted the middle pillow.

She lay down, stretching her arms over her head and arching her back to work all the kinks out of her muscles. It had been a long time since she'd made love, and parts of her felt a bit sore. Good, but sore.

Glancing to her right and then her left, she realized both men were staring at her. "What?"

"You keep that up, and I'm going to have to fuck you again." Carter reached over to put a possessive hand on her stomach.

"Do what?"

Brandon put a finger under her chin to turn her to face him. "Lie there looking like some sex goddess."

She snorted a laugh. "All I was doing was stretching my muscles."

"With enough grace and beauty to make my dick get hard again." His smile made her heart kick into a higher gear.

Lyrianna figured it was an exaggeration. No man recovered *that* quickly, certainly not simply because she was lying next to him and stretching. "You're just being nice."

He grabbed her hand and put it on his quickly stiffening cock.

"Okay...maybe you *aren't* just being nice." She let her hand wander down his length and then squeezed his sac. "But I'm gonna need at least a little recovery time."

Carter chuckled. "You're always going to have to set the limits, 'cause we've been without pussy for a long time. As long as I can still get it up, I'm going to be reaching for you. Probably even in my sleep."

Afraid to let her vulnerability show, Lyrianna bit back the question she was dying to ask. Surely she'd pleased them or they wouldn't be wanting to have sex again. *Right?* No one had ever really praised her performance before, and now that she'd opened this door to this kind of intimacy, it was important to her that she please both Carter and Brandon. She couldn't stop the question from tumbling out. "So...um...then you...liked that?"

The men burst into full-blown laughter. “Are you kidding me?” Brandon asked.

Her face flushed hot. “Never mind.”

Rolling to face her, he threw his thigh over hers and kissed her cheek. “You have the most wonderful mouth, and that was one of the best orgasms of my life. Carter’s got a fantastic ass, but I can’t wait to get inside that sweet pussy.”

Carter faced her as well, molding himself against her side and wrapping an arm around her waist. “You were wonderful, Lyri. Absolutely wonderful.”

A yawn slipped out when she tried to thank them both for their kind words.

“How about we get some sleep?” Brandon said. “When we get up, we can have some breakfast, make love again, then we’ll show you the farm.”

Between her fatigue and the drugging heat of their bodies so close to hers, she was already half asleep. She hummed her approval of his plan as she closed her eyes and let sleep claim her.

## Chapter 7

The first thing that registered was the feeling of pleasure zinging straight to her clit. Warm hands were teasing her tits, playing with the nipples until Lyrianna started squirming. She opened her eyes to see that each man was worshipping a breast as four brown eyes drilled through her. “Mmm... Good morning, boys.”

“Good morning,” Brandon said. “I thought you’d never wake up.”

“You’ve been up a long time?” she asked.

Carter laughed as he pressed the hard length of his cock against her thigh. “Since the moment I pulled out of you last night.”

“Is it morning?” Hard to tell considering the light pouring through the veranda doors was every bit as bright as when she’d fallen asleep.

Brandon nodded. “You’ll get used to the three-dark, three-light schedule after a while. Our internal clocks pretty much tell us when morning and night are.” Leaning in he pressed a kiss to her lips.

She gently pushed him away. “I’ve got morning breath.”

“Your breath is wonderful.” Brandon cupped his hand around her neck and pulled her toward him. “And I want you.”

“Me too.” Carter followed her as she rolled toward Brandon and pressed his cock to her buttocks. “Are you willing to try something new, Lyri?”

Brandon didn’t give her the chance to reply, and she let her curiosity go because his kiss scattered her every thought. His tongue rubbed across hers, coaxing her to follow it into his mouth where he gave her tongue a gentle suck. She moaned, pushing her hips back against Carter who was pressing his dick between her thighs.

Wrapping his arms around her waist, Brandon moved to his back

as Lyrianna sprawled over him until she straddled his hips. Carter moved behind her, kneeling as he traced the length of her spine with his fingertips, making her shiver. “Would you be willing to try to take both of us at once?”

Her whole body seemed to quake with desire when she realized exactly what he was proposing. Part of her was so filled with lust she immediately wanted to scream her approval, but then she remembered just how big Carter and Brandon’s cocks were. “I don’t know... Won’t it hurt?”

Carter kissed her shoulder as he smoothed his hands down her arms, lacing his fingers through hers. “We have some lube we made from aloe we use when we fuck each other that’ll help me slide right inside you. Trust me, nothing feels as good as a cock in your ass.”

“It feels...good?”

“Hell, yeah,” Brandon replied. “I love it when Carter fucks me.”

“And I’ll be gentle, honey,” Carter added. “I promise. I’d never hurt you.”

Brandon rocked his hips up, rubbing the head of his erection over her clit, sending another quiver through her. “Anything feels bad, we’ll stop. We only want to please you.”

The tender expression on his face, coupled with the lust she empathically read from both men, fueled her desire. She’d never considered herself remotely experimental where sex was concerned. Some kissing. Some fondling. Then a cock in her pussy until they both found release. Now, she was in a bed with two lovers and ready to try something as wild as having both those men inside her body at the same time. She’d come a long, long way in more instances than just distance through space.

Carter’s warm lips touched her neck. “If you’re not ready, Lyri... We’ll understand.”

“No. I’m ready. Let’s try it.” She reached over her shoulder to touch his face, loving the feel of the beard stubble on his cheek. “Just keep me so busy I don’t have a chance to worry about how big your

cocks are.”

“Gladly,” Carter replied with an enormous grin. He turned her chin a little more so he could kiss her, sliding his tongue past her lips to stroke the roof of her mouth.

Brandon held his dick, using it to massage between the lips of her pussy until he found her clitoris and rubbed it with the swollen head. She moaned into Carter’s mouth, squirming to try to let Brandon know that she was ready for him.

“Now, baby?” Brandon asked.

Lyrianna broke away from kissing Carter to put her hands on Brandon’s shoulders and stare down at him. “Fuck me, Brandon.”

“Oh, baby. I love it when you talk dirty.” He held his cock while she lowered herself over him until she’d taken him inside her. “Damn, you feel good.” He hissed out a breath as she pressed her hips against him, taking him deeper. His hand rose to cup her neck and pull her down until her breasts pressed hard against his chest. “You’re gonna love this, Lyrianna.”

“Shut up and kiss me.” And he did, drugging her with his taste and the feel of his tongue sliding over hers.

The bed shifted as Carter moved toward the small table by the bed, probably to get the lube. Then his fingers touched where she was joined with Brandon, smearing something cool and moist back across her perineum and circling it around her anus. As he pushed his fingertip inside the tight hole, her body reacted with a firm internal squeeze that made Brandon groan against her lips. She hadn’t thought how exciting it would be to have someone touching her in such an intimate place, but the more Carter eased his finger inside her, the more she felt herself spinning out of control with desire. When a second finger joined the first, she was close to begging him to put himself inside her.

“Think you’re ready, Lyri?” Carter smoothed his palms over the globes of her ass, separating them a little more as he pressed the blunt head of his cock against her entrance. “I really want to be inside you.”

She broke away from Brandon's kiss long enough to answer him. "Yes. Please."

Her tight muscles stretched as he eased inside her, pushing gently before pulling back again and again. Then he slid past the first ring, setting off a *mêlée* of sensations inside her that almost pushed her over the edge.

Brandon framed her face in his hands. "You love that, don't you, baby? You love having your two men claim you, don't you?"

"Yes," she hissed before kissing him again, letting all she felt in her heart and her body run roughshod over her.

The men set an easy rhythm, one that she found hit so many sweet spots, she knew she wasn't going to last long. Could the men feel each other through the thin layer of her tissue that separated them? Were they half as excited as she was to know that the three of them were as close as any human beings could be?

Carter growled, speeding his tender thrusts and causing Brandon to do the same. She closed her eyes and moaned, digging her fingers into Brandon's arms. It was as if they knew exactly what she needed, because after only a few moments, everything inside Lyrianna tightened into an almost unbearable knot before bursting apart, making her muscles spasm in orgasm as lights floated behind her eyelids. Her heart hammered in her chest so hard she feared it would simply give out. She called out to the men, practically screaming for them to join her.

Brandon came first, the heat of his fluid blasting deep inside her, setting off aftershocks that made her breath hitch. Carter held so tightly to her hips, she knew she might have a bruise or two. He pushed into her once, twice, and on the third thrust, he cried out her name as his essence filled her.

\* \* \* \*

After breakfast, the men took Lyrianna on the tour of their farm.

“How many animals do you have?” she asked. She watched the chickens scratching around to pick up the feed Brandon scattered on the ground.

“Not that many,” Carter replied as he stood next to her by the fence. “We brought most of them from Earth. Tons of seeds and plants for the garden, too. We figured we better come prepared to grow or raise all the things we like to eat. We needed the chickens for eggs and sometimes for dinner. We hired an enormous transport ship and stocked it to the roof with everything we knew we’d need that we might not be able to find on Pagonna.”

The men were showing her the chores she could take over on the farm, and she’d believed she’d enjoy working with the animals up until she realized she’d have to be eating some of them. Because she tended to get really attached to anything she cared for, she knew she’d never be able to eat any creature she’d taken the time to feed. Hell, she’d probably give the all names eventually. “I can’t kill a chicken.”

Brandon chuckled. “You won’t have to. Carter takes care of that. You can cook if you’d like, though. Neither of us cooks too well.”

“We tend to just chuck everything on the grill. Chicken. Fish. Vegetables,” Carter added as he took her hand and led her toward an enormous garden. Row after row of vegetables grew there in various states of maturity. Brandon came out of the coop and followed, taking her other hand.

“Wow,” she said, a bit breathlessly. “You really planned well.”

“Since the weather is always perfect, we stagger when we plant so we can harvest fresh vegetables all year round,” Carter explained. He nodded toward the thick tree grove. “Plenty of fresh fruit, too. We have some Earth trees planted there, and we’ve always got the variety of Pagonna fruit. We’ll teach you all about them.” His fingers ran through her ponytail.

The men seemed to always be touching her, stroking her hair, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder, caressing her cheek. How easy it would be to see affection in those gestures rather than recognizing



them for what they were—ways to stay physically connected after being without a woman for such a long time.

That thought hurt, and she almost gasped when she realized why. She was already forming strong feelings for Carter and Brandon. While she wanted to rejoice in those feelings because she'd always figured something was wrong with her since she never really loved a man before, she couldn't find any joy. The men didn't love her. She was simply a companion, a woman to sleep with instead of just being with each other.

Her heart whispered back that she'd be spending lots of time with them, that true affection could grow from their close quarters. They obviously loved each other. She'd seen them kiss, a bit ashamed at how hot it made her to see them touching. Unfortunately, her brain had its say as well, taunting that they already loved each other—that they didn't have to fall in love with her. That she could simply end up being a convenient pussy.

"Why are you frowning?" Carter asked, bringing her back to the present.

"I just feel...inadequate. I don't know anything about taking care of animals or growing vegetables. Now, if you need me to locate a smuggled part or get my hands on a banned medication, I'm your girl."

"Was that why you were in prison, Lyri?" Brandon asked.

She wondered when that question would finally come up. Not surprising her blunt-to-a-fault Brandon asked first. "I smuggled black market vaccines for missionaries to take to the planet Fraiqua. They have a demise pox epidemic there."

"So you stole vaccines? From a pharmaceutical company?" Carter's frown was fierce. "We do a lot of business with a lot of them, and if they found out you stole—"

Lyrianna placed her fingertips to his lips. "I didn't steal them from a pharmaceutical company. I stole them from a drug dealer—a black market guy. He was trying to charge a fortune for them, so I decided

to force him to make a donation to the cause.”

“You ripped off a drug dealer?” Brandon asked, squeezing her hand. “Then why did you end up in prison?”

“Because right after the ship with the vaccines took off, there was a police raid. Let’s just say they didn’t believe a word of my story. After a quick trial where I didn’t get to defend myself, I ended up getting sentenced to forty years of hard labor.”

“I’m so sorry, honey.” Carter leaned in to kiss her cheek.

“I’m not,” she replied, meaning exactly what she’d said.

“You’re not?”

She shook her head. “If I hadn’t been sent to that prison on Delta moon, I wouldn’t have ended up here. You know, I still haven’t figured out how *that* happened. I didn’t know prisons were allowed to commute a prisoner’s sentence, especially to turn her into some kind of indentured servant.”

Brandon snorted a laugh. “Doubt too many people there know. Probably some prison official, a warden or someone, who makes a pretty penny on handpicking pretty girls like you to send to places like this.”

“Seriously?”

“Oh, yeah,” Carter added. “I imagine they’ve got a nice racket going. Probably get kickbacks from the auction. Where is Delta moon?”

“Rozale,” she replied, her mind spinning.

“Never heard of it. How far is it from Pagonna?”

She’d tried to blot the whole experience from Delta moon to the auction out of her mind, but now she struggled to remember. “It’s in the Prime Sector. I think they said I was in stasis for four months. I remember thinking only government ships could travel at the speed it would take to get here.”

“That answers your question about someone official being involved,” Brandon said.

Having never stopped long enough to think of the ramifications,

Lyrianna now let her imagination run wild. “I wonder what they’ll tell my sister. After I was arrested, they wouldn’t even let me contact her.” Tears stung her eyes. “She won’t know what happened to me or where I am.” Her heart hurt. So many months had passed—the time for the trial and then traveling in stasis and the time she’d lived with the men—and Callinda would be worried sick. When it dawned on her that she might never see her sister again, a sob broke out. The wall of indifference she’d raised around her heart to cope with all that had happened suddenly crumbled.

Four arms wrapped around her, holding her close as she cried. “It’s okay, honey,” Carter whispered in her ear. “We’ll find a way to get her a message.”

“We’re going to the city soon for supplies,” Brandon added. “We’ll see if there’s any way we can let her know where you are. Might take a while to get a message there, but at least she’d know you’re safe.”

She sniffled and nodded against Brandon’s shoulder, feeling better simply from having the men hold her close. “Thank you.”

“Would you like to see the pod farm sometime?” Carter asked as he stepped back and wiped the tears off her cheeks.

Lyrianna nodded again. “Will I have to wear one of those...breathers?”

“Yeah, but—”

“Do we have to go today?” She probably sounded like a coward, but the notion of being smothered by one of those things frightened her.

“When you’re ready, Lyrianna.” Brandon’s soft voice comforted her. “We’ll take you diving to see the pods when you’re ready.”

## Chapter 8

“Don’t be afraid of it, Lyri,” Brandon said, holding the breather out to her on his outstretched palm. “I promise to keep you safe. I know you’ve been looking forward to seeing the pods.”

The idea of putting that disk over her mouth and letting it suffocate her made Lyrianna’s gut twist. It looked even more foreign sitting on the webbed glove he wore to make swimming underwater easier. She’d been on the island three weeks, and today was the first day she’d finally worked up enough guts to try and dive with the guys to see the pod farm. While she might be dying of curiosity to see what Carter and Brandon did every day when they went to work, she simply hated the idea of using the breather, so she’d found excuse after excuse not to go. She adjusted her goggles and asked, “You’re sure it’ll work?”

“We use ’em every day. They filter the oxygen directly out of the water. Believe it or not, they’re much easier than using old-fashioned oxygen tanks. Doesn’t take much to get used to them.” He pressed the disk to his face, and she watched—just as she had when Carter had first shown one to her—as it quivered, becoming flexible enough to form itself to his mouth and nose. He spread his arms and gave her a quick bow as if to say, “Ta-da!”

Her mouth fixed into a thin line. She wanted to trust the guys, but she’d always had a fear of being smothered, probably because her younger sister, Callinda, had always liked to tease her by dropping things from the upper bunk onto her face while she slept. Lyrianna would always wake up thrashing as she tried to get whatever was covering her off.

That memory made her heart catch. Despite their teasing, she and Callinda had always been close. When their parents died, they'd been shuttled from uncaring relative to uncaring foster home, knowing they only had each other to depend on. They'd only lived on their home planet of Belusia for the first ten years of Lyrianna's life. Since Callinda was two years younger, she might not even remember the planet at all. The last time Lyrianna had seen her sister, she'd been working as a nurse in a refugee camp on Bromond, helping the children there who'd been starving from yet another drought on the desert planet. Her sister had a heart of gold but the temper of a Dracorion. *Shortest fuse in the galaxy*, Lyrianna had always joked. Not that her own was much better.

Brandon peeled the breather away from his face, readjusted his goggles, and threw her a concerned frown. "Are you afraid of the water or is it really the breather that frightens you?"

Brushing aside the melancholy thoughts and getting herself back to the topic—her fright of being suffocated—she said, "The breather. Don't you feel like it's...smothering you or something?"

"Nah. I'm used to it. They're not hard to use." His hand encased hers, and he gave her a bolstering squeeze. "How about we go practice in the water? If it bothers you too much, we can just ease into it over time." She loved his laugh. "Hell, time is something we've got *plenty* of around here. We'll wait until you're ready."

"No. No more waiting. I want to do this."

Lyrianna let Brandon lead her toward the surf. It was hard to walk with the flippers she wore on her feet, although Brandon acted like he'd been born with them. Flexing her fingers, she made sure the webbed gloves were on tight before she followed, implicitly trusting him to keep her safe. The water lapped against her legs, cooling her sun-warmed skin. She'd learned to love the feel of the island's tropical heat, spending as much time as she could in the sun. Since she still didn't have any kind of swimsuit, she wore her tank top and her only pair of panties. She didn't mind wearing the guys' clothes,

enjoying the loose, breezy shirts that never stuck to her skin, even when she got sweaty from working in the garden or with the animals. The boxers she wore as shorts weren't exactly feminine, but she'd found a needle and thread and sewed the flies shut on several pair so she wasn't flashing the men all the time. If she rolled the waistbands down, they let her tummy get some sun as well. Over the weeks on the island, she'd gotten a nice golden tan, and her hair had grown quite a bit.

The water was comfortably warm. She'd quickly adjusted to bathing in the ocean, even looked forward to it because the men usually joined her. They seemed to love touching her, especially washing her hair. They made her feel cherished as they washed and dried her, which almost always resulted in them making love to her as well. Since she'd been on their island, they'd been attentive lovers, reaching for her almost every night.

Sometimes it was all three of them together. Sometimes Brandon would jump her while Carter was working on pods, or Carter would toss her on a blanket in the barn and make love to her while Brandon napped. She imagined they had their...*alone* times when they worked on the pods. They'd all fallen into a nice love life with no jealousy between the two men, and she was pretty sure she pleased them both. Heaven knew they pleased her.

Brandon held out a breather again, and she swallowed her fear. She really did want to see the underwater growing pods, having heard so much about them and knowing the profit from them made this paradise possible. Taking a deep breath, she pressed the disk to her nose and hoped for the best. As Brandon did the same with his breather, he dove into the surf. She followed, trying desperately not to panic. Once she was all the way underwater, she tried to take her first breath, relaxing as she realized how easy it was, even with the breather covering her mouth and nose. It felt a little like holding a cold washcloth over her face, but with each new inhale and exhale, the feeling of being smothered died a little more until it was finally

washed away.

Taking her hand, Brandon pointed toward the deeper water. Then he started swimming away like he'd been born a merman, effortlessly gliding through the water. Lyrianna followed, pulling hard with her arms and kicking with her legs, trying to let the gloves and flippers help propel her forward. Damn, but it was hard work, making every muscle in her body start to scream with overuse. No wonder her guys were nothing but a mass of hard muscle. They swam for hours at a time.

After what seemed like forever, Lyrianna saw the pods. Grids of the round glass spheres seemed to stretch out forever—farther than she could see. How could two men possibly take care of all these containers?

Each was filled with a small amount of water that contained the roots of the plants. Some spheres were obviously “ripe,” being entirely filled with leaves of many different shapes, colors, and sizes. Herbs that Carter and Brandon sold to make their fortunes.

The spheres looked so fragile, Lyrianna was afraid to touch them. She swam closer to the edge of the first grid and stared at one of the pods. They obviously held air inside them, but she couldn't figure out how they were ventilated when they were so far below the surface.

Hands settled on her waist, and she turned to Brandon. Since none of them could speak, she couldn't ask the myriad of questions racing through her mind. He took her hand and pressed it to one of the glass spheres. She was surprised how hot the surface felt. The sphere itself probably would have taken up the entire living area of their home.

Brandon traced her hand around the curve to a glass pipe connecting the sphere to the next in line. That's when she noticed the grids were all tied together, each sphere joined to the one next to it and above it with a similar glass tube. Those had to be what brought air below the surface to the pods, probably from the windmills she'd seen in the fruit tree grove. Hadn't Carter said they powered the pods?

She tried to count how many grids she could see, but quickly gave

up. Her admiration for her guys grew when she realized the immense responsibility they had to care for so many plants. No wonder they'd needed her help with the vegetable garden and the animals. She still couldn't kill a chicken, but she'd stopped naming them after the first few dinners. Now, she simply fed them and collected their eggs, always leaving a few in each clutch to eventually hatch. Milking the goats wasn't so bad, and those she *could* name, although she doubted her sister appreciated that the one with a little hint of red in its coat was now called Callie.

Arms and legs past the point of exhaustion, Lyrianna pointed up, letting Brandon know she was heading back to the surface. Instead of nodding, he tugged her into his arms, giving her a tight hug. Then he pushed back, grabbed her by the waist, and gave her a hard shove upward, aiding her ascent.

Once her face broke the surface, she quickly jerked the breather off her face. Her fingers were so shaky, she dropped it. Before she could grab a hold of the stupid thing, it sank out of her reach. At least Carter had told her they had tons of them around, so she didn't make an effort to chase after that one. Her muscles were already screaming at her, and another dive was out of the question.

Out of the water, her legs were almost too rubbery to let her stand. Damn, but she would have to start diving daily to get into better shape. If one of the guys ever needed her help with the pods, she wouldn't be able to give them a lot of assistance. The farm was as much her responsibility now as it was for the men, and she owed it to them to be as helpful as possible. Yes, she'd start a daily swim tomorrow. Today, she was simply too damned tired.

Perhaps if she made herself valuable to them, that value might someday become affection.

\* \* \* \*

"Damn, I wish I could have seen Lyri on her first dive. She



seemed to like it?" Carter asked after he peeled off his breather and shoved it in his pocket. He'd been tending some of the farthest pods that were about ready for harvest when Brandon had brought Lyrianna out to the open water, so he hadn't seen them.

Brandon nodded as he yanked off his own breather and put it in his pocket. "Her eyes were so wide, and I could tell she had a million questions to ask about how the pods worked. She looked like she was terrified to touch one, like she thought the glass would break if she did. We'll have to show her one of the replacements to let her know how sturdy they are. I imagine she'd like to know more about the operation now that she's seen it."

"Did she look impressed?" Stupid question, but he'd been trying so hard to get her to be happy on the farm that all Carter wanted to do was give her more and more reasons to want to stay. He and Brandon had talked, and if she ever said she wanted to leave, they'd agreed they wouldn't keep her there against her will. Carter had already fallen in love with her, and from what he could tell, even Brandon, despite his somewhat cynical nature, had it bad for Lyrianna. They agreed to give her as many reasons to stay as they could, and neither wanted to go back to their lonely days before she brought sunshine to the island with her smile.

Carter stopped and stared at his mate, wishing he knew what Brandon felt. Did he realize just how bonded the three of them were now? Or did he see Lyrianna as replacing him in Carter's affections? It had been a while since he and Brandon had enjoyed any time alone—not often since she'd come to their island. He crooked his finger at Brandon, needing to connect with him. "C'mere."

He didn't have to ask twice. Brandon swaggered over, put a hand behind Carter's head, and pulled him into a heated kiss. Carter pushed his tongue past Brandon's lips, deepening the kiss and needing to let his mate know how much he still loved him. Their relationship had changed since they'd brought Lyrianna to the island, but that didn't mean they still didn't need each other.

Pulling back from the kiss, Brandon smiled. “You know I love you. Right?”

“Yeah, I do,” Carter drawled. “And I love you too.” His hand dropped to stroke Brandon’s cock, loving how it grew because of his touch. “Want me?”

Brandon mimicked the action, stroking Carter’s hardening dick through his shorts. “Always.”

“Why do I hear a *but* in that statement?”

“No but. I want you. I’ll fuck you stupid right now. If that’s what you want.”

“There was definitely a but in *that* statement.”

Brandon gave one more caress to Carter’s erection before his hand fell away. “I don’t know how to explain it... It’s like...whenever she’s around, I want her.” He suddenly held his hands out. “Wait. That came out wrong... Fuck. I always say the wrong thing.”

Carter didn’t take offense, because he suddenly understood. Because he felt the same. The two of them had always been enough. Now, the three of them needed each other. “We’re not a just couple anymore, are we? We’re a trio.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“Not at all,” Carter replied. “I’m horny. Let’s go get our *other* mate and get busy.”

As they grabbed towels from the pile—which Lyrianna had taken over washing and replacing, as she had taken over all their laundry—they dropped their goggles, flippers, and gloves on the equipment racks and stepped inside the house. Since she’d almost always had some great supper ready, he was surprised that no smell of roasting fish or vegetables, her usual choice for meals, welcomed them.

She really was a part of them now. The three would be inseparable. For the rest of their lives. *If* they could convince Lyrianna to stay.

“Lyri?” he called softly, wondering why she didn’t reply. Then he saw her on the bed, flat on her back and sound asleep, wearing

absolutely nothing. Hard as it was to pull his eyes away from her tempting form, he took in the small pile of wet clothes, flippers, goggles, and gloves she'd left on the towel beside the bed. She'd obviously been too exhausted to even get dressed.

"I'd forgotten how much diving takes out of someone when they're not used to it." Brandon dropped his towel and took off his wet shorts. Instead of getting dressed, he flopped onto the mattress, lying next to her and then tugging her into his arms. "I guess sex is out of the question, so I'm gonna take a nap. We can all make dinner later."

Since the sun was setting for the beginning of three dark-days, Carter decided some sleep might suit him as well. Sure, he wanted to get laid, but he didn't want to disturb Lyrianna. He ditched his own wet shorts and snuggled up against her back, loving how she wiggled that sweet ass of hers against his swollen cock. He had to stifle a frustrated groan.

His last thought before sleep claimed him was that he'd do anything to keep her next to him for the rest of his life.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon woke with a start, thinking he was in the throes of some erotic dream when he felt the gentle brush of a hot tongue against the head of his cock. As the last of the sleepy haze cleared his brain, he saw Lyrianna licking him from tip to root and back again before she gave him a salacious smile and then wrapped her mouth around his dick.

In all the time she'd been on the island, she'd never initiated sex. Of course it wasn't as if he or Carter ever gave her much of a chance, jumping her almost daily. To know she'd awakened and reached for him touched something deep inside him. He laced his fingers through her long, loose hair and whispered, "That's the best way anyone has ever got me up before."

“Oh, you were already *up*. I just decided to take advantage of it.” She chuckled before she gave his cock a hard suck that he felt all the way to his toes.

Hissing his approval, he savored the visual candy of watching her love him with that sexy mouth. A groan slipped out when she moved away until her tongue licked his balls. He almost arched right off the bed. “Holy fuck, Lyri. You’re killing me.”

“Well, then,” Carter said as he rolled to his side to prop himself up on his elbow. “She can come over here and lick *my* balls. I promise I won’t die when she does.”

“No way,” Brandon replied, stroking her hair. “She’s busy right now.”

Lyrianna chuckled again as she took his cock deep in her mouth at the same time she reached out to stroke Carter’s stiff dick. She’d certainly learned early on how to make sure neither of her men felt left out when the three of them were together.

“So who gets fucked first?” she asked, her smile making Brandon’s cock twitch.

When she knelt, straddling his hips, he grabbed his erection and rubbed it against her pussy. “Seems like you should start what you finished with me. Then you can take care of Carter.”

“Or I could join you both,” Carter said, getting on his knees and crawling behind Lyrianna.

“That’s my favorite thing in the whole world,” she purred. Instead of fucking Brandon, she moved to his side, plopping on her cute ass and staring at the men. “But I’d really like you two to be connected too. I mean, you were a couple before I arrived. I...I wanna see...you...” Her nervousness was clear. “Oh, never mind.”

“What? Tell us what you want?” Brandon coaxed.

She shifted her gaze from Brandon to Carter and then back again. Although her cheeks were aflame with color, she said, “I want one of you to fuck me while the other guy fucks...him.” The last word was a whisper.

“Shit,” Carter said, staring at his cock. A spurt of fluid covered the purple head. “I almost came.”

Brandon grinned, feeling every bit as turned on. Pre-cum leaked from his slit as well. The image of three of them connected in such an intimate way was almost enough to make him spew on the sheets. “I’m in!”

His near shout must have pleased her, because Lyrianna smiled before flopping on her back. “You’ll have to help me with this. The...choreography might be...rough. Who fucks me?”

After exchanging a quick glance with Carter, Brandon rolled to cover her body with his. “Me.” He kissed her, lazily exploring her mouth with his tongue, trying not to let her know just how out of control her suggestion had pushed him. When he finally pulled back, he’d regained a little sanity and figured it was time to tease her. “I’m gonna fuck that pretty pussy, Lyri. Then Carter’s gonna put his cock in my ass.”

Her hips bucked, and a whimper escaped. So...she liked that image as much as they did.

“I’m getting the lube,” Carter volunteered, crawling over to the nightstand.

Brandon rose on his knees just as soon as Carter dropped the bottle on the sheets and put himself closer. He turned, cupped Carter’s neck, and kissed him in the same thorough fashion he’d just kissed Lyrianna, loving the passionate response from his mate as much as hearing her panting for breath, hopefully at the sight of them being affectionate.

“God, I need you to fuck me, Brandon,” she said with a throaty growl. “Now.”

Chuckling against Carter’s lips, Brandon finally ended the kiss. “I love you,” he whispered.

“Love you too.” Carter nodded at Lyrianna. “Now let’s fuck.”

“Gladly.” He turned and dropped toward her so quickly, she squeaked. He caught his body over hers, bracing his weight on his

arms while rubbing his chest against her gorgeous tits. "Ready?"

"Past ready," she replied, spreading her legs wider.

Brandon plunged inside her in one surge, groaning at how wonderful her tight pussy felt as it squeezed his cock. He almost said that nothing had ever felt better until the heat of Carter's body settled against his ass and the backs of his thighs. Rough hands separated his cheeks, and a wet finger smoothed the lube around his anus. Just when Brandon pulled his hips back and then rushed forward into Lyrianna's body again, Carter stretched a finger high inside Brandon and rubbed his prostate.

He almost came then and there. Only deep breaths and the thought of having to slaughter a chicken for dinner helped him keep any semblance of self-control. "Quit teasing," Brandon said. He started setting an easy rhythm, gliding his cock in and out of Lyrianna as she smoothed her hands over his pecs, raking her fingers through his chest hair. "Fuck me, Carter!"

Just as he pulled back, ready to thrust back inside Lyrianna, Brandon felt the crown of Carter's dick pushing against his anus. He used the opportunity to slam back, impaling himself on Carter's dick and savoring his mate's surprised gasp. "Holy shit," Carter said.

After a little awkward experimentation, they found a good rhythm. Carter would push into Brandon just as he thrust into Lyrianna. Then both men would gently pull back. Brandon wasn't sure how long he could take the sweet torture of her wet heat cradling his cock while Carter's dick rubbed his sweet spot. Lights were flashing through his eyes, and his heartbeat roared in his ears. About to surrender to the delicious pressure building inside of him, he almost sang his relief when Lyrianna pulled her knees up and shouted her orgasm as her pussy contracted around him.

The feeling of her squeezing him tight pushed Brandon over the edge. He let out something between a groan and a growl as his balls pulled up tight against his body and his semen blasted inside her. Carter was right behind, pounding into him twice before he gripped

Brandon's hips and bathed his insides in heat.

Sanity was a long time returning, and by the time Brandon could form a coherent thought, the three of them were resting on the sheets. He turned to smile at Carter, who grinned back like a contented kid who'd just finished opening all his birthday gifts. Then Brandon turned to smile at Lyrianna.

She smiled in return, but she looked a bit nervous. He'd quickly learned she needed praise from both of them whenever they made love. He wasn't about to disappoint her, figuring it was some "female thing" to have to hear just how wonderful she'd made her men feel, as if their groans and the fact they climaxed wasn't enough. Using the back of his knuckles, he gently rubbed her cheek. "That was *perfect*."

And he meant it. Everything about Lyrianna was perfect. From the top of her white-blond hair to the tips of her dainty toes. No wonder making love to her made him feel as if part of him was leaving his body and traveling into hers.

Because she already owned Brandon's heart.

The three of them were now a family.

## Chapter 9

“Wake up, honey.” Carter gently shook Lyrianna’s shoulder. She’d fallen asleep not long after they set sail for Pagonna City, and he feared she’d get seasick again like she had on the trip to their island. Eight hours in a rocking boat bothered a lot of people, and she seemed to be one of them.

She stretched, looking like a cat enjoying the sunshine. Since this was day one—closer to day two now—of sunlight, she blinked a few times and then squinted. He was glad her pallor wasn’t green. “Are we there?”

“Close,” he replied. “How’s the stomach?”

“Hmm... Seems good for now. Those herbs you gave me helped.”

“Yeah, we make a ton of money on that mixture. Two pharmaceutical companies pay us a fortune to grow those three plants. Since Brandon can mix it on his own, seems stupid to pay them for pills.”

“Besides, they added some spice to the scrambled eggs.” She shielded her hands with her eyes as she gazed at the dock. “We’ve got quite a list of things to shop for. Think we’ll have to stay overnight?”

Carter shook his head. “We’ll sail back tonight. With both of us, the normal shopping will only take half the time. Plus we *still* need to get you some clothes. I’m sorry it took us so long to get back here.” He frowned. “Not sure how much they have for women here, but I’m sure we can find some things you can use.”

“You’re very generous. I don’t need much, although it’ll be great to have ladies panties again.”

His threw her a saucy grin. “Oh, I don’t know... I kinda like being



able to slip my fingers inside those boxers anytime I want to. At least I could until you sewed all of the flies up.”

Her cheeks flamed. He found it quaint that she still blushed at any mention of sex. At least she never let that embarrassment hold her back. The woman was a wildcat in bed. Simply thinking about the way they’d all made love before she and Carter set sail made his cock harden. Almost four months with her, and not only had he not tired of her, he craved Lyrianna more and more each day. If they still had some more distance to go and were far enough away from the dock, he’d indulge himself now. Unfortunately, they needed to tie the boat up and get the things they came for. Perhaps on the way home...

Lyrianna seemed to scan the boardwalk next to the dock. “I didn’t get to see much of the city the day of the auction. I was a little...rattled.”

Carter chuckled. “So was I. You have no idea how much of a surprise you were to me.”

“Surprise? Why?”

“I didn’t know what to expect, especially since the auction was for prisoners. I guess I had a vision of an older woman with lots of tattoos. Someone hard and rough. What we got was soft and delicate. You weren’t at all what I thought I’d find.”

Her smile always warmed his heart. “I guess I’ll take that as a compliment. Unless, of course, you *want* a hard woman with tattoos. I know a gang of them back on Rozale. They’d be glad to eat you and Brandon for breakfast.”

Picking up her hand, he brushed a kiss over the knuckles, making her face flush a darker red. “Thanks, but I’ll pass. We’ve already found the perfect woman.”

\* \* \* \*

“Run through what’s left on the list,” Carter said after he found Lyrianna in the crowd again. He’d gone back and forth to the boat at

least four times when his arms were too full to carry anything else. They'd have supplies for a good, long while, and some of the things she'd had them purchase would allow her to add some more variety to their meals. She'd turned out to be a much better cook than either of the men, and now instead of dreading the usual grilled fish or chicken, they ate casseroles and stir-fries. Heaven.

"I think that's about it." She nibbled on her bottom lip and raised her eyes to meet his. "Except...I'd like to try to send a message to my sister."

He reached out to stroke her cheek, loving the vulnerability he saw in her face. She was such a contradiction. Part demure, part wanton. He loved her enough that he felt the same pull to be two different things. Yes, he wanted to help her contact her sister so Lyrianna didn't have to worry about her family fretting over what had happened her. But fear made his heart catch and forced his hesitation. What if her family got the message and eventually came searching for her? He and Brandon could lose her, and that thought tied his gut into nervous knots.

Sure, it would take months for the message to get to Belusia. Or Bromond. Or wherever the hell her sister might be now. If her sister wanted to come to Pagonna, it would take a long time to find a proper transport and travel time. No, her sister probably wouldn't come here to claim Lyrianna.

She might, however, find a way to arrange passage for Lyrianna to leave. If faced with the choice between staying with him and Brandon and going back to Rozale or even to her home planet of Belusia, which would she choose?

His heart clenched in naked fear. While he might have fallen in love with Pagonna, and Brandon might feel the same tie to this place—and to the farm they'd built with their own hands—that love might not mean anything to her. What about their beautiful Lyrianna? What would bind her to the farm? To them?

There was only one answer. They had to make her fall in love

with *them*, not the farm.

Carter almost smacked his forehead with the palm of his hand. Hell, he was an idiot. When Lyrianna first arrived, he'd told Brandon that they needed to win her over, that they'd be lucky if they could make her want to stay. That they might have a chance for something more permanent than a five-year companion. When had they lost sight of that goal?

*Duh.* The moment she'd voluntarily become their lover. They'd started thinking with their dicks, assuming that since she came to their bed willingly and enthusiastically, they had her right where they wanted her.

They'd been wrong.

"Carter?" Lyrianna's hand gently stroked his arm. "What's wrong?"

Starting now, he was going after more than simply getting her to stay for a while. He—and hopefully Brandon once Carter could talk to him—was going after something more. He was going to win her heart. "There's gotta be something more you need. Something special."

She seemed to think it over for a long moment. "Not really."

"You didn't buy anything just for you. Except underwear and some shorts and tops. Don't you need some...I don't know...perfume or something?"

Her eyes grew wide. "You think I need perfume? Do I smell bad?"

He rubbed his neck in frustration, angry that he was already mucking everything up. "No, no. That's not what I meant. I just thought you'd like something more...extravagant. You barely even bought any clothes for yourself. Don't you want something to pamper yourself with? Hand cream or make-up or...something? What do women like?"

Her shoulders rose in a dainty shrug. "I didn't need many clothes. I like the stuff you and Brandon gave me. They're comfortable."

“But not very girlie.”

Her gaze dropped away. “I’m not very pretty in them, am I?”

Carter crooked his finger and used it to raise her chin. “No, honey. You’re not very pretty.”

She tried to nod and turn her head. He wouldn’t let her.

“You’re not *pretty*,” he continued. “You’re *gorgeous*. I love seeing you in my clothes. Makes me feel kinda...possessive. I like that you wear my stuff. I’m sure Brandon does too.”

“Lyrianna!” a woman’s voice called from the distance. “Lyrianna, is that you?”

She whirled around, her gaze scanning the people on the boardwalk. Then her whole face blossomed into a smile. “Simone!”

A younger woman jogged toward them as Lyrianna turned to run toward her. They met in an embrace. Carter picked up the rest of their packages and hurried to meet the girl he remembered from the auction.

\* \* \* \*

“Oh, my God,” Simone said when she pulled out of Lyrianna’s hug. “I’m so glad to see you.”

“I’m glad to see you too, Simone,” Lyrianna said, patting the girl’s rounded belly. “Looks like you’ve been busy.”

Simone rubbed her baby bump. “Yeah. We decided to go ahead and start a family right away. I think Tyler wanted to be sure I wouldn’t leave. Did you know we got married right after the auction?”

“No, but Carter told me Tyler was looking for a wife, not...” She wasn’t sure how to finish that thought without making what she shared with Carter and Brandon sound sordid. While she might have come to terms with the fact the guys were willing to keep their relationship as status quo, she still hated that everyone on Pagonna who knew how she came to live with them thought she was nothing

more than a purchased bedmate. A whore, even though she'd never profited from the sale. For a moment she wondered again which government officials had made money off of selling her like some piece of meat. One day, she'd have to find out and be sure the horrid practice was stopped. No woman should be sold, even if in her case, the outcome had been a miracle.

"Is this Carter?" Simone asked as Carter came to stand at Lyrianna's side.

"Yes. Carter Verdel, this is Simone... I'm sorry, I can't remember your husband's—"

"Tyler Honeycutt's wife," Carter said, filling in the blank in her memory. "How's it going Mrs. Honeycutt?"

Simone gave her belly a pat. "Very well. Tyler told me you loaned him some of the money to buy me. Thank you."

Carter actually blushed. "I knew he wanted a wife, and when Lyrianna told me how young you were, I knew you two would be perfect for each other."

"Thank you," she said again. Then she turned her attention back to Lyrianna. "When did you and Carter get married? Right after the auction?"

Lyrianna blushed to the roots of her hair. "Um...we...didn't."

Simone's mouth formed a surprised *O*, but she thankfully let the topic drop. "Are you staying in town a few days?"

"No," Carter replied. "We're going back tonight. Brandon would worry—"

"Brandon?" Simone asked, her eyes widening. "Is he your son?"

"No, ma'am," Carter replied. "He owns the farm with me. We're a couple."

*He owns the farm with me. We're a couple.* Lyrianna had to sniff back the threatening tears. She'd been working side by side with the men for all those months, had taken over tending the vegetable garden and feeding all the animals. She did all of the laundry, the cleaning, and most of the cooking, too. Carter and Brandon devoted all of their

time to expanding the pod farm and left her to care for everything on land. Yet, Carter still thought of the place as belonging to him and Brandon, who had to feel the same. That hurt.

“You didn’t marry her?” Simone crossed her arms over her breasts and glared at Carter hard enough Lyrianna almost smiled in response. The young woman obviously still saw the universe in black and white, right and wrong. The Fates had truly smiled on Simone when they’d dropped her in that auction and made Tyler Honeycutt cast a glance her way. “But she’s living with you? Where’s your farm?”

Lyrianna swallowed her hurt and answered. “It’s about an eight-hour boat trip to their island.”

“You live there with *both* of them, but neither of them married you?” Simone’s tiny foot was tapping on the wooden boardwalk. “Doesn’t seem right, Lyrianna. Don’t they like women?”

Thankfully, she hadn’t asked outright whether Lyrianna was sleeping with both of them.

“Are you their housekeeper or something? I mean, if they’re a couple...they *are* gay, right?” Simone asked. Her mouth bowed into a frown. “I wish you could’ve found a nice husband like I did. You deserve someone who’ll be good to you.”

Carter was shifting his weight between his two feet as if uncomfortable. Lyrianna took pity on him even though she found some comfort in his embarrassment. “We need to go,” she told Simone, wanting to get away from what had turned into a humiliating encounter. “I’m going to try to send a message to my sister.”

“Good luck with that,” Simone replied. “I thought about sending word to my family, but Tyler and I finally decided against it. It cost a fortune, and there’s no real guarantee it’ll even make it out of this star system.”

A *fortune*. Lyrianna frowned. She hadn’t thought about the cost, and she had no money. Letting Carter buy her clothes hadn’t seemed wrong because she worked hard to earn her keep, but to blow money

on sending a simple message that might not even get where it needed to go? *Frivolous*.

Tears stung her eyes again when she realized she didn't really have anything that was hers. Money. Clothes. Even knickknacks. All she owned was back in her sublet flat on Rozale. God only knew what had happened to it by now. Perhaps Callinda would come looking for her one day and at least hold onto a few of the things that meant something to Lyrianna.

Tears slipped over her lashes.

"Honey?" Carter asked. "What's wrong?"

With a shake of her head, she choked back her heartache and wiped away the tears with the back of her hand. "Nothing. Just...homesick."

"We'll be going back to the island soon," he said, clearly misunderstanding.

"Simone!" a voice called. All three turned, and Simone's face broke into a breathtaking smile.

"Tyler! Over here, sweetheart!" she called to her husband as she waved her arm.

"After we say hello, we should really be going," Carter whispered in Lyrianna's ear before giving her cheek a kiss. "We're both ready to be home."

She nodded as Tyler shook Carter's hand. "I owe you money," Tyler said before nodding at his wife. "She was worth every penny. Maybe we could buy you and your wife dinner?"

Why did the question feel like a knife through her heart? Thankfully, Carter replied for them both. "We need to get heading home. Long trip."

"Let me go and catch my father so I can pay you back," Tyler insisted.

Carter waved him off. "Next time. There's no hurry, Tyler." He smiled at Simone. "Great to see you again, Mrs. Honeycutt."

"Please call me Simone," she replied before taking Lyrianna's

hands in hers. “You’ll come see me sometime? I’m kinda lonely for a woman’s company. Tyler has three younger brothers, but they’re only kids. His dad is nice...but since his mother died a few years back, I’m the only woman on the island.”

How could she answer that question? She had no idea where Simone lived, nor did she know if Carter or Brandon would allow her to leave to go visit other islands. Again, Carter had mercy on her. “We’ll see. The festival’s coming up in a few weeks. We’ll be coming back into town for that. Probably all three of us.”

“Festival?” Lyrianna asked.

“It’s a big celebration for all the farmers in the area,” he replied. “Anyone with unmarried daughters comes to try to get a marriage contract, and of course, we all come to trade for things we need and don’t have the cash to buy. There’s always a dance, too.”

“Simone and I will be going,” Tyler added.

“Then we’ll see you there,” Carter said as he took Lyrianna’s hand and started to drag her away.

Simone stopped them by throwing her arms around Lyrianna and squeezing the breath right out of her. “Thank you for everything.”

Lyrianna patted her friend’s back before pulling out of the embrace. “Take good care of yourself. And take good care of that baby.”

\* \* \* \*

The last of Pagonna City faded into the horizon, and all that remained was the vast ocean. Lyrianna felt a little heartsick. They hadn’t even attempted to send a message to Callinda. She’d declined when Carter had offered to try to find a place. She couldn’t bring herself to ask for the money, and that dirty feeling, the same one she’d had right after the auction, had returned. With a vengeance.

How naïve she’d been, letting herself dream of someday making Carter and Brandon fall in love with her the way she loved them. And



she did love them. Both. With all her heart. Turning her face away, she stared out at the waves, not wanting to show Carter the pain of realizing she would never be more to them than a bed toy.

Five years. She owed them five years, nothing more. More like four and a half now... Then she could leave, perhaps even find a way back to Rozale.

*Oh, who exactly do you think you're kidding?* She could never leave them. Ever. She loved them too much. Why couldn't they love her in return?

Carter finished tying the sail and plopped down next to her. Wrapping an arm around her, he stared ahead of them as if searching for the approach of the island even though it was hours away. "We'll be home before you know it. Wanna take a nap?"

*Only if I can cry myself to sleep.* Lyrianna simply shook her head.

His fingers caressed her bare upper arm, sending shivers racing over her skin and heat pooling between her thighs. All either of her guys had to do was touch her, and her insides turned into nothing but warm soup. She decided that if she couldn't make him *love* her, she'd make him *want* her. Grabbing the hem of her gauzy shirt, she jerked it over her head and dropped it on the deck. "I'm not sleepy."

He growled deep in his chest as his hand palmed her breast through her thin tank top. Her nipple puckered almost instantly. "I love how you respond to me. Makes me a little crazy," he said before leaning in to kiss her. But he didn't deepen the kiss, making her afraid that her body might be responding to him, but he wasn't all that interested in her. When Carter wouldn't give her his tongue, she grew frustrated and nipped at his bottom lip, making him laugh and finally cooperate by opening his mouth. She slid her tongue inside, stroking the roof of his mouth before trying to coax his tongue to follow hers back into her mouth. The instant he did, she grabbed his tongue gently between her teeth and tugged.

That action seemed to set him off. He broke away from the kiss long enough to tug at her clothes and then practically rip off his own.

He sat back on the bench, his hard cock jutting away from his body, fanned by a nest of dark curls and swaying enticingly with the gentle pitching of the boat. He crooked his finger at her. "Come here, honey. I want you."

She gave him a sly smile and knelt between his legs, opening them wider. Wrapping her fingers around his erection, she smiled broader when his fingers threaded through her hair, finding her ponytail and tugging off the band. As her tresses fell around her shoulders, she leaned forward to press a kiss to the swollen head of his dick. A drop of fluid streamed out in response. Lyrianna licked it away and then traced the veins of his cock with her tongue, savoring how he alternated between moaning and growling in response. Giving his balls a gentle squeeze, she sucked hard on his dick.

His taste was so familiar yet still so wonderful. She'd never enjoyed giving head until she'd met Carter and Brandon. Now, she couldn't seem to get enough of either of them. The feel of the silken skin over the steel beneath. The tangy taste of their pre-cum and of their semen. She loved running her tongue over them, loved even more how she could quickly make them lose control.

Judging from the way Carter panted for breath, she knew she'd pushed him close to the edge. Figuring she'd let him enjoy her attention to its fullest, she squealed in surprise when his hands grabbed her under the arms and yanked her onto his lap. "Fuck me, Lyri," he growled, holding his cock while she impaled herself on him. "You feel like heaven." His hips slammed up, planting him deeply inside her pussy.

Lacing her fingers through his hair, Lyrianna tilted his head up to claim his mouth, letting all the love she felt for him flow from her into him. She did love him, more than she'd ever find the courage to tell him or Brandon. At least in making love to him, she didn't have to hide her feelings, knowing the men would only see it as sex, not an expression of love.

"Lyri... Oh, fuck..." Carter's arms tightened around her waist,

pulling her forward as he slammed into her, again and again. He buried his lips against her neck, gasping for breath and calling to her, “Come for me, love.”

Her body exploded, contracting around him as his hot semen blasted inside her. Lyrianna took a long time coming down from the high he’d taken her to. Her heart slammed in her chest, and she gulped for air. She was pleased he seemed every bit as indisposed.

After they dressed, Carter held her against him, stroking her hair when she laid her head against his shoulder. “That was...wonderful.”

The men clearly understood how much she needed to hear they’d enjoyed making love with her. “Yeah,” she replied. “It was. Only one thing missing. Brandon.”

Carter nodded. “It was great...but isn’t it always best when it’s all three of us? Don’t you like it when both of us make love to you?”

She yawned as she nodded. Just as she was about to fall asleep, she smiled, remembering how he’d called her *love*. If only one day he’d truly mean it, and perhaps Brandon would feel that way as well.

Then she’d be the happiest woman in the universe.

## Chapter 10

Even from the dock, Lyrianna could hear the music coming from the big tent that had been erected close to where the auction had been held. The smell of cooking food floated through the air—pungent spices and mouthwatering aromas.

“You look beautiful,” Brandon said, giving her a quick kiss as he helped her step off the boat. Her cheeks flushed hot at the compliment. “I love seeing you in a skirt.”

“Thank you.” Lyrianna waited as Carter and Brandon tied the boat to the dock. At least both men had found the time to get away, making sure all the animals had plenty of food while the three of them would attend the festival.

It seemed as if everyone she could see was heading inside that tent, leaving the boardwalk looking like a ghost town. She tried not to be nervous about mingling with the other people who’d come for the festival, but she didn’t know any of them and felt a bit overwhelmed since she’d been alone with her guys for so long. Not that she’d ever felt comfortable in crowds. Living on Rozale, a person had to get used to being elbow to elbow. After months on her island, Lyrianna now craved the peace and quiet. The din coming from the packed tent seemed...intimidating, and more and more she really wished she hadn’t come to the festival.

Something had been nagging at her, making her feel anxious and afraid. She hadn’t been able to put her finger on exactly what, but the thought of entering the tent only seemed to make the feeling worse. She glanced around for a familiar face in the line streaming into the entrance. “Do you see Simone?”

“Who?” Brandon took her hand and gave it a squeeze as they walked away from the dock, heading toward the gathering.

“Simone Honeycutt,” Carter replied. “She was sold in the auction with Lyri.”

“Oh, yeah,” Brandon said with nod. “The one you told me you helped Tyler Honeycutt buy.”

“He married her right after the auction,” Lyrianna blurted out before nibbling on her bottom lip. She knew it was stupid to let her circumstances keep bothering her so much, but ever since she and Carter had seen Simone, the fact that her guys hadn’t married her had been eating at her. She’d made her choice to be with Brandon and Carter months ago, and she needed to learn to live with it and stop wanting more. The men were obviously happy with the situation the way it was. They took good care of her, gave her a beautiful place to live, and made love to her until her eyes crossed. She was foolish to want more. Yet she still did. She wanted them to love her the way she loved them.

“Young love.” Carter reached up to tuck a stray strand of her hair behind her ear before taking her free hand. “Wanna go get something to eat? We can look for Simone and Tyler.”

She shrugged, not feeling very hungry but deciding that bringing up the topic of marriage would only sour things. No, she needed to let that resentment go, and hopefully the anxious feeling would go with it. Maybe one day, they’d feel about her the way Tyler felt about Simone. “Sure. Let’s see what they’ve got.”

The crowd in the tent was loud, probably fueled by the enormous barrels of ale and the numerous bottles of wine on the far side of the tent. Most of the tables were full of people eating or drinking. Others moved through the crowd talking or perhaps discussing what they could barter. The men had told her that they’d conduct a lot of business while at the festival, so she tried to give them distance and not cling, despite how she felt swallowed by the crowd.

Carter waved at a man gesturing to him from one of the far tables.

Leaning in, he had to tell her twice before she heard enough of what he said to realize the he needed to go talk to that man. He kissed her cheek before he worked his way through the throng.

Brandon left her next, pointing to another man on the other side of the tent before handing her some money. More business to conduct, so she decided to find an inconspicuous place to park herself until her guys were done with all their business and ready to get something to eat. Tucking the uni-credits in her skirt pocket, she sat down and watched her guys while scanning the crowd from time to time for Simone and Tyler.

After about thirty minutes, the noise and heat inside the tent made her panic start to rise again, so Lyrianna finally stepped outside for a breath of fresh air. Once outside, she took a couple of deep inhales as she enjoyed the coolness that came with the setting of the sun. The guys had been right—she'd adjusted to the three-light, three-dark cycle. It seemed like part of her own internal rhythm now. She looked forward to the days she could watch the sun set over the surf as the waves rolled in, casting tiny rainbows over the wet sand. The days when the sun rose, she'd cook breakfast for all of them while she caught the first rays of sunlight, knowing she'd get to enjoy three days of feeling the warmth on her skin.

In the fading twilight, she walked along the boardwalk, figuring she'd stretch her legs and enjoying the freedom of being alone. She actually missed their island, realizing she'd come to think of it as home—the first one she'd ever really known. Rozale had been...busy. Bustling. Always something to do and someplace to go. But she'd never truly put roots down there. Belusia might have been where she'd been born, yet she'd left so young, no true attachments had formed. Her friend Hannah always bugged her to spend some time on Earth, telling her she'd love it there, but Lyrianna had been too busy doing her "work" on Rozale to take Hannah up on the offer.

But the island? *That* was truly home.

Turning the corner, Lyrianna figured she'd circle the block and

start back toward the tent. If Brandon and Carter had finished their business, they could all—

A thick arm wrapped around her, pinning her arms to her body as a sweaty hand covered her mouth. She struggled, trying to stomp the man's foot, but he slammed her headfirst into the closest wall, making stars dot her vision. "Miss me, sweetheart?"

*Syrus Graveland.* Lyrianna struggled harder, ignoring the blood that dripped into her line of vision. Dozens of questions about how he'd managed to get all the way out to Pagonna and why he'd come after her blended with her panic. He was so much bigger than she was, and before she could prevent it, he had her back pressed against the building, his forearm jammed against her throat. Only this time, she didn't have a gun to push into his gut to save herself.

"You're a dead woman," he said, spittle flying from his frothy mouth. "A walking corpse."

"Why?" she croaked. If she was going to die, she damn well wanted to know why. What kind of hatred could possibly make a person travel that far across the universe simply to kill her?

"You think I'd let you fuck me over like that and live?"

How was she supposed to answer that? Was he talking about getting caught in the raid? How in the hell was that *her* fault? The man was insane.

"Look where I am! The fucking Tadoorni System out with the fucking Pilgrims! I used to run the drug trade on Rozale. I controlled most of the crime in the Prime Sector. But thanks to you, too many people wanted my head on a platter. Other bosses. Police. Judges. All because of you!"

"I..." She coughed. "I...don't know...what—"

Syrus pressed his arm harder against her windpipe. She wheezed, hardly able to draw a breath. "Bullshit!" he shouted in her face, his stinking breath making her want to retch. "Your missionary friends came looking for you. When they found out you were sent to prison they made it their mission to get you off Delta moon. But the judge,

the matron, and the guards had already pocketed their money and sent you here. Once they got caught, I lost all my contacts. The new judge sentenced me to prison! *Me!* The fucking kingpin of Rozale! I go to prison, and I'm a dead man. I had to run from all the people wanting to ice me! Cops. Judges. Fucking guys who used to work for me. But I got away and made it here, you bitch—all for one reason.”

*Let me guess...to kill me.*

“To kill you, you stupid whore. You're dead, Lyrianna. Did you hear me? Dead! If I'm going to hell, you're going with me.”

Such a moron, blaming his downfall on her swiping some of his stolen vaccines. She figured the lack of oxygen to her brain was forcing her to remain calm in the face of his hatred, and despite the blood dripping in her eyes, she was tempted to roll them at him. The fact that he'd gone to such great lengths simply because he wanted to make her pay seemed a bit extreme, but she'd never pissed off an underworld boss before. They obviously took their vengeance seriously.

Syrus widened his stance, finally giving her a chance to retaliate. With the last of her strength, she brought her knee up hard between his legs. He groaned, stumbling backward until he released her. Lyrianna collapsed to her knees, taking big, gulping breaths as she tried to crawl away. Stumbling to her feet, she held herself up against the wall, looking around for anyone or anything that could help.

Two blurs moved from the darkness, one grabbing her by the waist and pulling her away while the other fell on Syrus and started whaling on him, throwing punch after punch.

“Lyrianna,” Carter said, wrapping an arm around her waist and holding her close.

“Help...Brandon,” she said between breaths.

Carter glanced toward Brandon and smiled. She saw why—Brandon had a bloodied and subdued Syrus pinned to the boardwalk. “Doesn't look like he needs my help,” Carter said with a chuckle. “Do you know who that man is?”



She nodded, swiping her forehead with the back of her hand and then seeing the blood smeared across her knuckles. She'd probably need stitches. About to ask what they could do to keep Syrus contained until help could arrive, Lyrianna breathed a sigh of relief when Tyler came heading down the boardwalk.

"You found her!" Tyler called before he hurried over to where Brandon sat on a huffing and puffing Syrus. Judging from the cuts and lumps on his face, Syrus was no match for her Brandon. "Who the hell's that?" Tyler asked when he cast confused brown eyes on Lyrianna.

She didn't have the strength to answer him. Thankfully, Carter swept her into his arms and started back toward the tent. Over his shoulder, he called, "I'm getting her some help. Catch up when you can, Brandon."

\* \* \* \*

At least she hadn't needed stitches. Her head throbbed, but the doctor who'd inserted her implant was able to close the wound with skin glue. She'd probably have an ugly bruise, but somehow, she'd survived.

A shudder ripped through Lyrianna as she thought about Syrus Graveland. Brandon must have noticed because he wrapped an arm around her shoulder and gave her a squeeze. "Are you in pain?" He tenderly ran his fingertip across her eyebrows.

"Not much. Just a headache," she replied. "What happened to Syrus?"

"The guy who attacked you?" Brandon asked. She nodded. "He's going right back on the transport that he came in on. This time in restraints. Seems like he'd been asking around about you for a few days, but the sheriff hadn't been able to round him up to bring in him for questioning. No one is sure how he got on that government transport, but we're damned well going to find out. He's heading back

to the Prime Sector. Evidently has a very long prison term waiting for him.”

“He said he had government connections.” She took Carter’s hand when he reached for hers. “He told me he knew I’d been sent here from Delta moon and that he knew who arranged it. The missionaries I helped with the vaccines evidently uncovered the judge and prison officials and guards trafficking innocent women for the auction. I imagine that’s what happened with Simone, too.”

Neither of her guys commented on that, but she knew that information held some great significance. The fact that she was wrongfully convicted and brought here could even be her ticket to freedom. Did they realize that as well?

She couldn’t read any emotion from either of them. Both men held tight to whatever they were feeling. Frustrating, but she knew it could simply be that they were processing the ramifications of Syrus finding her here on Pagonna. If he could locate her, then she could get a message back to her sister. Not that she wanted Callinda to come for her. She simply wanted to ease her worry. “Could we send a message to Callinda on that transport?” Lyrianna asked, her voice barely a whisper.

The question made both men’s faces contort into angry scowls, but Carter nodded. “We’ll try.” He glanced at Brandon, and she could tell they wanted to talk privately. Unfortunately, with the doctor, the sheriff, Tyler, and Simone all packed around her, the men would have to wait.

When the man who’d run the auction shoved his way inside the room as well and started asking questions, she knew that things could quickly get out of control. She wasn’t ready to make any choices about her future, nor did she want Carter and Brandon having all these people around when she tried to talk to them about their relationship. Lyrianna closed her eyes and prayed for patience. It didn’t arrive. Instead, the gnawing anxiety came rushing back, drawing her down like a relentless undertow.

Everything was suddenly too much, and she needed to escape the drowning feeling. “I want to go home!” she blurted out, needing to see her island. Because of Syrus, things were going to change, and she wasn’t at all ready for it. She needed to think. To plan. And to pray. “Please, Carter, Brandon... Please can we go home now?”

“Sure, honey,” Carter replied. “Sure.”

## Chapter 11

“Do you know who that is?” Lyrianna nodded toward the small motorboat rapidly approaching the shore.

Carter and Brandon both came to stand at her side. “Looks like Preston Archer,” Brandon replied.

“Who?” She shielded her eyes from the sun with her hand and tried to make out the face. “Oh, wait. I recognize him. He’s the auctioneer, isn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Carter replied. He grabbed her hand and tugged her along with him as he turned and started walking toward the veranda. “Why don’t you go inside and wait until we find out what he wants?”

So they were trying to hide her away. Evidently they thought, just as she’d assumed, that this visit was ominous and had been coming ever since the night of the festival. “You don’t want me to talk to him?”

“Absolutely not,” Brandon called as Carter kept dragging her toward the house.

Lyrianna dug her heels into the sand. “I should at least greet the man.” Finding her courage, she said what needed to be said. “We all know why he’s here. Hiding me in the house won’t change anything.”

“Ha-llo!” Preston bellowed, waving his arms. “Lyrianna! I need to talk to you!” His voice echoed over the roar of the surf pounding against the shore, loud enough that she realized why he made a good auctioneer.

Both Brandon and Carter frowned at her, but at least Carter wasn’t trying to stash her inside anymore. “Fine,” Brandon finally said. “Let’s get this over with.”

The men helped drag the small boat up out of the surf, and Preston slapped both of them hard on the back. “We need to have a talk, gentlemen,” he said before turning to smile at Lyrianna. “Seems like we’ve got a problem with your little woman.”

\* \* \* \*

Carter wished he’d gone ahead and tucked Lyrianna away somewhere else on the island so Preston couldn’t have the chance to talk with her. He’d feared something like this happening from the moment Syrus Graveland had found them at the festival. Lyrianna wasn’t ever supposed to have been sent to that auction. How many other women had been kidnapped and sent here just like her? Now someone who could remedy the situation by taking Lyrianna away knew it—Preston Archer knew it. Hell, lots of people probably knew it by now. Preston was here to right the wrongs done by the people who’d sent the unwilling women to Pagonna. That was the only explanation for what would bring the man to their island.

Lyrianna was going to be offered the chance to leave them. The thought of losing her felt like a knife to the gut.

Brandon folded his arms over his chest and glared at Preston. “What do you mean there’s a problem?”

Fishing some papers out of the waterproof duffle he had slung over his shoulder, Preston motioned for them all to take a seat at the big table on the veranda. He laid the papers out on the wooden surface. “When we found out where that shipment of women came from...well, I’ll tell you. All hell broke loose. Had to track the women down and see if they wanted to go back to Rozale. Most of them want to stay here. They figure it’s better than prison, and the Rozale government is glad ’cause it saves ’em from paying to get the women back home and then drop ’em in a prison and keep paying.” His gaze settled on Lyrianna. “But they were all women who were sentenced to prison. Lyrianna’s case is different.”

“Different?” Brandon asked.

Preston didn’t answer him, only nudged the papers. “Lyrianna, I’ve got news for you.”

“What’s the news?” She turned her gaze to Preston.

“After all the smoke cleared and we sent that bastard back to prison, we had such a mess to clean up. After what we learned from Syrus Graveland, we looked into your case specifically.” He pulled one paper from the stack, pushed his glasses down his nose as if having trouble reading it, and said, “You weren’t ever supposed to go to Delta moon like the rest of the women. The judge who sentenced you sent you there because he wanted to profit from your sale. That man’s been put in prison himself. He won’t be sending anyone anywhere now. He, the prison matron, and at least four guards are going with him, and their little operation has been shut down. You, Lyrianna, have been granted clemency by the Rozale government. Now, we’re giving you a choice—stay here on Pagonna or go home.”

Carter watched her closely, hoping to see something in her eyes that would tell him what she was thinking. Those gray eyes widened, but no other emotion could be found in her features. Her hands were folded in her lap, but her knuckles were blanched from how hard she was squeezing them together. “Lyri?” He reached over to cover her hands with one of his. Thankfully, she didn’t pull away. “You okay?”

“Home?” She sounded as if she was in a trance. “You mean back to Rozale?”

“Carter,” Preston continued, “you and Brandon will get a refund since she didn’t fill out her five years.”

“We don’t want your fucking money!” Brandon shouted as he popped to his feet and started pacing the length of the veranda. “She *is* home. She lives *here* now, ever since we bought her. She’s not going back to Rozale.”

Preston shook his head. “That’s just it, son. You don’t *own* her anymore. She’s got the right to decide what she wants to do now, and you can’t stop her. If she wants to head back, we can book her a

transport and get her off Pagonna as soon as she wants to leave. There's a military transport in dock right now that has room to take her back to the Prime Sector. They've got stasis and everything."

Carter gave her hands a squeeze. "Lyrianna, did you hear what he said?" Damn, but he wished she would give them some sign as to what was flying through her mind.

All she did was give him a curt nod.

"Now, you boys need to sign this form." He reached into the pile and plucked out another paper. "Then I can give you back your money."

"Fuck the money!" Brandon stopped his pacing in front of Lyrianna. Staring down at her, he set his fists against his hips. Carter could see him struggling for something to say. If only she'd give them some indication of what she wanted.

"Lyrianna, honey," Carter said, stroking her hand. "What do you want?"

\* \* \* \*

*I want you to beg me to stay!*

What in the fuck was wrong with her? All she had to do was open her mouth and tell Carter and Brandon that it didn't matter if they owned her or not—she still belonged to them. But Lyrianna also knew that if she stayed—loving them as much as she did and never getting love in return—soon she'd come to resent her situation and be starved for a scrap of affection. No, the men needed to give her some sign, *something* to let her know they held deeper feelings for her than a woman who did a good job tending their garden and animals and warming their big bed.

Her empathic abilities were letting her down, because all she could get from either man was frustration and anger. But frustration and anger over *what*? Did her leaving them mean they'd miss her? *Probably.*

*But why?* Because she was a hard worker or a good lay?  
Or maybe, just maybe, because they loved her?

She had to know, but she couldn't seem to force herself to ask, afraid of being humiliated, of opening her heart and having them throw it right back in her face. "What happens if they sign the paper?" she asked, her voice barely qualifying as a whisper.

"They get their money back, and you're free," Preston replied. "Then you get to decide what you want to do."

"And if they don't sign?" she asked.

Preston pulled off his cap and scratched his balding head. "Well...I suppose if they want to fight this in court, they might be able to hang on to you while a judge decides if the contract is still valid or not."

"Lyri," Carter said again, "what do you want?"

She decided on total honesty. "Then what I want," she said, staring first at Brandon and then at Carter, "is for you two to sign that paper that says I'm free." If they wouldn't sign it, she'd have her answer. Of course, if they *did* sign it, that only gave her a little more to go on, but at least she'd know they didn't want her to stay because they felt she owed them. At least it would be a start.

Brandon's scorching frown could have set the entire island afire. He stomped over to Preston, ripped the paper out of his hand and said, "Give me a fucking pen."

Preston reached into his pack and passed a pen to Brandon with a trembling hand. No wonder. She'd never seen Brandon so angry, and his size made him intimidating. He scrawled a signature over the paper and tossed the pen at Carter, who caught it and walked over to the table. Tossing a glance back over his shoulder at her, he finally leaned down and signed the paper.

Her heart pounded a rough cadence after that first hurdle was crossed. They no longer owned her, and her destiny was back in her control. Now, she needed to find out more so she could make her choice.



“That’s all done,” Preston said, shoving the paper back into his pack. “So, little lady, you heading back to Pagonna City with me?”

Carter and Brandon both came to stand in front of her. She glanced up at them, and asked the question that would shape her future. “Do you want me to stay?”

“How can you ask that?” Brandon threw his arms in the air. “After all this time, how can you ask us that?”

“Because I can.” Lyrianna tried to look past the anger she saw in his eyes because she wasn’t sure why he was angry. Being an empath could be frustrating because reading the emotion never helped her understand why the person felt it. “I need to hear from you...” She shifted her gaze to Carter. “...and you...what you want me to do and why.”

Carter crouched next to her and took her hand in his. “I want you to stay.”

She waited, hoping for more, but he didn’t say another word. His emotions were hidden from her, which only made her frustration worse. “Why, Carter? Why do you want me to stay?” Her temper took control when she still couldn’t figure out what he was feeling. “Because I take good care of the garden? Because I can milk the stupid goats? Because I cook for you both? *Why?*”

“Because I’d be lost without you,” he said softly, squeezing her hand. “Stay with me, Lyrianna. Please.”

All Brandon did was fold his arms over his chest and glower at her.

Her own anger erupted, ending all her restraint. Her self-control vanished at the onslaught of her feelings. She dropped Carter’s hands, jumped to her feet, and started pacing, punctuating her words every now and then by waving her arms in the air. “Why can’t you just answer a simple question? You’d be lost without me? *Why?* I need to know what you two think about me! I’ve spent all this time with you, with *both* of you, and neither of you has ever told me how you feel about me! You say I love you to each other...all the time! But you

don't say a thing to me!" Lyrianna stopped pacing and opened her heart, knowing if she didn't try just this once to be honest with her men, she'd forever regret it. Her voice fell away to a hushed tone. "If you want me to stay here, then I need to know there's a good reason for me to stay. I love you both. With all my heart. But I can't stay if you don't love me in return."

Brandon's eyes flew wide as he took a step back. Not the reaction she'd wanted at all. Hell, he looked like he'd been struck by a lightning bolt. Shifting her gaze to Carter, at least she saw some tenderness there, even if she couldn't get a read on him.

"Say something!" she finally shouted when she couldn't take the silence a moment longer.

Carter's hands wrapped around hers, and before she knew his intention, he'd tugged her into his arms. His mouth covered hers, the kiss one of total possession as he pushed his tongue past her lips, stroking her tongue and demanding a response. While she wanted to sink into the kiss, she knew she needed to hear the words. She pushed against his chest, struggling to get Carter to release her.

He didn't let her out of his arms, but he pulled his mouth away and stared down into her eyes. "I want you to stay. Not because of all you do to make our farm a success. Not because you cook so well. Not because you take such good care of Brandon and me. I want you to stay, Lyrianna, because I love you."

Brandon's hand was on her shoulder, whirling her around. His glare was still hot, but she saw a vulnerability in his eyes that made her heart catch. "Stay, baby. Please. I need you and...I love you."

Lyrianna wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her cheek to his bare chest, rubbing against the crisp hair in the center. Tears spilled over her eyelashes, and she had such a clog in her throat, she couldn't even tell her guys how happy they'd made her.

"Well then," Preston said, tossing all the papers back in his duffle and zipping it tight. "Looks like I'm done here." He fished a folded bundle of uni-credits out of his breast pocket and tried to hand it to

Carter. When Carter shook his head, Preston offered it to Brandon, who also declined with a threatening growl.

Lyrianna held her hand out. "I'll take it." When both Carter and Brandon gaped at her, she shrugged. "It's your money. If you take it back, I'll never feel as if I was sold to you again."

Preston chuckled and nodded as he pressed the bills against her palm. "Then I'll be on my way."

\* \* \* \*

The men helped the auctioneer get his boat back in the surf while she stood thigh-deep in the waves, watching them. Her heart was so full, she feared it might simply burst. Brandon and Carter loved her. That made everything all right. She'd stay with them on the farm, making a life on the outskirts of the universe, and she'd be content.

As the guys came jogging back up through the surf, she smiled, holding her arms wide to them. Carter reached her first, falling into her embrace and kissing her. Brandon pressed his chest to her back, kissing her ear, her neck, sending shivers racing through her and making her moan in pleasure. At that moment, all she wanted was to make love to her men. "Take me to bed," she demanded.

Brandon snaked his arm around her waist and lifted her hard against him, running through the surf as she bounced against his chest, laughing. Carter was hot on his heels. Clothes started hitting the floor the moment they reached the veranda, and by the time the three of them made it to the bed, they were all naked.

Carter flopped to his back, dragging Lyrianna across his body. He kissed her long and deep before framing her face in his hands and staring into her eyes. She loved seeing the desire reflected in his chocolate eyes. "I love you, Lyri."

"I love you too, Carter. Now fuck me!"

He chuckled until she scooted back enough to wrap her fingers around his stiff cock. She rose up on her knees, guiding him home

until he was deep inside her body and rocking his hips up hard against her. “God, that feels wonderful.”

“Gets better.” Brandon reached for the lube and then squeezed some onto his hand. She watched over her shoulder as he smeared it over his huge dick, and when he tossed the bottle aside, she smiled and wiggled her ass, drawing a groan from Carter.

She bent forward, rubbing her nipples against Carter’s chest hair before flattening her breasts against his broad muscles, giving Brandon a good angle to claim her. Her mouth covered Carter’s as she felt Brandon’s hands smooth over her ass, gently separating her cheeks. A slick finger whirled around her anus before sliding past the tight ring of muscle. Then a second joined it as Brandon started working in and out of her passage, driving her crazy as he hit spots that made her pussy tighten. If he kept it up too long, she was going to come. Tearing her lips away from Carter, she whimpered. “Now, Brandon.”

The blunt head of his cock replaced his fingers, and he eased inside her until he was deep in her body. His groan hit her hard, making her clitoris throb as she enjoyed the pleasure she was bringing her men as much as the thrill they were giving her.

They began to move, their cocks sliding over each other as they pushed into her, making her gasp before they pulled back out, drawing her higher as they fucked her. Again and again they brought her closer and closer to release. That wonderful, familiar knot of need formed between her thighs before she cried out as it unraveled, sending pleasure racing to every cell. Carter joined her in the bliss, bathing her womb with his essence and whispering his love against her ear. Brandon smoothed his hand up her spine before curling his chest against her back, slamming into her until he gasped as he came.

\* \* \* \*

In the afterglow, Lyrianna rested in the arms of the men she loved.

The future was something to welcome now rather than fear. She lived in paradise with two men who owned her heart and soul. A huge sigh slipped from her lips as she closed her eyes, picturing a wonderful life stretching out before her.

"You know," Carter said as he snuggled up against her right side and stroked her belly. "After seeing Simone and Tyler, I was thinking we might talk about starting a family sometime."

Her eyes flew open as she turned her head to stare into his eyes. "A baby? Are you serious?"

He nodded before he kissed her, a light peck before he pulled back. "Do you want to have our baby?"

"I hadn't ever thought about it. I suppose. Maybe someday."

"Of course, we have one other problem to fix first," Brandon said as he used his finger on her chin to turn her to face him.

"And what's that?" she asked.

"You'll have to marry us. *Both* of us."

Tears flooded her eyes. "Really? You want to marry me?" She glanced back at Carter. "You both want to marry me?"

"Absolutely," Carter replied.

"Ditto," Brandon added. "Next time we go into Pagonna City, we'll all get married—they allow multiple unions here." He wiped away her tears. "Doesn't that make you happy?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I'd love to marry you!"

Brandon rolled to his side and got out of bed. "How about a swim?" He held his hand out to her.

Lyrianna scooted toward him while Carter jumped to his feet on his side of the bed. Brandon took her hand and led her toward the surf. By the time they reached the beach, the three of them were running to the waves.

Splashing around, she felt a joy she'd never known. She'd arrived on Pagonna afraid of what awaited her.

She'd found paradise.

She'd found love.

And she'd found out that being sold could actually lead to a miracle.

**THE END**

**WWW.ELIZABETHRAINES.COM**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Raines makes her home in Indiana. A fan of all genres of fiction, she enjoys blending her love of science fiction with romance in the books she writes exclusively for Siren Publishing. Her favorite movies are *Pride and Prejudice* and *Love, Actually*, and she spends far too much time watching shows like *The Tudors* and *Mad Men*. Elizabeth has been happily married for almost thirty years and tries to express that kind of enduring love in all her stories, hoping to help all her heroes and heroines have their own happily ever afters.

### *Also by Elizabeth Raines*

Wicked Missions 1: *Locked In*

Wicked Missions 2: *Marooned*

Wicked Missions 3: *Bounty*

### *Also by The Sextet*

The Sextet Anthology, Volume 1: *Sharing*

Available at  
**BOOKSTRAND.COM**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
**[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)**