



FALCON STATION BOOK 5

SURPRISE
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ISLA NOIR

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FALCON STATION SERIES 5

ISLA NOIR

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This novelette is for open-minded science fiction romance fans who are not afraid of stories that include sexual encounters with aliens, no matter what their color, size, or gender.

Please note this novelette is the last installment of the Falcon Station Series and will end in a HEA. There may be some confusion if you have not read any of the previous installments.

In this specific novelette, readers can expect romantic encounters but also humor.

USEFUL GALACTIC TERMINOLOGY:

- **Alliance Empire:** A group of five planets occupied by a species that are almost genetically identical to humans but have grey skin tones.
- **Agnorrian Androgynous pronoun for 'he' or 'she':** hen
- **Dulu:** A sentient green species that are known to be good traders and businesspeople throughout the galaxy.
- **Galaxy Court:** GC, the governing body of all the space faring civilizations in the galaxy.
- **Instant Communicator:** IC
- **Holo:** Short for hologram. A 3D video.
- **Hogo:** A planet occupied by humans.
- **Lyrans:** An ancient sentient species that resemble big cats from Earth.
- **Koirans:** An ancient sentient species that resembles wolves from Earth.
- **Universal Credit:** UC
- **Video Messaging:** VM
- **Video Message in Real Time:** RVM

*“I was like, Am I gay? Am I straight? And I realized...I’m just
slutty. Where’s my parade?”*

— Margaret Cho

CHAPTER

ONE

“G ia?” Set calls my name while he touches my face.

But, I can't open my eyes.

“This should help,” I hear Doctor Jon say.

My eyes flutter open. I see Set and Doctor Jon looking at me, faces full of concern.

“Gia,” Set says accusatorily. “Why did you take a memory altering ring from a Dulu? You know how dangerous those are? You could have died, or worse.”

Doctor Jon skillfully moves Set away from me. “You're not being helpful. What happened is in the past. Now Gia,” he says gently. “I need to look inside your mind and try to right what was wronged.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, confused.

“When you use memory suppressing devices, the brain instinctually always tries to find a way around them,” Jon explains.

“That's why I was dreaming about Hogo all the time,” I reply. “It was like the place was calling to me.”

“Yes, and I'm sure there were even more subtle memories that displayed themselves that your subconscious didn't understand.”

“But the ring is off, now. I feel like I remember everything, but do I, Doctor? Or will there be things I will never remember?” Then it dawns on me. “Keiro, he's here. And oh

galaxies, Tiro is here too. Tiro is going to kill him.” The sight of seeing Tiro with the little dog in the docking bay gives me the shivers. I try to jump out of the medical bed, but the restraints are enabled. “I must go. Let me out of here, Jon. Tiro’s going to kill Keiro. He’s already tried to do it once before.”

“Calm, calm,” Jon says putting one of his grey hands on me to ease my anxiety. “Thankfully, Falcon Station security arrived before your suitors could tear each other apart.”

“They did do a reasonably good job of hurting one another before it was stopped though,” Set adds.

“You’re still not helping,” Jon says to Set. Then looking at me again, he asks, “Why did you take the memory altering ring? Do you remember? Do you remember who gave it to you?”

“I think Bruce gave it to me” I say wrestling with my memories. “He said when he took it from me in the docking bay he had to confess something that he had done,” I reply.

“And how long have you had it for? Do you know?”

I inspect my third finger of my left hand where the ring was. “I only had it for a short time, I think. Since I got back from Hogo. I met with Bruce then and that’s when the dreams about Hogo began.”

“Okay,” says Jon thinking. “Thank the gods you didn’t wear it for long. What do you remember about your trip to Hogo?”

“Everything now, I think,” I reply, mentally going over my trip to Hogo. “Oh Keiro.”

“When we talked the other day, you didn’t mention Keiro at all. In fact, the last time you mentioned him to me, besides today, was before you met him. When we all had dinner at Rullo’s,” Set says. “So are you sure Bruce gave you the ring and not someone on Hogo, Tiro, or maybe even Keiro himself?”

I shake my head. “I don’t think so.”

“You mentioned Keiro to me when you were on your way to Hogo. You had sex with him and your medical readouts showed that you were free of Tiro’s scent,” Jon says. “But obviously a lot of things happened after that and he means a lot more to you than just sex now, as the ring’s purpose is to specifically block out your memories of him.”

“What happened with Keiro on Hogo?” Set asks. “It’s not surprising Tiro wants to kill him. Tiro wants to kill every male you are intimate with.”

I close my eyes to gather my thoughts. “I think Keiro and I were together, and I mean, together together,” and I touch the palms of my hands to one another to indicate the galactic sign for a serious relationship. “Even before we reached Hogo, we were emotionally close. It’s difficult to describe how it happened. Maybe it’s the effects of the ring. I remember Keiro rendezvoused with the *Bluebird*. One thing led to another and he managed to remove Tiro’s scent from me.” I pause, then add, “Oh galaxies and Tiro joined us too.”

“You had a threesome with a Koiran and a Lyran?” Jon asks almost too enthusiastically.

“No,” I look at him like he’s lost his mind. “They fought over me and I remember thinking Keiro was lucky to get away.”

“What happened then? Why would you want to forget Keiro?” Set asks.

“I,” I pause trying to remember. The memory doesn’t want to release itself. “On the last morning, I was on Hogo, I met him at a coffee shop and I said I had to go and that was all. I can’t remember anything else, but there was something more.”

“And the trip back to Falcon Station?”

“I remember being sad about leaving Keiro so he couldn’t have given me the ring,” I say. “Why didn’t I say anything to either of you or Karen?” I take a deep breath, trying to make sense of all of this. “That’s not right. That’s not like me. I tell you all everything, almost everything.”

“Karen and I were selfishly involved in our own marriage ceremony plans I’m afraid. I distinctly remember her saying to me that you didn’t seem like yourself. And I’m sorry Gia, I didn’t take it seriously. You seemed fine to me. And then you went off to Wildera so I thought you were your old adventurous self again.”

“What’s your excuse?” I asked Set.

“We hadn’t talked in a while and I thought you were busy with life. But I think you remember when we did finally talk I was concerned for you, but I thought it had more to do with your helping your friend with the Octopod babies. I even made my ship come out of our way and lose money to be here with you now. So no snappy looks in my direction, thank you.”

“I don’t mean to be judgmental. I’d just like to think someone would’ve noticed me acting differently.”

“Well, it’s not like your life has been ordinary lately. You went off to Wildera and came back a gestational carrier for an Octopod. During which time you were isolated in your quarters,” Jon says.

“And you were on honeymoon. I tried to contact Karen,” I admit lamely, remembering now getting a recorded Alliance message that couples on honeymoon were not to be disturbed by order of the Imperial High Council.

“I know and she felt terrible when she saw all the times you had RVMed and it had gone to messages,” Jon says. “Once she’s back from her business trip on the Capital Planet she’ll make time for you.”

“Always a businesswoman first,” I comment.

Jon nods. “You know Karen and it was an invitation that she couldn’t refuse. Now that I have a basic timeline and idea of what’s been suppressed from your memory, I’d like to an Alliance technique to reset your memories and emotions in the proper order. This will reduce your headaches and the strange dreams you’ve been having.”

“Okay,” I say. “What do I have to do?”

“Just lie back and I’ll touch your hand. You’ll hear my voice in your memories and you and I will mentally walk back through them beginning with your leaving Falcon Station on the *Bluebird*.” Jon, then remembering something, says to Set, “You must leave now.”

Jon waits for Set to take his leave of us both before he begins.

I lie back down in the medical bed and make eye contact with Jon. “I’m ready.”

I close my eyes and Jon takes my hand. I don’t know who’s leading who, maybe both of us together, but we start to go through my memories. First, I’m communicating back and forth with Keiro and convince him to rendezvous and help me. Next I’m upset that he wants to have a privacy screen between us for our business meeting about buying properties on Hogo. Jon interrupts this memory reinforcing it from his own memory. Seeing myself from his perspective, I feel slightly embarrassed by my actions, but then I remind myself of how desperate I was at the time to get Tiro’s scent off of me.

Then suddenly I’m overwhelmed by the memory of my primal attraction to Keiro. While we were having dinner I remember his scent being rich and spicy and it made me want to lick every inch of his white fur to the point I might have died coughing up furballs.

“Keep going,” I hear Jon say. I don’t know if this is in my head or if he said it out loud, but it’s a reminder to me that he’s with me and seeing what I see. Experiencing what I experienced. And it makes me uncomfortable he might be getting aroused from this.

“Are you getting off on this?” I ask.

“I’m a medical professional. I’m helping you recover your memories so no more damage is done. It’s important we go through every detail. Paying special attention to the ones with heightened emotions.”

“I think you’re getting off on this.”

“We can stop now if it makes you uncomfortable,” Jon suggests.

I consider it. “No, tit for tat, I guess. I watched you have sex with my friend for your marriage ceremony,” I say. Then I continue reliving the memory of Keiro and I having sex on the *Bluebird’s* dining room table. The memory of Keiro telling me he doesn’t want to break any GC laws while his hand stroked my soaking wet underwear is enough to make me aroused again. His blue eyes hungrily searching my own. Me asking Keiro to “wash me.”

“Interesting use of vocabulary,” Jon comments.

“You’re breaking my concentration,” I chide, but then can’t help but add, “I’m clearly a more experienced lover and with a better turn of phrase.”

Jon spurs me on mentally with the memory. “And did he clean you, Gia?”

“Thoroughly,” I reply and continue with the memory. Keiro telling me to grab his horns while he licks my pussy clean. He set his whole mouth on my sex and I moaned loudly with the intense erotic sensation of it. All the while knowing my staff on the *Bluebird* were watching.

“Did you like putting on a show for your human staff?” Jon asks. Then adds as an afterthought, “Do you think they recorded it?”

“Don’t get excited. There’s absolutely no holo of it.”

“Then tell me, what happened next? Did he mount you like a wild beast?” Jon asks.

I continue to relive the erotic memory. Tiro boarding the *Bluebird* and a fight ensuing.

“You were sexually aroused and worried for Keiro at the same time while you watched them fight,” Jon says casually as if I need to be reminded of how I felt. “Humans still have those primal instincts it seems to want to be with the alpha male.”

“I can’t control my emotions, even when they aren’t moral,” I admit. There was something primeval about watching two males fight over me. Then I continue with the memory, Keiro moving so fast and ripping apart my black dress while he undid his belt to unleash his enormous cock. Him lifting me effortlessly and impaling my small human vagina on his alien penis. “Oh!” I screamed from the pleasure and pain both in the memory and now in Jon’s doctor’s office. Faster and faster, Keiro moved in the memory, thrusting in and out. At the time, I understood nothing but sex, the feeling of our bodies moving together, the sound of his breathing and my heartbeat thrumming loudly in my ears. I was in an erotic frenzy. “Faster, faster,” I commanded Keiro in the memory and even now, I’m wet between my legs reliving this.

Then, Tiro woke up and witnessed Keiro and I together. Tiro tried to drag me back towards him out of Keiro’s arms. We both fell down, me on top of him and I realized he was naked too. Tiro tried to enter me with his large barbed Lyran penis and I flipped out. I can hear myself scream, both then in the memory and now again, as I relive it here.

“And with good reason,” Jon says, placing a second hand on me to calm me. “You would’ve had his scent on you for the rest of your life if he would’ve entered you sexually then.”

“Yes,” I say, “and the pain of those barbs in me, scratching down the insides of my vagina.” In the memory, I manage to push Tiro away with all my might and then Keiro headbutted him with his horns. Then I ask Keiro to, ‘Finish.’ He obeys by setting me on the side of the conference room table and spreading my legs around him. Then he pumped into me so hard and I fast, I thought he’d come before Tiro tried to separate us again. But, I could see Tiro out of the corner of my eye and he wasn’t going to let that happen. He attacked Keiro again, but Keiro didn’t remove himself from me. He fought off Tiro while he was still fucking me. It was very animalistic. And Keiro reached his climax despite Tiro’s distraction. Then I remember the awkwardness and silence that followed before everyone left the room. All of three of knew what had happened there.

“Then you RVMed me?” Jon asks.

“Yes, and you told me that Tiro’s scent was gone.”

“What happened next between you and Keiro?”

“He came to see me in my quarters on the *Bluebird* and apologized. He told me a Lyran’s scent on a non-Lyran is an aphrodisiac to Koirans. He hoped Tiro wasn’t hurt, but he also mentioned that he feared Tiro could put him in a gulag, but even in that moment, I didn’t have the impression it was going to keep him away from me.”

“And he wouldn’t have been wrong. Tiro is a well-connected Lyran. Even now, Keiro is risking everything by attacking Tiro on Falcon Station,” Jon says. “Please continue with the memories, these are less emotional for you now, but I want to set them right.”

“Okay,” I agree. I guide Jon back into my memories. I focus on Keiro coming to my quarters and joking with me, saying, ‘Of course, we aren’t mated for life or anything.’

I can feel Jon mentally tense.

“What is it?”

Jon let’s go of my hands and breaks the connection.

I open my eyes and look at him. He’s already sitting at his computer on the other side of the examination room. “What is it?” I ask again.

Jon doesn’t look away from his screen, but says, “I think he mated for life. With you.”

“No,” I say, dismissively. “He was the one who let me go.”

When Jon doesn’t come back to my side, I ask, “What does your computer tell you?”

“Very little,” Jon says rising. “Let’s go through the rest of your memories. However, as a male and a spectator watching what he said and did leads me to believe he either consciously or subconsciously chose you as his mate.”

“Why would he let me leave Hogo then?” I ask. “He would’ve said I was his mate, wouldn’t he?”

“I don’t know. I’m not Keiro nor am I a Koiran. Maybe they love to torture themselves by denying themselves their mated ones for a while? Some species have rituals involving sexual torture as a precursor to mating for life.”

“Not more than any Alliance person, I don’t think,” I can’t help but say.

Jon ignores my commentary on his culture and takes my hand again. “Please lay back, Gia. Let’s pick up where we left off. Perhaps I’ve misinterpreted it. Memories can be distorted like that, especially ones that were suppressed.”

I show Jon everything else that happened in Hogo, Keiro letting me leave and my return to Falcon Station. I specifically replay my conversation with him.

“I honestly thought you were fine. I’m sorry I didn’t take you more seriously. But you have had your moments with various males in the galaxy,” Jon says in his defense.

“I guess Bruce was more perceptive to my heartache,” I reply.

“Possibly, as it was he who gave you the ring, it had to have been as that’s where your memories have a ‘scratch,’ if you will, in a way that would signal a memory change. However, we need to access the Dulu database. I’m worried that Bruce used the word ‘obsession’ with you and said that if you didn’t mate with Keiro, you would slowly go mad. It makes me concerned Koiran physiology may not be compatible with humans’.”

“How would he know? I mean besides being Dulu and they’ve been doing experiments on all of us for millions of years?” I ask, sarcastically. I’d laugh if I didn’t feel like crying. *This is all a mess.*

Jon shakes his head. “You can’t use experiments that happened under laboratory conditions and apply them to life in the wild, as it were. This is why so much of Dulu scientific documentation is taken with a grain of salt.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“For example, a human female in Dulu captivity would choose a shapeshifting Koiran over an Octopod or Lizardion every time. That doesn’t mean a human female would want to be with any of those aliens sexually if a human or an Alliance male was on offer. The human female would’ve just been choosing the worse of two evils. Dulus are asexual to such an extent they’ve forgotten what sexual desire feels like.”

“I see,” I say. “You don’t think Keiro mated to me for life?” I don’t know why I sound disappointed.

“Honestly, Gia, I don’t know what to think. I don’t know enough about Koirans. I think the best thing we can do now is talk to Bruce. He either thinks you mated for life or humans are allergic to Koirans, meaning,” Jon trails off.

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning if he’s your mate, you’d become physically and mentally weaker from being away from Keiro. But if you’re allergic to him, ‘allergic’ isn’t the right word, that you would want to be with him even if it’s literally killing you. And this is why I don’t like that Bruce used the word ‘obsession’ to describe your condition. But we know so little about Koirans. If Keiro really did mate with you, then I think he expected you to return to him. But I’m just speculating. For all we know all of this could just be a side-effect of your being in love for the first time and Bruce being overly dramatic with his words. So, regardless, we should talk to Bruce.”

“Wouldn’t it be better if I just asked Keiro?” I suggest.

“If only you could,” Jon says. “He and Tiro are being held in the Falcon Station holding cells and Tiro has asked for a GC trial to determine who you should marry.”

“What?” My heart begins to race.

“I didn’t want to tell you until you were mentally healed from the memory erasing ring.” Jon releases the restraints on the medical bed. “The GC is going to make you marry one of those males at the end of the trial.”

I jump out of the bed as soon as the restraints are lifted and say, “I’m not marrying anyone. The GC can’t make me!” Then

I storm out of the Falcon Station Medical Center.

CHAPTER

TWO

On my way back to my quarters, I notice most people are staring at me as I pass through the busy Marketplace. I hold my head high and pretend not to notice them. I know why they're all looking at me. Two big males are in the station's security holding cells because they were fighting over me. I know this isn't a good look for anyone in the galaxy, and especially not a human female.

I reach the door to my apartment and go in. It's clean and everything is in order as if I hadn't recently birthed some Octo babies here. *Galaxies, my life has been weird lately.* I take a seat at my empty table and go through my messages on my computer. One is blinking "official" from the GC.

I open it immediately and am met with a formal summons to a trial tomorrow to determine whether I'm guilty of facilitating interspecies jealousy.

"Interspecies jealousy," I say out loud. "What the hell is 'interspecies jealousy?'"

I get out my IC and RVM Karen. Once I see her blue eyes I just start talking, "Karen, why didn't you tell me that I had a thing with Keiro?"

"I didn't know. I was on honeymoon when you called," she says defensively. "Apparently, according to Bruce, you became obsessed with him."

I feel like she's slapped me. "No, I love him. There's a difference."

“Then why did you leave Hogo? You don’t leave people you love, Gia. That’s not how love works. You were lusting after Keiro, as per your usual, and in your mind, you knew that’s all it was, so you left. Bruce was right to give you the ring. It’s better than watching you have a pity-party for yourself over decisions you made,” she tells me in a matter-of-fact tone.

“It’s true. I took the ring because I wanted those feelings for him to go away. I couldn’t accept that I’d just leave my life and move to Hogo for him, but I think had I not taken the ring, I might have gone back on my own accord.”

“I don’t believe that. Bruce told me humans become obsessed with Koirans,” she says dismissively.

“Jon says we don’t know what Bruce meant by ‘obsessive,’” I say. “I feel like I love Keiro, not lust, and not an obsession. I wish I had never taken the ring.”

“Are you going to leave your galactic lifestyle and move to Hogo now?”

“I don’t know.”

“Look Gia,” she says a little impatiently. “You know I care a lot about you. But you didn’t heed Bruce’s warning and you got yourself into trouble with another alien yet again. And now, you just need to figure a way out of it. Just like you always do. I don’t believe you’re in love. I believe it’s as Bruce says, you’re a human who has become obsessed with a Koiran. It’s simple biology.”

I laugh sarcastically. “Oh, you haven’t heard the news from Jon then?”

“Heard what? I’ve been in meetings. I’m in the Empire right now, remember?”

“Tiro and Keiro got into a brawl here on Falcon Station over me. The Falcon Station security got involved and now I’ve been called to a GC trial tomorrow.”

Karen looks at me seriously, then hushes someone behind her, “Be quiet. I’m talking to my one friend in the whole

galaxy.” Then looking back at the screen she asks me, “What are they charging you with?”

“Interspecies jealousy,” I say.

“Ouuuhhh, that’s bad, Gia.”

“You’ve heard of this crime?” I ask.

“If you didn’t spend so much time gambling you would’ve heard of it too.” She sighs. “Who’s accusing you? The GC or Tiro or Keiro?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who is your representative?” Karen asks.

“I was going to represent myself,” I say. “I only have a few hours. The trial is tomorrow morning.”

“Oh no,” Karen exclaims. “You cannot do that. You need to find someone, an Alliance person would be best, to represent you.”

“There’s Set,” I say. “But how could he do a better job than me?”

Karen narrows her blue eyes at me. “Possibly because most of the GC is Alliance. They’ll explain things better to one another without missing the subtleties of the case that could be lost in translation.”

I begin to dismiss this, but Karen interrupts me. “Gia, I know you don’t like it when I give you advice but in this case you must listen. You’ve no hope of winning this if you don’t have an Alliance person helping you. Set is your friend. Don’t be too proud to ask for help now. No amount of human cuteness or UCs is going to buy off the GC tomorrow.”

“How can you be so sure?” I ask.

“Because unlike you I actually work in the galaxy and know how the GC works, and I know things aren’t as they seem to you. Ask Set to help you.”

I hate to admit that she’s correct, but in this case, I think she is. “I will,” I promise.

“Good luck tomorrow. And wait, do not under any circumstance plead guilty. You’re representing all of humanity tomorrow,” Karen says and then signs off.

“Galaxies,” I exclaim to myself. “Don’t put any pressure on me or anything, Karen.” Then I mock her to myself, “You’re representing all of humanity tomorrow.”

Then, I RVM Set through internal comms.

He picks up immediately. “Gia, how are you? Did everything work out with Doctor Jon after I left? Was he able to put your memories in order?”

“Yes, I think so,” I reply. “I’ve a favor I need to ask you.”

“Sure. What?”

“I need representation tomorrow at a GC trial where I’m being accused of interspecies jealousy,” I say watching his face expression change from one of concern to surprise.

“That’s ludicrous,” he says, always the loyal friend. “Who’d charge you with that?” But as soon as he says it, he answers his own question, “Tiro.”

“I don’t know who is charging me. I just have a message from the GC telling me when and where to show up for my trial tomorrow. I just spoke to Karen and she told me that I needed to ask you to represent me. Will you do it?”

“Of course I will, but don’t you think you could find someone better? I’m just a middling class man. This is something a maximum class man would be better suited for. Perhaps Doctor Jon?”

“I’m going to assume that since he’s my doctor that he can’t represent me or else Karen would’ve said so.”

“Okay,” Set says and runs his hands through his short black hair. “Send me the summons and I’ll do a little research. Then, let’s meet early tomorrow morning to go over everything. You don’t want to marry either of them do you?”

“I don’t know,” I confess.

“Gia,” Set looks at me sympathetically. “You need to decide before tomorrow morning. You can plead not guilty but it’s going to be a lot easier if you say you want to marry one of the men and you were confused. If not, it does look like you were deliberately causing interspecies problems.”

“How is dating different aliens causing interspecies problems?”

“How can *you* of all people ask that?” Set asks.

“It goes two ways. Tiro is the one who decided to marry me. I never said, ‘yes’ and I’ve told him many times that I don’t want to marry him.”

“Okay here’s the thing you’re missing, Gia. Just because you say, ‘no’ doesn’t mean that Tiro hears ‘no,’ or that it’s true for him or anyone else in Lyran society. He hears what a Lyran female would be saying and that is not ‘no.’ As I have told you before, the GC is only the umbrella of a governing structure we all live under, but in practice, we’re all still living by our own cultures with our own laws governing ourselves.”

“Great,” I reply. “Then I’ll go by Earth’s laws, continue dating, and not marry anyone.”

“That would be all well and fine if these men were human but they aren’t and now they’re both seeking their due. What’s worse is that they have physically fought twice over you, which is illegal.”

“But that’s not my fault,” I say.

“But you do have a part in it, Gia,” Set says. “You know why most people don’t date out of their species?”

I don’t answer him because this is rhetorical.

“Because Gia, they know that there’s going to be some crazy messed up laws that somehow made it through a GC loophole and they’ll end up in a bad situation just as you are now.”

“But,” I try to defend myself.

Set raises a grey hand and interrupts me, “It doesn’t matter if you were ignorant of it. You still have to deal with the

consequences. Of course, I'll represent you, but you know what would be really great?"

"What?"

"You decide by tomorrow morning which one of these men you are going to marry."

"I don't know if I can do that!"

"Then this trial will go on for days and everyone in the galaxy will watch it like it's a new interspecies fictional drama and have an opinion about you. And I don't need to tell you it won't look good for humanity."

"Fine. I'll think about it," I say. "And one more thing?"

"What's that?"

"Thank you, Set."

"Of course. We're friends. And I've a weakness for human women. Please think about what I said. With either Tiro or Keiro as your husband, you'd have a good life."

"I'll think about it," I lie. Then, I end the connection.

I stare at my computer and the message from the GC.

I RVM Bruce.

I see his green face and ask, "How could you give me that ring?"

"I thought it was for the best," he says. "However, Gia, when you told me about the dreams I knew it wasn't working."

"It was apparently messing up my mind according to Doctor Jon," I say.

"I know and I am sorry."

"Were you ever going to tell me or just let me go insane?" I ask.

"Gia, please listen. I was hoping that you would be distracted enough attending the Wildera Competition that your mind and heart would give up on Keiro."

“But it didn’t.”

“No, it did not.”

“And I risked my life for you on Wildera.”

“I am ever so grateful. When I returned to Falcon Station I removed the ring from your finger.”

“Too little too late,” I say.

Bruce holds up his hands and moves his bulbed fingers back and forth in a Dulu type apology. “I am sorry Gia. If there is anything I can do to help you just ask me.”

“Yes, tomorrow I’m being summoned to a trial for causing interspecies jealousy.”

“Did you find an Alliance representative?” he asks.

“I,” I begin then change my mind and ask, “Have you been talking to Karen?”

“No.”

“She said the same. That I should have an Alliance person represent me.”

“It is common knowledge that Alliance people are the best at negotiating these strange GC laws. Duluxians have never had much of a justice system.”

“Set is representing me,” I say.

“That is good. Is there anything else I can do?”

“Tell me everything you know about Koirans,” I demand. “Am I obsessed or in love or am I having some kind of biological reaction to Keiro?”

“There is not that much to tell that I have not told you already,” Bruce says. “Believe me, Gia, I looked. When you returned from Hogo, I was genuinely concerned for you and did as much research as I could. What I told you before you went to Hogo still stands true. Humans who are intimate with Koirans develop an unnatural obsession with them. I think it is biological, but I am not a doctor and I do not have access to any medical records from those Dulu experiments.”

“What about the Koiran? Do they become obsessed with the human?”

He looks at me curiously. “What do you mean?”

“Keiro jokingly said he mated with me for life. Do you think that’s possible and that’s why he came back to the station?”

“I do not know,” Bruce replies. “Do you know for certain he came back to the station for you? Perhaps he had other business here? Then by coincidence he saw Tiro and they picked up where they left off. Males from those species who have fought before will fight again, even if the original dispute is settled. It is in their nature.”

A lightbulb went off in my head. “Oh galaxies, what if Keiro isn’t here for me at all, but just wanted to beat up Tiro when he saw him?” My heart sinks and I feel like a fool.

“It’s a possibility,” Bruce says. “I suppose you will find out tomorrow at the trial.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, Bruce,” I repeat myself. “I’m not going to wait until tomorrow morning. You’re going to help me break into the Falcon Station holding cells.”

“No I am definitely not doing that. And I would suggest you not do that either. If Erik were here, he might have done it as a favor, but with the new guards. No way.”

“I have to find out why Keiro is on Falcon Station.”

“It does not matter. You choose to marry him tomorrow. Case closed and everyone but Tiro will be happy,” Bruce says.

“But what if Keiro doesn’t want me?”

“There are worse tragedies in the galaxy, Gia.”

“No Bruce, I must find out why he’s here on Falcon Station before the trial tomorrow morning. I want you to check all his private communications.”

“That will take me a few hours to hack into,” he complains.

“You owe me.”

Bruce looks away and then back at me. “I will let you know what I find in a few hours, sooner if I can.”

“Thank you, Bruce.”

He blinks his big black eyes. “I know this is important information for you, that is why I am helping, although I am tired and I do not see the difference between your marrying Keiro or Tiro. They are both fine males, but as I said, you should marry Keiro because you are and always will be obsessed with him. I warned you this would happen with a Koiran.” Then Bruce ends the RVM.

I look at my reflection in the screen and hug myself. “What if Keiro didn’t come back for me at all?”



BRUCE WAKES me up with an RVM.

I grab my IC and look at his green face. “Did you find out why Keiro is on the station?”

“He had a meeting with another Koiran.”

I feel like crying. He didn’t come back for me. But I hold my tears in long enough to end the RVM, “Thanks, Bruce.”

“Good luck tomorrow.”

“Thanks.” I end the RVM, put my IC on my bedside table and cry into my bedsheets.

CHAPTER

THREE

Set arrives at my apartment early and we sit at my dining room table overlooking the Falcon Station's Premier docking as we go over my case.

"I think you should wear something black," Set says to me eyeing my red dress and blue skirt. "You know, to appear more galactically knowledgeable."

"What's wrong with this?" I ask looking down at my clothing.

"Well, it looks very human."

"I am human."

"Yes, but today we don't want people thinking that. We want them to believe that you knew what you were doing all along and, knowing that, didn't provoke any interspecies jealousy," Set explains. "That is, unless you've decided to marry Tiro?"

"Why would you say him and not Keiro?"

Set shrugs. "Does it matter? Keiro then. You want to marry him?"

I take off my red shirt and begin looking for something black in my closet. "I found out from Bruce that he was only on the station to meet another Koiran."

"So?"

"So?" I shoot back. "Are you even paying attention? He didn't come back for me. It just happened to be that Tiro was

in the docking bay when he was.”

“Then marry Tiro,” Set says, clearly confused.

“No. I don’t want to marry him. I have never wanted to marry him. Are you even listening to me, Set?”

“I am listening, but I’m also trying to sort this mess you’ve gotten yourself into. Tiro wants to marry you. Why are you making this complicated?”

“Because,” I say, and then start to lose my composure.

Set gets up and meets me in my closet. He hugs me and makes some strange sounds I know are supposed to be soothing to Alliance people. I let him soothe me even though the sounds he’s making sound more like a bee buzzing than anything calming.

“If I were you,” he says. “I’d marry Tiro. You’ll have a good life. He’s powerful, good looking and he loves you. It’s not bad to be in a marriage where the male loves the female more, or at least that’s what they say around the galaxy. Also it’d look great for humanity. You’d be in every gossip column and you’d be a celebrity.”

“I don’t want to be a celebrity. I don’t want to have the responsibility of representing the image of humans to the galaxy,” I say. Then in a small voice I don’t even want to recognize as my own, I say, “I think, I want Keiro and whatever that entails.”

Set takes a step back, but his still holding my shoulders. “You want to choose Keiro? Keiro over Lyran Diplomat Tiro?” he asks me disbelievingly.

“You told me to choose one and I did. But now I worry that Keiro doesn’t want me.”

“I only said they were equal and to choose one because I was sure you would choose Tiro. Tiro is Lyran, rich, good looking and powerful,” Set says, as if I need reminding.

“And he’s a stalker and won’t take ‘no’ for an answer which is how I ended up in this mess,” I say. “Can you

imagine if I had to be married to him? He might have me on a gold leash. I can't marry him and I don't want to."

"You would look cute on a gold leash."

I swat at Set's face and he moves back just in time to avoid my hand hitting his cheek.

"I'm only joking, Gia."

"Don't joke about humans being pets to me ever."

"I'm sorry," Set says sincerely and then starts helping me look for some 'galactically appropriate' clothing to wear. Once I'm dressed in black trousers and a loose black top we sit down at the table again.

"I want to choose Keiro, but only if I know he wants me."

"You're not allowed to talk to him until after the trial," Set reminds me.

"I know. So we must find another way. Is he going to be there today at the trial?" I ask.

"I'd be surprised if he wasn't."

"What kind of questions will he be asked?"

Set thinks for a moment. "Questions about his relationship with you. But, don't forget I'm telepathic. I'll know whether or not he still has feelings for you during the trial."

"You will? I thought that was forbidden," I say.

"You know it is, but sometimes, friends have to do what friends have to do. But, the problem is that I won't be able to tell you because we won't have time to speak privately before you need to say how you plea which will be after the facts are stated."

I interrupt him, "Not before?"

"No, under GC law, the guilty are reminded of why they're being accused before they say if they think they're guilty or not. So, how about we have a signal. If I call you, 'Madame Gia,' then Keiro doesn't care for you anymore. If I just call

you by your human names, ‘Gia Rissi,’ he still cares for you. Understand?”

“Got it,” I reply. “If he doesn’t then I want to plead not guilty.”

“Galaxies, Gia, don’t do that. You must marry one of them or this will just get worse.”

I look down at my fingers on the table. It’s an old gambling habit I’ve not done in years. I move them around as I think. I say out loud as if I’ve a flower in front of me, but tap my fingers to my words, “Does he love me? Or love me not? Love me? Love me not?” I continue this until I look up at Set and say, I’ll give you my answer when it’s time.”

“Gia, if you plead not guilty this will have wider implications for humans in the galaxy. Your species might be put on mating restrictions.”

“What does that mean? Mating restrictions?”

“Meaning that the GC would appoint another civilization to tutor humans in acceptable galactic mating behavior for the next century or so. And that civilization would be the Empire. So think of that when you decide to plead not guilty. You don’t want to be remembered in history as the woman who sexually handed Earth to the Empire.”

“Don’t exaggerate,” I say. “This case isn’t that big of a deal.” Although in my mind, I can’t help but think about the gravity of his words. But I can’t marry Tiro. I don’t love him and I worry he would smother me as his wife.

Set and I walk towards the Falcon Station conference rooms where this GC trial is going to take place. As we walk through the busy corridors I feel like everyone is staring. I think, *Well, why not? I’d stare too.* This is pretty exciting for Falcon Station.

When we approach the conference rooms there are guards from both the station and the GC blocking our entrance. We are required to enter our GC codes and do a fingerprint scan. Once we enter, it almost seems quiet. One of the guards says roughly, “Conference room one.”

The double-doors to the conference room open and I quickly scan the room full of white chairs and desks. I only see GC officials. All of them are Alliance men. I don't see Tiro or Keiro and none of Tiro's men. I have no doubt that some Lyrans are going to show up though.

And as if my thoughts called them in, behind us walk in five Lyran males, splendidly dressed showing off their high status in the galaxy. They all bow to me and one says, "Madame Gia, I hope that we will be celebrating your marriage to Diplomat Tiro soon in Vega. After this mix-up is resolved, of course. We have proof that the Koiran drugged you to make you believe you loved him." My face must have shown my shock at this turn of events, because then the Lyran continued, "Ah, I see no one has told you yet. Don't worry my dear, you will hear it all this morning and all will be well. Walk with the gods, my human child."

I'm so stunned I say nothing as the Lyrans walk by.

Set puts a hand on my shoulder and says in my ear, "They are lying. Trust me. They've no such evidence."

I turn around. "I'm glad you're a telepath." I said it without thinking, which was stupid. Set and I both look up at the GC representatives who are now looking at us.

"Set of House Hu. You have a choice. You can either stay and represent Gia with a dampening device. Or you can leave. You know it's illegal for you to use your innate telepathic abilities during this trial."

Set bows and replies, "I'll take the dampening device." Then he gives me a sheepish look before heading up to the high table of GC officials and allowing them to put the largest dampening device I've ever seen around his neck. When he returns to me, he says, "I sit here and you sit over there." He points to a chair inside a little rainbow prison. It looks like something a six year old human child would create for 'criminals.'

"You're kidding right? I'm not sitting in that."

"You have to."

“Why?”

“You might run away,” Set says while he escorts me to the chair inside rainbow colored bars.

“How far am I going to get with guards outside?” I ask.

“I didn’t make the rules, just get in there.”

I sit and Set walks away. Then he turns around remembering something and walks right back toward me, a second later.

“I forgot,” he says, leaning down and whispering to me. “Are you going to marry Tiro or Keiro?”

“I don’t know yet,” I say. “Maybe I’ll say, ‘not guilty’ after all.”

“I wouldn’t be a good friend if I allowed you to do that. Maybe I should decide for you?”

“No,” I say. “Let the GC officials ask me when it’s time and then you can repeat my answer if we have to do it that way.”

“Just tell me now.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I still don’t know myself!”

Set looks into my eyes like I must be crazy, then he nods, turns, and leaves. He takes his seat a few feet away from me and we all wait. A few minutes pass and then one of the GC officials stands and begins the trial.

“Thank you all for being here. Diplomat Tiro of Lyra and Keiro of Folgo have entered into a disagreement about the human woman Gia Rissi of Earth currently residing on Falcon Station.”

Set raises his hand.

“Yes,” the GC member says acknowledging him.

“Gia is now a citizen of Hogo.”

“Mark it that she is now a citizen of Hogo.”

Set raises his hand again.

“What now?”

“I believe that Keiro is also a citizen of Hogo.”

“Noted and we will ask him if we even get that far,” the GC representative says. Then he pauses and resumes what he was saying. “We are here to determine whether or not Gia of Hogo has broken the galactic order of relationships by committing interspecies jealousy between Tiro and Keiro. Tiro claims she has. To begin this trial we will begin by calling on the Agnorrian Gia also had an affair with, Princess Hekyiib of the Agnorrian Empire after Tiro placed a Lyran betrothal on Gia.

I’m sweaty now. Why are they going to ask the Princess Hekyiib about this? What’s her going to say?

A large RVM opens in the conference room and I see the gorgeous face of Hekyiib, silver skin, white hair, and perfectly oval purple eyes. However, I can no longer find this face attractive knowing what is beneath those clothes.

The GC representative greets the Agnorrian, “Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with us today. This shouldn’t take too long.”

“Anything for Gia,” the princess answers giving me a wink.

All I can think is, *Oh galaxies don’t make me look like we had anything more than a one-night stand or these GC officials will think I’m leading on three men.*

“Of course, Princess,” the GC representative says. “Now getting right to it. Were you aware that Gia was betrothed to Tiro of Lyra when you fornicated with her.”

“I can’t recall,” the princess says. “However our meeting wasn’t one about futures.”

“What do you mean?” another GC representative asks.

“I mean, we met at the Galactic Games on Falcon Station. We saw each other from across the room and knew we had to have one another. Or rather I had to have Gia in a carnal way.”

The GC representative looks surprised and then asks, “Are you saying that you tricked Madame Gia into sex with you?”

“Now, now, ‘tricked’ is a strong word. I would say I marked her with pheromones so that she could not resist,” the princess says.

“That’s rape,” one of the other GC officials says strongly.

“This isn’t the Empire. Do you forget what uniform you wear?” the Agnorrian princess demands of the GC official who called her a rapist. “It’s all perfectly legal under galactic law. You can check the holo of it if you’d like? Gia consented and she enjoyed most of it, until she had to go to the hospital.”

I’m cringing. *Do not check the holo. Not here. Not in public.*

“Madame Gia, would you like us to check the holo to make sure you were not raped?” The GC representative asks me kindly.

“No, I was not raped. No need to check the holo,” I say. I remember that I wanted to sate my curiosity about the Agnorrian before I even met her. However, it’s annoying now that she mentions she basically drugged me too. *What is it with all these alien men drugging me with their pheromones?*

“You are sure? All we need is your consent to unlock the holo.”

“I am sure.” I never want anyone to see that holo again.

“A pity,” the princess says. “We had a good few hours on my ship. I’ve revisited it a few times, darling Gia.”

“Moving on,” the GC representative says. “Did Gia entice you by speaking about other males in front of you?”

“No.”

“Did Gia ask you to begin a relationship with her?”

“No.”

“Have you had any contact since the night of the Galactic Gambling Games on Falcon Station?”

“No.”

“Do you have any reason to believe that she would be guilty of interspecies jealousy?”

“With me, no.”

“With anyone else that she might have mentioned to you?”
The GC representative asks.

“No. She never talked to me about anyone else she was intimate with. The night we were together I believe we only had eyes for one another,” the princess says.

I give her a nervous smile through my rainbow cage.

Hen winks at me and then says to the GC representative, “Now if there is nothing else, I have important matters to attend to.”

“Of course, thank you for your time.”

The RVM ends and the GC representative calls to one of the guards, “Bring in Diplomat Tiro of Lyra.”

CHAPTER

FOUR

I watch the guards go. Moments later they reappear with Tiro between them. He's dressed in his usual fine galactic clothing and his prestigious Lyran medallion marking his diplomatic rank. He twitches a whisker at me and then I hear a little bark. He brought the dog with him. I don't know whether I should laugh or cry. The little pup is on a leash and has a Lyran scarf of his own.

I look over at Set and he cannot help himself. He's laughing.

"Something funny?" the GC representative asks.

"I've never seen a Lyran with a pet from Earth before," Set says. No one else gets the joke because no one else here knows enough about Earth to know why it's funny that a large, black, cat-like male is walking with a small dog on a leash.

"Calm yourself," the GC representative tells Set. "Nothing here is funny."

"I will do my best," Set replies and then looks over at me practically dying to control his emotions.

"Diplomat Tiro. You have asked for this trial," the GC representative says as Tiro takes a seat on the other side of the room near the other Lyrans.

"Yes," he says. "You see, there's a Koiran male legitimately trying to interfere with my betrothed. This is causing interspecies jealousy."

“But you name Gia from Earth, I’m sorry I mean from Hogo, as the accused not Keiro of Folgo, I mean also from Hogo.”

“This is true,” Tiro says. “I want to kill two things at once. I want Gia to marry me and for Keiro to be punished for trying to steal her away. Accusing Gia of interspecies jealousy accomplishes both of those things.”

I’m floored that Tiro is so transparent about his motivations. I look to the GC officials and hope they will end this right now that Tiro has stated his reasons for accusing me.

“I see,” says the GC representative.

“Wait,” says Set and I wonder if I should have begged Doctor Jon as ‘wait’ doesn’t seem like the best word to be opposing Tiro’s highhanded nonsense.

“Yes, Set,” the GC representative says.

“You can’t just let him do this. He cannot force Gia to marry him just because *he* wants it.”

“Diplomat Tiro has accused Gia of Hogo. Regardless of his motivations we need to see the evidence against her before making a decision to throw out this case,” the GC representative replies. “At this point, we have only talked with the Agnorrian. And I am satisfied that Gia acted in a reasonable manner with the princess. However, we still must hear what Tiro has to say. Or would you advice Gia to seek GC counseling?”

GC counseling doesn’t sound good, I think.

“No,” Set answers quickly. “Proceed.”

With that Tiro stands and begins his story. While watching him, I wonder what my life would be like married to this male. He is an excellent speaker I give him that. I almost forget that he’s talking about *our* relationship I’m so caught up in his words. “I had the pleasure of meeting Gia in Vega on Lyra. We spent many weeks together getting to know one another, playing, eating, doing all the things that two galactic citizens who love each other do. When it was time for her to say ‘goodbye’ I wanted to make our relationship permanent. So I

put my marriage contract on her as is the traditional Lyran custom. I gave her five imperial years to accept me. During this time I have been intimate with no other females as I am devoted to Gia and waiting for her to become my wife.”

“This all seems very reasonable,” says the GC representative. “Gia, do you agree with what Tiro has said?”

“More or less,” I reply. “I never said that I wanted to marry him though. I have been quite clear about that.”

“But that’s not the Lyran way,” the GC representative reminds me. “Lyran males make their claims and then the females take a few years to decide whether or not to accept them. One Lyran female can have as many as four claims out on her at once.”

“I know that,” I say a bit testy. “What I meant was, I told Tiro from the beginning that as a *human*, I never wanted to marry.” To my dismay I see people smiling, no doubt they think it’s because human culture is so below theirs. Every culture here today marries except for humans. “Dulus don’t marry either,” I blurt out.

“They also despise sexual intercourse,” another GC representative tells me. “Humans need to be cautioned, they are soiling the galaxy with these free thoughts and free sex. Sex isn’t for free for anyone.”

I look at Set then. He was correct, this really isn’t about me. It’s about Tiro getting what he wants and the GC being able to make an example out of me no matter what the outcome of this trial is. I’m suddenly not feeling as confident as I was when the Agnorrian princess was speaking.

“Tiro,” the GC representative addresses him. “Would you say that you anticipated Gia accepting your proposal?”

“Yes,” he replies.

Before the GC representative can say anything, I ask Tiro, “What have I ever done to make you think that?”

Tiro picks up the cute little dog and it barks the cutest bark as if on cue and says, “You gave me this dog which I named after you. To have with me when you couldn’t be with me.

Don't you remember? I have the message if you would like to see it."

Oh no. This is not happening. "That was a joke."

"It was not a joke," Tiro says putting the dog back on the ground as it settles near his feet.

"Mark the disagreement about the nature of the gift. However," the GC representative looks at me. "Giving someone you are romantically interested in a pet is quite a serious gesture of commitment."

"Not on Earth. Not really. I mean it was a joke. Ha. Ha," I say, but looking around no one but Set is amused.

"Tiro, can you please describe the first time you met Keiro of Folgo and how you knew he was also pursuing Madame Gia?" the GC representative asks.

"Yes," Tiro says. "It began with a misunderstanding. I had just finished an assignment when I was notified that Gia's ship the *Bluebird* had picked up a male passenger and was on its way to Hogo. As Gia is a human and needs protection and guidance in the galaxy, I changed my ship's course to intersect hers and check on her."

"What did you find when you rendezvoused? Was she happy to see you?" the GC representative asks.

I don't want to hear his answer. I remember full well what he walked in on. I hope they haven't retrieved any holo to prove anything.

"I found the Koiran and Gia having sex in the *Bluebird's* dining room like barbarians," Tiro says.

"Do you have proof of this?" the GC representative asks.

I didn't realize I was holding my breath until I notice I can't breathe. *Please don't say, 'yes.'*

"Yes, I do," Tiro replies.

Set raises his hand and is acknowledged by the GC representative with a nod. "Footage from the *Bluebird* can only be shared by Gia. Also the ship belongs to her and as she

was not married to Tiro, he cannot dictate what she does on her own property.”

Set and I make eye contact and I give him a thumbs up.

“This is from my own personal footage.” Tiro points to his necklace. “This records all of my actions so that I can be held accountable for my moral decisions.”

I feel dizzy. The lights are dimmed and from Tiro’s body camera I can see him entering the *Bluebird*, my lovely staff trying to stop him from entering the dining room and yep, there it is. Him walking in on me and Keiro. And we are really going for it. I’m mostly naked and Keiro has his horned head between my legs.

Then they begin to throw punches. I catch my facial expression in the background as they’re attacking one another and I’m ashamed to say, I’m turned on by these alien males fighting over me. Then Tiro is on the ground and, it’s not a great angle, but it’s possible to see Keiro entering my wet vagina again, I can see it glistening in the holo. You can see it even better when Tiro stands up again and then Keiro finishes ejaculating inside of me while fighting him off. Oh and the holo ends with Tiro putting his massive cock back in his trousers, lying it to the right which is for some reason more information than I wanted from that holo. Then the lights are brightened again. I look around the room. No one seems surprised, embarrassed, or aroused by watching that. Just me.

The GC representative looks at me. “Would you like to explain what was going on in this holo or perhaps provide more evidence from the *Bluebird*?”

“I’ll tell you what was going on,” I say, wishing I wasn’t stuck in this rainbow cage. “The last time I’d seen Tiro he had given me a necklace with his scent on it. I stank of it. No other male would even look at me. He did that without my knowledge. He tried to make me sexually invisible to other males.”

“Is this true? Did you trick Madame Gia?” the GC representative asks Tiro.

“No, it was a gift and I presented it to her in a way that any Lyran female would have known what it was.”

“I’m not Lyran,” I reply.

“But you are in a relationship with a Lyran male so you must be knowledgeable of his culture or know enough to ask when you do not understand. Mark that I am content that Tiro was being honorable in his gift of the Lyran necklace to Gia.”

“Why don’t you mark that I didn’t think it was honorable,” I retort and to my surprise, another GC representative notes it. This gives me some confidence. Then I begin to tell the GC representatives about my date and night with Tiro, how we had dinner at Rullo’s then a night at the Mera Hotel here on Falcon Station. Then I tell them about my visit to Doctor Jon at the Medical Center and that’s how I found out about Tiro scent being on me.

Set interrupts me then, “Doctor Jon can be a witness later if needed.”

I give Set a look that says, *he-should-be-here-now*, but Set ignores me.

“Continue Madame Gia.”

“Doctor Jon informed me that the only way he knew of to get rid of Tiro’s scent was to have sex with a Koiran.”

“And how did you find a Koiran male willing to do this? They are an exceedingly small population and even more so out in the galaxy. Also they are known for keeping to themselves.”

“As luck would have it, I needed help buying a property on Hogo and Keiro of Folgo, he hadn’t yet moved to Hogo, was going there as well. He agreed to help me and I gave him passage so we could start our business on the way over.”

“Do you have a copy of your agreement?”

“Yes it was filed with the GC,” I say.

Another representative speaks up, “We have it here and it is as Madame Gia says. There is nothing about the Koiran selling sex to the human in this contract.”

“I would not buy sex,” I say trying to stay calm.

“Humans do a lot of strange things. You are a new species to the intergalactic community and we have yet to get to know your habits,” another GC representative explains to me. “Now walk me and these other officials through how business went to sex so quickly.”

“Apparently a Lyranscent on a female is an aphrodisiac to Koirans. That’s how it went from business to sex so quickly,” I say, leaving out the details of him having a privacy screen up to begin with.

“But it says here in the contract he had a privacy screen,” the GC official says.

“Was Keiro aware at the time that you knew about the Lyranscent on you?” another GC official asks.

I try to remember. *Did he know?* “Yes, he knew,” I reply hoping that that is the truth. *That stupid ring. I can’t remember clearly.*

“Did you have sex with him again afterward? After Tiro left?”

“Yes.”

“Would you like to provide evidence of this from the *Bluebird*?” the GC representative asks me.

“Umm let me think about that. No. I definitely would not,” I reply. *How perverted are these GC representatives?* I see Set out of the corner of my eye and we make eye contact. He isn’t happy with my last comment.

“You can enter the video footage from the *Bluebird* of you and Keiro having sex after Tiro left later if you would like,” the GC representative says. “Now we will get to the crux of the matter, did you at any time tell Keiro that you were betrothed to Tiro?”

“I told Keiro that Tiro wanted to marry me but that I didn’t want to marry him.”

“Did you offer to marry Keiro?”

“No. Humans don’t marry.”

“Humans have been known to marry in the Empire,” a GC representative points out. “Not long ago you attended a marriage ceremony of your human friend to an Alliance man here on Falcon Station or was that another Gia Rissi?”

“I’m not that kind of human,” I say.

“But you must concede that some humans do marry.”

“Okay fine, some humans marry but as a whole, we no longer marry,” I say.

The GC representative seems satisfied with this and then asks, “Did you act in a way that would have led Keiro to believe you were his mate or wife, whatever they call it on Folgo?”

“I don’t know what they call it on Folgo and no, I didn’t. I don’t want to marry anyone,” I say but the looks I get in the conference room aren’t sympathetic.

“Perhaps you just do not know what is good for you. It sounds like you do want to marry Tiro and that he would be a good match for you,” the GC representative says.

I am dumfounded. “Have you been listening to anything I just said? I don’t want to marry anyone.”

“Yet, you accepted gifts from a Lyran you knew wanted to marry you and in return you gave him a precious gift back of a pet. In addition, you triggered his natural instincts to fight another male for you which is part of the Lyran mating cycle,” the GC representative says.

“But that’s not how it is to me or on Earth,” I say, but it’s clear no one cares how things are done on Earth. To them, Earth is a small insignificant place compared to these large civilizations that rule the galaxy.

“Everyone knows about Lyran mating cycles. You cannot say you were ignorant now after having been to Lyra and entered into a relationship with a Lyran,” another GC representative points out. “Your cultural ignorance cannot be an excuse.”

“Now let’s finish this up. Tell me, did Keiro ask you to stay with him?” the GC representative asks.

“No. I left him cordially on Hogo and returned to Falcon Station. We had no contact until yesterday when I was surprised to see him here,” I say, trying not to get emotional.

“But he came here looking for you?” the GC representative asks.

“No, he had a meeting,” I say.

By the shocked look of the GC representative’s face I can see that I said the wrong thing.

“If you haven’t spoken to him since you left Hogo, then why do you know his schedule? Were you planning on pursuing him again just to further your mating cycle with Tiro? Did you in fact schedule them to both be on Falcon Station at the same time so that they would continue their fight over you?”

“No. I had no idea either of them were going to be here,” I say.

“This is a mess,” the lead GC representative says to the others. “We will need a two hour recess so we can look over Gia’s messages and check the footage from Falcon Station. Also I want Doctor Jon here as a witness when we resume. Dismissed.”

CHAPTER

FIVE

I didn't realize that Set and I wouldn't get a recess. Instead we sat with the GC representatives to comb through all my messages. I'm glad that I did though as it was satisfying to prove that I'm more of an ignorant human than a scheming woman inciting interspecies jealousy.

When everyone else returned to the conference room, Doctor Jon was called to give his opinions on me and my relationships. Thankfully, Doctor Jon is not an idiot and said all the right things to confirm that I am in fact just ignorant of galactic laws and customs of other civilizations. He advised that humans should be made to study some of the larger civilizations in the galaxy before leaving our solar system which the GC representatives marked as a good idea.

After Doctor Jon's testimony, I thought that this would all be concluded and that I'd be able to leave. However, of course, these are aliens and they have an agenda. Just because they think I may be ignorant of galactic ways doesn't mean they aren't going to still try and make an example of me.

"Set, you are representing Madame Gia," the GC representative says. "How does she plea to the accusation that she is inciting interspecies jealousy?"

Set looks at me then replies, "Madame Gia would like to reply herself."

"Odd," the GC representative says, "but because she is human we will allow it. Madame Gia," the GC representative addresses me. "Are you guilty or not?" When I don't answer

right away he adds, “Do you understand the question and your options?”

“I’d like to hear Keiro’s side of all of this before I say,” I reply. I think that if I can just see his eyes, I will know which choice to make.

“I do not think that is necessary is it? It will not change anything, except to rile Tiro up. Is that what you want Gia? Another fight over you between these two males?”

“These two males should be able to control themselves, shouldn’t they?” I ask using their own tricks back on them. When I get no answer, I continue, “Keiro is an integral part of this case and I’d like to hear what he has to say before I make, I mean, state my position,” I say. I look over at Set and I can’t read his face. I hope that I’ve not messed this up for myself.

After a few whispers among the GC representatives a guard is sent to retrieve Keiro and more GC guards surround Tiro. Tiro is told that he must not attack Keiro in the conference room.

My heart leaps by its own accord as Keiro is escorted into the conference room by two large Octopod guards. His white fur still has some blood on it in places that Tiro had cut him. His blue eyes meet mine, but I can’t read his expression. Then he sees Tiro and the guards have to hold them both back from fighting with one another.

“I will have order,” the GC representative says loudly. “You both are respected members of this community and will use your minds to override your natural instincts to claim the human woman Gia.”

Keiro takes the seat Doctor Jon had just been sitting in, but the GC guards do not leave his side.

“Keiro of Folgo,” the GC representative begins.

“I live on Hogo now,” Keiro corrects him.

The sound of Keiro’s deep and melodic voice sends shivers through my body and I’m completely captivated by him from my rainbow cage.

“You are aware that Gia Rissi has been accused of inciting interspecies jealousy by Diplomat Tiro of Lyra?”

“I am aware.”

“Good. So far we have seen the evidence of your relationship, professional and then sexual with Madame Gia. However, Gia asked that we hear it in your own words before she make her plea. I told her it was not necessary, but humans, you know how they are. Would you please indulge us?”

Keiro looks over at me and again I cannot read his face expression. I wish I could talk to him and ask him if he came back for me. *Can I just ask in front of all these people?* I wonder. When I’m just about ready to utter the question the GC representative interrupts.

“Keiro?”

“Yes,” he says and looks away from me, addressing the GC officials. “Gia hired me to help her find a property on Hogo. As I was going there myself, it made sense for me to take her business. On our journey over, we became intimate. At first, because she had this Lyran’s scent on her.”

“Did she tell you how she got the Lyran scent on her and her relationship to Tiro?” the GC representative asks. “Take your time.”

“I don’t need to. She told me. Our conversation was not only recorded on the *Bluebird* but for my own records as well. We can access it now.”

I couldn’t help my own outburst then, “Are you all recording everything? Is nothing private or sacred in the galaxy?”

“Madame Gia,” the GC representative says, “You should be grateful these males have gone through the effort to verify their relationship to you. Unless there’s something in Keiro’s footage you don’t want us to see?”

“No, continue,” I say.

The lights are dimmed and Keiro’s footage from his personal device is revealed. Our conversation and then the sex.

My cheeks are burning when I watch myself, beg him to “clean” Tiro’s scent off of me.

Meanwhile Tiro is freaking out in the corner trying to get away from the guards to attack Keiro.

“Tiro, I will have you removed if you can’t control yourself,” the GC representative says.

Keiro isn’t unaffected either and he snarls at Tiro.

“Order,” the GC representative demands and the conference room calms down a little.

I wipe my forehead. I’m hot and feel like I have a fever.

“Keiro, when you reached Hogo. What happened then?”

“I helped Gia find a home to satisfy her citizenship requirements, but not in Mångata, she ended up buying a place in Almere.”

“Where do you live?”

“Mångata.”

“Did she ask to stay with you?” the GC representative asks.

“No.”

“Did she ask you to have a more permanent relationship with her at any time?”

“No.”

“Would you say she was using you to complete the Lyran mating cycle?”

Keiro suddenly looks at me then as if this thought had never occurred to him.

Before he can see me shake my head, the GC representative says, “Don’t look at her. Answer the question.”

“No. Gia has stated many times she does not want to marry anyone,” Keiro says evenly.

“What brought you to Falcon Station yesterday? Were you lured her by Gia? Or did you come of your own accord to

attack Tiro?”

“No. I had a meeting with an old friend. Falcon Station is a convenient place to meet.”

“Did you let Gia know you were coming?” the GC representative asks. “Don’t look at her. Answer the question.”

“No. I haven’t had any contact with her since she left Hogo.”

“Thank you, Keiro. I hope that you and Tiro can drop your dispute with one another as soon as we make a decision here. This case seems clear and ...”

“Wait,” I say, interrupting, “You still haven’t heard my plea.”

“If you want to say something you can, but I think the rest of us have made up our minds and we know what you’re going to say. That’s why the plea always comes last,” the GC representative explains.

“On Earth we do it the other way around.”

“On Earth it seems you do most things backwards,” the GC representative replies and a few people laugh including Set and I give him a nasty look and mouth the words, ‘you are supposed to be on my side.’ I know he can’t read my lips because of our translators but he knows what I mean.

“True,” I say not because I believe it but because I want them to listen to me. “Maybe you could indulge me as an ignorant human how this should best be solved?”

The lead GC representative may eye contact with his officials and after some nods he turns to me and says, “It’s clear that the best thing for you and for the galaxy is to marry Tiro. He wants you and he can teach you how to be a model GC citizen. If you do not want to marry him you could plea not guilty to interspecies jealousy, but the problem with that, which your friends Set and Doctor Jon will tell you is that you lured Keiro into sex with you to involve himself in your relationship with Tiro, which makes you guilty. It’s clear to all of us, despite you saying you don’t want to marry, you indeed

do want to marry and should marry Tiro to set a precedent for humans in the galaxy.”

When I don't answer he says, “What's your plea Gia?”

“Can I ask Keiro a question?”

“No.”

“Keiro...” I begin but I'm quickly interrupted.

“You will be taken from here and charged with disruption of a formal GC trial,” the GC representative says drowning me out. “What is your plea?”

I look between Tiro, Set, Doctor Jon, and Keiro. My eyes stay on Keiro. *Does he love me? Did he really come back for a meeting or is he just saying that because he didn't want to look desperate?* I know that Tiro loves me, but he isn't the male for me and I'm not for him. Now do I plead innocent only to be found guilty or do I force myself on Keiro and hope that he doesn't feel about me as I do about Tiro.

“We are waiting Madame Gia,” the GC representative reminds me.

“I choose to marry Keiro of Folgo, I mean Keiro of Hogo.”

Silence ensues.

“Gia has made her choice. She has proven she is innocent of interspecies jealousy,” Set says breaking the silence.

“She cannot,” Tiro says. “Gia, have you been brainwashed by that creepy Alliance doctor?”

“Tiro, the GC will not have such racist remarks, not even from you. The human woman has made her choice. As strange as it is, we all know humans are odd. Perhaps you will think twice before trying to pursue a human in the future.”

“Let it be marked that the human Gia Rissi has chosen to marry the Koiran, Keiro of Folgo, sorry, Keiro of Hogo. Her Lyran betrothal contract with Diplomat Tiro is now resolved. The marriage ceremony between Gia and Keiro must take place in no less than one Imperial week and all Koiran customs must be adhered to for the good of the galactic

community. That is the GC's opinion on this matter of Gia Rissi of Hogo being accused by Tiro of Lyra of inciting interspecies jealousy. The matter is now closed."

I am stunned. *That's it?*

Set approaches my rainbow cage but before he can say anything Keiro thrusts him out of the way and yanks my cage open so strongly the rainbow door falls off.

I look up at Keiro, scared. *What have I done?*

CHAPTER

SIX

Before I have time to react Tiro is behind Keiro and throws him back behind him. Again they are fighting over me. They hit each other blow after blow, both in mad rage. I want to get in between them but I fear for my life. Also I don't think this is all about me anymore. This is about Tiro accusing me of interspecies jealousy and me making Keiro marry me. All I can think is that he didn't want to marry me. *Shit. I made the wrong decision.*

It's not long before Keiro's rage wins out and he has Tiro in a death grip.

"No," I cry out but I know Keiro can't hear me or anyone else who is calling out for him to stop.

"Do something!" I say to Set.

"What can I do? No one is allowed weapons here. Security has been called. But I think Falcon Station Security and everyone else is enjoying this fight. Any publicity is good publicity and reminds people Falcon Station exists," Set replies.

"This is my life too, it's not some fictional galactic drama."

"Then *you* stop them, Gia. You're not an innocent bystander."

I push Set out of the way and approach Keiro and Tiro. As I get closer to the two massive males, I realize two things, first, that no matter what, my heart really only beats for Keiro,

even if he doesn't love me in return And second, he's going to kill Tiro if I don't do something.

"Keiro, please stop. Let Tiro go," I say. It doesn't work. He doesn't hear me. I take my life in my own hands and move even closer and repeat myself, wondering where security is. They must have known these two were going to attack each other. "Keiro, please stop," I say more forcefully. Then I move close enough to reach up and touch his shoulder. The moment I do I feel a sharp stab in my side. I put my hands over the pain and I feel hot liquid. I raise one of my hands to my face and it's covered in my thick, red blood. I look at the males, confused and my world starts spinning.

"If I cannot have you then no one will!" Tiro says as I fall to the floor. Above me I see Set and Doctor Jon. I hear Keiro roar and Tiro scream in pain. *I hope Tiro dies too*, I think.



I OPEN my eyes and I'm in Doctor Jon's familiar examination room on Falcon Station. I'm alone. The room is semi-dark. I touch my abdomen where I was stabbed and there's nothing there. I rub my eyes and try to clear my mind. Was that all a dream?

Just then the door opens and Doctor Jon comes in. He turns up the lights and asks me how I'm feeling.

"Fine, I think. This might be a strange question but was I stabbed?"

"Not a strange question at all. Yes you were. But thankfully I was able to heal you completely. Why, do you still feel pain?" he asks as he begins to assess my body with a scanner.

"No pain."

When Jon finishes his scans he says, "You're free to go. Try to stay safe."

"Where's Keiro?"

"He and Tiro are back in security's holding cells for disorderly conduct," Jon tells me.

“What do you think is going to happen to them?”

“Nothing more than a GC fine after they’ve both calmed down. But of course Tiro’s will be extra for stabbing you.”

“I can’t believe Tiro stabbed me,” I say, rubbing my hand over the nonexistent wound.

“I don’t think anyone can,” he replies.

“He’s not going to get in trouble with the GC for almost killing me?” I ask.

“No. Gia, all three of you caused this. And you didn’t die. There’s not even a mark on you.”

“Sometimes I don’t think I’ll ever understand galactic logic.”

“You might be the kind of person who can never understand different cultures,” he says. “On the bright side, all of this made for some fantastic news. Falcon Station is what everyone is talking about. That and your upcoming wedding to Keiro. Do you know anything about Koiran traditions?”

“No,” I answer honestly. “Do you?”

“Not a thing. But they’re a patriarchal society so I expect it’ll include something primitive and barbaric,” Jon says.

“Yeah, not unlike Alliance weddings that have nothing barbaric in them,” I retort.

“Sex between two people in marriage is a beautiful act,” he defends his culture.

“Sure it is,” I say, getting off the medical bed.

“Gia,” Jon says. “If there’s anything you need. Just ask. Karen and I are here for you, even if it includes something barbaric.”

“Thanks,” I say, feeling suddenly overwhelmed by the choice I just made. But I’m glad now I wasn’t forced into a marriage with Tiro. Who knows what kind of husband he would have been. “Do you think I can visit Keiro in the holding cell?”

“I don’t see why not? The only reason you couldn’t before was because of the GC trial,” Jon tells me. When I don’t answer immediately, he adds, “Keiro will definitely be expecting it.”

“Did you or Set stop Keiro from killing Tiro?” I ask. I’m actually surprised Tiro is still alive. I’d never seen such a look of anger as I did in Keiro’s eyes when he realized what had happened.

“No. But Keiro could have. I knew he wanted to, but he stopped himself because he’s moral. You made the right choice, Gia. Don’t let the GC, Set, or anyone else tell you differently.”

“How do you know he’s moral? He could have stopped for many reasons.”

Jon taps his head. “Because I’m telepathic Gia. I read his mind. Unlike Set, I didn’t have to wear a dampening necklace because I’m a doctor.”

“A doctor breaking his oath not to read minds other than his patients,” I point out.

“In wild moments, it’s not as if I can resist. It’s a natural instinct,” Jon says. “And understandable when violence is involved. Had this been an Alliance trial, I would’ve given evidence on what I feel from both of your males. But it wasn’t.”

“Does Keiro love me?” I ask.

“I cannot tell you that. As I said, it wasn’t an Alliance trial.”

“As friends, tell me.”

“No. That would disrupt the natural order of your relationship.”

Disappointed with that answer I ask, “And what about me?”

“What about you?”

“What’s in my mind? Do I really love him?”

“Gia, I can’t tell you what your own emotions are to you,” Jon replies.

We just hold eye contact. I want him to tell me that what I feel for Keiro is love, not lust, not some obsession, but real love. When Jon doesn’t say anything more I say, “I guess I’m going to the holding cells to see *my betrothed*.”

“This is some advice you can either take it or leave it,” Jon says. “You might want to consider changing your clothes first.”

I look down at the medical pajamas I was given to wear. “Where are my clothes?”

“I sent them to be cleaned. Even though they were black you could see and smell the blood.”

I run my hands over the smooth black pajamas. “This looks okay. I don’t want to look like I wasted time changing my clothing before seeing him.”

“The security cameras will be on and Falcon Station is being streamed by all the major gossip columns in the galaxy. First, because you had a thing with the Agnorrian princess and now because of Keiro and Tiro literally fighting over you. Do you really want to be seen in that?”

“I don’t care,” I say walking out thinking of how ridiculous aliens were with all their cameras everywhere. As I walk through the busy corridors of Falcon Station people are looking at me but not like they were before. They’re looking at me now as if I just won the Galactic Games or something. This gives me confidence and reminds me that it doesn’t matter what I’m wearing. Some species in th galaxy don’t even wear clothing like Dulus.

As I enter Security, I ask one of the many guards to see Keiro, but before I can even finish my request I’m led down an empty hallway and left in front of a room with a blue forcefield. Inside the room, Keiro is lying on the bed. He barely fits on it. His large feet are hanging off from one end and his horns from the other.

The guard leaves us and I just watch Keiro for a minute thinking about what I'm going to say. He obviously hasn't realized I'm there. *I hope the forcefield isn't soundproof.*

“Keiro?”

No movement.

“Keiro.” I try again, “Keiro.” Finally, “Keiro of Folgo!”

He jumps up ready to fight but then relaxes immediately when he sees me. “I moved to Hogo,” he replies as he comes to as close to the forcefield as he dares without hurting himself. His snowy white fur has some new red blood patches. No doubt from his latest fight with Tiro.

“Your blood?” I ask and indicate where he might have been hurt.

“No, yours and Tiro's,” he replies flatly.

“I heard you could have killed him.”

“I could have,” Keiro replies seriously.

“Why didn't you?”

“I may not be of high status in the galaxy but I do have my own set of principles, even when it comes to my *betrothed*. And Doctor Jon assured me that you'd live.”

The way he says, ‘betrothed’ makes me shudder. *Is he angry about that?* “I'm sorry.”

“Well,” he says looking anywhere but into my eyes, “at least I could do the right thing and save you from Tiro.”

“Keiro,” I say, shocked that he assumes that I chose him only because Tiro was so terrible. “That's not why...” before I can finish he interrupts me.

“If you cared about me,” Keiro says, “you would have come back to me or at the very least sent me a message. But I got nothing from you but silence.”

I'm so enraged by his comment I forget to tell him about the ring Bruce had given me. “Well, you didn't contact me

either, then suddenly you and Tiro show up here together to fight. That's a little too much of a coincidence, isn't it?"

"Excuse both of us for being concerned about you being a surrogate for a fucking Octopod," he replies. "Galaxies Gia. What did you think? That I'd hear that news and just say, 'Well, as long as she's happy.'"

"That's funny because I thought you were here for a meeting? Not for me."

"My Koiran friend was kind enough to pretend that we did have a meeting after Tiro and I were arrested by security and you were accused of interspecies jealousy. If Tiro and I had both come here looking for you then you would've looked guilty. Maybe I should've let you look guilty. Then we wouldn't be in this situation."

I want to cry but I won't give him the satisfaction. My heart is breaking. "What happens now then?" I try to keep all emotion from my voice.

"Clearly, by your or GC design or both, I don't even know, we have to get married. We might as well do it here as we cannot make it to Folgo or Hogo before the end of the week."

"This wasn't anything I planned and I don't know anything about weddings. I've only seen one Alliance marriage ceremony and I didn't daydream about doing that with anyone," I admit.

"Koiran weddings aren't like that," he replies.

I wait for him to elaborate but he doesn't.

"You know you have to tell me what's going on. I can't read your mind."

"I know," he says. "I'm still digesting the situation. Look, I'll be let out of here tomorrow morning. I'll clean myself up and then come to your apartment and we can discuss everything."

"Before I leave I want to tell you something," I say.

He finally makes eye contact with me and when my eyes meet his blue icy ones my heart skips a beat.

“I didn’t choose you just to avoid Tiro. Also I wasn’t ignoring you. A Dulu friend gave me a ring because he said I was obsessed with you and the ring almost erased you from my mind.”

“What do you mean, ‘almost?’”

“I kept having weird dreams about Hogo, like it was calling to me. Your name was always on the tip of my tongue, the brink of my memory, but I could never quite get there,” I say and I see his eyes soften toward me. And I want nothing more than to reach out and touch him. After a few seconds, I do reach out my hand, but I only feel the freezing forcefield.

“I want to wipe those tears from your cheeks,” he says. “Don’t cry Gia.”

I wipe my own cheeks. I hadn’t realized that I was crying. “I just don’t want you to resent me for making you marry me.”

“I only resent that it had to come about in this way,” he says after a few seconds. “I came to Falcon Station to ask you to come back to Hogo with me. I came here to offer myself to you because I realized I cannot live without you.”

Now I start crying in earnest because I feel the same way, but I’m afraid to say so out loud, even though I’ve agreed to marry him. I’ve never felt so confused.

Keiro puts his large hands against the forcefield and it ripples and sparks. “Don’t cry Gia. Don’t you want to be together?”

I can’t speak. I just nod. I can’t get ahold of my emotions. I can see he’s getting teary eyed too.

“Gia, go back to your apartment and get some rest. This is very upsetting and I don’t want to talk about it if I can’t comfort you. I’ll come to you in the morning.”

“I don’t want to leave. I can stay here,” I look around for a chair, but there’s nothing but the cold floor.

“No, I don’t need you to stay here and prove anything to me. I know,” he touches his hand to his chest, “that you love me. That’s why I came back for you.”

I start crying again because more than anything I want to believe this really is love. That I, Gia, who was out to sleep with anyone who ever struck my fancy has finally found what everyone else in the galaxy seems to talk about, love with someone who despite all logic is my one and only.

“And it’s not just an obsession? It’s not what humans have for Koirans? You are sure?”

He looks at me sternly. “I am sure. Now go. I will explain everything tomorrow. Goodnight and sleep knowing that soon you will be mine and safe forever.”

I nod and leave with a simple goodnight.



CHIME. Chime. Chime.

I register that someone’s at my door, but I’m so tired. I close my eyes again.

The next thing I know, Keiro is sitting on the side of my bed and he has me in his large muscular arms. “Gia,” he says, “you need to get up.”

“Is this a dream?” I ask. “How did you get here?”

“I’ve access now through GC protocol. Remember, everything according to Koiran customs.”

I let that sink in for a minute and then I urgently sit up. I look into his blue eyes and ask, “What all does that mean?”

He kisses me and his tongue ignites my soul. His large hands hold me close against him and my breasts are pushed up against his muscular chest. In between kisses, he says, “It means many things. And some things you will not like.”

I want to ask him what I won’t like, but he already has one of my breasts out from under my pajamas and is taking it into his mouth. It feels so good. His tongue and mouth sucking and licking. I put my hands on his horns and then move him to do the same to my other breast. When both my breasts are wet from his kisses he moves down my body taking my clothing off with him. Kissing his way down to my wet sex and when he arrives he plunges his mouth all over it with his massive

tongue. “Oh,” I say because I had forgotten how good it feels to be with him, my body is heating up, and I’m on the edge of an orgasm already. I put my hands back on his hard horns to direct him. “Please lick me fast, Keiro.”

“Lick you clean the way you like it?” he asks me.

“Yes, fast like you need to clean me with your tongue.”

“I’ve been dreaming about this for weeks,” he says before he begins moving his large tongue up and down my wet folds already engorged, begging for his touch.

I grab the bedsheets. I can’t trust myself to hold onto his horns because I might break his fantastic rhythm. “Yes, Keiro. That’s it right there. Don’t stop. Oh galaxies, don’t stop with your tongue. Clean me.”

He doesn’t stop. Then I’m coming so hard. I twist and pull on the bedsheets but he easily holds my body to his mouth and I ride out my orgasm, jerking and twisting against him and he licks it all up like he has never eaten a meal in his life.

When I’m calm again he kisses his way back up to my face. When his tongue enters my mouth I taste myself and it’s erotic thinking about what he was just doing. My fingers begin to fumble with his clothing, but he’s impatient and quickly moves away from me to strip. Once he does, he approaches the bed with his cock, large and erect emerging from his white fur. I’m lying on my back, my knees up inviting him into me. Our eyes meet and he puts his hands on my hips, angling me up, entering me with one hard thrust.

“Yes,” I say overwhelmed with the sensation of being filled so quickly and fully. I open my eyes and he’s reading my face, no doubt to see if my reaction was from pleasure or pain. “Pleasure,” I assure him. “All pleasure.”

He doesn’t speak and I hope this is because this also feels so good for him he can’t find the words. Keiro firmly takes my hips then and begins plunging in and out of me. His movements are fast but graceful. My breasts sway with his force and I’m sure I’m going to have bruises on my hips with

how tightly he's holding me but, at the moment, I don't care. This feels amazing and another orgasm building inside of me.

It's not long before Keiro flips me over and begins pounding into me from behind, occasionally slapping my ass, and if I thought the other felt good this is pure ecstasy. When he breaks and then begins licking my ass and vagina I know I'm probably the person screaming out his name, but I'm so overwhelmed with the sensations, I don't care.

“What do you want Gia?”

“I want you back inside of me. I want you to fuck me hard.”

Keiro slaps my ass and then positions himself. He lets his penis skirt around my wet sex. “Tell me again,” he says.

“I want you, Keiro. I want you now and hard. Enter me,” I say reaching back a hand to urge him forward.

He grabs my hand and puts it behind my back as he enters me. He puts his other hand on the nape of my neck and pushed me down. His cock pumping into me from behind and I can't focus on anything but that. I find it so erotic he's taking control like this.

After a while, he takes his cock halfway out of me as I wiggle to try and push him back in. He reaches down and angles me up so that he has a hand on each one of my breasts. He pulls at the nipples as he begins thrusting into me again and says, “You're mine forever, Gia.”

I can't control myself any longer and I orgasm so hard I squirt all over the bed. I never thought that those words would be something I ever wanted to hear, but from him it's all I want to hear, mind, heart, and body. Keiro comes shortly after, his large cock filling me with his hot liquid.

He doesn't remove his penis from me though. Keiro just takes me in his muscular furry arms and lies down on my bed with me on top of him. I close my eyes enjoying every moment of this and he kisses my eyelids.

I snuggle against his clean white fur as he runs a hand through my hair.

“Tell me,” I say, “How do we do this Koiran wedding thing? Are we going to have public sex? If we are I don’t we need to rehearse but I wouldn’t mind more practice. You know, just to be sure.”

CHAPTER

SEVEN

Kairo shifts but still holds me tightly to him then says, clearly ignoring my joke, “Normally there would have been a ten week run up to now with different ceremonies. But obviously that isn’t going to happen because we need to get married this week.”

“When you were going to ask me to return to Hogo with you, is that what you had in mind that we would marry in a traditional Koiran way?”

“No,” he hesitates and I lean up to look at him. “I was going to compromise with you. Do something a bit more human.”

“You would have done that for me?”

“Yes.”

I kiss him sweetly. “Thank you.”

“But that opportunity is gone,” he says unnecessarily.

“Does that make you happy?”

“I don’t know how I feel to be honest. Happy that we are together, without question. Happy that we have no choice in the manner of our relationship because of Tiro’s scheming, makes me not so happy.”

“Why? What’s so terrible about Koiran customs that you don’t want to follow?” I ask becoming worried.

“First and most obviously, Koiran customs aren’t meant for humans in mind. In fact, because of our past relationship

with humans, some customs directly oppose what a human could do.”

“The shifting,” I say.

“Yes, that and more.”

“Well, we’ll have to get around that. You can’t make me Koiran. Can you?”

“No. That’s an ancient human myth. However, what’s not a myth is that a Koiran baby will eat its way out of your womb if left unattended.”

“Say again?”

“It will literally eat its way out of your womb.”

“I’ve heard,” I say as casually as I can, “children are overrated.”

“I told you, you weren’t going to like it,” he says. “But, we’re jumping way ahead of ourselves. We need to plan our wedding to pass the GC officials expectations.”

“Surely that can’t be too difficult,” I say. “No one seems to know much about your people at all.”

“The GC knows. You know cultures can chose to make the information about themselves private if they want. We have always chosen to do that. But those officials have access to all Koiran customs now that this has been decided.”

“Oh,” I say, “but how bad can it be? You’re acting like it’s going to be an Alliance wedding or something.”

“No it’s nothing like having sex in front of your family and best friends.”

“What is it like then? What do I need to do?” I ask wondering if he’s just overreacting, thinking that humans are so fragile they’d never be able to do any alien things.

“I can’t decide which terrible thing to tell you first,” he says.

“Start with the least painful,” I reply.

“All your UCs and assets are now mine,” he blurts out. “That’s why I could walk into your apartment this morning.”

I feel sick. “What do you mean?” I pick up my IC and check my GC account. It’s still there but another name is on the account as an administrator. It’s his name.

“I’m sorry, Gia. I don’t want your UCs, you know that.”

I think back to all of our interactions on Hogo and it’s true he never wanted for anything.

“There’s more to that,” he continues. “After we marry, I’ll give your UCs and assets to your family.”

“But those are my UCs,” I say.

“Yes, but this is Koiran tradition.”

“Can my family give it back to me after our wedding?” I ask.

“No.”

“What nonsense. Why?”

“Because you accepted your new life and with that a new start,” Keiro explains. “I’ll also give my UCs to my parents.”

“What a stupid tradition,” I say and I don’t even care if I’m being racist.

Keiro narrows his eyes at me. “Maybe you should have thought about the consequences of your actions before stating in front of a GC committee that you wanted to marry me. Perhaps if you wanted to be married to a wealthy male you should have chosen Tiro instead.”

I take a deep breath. “I can make UCs after the wedding though, right? And none of that will be taken away.”

“Right.”

“What about my ship and my homes? What about your home?”

“We must start anew.”

“With nothing?”

“It’s not conducive to galactic life,” Keiro admits. “And this isn’t a tradition that many Koirans follow if they don’t live on Folgo, but the GC wants an intergalactic show and you volunteered us, Gia.”

“Are newlyweds on Folgo homeless after marriage then?”

“No, we will be given a sum of UCs by the government to begin our new lives humbly on Hogo.”

“I’ve never done humbly,” I say.

“I know you haven’t. This is why I would’ve rather come to a human compromise.”

“So that you could have my UCs?”

“No, so I wouldn’t have to listen to you complain about how difficult it’s going to be to be poor.”

“I’m not going to complain,” I say.

“I remember your reaction to the hotel in Mångata.”

I dismiss that. “But even to live humbly, we’re going to need a lot of UCs to find a place in Mångata, remember?”

“My government isn’t that poor,” he replies. “We will have enough.”

I’m in total shock. “But all my assets will be given to my family.”

“Yes. It’s a symbolic repayment for giving you life.”

“I’d say it’s more than symbolic. And my parents won’t even notice the extra UCs or assets. So it only hurts me and us.”

“Still it must be done,” he tells me. “But Gia,” he strokes my arm and gently pulls me back toward him, “we will have enough and we will build our new life together. That’s what this is really about. Not having any strings holding us to the past. I want that. And as much as I love what a spoiled brat you can be sometimes, this will be the making of you.”

I understand what he means. I’ve never truly had to test myself in the galaxy. I’ve always had UCs and connections

through my grandmother's company, even as a human. I've never been at risk of losing anything, really. But now all I'll have is my relationship with Keiro and whatever UCs we earn together. "I think I'm up for any challenge." I say as confidently as I can.

"Good," he says. "And I'll try to be as patient with you as I can."

I laugh. "It's not going to be that bad. I know how to make UCs, Keiro."

"I don't doubt that, but I think you underestimate how difficult it's to start from the bottom and work your way up."

"I can do it. I'm not weak," I say. "Which reminds me, what else? You said there were two things I wouldn't like. What is the other one?"

He hesitates.

"Tell me, whatever it is. The sooner I know the better I can prepare."

"You must hunt a *teddi*, kill it, and eat its heart while it's still warm."

"Excuse me?"

Keiro repeats what he said before.

"What is a *teddi*? My translator doesn't know it." Which is odd because my translator is very good.

Keiro grabs my IC and to my horror he doesn't need my code to unlock it. This must be also a part of the Koiran wedding stuff. He then shows me a picture of the cutest little animal I've ever seen. It has big brown eyes and fluffy ears with large paws. It must be nominated as the galaxy's most adorable creature.

"It's so cute," I say.

"You must hunt it down and kill it," he says. "That's the start of a Koiran wedding. It's to prove your worth as a female."

"What? How are we going to do that on Falcon Station?"

Keiro looks at me like I'm a fool. "You're joking right? Do you really underestimate the GC and the galaxy's need for entertainment that much? You know that a *teddi* was already in transit before your trial even began on the off chance that you'd marry me. Our wedding is two-fold for the GC. To show humans that if they flaunt other civilizations' laws and customs they will be punished and secondly to provide entertainment by showcasing marriage traditions from a reclusive planet. A *teddi* will be on the station for our wedding. How are your hunting skills, Gia?"



"So I'M SUPPOSED to wear this beautiful white dress as I hunt down that cute animal, rip it apart with my teeth and eat its heart?" I ask Keiro as he shows me some dresses I might choose to wear.

"Yes."

I want to repeat the words Doctor Jon said to me about Koiran traditions being barbaric, but I resist. I've already insulted Keiro's culture enough this morning. "What happens if I can't catch it?"

"You will have all the time you need to catch it."

"Can I ask for help?"

"Only from your female friends."

"What about Alliance men?" I ask.

"As much I'd like you to include your friends, no, the GC has made it a priority to perform the ceremony like we would on Folgo. I know you only have one female friend. You'll have to make the best of it."

"How am I supposed to kill this adorable animal though? What kind of weapon am I allowed to use? A gun?" I ask thinking I could probably do it with a gun. Just pull the trigger and not think too much about it.

"You will kill it with your hands and your teeth."

"You know I don't eat meat right?"

“I know.”

“I told you the GC is doing this to make an example of you and provide entertainment at yours and humanity’s expense. Just try to be as dignified as you can about it. Then we will go to Hogo and start our new lives. Your twenty seconds of galactic fame will be over then.”

“I’m not going to kill this cute animal with my hands and then just tear into its furry body with my blunt teeth,” I say.

“What do you think the alternative is Gia? And do you think that I made up this tradition myself? I didn’t. I’m just telling you what you have to do.”

“I don’t mean to shoot the messenger here, but honestly, this is a terrible tradition.” I take a deep breath and try to focus. “How long does it usually take the bride to find and eat the *teddi*? And what will you be doing while I do that?”

“The time varies. There’s no average time. I’ll be watching you drinking wine with my friend from a conference room, on Folgo it would be a sacred area.”

I narrow my eyes at him. “You’re going to be drinking while you watch me run around the station with Karen trying to catch and eat a little *teddi*?”

“Yes.”

I push him back.

“I didn’t make these customs up.”



“YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?” Karen asks.

“You have to help me find this little animal as part of the wedding ceremony. Don’t give me that look. I have to do it Karen. And don’t forget I helped you find your husband.” I hold up my IC to show her a picture of a cute Koiran *teddi*.

“What do you do with it once we find it? Present it to Keiro as a gift? Keep it as a pet?”

“I have to kill it and eat its heart.”

Karen gives me a look of horror and takes a step back. From inside the apartment I can hear Jon say, "I told you it was going to be something barbaric."

"Shut up, Jon," Karen and I both say at the same time.

"How are you going to do it?"

"I have to do with my hands and teeth," I tell her.

"Human teeth don't work like that. That's going to be disgusting and long, you trying to bite at flesh like that. Yuck. All it's fur and skin in your mouth."

"The GC hasn't inspected your teeth, Gia," Jon says from the back, then walking forward. "You've got some sharp incisors, as some humans do."

I run my tongue over my incisors, they are as dull as ever.

"If you come to my office, I can make sure they are as sharp as ever in preparation for your marriage. You also have long fingernails which I could make stronger."

I look down at my hands, I have anything but long fingernails, but if Jon is willing to help me, then I will take it. "I'll come by your office after I pick out a dress for myself and Karen." Then looking at Karen, "If you'll agree to help me?"

When she hesitates, I say, "You owe me Karen."

"I know I do," she replies. "I was just thinking about the repercussions on my business."

"Everyone will think you did the right thing by helping out a fellow human and it shows that you aren't the kind of human who thinks you can just flaunt the GC code of conduct," Jon says.

We both give him an annoyed look. But it's Karen who says, "The best thing that ever happened to the galaxy is that humans joined this community to flaunt some of the GC's ridiculous codes of conduct. And don't you forget where the Empire would be without human women." Then looking back at me she says, "Come on, Gia. Let's go find these dresses and kill that adorable *teddi* to satisfy the blood thirsty aliens."

CHAPTER

EIGHT

Me dressed in a long-fitted white gown and Karen in a purple number of the same cut set out in a cordoned off area of Falcon Station to find the *teddi*. What's most annoying is that everyone is watching. Not just on Falcon Station but in the galaxy too. Karen and I are more or less representing humanity here and I'm afraid it isn't going to be something honorable for the history books.

We weren't allowed any kind of tech because apparently, Folgo isn't that kind of place. The only tip that Kerio could give me was that *teddis* like to be near warm places and don't like bright lights. Not much to go on in the area it was given to run. The only good thing is that we were assured that it's not going to be able to get into any of the ventilation shafts.

"We need to look in the shadows," Karen suggests after walking for more than ten minutes and finding nothing.

"Warm shadows," I reply. "Where would that be?" It's strange to be walking these corridors without anyone here. Usually, this is one of the most bustling parts of the Marketplace.

Suddenly, Karen stops, cups her hands to her mouth and starts making a really strange sound like, "Kookoo Kookoo."

I'm speechless.

She continues, "Kookoo, Koo, kooo."

"It's not an owl," I say.

“No, but Keiro said it liked cute noises. That’s such a cute noise.”

“Is it?” I ask.

Then, we see movement. The *teddi*. “Make that owl sound again,” I say. “It’s over there.”

“Kookoo, Kookoo,” Karen says and we slowly walk toward the direction of the *teddi*.

“It’s so cute,” I say as we are no more than five feet away from it. It’s no larger than a chicken. It’s round and it’s sitting on its hind legs looking at us with big brown eyes.

“Is it purring?” Karen asks.

“I don’t know,” I say moving closer. “Don’t stop with the owl sounds.”

Karen doesn’t stop and I move closer and just when I lean down to grab it quickly, it squirms out of my hands and runs away.

“How could you lose it, Gia? It was right there!”

“I’ve never grabbed an animal before. I didn’t realize it was going to squirm out of my hands. I didn’t want to crush it.”

Karen looks at me without expression. “Gia, you’re going to kill it. It doesn’t matter if you crush it.”

She’s right. Still it doesn’t seem right. But then again, none of this seems right. “Come on, make the owl sound again.”

We walk through the corridors trying to find the little guy. And just when Karen doesn’t think she can ‘kookoo’ anymore we find it again. We use the same procedure as we did the last time, but this time I grab it so tightly it screams out.

“I’m hurting it!” I scream. “Oh galaxies! I’m hurting it!”

“Don’t let go. You have to kill it, Gia,” Karen screams back trying to be supportive, but being just as nervous as I am. I’ve no doubt the entire galaxy is taking immense joy in watching the vegetarian humans, who love their planet and animals, freak out over this.

“I don’t think I can do this! Look at its big eyes. He’s looking at me saying, ‘Don’t kill me.’”

“You can’t think like that. It’s an animal, I’m not sure it’s thinking much, but you’re definitely scaring it because it has instincts and it must know you’re going to kill it. So just do it already,” Karen says.

I look into the eyes of the *teddi*. I can feel it’s little heart pounding quickly in my hands. I open my mouth, as I am supposed to kill it with my teeth which Jon sharpened up, but then I hesitate. “I can’t do this. I feel like a monster.”

“You have to do it. Think of the alternative. Do you really want to marry Tiro?” Karen reminds me.

“But look how cute he is!”

“Close your eyes and imagine it’s Tiro stabbing you,” Karen suggests.

I close my eyes and try to do as she advises. I move my mouth closer to the little animal and it bites me before I can bite it. “Ouuuch, it bit me. Am I bleeding?” I don’t want to let go of the *teddi* to check and I need both hands to hold it.

“Bite it back!” Karen says quickly. “Bite it back now, Gia!”

I look at the *teddi* who is bearing its small teeth to me and I try to bite it on the neck and when its fur and flesh are in my mouth I feel so sick.

“Don’t stop. Eat it Gia.”

I can’t help it I start to vomit and I let go of the *teddi*. Then I’m on my knees, heaving from what I just did. Karen is holding back my hair.

“Get all that fur out. You’d think you’d be used to it,” she says the latter quietly. I want to tell her to fuck off but I don’t have the breath to do it. After a few minutes I wipe my eyes and my mouth. I’m sure my makeup is running down my face now.

“Where’s the *teddi*?” I ask.

“Let’s follow the blood trail,” Karen suggests and nods to the small line of red blood on the grey floor.

“Good idea,” I say and we begin following it. “Maybe you should make a different cute noise.”

“I don’t know any other cute noises. I don’t think it’s smart enough to remember I was the one making the owl noise do you?”

I shrug. I don’t know.

Karen cups her hands together around her mouth as we walk and she begins making a barking sound like a dog.

“That’s not a cute sound,” I say.

“What would you suggest? Dogs are cute. I mean come on, man’s best friend and all,” she says.

“And Lyran diplomats,” I add and we both laugh.

“And he named it Gia,” and we continue laughing so hard we have to stop walking. I’m doubled over and my stomach hurts from laughing so much. It feels so good to laugh with Karen about this and my anxiety is lifted a bit when we regain our composure and begin walking again.

“Not a barking dog then,” says Karen. “I know, then she starts, chirp chirp chirp chirp,” and looks at me. “Cute right?”

“Cute,” I agree. Then we begin walking again while she is chirping. The blood trail leads to a dark corner in the Marketplace and it’s not too much longer before we see the reflection of its big eyes. We both corner it. It’s sitting as it was before, on its hind legs looking at Karen. Mesmerized by the sweet sounds.

I gear myself up, *I have to do this. I can do this.* Then I count to three, “One, two, three.” And then I pounce on the *teddi*. It lets out a little scream and then I finish what I started. I swallow back the vomit in my throat as I kill it. When it’s no longer moving, I loosen my grip and look at Karen.

“You have blood all over your face. No reason to stop now. Eat its heart Gia and then we are done with this,” Karen says quickly.

“I don’t know if I can.”

Karen holds out her hand for the dead *teddi*. “Give it to me. I’ll find the heart and put it in your mouth. You just swallow. This is me paying you back for blackmailing you with the Agnorrian sex holo.”

I hand her the dead *teddi*. She turns her back to me, “It’s probably better if you don’t watch this.” I hear gushing and tearing and I see bits of flesh being thrown on the ground. Then Karen turns back around and says, “Close your eyes and hold your nose. It’s not big, I’m going to put it in your mouth. Imagine a grape. You chew it and it will gush some juices then you swallow. Got it?”

“Yes,” I say. “Give it to me.” I close my eyes, hold my nose, and open my mouth in anticipation of the gushy heart.

Karen puts a warm wet odd, shaped ball near my lips and I take it in my mouth. It’s coppery and salty. I have to fight every urge I have to spit it out.

“Chew it,” she commands me and I will myself to do it, clutching my sides to override my natural instincts. Once I penetrate it’s outer muscles the ball bursts with more copper taste. It’s so chewy and all I can think about is how terrible this is.

“Swallow as soon as you’re ready,” Karen tells me.

I swallow but the taste that still lingers. When that doesn’t work I use my fingers to try and claw out the taste from my mouth, forgetting about my long sharp fingernails that Jon enhanced and I end up cutting my mouth. Then, I begin to dry heave.

“You did it Gia,” Karen says. “Try to think of something else.”

“Easy for you to say. You don’t have the taste of dead *teddi* in your mouth.”

“True, I just have its guts all over my hands,” she says.

I look up. “And your dress. You look like you murdered someone.”

“And you look like you ate someone,” she replies. “But come on, let’s deliver the dead corpse back to your husband-to-be so that we can change.”

I take a minute to right myself. Then I pick up what’s left of the *teddi*’s body after Karen ripped through it to find the heart and then we begin walking to the conference room where Keiro, his friend, Jon and Set are waiting for the GC officials. They’ve been watching the entire thing while drinking and eating traditional Koiran food.

“It’s little body is cold,” I say looking down at it. “I’ve never killed anything before.”

“And unless you’re really unlucky you’ll never have to do it again either,” Karen says.

We enter the conference room and I quickly present the dead *teddi* to Keiro who takes it and to my horror eats the rest of it by popping the whole thing in his mouth. Then he leans down to kiss me.

I put my hand on his chest. “You aren’t kissing me with that mouth.”

“You just ate some of it too.”

“But,” I stammer.

“Gia, kiss me. This is part of the ceremony.”

“If you so much as put your tongue in my mouth I will vomit everywhere.”

“I’ll keep my tongue to myself,” he says and then puts his lips on mine and draws me against his muscular furry body. When his lips pull away, he looks down into my eyes and says softly, “You did a good job, Gia. We are halfway to becoming husband and wife.” Then without warning he picks me up as if I weigh nothing and walks out of the conference room.

“Where are you taking me?” I ask, my face half pressed against his warm fur.

“The Mera Hotel.”

“I thought we still had to say some words to fully commit ourselves to one another and finish this for the GC,” I say wondering if I misunderstood the order of things.

“We do. But I’m rearranging things for an hour. Don’t worry, everyone will wait. If anything it’ll add to their anticipation,” he says the last sentence under his breath.

I know this is important to Keiro no matter how it came about so I don’t tell him I don’t care whether people wait or not. I’m still freaked out about eating that *teddi*.

We enter the Mera, the most exclusive hotel on Falcon Station. I wanted to book it for our last night with my UCs before I became a Hogo peasant. The staff almost run toward us.

“Madame Gia, are you hurt? Should we call for a doctor?” One hotel attendant asks.

Another rushes up and says, “We didn’t expect you until later, but your suite is almost ready.”

“It’s ready enough. We only need it for an hour and then we’ll return at the scheduled time,” Keiro informs them. “Also, have Gia’s wedding gown brought from the Marketplace to our room here rather than to her apartment.”

The staff nod and then run off.

Keiro quietly carries me to our suite. It’s a gorgeous set of rooms overlooking a distant nebula. However, I hardly have a chance to enjoy that when he uses the holograph settings to change the room into a stone like cave with furs and dark metal furniture.

“Is this what houses on Folgo look like?”

“Sacred houses yes.”

“Why did you change it?” I ask.

“Because I need to take care of you. You need me now with no distractions of beautiful nebulas or thoughts about expensive furniture.”

“I’m fine,” I say.

He looks into my eyes and says, “You’re not.” Then he starts taking off my bloody white dress. But none of his movements are sexual, they are caring and sensitive. “I’m going to bathe you myself.”

Once I’m completely naked, he leads me into what I suppose passes for a Koiran bathroom. There’s a massive waterfall of water constantly flowing and a large stone bathtub in one corner. The bathtub is definitely big enough to fit Keiro and myself. But first, he puts me under the waterfall shower and then quickly removes his clothing, folding it nicely outside the bathroom.

Then he joins me under the hot water. And to my surprise he just holds me against him, running his hand through my hair. I open my mouth to let the water run in and out of it, removing the taste of the dead animal. Then, I close my eyes and enjoy the feeling of his body against mine and the hot water running over us.

I didn’t know that I needed this until now.

A few minutes pass and then he says, “Gia, everything’s going to be okay.”

Five, no ten minutes ago I would’ve told him that I’m fine. But that’s not true. Although I didn’t know until now that he’s right. I’m just going through the motions but I’m absolutely not fine. I’m scared to be giving away all my UCs, even if it’s just back to my family. And even more than that, I’m scared to be committing myself to a male who I don’t even know that well, but who I think I love. I’ve never been in love before, so I don’t even know if this is really love. What I’m doing is completely crazy, although all the great human writers say making illogical choices is a sure sign of love. But will this love last?

As he continues to hold me a caress my hair, he continues to tell me that everything’s going to work out. And then despite my mind trying to be strong, I begin to cry. I don’t want to because I’m not a crier. I don’t cry, but something about this moment and him caring so much for me just has melted me completely.

“And I killed a cute animal and ate its heart,” I say sorrowfully, and then realize too late I said that part out loud.

“I know,” he says. “I’m sorry you had to do that.”

“I want to erase that memory forever,” I say. “I killed that cute animal.”

“It wasn’t a real *teddi*.”

“What?” I look up at him.

“The *teddi* that was being transported from Folgo died on the way over. That was a replica. I didn’t want to tell you because the GC needed their show for the galaxy and you and Karen really gave it to them. But you don’t need to feel guilty, it was a hologram.”

I push him. “You should’ve told me! I thought I killed something.”

“You didn’t.”

“But everyone on Earth thinks I did too.”

“They’ll forget about it until the next scandal comes up,” he assures me. “Plus, we won’t be living on Earth. Our home is Hogo.”

“And where are we going to live?” I cry. “We have almost nothing but handouts from your government.”

“My boss’ house, you remember the pink one. It’s big enough for us and some children. I’ve petitioned for it from the Koiran government explaining the housing situation on Hogo and I believe they’ll give us the necessary UCs. And I’ve my job there.”

“And your boss. He still hasn’t sold it to anyone else?”

“No, I told him you’d be back,” Keiro says.

“Why would you say that?” I ask looking up at him as the water splashes around his horns.

“Because we mated for life. That’s why Tiro’s scent was removed. It wasn’t his scent driving me mad, it was you all along.”

Relief washes over me. “You’re sure?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”

“How do you not know we are mated, Gia?”

“Because I’ve never felt this way about anyone. Jon suggested it might be love. Why didn’t you tell me you mated with me until now?”

“I shouldn’t have had to tell you. I thought you would have felt it too. Even if you wanted to deny it mentally, physically your body temperature rises when I’m around, your heartbeat faster, and suddenly you’re aroused by my presence. Don’t you feel those things?”

“I do, but I didn’t know that’s what it meant. I thought I had a fever. You should have told me,” I say.

“I don’t know if you remember this, but on the *Bluebird* I did tell you we were mated, but when I saw your expression at my words, I backtracked. I wanted to wait for you to feel it too,” he says softly.

“I felt like dying when I left you. But no one knows anything about Koiran culture. My friend Bruce told me I was obsessed with you only because you were Koiran and that’s why he gave me the ring.”

Keiro lightly taps on my forehead. “But your body knew that you had left your mate and it was screaming out to you.”

“And Tiro?” I ask. “Did he know that we are mated?”

“Of course Lyrans are well-aware of Koiran mating habits. We’ve been rivals for centuries. He knew when he entered the room what was going on. He would’ve smelled it. Mating is different than just sex.”

“And he still wanted to take me as his wife,” I say, shocked.

“And he would’ve tried to “cure” you of me with Lyran medicine. Lyrans and Dulu think they can override nature.

They can't." He strokes my hair. "But in the end, it all worked out."

"Ha. Yes, it all worked out," I say mockingly. "You have a criminal record with the GC for fighting with a Lyran diplomat, twice, I have eaten possibly the cutest animal known to man with my best friend and now I'm almost without any UCs and literally the clothes on our back, and tomorrow I'm leaving to live the rest of my life on one of the most undesirable places in the galaxy. Yes, it's all worked out."

"Gia," he says, swinging me up into his arms. "We are mates. We have each other. There is nothing more we need. We will have a clean start as it's meant to be. You will flourish with me and I with you. Trust the Koiran method."

"A clean start," I repeat. "I don't know if I really deserve that," I say more to myself than to him.

"Throw out this guilt for whatever it's for, I don't even care, nor should you. Every newly married Koiran gets a clean start, no matter what. That's why we give up all our material goods. Our clean start begins with our mate. Our true lives begin now. Whatever you did before with any Agnorrian princess or Lyran diplomat is dead and buried. There's just us from this moment and you just like anyone else have earned the right to a fresh start."

"But my past still exists with other people and on holos. It's the 27th century, nothing disappears anymore, no matter how good this Koiran tradition is."

"It doesn't matter what evidence of our old lives is out in the galaxy. All that matters now is what you believe. What is between us. Do you believe we can start over now with clean now?"

"I want to believe we can, of course, I do. I just hope that I can live up to your expectations. I've never had a husband. I don't know how to be a wife and certainly how to live without UCs. And I won't know what to say when people will remind me of who or what I did before."

“We are here to help each other and we will figure out ways. I’ve never had a wife either,” he pinches one of my butt cheeks. “But I suspect we will learn that together too.” After a few minutes of silence with the only sound the water falling, he starts caressing me in earnest and with intent.

CHAPTER

NINE

“Don’t we need to get back to finish the wedding?” I say as Keiro deliciously kisses my neck. “I don’t want to be on the GC’s naughty list.”

“All we need to do is drink wine out of the same cup in front of them. They’re all drinking and having fun on our UCs. They can wait,” Keiro says hungry desire in his voice. Then to my surprise, he leaves the shower taking me with him and we both get into the enormous stone bath.

He puts one hand on the small of my back and guides me to float on the water. It feels wonderful to be weightless in the hot water. I open my eyes and look at my reflection in an ancient mirror above the bath.

“Watch us, Gia,” Keiro commands.

I obey. His free hand touches my breasts, one by one, tantalizing my nipples, while his mouth moves along my skin, leaving goosebumps as he passes, savoring the exposed parts of my body floating on top of the water. I watch in the mirror as I open my own mouth and bite my lip with pleasure. It’s erotic watching my reactions to him. My big alien Koiran touching my body so tenderly in this crude cave. Still holding me, he maneuvers his head between my legs. His ice blue eyes meet mine in the reflection above us.

“Don’t close your eyes. I’m going to lick you up and down, devouring you and I want you to watch.”

He kisses the top of my thighs then takes his free hand and runs it through my pubic hair. “I’ve thought about this

gorgeous patch of hair too many times after you left,” he says.

Before I can reply, his large tongue is lightly teasing my clit and my heart stops.

“We are mates,” he says between licks and sucks. *He really is devouring me.* “The more we are together, the more pleasurable sex becomes, Gia.”

“And if we aren’t having regular sex, what happens then?” I ask breathlessly.

“We become ill,” he replies and puts a finger inside of my vagina.

I arch my back with pleasure.

“But that won’t happen. Because I will always want you and I hope that I will always be attractive to you too.” He begins moving his finger in and out while holding eye contact with me in the mirror above.

“I want you to lick me, Keiro,” I say. Then I put my hands on his horns, although he needs no guiding. I watch in the reflection as his head moves back and forth causing ripples in the water in the bath. His tongue feels so good and completely in line with the warm water around me. My nipples are hard from the cooler air and when I look at my reflection in the mirror I feel like I’m looking at a video of an old painting, one of a beautiful woman making love to Pan or some other Greek god who doesn’t have a human form. *Maybe those myths were based on aliens not gods?*

Keiro knows exactly where to lick me with his gorgeous Koiran tongue. It’s not long before I’m writhing in the bath. Moaning and saying his name, “Yes Keiro, Yes, don’t stop.”

He grabs my ass to steady me, but he doesn’t stop. His whole face is between my legs and he really is consuming me. Watching him in the reflection, I feel he gets as much satisfaction from this as I do.

I squeeze my thighs together as the buildup of erotic pleasure begins to ripple through my body, just as unruly as the water moving around me. I want to watch myself in the

mirror, but it feels too good and I must close my eyes as I ride it out, but I don't loosen my grip on Keiro's horns.

When I open my eyes again, Keiro is kissing his way around my thighs and rising, standing so that his waist is perfectly level with my vagina. He doesn't speak, but I open my legs wider, inviting him. He pulls me closer to him and impales me on his massive penis. There's some extra friction because of the water, but I don't care. I float with my hands above my head, to keep myself from being submerged he moves my body against his cock with the help of the momentum in the water. It's mind-blowing all the sensations, the sound of the water in my ears, his penis stretching me and the extra friction of the water.

Keiro looks down at me, his blue eyes now dark with desire. In and out. Forcefully, and then, without warning he begins to shift into his human form.

I turn away. I don't like to watch him mutate his body.

"No, watch me, Gia," he commands. "I am your mate. I am both an alien and human."

I obey. I watch him shift. His bones and skin contort again. The skin goes inside out and then loses its fur. A clear film covers him but he's human now. I feel like a different male is thrusting in and out of my most intimate parts. Not my Koiran. It's a very strange sensation and I remember I felt the same when he shifted during sex before. It's like having sex with two different men at once.

Keiro is looking down at me with the same blue eyes and I can feel his cock is the same too.

"Don't you love me like this too?" he asks as he pounds into me harder than before as if he is trying to prove he is just as strong in this form.

I remember that this is important to him. That privately he does like to be in his human form and I don't mind, in fact in some ways I would say it's the best of both worlds, galactically speaking. I watch him move in and out of me.

Alternating my view between the reality and the reflection of the mirror.

All of these thoughts and sensations become so all encompassing, the physical pleasure, the emotional reassurance that this is the right path for my life and both familiar and alienness of my surroundings. I close my eyes and let them wash over and engulf me. At the same time, Keiro orgasms inside of me with heavy satisfactory groans.

Keiro holds me close to him in his large human form, his ice blue eyes search mine. “I want to say my vows in this form. I think it’s only right that I split the ceremony.”

I hadn’t expected that.

“You’re disappointed?”

“I’m only surprised.”

“You are marrying all of me.”

I lean up to kiss him and he meets me halfway. “I find both of your forms exquisite. It’s just always a surprise to me. I’ll get used to it.”

My words must have reassured him because then, without warning, he lifts me out of the bath and guides me into a little alcove that is a drying room. It literally looks like a wall of red hot coals. *Folgo is not messing around when it comes to the cave man feel.* And I think that if I never visit there, I’ll still live a very happy life. I don’t like roughing it in nature and I’d never want to experience living in a cave, not even a modernized one.

Once we are clean and dry he puts new clothing on, ceremonial robes not unlike his others but in a much smaller size as he’s in his human form. Then he helps me into the dress from the Marketplace. It’s made of the most beautiful maroon colored silk and it feels like rose petals against my skin. I can’t help but rub my palms against the fabric of the skirt.

Keiro watches me and says, “I’m glad you like it.”

“It feels so soft and sleek.”

“It represents the female in the marriage as the flower; beauty, foundation, and the bringer of life.”

“What do your robes represent?” I ask.

“The caretaker of the flower,” he says and points to an emblem on his robes. I assume it’s some kind of gardening equipment. Not the most romantic thing but he’s a shapeshifter, so I’ll let ‘gardener,’ go.

“I want to put on some makeup,” I say.

“No,” he reaches out a hand to stop me now. “I would like us to marry like this.”

“But the whole galaxy will be watching.”

“Yes, but we’re coming to this marriage clean, remember? I want to marry you exactly the way that you ‘ll look every morning and every evening I share a bed with you. I’m marrying you Gia, not your public image. Not what you wished you naturally looked like.”

“Okay, okay,” I concede. “You’ve convinced me. I may never wear makeup again when you put it like that.”

Keiro gives me a smile. “I highly doubt that but just like with my shifting, either way, you’re mine and I think you’re the most fantastic female in the universe. But right now, for me, I want to marry you in front of the whole galaxy just like this.” He takes my hand in his and we walk out of our suite. Through the corridors of the Mera Hotel and back to the conference room. Strangers actually smile and congratulate us on our nuptials as we pass.

“I’ve never felt like this before,” I admit.

“Felt like what?” he asks.

“Like I belong with another being.”

Keiro stops suddenly.

I stop too and look up at him. He brushes my long brown hair behind my ears with his hands and then cups my face. “You will always belong with me.” Then he leans down and kisses me. His tongue still tasting slightly of me enters my

mouth and I allow him to remind me of his lovemaking in the bath. I put my arms around him and pull him closer. He breaks off the kiss, but I don't let go.

“We must finish the wedding and then we are free from any GC requirements and can spend all night kissing,” he says.

I reluctantly let go of him. He takes my hand as he did before and we walk towards the conference room where everyone is waiting.

As we enter, all eyes are on us. Wine is being served and Karen, wearing a dress still stained with blood makes a toast when she sees us, “To the bride and groom, thank you for remembering you weren't married yet and that you had to come back.”

“To the bride and groom,” is echoed by everyone through the room and glasses are raised towards us.

I've never felt like this before. I've never felt so cared for or loved. Not just by Keiro but by all these people here. This strange group of aliens I've gotten to know on Falcon Station, and I didn't realize until now how much I'll miss them on Hogo.

Before I let those thoughts overtake me, Keiro and I are given a large ceremonial cup of wine. I normally do not drink alcohol so I've been assured that there is no alcohol in it. Then the only other Koiran male in attendance, still in his snow beast form announces that Keiro and I should join him in the center of the room and all our friends and the GC officials are to make a circle around us. I smile up at Keiro when we take our places. Then Keiro nods to his friend and he begins the ceremony. I expect no surprises here. Keiro has told me it's just a short blessing.

“Friends from the galaxy today we recognize the mating of Keiro of Hogo and Gia Rissi also of Hogo. Keiro, please take your mate's hands in yours.”

Keiro gives the wine cup to his friend. Then he takes both of my hands in his. His ice blue eyes are sparkling with delight and I wonder if mine look the same. In this moment I couldn't

be happier. And what's strange I would've never guessed a year ago this would've have been what I actually desired the most.

Keiro's friend is listing off what is expected of a Koiran husband and wife, even if I'm a human and we are living on Hogo. But I can't concentrate on what he's saying. All I can think about is the man before me. The man who has only had sex with me. My man who was so romantic he actually let me go. And then he patiently waited for me to return to him in my own time and then when he couldn't wait any longer, he sought me out without prejudice, well without too much prejudice. He loves me and I love him. We are mated, married, and will be together forever. I realize now that I never wanted this before because I hadn't met him yet. *That's how it happens. You meet that one person against all the odds in the galaxy and then you wonder how you were ever the singleton you were before.*

"Gia?" the other Koiran says.

"Yes?"

"Do you accept these terms of marriage to Keiro?"

"What? Oh, yes. Yes I do."

"Keiro do you promise to do these things for Gia?"

"Yes."

"Then take the cup of renewal," he says handing the large ceremonial cup to Keiro.

Keiro says, "You hold the cup too, Gia."

I grasp hold of it and make eye contact with Keiro across the moving dark liquid.

"Gia, I pledge you my faithfulness to show to you the same kind of love as you show me, and to love you as a part of myself because from this moment on we shall be renewed as one. Accept me by drinking from this cup."

I look at the liquid and hesitate.

Keiro whispers, "I swear Gia there is no alcohol in this."

I look at the wine again and then close my eyes and drink. I'm pleasantly surprised. It's water made to look like wine. I open my eyes and smile at Keiro.

"Now you must say something to me. From your heart."

What? I think, but then I get control of myself. I close my eyes to think fast. I open them a few seconds later and say, "Today, I'm honored to make my life forever yours and build my dreams together with yours and with Hogo, a new civilization in the galaxy. Accept me by drinking from this big cup."

"Big cup?" he whispers.

"Drink," I reply, smiling.

Keiro drinks from the large ceremonial cup and then we both hand it back to his Koiran friend officiating the ceremony.

"Then I, on behalf of all the witnesses here, proclaim you to be husband and wife, mated for your mortal lives. Today you were reborn as one and the galaxy will always see you that way from this moment forward. Congratulations."

Our guests surrounding us then move in to congratulate us and more toasts are made. Keiro is given a glass of real wine and I have water. It's not long before I figure out that Set, Karen, and Jon hit the wine pretty hard while I was in the bath with Keiro. Even the GC officials seem intoxicated. When they begin playing drinking games, I think it's time for us to say 'goodnight.'

Keiro and I make our exit and head back to the Mera Hotel. Tomorrow we will be gone. I hate goodbyes so I'd rather have the memory of seeing my friends at my wedding and not an awkward early morning goodbye.

The hotel staff is ready for us this time and we are escorted to our suite. As we enter, it's no longer the Folgo cave, it's a modern suite with all the amenities and the view of the nebula.

"I knew you would want it this way for your last night here," Keiro says.

“The only view in the galaxy I want right now is you. Come here and kiss me. Make me yours again and again. You’re all I care about now, my lover, my mate, my husband.”

Keiro pulls me into his strong embrace and says softly as he kisses around my ear, “My wife, Gia.”

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading the final installment of the Falcon Station Series.

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(Conclusion to Falcon Station Series)

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I want to thank Ms. Alma Nilsson for creating the world from which I am borrowing a station as well as some aliens. Now with her consent, I used Falcon Station, located on the edge of the Alliance Empire, which Ms. Nilsson introduced in book eight of her Renascence Alliance Series, *The Disciple of the Alien Goddess of Home*.