



When She's
READY

READ ME ROMANCE

AUTHOR OF ICE PLANET BARBARIANS

RUBY DIXON

WHEN SHE'S READY

A SCI-FI ALIEN ROMANCE NOVELLA

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WHEN SHE'S READY

To get amnesty on a remote farm planet, ex-con Tassar has to marry an alien – specifically, a strange looking creature called a ‘human’. When he sees gorgeous, delicate Leilani, though, all of his plans change. He wants more than just a marriage of convenience. He wants her forever, but only when she’s ready.

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PART I

TASSAR

“Explain to us again how this works.”

I cross my arms and watchfully study the male across the table from me and my friend, Vordigar. The tiny food service restaurant we’re seated in is run-down and dingy, and the protein chips we ordered nearly as dry and tasteless as the fermented brew. On Risda III, though, there aren’t a lot of options for restaurants. In fact, this is the only one, and it has all of three tables. The farm planet on the outer rim isn’t very populated, which means the supply depot functions as spaceport, social gathering spot, and community center. If I look out the window, I can see the large, sprawling manor that houses the lord of this planet...and not much else. Lots of fields full of green crops and endless rolling hills.

It’s a far cry from the red and bleak atmosphere of Haven, but I’ll take it. I’d rather be anywhere than on a prison planet. I know Vordigar feels the same way. This isn’t ideal...but it’ll do.

Jutari clears his throat and toys with his glass of brew. He glances at us, then over at the window, where his fragile mate watches, their child in her arms. His hard expression softens for a moment as he gazes upon her, and then he looks over at

us. “Leilani’s a human, just like my mate Chloe. She’s one of about fifty of them that arrived six months ago as part of an amnesty program.”

“Yes, but why here, and why now?”

Jutari points at the window, to the massive house on the hill. “Lord va’Rin mated a human, you know. Bunch of planetary lords lost their keffing minds when they heard that, but he wouldn’t be budged. Said she was his and that was all there was to it, and if they had a problem, they could go keff themselves.” His lips twitch with amusement. “His family’s old and has a lot of power on Homeworld, so they let it be. But then a bunch of humans got rescued recently, and Homeworld decided to dump them here on the edge of the galaxy where they could be quietly forgotten.”

Vordigar’s lip curls slightly. “Humans?”

I grunt. I’ve heard about humans—they’re an intelligent species from a Class D planet, which means it’s off limits. They supposedly are hot commodities on the black market, and lots of females get stolen from their homes, never to return. Once a human’s come into contact with the rest of the universe, they can’t be returned home. As a Class D planet, no one in the Interplanetary Alliance is allowed first contact, so I always wondered what the government did when they confiscated the contraband humans.

I guess they dump them on backwater farm planets like this one.

Jutari takes another sip of his brew and continues. “Lord va’Rin didn’t want all the humans living at his house so he parceled out farms to them and got them set up out of his own pockets. It’s been a mess ever since. People are trying to steal the farms from the females, and others have been forcefully kidnapping them or getting rid of them to take over their land. Heard rumor that one female was forced to marry a ssithri, and then he killed her and kept the land. Basically it’s a shitshow and it’s not safe for a female alone.”

I lean back in the rickety wooden chair, scowling. Even on the far ends of the universe, it never fails. People are assholes

no matter where you go. “So this Leilani wants a mate to protect her land and keep her safe? Why doesn’t she ask lord whoever to find her a male?”

“She doesn’t trust him,” Jutari says. “She thinks he’ll go for the simplest solution, which would be to marry her off to a neighbor. Hers has already petitioned to marry her, but she doesn’t like him. Leilani trusts Chloe, though. She trusts another human to help her.”

I glance over at the female at the window. She’s the first human I’ve seen and if they all look like that, this is a bad keffing idea. Jutari’s mate is tiny and slender. I doubt she even reaches his shoulder. She’s pale with a dark mane and looks so fragile that I’m surprised she hasn’t snapped under his touch. I don’t like the thought of having a mate I can break in bed, but I guess this won’t be a real mating after all. It’s for convenience. It gives her someone to protect her farm, and me a way to ensure I don’t get sent back to the prison planet.

That’s all it is.

“And that’s why we’re here?” Vordigar sounds displeased.

“Yes. I figure the three of you can decide who gets together, and we can work on finding a bride for the other...” Jutari’s voice trails off as Vordigar gets to his feet. “Where are you going?”

“I’m out,” Vordigar says. “Tassar can have the human female.”

“It’s the safest way to stay here,” Jutari warns.

Vordigar just claps me on the shoulder. “Which is why she belongs to Tassar here. I’ll take my chances elsewhere.”

I study the big male as he heads out the door. Vordigar served in the wars with me and got sent to the same prison planet I did. He’s a good man, but I know why he’s leaving. He doesn’t want a human female to take one look at his acid-scarred face and skin and recoil in horror.

Can’t say that I blame him. It’s hard to see people flinch at the sight of you. Still, it clears the path for me. I don’t have

many options left, and this will work well enough, I suppose. I grunt acknowledgment. “She...knows I’m a convict, right?”

At the window, Chloe turns to look at us. “Leilani’s fine with it, Tassar. She knows Jutari’s one and how good he is to me.” And her skinny human face lights up with a smile, as if this answers everything.

Jutari drains his brew. “We told her you were a prisoner of war and that’s why you were at Haven.”

The look he gives me is a careful one, and we both know the reality behind the situation. Just because I didn’t get freed after the Threshian war doesn’t mean I don’t belong in prison or that I’m a good male. I’m still a killer. I just happened to get caught up in the wrong side of the war and spent the last several years on a prison planet, until I slipped into a box of recycled trash that was taken off-world and Jutari’s pirate brother Kivian picked me up and brought me here.

All I know is I don’t want to go back. Most people don’t last more than a few years at Haven, and I’d already been there for far too long. “You’re sure this will work?” I ask Jutari skeptically.

“I assure you it will,” he says. “Lord va’Rin loves his human. He’s going to look the other way when it comes to your record as long as you keep your human happy.”

Keep the human happy. Right. I look at Jutari’s all-too-breakable human mate again and try to imagine taking something as fragile like that in my arms and keffing it. The thought isn’t appealing in the slightest. “Not sure about that,” I admit.

“It’s easy. Do things to make her happy. Help out around the farm. And humans are big on kissing.”

“Kiss-ing?” I ask, the word unfamiliar. “What is this?”

“It’s putting your mouth on her mouth and touching tongues.”

“Touching...tongues?” I look at Chloe and imagine Jutari doing such a thing to her, and the thought is ridiculous. “I’m pretty sure that violates a sanitary law or two.”

“Several of them,” Jutari agrees, and he looks utterly pleased at the thought. “Humans don’t care about those kinds of things. They’re very big on touching and kissing. You’ll see what I mean.”

I’m not sure I agree, but I say nothing.

Chloe makes a happy little sound at the window and bounces her large baby on her hip as she looks back at us. “She’s here! She’s just outside! Get ready.”

To my surprise, Jutari grabs a handful of my tunic and hauls me up from my slouch. “Sit upright. Straighten your clothes. Don’t scowl. And be nice to her.”

All this to impress a human? I brush his hand away and it’s on the tip of my tongue to tell him to go kef himself, when the door to the tiny restaurant opens and a cloaked figure steps inside. A split second later, the hood on the cloak drops and I see the female that’s going to be my mate.

Well, well, well.

This...is promising.

She doesn’t look much like Jutari’s little Chloe. Instead of Chloe’s sickly pale, this female’s skin is a warm, golden brown. Her face is round, her eyes dark, and the mane that falls down her shoulders is wavy and long and a thick, rich shade of black. She’s taller than Chloe, and where Jutari’s mate is slim and fragile, this one has a thicker figure and ample, rounded hips and breasts.

Oh yes, I think to myself. Now I’m definitely interested.

And I grin, utterly pleased.



LEILANI

I’m nervous.

I feel silly for being anxious about the meeting today. I have all the power, I remind myself. I’m the one in control of

the situation. If I say I don't want to get married, I won't get married. It's as simple as that.

Chloe's smiling as I enter the solitary little restaurant in Risda III's spaceport. She's holding her daughter Kivita, and the baby's so big that it looks like it belongs to a stranger and not this petite woman. But then I see Jutari, Chloe's mate, and I remember that she married a giant. A big, blue giant with horns and a tail. Of course her baby's big.

She greets me at the door and touches my hand. "If you don't want to go through with this, just say so."

I nod at her, butterflies in my stomach. Truth is, I'm not entirely sure I do want to go through with it. I've been on my farm alone for six months and while sometimes it's lonely, it's all mine. I don't have to worry about anyone else bothering me or telling me not to talk. But then I think about my neighbors, and how often I've seen them scoping out the edges of my land as if it's theirs. I think about how unsafe they make me feel when they stare at me in town. I think about how Annabelle died because someone killed her over her land.

"I'm fine," I tell Chloe. And I will be. I'm strong. I can handle this.

So I lower my hood and straighten my shoulders, looking around the restaurant for my husband-to-be. For a moment, I think he's not here. That he's stood me up because the only man in the room other than Jutari is...gorgeous.

He's flat-out beautiful.

I was stolen from Earth three years ago. In that time, I've seen a lot of ugly aliens. There's froggy races, and reptilian-looking races, and lots of races with sharp, scary teeth. I haven't run into an alien that I ever thought was attractive, and I resigned myself to the fact that I was going to marry someone I wasn't sexually attracted to. A loveless marriage is better than a shallow grave, though, and I'll do what it takes to protect my farm.

I didn't expect a gorgeous hunk of an alien.

Jutari is from a race of aliens called “mesakkah” and I knew that my husband-to-be would be one, too. He’s a distant relative who escaped a prison planet, where he’s been for the last few years due to some messy alien war that ended badly. I don’t care that he’s a convict. That just means he’ll intimidate my neighbors. And because he’s mesakkah, I knew he’d be tall and blue and horned like Jutari, but...whoa.

I was not prepared for what I’m seeing before me.

The man I’m supposed to marry is tall. He’s about the same height as Jutari, but his horns sweep higher, which makes him look even taller. His head is shaved close, dark bristles shadowing his scalp. His shoulders are massive and broad, covered in tattoos and bulging with muscle. His thighs are as big around as my not-very-small waist and I swear I’ve never seen a man so overtly masculine and mouthwateringly built. Even his face is appealing. His expression is stony, his brow hard with ridges that sweep into the arching horns. The eyes that regard me are intelligent, though, and his nose is large and strong, and he’s got the prettiest, fullest mouth I’ve ever seen on a man.

And he’s smiling at me as if he likes what he sees.

My knees feel weak. This has to be a mistake. I thought the man I’m supposed to be marrying is desperate and that’s why he needs a bride? This delicious blue testosterone feast could have any woman he wanted. I’m not sure why he’s getting stuck with me.

As humans go, I’m unexciting. If he’s expecting someone like Chloe, I have to be a disappointment. I’m tall where she’s short, and I’m robust where she’s dainty. Robust is maybe a kind word. Let’s just say all the calories I eat gravitate towards tits and ass...and waist, and thigh. Strong, yes. Delicate flower like Chloe, no.

Maybe this is a mistake, though. I glance down at the name I’ve written on my hand so I wouldn’t forget. “Did Tassar not show up for the wedding?”

Chloe’s brows furrow. She shifts her large daughter on her hip. “What do you mean?” She glances backward, looks at the

two men, and then back at me. “He’s right there.”

“That’s him?” I whisper, still astonished. “That’s Tassar?”

“I can hear what you’re saying, humans,” the man calls out. He crosses his arms over his chest and just looks amused.

Jutari, meanwhile, goes to his wife’s side and takes the baby from her arms, pressing a dotting kiss to his chubby daughter’s cheek. “Is there a problem?” he asks.

“No,” I manage to squeak out. “I just wasn’t expecting...”

“An alien?” Tassar asks.

I wasn’t expecting you to be sexy, I want to say aloud, but I shake my head. “I guess I’m not sure what I was expecting. I’m Leilani.”

He inclines his head at me, those shockingly large horns tilting as he does. “Tassar sol’Irian.”

I lick my suddenly dry lips and try to focus. This is for my farm, not for anything else. This is so I can keep my freedom. I need to concentrate. “So you want to marry me? For protection in case the authorities come looking for you?”

He moves closer, taking a few slow steps in my direction. The floors of the run-down restaurant creak under the weight of his boots, and out of the corner of my eye, I can see his tail twitch. “That was the original idea, yes.”

“What do you mean, original idea?”

A smile curves his mouth as he leans in. “I mean I’m seeing benefits to this mating that I didn’t see before, little one.”

I can’t decide if I want to flush or slap him across his pretty, pretty mouth. I’m not little by anyone’s standards, and I can’t decide if it’s an insult or a compliment. Either way, it makes me nervous. “I have rules to set before we head to the registrar.”

“Rules?” His tail twitches, close to my leg as if closing the space between us.

I cross my arms and try to glare up at him, determined to look fierce. “Yes, rules. Two rules specifically. If you don’t like them, I’ll find myself another groom.”

I mean, sure, whoever I get next won’t be smoking hot, but that might be a good thing. It’ll sure be less distracting. But I find myself hoping he goes along with my suggestions. Not just because he’s pretty, but because he’s utterly massive and at seven feet tall, he’s bound to intimidate my unpleasant neighbors.

Tassar lifts his chin at me. “Tell me these rules and I’ll let you know if they’re agreeable or not.”

Arrogant man. I flick a finger out to count. “One. I get to talk as much as I want. You can’t ever tell me to be quiet or try to force me into silence.”

“Done.” He’s still staring at my finger. Tassar reaches out and touches his finger to mine, and I realize he’s only got three fingers and a thumb, all of them far, far bigger than mine. “What is your next rule?”

I clear my throat, my cheeks heating. I sort of expected an argument about the talking rule, or at least a few questions. “Oh, uh, rule number two?” I flick my second finger out and I wonder if he’s going to touch it, too. “No sex.”

He looks at me. “No deal. I want sex.”

I can feel my face getting hotter by the moment. “That’s not part of the deal. This marriage is so you can hide out and so I can protect my farm.”

Tassar leans in, his deep voice dropping to a whisper. “Doesn’t mean we can’t have some toe-curling sex.” He takes my hand in his and touches my fingers as if studying them. His hand is callused and huge, and for some reason, the sight makes heat pool between my thighs, my pulse throbbing. “Do you have five little toes, too?”

Oh damn, he should not sound so fascinated. “I...why does that matter?”

“It doesn’t. I’m merely curious about my mate.” And he lifts my hand to his mouth as if he’s going to nibble on my

fingertips.

I snatch my hand out of his grasp, because the flush in my cheeks has moved lower, and my entire body feels lit up with arousal. “This is a marriage of convenience.”

“And?” He smiles.

“Sex isn’t supposed to be on the plate.”

“But it is now.” And he gives me another confident smile, as if it’s already been decided.

Suddenly nervous, I try to think of a way around this, a way to keep control. “No sex until I’m ready, then.”

“Done,” he says, just as quick to agree.

“Wait,” I say, panicked. He can’t agree just like that. “I might not be ready for a long time. Maybe ever.”

Tassar reaches out and takes my hand in his again. He turns it palm up, and then traces one big finger down the center of my palm. I feel that small touch all the way to my core and have to bite back a gasp. “Then it’s my job to make you ready.”

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PART II

TASSAR

Two hours later, we leave the registrar's office, our names recorded as "Leilani, human refugee, and her mesakkah mate, Tassar." The license is electronically approved and filed by Lord va'Rin's bored clerk and he doesn't even so much as ask for identification checks beyond a thumb print. I had mine repatterned after I escaped to hide my identity, and if the clerk had bothered to check deeper, he'd have noticed that my records are rather alarmingly blank. But he just yawns, wishes us luck, and then schedules a follow-up at Leilani's farm a week from today.

"A follow-up?" I ask my female—since she's mine now. "Why a follow-up?"

"Because my safety is important," she tells me. "They're going to make sure you're not abusing me, that's all." Leilani gives me a pert look. "The moment you lay a finger on me, I'm poisoning your food, just so you know."

I chuckle. "What if it's a good finger?" I flirt. "And you want it laid on you?"

I like the way her cheeks darken and her expression gets flustered. It's clear this little human doesn't have much

experience with men. “You know what I meant. Don’t pretend to misunderstand.”

“I would never hurt a female,” I tell her, and I mean it. The thought is sickening. “You are safe with me.”

“Unless you want sex,” she replies tartly, not looking in my direction as she approaches her vehicle, an air-cruiser with a large bed for hauling goods. “Then I’m not safe.”

“Not until you’re ready,” I remind her. “That’s what we agreed on.”

“You’re going to be waiting a long time,” Leilani says.

I don’t mind. I want her to be comfortable around me. If it takes a week, or a month, or a year, I’m content to wait. After all, I just escaped a prison and before that, a prisoner of war camp on an alien planet. Sex hasn’t been high on the list of demands in a long, long keffing time. I can be patient.

But I will have her eventually. Even now, as we get into the cruiser, I’m memorizing things about her for the next time I jerk my cock. I watch as she gets into the air-cruiser and taps the button for the programmed route with a delicate touch. I watch as she tucks a long strand of hair behind one fascinatingly small ear. And I watch as she starts to talk.

Now I see why she wanted that as a rule.

For the entire, hours-long ride back to her farm, Leilani talks. At first, she points out each farm we pass, who lives there and what sort of crops they are growing. Then she talks about her vehicle, and how it was part of the package she was given when she was gifted her land, and how she only knows how to operate a few buttons. Then she talks about the weather on Risda, and how it compares to her home, which is a place on her planet called Hawai’i. She talks about how she misses the water and the trees. She talks about the stars and how different they look, and how many alien races she’s met. She talks about the other humans that have settled on this planet.

She talks. And talks. And talks. There’s not a moment of silence that passes between us that Leilani’s not filling with

words of some kind. At first I think she's just nervous, but as the hours pass and she relaxes, I realize she just likes talking.

It's keffing adorable, and every time she gives a self-conscious little laugh, my cock hardens in response. I'm picturing me on top of her, sinking my cock into her tight cunt, and her talking out just how it feels, and the mental image makes my dick as hard as metal.

"We're here," she calls out, distracting me from my study of her as she gestures at the windshield of the cruiser. "All of the protein-synth plants are mine. They look kind of like the corn they grew back at home, but apparently it's a protein-based plant product and I'm supposed to grow it for cash. I also have fifty head of meat-stock." She leans over to me and charmingly says, "We called them animals back home."

"I see," I say, trying not to grin. As if I have never heard of the word "animals." The cruiser comes to a stop in front of the small house, and she gives me a suddenly wary look, as if just now realizing that she's here alone with me and there's no one around for leagues and leagues. I don't like the unease on her face, so I say, "Mind if I take a look around?"

Maybe if I show more interest in the farm she'll be less anxious about my interest in her. Truth is, I like the thought of a farm, but it's become secondary to my interest in Leilani.

"Absolutely! Take a look around, get to know the place, and I'll be inside." She flashes me a bright smile and then practically races into the house to get away from me.

I bite back my laughter and watch her go, then access the air-cruiser's control panel. Sure enough, the chips on the energy drive look fried, and I wonder if someone sold her a cheap piece of garbage because she wouldn't know better. While it was driving, I noticed a few alarming warning lights on the dash but I didn't say anything, because I didn't want her to feel as if I was intruding. I'll fix this for her later. For now, I want to get a good look at the farm.

Actually, I mostly want to go back inside and drink in the scent of my female, but for now, I'll look at the farm.

LEILANI



“He’s so sexy, I don’t know what to do,” I tell the plates as I wash them in the sink. The plates don’t answer, which is fine. I mostly like hearing the sound of my own voice. I dip another into the water and absently scrub it. “Chloe said this would be good for me and that he’d keep me safe, but I don’t know what I was thinking. He’s going to live *here*. With me. We’re going to be *married*.”

I think of the hot way he looked at me, as if he was imagining me without my clothes on, and a little shiver runs up my spine. It was one thing to picture myself marrying some stranger just to protect the farm, and another to actually bring him home. Suddenly my small farm house with its space-age plastic walls and bright, cheery windows and tiny, tiny rooms doesn’t seem big enough. There’s a living room, a dining and kitchen area, and two rooms. There’s one bathroom, which means we’re going to have to share, and I’ve already set up the second room as a guest bedroom for him.

But he’s not a guest. He’s my husband.

I swallow nervously and wonder what the customs are for his people. Do they have wedding nights? Is he going to expect one? I told him I had to be ready for sex, but the truth is...parts of me are pretty darn ready already. In fact, parts of me are definitely heated up and slick with need, and I feel the insane urge to lock the doors, hide away in my bedroom, and masturbate furiously until I get myself under control again.

“Nope, we are not gonna do that,” I say aloud. I put the dishes on their drying rack, finish tidying the kitchen, and then head to the guest bedroom. It’s little more than a cubby with a small, narrow bed that doesn’t seem big enough for a man of Tassar’s stature. “Of course, he’s not a man,” I correct myself. “He’s a mesakkah. They’re different. They’ve got horns, and tails, and three great big fingers and a thumb and...now I’m thinking dirty things about his great big fingers. Bad Leilani.”

I grab one of the pillows and fluff it with a few rough slaps. Everything the aliens use is synthetic and not made from animal products, so the filling of the pillow itself just molds itself to my hands and makes the whole “fluffing” thing useless. I feel better after slapping it around a little, though. “You’re next, blankets,” I tell them. “I don’t know if his planet gets as chilly as this one at night, but he’ll be grateful to have you if he sleeps nude.” I pause. “And now I’m thinking about him nude. Damn it, damn it, damn it.”

My brain is really on a roll tonight. Viciously, I tuck in a corner of the blanket under the self-molding mattress and I give it a hard thump. “You’re just going to have to do, bed. I don’t care that he’s seven feet tall and built like a big blue god. He’s sleeping here and I’m not changing my mind. Period.”

“Not changing your mind about what?”

I scream, jumping and turning to see Tassar in the doorway. “You scared the shit out of me!”

“I wanted to see who you were talking to.”

“Oh. No one. I just talk to everything. The meat-stock, inanimate objects, you name it. Sometimes it gets lonely out here, so I talk to hear conversation.”

“I see.” He leans against the door, seven feet of casual alien elegance, and it makes his tunic stretch tight over those fantastic, broad shoulders. Oh man. Now I’m looking at his shoulders.

“Why is that bad?” He looks down at himself and I realize I said that aloud.

“It’s not,” I blurt out, thinking quickly. “I was just wondering how you were going to fit in your bed.” And I pat it.

He tilts his head, then rubs a big hand over the dark black stubble on his scalp. “I thought since we were married we would be sleeping together.”

“Um...”

Tassar just grins at me. “Not until you’re ready, right?”

I could melt at the sight of that gorgeous smile. It doesn't even matter that he has a pair of inhuman-looking fangs. They just look...delish.

Man, I am hard up for some sex.

"Not until I'm ready," I tell him firmly, and give his pillow one more smack.



LEILANI

"Wake up, little one," a deep, liquid voice tells me. "Wake up. You're having a bad dream."

I jerk awake, my heart pounding, and stare up at the man looming over my bed. Even though he has dark blue skin and horns, there's something comforting about the sight of him that chases away any of the shadows lingering in my mind. I rub a hand over my eyes. "Wh-what are you doing here, Tassar?"

"I heard you talking," he murmurs, and the bed shifts, sinking down on one side as he climbs in next to me. "I figured you were asleep, though. Then you started arguing and crying out, and I thought I'd come wake you up. I hope I didn't intrude."

"No, it's okay," I manage, a little disoriented. A quick glance at the window tells me that it's still night. "Thank you for waking me up."

One big arm slides around my shoulders and he pulls me against him. Suddenly, my cheek is pressed to warm, hard pectorals and I realize he's bare chested. He's lying atop the blankets, which is thoughtful, but then I find myself wondering if he's completely naked. I squeeze my eyes shut, determined not to look down just in case my mouth starts making decisions for me.

Bad, bad Leilani's mouth.

“Do you often have bad dreams, or am I causing it?” Tassar asks, his hand sliding down my arm. I’m wearing a sleep tunic made of thin material, but for a moment, I wish I was as bare-chested as he is so he could touch skin.

“No, I have bad dreams,” I say. “I have ever since I was taken from Earth. They’re mostly about my old master. He... wasn’t a nice man. And he liked quiet a little too much.”

“Which is why you talk,” he agrees easily, his hands rubbing comforting patterns against my skin.

“Yeah. Silly, I know, but when you’re deprived of something for a long time, when you get it again, you’re addicted.”

“Oh, I know,” Tassar murmurs, and then I feel like an ass. He was in a prison. Of course he knows about being deprived of things. I want to ask him what he’s been deprived of, but I don’t dare.

“Thank you for checking on me,” I tell him again, and put a hand on his chest to push away...and then I stop. Is he... fuzzy? When I touch his skin, it’s a bit like touching velvet. “Are you soft everywhere?”

“That’s not exactly what a male wants to hear with a woman in his arms.”

“Your skin. That’s what I meant.” Now I’m blushing again.

“I could say the same about your skin,” he tells me, and I realize he’s brushing his thumb against the collar of my tunic, touching the base of my neck. It feels so good and so welcome that I don’t even mind. How long has it been since someone touched me in a pleasant way? Far too long. I relax against him, and even though I keep telling myself that it’s a bad idea, I run my fingers over the hard planes of his belly. He’s just so...pettable.

Who knew that this fascinatingly blue skin was so very velvety? It makes me wonder what other surprising things there are about him.

Tassar’s thumb grazes my neck again. “Better now?”

“I think so.”

“Then I’d better leave.”

“Of course.” Right. I told him I didn’t want him in my bed until I was ready. A couple of touches and a few hours shouldn’t change my mind. “Thank you,” I tell him. “I appreciate your thoughtfulness.”

He grunts. “Sure. We’ll call it thoughtfulness.”

And when he leaves my bed, I notice two things—one, that he’s wearing pants, and two, that they’re stretched tight across the mouthwateringly huge erection he’s sporting.

The door closes behind him and I stare up at the ceiling instead of falling back asleep. I should go back to bed, but instead, I think about his body and just how long it’s been since I’ve had sex.

This is a marriage of convenience, Leilani, I remind myself. If you start having sex with him, it’s no longer about your convenience but his.

I hate it when my brain is right.



TASSAR

I wake up early and head out into the fields. I grew up on a farm, but it’s been a long time, so I decide to get to know the land and the equipment. The animals are fed with programmed machines, and their stalls cleaned and scraped regularly. The protein-synth plants are maintained by small drones that spray a natural pesticide and eliminate weeds. Very little of the “farming” is done by hand anymore, but there’s more than enough equipment that needs to be maintained, and all of it looks like it could use a good going-over. I start with the drones, oiling rotors and changing out filters, adjusting spray nozzles and then sending them on their way back into the endless fields of Leilani’s crops. It doesn’t take long before the sun is high overhead, the air warming up quickly. I’m

sweating as I work, but it's a good sweat. Working on a farm towards a shared future with Leilani is satisfying work. It sure beats breaking rocks in a POW camp or fixing the terraforming machines back at the prison.

I look up at the blue sky, dotted with fluffy clouds, and feel a hint of a breeze on my face. I close my eyes, just enjoying the sheer...freedom of this place. As far as the eye can see, there's nothing but crops, grazing animals, and endless horizons. I love it. It's invigorating, and I can see growing old here, surrounded by the quiet. I've had enough of wars and the endless noise of society. I like that it's quiet and isolated here.

It's when I'm replacing the last of the drones in the field that I notice tracks in the soft, reddish-brown dirt. They're boot tracks, with a split at the top indicating that the wearer has two toes, and the track itself is twice as big as Leilani's small foot would be. Someone else has been here. I straighten, looking around. My senses are instantly on alert. The tracks continue on between the rows of crops, heading east, and I follow them, gripping the screwdriver in my hand tightly. I've killed other soldiers and gotten into a fair amount of fights back in the prison. I thought I'd leave that life behind, but the adrenaline roaring in my ears tells me that once a warrior, always a warrior. The need to protect Leilani is real and urgent. I won't let anyone threaten her, and if I have to bury a body in the fields and hide the evidence, so be it.

The tracks continue on for a time, and then I see an electronic marker, mounted to a metal post. It beeps as I approach, indicating the edge of Leilani's property and where her neighbor's fields begin. I scan the horizon and my body stiffens at the sight of two large figures standing atop a nearby hill, watching me. From their narrow shoulders, slim height and smooth reptilian heads, I know that they're Ssithri. Do they think they can take my female's property?

Do they think they can take *my* female?

I'm growling low in my throat as I clench the screwdriver in my hand. The two watch me for a moment, and then leave, retreating, and my grip relaxes. There's no confrontation today, then. Leilani needs to know she's being watched,

though. She needs to be careful in case her neighbors intend on trying something. I might not be the only convict hiding out in the outer rim.

I need to make sure she's safe and protected. I'll talk with Leilani, make sure we have an understanding, that she's not to leave the house without checking in with me first so I can protect her. I'm willing to bet that her neighbors will ease off when they find out she's married and they can't claim her or her land, and some of the tension in my shoulders eases. I realize just how keffing hot the day is, and I haven't brought water with me.

Time to head back to the house.

I take a different route through the rows of crops, looking for more footprints, but there aren't any, and they don't come close to the house, which makes me feel better. By the time I get inside, I'm covered in sweat, my scalp itching, and I pull at the thin fabric of my tunic that's sticking to my skin. The interior of the house is cool, and the smell of food baking in the oven greets me as I enter. There's no sign of Leilani, though, and when I head toward the lone washroom, I hear the shower running.

And then I hear a low moan.

My spine stiffens. Is Leilani in pain? Or did the ssithri show up to harm her while I was distracted in the fields? Was this all a ploy to get me away from her? With an angry snarl, I grab the handle to the washroom door and shove it open.

There, standing in the shower, her delicate brown foot planted on the edge of the tub, is my human mate. Water runs down her lovely skin, and her hair is a silky black waterfall down her back. Her hand is between her thighs, and she stops rubbing herself as I enter. Her shoulders stiffen and her lips part.

I forget everything.

She's keffing touching herself.

Her hand is on her cunt and she has her fingers between the folds. Her large, beautiful breasts are beaded with water,

her nipples tight and hard. That flush on her cheeks? That's not from the warmth of the water, just like the moan I heard wasn't one of pain.

My cock goes stiff instantly.

We both stare at each other for a long moment and I can't decide if I should back out and pretend as if I saw nothing, or confront her about this.

Before I can say anything, though, she lifts her chin. "Women have needs, too."

"I see that," I murmur, fascinated at how proud and defiant she is. I love her fierceness. I can't stop staring at her, at the delicate fingers between the soft folds of her cunt, the lushness of her breasts, the rounded swells of her buttocks. She's utterly perfect.

"Don't just stand there," she says, and there's a wobble in her voice. "Shut the door."

Shut the door? Oh, I can do that.

I reach behind me and close the door so we're alone in the bathroom together. And I lean against it and give her a wicked grin. "Go on. Don't let me interrupt."

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PART III

LEILANI

I stare at the big blue hunk of alien leaning against the bathroom door—on the wrong damn side of the bathroom door—and try to make my mouth work. I can't form words. I'm shocked.

He's caught me red handed with my fingers on my clit, one foot lifted onto the side of the tub, my legs spread and all of my lady business wide open. I was just about to come, too. In fact, I'm aching so badly, panting with the need of it that I can't resist giving myself another quick little swipe over my clit, even though he's standing there watching me.

Tassar groans fiercely, his eyes gleaming. His hand moves down the front of his pants and he grips his cock, working it through the fabric. "You going to keep touching yourself, little one?"

I gasp, because this is the naughtiest thing I've ever done, and because I do want to keep touching myself. There's something so dirty and wrong—and yet so very right—about this. I want to keep touching myself. I want the pleasure of looking at him as I do so, too. Wasn't I just imagining holding onto his big shoulders as he pumped into me? Thinking about him is why I needed to come in here and take care of business

in the middle of the day. I'm attracted to him like crazy and I need to be rational about things, so I thought I'd blow off some steam and give myself a quick release.

But he's here now, and he's watching me so closely that I feel as if I'm going to come on the heat of his gaze, alone.

"You shouldn't be in here," I manage to pant, even as my gaze trails down his sweat-plastered tunic to his waist, and lower, to where he's holding on to the enormous length of his cock. It's outlined against the thin fabric of his clothing, and if what he's grabbing is any indication, he's going to make some lucky woman very happy someday.

Wait. I'm that lucky woman.

And because I can't help myself, I swipe a finger over my clit again.

He growls, the sound low and sexy and so fucking delicious that I shiver all over. "I like watching you do that," he tells me.

The breath catches in my throat. I should tell him to leave. Tell him to fuck off, that this is a personal moment. Instead, I keep staring at that massive bulge in his pants. "Are you... please tell me you're a shower and not a grower."

Tassar's big hand swipes down the length, outlining it to my greedy gaze. "This is all of me. You want to look?" His voice is husky and deep, and his eyes are fierce with need as he watches me.

"Y-yes." And I trace a circle around my clit again.

"It's only fair," he murmurs. "Since you're showing me just how pretty your cunt is."

Oh god, he said cunt. Oh god, he said it's pretty. I bite back the whimper rising in my throat and watch, mouth dry, as he strips off his sweaty tunic, revealing a chest that's just as broad and muscular as I remember, tattoos dancing over his dark blue skin like poetry. Watching him move makes me even wetter between my thighs, and I didn't think that was possible. He's just so big and brawny that it's making me imagine all kinds of things, and when he runs one hand over a rock-hard

pectoral, I whimper aloud like the shameless woman I am. I want to be that hand.

A smile curves his mouth and I realize he heard that. “Do I look like your human males, little one?”

“God, no,” I blurt out. I want to tell him that he looks far better, that he’s bigger and broader than any human could ever be.

Tassar chuckles at my response, and then his hand goes to his belt. He pauses there, the fucking tease, and looks at me again. “If you want me to leave, I will.”

“Don’t you dare,” I tell him. I’ll regret this tomorrow, sure, but right now? I want to see the goods. “Strip down.”

“As you wish,” he says, and those three words send another shudder through me. He tugs his pants down and then the hard, midnight-blue length of him is revealed to my gaze. He looks even bigger like this, the fat head of his cock beaded with precum. He’s thick, too, so big around that my thighs do a little needy clench as I imagine how that’d feel inside me. Tassar strokes one hand down the long length of himself and I notice he’s got ridges.

Dear lord, the man has ridges on his cock. He’s like a walking sex toy.

His hand moves again, and then I see something I didn’t notice before—there’s a protrusion just above his cock, about the size of a thumb and as deep a blue as the rest of him. I pause at the sight of it, though. “What the hell is that?”

He looks down, then gives me a puzzled glance and gestures at his dick. “This is my manhood. Are you a virgin, Leilani?”

“Not your dick. That thing above it!”

“My spur?”

“What’s a spur?”

He shrugs. “I don’t know. It’s just there. Do your males not have one?”

“No!” But now I can’t help but think of the rabbit vibrator in my bedside drawer back home, because it had a very similar protrusion. My insides clench again, and I feel achingly hollow. “Does it... feel good?”

He shrugs again. “It feels like a spur.” Tassar’s gaze locks on my chest. “Your nipples look soft. Are they sensitive?”

My hand slides up to one breast and I caress it, skimming my fingers over my skin before stopping over one nipple. “Yes.”

I love the low groan he makes and the way he watches my hands as I touch myself. “Someday you’re going to let me touch them,” he says, and then adds, “When you’re ready.”

“When I’m ready,” I echo, though I feel pretty ready right now.

I watch as his hand strokes over his massive length again, up and down those glorious ridges. I can see a thick vein tracing his length and my mouth waters at the sight. “I like your body, Leilani,” Tassar murmurs, looking me up and down. “Is that fur on your pretty little cunt?”

The water spattering against my skin from the shower feels like freaking foreplay as it rains down on my breasts. I slide my hand back between my thighs and realize for the first time that I haven’t seen a bit of body hair on him. Other than the short black stubble on his scalp, he’s utterly hairless. “Humans get hair here,” I tell him and lift my chin. “Is that a problem?”

He growls low again, the sound sexy and delicious. “Only that it hides the sight of your cunt from my gaze.”

Oh, he wants to see? Breathless and shameless, I stand a little straighter and slide my fingers over my folds, parting them to give him a good look as he strokes his cock up and down his shaft, over and over again.

He steps forward, and I want to tell him to move back, but the words die in my throat. I don’t really want him to move back. I want him to look at me with those hungry, hungry eyes. To devour me with a gaze, because it’s making me so turned

on that I could practically come just like this. “What’s that?” he asks.

“What’s what?”

“The little bud between your petals.”

Oh. “It’s my clit.” I touch it, and another whimper escapes me.

“Sensitive?” he murmurs, and licks his lips.

“Oh god, yes.”

“Touch it again.”

Moaning, I do as he asks, performing for his hungry stare. I’m incredibly slick, my finger skimming circles around my clit as I hold my folds open so he can watch. My nipples are achingly tight and he’s standing so close that I wonder if he’s going to get into the shower with me. I picture him putting one of those big hands on my stomach and then dropping lower, rubbing my clit for me.

I come with a hard clench. Crying out, I let my head fall back as I continue to stroke myself, imagining that it’s him touching me. I keep rubbing until it grows too sensitive to do so, and then with a shuddering gasp, I let my hand fall away as I struggle to get control of myself. At some point, I closed my eyes—probably when I came—and when I open them, I see that his face is taut, his eyes shut, and the hand that strokes up and down his cock is covered with his release.

It seems I wasn’t the only one that came.



TASSAR

It’s hard to leave my female’s side when everything in me shouts to get in that shower and claim her. To grab her wet body and pull it against me and drag her to the bed. But now that she’s climaxed, she’s giving me a shy, uncertain look and I don’t want to make her uncomfortable. This is all still new for both of us, so I grab a towel and leave the bathroom, wiping

down my cock. I head to my room, and a few minutes later, I hear her get out of the shower. I wait another few moments and then I go inside and clean myself off...and jerk another one out, because I can't stop thinking about her rounded breasts and the expression of ecstasy on her face as she came.

I can't wait to find out what she tastes like.

That can wait for another day, though. Once I'm done in the shower, I get dressed in fresh clothing and head into the kitchen. At first I think my human mate's having a conversation with the window over the sink, but then I realize that there's a bird sitting on the window sill.

"It's too soon, Manu," she tells him. "Just because I'm acting like a shameless hussy doesn't mean that it's a good idea. These things take time, you know?" She slowly reaches one hand out and drops a few crumbs on the sill, watching the bird. "I can't mess things up because I'm impatient."

Is she talking about me, I wonder? I remain perfectly still, not wanting to interrupt the moment...and so I can hear what she's saying.

The bird doesn't move for the food, so she reaches out and nudges a crumb toward it. Instead of going for the food, it flaps away and leaves.

"Like I said, Manu," Leilani sighs. "These things take time."

She sounds so sad that I speak up to distract her. "Are you trying to train the birds to eat from your hand?"

Leilani jumps, looking over at me. Her expression is that of embarrassment, but there's a little smile on her fascinating face that makes me feel good. Like she's remembering what we just did and has no regrets. "It gets lonely out here, so yeah, I'm trying to befriend the birds. I'm impatient, though, and they get scared off." She shakes her head. "Disney princesses make this shit look easy."

I have no idea what a "Disney" or a "princess" is, but I need to talk to her. Her comment about being lonely reminds

me that she's not as solitary out here as she thinks. "Do you know your neighbors? The ones with the farm east of you?"

I don't like the way her shoulders stiffen. "I've met them in passing. They gave me some creepy looks so I try to avoid them, though. They're snake-men, aren't they?"

"Yes. Their people are called ssithri and I'm afraid they've been wandering over your land. I saw some tracks in your crops. I think they're watching you." When her eyes go wide, I add, "But you don't have to worry. I'll keep you safe."

"They've hinted that they want my land," she admits. "I guess because my farm is adjacent to theirs."

"They won't get it," I tell her firmly. "You're my mate now. I'll go over and have a talk with them in the morning. Let them know you're claimed."

"Do you think that'll work?"

If it doesn't, I'll think of another, more forceful way to get them to leave her alone. "Positive," I tell her. "You don't have to worry about a thing."

I don't sleep well that night. I keep thinking about Leilani and the dark fall of her hair, the way her wet skin gleamed in the shower, the way she touched one of those big, plump breasts and toyed with the nipple shamelessly in front of me. I think of her cunt, and the little nub she teased until she came. I can't stop thinking about her, and my cock's incredibly hard. Even taking myself in hand doesn't stop the ache. I want her in my bed, under me, and I suspect I'm not going to get much rest until I do.

So I stay up most of the night, listening in the hopes that Leilani will have another bad dream and I'll get to wake her up. It doesn't happen, though. She's quiet on her side, and I tell myself it's for the best. I want her to sleep well, unafraid... I just wish I was in that bed with her.

I wake up before dawn and make sure the animals are fed. By the time I've set the feeders and checked the machinery,

the sun is up and when I approach the house, I see the kitchen window is open and Leilani's birds are waiting for their handout. I raise a hand in greeting when I see her pretty face, and then skirt wide so I don't scare her little friends away. The kitchen is warm and full of good smells when I enter, and my pretty little human mate has a bright smile on her face.

"Sleep well?" I ask, and I like that she blushes. She's so shy. It's adorable.

"Of course, you?"

I don't tell her that my body was hungry for hers all night, that I couldn't sleep because the ache in my cock was too overwhelming. "Fine," is all I say.

"Should we talk about what happened yesterday?"

"Do you want to?"

"Not really." She bites her lip.

I smile. It's adorable that she's shy, considering this is the same female that parted the lips of her cunt so I could watch her touch herself. "We don't have to talk about it until you're ready."

"Do you like meat?" she asks instead, playing with a strand of her long hair. "My people have a way of cooking where you cook the meat in an underground pit called an *imu*. It makes the meat very tender and delicious, and I thought since you were here I might make it for you."

She wants to do that for me? I'm filled with pleasure at the thought, not just because she wants to cook for me but because that means she's been thinking about me as much as I've been thinking about her. "I would love that. Can I help?"

"You can help me dig the pit," Leilani tells me, more relaxed. "There's a spot outside that would be perfect. I can show you."

I get to my feet to follow her.

Leilani smiles at me and goes to the door of the house that leads outside. The moment she opens it, though, I grab her and pull her back behind me.

Two Ssithri aliens stand there on the doorstep, and they're staring at my mate with covetous eyes.

"You need to get out of here," I say, my voice low and deadly. I put a hand in front of Leilani, determined to keep her hidden from their sight. "You're not welcome on this land."

The taller of the aliens blinks at me, his expression impossible to read. "I am here to speak to the human female, not you."

"What can I help you with?" Leilani asks, and her voice is far too polite for my tastes. She tries to step out from behind me.

Just as quickly, I step in front of her again and glare at the two males. I know what they want. They want my mate. Possessive need races through me and I fight the urge to drag her away into the bedroom, out of their sight.

One of the aliens smirks at me and gestures at the second one. "My son wishes to offer a mating to the human Leilani."

"I have a husband," she says, outraged. She tries to step around me again, and this time, I put an arm over her shoulders and pull her against my side. She fits there neatly, and the pleasure of that small touch almost makes the burning rage behind my eyes go away.

Almost.

"Tassar is my husband," she tells them, her spine stiff. I can feel her outrage stiffening her body and the need to protect her grows stronger by the moment.

"We have heard rumor that this is a pretend marriage," the taller alien says. "My son wishes to offer for you so you can have a real mate."

Where would he have keffing heard that? I think of the small restaurant, and the long conversation I had with Jutari there, and want to kick myself. Of course someone overheard us there. And because it's such a small community, no doubt everyone's heard that we're marrying just for show.

The thought makes me furious. Leilani is *mine*. I don't care if she thinks this is just for show. It's not for me. It hasn't been since the moment I laid eyes on her. "This is a real mating."

"We do not believe you," the taller alien says.

I'll just have to keffing show them, then. I turn, look down at my female's upturned face and plant my mouth against hers in one of the so-called human "kisses."

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PART IV

LEILANI

The kiss that Tassar plants on my mouth is as surprising as it is awkward. His tongue slides all over my lips and he mauls me for a brief moment before he turns and gives the two aliens on our doorstep a triumphant look.

“You see?” he says as I stand there, dazed. “She is my mate.”

They look at both of us with disgust. “Revolting,” says one of the lizard men.

“She is my mate,” Tassar says again. “So get off our land.”

They give us a few heated glares and turn away, and I can practically see the gears turning in the taller one’s head. He’s not giving up. I think Tassar sees it, too, because he grabs me and plants another “kiss” on my face, his tongue swiping all over the lower half of my chin.

I have to fix this.

Tassar watches them leave, practically bristling with anger, and then shuts the door when they disappear from sight. “Keffing fools,” he mutters. “Do they think they can strong-arm me into backing down? To giving you up?” He snorts.

I touch my mouth. “What *was* that?”

“What was what?”

“Your tongue moved over my face like a windshield wiper not two moments ago!”

“Oh, that?” Tassar gives me an arrogant look. “That was a kiss. I am told that humans enjoy such things.”

“They do,” I agree, and then give a little shake of my head. “But that wasn’t a kiss.”

“Yes it was.” He looks offended that I would question such a thing.

“I’ve been kissed before, and trust me, that’s not how you do it.”

His expression changes and intensifies. He studies me for a long moment and then puts a finger under my chin, tipping it up. “Show me how it works, then.”

Oh, now I’ve done it. I should be upset that he’s calling me on it, that I’ve walked into this verbal trap, but...I want to kiss him. A kiss should be proper, and someone as gorgeous as him is interested in kissing me? I might as well show him the right way to do it. It’s my duty to womankind.

I’m feeling breathless at the thought of kissing Tassar, though. I gaze up at him, at his hard mouth with his firm lips and those fangs that flash every so often. “Well,” I say, and I’m nervous and excited both. “It’s lips on lips. A caress of one mouth to another.”

“Show me,” he says again.

He’s so much taller than me, so I crook a finger, indicating that he should lower his head. Instead, though, he grabs a stool and thumps down upon it, then pulls me against him. When he’s seated, we’re practically the same height, and I can look him in the eye. One big arm is locked around my waist, as if to stop me from running away. As if I’d do such a thing. I lick my lips, because it’s really shameful how much I’m looking forward to this kiss.

I touch his jaw, noting that he’s utterly smooth—no alien beard for him. His suede-like skin feels like heaven under my

touch, and I want to pet him all over. That might make things weird, though, and I'd really like to kiss him before shit gets too weird. He's watching me with that intense gaze of his, and it makes me feel all hot and achy deep inside.

"A caressing of mouths," I tell him again, and then I lean in and brush my lips over his. It's the barest of touches, a whisper of mouth on mouth, but it feels like nothing I've experienced before. There's something far more intimate about kissing Tassar, knowing that this is his first one and I'm setting the precedent for all kisses after this.

And because I can't help but want to make it memorable, I flick my tongue over his lips in a tease as I pull away.

The big alien is silent as he gazes up at me.

"Well?" I ask, breathless. I'm practically panting and all I did was skim my mouth over his.

"Are they all so brief?"

I'm surprised at his question. That's all he has to say? "No, they're not all brief." I can't keep the annoyance out of my voice. "Here, I'll do a longer one." I put my hands on his shoulders, touch a finger under his chin, and then put my mouth on his again. This time, I don't pussyfoot around. I press my mouth firmly to his, and when his lips don't part under mine, I make it a personal mission to get him to open up. I nip and suck on his lips, nibbling on his full lower one before moving to the upper lip and grazing it with my teeth. There's something about his scent and his big body against mine, but by the time I'm done kissing the hell out of his mouth, I'm throbbing with need. Breathless, I pull back and study him. Is he as flushed as I am? Is that sleepy look in his gaze desire or is it boredom? "Well?"

"You didn't use your tongue that time. I thought there was tongue."

"Most of the time there is," I say, flustered.

"You should do it again and show me with tongue." His arm tightens around my waist. "Once more, and do it properly."

It occurs to me as I lean in and put my mouth on his that I'm being manipulated. That he's not as unaffected by the kiss as he pretends to be. And I know it's true once he tugs me even closer and I'm straddling one big thigh, my breasts pushed against his chest as my mouth slicks over his again. I don't care, though. I'm far too interested in kissing him to point out his game. This time, I press the tip of my tongue against the seam of his mouth and he opens up for me. I flick my tongue against his, and a hot shudder of pleasure ripples through me when I realize it has ridges, too.

His cock had ridges. I remember that from my shower.

A low moan escapes me, and then his hand is behind my neck and he's holding me close as the kiss grows deeper. I'm no longer in control, I realize. He's taken over it. Tassar's tongue plays against mine and then he's conquering my mouth one slow, delicious stroke at a time. The world stops existing for me outside of the sweep of his tongue into my mouth, that hot, slow lick that promises all kinds of filthy, exciting things.

And then he pulls away.

I let out a little mew of protest, sounding like the neediest woman ever. His mouth is still temptingly close and I lick my lips, wondering if I can still taste him on me.

"Are you ready yet?" he asks.

"Ready?" I've been kissed so thoroughly I have no idea what he's talking about.

"For mating. For joining me in my bed." He leans in and nips at my lower lip in a sexy little bite that sends a shudder through me.

Right. I'd forgotten that I made him promise to wait until I was ready. "Still not ready," I manage to gasp out, though I can't stop staring at his mouth. I want it on mine again. I'm addicted after just a few quick kisses. For a man that practically licked my face a few minutes ago and thought THAT was a kiss, he sure is a fast learner.

Makes me wonder what else he'll be a fast learner at.

“If you’re not ready, can I make you ready?” His thumb strokes over the back of my neck.

Oh god, what does that mean? I whimper, and his eyes light up with pleasure at the sound. “What—what did you have in mind?” I shouldn’t be asking. I really shouldn’t...but I can’t help myself. I have to know.

And he gives me a wicked, wicked smile that makes my toes curl.

“I like tasting you,” he murmurs. “I like the sweet honey of your mouth. It makes me want to taste the rest of you.”

“The rest of me?” I echo, even though my thighs are tightening and there’s a quiver in my belly.

“Your cunt,” he says boldly. “I want to put my mouth between your thighs and taste that sweetness that you touched the other day when I saw you in the shower.”

I gasp. I’m torn between shucking my clothing and slapping him across the face for being so very blunt. “You shouldn’t say such things.”

“Why not? It’s the truth. My mouth waters every time I see you, and I can’t stop thinking about your body. I want to explore your sweet little folds and see if they’re as soft as they look. I want to touch that button of yours to see if it’s as sensitive as it looks. I want to see if I can make you gasp and climax. More than anything, I want to have the taste of you on my tongue.” His hand trails down my spine, fingers sweeping along my back. “Because I bet the taste of you is utterly glorious.”

“Oh,” I breathe.

“What do you say?” He wraps his hand in my long hair, watching me with utter fascination.

What do I say? The man is offering to give me oral simply because he wants to. It’s not a situation I’d ever thought I’d be in. I’ve had sex before, sure, but trying to get a man to go down on a girl without offering a reciprocal first is like...well, I don’t know what it’s like because I’ve never ran into it before. Ever. My last boyfriend absolutely refused to do oral

and I resigned myself to a life where my girl parts were ignored.

And now this stranger's offering me oral sex like I'd be doing HIM a favor? This is...not what I expected.

"Say yes," he encourages when I'm quiet. "Let me taste you."

How can I refuse such a request? He's sexy, I'm horny, and his tongue has ridges. "This doesn't mean I'm ready for everything," I say, trying to establish some control over the situation.

"Of course not," he says, and gets to his feet. As he does, he picks me up as if I weigh nothing, and I make a noise of surprise and fling my arms around his neck so he doesn't drop me. "This changes nothing," he reassures me. "Just that I get to taste you and you still get to decide when you're ready."

It feels like there should be a catch. Should there be a catch? Because I feel like there's a trick somewhere in here. He's this big, sexy, ridiculously gorgeous alien and I'm a plain-looking human with an extra fifty pounds. These sorts of situations don't happen to girls like me. "If I say stop, you have to stop," I warn him.

"Of course. I wouldn't want to touch you if you weren't interested." He sounds disgusted at the thought.

All righty then. I say nothing else as he locks the front door and then carries me back to my bedroom with confident steps. He shuts the door behind him and then sets me down carefully on the bed. His eyes gleam as he gazes down at me. "I don't understand why you are so shy, Leilani."

"Shy?" I scoff at his words. "Me? I'm not shy." I'm a huge liar, though. Shy probably isn't the right word. Embarrassed, maybe. I just feel completely out of my element around him and I keep waiting for someone to tell me this is all a joke, or I'm reading the situation wrong. Something. Because my heart's beating like a nervous butterfly in my chest and my pussy is soaking wet at the thought of this man wanting to taste me.

“I would not think of you as shy, no,” Tassar agrees, and traces one finger under my chin. “After all, you are the human female that stroked herself so boldly in the shower in front of me and told me that she had needs, too. And yet your cheeks are flushed and you quiver when I touch you. This tells me you are shy.”

I put a hand to my cheek. It does feel hot. Damn it. “I’m just...not used to this sort of thing, that’s all. Most human males I’ve dated aren’t into that sort of thing.”

“Good,” he growls.

“Good?”

“Yes. Because it means that they are fools. Because it means that your cunt is mine and mine alone. That is why it is good.”

I shudder as he drops to his knees by my bed. “Tassar...”

“I like it when you say my name, shy Leilani,” he murmurs, and my skin pebbles with goosebumps. His hand cups my jaw, and I can feel the calluses on his palm, at odds with the soft peach-fuzz of his blue skin. “And I am here to tell you not to be shy about this. You let me kiss your soft mouth, did you not? Now let me kiss your soft cunt.”

And I moan at those words.



TASSAR

I have never wanted anything as much as I want Leilani in this moment. She’s utterly beautiful as she lies back on the bed, her dark hair spread around her head like a cascade of silk. I devour her with my hungry gaze, fascinated by the sight of her. She’s delicate and soft, all rounded curves and bountiful breasts. Her hips are full and wide, perfect for my hands to grip, and I’m itching to touch her. More than that, I’m itching to taste her.

Because the scent of her, the nearness of her, is driving me wild. In the few short days that we've been together, I've become addicted to the scent of her hair when she tosses it over her shoulder, the faint musky scent of her sweat after a long day of work, and the sweet taste of her breath on mine as I kissed her.

Ah, kissing. Clever, clever humans. Of course a mouth should be mated and tongued. It makes perfect sense, and now that I have tasted Leilani's sweet lips I cannot wait to taste her again.

My people are a possessive people, I think, as I gaze down at her rounded curves. When we find our mate, there is no one more devoted than a mesakkah male. Leilani might not be ready yet, but I will follow her from one end of the galaxy to the next if she just promises me more kisses. No other male will ever touch her or threaten her. No male will ever even LOOK at her again, because she belongs to me.

"Are you angry?" Leilani asks, interrupting my thoughts.

"No, why?"

"You're frowning."

Am I? It's only because I think of the idiots that came to our door earlier and tried to push their claim on my female. If I see them again, they will be dead. I noticed how worried they made her and how uncertain she was. Thinking about it fills me with rage and I have to catch myself before I start snarling at the world. "I am just lost in thought."

"Those are some thoughts," she says, her voice tart, and I like that she is impertinent. It means that however she's feeling, she's not afraid of me.

"I am frowning because you wear far too many clothes," I tell her. It's not a lie. I want her naked and lush and, most of all, underneath me. "Can I take them off of you?"

She bites her lip and gives me another shy look, but nods. Good. I touch the auto-fastener at the collar of her prim tunic and watch as it slides down the length of her body, showing tantalizing bits of brown skin as it does. She wears unfamiliar

female undergarments over her breasts, and as I watch, she reaches between them and unsnaps something, and then it falls away from her body.

And then my lovely Leilani is naked on the bed, her clothing falling to the mattress in a heap. She's just as gorgeous as I remember from that day in the shower, her deep golden skin such a warm shade that it invites my touch. I want to put my hands all over her, to play with those large breasts and caress every inch of her skin. She's trembling as I gaze down at her, and I want her trembling to be because she needs to come under my mouth, not because she's nervous.

But I have to go slow. I have to make her ready.

"Have you ever mated with one of my kind?" I ask her.

"Blue aliens?"

"Males."

Leilani gives an indignant little snort. "Yes to men, no to blue aliens. What about you?"

"No to men, yes to blue aliens."

She reaches up and smacks my arm in a surprising motion. "That's not what I meant. Have you ever slept with a human?"

I laugh, pleased at the way she bats at me. Even though she's half my size, it's clear she's not intimidated by me, and I love that. She might be tiny and soft, but she's fierce, my Leilani. "You are the only human."

"You mean first."

I level my gaze at her. "I mean only." Does she not realize that I'm not doing this for a quick afternoon's enjoyment? I do this because she's mine. All mine. "Just as I will be your only mesakkah."

"We'll see," she says boldly, but I can see a flush on her cheeks.

I growl my displeasure. "I do not share, my Leilani. You are my wife and that means you belong to me and me alone. You think I would let another man taste your mouth?" I put my

hands on her hips and then skim my fingers down one rounded thigh. “You think I would let another put his mouth on your cunt and taste your honey?”

Her lips part, her eyes soft. She gives a little moan. “God, you’re filthy.”

“I am honest. If you are my mate, this body is mine. These soft breasts and hips are mine. This pretty little cunt is mine.” I lower my head, letting my breath fan over the dark curls of her mound. I want to taste her so badly, but I’m not yet done teasing. “Just like all that I am belongs to you. From horn to tail, I am yours to taste and to pleasure.”

Leilani moans low again and her fingers clench on empty air. “Can I...can I touch your horns?”

“While I lick your sweet cunt? It would give me great pleasure.”

Her breath hitches in her throat and she curls one hand around the base of one horn. Her skin feels heated against the hard plates of my brow, and I didn’t expect it to feel this... good.

“Are you going to taste me, then?” she asks, her voice a mere whisper.

“Oh yes.” I pause for a moment and then add, “When you’re ready.”

Leilani gasps and I can feel her hand clench on my horn. “What do you mean, when I’m ready?”

“I mean that I’ll taste you when you agree to become my mate in every sense.”

“So this is just a tease—”

Her indignant question is cut off by a pounding at the door.

I jump up from the bed, a snarl on my lips. My cock is aching hard in my trousers, and I want nothing more than to shuck my clothing and climb atop this female and prove to her that we’ve played long enough. That she’s my mate in all ways...but first I have to chase off these fool Ssithri neighbors

of hers that don't know when to stay away. "Wait here," I tell Leilani.

She grabs at the blankets and pulls them to her chest, hiding her pretty breasts. "Tassar, wait. I should answer the door."

"No," I tell her, and mean it. If they get one look at my mate, disheveled and sweet, her eyes soft and the scent of her honey-laced cunt perfuming the air? They'll want her as badly as I do, and I don't intend on letting them get close. She's mine and mine alone. I take advantage of the fact that she's naked and leave the bedroom, shutting the door behind me and crossing the living area to the front door of Leilani's small house.

I spot a heavy pan and grab it off of a nearby counter, ready to use it as a weapon. If those Ssithri don't know what's good for them...

But when I open the door, I'm not looking at Leilani's Ssithri neighbors. I'm looking instead at two of Lord va'Rin's militia, their uniforms crisp, their horns capped with gleaming silver. One taps his badge and his credentials display in the air as a holo-vid, as a pre-recorded citation of prisoners' rights begins to play.

The second steps forward with stun cuffs. "Tassar sol'Irian? We're going to need to bring you in for questioning."

PART V

LEILANI

I drum my fingers in irritation on the arm of the chair in Lord va'Rin's manor house. It's been a long damn day. My new husband was stolen from my house by the authorities, and now he's being held for deportment back to the prison planet Haven. It doesn't matter that he was a prisoner of war and shouldn't have been held at a prison planet anyhow. All that matters is that he's supposed to be there instead of here, and that means someone snitched on us. Probably my neighbors, who have made no secret that they're interested in my land. I could easily see them heading over to the authorities and telling them a big bad escaped convict is on human Leilani's farm.

No one will listen to me when I say I'm not in danger, though. I tell them that we married legally, that Lord va'Rin doesn't mind my choice of husband. I tell them that Tassar's a prisoner of war and it's only because of treaty issues that he was on the prison planet at all, not because he broke the law. I tell them that they're taking away my protector and breaking human laws by separating me from my mate—I might have made that part up, just because it sounds good.

But the militia won't hear it. They just give me patronizing smiles and shake their heads. They tell me that I'm a fragile

little human female and I have no idea what I've been saved from and that I should return to my farm like a good girl and mind my business.

It makes me so mad I want to spit.

At first, I let them push me away. I had a good cry sitting in my air-cruiser, and then I wiped away my tears and thought of a new course of action.

Which is why I'm at Lord va'Rin's estate, sitting in an oversized chair and waiting to see the lord himself. I've been told that he's busy and has no time in his schedule today for personal matters. I've been told that I need an appointment.

I ignored all of that and sat in the chair and told them I wouldn't move until Lord va'Rin saw me. Annnnd I might have hinted that if he didn't see me before supptime, I might die of malnutrition. I mean heck, they don't know how often humans need to eat, right? If it takes a few white lies to grease the wheel, so be it. I'm not letting Tassar get shipped back to the prison planet without a fight.

Absolutely not. We're a team.

It's been a really damn long time since I've been able to trust anyone, I realize. Ever since I was abducted by aliens, I've felt alone, like I had no one watching my back. But the moment I met Tassar, things changed. I don't know when I realized it, but having him around made me feel less solitary, less afraid. I can be myself around him. I can crack jokes or be as weird or as human as I need to be.

I can masturbate in front of him and he won't attack me.

I want him home. I want this marriage between us to work out. I can see us blossoming into more over time. Yes, it's early. But I can see us figuring out the relationship as we go... and I can see us in love and having oversized babies with blue skin and tails...and I can see us growing old together, sitting on the porch of our farmhouse. I want that so badly.

I'm not going to let some dickface militia take that away from me either.

So I sit in the chair and pretend to look as if I'm wasting away while one personal secretary after another tries to figure out what to do with me. It's clear that having a human pop by the lord's house isn't a normal thing, but I'm not leaving until I get my way.

After an hour or so of waiting, I get results. A very tall, blue-skinned alien with ornate metal coverings over his impressive horns sweeps into the room. He's wearing long, dark robes and has a frown on his face as he gazes down at me.

"They told me you are starving to death in order to force an appointment with me."

"Is that what they said? Gosh, it's so hard to find good help these days." I keep my tone bright as I leap to my feet and offer my hand to him. "I'm Leilani. A human, just like your mate."

"My mate would not starve to death after a few hours of sitting in a room," he says coldly. "Do not think you can play games with me. I am a very busy person and have no time for this nonsense."

His tone is positively arctic and I feel a wave of despair. Did I sit here for nothing? Is he not going to help me out after all? "Please," I begin, and he puts a hand up to silence me.

"Do not 'please' me, human."

All right, if being friendly isn't going to go far, I'll try a different tactic. My lower lip wobbles and I let tears fall down my cheeks. It's not hard to cry on command, because not only am I frustrated, but I'm feeling very alone and helpless.

"You," the lord begins again, and then sighs heavily at the sight of my tears. "You are no fun, human. I am, how do you say, busting balls." He reaches out and pats my shoulder awkwardly. "Don't cry. If my Milly hears that you're crying, she's going to give me the silent treatment for weeks."

I take the handkerchief he offers me, noting that it's emblazoned with his house symbol. If nothing else, maybe I can use this to throw his name around. "I'm really sorry," I say

between sniffles. “It’s just...someone stole my husband and my neighbors are trying to take my claim and I’m having a really, really bad day.”

The lord frowns down at me. “Someone stole your husband?”

I nod.

Before I can say more, a tiny human woman in a long, ornate gown busts into the room. She’s got bright red hair and a cute little pug nose. Her hands go to her hips and she gives the big alien at my side an outraged look. “Varrik, really, darling! Do you have to make all the humans cry when they come for help?”

“I am busting balls,” he protests. “Isn’t that what humans like?”

“Not right now,” she says between clenched teeth, and hustles over to my side. She puts an arm around my waist and steers me into the house, giving my arm a reassuring squeeze. “Ignore my husband. Why don’t you sit down and tell me how we can help you?”

“I want my husband back,” I say immediately. “And they’re going to deport him.”

“Not if I have anything to say about it,” Milly replies, and the hard gleam in her eyes tells me that this is a woman that gets her way.



TASSAR

“Your ride’s here,” one of the guards says, coming to the entrance of my cell. He activates my cuffs and then taps a button, the door sliding back with a whoosh of air.

My ride, eh? Disgusted, I get to my feet slowly. Back to the prison planet and breaking rocks, then. I’m angry. Angry that my freedom was only a few days. Angry that someone probably overheard me making plans in the restaurant with

Jutari and I'm sitting here, imprisoned once more. Most of all, though, I'm angry that Leilani's going to be left vulnerable. That my mate—because she IS mine—will be left without a protector.

Maybe I can contact Vordigar and ask him to watch out for her. Get a message to him somehow and ask him to keep an eye on my vulnerable mate.

Because it's clear I'll just have to figure out a way to escape again so I can come back to her. I won't leave her alone on this end of the universe with no one to look after her. That's my job. She's mine to protect and I plan on doing so. This is a temporary setback, and the good news is that I'll have plenty of time to think up a new plan to get out of here on the long trip back to the prison planet.

The guard that leads me out of the holding cells gives me a little shove. "Quit dragging your feet. Move it along."

I bare my teeth at him in a snarl, but I do as he says, striding forward through the small building that functions as both spaceport and holding facility. I look out the windows to the spaceport itself but I don't see any ships waiting to take me out of here. Are they going to make me sit outside until it arrives, then? What's the point of that? I turn to ask, but the guard just shoves me through the door to the front of the building...

And then I'm looking right at my lovely human mate.

I'm surprised to see her here. A moment later, though, that surprise is tempered with fierce pleasure as I drink in the sight of her. It's been less than a day since we were separated, but it feels like a thousand years. I scan her appearance, looking for bruises or signs that she's been abused by someone while I've been stuck here. She's wearing a loose, pale yellow tunic dress that sways around her delicate brown ankles, and she has a flower tucked behind one ear, her silky black hair flowing over her shoulders.

It makes my heart ache to see how beautiful she is. I am the luckiest male alive, I realize in this moment. It doesn't

matter if I'm being shipped out. I'll find a way back to her. She's my home now.

My lovely wife lifts her chin and gives the soldier at my side a haughty look. "Are those cuffs really necessary? Do I need to complain to your superiors?"

I automatically step a little closer to the soldier at my side, because if he says something unpleasant to my mate, I'm going to have to flatten him.

To my surprise, though, the man just clears his throat. "My apologies."

And he grabs my cuffs, taps in a code, and disables them.

Leilani sniffs, all arrogance. "That's better. Come on, Tassar. We're leaving."

I rub my wrists, not entirely sure what's happened. I glance at the soldier, but he's pocketing the cuffs and walking away as if everything's settled, as if I'm not an escaped convict that's been caught. I want to question him, to find out the truth, but I move quickly to Leilani's side instead, because I'm not stupid.

I just want to get out of here. If this is an escape attempt, she doesn't need me sitting around mucking things up.

She sticks her small hand out, indicating that I should hold it. I take her hand in mine and she leads me through the row of shops that make up Risda III's only town, and to her air-cruiser. She walks with unhurried steps, as if she has all the time in the world, but I notice her back is stiff, her posture erect. She's not nearly as calm as she's faking.

All right, then. I let go of her hand and race forward to open the air-cruiser's door and help her inside, then get in on my side. The moment the doors are shut, I turn to her. "What's the plan?"

Leilani immediately starts up the air-cruiser and eases it into the sky. "Well, we're going to find a somewhat private field as close nearby as we can, and then you and I are going to fuck like bunnies."

“What?” I’m not entirely sure I’ve heard her correctly.
“Are we not escaping?”

“We are not,” she says, her tone matter of fact. She pulls out a heavy sheaf of official parchment from a tube and hands it to me, her gaze locked on the windshield. “You’ve been pardoned by Lord va’Rin, who has acknowledged our mating and he’s given you sanctuary here on Risda III because I’m a fragile human and need your protection at all times. It’s come to light that humans are exceedingly dependent on their mates and it would be medically dangerous for my health if you were pulled away from me.”

“What?” I scan the document. Sure enough, there’s a million official seals at the bottom, along with digital validations for seven different languages and an authorization code that means that this has been recorded as official law. “But...it’s not medically dangerous for you, is it?” I eye her with concern. She’s beautiful beyond all imaginings, but could she be hiding secret pain?

“It’s not,” she agrees, and a smile flashes across her face. “But no human is going to admit that to an alien.”

I laugh, shaking my head at her cleverness. “So you’ve solved the problem.”

“Not entirely.” Leilani smooths her hair with a nervous hand, nearly dislodging the cheery flower tucked behind one small human ear. “Lord va’Rin suggested that I get pregnant very quickly in order to cement our bond. Our child will be born into citizenship of the Mesakkah empire, and he’ll have more rights than you and me both. So...wanna make a baby? Because va’Rin’s human wife gave me a few shots of fertility drugs that mean your swimmers are compatible with my eggs for a short period of time. We’ve got about two days before I stop ovulating like crazy.”

I go very still. I don’t like the nervousness on her face. “No.”

The air-cruiser jerks to a halt over a field of synth-protein, the tall greenish-blue stalks waving in the breeze. Leilani looks over at me, hurt on her face. “You don’t want to have

sex with me? What the hell was all that back at the house about wanting to taste me? Or was that just you wanting to give me blue balls?" Her face flushes a darker shade. "No pun intended."

"I would love nothing more than to claim you as my mate, sweet Leilani." I reach out and straighten the flower in her hair, and then I'm unable to resist caressing the shell of her delicate ear. "But I promised you that we would only mate when you were ready, and I won't break that promise. Child or not, my safety means nothing if my mate, my wife, feels as if she is trapped with me."

Leilani just stares at me for a long moment while the cruiser hovers over the field, swishing the crops below with the force of its fans. I can hear them rustling around us. In fact, it's the only noise right now, because my mate has gone utterly silent.

"I'm not trapped," she says after a moment. "With you, I have more freedom than ever. More than that, I have hope. I can see a future with someone. A future where I'm not alone, surrounded by nothing but alien strangers. I don't feel alone with you." Her mouth twitches as if she's struggling to remain solemn. "And...can I show you something?"

"Of course."

She takes my hand and guides it up under the skirts of her dress. Before I can realize what she's doing, my fingers are on her cunt and I can feel the slick honey on her folds.

"Does that say I'm not ready?"

"Leilani." I groan her name so loudly that it reverberates in the cruiser. She's slippery and hot and I want to keffing rub her like mad, but I also don't want to scare her with my need. "Say the words aloud, little one," I tell her, my hand still. "Tell me that you want me truly. That this is not panic. Because I am content to wait as long as I have to."

It's a lie. My cock aches all day every day for need of her, but I won't push her into doing something she doesn't want. If she doesn't come to my bed of her own free will, she doesn't

come to it at all. I want her smiles and her eager caresses more than I want to sink my cock into unwilling flesh.

“I was ready the moment your head went between my thighs,” she tells me, unbuckling her seatbelt and then sliding over. She puts her arms around my neck and slips one leg over me until she’s straddling me, our faces a breath apart. “Although if I’m being honest, I’ve wanted you ever since I saw you.” Her hand slides down the front of my chest. “It’s unfair for you to be so damn sexy, it really is.”

I capture her mouth in a quick, hard kiss even as my hand goes under her skirt once more and finds the spot between her legs. I seek out her clit with one finger and then begin to rub it in small circles like she did the day I watched her shower. “You find me sexy, then?”

She whimpers against my lips, her hands tightening against me. “Oh god, yes.”

“And you want us to mate right now? Here in the open? Above this field?” My fingers glide over her folds, and I’m reveling in just how wet she is. She’s so slick that she’s coating my fingers, and I ease one into the tight channel of her cunt, testing her. She’s small, my human, but I know she’ll be able to take me despite the difference in our sizes.

“No one will stop us,” she pants, pressing hot, fervent little kisses to my face. “If the car’s a rockin’, don’t come a knockin’.” Her fingers move to the front of my tunic, and then go lower, undoing the auto-fastener at my waist. “But if you don’t want a baby, we should probably use protection.”

“You’re sure I can make you pregnant? Even though you’re human?”

Leilani nods, her gaze meeting mine even as I push my finger deep inside her again. She gasps, and the look on her face as I stroke into her is beyond beautiful. “Milly...said... she used same doctor Jutari and Chloe did...”

I think of Jutari’s fragile human mate and the large child in her arms. It *is* possible, then. I imagine Leilani holding my child, walking through the house and talking to him like she

talks to everything else, and my heart fills with a bolt of longing. I hold the back of her neck and kiss her fiercely, plunging my finger deep into her hot cunt. “I want that,” I growl against her mouth between kisses. “I want to give you a baby.”

“You’re sure?”

I never thought of myself as a farmer before meeting her, but now I can’t picture anything but spending the rest of my life on her farm with her at my side. I love the quiet, cozy little farmhouse, I love the solitude of this planet, and most of all, I love this female. But I never thought of myself as a farmer until now...and it’s the same with being a father. I never thought of it before, and now I want it more than anything. “I’m sure.”

Leilani smiles, and she’s heartbreakingly beautiful. “Then let’s do this.”

“I thought that’s what we were doing,” I tell her, and thrust my finger into her again.

She gasps, her thighs trembling over mine, and a little moan escapes her before she lifts her hips and bucks onto my finger again. I love the sight of her face as she rides my hand, but it makes me want more.

“Let me taste you,” I demand. “I want my mouth on you.”

“Next time,” she promises, and rocks her cunt against my hand again. “I want you too badly.”

I want her, too. I want her so much that I’m aching, my body pushed to the limits so quickly that it’s startling. I’ve never needed a female as badly as I need Leilani right now in this instant. I need to claim her, to mark her as mine with my seed and fill her cunt with my essence. It’s a primal urge...but so is my need to taste her.

A compromise, then.

I slide my finger out of her heat and I love the whimper of protest she makes. My hand is slick with her honey, and I raise it to my mouth and suck the taste of her off my fingers. She’s just as delicious as I imagined, the scent of her filling my nose

and the taste of her on my lips is incredible. I'm disappointed when I suck them clean, and I'm hungry to taste her again. But then Leilani's mouth is on mine, and her hand is between our bodies. She pulls my stiff cock free of my trousers and moans as she wraps her fingers around my girth.

"You're so warm," she whispers. "Warm and hard and covered with ridges."

I pull her close, press my face against the softness of her neck, and kiss her there. "You like the ridges?"

"Oh yes." Her breath catches in her throat as I nip her neck. "Can I...touch your spur?"

"You can touch me wherever you like, little one."

She reaches up and caresses it, fascinated. "It's hard like cartilage. Does it do anything?"

"Should it?" To me, the spur is just...there. Like my tail.

"I guess not." Leilani looks up at me and bites her lip. "It's just new to me."

She's so beautiful that I can't concentrate on anything but her full mouth and her hands on my cock. "Do whatever you like to me. I'm yours."

It's clear that she likes hearing that. She squeezes my cock and then lifts her hips. I capture her mouth, kissing her with all the fierce hunger and need inside me, and I groan when she fits me against the entrance to her core. One move, and then I'll be inside her...

And then she sinks down atop me.

The groan rips from my throat and I clench her soft body against me, burying my face in her neck as she slowly rocks down onto my length. She strokes one of my horns in a gentle caress, as if she needs to touch all of me. Then I'm seated completely inside her, and her cunt's squeezing me tighter than anything I've ever felt before. It's keffing bliss.

"Oh," she breathes. "That's what your spur does."

"What?"

Her hand slides down my stomach and she reaches between us, demonstrating. Her fingers trace the short length of my spur and where it ends, it's pressing alongside the little button of her clit that's so sensitive.

Interesting. I rock my hips, thrusting up against her, and her eyes flutter shut as a primal sound escapes her throat. "Oh, god."

Now that's more like it.

We build a rhythm, our bodies coming together awkwardly as we try to figure the other out. She's small and I worry I'm going to hurt her, even as she drives her hips down on my cock, demanding more than I'm giving her. The little tease tries to take control, and even though she's seated atop me, I grip her hips and show her that I'm the one in charge of her pleasure. Her breathing quickens, and her moans become more and more frequent. I drive into her, thrusting into the tight heat of her cunt, and each time, she cries out, her hand spasming against my chest. "Your spur," she says, over and over again. "Dear god, your spur."

I think she likes it.

I can feel her tightening around my cock, the clasp of her body driving me to the edge. I grab a handful of her glossy, dark hair and wrap it around my hand, trapping her against me as surely as my hand on her hip—and my cock spearing her cunt—do. "My little one," I tell her, and nip at her throat again. "My beautiful mate. My Leilani."

She comes with a cry when I say her name, and her channel shudders around me, squeezing me so tight that I come, too. My seed pours into her, my release blinding me with the intensity of it. I've never come so hard or so fast.

By the time I can catch my breath, I realize she's panting against me and our thighs are sticky with my release. I shift my weight and she moans again, rocking wetly down on my length again as if greedy for more.

And suddenly I am, too. I kiss her pretty golden-brown neck, unable to stop touching her, stop tasting her. I'm going

to take her home to OUR bed and fill her cunt with my seed again. And then I'm going to lick her sweet folds clean of any trace of my claiming...and do it all over again.

Her hand curls against the front of my tunic and she sighs, then snuggles up against me.

This female. I still can't believe she's mine. "You could have left me, Leilani."

"Mmm?" She lifts pleasure-sated eyes to gaze at me, questioning.

"You could have left me at the compound. Let them dump me back on Haven. Gotten yourself someone that's not a criminal."

She reaches up and touches my mouth, her fingers skimming over my lips. "You're a prisoner of war, remember? That's different. And even if you were a criminal, it doesn't matter. You're good to me. You treat me like I'm a person and you respect me. You could have hurt me, robbed me, raped me, and instead, you were good to me. You never pushed, even when I wanted you to. I want you, Tassar. You're the only person I could see being truly happy with. I know it's too early to declare love—"

"Is it? Because you've been mine since the moment I saw you." I take her hand and press a kiss to the palm. I like this human kissing. It feels good. Right. Just like Leilani does. "The moment I looked at you, I knew you were everything for me. I don't need to wait to know that I love you."

Her eyes shine with happiness. "Really?"

"Really."

"You've given me so much," she says softly, and then wraps her arms around my neck, her expression growing both mischievous and full of need. "Now, give me your baby."

And I do.

BONUS EPILOGUE

TASSAR

““**W**hat do you call this again?” Lord va’Rin asks in that oh-so-polite voice of his as he watches my Leilani move around the yard to the side of our small house.

“A keffing tragedy is what I call it,” Jutari says. He has his hands hooked to the carrier strapped to his chest and scowls at the pit of cooking food. The baby on his chest has no idea of her father’s bad mood. She flails her little arms and legs with excitement, burbling as she watches the activity.

“It is called a luau,” I say to the others.

“Throwing meat in a pit and covering it with leaves,” Jutari grumbles. “I bet it will taste like dirt.”

“The pit is an imu. It is tradition among her people. You prepare the pit carefully with layers of rocks and leaves and fire and then let the meat slow cook in the pit until it is ready.” I nudge him. “She made food in it yesterday and it was delicious.” My Leilani tested the pit yesterday, because she wanted to ensure that the food would taste similar to what it was in her homeland. The leaves here are not the same, the rocks are not the same, and the meat-stock certainly is not, but she was pleased with the results. I loved the way her eyes lit up so brightly at the first taste of meat. It was like she had

figured out a way to bring part of her home here to this world, and it filled me with joy.

So I lean close to Jutari. “She has worked very hard on this for days. I don’t care if the meat tastes like dirt. She’s my mate and this makes her happy, so you’re going to take big mouthfuls, exclaim how good it tastes, and demand seconds.”

He scowls, offering his finger to the chubby baby strapped to his chest. “You think this is my first time pretending to like human food? Chloe made a thing she called ‘iced cream’ the other day.” He shudders. “I pretended to love it even though the taste was a nightmare.”

“I quite like human food.” Lord Varrik va’Rin glances over at the two of us, his hands clasped behind his back. “But then again, as a former diplomat, one learns that you eat everything with a gracious smile...and try not to think about the preparation or ingredients too much.”

If everyone doesn’t enjoy Leilani’s kalua pua’a, she’ll be terribly disappointed. I’m not entirely sure what ‘pua’a’ is. She tells me it’s like pork, but I don’t know what that is either. But the food she made yesterday was tender and juicy, and I just grin at the men proudly. They’ll see.

I can’t help but be a bit nervous on Leilani’s behalf, though. It’s the first time my mate has entertained guests, and she’s been so nervous for the last few days that it’s making me nervous, too. I want it to go well for her, because if it doesn’t...I’m going to have to stomp some asses. “It’s going to be keffing delicious, damn it. Wait and see.”

Jutari just makes a noise that might be dissent, and the baby drags his finger to her mouth and chews on it. “Someone’s here’s hungry at least.”

Lord va’Rin considers the baby even as the women bustle past us. I see va’Rin’s mate Milly waddle past with a big bowl of something perched atop her expansive belly. She’s heavily pregnant, and I see va’Rin’s gaze settle on her for a long moment before he turns to Jutari. “May I hold your child?”

Jutari frowns, a hint of the dangerous criminal he used to be flashing across his face. “Why?”

Va’Rin gestures at his mate. “I should think it obvious.”

“You’ve never held a baby before?”

Chloe – Jutari’s mate – immediately appears, heading over to her male’s side with a big wooden spoon in hand. “Let him hold her,” she tells her mate with an exasperated smile. “I have to finish making the potato salad.”

“Potato salad?” Jutari echoes.

“Ish?” Chloe shrugs and helps him undo the baby.

“Ish? What does ‘ish’ mean?”

“It means it’s potato salad-ish.” She grins at her child and pulls her from Jutari’s chest, then holds the child out to Lord va’Rin. “Her name is Kivita.”

Lord va’Rin takes the baby in his arms, a perplexed expression on his face. He studies Chloe, and then Kivita once more, his expression pale. “She is very big.”

“Her father is very big,” Chloe says, and then waves the spoon. “I have to go. Jutari will help you if you need anything.” She smacks her mate’s ass with the spoon, giggles, and then heads back into our house.

Jutari grins at his little mate as she retreats, then gives Lord va’Rin an odd look. “You’re rather pale.”

“She is very large for a human mother,” Lord va’Rin says after a long moment. He continues to hold the baby at arm’s length, the child squirming in his arms, her little legs kicking. “Did it cause your mate much pain to give birth?”

“Terrible, unendurable pain,” Jutari drawls. “Chloe likes to remind me of it every time we get into an argument.”

Va’Rin looks sick. He quickly hands the baby to me. “I must see about scheduling the finest physician in this galaxy to come to Risda for the next several weeks.” He stares at his very pregnant mate and then rubs his mouth. “Months. Make that months.”

I take Kivita in my arms and bounce her.

“He looks keffing terrified,” Jutari says, watching Lord va’Rin retreat. “Maybe I should have told him Chloe wasn’t exactly upset about the birth and she’s pregnant again, so it wasn’t all that bad?”

I grunt. “His mate is small. Not like my Leilani.” I eye my mate as she moves toward the pit. She has a brightly colored skirt tied at her waist, and I can see a sliver of brown skin from where her cropped tunic rides up and exposes her back. I admire her wide hips and strong, sturdy thighs. “My Leilani will be able to carry a kit like this, no problem.”

“You say that now, but you wait until it starts coming and she screams with pain. This head,” he taps lightly at Kivita’s fuzzy little scalp. “Has to come out of your *mate*.”

I study the baby. She’s adorable, shoving one chubby light blue fist into her mouth and gnawing on it. Her teeny tiny horns are nothing but nubs, and she’s got the small blip of a human nose instead of a strong, hard mesakkah one. Her eyes are bright and a dark brown as she gazes up at me, and then begins to giggle. She’s adorable. I heft her again, grinning, but my grin slides off my face as I realize...she really is quite large. And her head is enormous. I look over at Leilani again, and that sick feeling churns in my gut. “Here,” I say to Jutari. “Take your daughter.”

“Where are you going?” He takes her from me, a frown on his face.

“I’m going to go see if I can get the name of that physician from Lord va’Rin,” I say, and head inside.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hello there!

I hope you enjoyed this short, sweet, sexy little story! When the girls at Read Me Romance first approached me to write for them, I declined. My schedule's already hectic as hell, right? I'm constantly running behind. But the first week I heard RMR, I fell in love. I loved the banter, the books, the positivity. They were having so much fun that I wanted to be in on that fun! So I wrote Mel immediately and said I wanted in, and could they find a spot for me somewhere?

Spoiler: They did!

I loved writing Leilani and Tassar. I've had requests from a lot of people to write short, sweet stories kind of like *The Alien's Mail Order Bride*. I hope this delivered for you in all the best ways. If you're getting the ebook of this and you've never listened to Read Me Romance, I highly recommend you download a podcast app on your phone of choice and get to it!

If you're wondering where you've seen Chloe and Jutari before, they were the main couple in *Prison Planet Barbarian*. If you're wondering about Milly and Lord va'Rin, they're the couple in *Pretty Human*. If you're wondering about Vordigar, he doesn't have a book...yet. And if you're wondering how all those humans got to Risda III, that's a story I'm also working on. :)

Ruby

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