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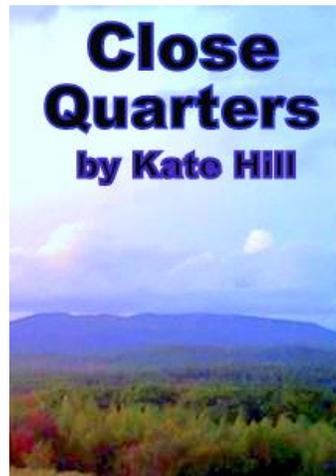
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The Following story, **CLOSE QUARTERS**, is for readers 18 and over.



Close Quarters by Kate Hill

Tasia knows she's the luckiest woman in the universe to have lovers like Staff and Drago. She wants to make their union official with a

wedding on the planet Elpsede where most people have two spouses. Her men are all for it, until they learn the rules about Elpseden marriages. With a bed that's too small for three, a sex questionnaire, and a mission that might cost Drago his life, will Tasia ever have the wedding she's always dreamed of?

Note: CLOSE QUARTERS is an adventure in the lives of Drago, Staff and Tasia from Menage a Tasia. If you prefer to read CLOSE QUARTERS in black text on a white

background, click here.

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Chapter One

Somewhere between wakefulness and sleep, Tasia smiled. She snuggled closer to Drago and rubbed her cheek against his rock-hard chest. Their lover, Staff, slept on the other side of Drago, but kept his arm stretched across both his companions. Tasia felt the warmth of Staff's palm on her hip, the way he stroked her lightly, even while asleep.

Tasia thought how lucky she was having two such wonderful men in her life--or should she say three. Staff was a full-blooded Laetez, which meant that his person was made up of two symbiotic beings--the Re and the Er. The external being, called the Re, appeared almost human and communicated directly with others through speech. The internal being, called the Er, was an organism that lived within the brain of the Re, virtually a living conscience. It spoke telepathically to the Re, governed his emotional state and usually possessed a higher intelligence. Staff was the Re and Pace was his Er.

Though Tasia was half Laetez, her mother had been human, so Tasia had no Er. She enjoyed the freedom of life as an individual, yet at times she wondered what it was like to be a full-blooded Laetez.

Drago stirred slightly and shifted his head to the side. His long, black hair brushed across Tasia's face and she gently swept it away. Like most other Drapers, he had exceptionally beautiful hair and it was also extra sensitive. Due to a high concentration of nerves, Draper hair could never be cut. Drapers were unusual creatures, having little feeling in their sex organs and gaining no pleasure from intercourse, they engaged in an act called "hairplay" that provided orgasmic sensations. Both Tasia and Staff loved caressing Drago's hair. She found the pleasure they could give him just by stroking or kissing it fascinating. Drago was luckier than most of his kind, though. Because of ACT--Alien Conversion Testing--he also had Laetez characteristics and gained the same

pleasure from sex as humans or Laetez.

Staff moaned softly in his sleep and shifted position. To accommodate him, Drago edged closer to Tasia. She shifted backward. Again Staff moved. So did Drago. And Tasia. . .

She landed on the floor with a grunt.

Drago raised himself onto his elbow and stared down at her through eyes still narrowed by sleep. "Tasia, what are you doing down there again?"

"Again?" she snapped. "Yes again, Drago. You guys have pushed me off this bed so many times I have a permanent dent in my ass."

"What happened?" Staff said, his voice husky. "Did she fall off again?"

"Yeah, Staff, I fell off again." Tasia stood, walked around to Staff's side of the bed and shoved him. "Move over. This time I'm sleeping on this end."

"What's the difference between this end and your end?" Staff demanded, refusing to budge even as she shoved him.

"The difference is, my end always seems to fall on the floor. Move!"

"Tasia, you know I don't like the middle," Staff said. "I feel trapped."

"So switch with Drago. He's used to being in the middle."

"Did you ever think that no matter what end you're on, you'll end up on the floor because we're bigger than you are?"

"You both can have the bed. I have to go to work," Drago said and stood, stretching his arms overhead.

Like Tasia and Staff, he slept naked and in spite of being irritated by such a rude awakening, Tasia couldn't help admiring his body. He was so tall and powerful. When he turned and walked to the bathroom, she could scarcely keep her eyes off his gorgeous ass.

Glancing at Staff, she noticed him watching Drago with the same desire she felt. Though different in appearance, Staff was every bit as sexy as Drago and many would argue that he was far more handsome. Tasia found them both gorgeous—Staff with his traditional Laetez face and Drago with his crossbreed looks.

Staff rolled onto his side, grasped Tasia and held her close. She molded her body to his, their legs entwined and his hard chest pressed against her back.

Nuzzling her hair, he said, "Unfortunately I have to get up too. I'm working on some special projects in the med lab so I want to get there before my shift starts."

Staff was one of the finest medics Tasia had ever known, excelling within even the limited resources of the slave colony where they had been raised.

"So that means I get the entire bed to myself for a few hours." Tasia turned to meet his gaze. "How boring."

"Weren't you just complaining about not having enough room?"

"Yeah, but that's only when I'm trying to sleep." She cupped his cheek.

A smile flickered across his lips and he brushed her mouth with a kiss.

"Oh! I want to check my computer," Tasia said, trying to tug away from him, but he tightened his grip and kissed her again.

Closing her eyes, she surrendered to him, loving the feel of her breasts pressed against his chest. She had large Laetez nipples and right now they tingled with desire from the sensation of Staff's chest hair against them.

When the kiss broke, she said, "You know why I want to check the computer."

"Oh yeah." He grinned, then loosened his hold on her. "Go to it. If the info you asked for has been sent, we can talk to Drago about it over breakfast."

She left the bed and tugged on a robe that had been tossed over the chair by the desk. It was Staff's robe, but she didn't mind. She liked how it carried the scent of his cologne.

Seated at the desk, she switched on her handheld computer and a little thrill shot through her when she read the message she'd been waiting for.

"It's here, Staff," she said, unable to keep the excitement from her voice. "This letter is from the office of the Elpseden Alien Correspondence Chief. They do allow aliens to marry on their world, however we must take part in a retreat."

Staff's brow furrowed. "What kind of

retreat?"

"They've forwarded questionnaires we'll have to fill out, pamphlets regarding marriage on Elpsede and dates for several retreats. We'll need to attend one and then they'll provide us with a license to marry." She turned to face him and said, "How about it? Please?"

He pushed himself to a sitting position, a faint smile on his lips and a glimmer in his eyes that told her he was just as happy about the news as she was. "You know how I feel about it. It's what I've always wanted."

"How do you think Drago will feel about it?"

"Feel about what?" Drago asked, stepping out of the bathroom.

Tasia and Staff exchanged glances, then Tasia stood and approached Drago. Their gazes locked and though she tried to read his expression it was impossible. No matter how close they had become, there was still a part of him that seemed distant at times. Most likely it was the Draper in him. Unlike humans and Laetetz, they weren't given to wild bouts of emotion. Not to say they didn't feel, they simply had different ways of expressing themselves.

"As you know, before we met you, Staff and I had plans to marry. We've been talking and marriage is something we still want."

This time there was no mistaking the flicker of emotion in Drago's jewel-like gray eyes. "I see. I'll leave as soon as possible."

Staff curled his lip. "Then you're against the idea?"

"No. If you want to marry, that's what you should do," Drago stated. He strode to the closet and removed black pants which he pulled on with unnecessary roughness.

Tasia and Staff exchanged looks and she said, "The question is, do you want to marry us?"

Drago turned to her, his brow furrowed. "You mean all three of us?"

She curled her lip and placed her hands on her hips. "Yes, crater-brain, what did you think we meant?"

"Excuse me, all *four* of us," Staff said. "Er Pace is very much a part of this."

"No offence, Er Pace," Tasia said.

"How is that possible? Laetez, humans and Drapers don't have three way marriage ceremonies," Drago reminded them.

"Yes, but on Elpsede almost every marriage consists of multiple partners. They allow aliens to marry on their planet, but under special conditions," Tasia said.

Drago looked wary, but that didn't phase Tasia. Because of him and Staff, she was accustomed to suspicious men. "What conditions?"

"We need to attend a retreat. And before we do that we must read some pamphlets about their views on marriage and fill out some questionnaires for discussion at the retreat. So how do you feel about it?"

"Do you want to marry us?" Staff asked.

"Yes," Drago stated. "We've already made a commitment to each other. This will only serve to strengthen it."

"Great!" Tasia leapt at Drago and he held her tightly. Closing her eyes, she caressed his back, loving the sensation of his warm flesh. She felt the faint ridges of old scars and remembered the brutal flogging that had caused the injuries. Thank the heavens those times were far behind them.

When she stepped away, Staff pulled Drago into his arms. Tasia gazed at them, almost overwhelmed by affection for her lovers and aroused by the sight of their gorgeous bodies locked in a firm embrace.

"I'll send the information about the retreat and the marriage ceremony to your computers," she said. "You can look them over when you have a chance."

The men agreed and while Drago finished dressing, Staff stepped into the bathroom while Tasia started cooking breakfast.

This was the beginning of a wonderful day.

* * * * *

Tasia enjoyed working on the security team aboard *Nameless*, a ship commanded by Xenos, a Tydisian crossbreed considered a villain by some and a hero by others. Tasia considered him the latter. If not for his help, she, Staff and Drago wouldn't have had a chance for a life together.

One of her closest friends was Xenos' wife, Moonlight. At lunchtime she met Moonlight in the mess hall for the daily special and some

woman-to-woman conversation.

They settled at a corner table and Tasia offered Moonlight her handheld computer so she could look at the marriage info and questionnaire. Tasia hadn't yet filled out any information, but reading the questions had put doubt in her mind about whether or not this marriage ceremony would actually happen.

"Wow," Moonlight said, her brow furrowed. "If we had to answer this stuff before getting married, it never would have happened. Not with Xenos. I can't picture him sitting around at a retreat telling a bunch of strangers how he feels about anal penetration."

Tasia sighed. "I know. That's what concerns me. Neither Staff nor Drago are the kind of guys who find it easy to discuss sex or their emotions. Well, they'll talk about sex easily enough among the three of us, but not in a room full of strangers at a retreat."

"I know this isn't my business, but since you're talking about it, may I ask why you want to change your living arrangements? Just because some Marriage Maker on Elpsede says you're devoted to each other doesn't change anything. You know if you're dedicated or not. You know if you're in love."

Marriage Makers performed the wedding ceremony on Elpsede. They were both spiritual leaders and legal figures.

"If that's true, then why did you marry Xenos?" Tasia asked.

Moonlight smiled and nodded. "Point taken."

"If we actually go through with this, we're going to apply to Xenos for larger quarters. Lately the three of us have been belly button to asshole and not always at the right moments."

Laughing, Moonlight said, "You don't need to get married to apply for larger quarters."

"Well I know they're only reserved for families."

Though Tasia, Staff and Drago were the only blatant menage aboard *Nameless*, the crew was made up of alien crossbreeds who were open-minded about various lifestyles. Still Tasia would feel better applying for larger quarters once they were married.

"That's not necessarily true," Moonlight said. "And the size of your quarters is no reason to get married."

"That's not the reason, Moonlight. We want this. Or at least I do. After looking at these questions I'm not so sure if Staff and Drago will lose their enthusiasm."

"If they know how much it means to you, there's a chance they'll go along with it," Moonlight said, then her eyes widened and she read the next question, "Does one partner provide better orgasms than the other?"

Tasia glanced down at her bread and soup and sighed. Suddenly she wasn't hungry anymore.

* * * * *

Drago stood in the locker room at the gym on *Nameless*. At this time most people were on duty, so the gym was almost empty. Drago had a meeting with Xenos around noon and decided to get in a quick workout before then. He needed something to relieve the tension after reading over the information about marriage on Elpsede. If Tasia thought he was going to sit around with a bunch of aliens talking about the size of his cock and the most orgasms he'd ever supplied his female partner with, then she was completely out of her mind.

He had just pulled on shorts and a tank top and was about to hit the gym when Xenos stepped into the locker room. Drago didn't like to talk about personal problems with anyone except Tasia and Staff, but since coming aboard *Nameless*, he had felt a strange kinship with Xenos. He was similar to Drago in many ways--a former military man who had learned to keep his emotions in check.

Just when it seemed his life was over, Xenos had given him the chance to start again. Now Drago worked aboard *Nameless*, taking part in dangerous yet necessary covert missions organized by Xenos.

"Drago," the captain said in greeting.

"Xenos." Drago nodded and headed for the door. Then he paused and glanced back at the sleek, purplish-blue Tydisian crossbreed who stood undressing by his locker.

Xenos turned to Drago in question.

"You're married," Drago began.

"The last time I checked."

"I'm only familiar with Draper ceremonies. Is it customary for other species to attend classes before they're wed?"

Xenos' brow furrowed. "I'm not sure. I imagine there are many different rituals throughout the universe."

"Do you know anything about Elpsede?"

"Only that when I spoke to officials there several months ago about ACT they seemed like reasonable candidates for working with the Earth government. They're a mild species who showed no desire to mistreat the ACT program."

"Their marriages usually include three spouses."

"Yes."

Drago sighed, torn between the urge to discuss his situation and the habit of keeping his problems to himself.

"Is there a problem, Drago?" Xenos asked rather coolly.

"Your wife is human. Tasia is half human and I've noticed their emotional needs are . . . different."

"I agree. They're like the Laetez in many ways. Human females in particular must be handled carefully."

"How do you deal with it? Usually I have no problem with Tasia or Staff, but lately she's wanted to talk about certain emotions that--"

"That make you prefer a forced march through the desert to delving into what she wants to discuss?"

A faint smile touched Drago's lips. It seemed Xenos understood him even better than he imagined. "Exactly."

"In the time I've known Moonlight I've learned some things you might find useful. Humans can be stronger and far more interesting than I've given them credit for. The females can be admirably loyal but if you want to live in anything resembling harmony, never turn your back on a discussion regarding emotions, no matter how torturous it seems."

Drago nodded. That was exactly what he was afraid of.

"Now I suggest we get to our workout," Xenos said. "We have a meeting soon."

Chapter Two

That afternoon, Staff took charge of the med

lab while the head medic, Trissa, took some time off. During a lag between patients, Staff was about to finish reading the marriage questionnaire when Drago stepped into the lab.

"Hey." Staff smiled, greeting Drago with an embrace. "Is this a social call or do you have a medical problem?"

"Social. Two things. First, have you read the pamphlets yet?"

"For the most part. Come with me for a minute." He led the way to his office and sat behind the desk while Drago took a seat.

"What did you think?" Drago asked.

"I think Tasia is crazier than a Triroot yak in heat. I don't want to sit in some sewing circle talking about my sex life. What the three of us do in the privacy of our quarters is our business. And I especially don't like the part of the instructions that tells us not to share our answers with our partners before the retreat. We can tell a bunch of strangers, but not the ones we're going to marry?"

"I agree with everything you just said. However Tasia is enthusiastic about this marriage."

"So am I. For as long as I can remember I've wanted to marry Tasia and since meeting you I can't imagine our lives without you, but I don't know if I can do this retreat thing."

"I'm not happy about it either, but isn't a weekend of humiliation worth a lifetime of commitment?"

"I don't need a Marriage Maker to tell me I'm committed!" Staff's blue eyes blazed. Usually the medic remained cool, but sometimes his Laetez temper got the better of him. Through their telepathic connection, he heard Er Pace inside his head. *Calm down, Staff. This situation is uncomfortable for all of you. There is no need to compound the problem by losing your temper.*

"That's not the point and I think you know that," Drago continued.

Staff's chest expanded as he drew a deep breath then released it slowly, closing his eyes. Er Pace's soothing vibes rolled through him, helping to clear his mind. "I know. I'm just going to need some time to think about it."

"Have you told Tasia yet?"

"I talked to her. She seemed a little depressed and of course I've felt guilty about it all day. I don't know why. She doesn't feel guilty about asking us to go through with this retreat."

"I was under the impression you two had discussed this marriage before even asking me, so it was hardly all Tasia's idea," Drago said.

"You're right. But when we made those plans, I didn't think I'd have to put my life on display."

Again Er Pace spoke and what he said made perfect sense.

"He's right," Staff sighed.

"Who's right?" Drago demanded.

"Er Pace. He just said that once the retreat is over, we'll never have to see those people again, but our marriage will last a lifetime."

"As usual, Er Pace is wise."

"Then we should go ahead with our plans?"

"I believe that's best." Drago held his gaze. Whenever the Draper looked at him with such an expression in his jewel-like gray eyes, Staff was almost overcome with desire.

Staff rose from his desk and approached Drago who leaned back in his chair, his heated gaze sweeping the medic and lingering on the bulge in the front of his white uniform trousers.

Straightening in his seat, Drago grasped Staff by the hips and tugged him closer. Staff unfastened Drago's black cap and hair sheath--a cylindrical attachment made of silvery metal molded into the shape of a thick braid that protected his sensitive Draper hair. Staff ran his fingers through Drago's hair and the Draper sighed with pleasure.

Drago unfastened Staff's pants and tugged them down partway, freeing his cock. Raw desire shot through Staff as Drago stroked him in his warm, rough hand. Moistening his lips with his tongue, Drago leaned closer and Staff's heart pounded with anticipation. The Draper's mouth hovered over his cock, his breath teasing him and making him swell to even greater proportions.

The buzzer from the waiting room interrupted them. Drago glanced up, the longing Staff felt reflected in his eyes.

"Duty calls," Staff said in a husky voice. He

stepped back and hitched up his pants while Drago stood.

"See you tonight."

"By the way, what was the second thing you wanted to talk about?" Staff asked.

"I just wanted to tell you that I'll be leaving on a mission tomorrow."

Staff's stomach clenched. He knew Drago's work was important, but every time he left on one of Xenos' missions, there was a chance he wouldn't make it back. He knew better than to ask Drago what the mission entailed. They were usually top secret.

"Any idea how long you'll be gone this time?" Staff asked coolly.

"If everything goes well, I should be back within twenty-four hours."

"Have you told Tasia yet?"

"I'm going to see her now."

Staff nodded and headed for the waiting room. There was no need to worry about embarrassing himself with the huge erection of moments ago. News of Drago's mission was enough to deflate just about anything.

* * * * *

That night at dinner, Tasia, Drago and Staff were uncharacteristically quiet. When she'd awakened that morning, the most important thing on her mind had been marriage. Now all she could think about was Drago's upcoming mission. She didn't doubt Staff shared her concern. They accepted Drago's work since they knew how important it was, but they couldn't help worrying when he was away on missions.

Tasia took a forkful of mashed potatoes, a delicious Earth food Moonlight had introduced her to. At one end of the table, Staff took a swallow of water while at the other end Drago munched salad.

After a moment, Drago said, "This silence is getting on my nerves. Usually it's impossible to shut you two up."

Tasia flashed an annoyed look in his direction. "I have nothing to say tonight."

Raising an eyebrow, Staff said, "Now that *is* hard to believe."

"What about you?" she retorted. "You're not

exactly the life of the party tonight."

"I think we have the wedding on our mind," Drago said quietly.

"It's not just the wedding," Staff admitted.

"He's right," Tasia said. "But we're not going to say anything because we know it's your job. I'm sure you guys aren't thrilled when my job puts me in danger. And the times Staff has volunteered to help the wounded in battles zones haven't been stress-free for us either."

"I don't want you to worry," Drago said. "But the work we do with Xenos is important."

"We know that," Staff said, meeting Drago's gaze. "If we didn't believe it then we wouldn't be on this ship. Just. . .take care tomorrow, Drago."

A faint smile touched Drago's lips. "I always do. Now about that questionnaire, what do you think of it, Tasia?"

She picked at her food for a moment and shrugged. "I think you guys probably want to back out of the wedding now."

Again Staff and Drago looked at each other.

"She's either calling us cowards or she's having second thoughts and wants to blame us," Staff said.

"I do not!" Tasia glared at him, then relaxed upon seeing his teasing smile. "I know how you guys are about sharing your innermost thoughts. It's difficult enough to get answers out of you when we're here by ourselves. When I think about some of those questions and the retreat--"

"Tasia, we're not going to do anything to jeopardize the wedding ceremony," Drago said. "If getting married on Elpsede means a lot to you, we'll go through with it."

She curled her lip. "Thanks so much, Drago. You'll endure the torture to keep me pacified."

"Why are human females so complicated?" Drago asked.

"It's not just human females. It's females in general," Staff said.

"If you guys are trying to make me so mad I'll say drop the wedding plans, it's not going to work."

"We're still waiting to hear what you think of the questionnaire," Drago said.

"I think. . ." she began, then her voice trailed off and she sighed. "I think it's too personal to share with strangers and I don't understand why they've asked us not to share our answers with each other before the retreat. However I'm willing to be open-minded about this. I don't know everything about the Elpseden culture, but if they're willing to let us marry on their world, then I'm willing to give their ways a chance."

"I agree," Staff said.

"So do I," Drago added.

Tasia glanced at them in surprise. "All right then. Moonlight said we'll be traveling in the area of Elpsede at the end of next week. I'll go ahead and sign us up for the retreat scheduled for that weekend."

Drago took a sip of water, then placed his glass aside. "And in the meantime we should practice."

"For what?" Staff asked.

"For the wedding night," Drago replied, lust glistening in his gorgeous gray eyes.

"I think we already have that part down well," Tasia said, her stomach tightening with desire. "However I'm all for practicing."

"So am I." Staff rose and walked behind her chair. He pulled it out and guided her to her feet. Wrapping his arms around her from behind, he nuzzled her neck.

Drago also stood and walked to the bed. He pulled down the sheets, his gaze never leaving his lovers, then unzipped his fly.

Staff cupped Tasia's breasts and kneaded them gently. His thumbs stroked her nipples and even with the barrier of clothes, his touch stirred them to hard peaks. Moaning softly with pleasure, she fought to keep her eyes open. His touch felt so good that she wanted to close her eyes and surrender completely, but she also didn't want to miss watching Drago strip.

The tall Draper had already removed his shirt, baring his gorgeous chest and sleek abs. Tasia longed to lick him all over, but not right away. Not with Staff fondling her breasts and teasing her neck with kisses. He dipped a hand between her legs, cupping her soft mound and massaging. A shiver of desire

shot through her and she arched against his hand.

Drago sat on the bed and removed his shoes and socks, then pulled off his pants. He sat, his legs braced apart and hands resting on his knees. His cock, thick and hard, drew his lovers like a magnet.

Tasia and Staff walked toward him and he grasped their asses.

"Come here," Drago said, his voice husky with passion, and tugged Tasia onto his lap. He covered her mouth in a breath-stealing kiss and this time she couldn't keep her eyes open.

Moaning softly, she clung to him, her bare breasts pressed against his rock-hard chest.

Drago groaned, a sound of raw desire.

When the kiss broke, Tasia opened her eyes and saw Staff had knelt behind Drago and was teasing his hair, running his hands through it and his lips over it. She knew how good it must feel to Drago, as good as having his cock stroked.

A wicked smile on her lips, Tasia tugged away from his grasp only to kneel between his legs. Grasping his cock, she stroked the hard, velvet-skinned staff. The engorged head was irresistible and she bent, licking her lips. While she teased him with her hands and mouth, Staff continued working on his hair.

After a few moments, Drago's muscles tensed and his breath came in harsh pants. He buried his hands in Tasia's hair, kneading her scalp. In spite of his obvious excitement, he never hurt her.

Finally, he pushed her away and reached up to grasp Staff's wrists.

"That's enough," he growled.

Seated on her backside, Tasia gazed up at him, her pulse racing at the look of raw desire on his face.

Drago stood and shoved Staff onto the bed. He loomed above him, their intense gazes locked for a moment before Drago covered Staff's mouth in a passionate kiss. Tasia stood, the sight of her men together, so feverish with lust, sent her desire off the scale. Reaching between her legs, she caressed where she was so hot, damp and aching.

As if sensing what she was doing, Drago

broke the kiss and glanced at her. "Get your hand out of there. If anyone is going to give you pleasure, it will be me or him."

"Oh yeah?" Tasia said, deliberately taunting, though she loved it when her men went alpha. With them, especially Drago, it was quite often.

"Come here, Tasia," Drago said in the commanding tone that never failed to make her heart beat faster.

She stood defiantly for a moment, both men staring at her with burning desire. That was more than she could resist. She approached the bed and Drago tugged her onto it.

Staff kissed her, one hand fondling her breasts while Drago lifted her legs over his head and rolled his tongue over her tingling flesh.

Closing her eyes, Tasia let waves of pleasure break over her. She threaded her fingers through Drago's hair and kneaded the steely muscles of Staff's shoulders and back.

Orgasm struck her hard and she cried out, gasping with pleasure. Drago didn't stop licking until she lay, thoroughly satisfied. Only then did he move away.

A moment later, she felt the bed shaking and opened her eyes partway. Beside her, Staff lay on his stomach, his fists tight in the sheets while Drago claimed him from behind. Muscles bulged in the Draper's powerful arms that were braced on either side of Staff's shoulders.

Tasia sat up, thoroughly aroused by her lovers. She caressed Staff's arm and his lean side and she kneaded the straining muscles of Drago's broad back. Then she ran her fingers through the Draper's hair. That added pleasure seemed to push him over the edge. He thrust faster, his breathing as ragged as Staff's.

Unable to resist, Tasia reached down and stroked herself again. When Staff and Drago came almost simultaneously, she joined them soon after.

Drago moved off Staff and lay on his stomach, his eyes closed as his breathing returned to normal. Lying beside him, Tasia draped a leg over him and rested her cheek against his sweaty back.

Then she remembered that tomorrow Drago would be leaving on a mission. She held him a bit tighter. Opening her eyes, she saw that

Staff had also edged closer, his leg draped over her and Drago. Her gaze locked with the medic's and she knew he shared her concern.

Chapter Three

Kayndle was a bordello located in the mountains of the planet Talpyne in the Delilah Sector. Owned by a man called Bangle, Kayndle was the sort of place men and women of just about any known species could come for the companionship of attractive, disease-free escorts. Bangle treated all his employees well. No abuse was allowed at Kayndle, and Bangle had an efficient security team to enforce this rule.

At the moment Drago, along with a dozen young ACT products, sat in a basement room at Kayndle. Though they had been provided with every possible comfort, they were in no mood to enjoy such luxury. Two Butchcade Pirate ships hovered near Talpyne. The pirates dared not attack Kayndle, since it possessed some of the most advanced security systems and weapons in the galaxy, so they waited for Drago and his charges to leave. Once in open space, they would attack Drago's shuttle to retake possession of their recently purchased slaves.

The ACT products with Drago had been abducted from a private lab on an Earth base. Their captor had been taken into custody by Steel and Pandora, two bounty hunters who also happened to be friends of Xenos.

"I knew the chance for us to be free was too good to be true," said a dark-haired human-Laetez crossbreed seated across the table from Drago. "We should have just gone back to the lab."

"Don't give up so fast," Drago told her, though given the situation, he had serious concerns of his own.

Before Steel and Pandora had turned the slave trader over to Earth authorities, they had questioned him about the kidnapped products and learned that they had already been sold to a certain band of Butchcade Pirates. Rather than immediately pass this information on to Earth authorities, Steel and Pandora had taken it upon themselves to rescue the slaves. After bringing them to Kayndle, they contacted Xenos who arranged for the slaves to be taken to a group of colonists on a distant planet. The colonists, former slaves who had fought for their freedom, agreed to raise the ACT products until they reached legal age. Then they would

truly be free of both the pirates and the lab in which they'd been created. Given the choice, the products had taken the opportunity Xenos offered them.

Since Xenos and his crew were independent contractors employed by the Earth government, they needed to keep missions such as this secret. Should Earth discover what they were doing, it would place Xenos and his people back on the intergalactic most wanted list.

Therefore Drago had been asked to transport the slaves in a private shuttle from Kayndle to the colony. Unfortunately, no sooner had they broken the planet's atmosphere than they were driven back by the pirates who had tracked them down.

"It's been two days already," the girl continued. "We're stuck here."

A boy who appeared to be of Searilla origins, said, "I'm not so sure going to the colony will make a difference anyway. According to Earth law, once we turn eighteen the lab has to set us free."

"Yes, but is the lab preparing you for life on the outside, or are they manipulating you so you'll want to stay and continue serving as they see fit?" Drago asked.

A year ago he never would have imagined taking this particular side of an argument regarding slaves. Slavery was widely accepted among Drapers, but due to his situation with Staff and Tasia, Drago had learned to question his beliefs regarding many things.

He knew that they couldn't stay here forever. Sooner or later, they'd have to take a chance and fight their way out. His shuttle, though well equipped, was no match for two full-sized Butchcade Pirate ships. There was a very real chance that he and his passengers might be killed.

His thoughts lingered on Tasia and Staff. He hoped they realized how much he loved them. Had he made it clear enough before he left? Surely they must know by now how he felt. Yet no matter how much he expressed his love, it would never be enough. For their sake as well as these young ACT products, he hoped they would make it to the colonists.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm tired of living in a lab," said another boy from across the room.

Before anyone else could reply, the door

opened and Bangle stepped inside. About average height for a human or Laetez, he had an athletic build, dark eyes and thick, dark hair.

"All right, ladies and gentlemen," Bangle stated. "As they used to say on ancient Earth, the cavalry has arrived."

Drago stood and approached him. "What are you talking about?"

"Steel and Pandora happened to be in the area and they've been kind enough to keep the Butchcade Pirates occupied so you and these charming young people can make your escape. I suggest you move quickly."

Drago didn't need to be told twice. He and the ACT products hurried to the docking bay and climbed into the shuttle. Moments later, they were on their way.

* * * * *

Tasia and Staff sat in their quarters after dinner. It had been three days since Drago had left on his mission--a mission that should have taken no more than twenty-four hours. They had asked Moonlight to talk to Xenos, but she hadn't been able to provide any information. Xenos had assured them that as soon as he knew something about Drago's whereabouts or condition, he would let them know.

"Do you want to listen to music?" Tasia asked Staff.

The medic, who sat staring at the blank screen of his handheld computer, shook his head. Staff loved all kinds of music. His hobby was collecting samples of it from all over the known universe. For him to refuse music meant that he was as worried about Drago as she was.

Over the past couple of days, Tasia had tried to fill out the questionnaire, but couldn't get into it. Not with Drago missing.

"Do you want to talk about the wedding?" Staff asked.

"Not really," she murmured. "Not without Drago."

"This is crazy, you know. We should be used to his comings and goings by now. Drago knows his job and he can take care of himself."

"I know."

Staff rose to his feet and ran a hand through his hair. "Want to go to the gym? It's better than sitting around here."

That was true enough. Tasia stood to change into workout clothes, but the desk spec buzzed. She and Staff raced to it and Xenos' purplish-blue face filled the screen.

"I thought you'd want to know that Drago is in range," Xenos stated. "He will be docking momentarily."

"Is he all right?"

"He has reported no injuries."

"Thank you," Tasia breathed, closing her eyes.

"Once he's been debriefed, I will send him home," Xenos stated, then disappeared from the screen.

Tasia and Staff embraced each other tightly.

"Let's forget the gym," Tasia said.

"My thoughts exactly."

A couple of hours later, Drago stepped into their quarters. Tasia, who had decided to work on the questionnaire after all, rose from the couch and jumped into his arms.

"We're glad you're home," she said.

"Glad to be home," Drago admitted, kissing her cheek and then turning to Staff who embraced him tightly.

"I'm guessing you can't talk about what happened?" Staff said.

Drago smiled. "You know the answer to that. I'll tell you one thing about the mission, though."

"What?" Tasia asked.

"It made the retreat look better."

Her eyes widened and she playfully slapped his shoulder.

"Speaking of the retreat, I'm just about finished with my questionnaire," Staff said. "Painful as it was."

"I am finished," Drago said. Placing an arm around each of his lovers, he guided them toward the couch. "It was. . .interesting to say the least."

"I contacted the Marriage Maker," Tasia said. "She has agreed to marry us right after the retreat, so we won't have to wait until *Nameless* is in the area again."

Seated with her lovers, Tasia hoped they reached Elpsede without incident. She, Staff and Drago had a history of things going wrong.

* * * * *

The retreat on Elpsede took place at a beautiful mountain resort. Each partnership was assigned to a quaint stone cottage. The classes and lectures were held in a spacious, log-cabin-style assembly hall. Also on the premises was a gym with an indoor pool, a spa and a restaurant for guests to enjoy.

When they stepped into their cottage, the first thing Staff noticed was the enormous bed. Dropping his overnight bag on the floor, he walked to the bed and flopped onto his back.

"Look at this," he said. "It's huge. You'll have no complaints sleeping in this, Tasia."

"It's not surprising," Drago said. "Seeing how most marriages here consist of three spouses."

Tasia walked to the bed, grasped Staff's hand and tugged. "Come on. The first class is in fifteen minutes."

Raising his eyes to the heavens, Staff sat up. The reality of the retreat had finally set in. Yes he still wanted to get married, but he hated the idea of discussing that questionnaire among strangers.

A short time later, they sat in the assembly hall. Most of the other participants were Elpseden, however there were a few interspecies partnerships, including some Laetez.

The Marriage Maker conducting the class was a tall, willowy Elpseden female. Like most of her species, she had pale pink skin, reddish hair and three fingers on each hand.

"I'd like to begin today with a discussion about Elpseden values within the marriage. While you have your own beliefs, there are some values we would like you to understand before you're married on this planet. But first we'll introduce ourselves."

Staff and Drago exchanged glances. Neither seemed pleased by this schoolyard, getting-to-know-you trash, but they'd agreed to play

along for Tasia's sake.

After the introductions were made, the Marriage Maker delved into a speech that Staff found surprisingly sensible. She talked about equality and respect within the marriage and the importance of trying to understand each other.

When they broke for lunch, Drago, Tasia and Staff sat at a corner table in the restaurant.

"This isn't so bad," Tasia said. "You guys had nothing to worry about."

"Not yet," Staff said. "This afternoon we're moving on to the questionnaires."

"I can hardly wait for that," Drago muttered.

After lunch, they returned to the assembly hall.

"I asked you to bring your questionnaires for our discussions this afternoon," said the Marriage Maker. "I realize some of you have been concerned about the personal nature of the questionnaire. The intent of this retreat isn't to embarrass anyone, but to enrich your lives together. I would like you to separate into groups with your partners and share the answers to your questionnaires with each other."

Glancing around, Staff noticed several people looked as relieved as he felt. Discussing his answers with Tasia and Drago was acceptable. His main fear had been talking about such personal matters with others.

Moments later, everyone sat in their private groups, looking over the results of the questionnaire on their handheld computers.

Staff had been dreading this part of the retreat, but was surprised to find it most enlightening. He learned things about his partners that he hadn't expected and by their responses they learned as much about him.

"I was a little worried about this question," Tasia said. "Does one partner provide better orgasms than the other?"

"We all had pretty much the same answer to that one," Staff said. "Sometimes yes and sometimes no."

"But usually both are acceptable," Drago stated.

Staff raised an eyebrow and Tasia curled her lip as they said simultaneously, "Acceptable?"

Drago smiled, his gray eyes gleaming with amusement. "All right fantastic."

"It's the Draper in him," Tasia said. "Always so disciplined."

Staff cast a lustful look at Drago. "Not always."

The Marriage Maker stood in the center of the room and said, "A few more minutes and then we'll break for the day. Tomorrow morning will be the final class. We'll cover the types of marriage ceremonies you may choose from."

Tasia, Staff and Drago had already made their choice, but Staff liked the idea of running through the details again.

* * * * *

When they returned to their cottage after dinner that night, Tasia sat on the bed and gazed seductively at Drago and Staff who had already started undressing. Staff unzipped his pants and Drago stood, bare-chested, and unfastened his hair sheath.

"You know going over that questionnaire with you guys turned me on," she said.

"And I thought I was the only one who felt that way," Drago admitted. He tossed his hair sheath aside and shook out his long, dark hair.

Staff, his stiffening cock poking through his open fly, approached Drago and buried his fingers in the Draper's sensitive hair. "I guess that makes three of us."

"I say we make the most of this oversized bed while we can," Tasia said.

They turned to her, their gorgeous eyes gleaming in a way that made her nipples tingle and clit throb with passion.

The men quickly stripped off their clothes and Tasia undressed to her underclothes. She started to remove her bra, but Drago stepped toward her, grasped her wrists and kissed her palms. He guided her to her feet and whispered in her ear, "Allow us."

While he unfastened her bra and slid the straps down her shoulders, Staff squatted in front of her and tugged down her panties. His firm, moist lips pressed kisses to her hips and belly. She lifted one foot at a time so Staff could remove her panties. He tossed them aside and continued kissing her stomach.

Drago had discarded her bra and stood behind her, fondling her breasts. Her back rested against his warm, hard chest.

Staff nuzzled her soft mound and flicked his tongue across her clit.

Moaning with pleasure, Tasia closed her eyes and surrendered completely to her men. Drago's powerful body supported her from behind while Staff steadied her hips as he lapped her sensitive flesh.

Drago's cock stiffened against her. He tickled her ear with his tongue and brushed his thumbs across her nipples then pinched them.

Within moments she hovered on the edge of orgasm. Staff rose to his feet and Drago swept her into his arms and placed her on the bed.

The men glanced at each other, then Staff covered her body with his, bracing a hand on either side of her head. He gazed into her eyes, his expression filled with the same lust and affection she felt. Then he slowly filled her. She already teetered on the edge, so it took only a few thrusts to hurl her into ecstasy. As she pulsed around him, he quickened his pace. His breathing ragged and his sleek muscles tense, he exploded inside her.

No sooner had Staff rolled off her than Drago took his place. He slid into her wet sheath and she moaned with pleasure. Though he was a different size and shape than Staff, he felt just as wonderful. He pumped slowly, taking the time to rekindle her desire. He ran his lips along her neck then covered her mouth in a passionate kiss. He thrust his tongue into her mouth, exploring thoroughly. Tasia's tongue met his while at the same time her hands sifted through his sensitive Draper hair. He groaned, the sound enflaming her even more.

Within moments she was on the verge of climax. Wrapping her arms and legs around him, she closed her eyes.

"Drago," she panted, trembling with need. "Oh, Drago."

A few more thrusts and she came long and hard. Quickening his rhythm, Drago growled softly, his powerful body surging into her as he joined her in bliss.

* * * * *

Once the retreat ended the following

afternoon, the Marriage Maker came to Staff, Tasia and Drago's cottage to perform the wedding ceremony. Moonlight and Xenos had agreed to attend as witnesses.

While the Marriage Maker spoke the traditional wedding poem, Tasia, Staff and Drago each took a bite from the binding cake.

When the ceremony ended, the spouses, Marriage Maker and witnesses signed an official document that would be archived in the Elpseden marriage database.

"May you have a long and joyous life," said the Marriage Maker before she left.

They thanked her and saw her out, then turned to Xenos and Moonlight.

"Are you ready to go home?" Moonlight asked.

"Yes."

"Good because the crew planned a reception for you tonight in the mess hall."

Tasia and Staff looked quite happy and Drago had to admit he was touched by their friends' gesture as well.

While Tasia and Staff walked out with Moonlight, Xenos waited with Drago who locked the door to the cottage.

"About the party, it's a human-Laetez thing," Xenos said.

"I understand. Remember, I've got Laetez in me too. I've learned to enjoy certain things about humans and Laetez."

Xenos' brow furrowed. "So have I. Strange, isn't it?"

Drago grinned and shook his head. "Come on, Xenos. This retreat was all right for a couple of days, but I've had about all the peace and heartfelt communication I can stand, at least for a while."

* * * * *

The reception aboard *Nameless* that night was something Tasia would never forget. The cooks made a delicious meal, complete with a traditional Earth wedding cake. Several crewman who had formed their own band played the Laetez marriage waltz.

Best of all was the wedding gift from Xenos and Moonlight--spacious new quarters with a bed almost as large as the one in the Elpseden

cottage.

After the reception, the trio retired to their new home.

"I can hardly wait to test this bed," Staff said, sweeping Tasia into his arms and carrying her to it. No sooner had he dropped her on it than Drago covered her body with his and nuzzled her neck.

Smiling, Tasia closed her eyes and sighed with pleasure. She had two gorgeous, wonderful mates and a bed she wouldn't fall out of. What more could a woman possibly want?

The End

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