



# Possessive Alien Mate

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**Category:** Romance, Fantasy, Science Fiction

**Description:** The bossy, possessive alien will never let her go...

Rem is completely taken by the beautiful dark-haired human who steps off the spacecraft from Earth. Tyra. His Tyra. After many years of solitude, he finally has a female to call his own. But he carries a dark secret, one which deeply affects his budding relationship with Tyra. She hasn't given him any reason not to trust her, but as he tries to outrun the secrets that are haunting him, he finds himself restricting her freedom more and more, always on the premise of keeping her safe. Her furious response stuns him, but he refuses to back down—he's determined to keep the female as his.

Tyra has spent her whole life looking to the stars and dreaming of leaving Earth. The prospect of becoming an alien mail order bride excites her and she signs up as soon as she reaches the minimum required age of twenty-one. But she's in for a rude awakening when she meets her betrothed, a huge bossy Martian named Rem. He won't let her out of his sight...in fact, he won't let her do much, at all. His passionate kisses drive her wild, but he's far too overprotective and prone to jealousy for her liking. Has she made a terrible mistake, or will the sexy green alien eventually come to his senses?

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## Chapter 1

Rem navigated the corridors of the palace, his mood darkening with each step. A growl built in his throat when he reached the golden double doors of the royal receiving chamber. He didn't know why the king had requested his presence, though he hoped the chamber wasn't filled with dozens of dignitaries and royal advisors. Rem didn't enjoy large gatherings and preferred to keep to himself as much as possible, thus the reason for his preemptive dark mood.

The golden doors zipped open upon his approach and he strode into the chamber. To his surprise, he found King Vaath of Mars standing alone near a window that overlooked the capital city of Ressiktron. Perhaps the king had a personal favor to ask of him. Something he wished to keep private. Rem cleared his throat and waited for the royal to acknowledge his arrival.

As King Vaath turned around, the sunlight pouring through the window glowed against his blue horns, accentuating the darker markings upon them. The royal shot Rem a polite smile and crossed the room to greet him with a foot tap. Rem tapped one foot to the king's in return, trying not to allow his shock over the friendly greeting to show on his face. Marttiadoxalian royals did not greet acquaintances in such a way, which likely meant the king was starting to view Rem as not only an asset to the palace, but maybe even a friend.

"Thank you for meeting with me today," the king said.

Rem inclined his head briefly. "I am at your service, King Vaath."

“It has come to my attention that you have not signed up to receive a human mate, though shipments of the females from Earth arrive on Mars frequently and palace guards are given top priority.” The king leaned back on a table, crossed his arms over his chest, and gazed at Rem expectantly.

“I have no need for a female,” Rem said, biting back another growl. His mood darkened further, until he felt his hands curl into fists at his sides. He wanted to punch something, the sudden desire to cause damage rushing through him in a violent red wave. After taking a deep breath and trying to calm himself, lest he launch himself upon the royal leader, Rem met King Vaath’s eyes.

“Your service during recent events was much appreciated,” the king said, obviously referring to the events that had led to his recent rise to power, which had included banishing Vaath’s traitorous father from the Marttiadoxalian Empire. “To thank you for helping justice prevail, I would like to offer you a human female.”

“Thank you for the offer, but it is not necessary. As I’ve already said, I have no need of a mate.”

The king’s dark eyes narrowed. “Perhaps you misunderstood, Rem. I am ordering you to take a human female as a mate.”

Rem’s entire body tensed. He visualized smashing a fist into the king’s nose repeatedly, until it shattered and left the royal a disfigured, bloody mess. But he kept his fists at his sides, not daring to raise a hand to the king he had vowed to protect. Furthermore, it was Rem’s duty as a royal guard to obey King Vaath’s every command. But while Rem had taken vows to protect and obey the king, he had not imagined the king would order him, or anyone else, to take a human female as a mate.

“Is my order unclear in any way?” King Vaath asked, annoyance threading his words.

“Not at all, my king,” Rem replied.

“Good. A shipment of human females from Zone 15 is expected tomorrow morning. Your mate will be among them. By this evening, someone from Martian Affairs on Earth will send you a message informing you of your mate’s name.”

Rem nodded. “Thank you, King Vaath.” He fought the urge to fidget in front of the royal, but the need to depart this room was making him unusually restless. A human female. His heart pounded violently in his chest. He was being forced to take a human female as his mate. But how could he refuse an order from the king?Fluxx. He couldn’t.

“It is my pleasure.” The king gestured toward the golden double doors. “You may return to your duties now.”

Rem exited the royal receiving chamber, his footsteps echoing against the walls. Once he stepped out into the corridor, he released a low growl as he looked around, as if hoping to glimpse an enemy intruder he could pummel. But the corridor was empty, and even as Rem headed for the palace’s main exit, the only Marttiadoxalians he ran into were the Wise Ones, the holy men whose spiritual guidance his people depended upon. He couldn’t very well beat a Wise One to a pulp, so he departed the palace and returned to his post at the gates.

The other guards on duty backed away, as if sensing the fury building within him. Rem tried to focus on his duties and proceeded to check the palace’s security system, as well as the protective measures that were in place around the gates. He stood at the security console, his thoughts in turmoil.

Why had King Vaath ordered Rem to take a mate?

Despite the friendly foot tap greeting, Rem did not feel as though the king knew him

well. How did the royal justify inserting himself into Rem's private life?

What private life?

He pushed the stray thought away and stared at the security screens. Memories rushed back, haunting images of the life he had almost embarked upon back on Marttiadoxalia. Before their females had begun dying off, Rem was betrothed to a beautiful Marttiadoxalian female called Bethamma. But the female had betrayed him, leaving him for another male.

In the end, Bethamma perished, along with millions of other females, after the Xieandans poisoned the water supplies on Marttiadoxalia. Thoughts of the female always drew up conflicted feelings within Rem. He had been furious when she broke their betrothal, but even worse than his anger had been the utter humiliation of her refusal to mate with him. And yet, he also harbored sadness in his heart whenever he thought of her. She was gone forever, her life taken by cowardly enemies who had used poison as warfare—a dishonorable method of fighting, in Rem's opinion.

Many years had passed since the war against the Xieandans. Not long after this war had ended, his people had then gone to war against the humans, in retaliation for the humans' surprise attack on their first settlement on Mars. Rem had reveled in every battle, fighting with all his might and not caring if he perished in the process. But he had survived the two wars and after the last war had ended, he'd been appointed as a palace guard, one of the highest honors a male in the Brotherhood of Warriors could receive.

Rem was proud to dedicate his life to serving his people, as well as his king, though he still raged at the fact that he'd been ordered—ordered—to take a human female. If King Vaath believed he was rewarding Rem by gifting him with a human woman, he was profoundly mistaken.

Rem had no need for a mate.

After what Bethamma had done to him, how could he possibly trust another female?

He couldn't, and his heart hardened with each breath. But he would not be made a fool of again, and he resolved that he would keep his mate under control.

“I came to wish you many blessings from the Gods,” came a familiar voice, “upon the occasion of your impending mating union.”

## Page 2

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Rem turned as his friend, Jav, approached the security console. Annoyance flared within him, hot and all-consuming, as the tall purple male walked closer. The knowing look in the warrior's eyes filled Rem with suspicion and he pushed away from the console, coming face to face with his so-called friend.

“You ought to take a mate, Rem. It would be good for you. And taking a human female would help King Vaath's cause. Many of our males are hesitant to claim a human female as a mate, for they have been too influenced by the lingering propaganda of the anti-Earthers.”

As Jav's words, spoken only days ago, returned to him, Rem released a deep, menacing growl, though it didn't even cause Jav to blink. “You,” he said in an accusing tone. “You had something to do with King Vaath's order. I ought to rip your horns from your skull.”

Jav had the decency to appear guilty, though only for a brief moment. He stood taller and glared at Rem. “I believe we must all fulfill our duties to the empire, as faithfully as possible. Every able-bodied young Marttiadoxalian male should take a human female and procreate with her, even those of us who are haunted by the past.”

Rem growled again and Jav held up his hands in a gesture of truce.

“You are my friend, Rem, and I am leaving soon.” Jav cleared his throat, and it was at this point Rem noticed the purple male was wearing a backpack. “I wished to ensure your wellbeing before my departure. It may be a while before I'm able to return. Classified mission.”

As a member of the Vash'arr, an elite group of genetically enhanced Marttiadoxalian warriors, it wasn't unusual for Jav to disappear from time to time, though he rarely informed Rem or anyone else when he must leave on a secret mission. "Classified mission?" Rem repeated. "Well, lucky for you. I won't pummel your face until you return, then."

Jav cracked a smile. "I'd be happy to meet you in the training ring when I get back," he said, "just promise you'll save your anger for me. Don't take your frustrations out on your female."

Before Rem could respond, a group of Vash'arr approached and one of the warriors called Jav's name. The ground vibrated and Rem didn't have to look at the security console to know a sleek Vash'arr ship had just descended to the landing platform that rested outside the palace gates.

Jav nodded at Rem and jogged over to join the group of Vash'arr warriors. Rem opened the gates and watched them exit the palace grounds, his fury growing with every breath. So, this was Jav's doing. Jav was close to the king and had no doubt called in a favor.

Rem's mood descended into pitch darkness. All the anger he'd felt toward Bethamma came rushing back, as well as the humiliation and heartbreak. He had foolishly believed he cared for the female and had allowed himself to develop tender feelings for her, only for her to betray him just days before their mating union was to take place.

What would it be like to mate with a human female?

Relations between Mars and Earth remained tense. Would his female view him as the enemy?



He glared at the sun, sitting low in the sky. It was late afternoon by now, and tomorrow would arrive soon enough. Fluxx. He went about his duties, unable to stop conjuring images in his mind of what his female might look like. As he completed a sweep of the palace grounds, he finally began to calm down somewhat. Reality soon started to set in, as well as reason.

Marttiadoxalian numbers were not as strong as they once were. It was logical to take a human female as a mate, get her with child, and help his people grow their numbers, and many males of his kind had already done so. Not only was it logical, but the practice was encouraged by the king and other dignitaries who wished to strengthen their people. How could they remain strong if their numbers dwindled?

His wrist comm buzzed just as he returned to the security console. He looked down at the message from Martian Affairs, his heart suddenly racing.

Tyra. His female was called Tyra.

When he said her name aloud, in the privacy of the security console where no one would hear, a strange warmth flowed through him.

“Tyra.”

Gods help him, but he liked the way her name rolled off his tongue.

## Chapter 2

“We’re finally landing.” Tyra stood at the large viewscreen, her heart racing with excitement as the spacecraft descended to the lush green surface of recently terraformed Mars. Hope swelled in her chest and she soon found herself blinking back tears.

Though she had pinned all her hopes and dreams on this planet, she hadn't expected to become so emotional upon her arrival. She clasped her shaking hands together and took a few deep breaths, trying to calm the doubts that were suddenly racing through her mind.

Please let me find what I'm looking for here.

She cast a quick glance around the women's quarters, but none of her companions seemed pleased to have reached the planet that would be their new home. In fact, most of the women appeared frightened. To help ease their fears, and perhaps some of her own, she decided to spout some of the benefits of becoming the mail order bride of a Marttiadoxalian, which humans usually called Martians for short.

"You know, there's no pollution here," she said. "The water is clean, the ground is fertile, and the capital city is warm year-round. Plus, there are already several thousand human women living on Mars. We're going to be joining a Martian-human community and—"

"And live in subservience to our alien overlords," a tall redhead interrupted.

Tyra frowned at the young woman, but she didn't feel like getting into an argument, so she returned her gaze to the breathtaking planet below. The spacecraft landed gently upon a platform in the center of Ressiktron, the capital city of Mars.

A sense of giddiness spread through her, which helped chase away most of her doubts, at least for the moment. She would soon meet her mate, a Marttiadoxalian male. She wondered what he would look like and where on Mars he lived. Would her new home be in the city or in a more rural location on this planet?

"Why issheso excited anyway?" someone whispered, just loud enough for Tyra to hear.

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“I don’t know. She must be crazy. No one signs up to become a Martian’s bride unless they’re forced to,” another woman replied.

“Maybe she doesn’t have any family left on Earth,” said yet another woman in a sympathetic tone.

Tyra felt her face heat. During the ten-hour journey to Mars, she hadn’t confided in the women her reasons for leaving Earth and she wasn’t about to now. It was none of their business. Besides, this was her fresh start. A chance to be someone else, anyone but the person she had been on Earth.

“I can hear you, you know.” She spun around and placed her hands on her hips, then scanned the small crowd gathered around the viewscreen, though she wasn’t sure which of the women had been whispering about her. “I’m sorry if most of you are here because you feel you’ve been forced, but perhaps you should try to think of this as an adventure, or an opportunity for a better life.”

“A better life?”

“An adventure?”

“Twenty years ago, these assholes conquered our planet, slaughtering millions of human soldiers in the process, and even though most of them settled on Mars instead of Earth, they still won’t leave our planet,” the redhead said, stepping forward. “They’ve practically enslaved us, forcing us to pay increasingly higher taxes and making us work in their factories, where they don’t pay us enough to make ends meet. My widowed mother was jailed when she fell behind paying rent and Martian

taxes. That's why I'm here. Because by signing up to become a fucking alien's mate, my mother's debt will be erased and she'll be freed from prison. And that ten thousand galactic credit bonus we're all given? I've directed Martian Affairs to deposit it in my mother's account so she doesn't end up in the same situation again, so my younger siblings don't end up in a godforsaken Martian-run orphanage."

"This is just a game to you," another woman said with a sneer, "but it won't feel like a fun adventure for long. Do you honestly have any idea what these Martian savages are like? They're controlling, unfeeling brutes who only care about getting their females pregnant as many times as possible. They only care about increasing their population, growing their numbers so they can become even stronger and keep subjugating the humans."

"I don't think the Martians are much different from humans," Tyra said, even as the hair on the back of her neck suddenly prickled.

What if these women were right? What if Martian males really were unfeeling brutes?

But she wasn't ready to admit she might be wrong, especially when there was no turning back. She'd just arrived on Mars, after all. And while she wasn't about to admit it to these women, there was nothing but pain and humiliation awaiting her on Earth, even if she could somehow manage to return.

She had to make this work.

She had to make Mars her new home.

"I am certain Martians are capable of love and kindness and compassion," she said in a hopeful tone, but none of the women appeared convinced. Half of them looked angry with her, and the other half were gazing upon her with immense pity.

Before anyone could say another word, the door zipped open and over a dozen huge Martian males poured into the women's quarters, their dark gazes scanning the room with purpose.

Tyra's heart skipped a beat. She was about to meet her new mate, the alien male with whom she would spend the rest of her life.

Would she find what she was looking for on this planet?

Or would her secret pain follow her, no matter how far she ran from Earth?

"Carmen!" a purple alien called out as he stepped closer to the gathered women.

A trembling brunette emerged from the crowd. "Um, hi. I'm Carmen."

The purple Martian tapped a foot against Carmen's and then reached for her hands, pulling her away from the others. The males took turns calling out the women's names. Tyra noticed that while none of the aliens smiled, they at least appeared cordial enough. All of them greeted their females with a traditional Marttiadoxalian foot tap before ushering them out into the corridors of the ship.

Tyra's breath caught in her throat as she studied the three males who remained. Two of them seemed somewhat pleasant, but the massive green one standing behind the others wore a deep scowl. He was taller and more muscular than all the other aliens she'd seen thus far, and his overly massive size combined with his fierce expression made her insides quiver. When the two males standing in front of him were matched with the other remaining women, Tyra couldn't help but take a step back as realization crashed over her.

This angry looking brute was the only one left.

He was her mate.

She swallowed hard and tried to summon all the bravery she'd felt during the short voyage from Earth. She'd been excited and determined to make a brand-new life for herself on an exotic planet. She'd been hopeful and eager to meet her Martian husband, because surely the life awaiting her on Mars would be better than the one she was leaving behind.

Once the other couples filtered out of the room, the green male approached her, his gaze sweeping from her head down to her feet. She fought the urge to back up even further.

“Are you Tyra?” he asked, speaking in Galactic Common, his tone shockingly deep and gruff. His voice felt like a rough but intimate caress, and she found herself longing to hear him speak again, just to feel the vibration of his voice rumbling inside her chest.

“Yes, I-I am Ty-Tyra,” she replied.

He walked closer and tapped his left foot against her right one. She returned his greeting and tapped his foot in return, all the while holding his gaze, even though staring up at him made her neck ache. He had to be at least seven and a half feet tall.

Holy hell, what had she gotten herself into?

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His eyes were dark and forbidding, and when he reached for her arm it was all she could do not to pull back and run for her life. Her instincts told her to flee, yet there was nowhere she could go. She'd already agreed to become a Martian's bride. She'd signed a contract and she very much doubted she would be permitted to return to Earth even if she tried to refuse this alien male.

To her shock, he reached out to cup her face in one hand. His palm felt hard as steel, causing a pang of fear to tighten in her stomach. She remembered that Martians possessed armored skin that was impervious to most weaponry, one of the reasons they had so easily conquered Earth. He could crush her if he wanted to. He could hurt her worse than the monster she'd run away from.

Silence stretched between them as he peered into her eyes. He still wore a deep scowl and when his nostrils flared, he looked frightfully angry, like a beast on the verge of attack. But maybe she was reading him wrong. Maybe he wasn't angry at all.

A feeling of inadequacy washed over Tyra. Perhaps he didn't find her pleasing, or perhaps he wished he'd been matched with one of the other women, or maybe he simply didn't like humans yet was taking one as a mate because he needed to help his people grow their numbers.

As all these possibilities swirled through her mind, she began to feel faint and hoped he said something soon. The silence became deafening and with each second, the tension in the air rose higher, making her sick to her stomach as a tremble spread throughout her body.

"My name is Rem." He forced her face higher. "I am pleased to meet you, my bride,"

he said, putting a strange emphasis on the last two words that sent a shiver down her back.

“Hello, Rem. I am pleased to meet you as well.” Somehow, she forced out the response, even though she was still shaking. All her enthusiasm from earlier had long faded. She couldn’t help but fear this alien.

How had she deluded herself into thinking this would be an adventure, let alone a fresh start?

In her haste to escape Earth, she hadn’t considered what she would do if her alien mate possessed a bad temperament. Instead, she had allowed herself to get carried away by visions of beautiful green forests, snow-capped mountains, and a resplendent alien city just waiting to be explored.

In addition to her dreams about the incredible new world she would call home, she had even fantasized about falling in love with her handsome Martian husband. Well, he was handsome, in a hard, fierce warrior sort of way. But he didn’t appear capable of tenderness or affection. This frightened her more than she would have liked to admit, and she prayed her first impression of Rem was wrong.

“A Wise One is waiting at my abode,” he said, interrupting her thoughts. “Let us depart the ship and seek the holy man’s blessing upon our union.” He released her and grabbed the suitcase that rested near her feet. “I assume this is yours?”

“Yes, thank you.” It was heavy and she appreciated that he was apparently going to carry it. Perhaps he had a gentlemanly side, after all. God, she could only hope.

With his free hand, he grasped her upper arm and guided her out into the gleaming silver corridors of the spacecraft. He didn’t say a word as they disembarked, and by the time they reached the bottom of the landing ramp, she didn’t see any sign of the



other couples. The city stretched out large and majestic in all directions, and she wondered if she would ever see any of the women again. Even though she hadn't particularly gotten along with any of them, she abruptly felt their absence and prayed she made at least a few human friends on this planet.

She lifted her face to the sun and breathed in the fragrant air. Tall green trees lined the perimeter of the landing platform. She peered into the surrounding forest and marveled at the thick underbrush and flowering vines that flourished upon the land. Beyond this forest area, she glimpsed the rooftops of reddish-orange houses and other impressive looking structures, including the huge palace that she realized must house the royal Martian family. Now that she was out in the open, her sense of adventure began to return.

"Wow," she said. "I've never seen so much green in my life. This place is magical."

As they left the ramp and continued down a white stone path that curved through the trees, he pulled her closer and gave her a quizzical look. "Magical?"

"Don't you think it's magical?" She grinned and gestured around the woods. "Why, I feel as though I'm walking through an enchanted forest at this moment. Everything is so green and lush and there are thousands upon thousands of flowering plants, some of which are glimmering in the sun—just look at that flower patch over there—and the little animals that are flitting amongst the trees are adorable." She spotted a creature that looked like a mixture between a squirrel and a chipmunk, but before she could point it out to him, she heard footsteps approaching and Rem's grip on her arm tightened painfully.

She tried to wrench out of her mate's hold, but he didn't loosen his grasp. He pulled her closer and she glanced ahead to see two Martian males approaching. They were dressed in black, like Rem, and it occurred to her that they were all dressed like the guards who'd been aboard the spacecraft. She supposed that meant Rem was also a

guard or maybe an enforcer, like those Martians who patrolled the streets on Earth.

The approaching males paused and greeted Rem with foot taps, though they spoke in their own language, which Tyra couldn't understand. From what she'd heard, few humans could speak, let alone comprehend, the Marttiadoxalian tongue.

She peeked up at Rem and her stomach lurched at the murderous glint in his eyes. What was wrong with him? She got the sense that he didn't like these two males, but she didn't understand why he was being so rough with her. Every time she tried to escape his grasp, he tightened his hold on her, and sometimes a low growl would escape his throat.

Her fear started to return, causing a shiver to rush through her, despite the heat of the day. What was Rem's problem?

She eyed the two males openly, wondering who they were. While Rem's skin was a bright green shade, which she loved because it reminded her of the beauty of a lush green forest, the newcomers were both a bright purple color. In fact, the longer she looked at them, the more she suspected they were brothers. The markings on the horns that curved over their heads and down their backs were almost identical, and the ridges on their foreheads were similar as well.

Finally, Rem switched to Galactic Common and introduced her to the males.

"Tyra, this is Chexxa and Frinik. Chexxa is a warrior in training, and Frinkik is a guard who also works at the palace."

Alsoworks at the palace? She shot Rem a questioning look but decided she would ask him about his job later. Recovering her senses, she smiled briefly at both men, only for another growl to leave Rem. Seriously, what was his problem?

“Hello, Chexxa and Frinik, it’s nice to meet you,” she said, still smiling, even though she was beginning to suspect that her friendliness toward these males was pissing Rem off. Ugh. She really hoped her impression of the situation was wrong and that her mate wasn’t the jealous type. Just in case he was, she allowed her smile to fade.

“Welcome to Mars,” Chexxa said.

“Yes, welcome to our planet,” Frinik said, “and may I wish you both a happy mating union.”

“That’s most kind of you. Thank you.” Tyra nodded at each male and forced herself not to smile again, lest it anger Rem any further.

Once the males said farewell and resumed walking by, Rem loosened his hold on Tyra’s arm. She took the opportunity to physically pull herself from his grasp, putting all her strength into her movements. She rubbed her upper arm and glared up at him.

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He reached for her, but she placed a hand up in a gesture of self-defense.

“Stop!” She gave him a pleading look. “You’re being too rough. Perhaps you don’t know your strength,” she said, giving him the benefit of the doubt, “but you were hurting me just now.”

To her relief, his previously harsh expression morphed into one of concern. He reached out to gently caress her arm, rubbing the spot he’d just been grabbing. However, despite how worried he appeared over the prospect of hurting her, his muscles remained tense and an anxious aura hovered around him. He wasn’t entirely relaxed and she wondered what had him still on edge.

“I am truly sorry for causing you any pain, Tyra.” He shifted closer and stroked a hand through her hair, his touch eliciting goosebumps to rise all over her body. “But I did not like the way you were looking at those males. You were smiling at them and they were smiling at you. I wanted to kill them.”

Her stomach flipped at his words. So he was the jealous type.

After taking a deep breath, she cleared her throat and met his gaze.

“Rem, I’ve been matched to you. We’re about to become mates. You have nothing to worry about. I came to this planet fully intending to honor my promise to become a Martian’s mate. I’m not the type of person to cheat.” Her heart sank at the memory of how her uncle’s habitual cheating had affected her poor aunt. She would never do that to anyone, not even this temperamental Martian she’d just met. Perhaps he wouldn’t seem so angry all the time once he trusted her.

But how long would it take to build such a trust between them?

“It pleases me to hear you intend to honor our mating union.” He looked her up and down, appearing deep in thought as he studied her. “I only hope you are telling the truth.”

“Of course, I’m telling the truth.” Feeling more than a bit affronted by his statement, she placed her hands on her hips, giving him her best glare. Were all Martians jealous barbarians? Before she could say anything else, he wrapped an arm around her—not too tightly this time, for which she was thankful—and guided her further down the white stone path.

After a few minutes, they arrived in a clearing near the palace, where a huge red house sat amongst the thickness of the surrounding forest.

“This is my home.” Rem pointed at the red house. “Ourhome,” he amended, his tone filled with unmistakable affection. The sudden change in the timbre of his voice caught her off-guard.

Her heart skipped a beat when he pulled her closer, his nearness and the warmth in his voice making her pulse race with anticipation.

He’d said a Wise One was waiting for them at his house. That meant their union would be blessed very soon and she would officially belong to him.

She peered at the house, admiring the unique but beautiful structure. It looked like some sort of exotic fairytale cottage and she couldn’t wait to go inside and explore.

Rem grasped her hand, lacing his huge fingers through hers, and gave her a heated look that only caused her pulse to race faster. Though the possessiveness he’d displayed in the forest earlier had frightened her, it had also affected her in other

ways, ways she didn't quite understand. Warm pulses were gathering between her thighs and she couldn't stop admiring Rem's huge, muscular physique.

"Come, my sweet mate," he said, and the unexpected endearment caused her to flush all over. In the next moment, nervous flutters rose in her stomach. "It is time for our union to receive the traditional Marttiadoxalian blessing. Then we will consummate our union immediately. I am most eager to make you mine."

### Chapter 3

My sweet mate?

I am most eager to make you mine?

Gods. Had Rem truly just uttered those phrases?

He stared down at the dark-haired beauty called Tyra, as he wondered what had gotten into him. There was a gentle warmth about her that drew him in, causing him to feel increasingly protective of her. But protecting her also meant treating her with fairness. Was it fair to assume she would try to run off with another male should the opportunity arise?

No, it wasn't, and he suddenly regretted the way he'd treated her during their brief meeting with Chexxa and Frinik. At the same time, he must tread carefully during the beginning of their mating union, because Tyra was a stranger, a female he didn't know well. While she had claimed she intended to honor their mating union, he didn't yet know if he could trust her.

You trusted Bethamma, only for her to betray you.

He repressed a growl and ushered Tyra into his home. He placed her suitcase down in

the entryway, intending to carry it upstairs later.

The Wise One, a holy man by the name of Gieannas, was waiting in the downstairs sitting room. Rem nodded at the male and urged his soon-to-be mate further into the morning sunlight that was pouring through the windows. A glance down showed she was peering around his house, her dark eyes growing wider with each passing moment. She appeared impressed by his home, which he found pleased him more than he would have expected. He hadn't imagined possessing the desire to impress his mate, and yet here he was, hoping she found the upper levels of his home just as impressive as this one.

"Are you ready to become a mated pair?" Gieannas asked.

"Yes, we are," Rem said.

He noticed Tyra swallowed hard and started to smile at the Wise One, only to press her lips firmly together and look down at her feet. Was she afraid of incurring his anger? Marttiadoxalian holy men took a vow of celibacy and he wasn't worried anything untoward could happen between her and Gieannas, but he still appreciated that she was making an effort not to look upon another male for too long. He hoped it was a sign that she would indeed honor their mating union.

Still, he would need to keep an eye on her. After what Bethamma had done to him, he could never be too careful, and he would never endure such agonizing humiliation and heartbreak again. He would ensure he always knew where Tyra was, as well as with whom she was keeping company. He vowed not to let his guard down. Not even once.

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Gieannas stood before Rem and Tyra, clasping his hands together as he bowed his head. He began chanting the traditional Marttiadoxalian mating blessing, the holy man's deep voice echoing off the walls.

During the blessing, Rem stood facing Tyra while holding her hands in his. He maintained her gaze, and whenever she tried to look away, he grasped her chin and forced her to look at him again. Each time he did so, a full body tremble affected her and her face became flushed.

He breathed deep, savoring the scent of his female. She smelled like a flowering meadow and he longed to bury his face in her hair, to feel the softness of her dark fragrant locks brushing against his cheeks. His cock stirred in his pants, hardening as a fierce wave of lust swept through him. Despite his initial reluctance to take a mate, he now found himself desiring this small human female beyond all reason.

Mine. My human.

He released a deep growl, though he doubted Tyra heard him over the resounding chants of the Wise One, since she didn't flinch once. As he stared down at her, he noticed a small smattering of light brown freckles on her nose and cheeks, and the markings made her look all the more beautiful and enticing to him. She was an exotic female from Earth, with creamy skin that was soft to the touch, and hair that was almost black. Her dark brown eyes contained golden flecks that seemed to reflect the light in the room.

Gods, she was stunning. He couldn't tear his gaze from hers.



The Wise One finished chanting and an abrupt silence filled the house. Rem couldn't be certain, but he thought he heard the rapid beating of Tyra's heart.

When she parted her lips and inhaled slowly, the sight of her pink lips moving made his cock harden further. He imagined those lips wrapped around his length and his blood heated.

"I wish you a long, happy mating union," Gieannas said as he exited the sitting room.

"Thank you, Gieannas," Rem called out. He appreciated that the holy man was choosing not to linger.

When he heard the front door closing after Gieannas' departure, a fresh wave of desire gripped him at the knowledge that he now had Tyra completely alone. He released her hands and reached for her hair, unable to stop himself from caressing his fingers through the silken locks. He leaned closer and breathed deep. The scent of her womanly essence, evidence of her building excitement, reached him as he drew her closer into his arms.

All his reasons for not wanting a mate faded as he embraced her, resting his chin atop her head as he continued petting her hair and running his hands up and down her back. She shuddered against him and the scent of her arousal increased in the air. His cock lurched into her stomach and he pressed his body closer to hers, allowing her to feel the evidence of his own arousal. A tiny gasp left her, but she didn't attempt to escape his hold.

"That was a quick mating ceremony," she said after a moment. She pulled back slightly to peer up at him, her face still flushed and her eyes shining bright with excitement. "Human wedding ceremonies are usually much longer."

He cupped her face in his hands. Mine. My human.

Again, that fierce, almost violent, possessiveness for Tyra stole through him. He resisted the urge to grab her roughly and carry her upstairs. He took a deep breath, reminding himself that she was his mate. It was his duty to protect her and he must exercise self-control and refrain from harming her during their first mating.

But Gods, he ached to hold her down and ravage her right here and now.

He wanted her to feel that she belonged to him.

“Are you all right, Rem?” She looked concerned as she gazed up at him, those pretty dark eyes of hers searching his face. “You, um, you look strange, and you’re being so quiet. Is something wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong, my sweet mate.” That endearment. He’d just used it for the second time, without even thinking. The words had simply issued from his lips. He straightened and reached for her hand. “Come, and I will escort you upstairs.”

Her breath hitched and she glanced around the room, as if looking for an escape. Annoyance flared within him. She was his, and she wasn’t going anywhere but to his bed. He pulled her closer and tightened his hold on her hand.

“You aren’t going anywhere,” he said sternly. “You belong to me now, Tyra.”

“I thought we belonged to each other?” she said in a wary tone. “You are now my mate, as much as I am yours. At least, that is the way of mating unions, or marriages, on Earth.”

“You are no longer on Earth.” He guided her toward the steps that led upstairs. But he couldn’t deny he liked what she’d just said, about them belonging to each other. Did she truly view him as belonging to her? The very idea struck him as unusual. In Martti axoxalian mating unions, males led and females followed. Females obeyed.

Would Tyra obey him in all things, or would she prove rebellious?

“I know I’m no longer on Earth,” she said once they reached the corridor that led to his bedroom. “I’m simply trying to explain to you how I view our union. You don’t have to be so grouchy about it.”

Grouchy? He paused in the corridor and stared down at her, completely taken aback. No one had ever called him grouchy before. At least to his face. No one would ever dare issue such an insult. Children were grouchy. Adult Marttiadoxalian males who worked as palace guards were not.

“I am not grouchy,” he said.

A smile played about her lips. “Yes, you are. I realize I’ve known you for less than an hour, but I can already tell that you take yourself way too seriously, Rem. You need to loosen up. Trust me, you’ll have more fun that way.”

“I don’t need to have fun.” He tightened his hold on her hand and guided her into his bedroom. The sight of the bed made her steps falter, and he had to pause until she recovered her senses and continued walking with him.

He spun her to face him and gave her a severe look, wanting her to understand that he didn’t appreciate the turn their conversation had taken.

Who was she to tell him that he took himself way too seriously? If any male among his peers ever said such a thing, Rem would make the male suffer.

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He couldn't make Tyra suffer, however, nor did he wish to hurt her. If anything, he wished to prove her wrong, to show her that he wasn't grumpy and that he could have fun, despite claiming only moments ago that he didn't need to have fun.

A glint of worry shone in her eyes suddenly, as she glanced from Rem to the bed and back again. Was his outspoken little human nervous? When she exhaled a shuddering breath an instant later, he decided she must be at least somewhat anxious about being claimed by him for the first time. His cock thickened in his pants and his balls drew up tight. Fluxx, he wanted her now.

He leaned down to press his lips to hers.

### Chapter 4

His kisses were making her delirious.

Tyra's head swam as she clutched onto Rem's shirt and began to tentatively kiss him back. He responded to her cautious efforts by holding her face and deepening the kiss, causing heat to surge through her in sharp, quaking waves.

The steady pulses of warmth between her thighs became more urgent, and she pressed her legs together, hoping to ease the needy throbbing sensation that threatened to drive her mad. If Rem didn't reach down and touch her there soon, she feared she might combust.

In between kisses, he would pull back for a few moments to stare at her, before he dipped his head down again and resumed delving his tongue into her mouth and

tangling it with hers. He held her in place, completely in control as he kissed her, and the knowledge that they would soon end up in bed together made her desire mount further.

It was pure physical attraction, she realized, but she didn't care. She didn't know Rem well at all yet, and he didn't know her very well either. But they were attracted to one another, and she was at least thankful for this as he lowered her to the bed and pressed his huge body to hers.

Oh God. He was on top of her. As his hard cock pressed to her thigh, she imagined she could feel the heat of his stiff appendage through the layers of their clothing.

Breaking the kiss, he focused on her attire. She was wearing a yellow sundress, and he slipped the straps over her shoulders and began tugging the garment down over her body. She lifted her hips to assist him, even as she felt her face heating. He was still wearing his black uniform, while she was now only wearing panties and a bra. His dark otherworldly eyes scanned over her body as he tossed her dress to the floor.

His nostrils flared and a deep growl resounded from his throat. Her stomach flipped. She had thought Martiaxoxalian males only growled when angry, but apparently, they made such noises when sexually excited as well. But, though the animalistic sound had startled her at first, when he issued yet another growl, this time it caused goosebumps to rise on her arms and a fresh surge of heat to flare between her thighs.

As she squirmed around beneath him, she felt the wetness of her arousal pressing onto her panties. His nostrils flared every time she moved around, making her wonder if he could detect the scent of her essence. Her face flamed at the prospect.

“You are the most beautiful female I have ever seen, sweet Tyra.” Affection gleamed in his eyes, taking her aback. She liked this side of him much better than his jealous side. She hoped he treated her with warmth more often than he behaved like a jealous

brute.

“Thanks. You know, you’re pretty good looking yourself.” She reached for the top buttons on his black shirt and unfastened them, revealing the top half of his muscular chest. Lord have mercy. The longer she stared at him, the more difficult it became to breathe.

He reached for her panties and she heard a tearing noise a second later. She gulped hard and watched as he tossed the ripped undergarment to the floor. Next, he focused on her bra, but before he could tear it off her, she quickly unfastened the front clasp. She’d only brought a handful of bras with her to Mars and she didn’t want any of them ruined so soon. She wasn’t sure what kind of clothing, let alone undergarments, were available to the females who lived on this planet.

As she revealed her breasts to him, he helped her shrug off the bra, then he took one nipple into his mouth, sucking and even dragging his teeth along her flesh. She arched into his touch, even as she attempted to undo more buttons on his shirt.

He ground his center against hers, allowing her to feel the fullness of the erection still encased within his pants, before he rose off the bed and started stripping his own clothes off. I’m really on Mars and I’m really about to mate with a Marttioxoxalian. This realization struck her as she watched him undress. The sight of his naked body, so powerful and huge, made her mouth go dry.

But suddenly, he froze. She peered up at him, taking note of his tensed posture and the angry look in his otherworldly eyes. His nostrils flared and yet another growl left him, but this time he sounded decidedly angry. He wasn’t looking directly at her though, she realized, and she followed his gaze down to the necklace she was wearing. The locket had come open, revealing the picture of a young man smiling warmly for the camera.

“Rem?” She couldn’t believe this. Was he really getting jealous over a picture of another male? The least he could do was ask who the man was before he started growling at her. His sudden jealousy and the darkness entering his eyes was a splash of cold water. All the excitement and arousal she’d felt moments ago vanished. All she wanted was for him to get off of her and leave her alone—at least until he could learn to behave like a reasonable man.

“You dare to wear that around your neck, female?” A vein on his temple throbbed and the ridges on his forehead drew together, making him look even more menacing than usual. “You dare to carry the reminder of a former lover into our mating union?” He grasped her shoulders and gave her a slight shake.

Tyra snapped. She pushed against his chest with all her might and tried to wiggle out from underneath him. When he reached for the locket, she screamed “NO!” and cupped the precious item in her hands, shielding it from his grasp. “No! Get up! Get off me right fucking now!”

To her relief, he rolled off her, though he didn’t quite release her. He kept hold of her elbow, giving it a brief tug, as if trying to get her to surrender the locket.

But she wasn’t going to let go, not until she was certain he wouldn’t harm it. The locket was all she had left of the man on Earth whom she had loved most. A man she would never see again. It was a private pain, one which she didn’t wish to share with Rem or anyone else. She’d wanted a fresh start on Mars. Perhaps she shouldn’t have brought any reminders from Earth, but then she hadn’t expected her mate would be a jealous brute prone to overreacting.

He pinned her with a fierce look. “You are dishonoring our mating vows by wearing an image of another male around your neck.”

“The man in the picture is my father, you giant ass!” She wrenched away from him

and shot off the bed. She grabbed her dress off the floor and ran for the door, determined to escape this house and the beast who lived here. Determined to run as far as her legs would carry her.

Oh God, what a horrible mistake she'd made in coming here.

## Chapter 5

Rem cursed and scrubbed a hand over his face. Fluxx.

He took a deep breath and rose to his feet, his anger dissipating as quickly as it had fallen over him. He heard Tyra's footsteps on the stairs and called out a verbal command to the security system, ordering the house to go into lockdown. She wouldn't be able to escape him.



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He stalked after her, realizing he must apologize and try to make things right between them. Still naked, he hurried down the steps as he searched for her. He followed her sweet flowery scent and found her trying to push open the front door. When it failed to open, she moved to the nearest window, but it didn't budge either. She was wearing the yellow dress again, though in her haste to get dressed, it looked as though she'd put it on backwards.

He cleared his throat and waited for her to look at him. When she turned, her eyes went wide and she quickly looked away. "Jesus, Rem. Put some clothes on."

He glanced down at himself. His cock was still hard and bobbed slightly with his movements. "I left my clothing upstairs." He reached out a hand to her. "Come, Tyra. We are going back upstairs." He wanted her back in his bedroom, where he could hopefully make a proper apology and then they could pick up where they'd left off. He still longed to make her his, to claim her as his mate.

She shook her head back and forth. Tears glimmered in her eyes and she blinked rapidly as she made another futile attempt to open the window. "Fuck!" she said, slamming a hand against the reinforced glass.

"Tyra," he said, "I am sorry." The apology felt strange on his tongue, as strange as the one he'd issued in the forest after grabbing her too hard. Before these instances, he couldn't remember the last time he had apologized to anyone for anything. Perhaps when he was a child, or a young warrior. Gods. No wonder Jav was his only friend.

She exhaled a shuddering breath and stared at him, her expression wary as she

remained pressed to the wall near the window. She made no move to step closer and he didn't invade her space. He cursed his jealousy and the Marttiadoxalian female who had caused him to harbor such distrust in his heart. Tyra didn't look as though she accepted his apology. How could he mend the rift between them?

"I-I was wrong to react the way I did, my sweet mate. Please know that I am sorry." He reached out his hand again, holding his breath and hoping she would take it.

"Rem, could we perhaps talk and get to know one another better before..." Her voice trailed off and her cheeks reddened. "Before we, um, go back upstairs." She met his gaze and his heart clenched at the fear reflecting in her dark eyes. Fear he had caused.

"Yes, Tyra," he answered without hesitation. He certainly wouldn't force her to go back upstairs with him, not until she was comfortable doing so, anyway. How could he calm her? How could he erase the worry that glimmered in the depths of her eyes? He was vastly inexperienced with females. It had been many years since he'd spent more than a short moment speaking to one, let alone engaged in a full conversation. Suddenly, he felt woefully unprepared to accept a mate into his life. And yet, he couldn't fathom letting Tyra go.

He still felt possessive of her, still ached to claim her as his forever.

After a tense moment, she finally stepped forward and reached out to take his hand. When their fingers touched, warmth flowed through him, a river of emotion that couldn't be tamed.

Why was he drawn to Tyra unlike any other female?

As he pulled her closer, he experienced an emotion he hadn't felt in ages, one that startled him to the very depths of his being. Hope.

He gathered her closer and wrapped his arms around her, hugging her to his chest as he stroked one hand through her hair. She shuddered against him but made no move to return his embrace. He couldn't blame her, after the way he'd acted.

Her stomach abruptly grumbled, and he eagerly latched onto this distraction. He pulled back to stare down at her, still caressing his fingers through her soft tresses. He placed a finger beneath her chin, reveling in the silkiness of her skin. Were all human females so soft and delicate? Gods, he wanted to undress her again and run his hands all over her body. He wanted to examine every little part of her. He inhaled a deep breath, attempting to calm the desire that was rushing through him, and gave Tyra a brief smile.

"Come, my sweet mate, and I will get you settled in the sitting room while I prepare an early midday meal. It sounds as though you're hungry."

"I-I could eat. Thank you. That sounds nice."

He guided her through the lower level of his house, to the sitting room that faced the forest area around the palace. Though he lived in the center of the city, there was plenty of greenery, with small wooded areas in between clusters of houses. His house, in particular, wasn't situated near any others, as most of the palace guards lived within the walls of the royal estate. As he recalled how much Tyra had enjoyed the walk from the landing platform, he was now glad for the remote feel of his home. He was also thankful that the large window in the living room showed a splendid view of the flowering trees and other greenery.

"Wow, it doesn't feel like we're in a city." She walked to the window. "Are Marttiadoxalian cities usually designed this way? With little forests in between all the houses and buildings?"

"This is our only city at the moment," he said, "though there are a few smaller

settlements in more rural areas on Mars. But, yes, before we were forced to leave Marttiadoxalia, most of our large cities were designed this way. Even our most populated cities were not very similar to your cities on Earth.”

“Oh?” She turned to face him, and the late morning sun spilling into the room bathed over her long locks, drawing his attention to the lighter strands in her otherwise dark hair. “Have you been to Earth, then?”

He stared at her, unsure of how to answer. Of course, he’d been to Earth, and he’d killed many human soldiers during the short time he’d spent on the planet. Didn’t she realize most Marttiadoxalian males, aside from the very youngest of them, had battled Earth during the war?

“Yes, I’ve been to Earth.”

“When? And what part of the planet?”

“I was stationed in North America during the war,” he said. “Though the occasional mission took me to other locations on your planet, depending on where my unit was needed most during the fighting.”

She paled. “You fought in the war.” She forced a strange looking smile and shook her head briefly. “Of course, you fought in the war. Silly me. It’s just that twenty years have passed since then, and I am too young to remember the war, that it sometimes feels as though it happened a hundred years or more before I was born. I’ve heard stories about it, and I’ve seen some videos of the battles, but it’s difficult to grasp it as a more recent event when I didn’t witness any of the fighting with my own eyes.” She shrugged. “I never experienced what life on Earth was like before the war. This reality is the only one I know, unlike the generation before mine. My father used to tell me I was lucky in this regard, claiming that I was born at precisely the right time in history, for I would never yearn for the old days as his generation and that of his

parents' were doomed to forever do." She paused and flushed as she met his gaze. "Sorry, I guess I'm rambling." She tried to turn back to the window, but Rem caught her in his arms, unable to resist touching her yet again.

"You are unlike any female I've ever met," he found himself saying, though perhaps this was because he rarely interacted with females. Tyra's very presence, including her rambling, brought a much-needed lightness to his home. His house felt more open, the walls no longer closing in upon him. As he cupped her face and placed a gentle kiss to her forehead, he realized for the first time what was currently missing from his abode—the pervasive sense of loneliness that usually blanketed the entire place.

"Is that a compliment?" Tyra asked, her face flushing yet again.

"Yes, my sweet mate, it is." He ran his hands down her arms and then guided her to sit near the window on a long plush sofa. "You can wait here. I'll return shortly with our midday meal. I'll be certain to put some clothes on first."

"Thank you, Rem," she replied, blushing.

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He turned and hurried upstairs to dress quickly, then rushed to the kitchen, anxious to return to his mate soon.

But how long would it take to get to know one another? He didn't like the uncertain time table and had to push aside his impatience to get her back into his bed. He reminded himself that the Wise One had already bestowed a blessing upon their mating union.

Whether he'd bedded her yet or not, legally, she still belonged to him.

### Chapter 6

Though only minutes ago she'd run from Rem and attempted to escape his home, as Tyra sat on the sofa staring out the window, she now found herself anticipating his return to the sitting room. He'd seemed genuinely remorseful over his reaction to her locket, and her forehead still tingled in the spot where he'd kissed her so sweetly. Furthermore, he could've forced her to go back upstairs to resume their intimate activities, but he'd ceded to her wishes that they spend some time talking and getting to know one another better first.

From what she'd seen so far, she knew Rem had plenty of rough edges, but he also possessed a gentler side and she longed to see more of it. To see more of him. She had the sneaking suspicion that his hard exterior was a mask he'd taken to wearing, a defense mechanism of sorts, though she wasn't yet precisely certain what particular experiences had shaped him and caused him to put on the mask.

But the fear she'd experienced when she'd run downstairs had now long faded and

she was once again certain she'd made the right choice in becoming a mail order bride to an alien.

I'm finally free.

This thought kept flitting through her mind. She had finally reached Mars, the planet she had spent years dreaming about. Ever since she'd learned of the mail order bride program, she had longed to make Mars her new home. Now she was really here, sitting in a Martian house and staring at the most beautiful forest she had ever seen. The trees were tall and majestic, reaching up to the clear blue sky. The flowers were exotic and huge, some of them multi-colored and sparkling in the sun.

But even better than the natural beauty that was surrounding her was the fact that she no longer had to live in fear of her uncle's vile money-making schemes. She was free of his power over her and safe from the future he'd been trying to force upon her. She repressed a shiver and tried to push thoughts of him aside.

She heard the clattering of dishes a few rooms away and a sudden warmth filled her, chasing away the dark clouds that had gathered during her musings about her life on Earth. She had come to Mars expecting that she would be required to cook, clean, and perform all the domestic chores in her new household, yet Rem was currently in the kitchen preparing a meal for them. No man had ever cooked for her before.

She straightened when she heard his footsteps approaching. He entered the sitting room carrying a large tray of food. In all her life, she had never seen food so brightly colored, and she couldn't help but stare as her mouth watered. Most of her meals in Zone 15 had consisted of lumpy gray stews that contained whatever sort of meat her uncle had managed to catch—usually rabbit or squirrel. It was a rare treat to get fresh fruit or vegetables, but it would appear such food was easily found on Mars.

Rem set the tray down on the coffee table and took a seat next to her. "I wasn't sure

what kind of food you liked,” he said, his tone almost sheepish, “so I included a little bit of everything I had in the kitchen. This is all fresh, though I also have a food replicator that can make anything you desire.”

Tyra’s stomach rumbled again. “I don’t know what any of this is, but it looks and smells amazing, Rem. Thank you.”

He gestured for her to try something, so she reached out and plucked a piece of red fruit from the tray and popped it into her mouth. When she bit down, the sweet yet tangy flavor exploded in her mouth, dancing across her taste buds as she moaned with pleasure.

“Mm. This is good.”

Rem moved the coffee table closer and urged her to eat more. She gladly obliged and made a point to try at least one of everything he’d included on the tray. There were thin slices of flavorful bread, salted meats, spicy cheese, and round sweetcakes that practically melted in her mouth.

They ate in silence for several minutes, and she appreciated the informality of the meal. While food had been plentiful aboard the spaceship that had brought her here, she had spent most of her time gazing out the large viewscreen in the women’s quarters, anxious for her first look at Mars. She’d grabbed a small piece of fruit from the counter in the kitchen and nothing more, even though she’d heard the other women discussing the amazing variety of food available to them while she stared out at the stars, hoping for her first glimpse of her new home.

“I was told all the women aboard today’s shipment were from Zone 15,” Rem said, gazing down at her. “Is that correct?”

Tyra swallowed a bite of cheese and nodded. “Yes, we were all from Zone 15. Most



of the women were from Fargo—that's a city in the midwestern part of the former United States—but I was from a smaller city called Bismarck."

Rem leaned back on the sofa, apparently finished with his meal, as he continued staring at her. She felt herself flushing under the intensity of his gaze and had a difficult time meeting his eye.

There was something about him, aside from his jealous side and his huge stature, that put her on edge. Perhaps it was the heat in his gaze, the unmistakable lust that was darkening his eyes. He looked as though he wanted to pounce on her and warmth quaked between her thighs at the image this realization provoked. Needing to cool herself off, she reached for a glass of water and took a long sip.

"Bismarck," he said, his Martian accent thick as he repeated the name of a human city. "I fought several battles in Zone 15, though I am uncertain of the names of the cities I helped defeat during the war."

A shiver ran through her. He had likely killed many of her fellow humans. All the terrible names the women on the ship had used to describe the Martians came rushing back.

Barbarians.

Unfeeling brutes.

Bloodthirsty savages.

But she quickly reminded herself that Rem hadn't hurt her yet, not really, nor had he treated her with cruelty. She again reminded herself that he could've dragged her back upstairs and forced her to mate with him, but he hadn't even protested her request that they delay the consummation of their mating union.

Would he expect her to mate with him tonight?

She pressed her thighs together and squirmed in her seat, unable to help the warm pulses that were affecting her more and more as she contemplated the particulars of sharing a bed with Rem. Given that she'd spent years trying to avoid the unwanted attention of men in her city, she was surprised she wasn't more frightened of the physical act of sex. Perhaps it was because she'd made the decision to become a mail order bride to a Martian, rather than having a man forced upon her.

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“You don’t have any skills, Tyra. You can’t even cook. Far as I see it, you’re only good for one thing. Unless you want to find yourself starving on the streets, you’ll do as I say.”

Her spirits fell as her uncle’s harsh words resurfaced in her thoughts. She closed her eyes and jerked her head to the side, wishing she could forever erase his voice from her mind. She reached for the locket and clutched it in one hand, trying to replace her uncle’s voice with that of her late father’s. Her father had been warm and kind, nothing like his younger brother. If he hadn’t died, Tyra would probably still be on Earth.

“If you would like to speak with your father,” Rem said, “I could arrange for you to contact him using one of my video comms.”

She opened her eyes and swallowed hard, then lifted her gaze to Rem. “I appreciate the offer, but he died fifteen years ago.”

“I am sorry for your loss, my sweet mate.” Rem reached for her hand and squeezed it. “What about your mother? Any siblings? You are welcome to contact them if you wish.”

She shook her head. “My mother died when I was three months old. I don’t even remember her, and I don’t have any siblings.” She forced a smile, even as her throat burned and her vision became blurry, her eyes filling with tears. She blinked rapidly to keep herself from crying. Rem’s apparent concern touched her, as did his offer to allow her to contact her family on Earth. If only she had family members she wished to contact.

“I am sorry to hear it, Tyra.” His gaze filled with concern. “Does that mean you were raised in an orphanage?”

“No,” she said, dreading where this line of questioning was going. She could just kick herself for suggesting they become better acquainted—that meant sharing facts about her life and right now she didn’t want to divulge such personal details.

“Then who raised you?”

“My-my aunt and uncle.” She pretended to study something outside the window as she drew in a deep breath. After exhaling, she turned back to Rem, determined to change the direction of their conversation. “What about you? Do your parents live on Mars? Are they nearby?”

“My parents live a short walk away. I am fortunate that my mother is alive and in good health—we lost most of our females many years ago when the Xieandans poisoned the water supplies on our home planet. My father was a palace guard at the time and we lived on the palace grounds in the capital city on Marttiadoxalia. The palace drew water from a source so deep beneath the ground that the poison—which only affected our females—hadn’t yet reached it, but most females who lived outside the palace grounds perished.”

“I am glad to hear your mother survived. Did you lose anyone you cared about because of the Xieandans?”

A look of pure rage entered his eyes, causing her to draw away from him. Obviously, she had hit a nerve with this last question. She wondered who he might’ve lost and prayed he didn’t have any sisters who’d lived outside the palace grounds on Marttiadoxalia.

He stood up and moved to the window, staring out at the flowering trees. “I lost

someone I used to care about,” he said after a long, tense silence, “however, I do not wish to speak of it any further.”

“Of course. I’m sorry.” She clasped her hands together and sat unmoving, her shoulders hunched as she bent into herself slightly, as if she might ease his anger if only she were very quiet and very still. This method had sometimes worked with her uncle, particularly when he was in the midst of a drunken rage. If she couldn’t run past him and hide, she would be quiet until his rage ran its course, hopefully without any harm coming upon her. However, she wasn’t always so lucky.

“Would you like to contact your aunt and uncle, Tyra? To let them know you have arrived safely on Mars?” He turned to her, his posture still tense.

“I, um...” She fidgeted in place and fumbled for words. “They don’t have a video comm, but I will eventually send them a message.” God, she couldn’t tell him the truth and she hoped he forgot about her promise to send them a message. She wouldn’t mind speaking with her aunt, but she knew her uncle would never permit the contact. He would be furious when he discovered she’d fled Bismarck and ruined his big plans for her. It was best to close the door on this part of her life forever, even if it meant never speaking to her aunt again.

“Very well,” Rem said. “The video comm system in my abode is also capable of transmitting messages to Earth. You are free to use it whenever you wish.”

“Thank you.” She had a few friends she hoped to contact, but that was it.

“I’ll bring your suitcase upstairs now, and you can unpack while I clean up the kitchen.” His nostrils flared then and he pinned her with a heated look. “I will come find you when I am finished.”

A shiver rippled through her, even as heat quaked between her thighs. She hadn’t

missed the note of promise in his voice, nor the desire in his eyes.

He expected to consummate their union—and soon.

## Chapter 7

When Rem returned to his bedroom a short while later, he found Tyra curled up in a chair by the window, sound asleep. Though the day was warm, the breeze kept ruffling her hair, and he noticed her shiver as goosebumps rose on her arms. He quickly grabbed a cover from the bed and draped it over her, taking his time to tuck the blanket around her.

He had hoped to finally claim her as his mate when he came upstairs, but he found he was more than content to watch her sleeping. She appeared younger in sleep and peaceful, all traces of worry absent from her pretty, innocent face.

As he stood watching her, he mulled over her life on Earth. It saddened him that she'd lost her mother and father at such an early age, especially losing her mother when she was too young to remember her. How tragic.

He decided to contact the Martian Affairs offices in Zone 15 and arrange for a video comm to be delivered to her uncle's home. Perhaps it would cheer her up if she were able to see her aunt and uncle and speak with them in real time, rather than only sending them messages.

He moved to the other side of the bedroom and made a quick call using his wrist comm. It took a while to get through to the Martian Affairs offices in Zone 15, but once he finally did, he easily arranged for a video comm to be installed at her uncle's home. The clerk he spoke with promised him it would be taken care of within the next three days. Rem decided he would wait until he'd heard confirmation about the installation before he informed Tyra of the news. He wanted to surprise her.

After watching her sleep for a while longer, Rem pulled up information about Zone 15 on his wrist comm and discovered it was just after midnight in Tyra's former home. Well, that explained her tiredness.

He took note of her suitcase sitting near a dresser and ventured closer, curious about the items she'd brought with her from Earth. He discovered she had unpacked her meager belongings and placed them in the top drawer of a dresser—mainly clothing items. A pair of well-worn boots rested against the wall beside the sandals she'd been wearing upon her arrival this morning.

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Unable to help himself, he examined the items of clothing in the drawer. Clearly, the yellow dress she was still wearing was the finest garment she owned, for he found everything else she'd brought in poor condition. As he touched a threadbare shirt, he glanced over his shoulder at Tyra, saddened that she had possessed so little on Earth.

What kind of home had she lived in? Had she lived in a safe location? Had she ever gone hungry?

With a sinking heart, he recalled her reaction to the simple midday meal he'd served her and how her face had lit up as he carried it into the sitting room. Her eyes had gone wide and she'd appeared in awe of the meal, as if she had never seen anything like it before. Perhaps she hadn't.

She would never go hungry again, he vowed, nor would she go without proper clothing and shoes. As her mate, it was his duty to take care of her needs and provide for her, and he would gladly do so. Though he felt honor-bound to care for his female, he also truly wished to see Tyra happy, especially considering that he was starting to suspect she'd had good reasons for leaving Earth.

As the sun shifted higher in the sky and better illuminated the room, he caught sight of three tall stacks of books resting upon the bedside table that he hadn't noticed earlier. He moved closer to the books and picked one up. They must be written in English, for he couldn't read the titles or the words within them. His home library contained thousands of books written in the Marttiadoxalian tongue, as well as some in Galactic Common, but he didn't own any books penned in any of the Earth languages. So, this was why her suitcase had been so heavy.



An idea began to form as he stared at his mate, still sleeping peacefully by the window, her long dark tresses ruffling in the breeze.

She needed new clothing and shoes, as well as undergarments. That meant a trip to the shopping district in Ressiktron. This area of the capital city contained over a dozen bookstores, some of which offered books written in various Earth tongues, catering to the human females who now called Mars home. He smiled to himself when he imagined her reaction to the bookstores and clothing shops. He had a feeling she would enjoy such an excursion deeper into the capital city.

She stirred in her sleep, releasing a soft sigh that floated away on the breeze. He approached her and carefully lifted her in his arms. If it was just after midnight in Zone 15, she would probably want to sleep for a bit longer and might be more comfortable in bed. He placed her upon his large bed and tucked the blanket around her again. After sitting on the bed beside her, he studied her features and couldn't resist reaching out to touch the softness of her cheek.

He liked the sight of her in his bed.

Gods, she was beautiful, and she was all his.

## Chapter 8

The bus swayed as it rounded a turn. Tyra shivered and peered at the sunrise. Her stomach flipped. Uncle Sebastian would be awake by now.

Had he discovered her missing yet?

She repressed a shudder as she considered his reaction, but she also tried to convince herself that all would be well. She was safe now, finally out of his reach.

And soon, she wouldn't even be on Earth anymore.

But the bus came to a sudden stop, and she braced her hands on the seat in front of her. Once she recovered her senses, she peered out the window. This wasn't a bus stop and they weren't even passing through a town at the moment, but traveling in between cities out in the wide-open countryside.

Why had the bus stopped?

An uneasy feeling spread through her when the bus driver opened the door. Tyra glanced at the other women aboard the bus, all of them mail order brides like her, but none of them appeared concerned. They were all reading, sleeping, or quietly conversing with their seatmates.

Why didn't anyone else think this was strange?

Suddenly, she heard heavy footsteps as someone approached the bus, though she couldn't see the person as she scanned the roadside. When she returned her attention to the front of the bus, horror filled her as she made eye contact with her uncle, who was now standing at the front of the aisle. Fury glinted in the depths of his dark eyes and she felt abruptly cold, chilled to the bone.

As he approached her, she tried to will herself to move, to bolt out of her seat and take the emergency exit in the back, but she couldn't make her legs work. She couldn't even stand up.

He approached her, a menacing smile upon his face. Once he reached her, he offered her his hand, nodding for her to take it. She managed to shake her head, but even that brief movement left her exhausted.

"Happy Birthday, niece." His grin widened, revealing several gold-capped teeth.

Panic gripped her. It was indeed her birthday—her twenty-first, to be precise. The birthday she'd been simultaneously dreading and looking forward to for years.

It signaled the age at which her uncle's nefarious scheme for her would come to fruition, but it also heralded the age at which she could legally apply to become a Martian's bride.

It was the magic age that would allow her to leave forever.

But now he was here and her plan was ruined. Tears burned in her eyes but she blinked rapidly, not wishing to give him the satisfaction of seeing her tears. Even when she'd been a little girl, he had usually laughed at her or belittled her whenever she cried.

"Take my hand. You're coming with me." His jaw tightened.

"No, Uncle. I'm no-not going an-anywhere with you."

"You don't have a choice." He sneered. "The auction takes place this evening and the event has already sold out."

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She shook her head again and pushed herself against the window. This couldn't be happening. She had been so careful. Except, maybe she hadn't. She'd revealed to her friends on more than one occasion that she planned to apply to become a mail order bride.

Had one of her friends betrayed her?

This thought caused a tear to cascade down her cheek. Before she could wipe it away, her uncle chuckled and his eyes lit up with glee.

There was something seriously wrong with him, for him to enjoy the suffering of others. She had always thought so, had even hinted of her worries to her aunt on numerous occasions, only for her aunt to plaster a smile on her face and dismiss her worries. Aunt Tammy always dismissed Tyra's worries and turned a back on her husband's reprehensible dealings. The only time Tyra ever saw a glint of emotion in the older woman's eyes was when she was faced with evidence of Uncle Sebastian's cheating—namely, when he came home late reeking of perfume.

A haze began to hover around Tyra. She felt as if she were growing weaker, as if she were about to fall asleep. She still couldn't force herself to stand up. Her uncle hovered above her, his head now thrown back as he laughed at her. When he finally quieted, he sat next to her and roughly grabbed her thigh, digging his fingers deep into her flesh. She winced in pain and tried to escape his hold, only for him to grip her more harshly. Fresh tears sprang to her eyes.

“You're good for one thing only, niece, and that's the prize between your legs.” He flashed her another broad smile. “You knew this day would come. I've raised you

since your daddy passed away, took you under my roof and kept you fed and clothed. Times are tough, and this is what you owe me, girl.”

“No-no,” she stammered. “No, I don’t owe you anything. I-I worked every day. I waitressed in your bar without pay and gave you all my tips, and I also—”

She heard the slap before she felt it. She lowered her head and touched her stinging cheek, unable to help another tear from falling. It wasn’t the first time he’d struck her, but it still came as a surprise.

“I won’t do it!” she screeched as Uncle Sebastian proceeded to drag her off the bus. “I won’t do it! I won’t do it! I won’t do it! No!”

Somehow, she managed to push him down and she started running, though after a few seconds she could no longer find any traction upon the ground. She frantically treaded air as her uncle’s footsteps came closer.

“Tyra, my sweet mate. Tyra.”

She heard a familiar voice in the background, but try as she might she couldn’t place it. She drifted in a sea of confusion and pain, tossing and turning and trying to get away from the monster she was certain was at her heels. She needed to run faster. She needed to get away.

“Tyra,” the voice came louder. “Tyra, you’re dreaming. Wake up.”

A pair of strong hands shook her and suddenly her eyes sprang open.

For a moment, she stared at the concerned looking face of a green Martian, still uncertain of her surroundings and what was happening to her. A second later, her memories returned to her and relief filled her to overflowing.

It was only a dream. A nightmare.

Thank God.

Her uncle hadn't actually tracked her down and prevented her from leaving Earth. She was currently on Mars, lying in bed next to Rem, her new mate. A shuddering breath left her, and then her eyes started burning and she couldn't hold back any longer.

She burst into tears and tried to cover her face, but Rem lifted her onto his lap and cradled her face in his hands, wiping at her tears with his thumbs as he continued gazing upon her with worry.

"Tyra? What is wrong?"

Oh God. She couldn't believe she was crying in front of Rem. But she couldn't seem to stop the flood of emotions that were taking over her mental processes. She'd been so certain her uncle was about to drag her to the secret room in the back of his seedy bar and force her to stand on stage. She'd been certain she was about to be sold to the highest bidder, forced to surrender her virginity to a stranger.

Thank God her application to become a Martian's bride had been accepted. Thank God the Martian Affairs building in Bismarck had had a bus waiting to take prospective brides to Zone 15's departure site in Fargo, and that in real life the bus hadn't stopped in the middle of the countryside to allow her uncle to drag her away.

"It was just a bad dream," she finally said, praying he didn't ask for details.

In all honesty, it was the most frightening dream she had ever had. She didn't want to have to describe it to Rem. Besides, what would he think of her if he knew her own uncle had planned to auction her virginity on her twenty-first birthday? That he'd

been planning it and advertising the event for years as a way to drum up business in his bar? Most of the residents of Bismarck thought she was trash just because she'd worked at the seedy bar owned by her disreputable uncle. She didn't want Rem thinking badly of her too.

He pressed a kiss to her forehead and wrapped his arms around her, holding her tightly to his chest. He rested his chin atop her head and stroked her hair. When he began murmuring softly to her in his native tongue, she felt herself calming further as she settled deeper into his embrace.

Maybe Rem's jealousy wasn't such a bad thing. At least she wouldn't have to worry about him putting her on display to other men. He would keep her for himself.

He would keep her safe.

She only hoped she didn't end up feeling as trapped on Mars as she'd felt on Earth. Was the freedom to be her own person too much to ask for?

Back in Bismarck, there weren't many options for women. Most of the factories in town employed only men and other jobs were scarce. Most women in Bismarck got married at a young age and depended solely upon their husbands for support. While she'd watched many of her friends and acquaintances get married, often to men who didn't treat them with very much kindness or respect, she had been making secret plans to leave.

And, over the years, she had grown more and more excited about the idea of traveling to another planet, especially one as beautiful as this one. Every time she gazed at the sky, she had imagined the brand-new life that was waiting for her on Mars.

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She had spent her free time in the library, looking up images of the terraformed planet and dreaming of the day she would finally set foot on another world. The past few years had indeed been a mix of dread and excitement for her, though she had often strived to focus on the latter, telling herself that she would eventually find the happiness and the adventure she was seeking.

“Tell me of your dream,” Rem said quietly.

Her spirits sank. She didn’t want to lie to him, but she also didn’t wish to tell the truth. After a long moment, she opted to be as honest as possible without revealing too much. She didn’t want him asking questions about her uncle. “I-I dreamt I was back in Zone 15 and a monster was trying to drag me off a bus.”

He pulled back slightly to stare into her eyes. His gaze was filled with so much warmth that her eyes began to burn again. She was thankful Rem had a tender, compassionate side. He was comforting her and he seemed to genuinely care about her well-being in this moment. Hope rose within her.

The women aboard the spacecraft had been wrong. Marttiadoxalians weren’t unfeeling brutes. At least this one wasn’t.

“I’m sorry you had a nightmare, my sweet mate,” he said in a gentle tone. “Are you feeling better now?”

“Yes, I am.” She felt a flush rising in her cheeks. She was starting to feel embarrassed by what had happened. But perhaps her nightmare had occurred for a reason. This interaction they were sharing felt special and intimate. Whether he intended it or not,



Rem was revealing his true character to her right now, the Marttiadoxalian behind the mask.

She glanced out the window to find the sky was dimming. Had she really slept for most of the day? She straightened in Rem's arms and gave him an apologetic look.

"I'm so sorry I slept all day." Her flush deepened. "I-I know you meant for us to consummate our union earlier."

"We will consummate our mating union tomorrow," he said. "For now, I want you to rest and recuperate from the ordeal of your nightmare." He looked her over and wiped his thumbs over the tear tracks on her cheeks once more, even though she hadn't released any fresh tears since he'd last brushed them away.

A shock of orange filtering through the trees caught her attention. The sunset had grown even more magnificent than when she'd looked outside but seconds ago. She stared at the breathtaking sight, spellbound by her first sunset on this planet.

Rem wrapped the blanket more tightly around her and hugged her to his chest. Her eyes soon grew heavy and she drifted off to sleep once again.

This time, the monsters didn't touch her.

## Chapter 9

Rem found he couldn't bear to leave Tyra alone, even if she was sound asleep. The description of her nightmare troubled him and reinforced his belief that she'd had a good reason to leave Earth.

A reason she hadn't yet divulged to him.

He was starting to suspect something more sinister than poverty and lack of food and other resources. A monster had been tormenting her, and he very much wanted to know who this monster was.

Marttiadoxalians dreamed just as humans did, and his people believed dreams were a reflection of the waking life. Dreams held symbolism and private meaning for each individual. He always paid attention to his dreams.

Before King Vaath had ordered Rem to take a human mate, Rem had dreamed he was standing alone on a dock, watching the ocean water ripple as he awaited the arrival of a ship. In his dream, he hadn't known who he was waiting for, he simply knew he must wait until the ship arrived, as someone important to him was aboard.

But just as the ship had appeared on the horizon, the sky darkened and a storm swept in. He had awoken just as the thunder and lightning intensified and the waves lashed violently at the ship.

He peered down at Tyra. Was a storm coming?

Not for the first time since he'd met her, the need to protect her surged through him. He vowed to keep her safe, always, and he was now starting to reconsider his plans to take her into the shopping district. Perhaps they ought to remain closer to home and the palace until his dreams provided more clarity.

By the time Tyra awoke, it was nearly midnight. She blinked up at him and looked around, appearing a bit confused. The sound of nocturnal animals and insects echoed in the darkness outside, and she peered toward the window and then returned her gaze to him.

"I didn't mean to sleep for so long. I'm sorry."

“You need not apologize.”

“Have you been to sleep yet?” she asked.

“Not yet, but I will be fine. We’ll both try to stay up all night and as late as we can tomorrow. Hopefully that will help you adjust to the time difference and a new sleep schedule.”

She nodded and her attention was soon drawn outside again. He grasped her hand as he rose to his feet. The sound of the nighttime insects seemed to grow louder as he stared down at her, admiring the pretty sight of his mate with her disheveled hair and her sleep-clouded eyes.

“Would you like to see the stars?” he asked. “And the moons?”

Her mouth dropped open. “The-the moons? Oh, that’s right. Mars has two moons. Ph-Phobos and Deimos,” she said carefully, as if trying hard to recall the names. “I’d almost forgotten.”

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“The night air is cool,” he said. “Let’s get you dressed in some warmer clothing before we venture out on the balcony.”

He grasped her hand and guided her to his closet. He knew she had some of her own clothing in the top dresser drawer, but he didn’t want to see her wearing the tattered clothing she’d packed away. He would dress her in something from his own closet for now.

He opened the door and guided her into the small room that contained his clothing. There were several empty racks, which he hoped to soon fill with new gowns in the Marttiadoxalian fashion just for Tyra. He searched for a jacket he’d worn long ago when his father had taken him ice fishing on the northernmost continent of his home planet. Once he found it, he turned and gestured for Tyra to turn around so he might help her into the garment.

“I-I brought a jacket of my own,” she said, “as well as some sweaters and some pants.”

“I want you to wear this,” he said, his voice coming out a bit sharp. He offered her a smile to soothe any offence he’d just caused her with the bite of his tongue. He wasn’t used to his orders being challenged, but he reminded himself he wasn’t just speaking to a female, but he was conversing with his female. The mate he wished to keep safe. The human his dreams had apparently warned him about, though at the time he hadn’t realized the meaning of the ship attempting to sail into the bay during a fierce storm.

“Very well,” she murmured, a shadow falling over her face before she turned around.

He slipped the jacket on her and moved in front of her to close the fastenings, wanting her to be warm. She probably didn't require a garment so heavy, but he didn't want to risk her catching a chill outside. He searched for a pair of thick socks next, though after he helped her step into them, they reached to her upper thighs.

Once he had her dressed to his liking, he guided her back into the bedroom and toward the balcony. He pressed his palm to a panel next to the door and it soon slid open. He placed a hand to her lower back and urged her out onto the balcony. His eyes adjusted to the darkness at once, though he knew humans could not see so easily in the dark. She wouldn't be able to make out the individual trees or flowers in the forest below, but she would of course manage to see the stars in all their glory, as well as the moons.

A gasp escaped her as she lifted her gaze to the sky.

"Oh my goodness." She stepped closer to the railing. "It's breathtaking. I've never seen a night so clear. Earth is heavily polluted and even in more rural areas like Zone 15, it's not often we can see the moon very well, let alone the stars."

He gathered her close to his side as they continued gazing at the brilliant night sky. She leaned against him, and the feel of her body against his reignited his passions from earlier in the day, when he'd been ready to claim her. Right before he'd allowed his distrust of females and his temper to ruin the moment.

He wrapped an arm around her and rested his head atop hers, inhaling the floral scent of her hair. After a while, she shifted beside him and tentatively laced her arm around his waist. Or, rather, she tried to. Given her petite stature, she ended up putting an arm around his buttocks. He wasn't about to complain, however. The feel of her touching him of her own free will, even through several layers of clothing, caused his balls to tighten as his cock grew painfully hard.

Gods, he wanted to take her now, but he could already hear her stomach growling again, even over the chorus of nighttime insects.

He grasped her hand. “Let’s go to the kitchen, my sweet human, and I will prepare you something to eat.”

## Chapter 10

Dawn arrived in a glorious splash of orangish red through the trees. Tyra cast a sidelong glance at Rem, who was seated beside her on the back porch, and wondered when he was going to initiate the consummation of their mating union.

He’d been extremely attentive to her in the proceeding hours, constantly inquiring how she felt and if she was hungry. He’d shown her how to use the shower in his bathroom and left her alone while she cleaned up and donned a fresh outfit—a long shirt of his that fit her like an oversized dress.

She didn’t understand it, but for some reason he seemed hesitant to allow her to wear her own clothes. Her face heated. Perhaps he’d glimpsed her tattered garments in the dresser drawer and found them inadequate. She’d worn the yellow dress yesterday because it was the nicest item of clothing she owned.

The only other attire she had possessed that didn’t have holes was the uniform she’d been required to wear while waitressing in her uncle’s bar, which consisted of an exceedingly short skirt and a tight, low-cut blouse. She’d gladly left the uniform behind, but she wished she’d had some better clothes to bring.

She took a sip of hot tea and peered over at Rem again. God, he was handsome, particularly when she looked at him from the side and she got a glimpse of the horns that curved over his head and down his back. She’d never imagined she would find a Martian’s horns sexy, but she did.

He turned to meet her admiring gaze. She flushed and looked away, not wanting him to discern her thoughts. They barely knew one another and here she was ogling him as if he was the first attractive man she'd ever seen.

Without warning, heat pulsed between her thighs and she couldn't resist shifting in place. A second later, his nostrils flared and a knowing look entered his eyes. Her heart beat faster and she resisted the urge to wiggle in her seat, even as the throbbing in her feminine core increased under the intensity of Rem's darkly piercing gaze.

He took her hand in his. "Do you feel you know me better than you did when we first met yesterday morning?"

"I..." She fumbled for a response. She still didn't know much about Rem, as he'd only shared small tidbits about his life with her thus far, but she recalled the comfort he'd given her yesterday after her awful nightmare. He'd been thoughtful and gentle, a far contrast to the brutish behavior he'd displayed earlier in the day when he'd been roused to jealousy.

He reached for her and cupped the side of her face in one of his large, warm hands, causing a pleasant wave of dizziness to assail her. She rather felt as if she were becoming intoxicated, despite not having imbibed a single drop of alcohol. She couldn't deny the warmth that was filling her, nor the profound effect wrought from Rem's nearness.

He shifted closer, allowing his thigh to brush against hers, and a delightful shiver rushed down her back to coalesce with the continuous pangs of heat between her thighs.

"I can smell your arousal, my sweet mate." He leaned in to trail light kisses down her neck and she found herself helpless against the fresh waves of heat rolling through her, even as the knowledge that he could smell her arousal left her a bit embarrassed.

“Tell me, Tyra, is your pussy becoming slick and swollen right now? Are you aching for me to carry you upstairs and claim you? Is that why you keep squirming in your seat?”

His crass words only caused an immense pang of sensation in her nether region, and she gasped a second later when he reached underneath the borrowed shirt she was wearing. He ran a hand along her inner thighs in a slow and enticing manner, then urged her legs to part for his explorations.

She wasn't wearing underwear, as he'd handed her the shirt and nothing else just before her shower, and the feel of his fingers grazing over her bare folds nearly caused her to jolt at the shockingly pleasant sensation. She sucked in a shaky breath and quivered at his touch.

He dragged his teeth along her neck and she couldn't repress a moan, her need building with each moment.



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“Spread your legs even wider, sweet human. I want to feel how wet you are.”

She obeyed, parting her thighs and allowing him to dip two fingers into her gathering essence. A throaty whimper left her and she jerked her hips as he pushed those two digits deeper.

“Ah, just as I suspected. You’re very, very wet.”

He drew his fingers lazily through her moisture, and whenever he happened to graze her throbbing clit it was all she could do to keep from pleading with him to take her upstairs. But she wasn’t certain if she should appear so eager, so she allowed him to take the lead and continued following his commands.

When he ordered her to spread wider or raise her hips, she acquiesced. She even gathered up the fabric of his borrowed shirt to her waist when he demanded it, revealing her womanly parts to his gaze. A glance down at her center showed her pussy lips were puffy and gleaming with her arousal, and her inner thighs were shining as well.

The sight startled her. She’d had no idea her body was capable of such a visceral response to a man’s touch. Until Rem, she’d largely found herself disgusted by the attention men showed her, particularly when one of them groped her or forced a kiss upon her. Working at the bar, it was a rare occurrence to go a full night without one of the patrons trying to cop a quick feel or steal a kiss.

But Rem made her feel different. Under his attentions, she felt both beautiful and desirable. And God, she wanted more. More of his kisses. More of his teeth dragging

along her neck. More of whatever he was doing between her legs to make her feel so good.

He pressed his lips to hers and the whole world melted away.

## Chapter 11

Tyra's mind whirled as Rem carried her upstairs. She still felt drunk, but it was a deliriously wondrous sensation. She felt safe in his arms, even though a small part of her still feared the physical aspect of their mating.

He was huge. Her head barely reached the center of his chest, and she shivered as she remembered the massive size of his cock, which she had glimpsed only briefly during their first attempt at mating.

Well, she decided, virginal apprehension was much better than absolute dread. She had run to Mars, to Rem, while she had run away from the other situation that would've seen her lose her virginity. She was here by choice. Mostly.

She was partially in control. Well, perhaps more than partially. If she became too frightened or experienced too much pain during their first mating session, she believed Rem would stop at once. For all the concern he had displayed after her recent nightmare, she could not imagine him disregarding her needs if she asked him to pause.

Deep down, beneath his jealousy and the fact that he was a warrior who'd helped defeat her people, she dared to believe he was a decent man. A man guided by principles. A good man, like her father.

Once they reached the bedroom, he carried her to the large bed and placed her upon the covers. He sat next to her, staring down at her with a look so affectionate, it took

her breath away.

Who had he lost that he cared about after the Xieandans poisoned the water supply on his homeworld? She couldn't help but wonder about this as she held his loving gaze. The more she considered his reluctance to confide in her about his loss, the more she suspected he'd lost a female he'd cared for.

Her heart broke under this suspicion and she found herself reaching for him, as if to offer comfort, even though he likely had no idea of the direction her thoughts had taken. She caressed his face and allowed her hand to travel back over his head, to the base of one horn. It was hard and cool to the touch, and a deep rumble left him when she stroked her hand down the length of his horn. His nostrils flared and his eyes darkened as he stared at her, a predatory gleam in his eye that only caused the warmth quaking in her nether region to deepen.

"I am going to claim you now, Tyra from Earth," he said in a somewhat formal tone, "and then you will belong to me in both body and spirit. For the rest of our days." He pulled his borrowed shirt off her before she could think of a reply, baring her completely to his ravenous gaze.

She peeked at the enormous bulge at the front of his pants and began to tremble, little shudders of need rushing through her. As she shifted upon the mattress, she felt the wetness of her arousal rubbing between her thighs. She was indeed ready for him, wet and aching and eager to be claimed.

He rose off the bed just long enough to divest himself of his own clothing, and in moments he stood before her, gloriously naked. She couldn't help but stare. Bright rays of sunlight entered the room and reflected off his beautiful green skin, the planes of his sculpted muscles especially accentuated in this lighting. The heat pulsing in her womanly core erupted into a full-blown blaze, drawing a needy whimper from her as she flushed all over.

She rested on her elbows as she gazed up at him, her pulse accelerating when he settled his huge body atop hers. His eyes darkened further and his cock throbbed against her inner thighs, the tip of his huge manhood resting at her entrance. She instinctively parted her legs wider, even as she hoped there would be no pain.

He glided his length up and down through her wetness, spreading her moisture around her nether parts with his cock. She shuddered at the jolt of sensation that assailed her, unable to keep a moan from escaping her. Oh God. It felt so good and he wasn't even inside her yet. There was a place deep within her feminine core, where she was aching especially hard, a place that felt empty without him filling her up, even though she was an innocent and had never experienced the thrust of a cock into her pussy.

It suddenly occurred to her that perhaps Rem wouldn't know she was a virgin. Should she tell him? Was premarital sex even a thing among the Marttioxoxalians? She didn't know, but before she could decide whether or not to broach the subject, he started pushing his hugeness inside her. Oh God. Oh, dear God. Yes.

"That's it, Tyra. Good girl," he said in a praising tone. "Take all of it." He pushed even deeper and she gasped as her insides stretched around his cock.

He grasped her face in his hands, not allowing her to look away as he inched further into her snug channel. A sense of surrender washed over her, but it didn't make her feel weak. Instead, it made her feel safe. She belonged to Rem now and the monsters from Earth could never, ever reach her now.

The physical act of consummating their mating union cut Tyra's last ties to her home planet, the place she never wished to see again. As he began to thrust in and out of her, she realized this physical joining also signaled the start of her brand-new life on Mars. There was no turning back now.

As he built a slow rhythm of plunging in and out of her, he leaned down to capture one nipple in his mouth, circling his tongue over the hardened bud before clamping down upon it with his sharp teeth. She arched into his mouth, each small bite of pain causing a spasm of heat between her thighs, prompting her insides to tighten around his cock. She was burning up for him, eager for each lick and bite and thrust.

He gripped her hips and increased his speed, surging into her faster and deeper than before. She braced herself for the pain, but it never came. He had gotten her so wet and achy before he'd pushed inside her, that it hadn't hurt. Not really. Sure, his size had stretched her a bit uncomfortably a few times, but she hadn't winced in pain or cried out once, as she had worried she might during her first time.

"You're mine now, Tyra," he said in a firm, almost angry tone. His eyes blazed down at her and he tightened his hold on her hips. "Say it." He thrust faster and harder. "I want to hear you say it. Say that you belong to me."

His command stunned her and for a few seconds, she could only stare up at him in surprise, her mouth gaping as she struggled to obey this particular order. The idea of belonging to him made her feel safe, but having him boldly order her to proclaim his ownership over her made her uneasy, reminding her of his previous bouts of jealousy.

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“Say it,” he said through gritted teeth. His huge muscles flexed with his rapid movements and he continued plunging into her, driving into her so hard that the headboard repeatedly banged against the wall.

She opened her mouth to speak, but she couldn’t manage to force the words out, even though deep down she believed belonging to him would keep her safe. At her continued silence, his eyes flashed and he abruptly withdrew from her pussy. Before she realized what he was doing, he had turned her over on her hands and knees.

Fear sliced through her.

What did he mean to do?

She braced herself, unsure of what to expect, but he only grabbed her hips and shoved his cock back into her depths, taking her from behind. Heated waves flowed through her as he slammed into her, again and again. This position allowed for much deeper penetration, and he drove into her so rapidly that his balls slapped heavily against her pussy with each thrust, sometimes impacting directly upon her pulsing clit. It was almost too much, yet she didn’t wish for him to stop.

He released one of her hips and reached for her hair, giving her locks a quick tug, though not missing a beat as he kept surging into her. She couldn’t help but wonder if he was becoming frustrated with her over her silence.

Did anger account for his sudden roughness?

He gave her hair another tug, causing her back to arch, which only forced her to

accept his cock even deeper than she imagined possible. She released a throaty moan as perspiration trickled down her temples.

“Say it, Tyra.” His sharp command sent a thrill through her, even as her mind protested that he was behaving like a brute. What did it matter if she admitted aloud that she belonged to him? By the laws of his people, she was already his mate.

He released a growl that was so loud it shook her insides. Despite her worry that he was mad, she was nearly delirious with the increasing pleasure caused by his roughness. Each hard thrust sent shocks of euphoric sensation through her entire body, and she felt as though she were riding the crest of a wave and ready to crash into something, though what this something could be, she wasn't yet certain.

Rem bent over her and growled into her ear. Goosebumps rose on the back of her neck and she shivered, despite the fact that she was sweltering with the rising need of whatever was happening to her, this unknown destination she was headed toward.

“Say it! By the Gods, say it, Tyra, or you will drive me to madness.”

She was certain the next growl that issued from his throat was loud enough to rattle the walls.

“I-I belong to you!” she finally cried.

In the next moment, a wave crashed over her and the most intense pleasure she'd ever known sent her flying straight up to the stars.

## Chapter 12

Rem tensed as his cock jerked within Tyra's tight depths and the first spurt of his seed erupted into her. There was a certain primal satisfaction in filling her with his

seed, and he held her hips firmly in place while he spurted every last drop of his essence into her, marking her as his.

When he finally withdrew from her center, the sight of a small amount of his seed escaping her pink folds to trickle down her inner thighs made his cock harden to readiness in mere moments.

He considered plunging into her again, but he restrained himself from shoving into her depths just yet. Perhaps later, once she'd had time enough to recover.

Other than her rapid breathing, she remained still beneath him. Concerned, he gently turned her over and searched her face for any hint of pain. To his relief, she appeared utterly blissful and content.

He placed a hand upon her center. "Are you hurt at all?" he asked, feeling guilty that he'd been so rough with her. But Gods, he hadn't been able to help himself. Once he'd pushed his cock into her tightness and felt her insides clenching around him, he had become blinded by his need to claim her in the rough manner his instincts had suddenly demanded.

Flushing, she shook her head, though she quickly averted her gaze, as if she didn't wish to maintain eye contact. He grasped her chin and forced her to look at him.

"I'm not hurt," she said, the dreamy look still upon her face. "I thought there might be pain, you know, during, but there wasn't."

"Stay here, my sweet mate. I'll be right back." Even if she claimed she wasn't in pain now, he worried she might experience some soreness later.

As her mate, it was his responsibility to look out for her welfare, and he hurried to the bathroom and began filling the tub, adding a medicinal powder to the water that



would soothe any aches in her body. Next, he prepared a cool compress for between her thighs, also adding the medicinal powder to it.

He returned to Tyra to find she'd pulled the covers atop her and was curled up on her side, as if sleeping, but when he paused above her, he didn't hear the sounds of steady breathing. Satisfied that she was awake, he sat next to her and pulled the covers away.

“Come, Tyra, I need you to turn over and part your thighs for me.”

She tensed and looked over her shoulder at him. “What?”

He showed her the cloth and though she didn't appear happy about it, she soon obliged him and came to rest upon her back. She spread her legs and he applied the cool compress to her swollen parts.

“Does that feel better?” he asked, keeping his tone gentle.

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She nodded. “Yes, thank you, Rem, though it didn’t really hurt before. Just a tiny bit sore, I guess.” She blushed and glanced away.

“I drew you a bath, my sweet mate,” he said, applying more pressure upon the cloth, hoping to force the medicine to sink into her tender flesh.

“I thought I heard water running. A bath sounds heavenly.” She stifled a yawn and then gave him a shy smile as he brushed a hand through her dark tresses.

She sighed and leaned into his touch. For several long moments, they simply stared at one another in silence, though he felt as though an understanding was passing between them. The understanding that they were now mated in every sense of the word and she belonged to him forever. And likewise, he belonged to her. He had decided he liked her human concept of a mating union, in which both the male and female belonged to one another.

However, that still meant he planned to protect her and keep a close eye on her. She was his female, and Gods how he wanted to trust her fully. He wondered how long that would take, but quickly pushed such thoughts aside. He needed to get her into the medicinal bath.

“I would like to bathe you now, before the water gets cold.” He lifted her up and carried her into the bathroom, the cool compress still tucked between her thighs. He sat on the edge of the tub, cradling her in his lap, as warmth for his sweet mate filled him. She truly was a treasure to behold. A gift from the Gods.

“No one has ever bathed me before,” she said, her cheeks turning bright pink. “Isn’t

this a little strange?”

“There is nothing strange about a male tending to his female’s needs,” he declared as he set her down in the water. The compress floated up and he lifted it from the bath, setting it aside.

“Mm. This feels nice.” She sank back in the water, the corners of her lips curving in a slight smile.

He picked up a washcloth and gave her a pointed look as he dipped it into the water. “Give me your leg.”

## Chapter 13

Despite the intimacies they had just shared, Tyra lowered her head, feeling shy and a bit uncertain as Rem dried her off using a large plush towel. He was still unashamedly naked and she couldn’t help but sneak the occasional peek at him. His cock was completely erect, though he acted as though nothing were amiss as he took care of her, nor did he attempt to claim her again and satisfy his obvious needs, for which she was grateful. She wanted some time to get her thoughts in order before they were intimate again.

She repressed a yawn as he held up her yellow dress, which he’d just pulled out of a strange looking box with flashing lights that rested against the bathroom wall.

“It’s clean,” he said. “Fresh out of the clothing refresher.”

“Thank you.”

He helped her into the dress just as an odd ringing sound echoed through the house. It sounded almost like a doorbell, though it was more melodious than any doorbell

she'd ever heard.

Rem stiffened and growled low in his throat. "Whoever that is, I will be sending them away," he said, pressing a kiss atop her head. "Stay here. I'll return soon."

She nodded and set about taming her long locks while he went downstairs. She found her hairbrush stashed in the top dresser drawer next to her clothing and moved it into the bathroom, along with a few makeup items she'd brought. After she finished getting ready, she found an empty shelf in a bathroom cabinet to store her things in. A sense of giddiness filled her to see her hairbrush resting on the shelf next to her cosmetics.

She lived here now. On Mars. With a huge green alien named Rem who'd just made her see stars, then proceeded to give her a bath. She flushed in remembrance of his hands roaming all over her body with the washcloth.

She stared at herself in the mirror and smoothed her hands over the skirt of her dress, then made sure her hair looked perfect. She found she wanted to look good for Rem and this realization left her feeling a bit dizzy, in a pleasant sort of way. I'm crushing on him, she thought. I like him, and he likes me.

As she exited the bathroom, she heard multiple voices drifting upstairs. Curious, she exited the bedroom and crept down the hallway to the staircase. She peeked down the steps and glimpsed a beautiful purple Marttiadoxalian female standing next to a green male who looked almost like Rem. He wasn't quite as tall though and the markings on his horns were slightly different.

Her stomach clenched with nervousness. Apparently, Rem's parents had stopped for a visit, and quite unexpectedly judging from the tone her mate was using as he conversed with them. She couldn't discern his exact words, however, as he was speaking in his native tongue.

Should she venture downstairs and say hello?

Even though she'd just brushed out her hair, she found herself nervously smoothing her hands through her long locks in an effort to look as presentable as possible. She wanted his parents to like her.

Before she could decide whether or not to go downstairs, Rem's mother turned and glanced up the steps, her gaze locking with Tyra's.

Well, she'd just been spotted. There was no hiding now. Not unless she wanted to be rude.

"Hello!" Rem's mother called out in Galactic Common, her whole face lighting up, making her look younger than she had moments ago. Not that she looked very old. In fact, both Rem's parents appeared about the same age as him, with the exception of an extra line or two on their faces.

Tyra smiled at Rem's mother and waved as she started descending the steps. Rem moved into her line of sight and she almost chuckled at the look of exasperation he was wearing. He looked every bit the grouch she had accused him of being just yesterday, and she pressed her lips together to keep herself from laughing.

"Mother and Father," he said, "this is my mate, Tyra." Rem held out a hand to her as she reached the bottom of the steps. "Tyra, meet my mother, Alissina, and my father, Teva."

Alissina drew Tyra away from Rem before she could reply and wrapped her in a warm hug.

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“Alissina, let go of her. You’re going to smother her.”

Rem’s mother withdrew from the hug, only to hold Tyra out by her shoulders as she looked her up and down. “You look as though you are glowing, Tyra. Has my son been treating you well?”

Tyra couldn’t be sure, but she thought she saw Rem roll his eyes. She smiled at his mother and nodded. “Oh, yes, he’s been treating me well. I only arrived a day ago, but he’s made me feel right at home. It’s nice to meet you, by the way, Alissina, and you as well, Teva,” she said with a smile at Rem’s father.

Teva stepped closer and tapped a foot against Tyra’s, and she quickly gathered her senses enough to return the foot tap greeting.

Alissina eventually backed away and initiated a foot tap exchange with Tyra. “I know humans often hug one another in greeting,” she explained, “and I wished to make you feel welcome to our family, and to our planet.”

“Thank you,” Tyra replied as Rem came to stand beside her and wrap a possessive arm around her waist. “That’s most kind of you.”

“After we received your message that you were taking a human bride,” Rem’s father said, “your mother has been overly excited. She tried to visit yesterday but I forbade her from leaving the house. A newly mated couple should expect to have privacy on their first day together.”

Tyra had never met a female Marttiadoxalian before and she was relieved to find she

liked Rem's mother very much. She exuded warmth and there was a playful manner about her that put Tyra at ease.

Alissina said something under her breath in her native language and then giggled as Teva shot her a stern look. Well, Tyra thought, as she repressed a smile, she could see from which parent Rem had inherited his serious side.

"Rem, I was hoping you would permit me to take Tyra shopping someday soon. I know most mail order brides do not arrive with many belongings when they reach Mars and I would like to ensure she has a proper wardrobe for this climate."

Rem appeared as if he were about to protest, but then he finally nodded and said, "Very well. You may take Tyra shopping five days from now."

"Excellent," his mother said, clasping her hands together. "Tyra, I will arrive just after sunrise and we'll enjoy the entire day together."

"Thank you," Tyra said, excitement filling her. "I look forward to it." She couldn't wait to spend the day with Rem's mother. She imagined they would have a wonderful time and she eagerly anticipated getting a chance to explore the city.

Teva reached for his wife's hand and gave her another serious look that mirrored his son's current expression. "Come, Alissina. We should allow our son and his new mate privacy, as they have only just become mates."

They exchanged farewells and Tyra couldn't help but chuckle as Rem breathed an audible sigh of relief once his parents had departed.

"Your parents are sweet," she said. "I like them both very much."

Rem gave her a strange look. "My mother is too energetic and my father is often

harsh.”

She opened her mouth, ready to point out that Rem was just like his father, but she smartly pressed her lips together, worried that perhaps he wouldn't appreciate the comparison. “Well, I like them and I look forward to spending more time in their company.”

Excitement spread through her. In five days, she would set off for a day in the city with Rem's mother. Alissina's kind invitation had touched Tyra more than the woman or her son could possibly know.

Rem appeared thoughtful for a few seconds and then grasped her hand, giving it a quick squeeze. “Since we're both dressed now, and we should try to stay awake for a while longer, would you like to take a tour of the palace grounds? I think you will enjoy the gardens.”

“Oh, that sounds wonderful! Yes, I would love that.”

He looked down at her bare feet. “First, my sweet mate, we must find your shoes.” He playfully swept her up in his arms and carried her back upstairs. She rested her head against his chest, her heart brimming with happiness and hope. It was easy to forget about the bad things she'd been running away from when she now had so many good things awaiting her in the days to come.

## Chapter 14

It seemed as though Rem's life was now divided into two distinct phases: before he'd met Tyra, and after. Three full days had passed since her arrival on his planet and already he couldn't fathom life without her. Her sweet presence illuminated the dark corners of his heart and already he was starting to imagine the family they might one day have.



Children. He had never given offspring much thought, as he had never planned to take a mate. A smile touched his lips as he recalled how furious he'd been with King Vaath when the royal had ordered him to take a human female as a bride. But now he would not trade Tyra for all the riches in the universe. She was his precious female and she was growing on him more and more each day.

He stared across the dinner table at her and smiled when she met his eyes. She returned his smile and then took another bite of the pasta dish she'd prepared for dinner. She'd made something called spaghetti and meatballs in the food replicator and though he'd never tried Earth food before, he found he liked it very much. And as he held her gaze, he finally grasped the depth of his former loneliness. Gods, how could he have been so foolish as to believe he didn't want or need a mate? It wasn't natural for a Marttiadoxalian male to live out his days alone.

His wrist comm buzzed and he glanced down at the message, just to ensure his presence wasn't needed at the palace. He was due to return to his guard duties tomorrow, but if there was an emergency he would not hesitate to fulfill his pledge to protect the king as well as Marttiadoxalian interests.

He frowned at the message. It wasn't from his guard unit or the palace, but it was a message from the Martian Affairs office in Bismarck, the city Tyra had called home. The clerk's message indicated that Tyra's uncle already had a functioning video comm installed in his home and claimed his comm number had been active for over fifteen years.

He glanced up at Tyra as he allowed his utensil to clatter on the table. He swallowed hard and glared at her. She had lied to him. But why? The message also included the comm number of Tyra's uncle. Perhaps Rem could contact her relative and demand an explanation.

But no. He ought to interrogate his mate first. Find out why she'd lied to his face. A

growl built in his throat and he noticed her fidgeting as she looked at him. Her face then went pale.

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“Is-is something wrong, Rem? You, um, you look angry.”

“Finish your meal,” he said in a sharp tone, his happiness from moments ago evaporating. “After dinner, I want you to go to our bedroom and wait for me. We have something to discuss.”

Her eyes filled with worry, but she nodded and slowly took several more bites of spaghetti. He rose and started clearing the table.

“I-I can help with that,” she said, reaching for a plate.

“No, go upstairs.” His fury was steadily building. He had the sudden urge to grab her and shake her and demand she spill her secrets, but he refrained from rushing around the table to accost her. He needed some time to calm down before he confronted her with the proof of her lies.

She turned and hurried out of the dining room.

Fluxx. How could he ever trust her now? What would possess her to lie to him about her uncle owning a video comm? If she didn’t wish to contact her relatives on Earth, he didn’t understand why she wouldn’t just say so. Instead, she had lied.

Had she lied to him about anything else?

He finished clearing the dining room table, tossed the dishes into the refresher, and wiped down the kitchen with angry movements.

With a growl of frustration, he stalked upstairs to find his errant mate.

\* \* \*

Why was Rem angry with her?

Tyra paced back and forth over the rug in the center of their bedroom, racking her brain as she tried to understand what she might've done to upset him. It was possible he was mad about something that didn't have anything to do with her, but given the furious way he'd glared at her, she had a horrible suspicion that she'd done something to incur his wrath.

She replayed the last few days. They'd enjoyed time on the palace grounds and he'd even introduced her to the king and his mate, a human woman named Esmay. Yesterday, they had taken their midday meal in the banquet hall with dozens of other guards, royal dignitaries, and others who lived in the palace. It had been clear to her after meeting several guards that many were surprised by Rem's decision to take a mate, though she didn't understand why.

Rem had become angry with her twice during her first day as his mate—first, when she had behaved too cordially to the purple males they met in the forest (in his opinion, anyway), and second, when he'd glimpsed the picture of her father in her locket and assumed it was a lover she'd left behind on Earth.

She sighed and ran a hand through her hair. Rem had apologized for grabbing her roughly and also for his reaction over the necklace, and she had accepted his apologies, however, now she was starting to worry he was prone to angering easily. If she couldn't even figure out what she'd done to upset him, she imagined his reasons for being angry with her this time weren't justified either.

She was pretty sure she hadn't smiled at any of the guards she'd met at the palace.

She also hadn't spoken to any of them alone. Rem had been by her side the entire time, with his arm wound tightly around her shoulders.

Furthermore, she had also done her best to take up some of the cooking and cleaning duties around the house. She'd learned how to use the gadgets in the kitchen, as well as the clothing refresher. She had made a serious effort to keep house, emulating her aunt, who had always kept an impeccably tidy house, as much as she could. But was she still not doing enough around the house to please him? She gulped hard and turned to face the door.

Footsteps sounded on the stairway.

Her stomach flipped.

Oh God. He was finally on his way up to talk to her. Her legs suddenly felt like jelly and she struggled to remain standing. She hated that she was all at once afraid of him. She didn't think he would physically hurt her, but she still hated conflict and wasn't looking forward to this confrontation.

The door zipped open and he strode inside, his huge presence filling the room. His gaze remained dark and furious. His nostrils were flared and his muscles tensed. He looked murderous and she repressed a shudder. She was still racking her brain and still coming up empty—she had absolutely no clue what might've set him off.

But she didn't want to cower. She'd come to Mars seeking a fresh start, a new life, and she didn't want to be the scared little girl she once was. She lifted her chin and tried to summon her bravery. Whatever accusations he threw her way, she was prepared to meet them.

She drew in a deep breath, bracing herself for his anger.

But his next words made her blood run cold.

“You lied to me, Tyra. You lied.”

## Chapter 15

Confusion washed through Tyra, as well as a deepening sense of fear. What in the world was Rem talking about? She hadn't lied to him. Not that she could recall.

He stalked closer and thrust a tablet into her hand. She recognized the Martian Affairs emblem and began reading the short missive it contained, which was written in Galactic Common. She gasped at the contents of the message and backed away from Rem, almost dropping the tablet as her hands commenced shaking.

Oh God. She had lied to him, but she'd forgotten all about it. She'd told him her aunt and uncle didn't own a video comm, but this memo from Martian Affairs was informing him that not only did they possess a video comm, but they'd had it installed in their home many years ago. The clerk in communication with Rem had even included their comm number.

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Panic raced through her and for a moment, she felt as if she were back in her nightmare, on the bus headed for Fargo, only for her uncle to board the bus and drag her away.

“Rem, I can explain...”

“I’m waiting.” He loomed over her and the ridges on his forehead drew together, making him appear fiercer than ever. He looked as though he was ready to charge into battle and slay his enemies.

What could she say? She didn’t want to admit the full truth. The horrible truth. But she had to tell him something. She met his furious stare and inhaled a shaky breath, clutching the tablet harder so as not to drop it.

“I-I will admit I lied to you, and I am so sorry.” Tears burned in her eyes and she blinked hard, trying desperately to hold herself together. She despaired over the fact that she’d lied to her new mate, but at the time it had been necessary to protect herself. The full truth was a dark mark upon her soul.

Rem approached her, yanked the tablet from her hand, and tossed it onto a table near the window. It landed with a loud clatter and caused her to jump in place. He faced her and grasped her shoulders, though to her relief, he wasn’t hurting her. Considering the waves of anger she felt radiating off him, his touch was remarkably gentle.

“Tell me, Tyra. Tell me why you lied. I expect an explanation—a truthful one. Don’t you dare tell me any additional lies.”

She shivered at the coldness of his tone.

“I-I’ve never gotten along with my uncle. He’s not a very nice man. I don’t wish to speak to him ever again. And while my aunt usually treated me with kindness, she always made excuses for my uncle whenever he treated me poorly.”

His expression remained hard. He didn’t appear very convinced by her explanation. “Why didn’t you simply tell me about your poor relationship with your uncle when I first asked if you would like to contact your family on Earth? Why tell a lie?”

Her mouth went dry and she fumbled for a response. His grip on her shoulders tightened a bit, but he still wasn’t hurting her. He leaned down until his face was nearly level with hers. It took all her self-control not to take a step back.

“I came to Mars looking for a new life,” she finally said. “I didn’t wish to speak about my uncle with you, so... that’s why I lied. It seemed harmless at the time. I didn’t know you were going to check on whether or not I was telling you the truth.”

He growled. “I didn’t expect to catch you in a lie, Tyra. That is not why I contacted Martian Affairs in Zone 15. I contacted them because I wished to provide your aunt and uncle with a video comm so that you might be able to contact them. It wasn’t until Martian Affairs showed up to install one in their home, that they realized your family already owned one.”

“I...” Her voice trailed off as the gravity of the situation fell upon her. He’d tried to do something nice for her, only to discover she’d been dishonest with him. Oh, how she wished she could go back and retract the lie. Wished she could go back to the first day they’d met and just tell him the truth, even if doing so led to more painful questions she didn’t wish to answer. At least he wouldn’t be upset with her right now.

Some of the anger faded from his eyes, but the emotion that replaced it next broke her



heart—disappointment.

“I-I am so sorry, Rem. Truly, I am,” she said, her voice wavering with anguish. It occurred to her that she had grown so used to telling little white lies over the years—to her aunt and uncle—that she hadn’t stopped to consider how Rem might feel should he discover the untruth. Except maybe this wasn’t a little white lie. They were mated now. Shouldn’t she open up to him? Tell him more about her past?

“Have you lied about anything else?” he asked.

“No, I-I don’t think so. Please, Rem, please don’t be angry with me.” She despaired over the way she sounded. She sounded weak and groveling, the way she had often sounded as she begged her uncle not to make her wait on a specific table—because certain patrons always got handsy with her—or as she tried to reason with him regarding the disgusting auction he’d planned.

Rem cupped her face and leaned closer. “Promise me,” he said in a serious tone. “Promise me that you will be completely honest with me going forward. No more lies.”

“I promise.”

Relief filled her when his expression grew more relaxed.

After a moment, he nodded. “Good.”

Although he’d grown calmer, tension still blanketed the room. She struggled for breath as a fresh wave of nerves overcame her.

Where did they go from here?

She had never had a boyfriend before and she didn't have any real relationship experience. She didn't know what else she could say to bring closure to this conversation. Should she apologize again?

"Tomorrow, I am due to return to work," he said. "During my absence, you are not to leave this house, not even to go on a walk. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," she replied, even as her heart sank.

"Good. Now, it's time for bed."

## Chapter 16

Tyra had broken his trust. Rem appreciated that she'd apologized and finally told him the truth, but he still had a difficult time understanding her reason for lying in the first place. To him, it seemed a simple thing to admit she had poor relations with her uncle and therefore had no wish to contact him or speak of the matter further. He would have accepted this answer, yet she'd chosen to deceive him.

Would she lie to him again?

Gods, he hoped not. He watched as she emerged from her closet, dressed in one of his loose shirts, which she'd taken to wearing to bed. Suddenly, he remembered her appointment with his mother. In two days, the two of them were supposed to venture to the shopping district together.

His throat rumbled under a low growl. The thought of her leaving their home without him was making him increasingly uneasy. He considered his dream about the ship and the storm. He'd already been hesitant to allow her off the palace grounds, but he hadn't been able to deny her the opportunity to spend time with his mother, especially when she had looked so excited by the prospect.

But now... now he felt the overpowering need to know exactly where she was at all times and with whom. The shopping district was large and typically crowded. She might meet any number of individuals there, including a young foolish Marttiadoxalian male who might try to catch her eye. Once officially joined in a mating union, the males of his kind never cheated on their mates, but he'd heard of younger, unmated males attempting to attract human females into engaging in intimate activities. It was rare, but it still happened sometimes.

Whenever such a transgression occurred, the older, mated male usually killed the younger one during a battle to the death. He clenched his fists as he imagined repeatedly headbutting a male who'd dared to even look upon Tyra with desire.

He watched as Tyra approached with downcast eyes, her steps slow and hesitant. He tossed the covers back when she reached the bed. She mumbled her thanks and joined

him, immediately reaching to pull the covers over herself. In fact, she pulled them up to her nose, as if she wished to hide from him.

Guilt settled upon him. Given her subdued demeanor, he couldn't help but wonder if he'd been too harsh with her when confronting her about the lie.

He still worried if he could trust her, but as he looked at her, a tiny form beneath the covers, the last of his anger dissipated. Suddenly, he ached to hold her in his arms, longed to embrace her and feel her breathing onto his chest.

He was sitting up against the pillows, but he straightened further and began to peel the blankets off her. She shot him an alarmed look and he noticed her hands trembling.

"Would you like me to sleep elsewhere?" she asked. "I-I can leave the bedroom if you'd like." She made to get out of bed, but he grabbed her and lifted her into his lap, circling his arms around her and bringing her snug against his chest.

"No," he said in a calm voice. "No, my sweet mate. Your place is by my side. Always."

Her breath hitched and she peered up at him, her dark eyes luminous and huge, reflecting every little emotion that flitted through her mind. Right now, he saw fear and regret and heartache, and Gods, he despaired over what he was reading in her eyes. He missed her spark of joy, the excitement that filled her gaze whenever she looked at the sunrise, tried a new kind of food, gazed at the flowering trees from the balcony, or glimpsed the stars and moons.

"But you're mad at me," she whispered. "Surely you don't wish to share a bed with me tonight."

He stroked her hair and inhaled her fragrant scent, his loins stirring at her nearness, despite the seriousness of their conversation, as well as the events that had preceded it.

“I’m no longer angry with you, Tyra.” He drew in a deep breath and braced himself, as the words that rested on the tip of his tongue felt as strange as the apologies he’d given her the other day. “I forgive you, and I want you in my bed. If you try to sleep elsewhere, I will follow you and lay down beside you, wherever you are.”

She blinked rapidly and swallowed hard. “Thank you, Rem.” Her shaking began to lessen, and gradually the fear and pain and heartache started to fade from her eyes. Relief replaced her immense look of worry, and soon he noticed a spark glimmering in her dark depths that he thought was hopefulness. At least he prayed it was. He didn’t want to see her upset for a moment longer.

“I know you don’t wish to speak of your uncle, however I cannot help but worry that he hurt you badly. Did he do something to you that caused you to leave Earth?”

She appeared hesitant to answer, but she eventually nodded.

“Yes. He drank a lot and was prone to angry outbursts. He made me start working in a bar he owned when I was only fifteen years old. He didn’t pay me and he always confiscated my tips, and he generally made my life a living hell.” She sighed and blinked slowly. “When I was seventeen, my friend Andrea told me about the mail order bride program. I immediately started planning to leave Earth, keeping it a secret from my uncle, of course, and I left Bismarck on my twenty-first birthday after my application to become a mail order bride to a Martian was accepted. I met you the very next day.”

Rem’s blood heated with rage as he learned the truth about her uncle. He repressed the growl building in his throat, as he didn’t wish for her to think he was angry with

her. But he felt pure rage toward her uncle, a male who should've treated her with kindness and protected her. Instead, it sounded as though he had exploited her.

"I am sorry to hear of your upbringing on Earth," Rem said. He stared into her expressive eyes, wishing he could erase the memory of her painful experiences on her home planet, especially when he still sensed she was holding back some darker reasons for leaving Earth. But perhaps he could give her something else—justice. "Would you like to see your uncle imprisoned? I can arrange for him to be detained indefinitely. He should pay for what he did to you, my sweet mate."

She pulled back slightly, her eyes growing wide. "I-I don't know."

"Think about it," he said, caressing her head. "If imprisonment doesn't satisfy you, I would travel to Earth and end his life myself, if only it would make you forget the things he did to you."

Tears brimmed in her eyes. To his surprise, she smiled at him.

"I don't want you to kill him, Rem, but I really do appreciate the offer. I'm not going to lie—there are plenty of times when I found myself wishing he were dead—but I don't wish to have a death on my conscience, even his."

"I understand." He pressed a kiss to her forehead. "If you ever change your mind, know that the offer still stands." He was tempted to travel to Earth anyway and end her uncle's life, but that would mean leaving her for a full day.

She covered a yawn and snuggled deeper into his chest. He held her until she drifted to sleep, until the soft sounds of her steady breathing lulled him into a restful state. He positioned her alongside him and curled his body around hers, draping an arm over her and tangling his legs with hers.

“Sleep now, my Tyra,” he whispered into her ear. “Sleep.”

## Chapter 17

As Tyra stood on the balcony watching the sunrise the next morning, she felt as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. While she hadn't told Rem the full truth about her reasons for leaving Earth, she had at least told him a large part of the truth. Not only had he listened, but he'd forgiven her for lying to him.

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She was still a bit shocked he'd offered to have her uncle jailed or killed in retaliation for his poor treatment of her and she now had a lot to think about. If her uncle was jailed, that would keep him from hurting anyone else. She'd recently overheard a conversation between him and one of his regulars, a man named Karl who was interested in auctioning off his step-daughter's virginity. Karl had promised to split the winnings with Uncle Sebastian in exchange for the use of the bar's secret back room.

As she recalled further details of the conversation, in which Karl and her uncle had discussed his step-daughter's physical attributes, her stomach twisted with revulsion. But she soon came to a decision, one which she didn't feel guilty over.

She turned at the sound of Rem's footsteps. He was fully dressed in his black guard's uniform and she thought he looked quite handsome this morning. He took her in his arms and kissed her forehead, then her cheek, before trailing a line of kisses down her neck.

"I thought you had to get to work," she said with a laugh.

He straightened and peered into her eyes with warmth filling his. "I do, and I'd better go now so I'm not late. I'm putting the house into lockdown on my way out," he said, and her spirits plummeted.

She had hoped that he would allow her to walk the grounds of the palace freely when he was on duty. She'd enjoyed the walk they had taken there several days ago immensely and had hoped to see Esmay and some of the other human women she'd met again soon. "What if someone stops by?" she asked. "Like your mother?"



“My mother is stopping by tomorrow morning to take you into the shopping district,” he said. “I doubt she will come today.”

“I’m still allowed to go?”

He nodded. “Yes, my mate. As long as you promise to stay with my mother at all times. You will also wear a wrist comm that will allow me to pinpoint your exact location in case you run into any trouble.”

Relief spread through her that she would still be permitted to go shopping with his mother, but she bristled at having to wear a wrist comm. Mars was supposed to be a safe planet, at least compared to Earth. What kind of danger could she possibly find herself in?

“No arguments,” he said, lifting his lower forehead ridges. The facial expression made him appear stern, but he soon resumed gazing upon her with affection. “If it makes you feel better, my father requires my mother to wear a wrist comm whenever she leaves the house without him. Many Marttiadoxalian males put tracers under their female’s skin as well.”

She felt her eyes widen. She wasn’t certain if he meant his last statement as a threat, but she didn’t want anything inserted under her skin. Nope. No way.

“Very well,” she replied. “I will wear the wrist comm.”

“Good.” He paused and gave her a serious look. “Have you considered what we talked about last night? About the fate of your uncle? I am not trying to rush you, but if you have reached a decision, I am ready to take action on the matter at once.”

She drew in a deep breath, a sense of victory rushing through her. After years of listening to Uncle Sebastian’s taunts about what would happen to her when she

turned twenty-one, after years of enduring his drunken tirades and watching him degrade her aunt with harsh words and frequent cheating, she would see justice prevail. As far as she was concerned, he deserved to rot in prison and never see the light of day again.

“Yes,” she finally answered. “I’ve come to a decision. I would like him to be jailed. If you need a good reason to have him arrested, there is a back room in his bar, a secret room, and he holds illegal gambling nights there every Friday.” She didn’t dare mention the auctions, for fear he might realize she was holding some truths back.

“Consider it done,” he said, leaning down to rest his forehead against hers. “What about your aunt? Will she manage to survive without your uncle’s income?”

Tyra flushed. She hadn’t thought the whole thing out. How would Aunt Tammy react when her husband was hauled off to jail forever? Would she feel sadness or relief? Tyra wasn’t sure, but she knew how to help her aunt remain in her home and keep paying her bills. “My aunt doesn’t work outside the home, but I received a deposit of ten thousand galactic credits in my account after my application to become a Martian’s bride was accepted. I wasn’t sure what to do with the money yet—I didn’t want my uncle to get his hands on it—but if he’s been put away for good, I can have the money transferred to her.”

“Are you certain that’s what you want to do?”

“Yes, I am.” Tyra’s relationship with her aunt would always be complicated, and she still wasn’t even sure if she wished to speak to the woman. But, she had some fond memories of her aunt. The woman had been particularly kind to her when she was much younger, before her uncle’s drinking had gotten worse and he’d forced Tyra to start working at his seedy bar.

“All right,” Rem said, pulling back from her. “You may use the video comm to

complete the transfer into your aunt's account whenever you would like. Your uncle will be jailed within the hour. I swear it on the Gods." He gave her one last kiss, promised to be home in time for dinner, and finally left for work.

Within the hour. Would Tyra's nightmares about her uncle stop once he was locked away where he would never hurt anyone again? God, she hoped so. She also hoped her aunt didn't mourn his absence. She reminded herself of all the times he'd pushed Aunt Tammy down or worse during one of his rages. She was doing the right thing by locking him away, even if her aunt did miss him at first.

She soon departed their bedroom and entered the balcony on the far side of the house that had a perfect view of the city. As she gazed at the alien landscape, marveling at the ships that zipped through the clear blue sky, she started to feel a sense of purpose for the first time in a long time.

She was doing good by asking Rem to lock her uncle away, and she started to think about the other well-known criminals in Bismarck who'd gotten away with worse crimes than Uncle Sebastian. Fear had always kept her and everyone else in her town silent. But she wasn't on Earth anymore. The criminals from her city couldn't hurt her, even if they did find out she'd ratted them out to the authorities.

How would Rem react if she gave him a detailed list of the harmful and very illegal activities that had been causing her city to go downhill during the last few years? She'd seen and heard a lot of crazy things at the bar. She knew everyone's name, who they worked for, and what kind of disreputable dealings they were involved in. The few friends she had in Bismarck longed to escape the city, but none of them had the means to do so, and she'd felt guilty leaving them behind, particularly the other waitresses who worked at her uncle's bar.

She rushed to the stack of books she'd placed on the bedside table, searching for the diary she'd brought. She slipped the pen off the side, sat down on the bed, and ripped

out a blank page, intent to get to work.

She only hoped Rem would help.

## Chapter 18

When Rem arrived home, he was met with the delicious smell of... something. He wasn't certain what Tyra was cooking, but he'd barely set foot inside his home and his mouth was already watering. He strode through the house in search of Tyra. He found her as she was placing a large pot on the dining room table.

She looked up with a smile when he entered. He rounded the table and opened his arms, and his heart warmed when she rushed into his embrace. He hugged her to his chest and pressed a kiss to her cheek, thankful to finally be home with his mate. He had missed her today and had caught himself staring at the time on his wrist comm more than once.

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“I missed you,” she said, peering up at him from under her thick eyelashes.

“I missed you, too, my Tyra.” He kissed her cheek again. “Whatever you made for dinner smells delicious, and I am famished.”

“Thanks. I don’t have much experience cooking, but I did bring one of my mother’s old cookbooks with me and I replicated the ingredients, then made the meal by hand.” She sat down when he pulled her chair out for her, and he couldn’t resist kissing the top of her head. Gods, he wanted to kiss her all over right now, but he didn’t want to interrupt the meal she’d obviously worked so hard to prepare, so he moved to his seat across from her.

“Um, Rem?” she asked, her expression falling slightly.

“Yes?”

“I hate to spoil the good mood, but I must know,” she said. “Has he been taken care of yet? My uncle, that is.”

“Yes. He’s currently in jail. I spoke directly with the enforcers who dragged him away from his bar.” He reached across the table to take Tyra’s hand, squeezing it gently as he held her gaze, praying this news pleased her.

“Thank you,” she said, her visage all at once brightening. “Now, let’s eat.”

“What is this called?” he asked, staring at the dish.

“Lasagna. Since you liked the spaghetti I replicated the other day, I thought you might enjoy this as well. Oh! I forgot the garlic bread and salad!” She jumped from her seat and hurried back to the kitchen, only to return moments later holding the dishes she’d forgotten.

Rem took a bite of the lasagna and couldn’t suppress a moan. It was similar to the spaghetti, though the noodles were long and flat and there was a delicious cheese filling that mingled with the tomato sauce. There was also a different kind of cheese on top of the whole thing, though it was melty and gooey. He took another bite and met Tyra’s eyes.

“Lasagna is my new favorite Earth food,” he declared. “Tyra, this is wonderful. Thank you for preparing such a delicious meal.”

“You really like it? My, um, uncle always said I was a lousy cook.”

Rem repressed a growl at the mention of the relative who had tormented her so, the very uncle who was now facing a lifetime in prison. “I love it,” he said, “and I think you are a wonderful cook.”

She grinned. “Try the garlic bread. And the salad. I made the dressing from scratch, too.”

He tried both and was pleasantly surprised. Vegetables weren’t always his favorite food, but the dressing she’d used on the salad was tasty and the garlic bread was unlike any bread he’d tried before. “You must make this entire meal again soon,” he said. “It’s amazing.” His cheeks started to hurt and it took him a second to realize it was because he was smiling so much.

“I’m so glad you like it.” She beamed at him as she reached for a slice of garlic bread. “My dad actually used to make this when I was a kid. He always told me it was my

mother's secret recipe."

He liked hearing her speak about her parents. He liked it when she shared information about her life on Earth, as it made him feel closer to her. She had seemed guarded about her past when she'd first arrived on Mars, but she had started opening up to him recently and he treasured their interactions when she did so. It suddenly occurred to him that perhaps he ought to open up to her. He thought about his one dark secret. Would Tyra wish to know about Bethamma?

He mulled this thought while they told each other about their days. She'd spent the day reading, talking to several friends from Zone 15 via the video comm, gazing out the windows at the landscape, which she claimed she couldn't get enough of, and figuring out what to prepare for dinner. He told her about his guard duties, and he also explained the recent change of Martian leadership to her, telling her of King Vaath's treacherous father and how the new king had banished his father from the Martian Empire after discovering he'd aided the anti-Earther movement.

"Anti-Earther movement?" she asked. "That doesn't sound good."

"We have rounded up all the members of the organization and believe they are no longer a threat. The leaders have been put to the death or banished, and those who held lesser positions are currently imprisoned. We take the safety of females on our planet very seriously, human females and Marttiadoxalian females alike."

"Well," she said, "I'm glad the anti-Earthers no longer pose any danger. That's sad they didn't agree with Marttiadoxalian-human mating unions. The way I see it, such unions benefit both your people and mine, though I'll admit not all the human women aboard the spacecraft that brought us to Mars were happy to leave Earth. Many of them had fallen upon difficult circumstances and felt they had no other choice. I felt sorry for some of them, though I tried to convince them traveling here to become a Martian's bride was a good thing, a brand-new beginning."

“From what I have observed of Marttioxoxalian-human mating unions, most of them are happy. Many of my fellow guards have taken human females as mates. The king is encouraging it, in fact.” He considered telling her that the king had ordered him to take Tyra as his mate, but he quickly decided against it. He didn’t want her to think that he hadn’t wanted her. It no longer mattered what he used to desire, because, by the Gods, he wanted her now, and he would destroy anyone who came between him and his beloved mate.

She belonged to him. Forever.

## Chapter 19

Once she was ready for bed, Tyra found Rem on the balcony off their bedroom. He had a blanket waiting and wrapped her in it the moment she stepped outside. Tonight was warmer than usual though, and she didn’t mind the cool evenings, as the days were warm and humid and even a cold night on Mars likely wouldn’t compare to the brutal winters of Zone 15.

“There’s a meteor shower tonight. Look,” he said, his lips grazing her ear as he spoke, sending a delightful shudder through her.

She lifted her gaze to the sky and gasped. She’d rarely glimpsed the stars while on Earth, so seeing a clear night on Mars with meteors streaking across the sky was a sight to behold. “It’s amazing,” she said.

They stood on the balcony, watching the falling stars as the noise of nighttime insects swelled around them. Hours might’ve passed, Tyra wasn’t sure, but she was content to remain wrapped in the blanket in her mate’s strong arms as she basked in the ethereal beauty of the Martian night.

Once the meteor shower ended, Rem swept her up into his arms and carried her back



inside, his dark gaze glimmering with heat as he stared down at her. Warmth abruptly pulsed in her womanly core when he placed her upon the bed and hovered over her, stroking her hair and occasionally uttering something to her in his native tongue.

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She had no idea what he was saying, but she decided not to ask, for she liked the mystery of it. For all she knew, he might be telling her that he loved her. She brightened at the prospect, because she was starting to truly care about the big green alien. She had missed him tremendously today and had had plenty of time to examine her growing affection for him, and she'd come to the conclusion that he was starting to steal her heart.

He gathered her close and captured her lips in a kiss that was so achingly tender, she became putty in his very capable hands. Her head swam as he gradually deepened the kiss, and moments later after he'd finished divesting them both of their clothing, when he pressed her down upon the bed, his hardened cock was throbbing against her thigh. She reached down and for the first time, wrapped her hand around his huge male appendage. It pulsed in her hand and felt so hot to the touch that she gasped and almost released him. But the growls of pleasure rumbling forth from him encouraged her to keep hold of his cock, and when she stroked her hand down the steely hard length of him, he threaded his fingers through her locks and gave them a tug, forcing her head back and causing her gaze to collide with his.

"I want to taste you, my sweet mate," he said, his voice deeper than usual. "Lean back on the pillow and be a good girl and spread your legs."

Exhaling a shuddering breath, she rested back on the pillow and slowly parted her thighs, heat quaking through her at the feral look in Rem's dark gaze. Anticipation built as he kissed his way down from her neck to her stomach, before he traveled even lower and began trailing his tongue along her inner thighs.

Oh God.

She was throbbing for him, waiting for the first graze of his tongue upon her aching parts, despite being a little embarrassed by what he was about to do. She had never imagined he would want to kiss her down there, but she couldn't deny that she was more than intrigued.

He forced her legs wider apart and finally settled himself between her thighs, the heat of his breath hitting her delicate flesh and making her quiver anew.

“Your clit is poking out from your pink folds, little human. So beautiful,” he said, each word spoken sending a puff of warmth against her, causing her to squirm around in desperation. If he didn't touch her there soon, where she was aching the most fervently, she was going to explode.

She whimpered and stared down at him, shooting him a pleading look, even though his gaze was focused solely on the area between her thighs.

“Who do you belong to, Tyra? I want to hear you say it again.”

“You!” she nearly shouted. “I-I belong to you, Rem.”

He reached for her throbbing parts and cupped her pussy, pushing the heel of his hard palm down upon her clit. Curse words escaped her as her desire mounted, though she uttered them in English, somehow unable to recall the proper translations in Galactic Common, her mind had become so muddled in the face of her growing need.

She moaned in relief and pleasure when he finally removed his hand and ran his tongue over her swollen nubbin. She jerked in place and parted her thighs wider, her entire body trembling and convulsing. He parted her folds and paid homage to her clit, drawing his tongue around it with the perfect amount of pressure.

Slowly, he increased the pace of his swirls and also pressed down harder upon her

clit, driving her to whimper repeatedly as her hips lurched and she pushed her center to his face.

A deep moan left her when she felt him inching two, or possibly three, thick fingers inside her, plunging deep as he continued his relentless assault on her clit.

“Rem,” she said, repeating his name over and over. She couldn’t stop whimpering and moaning and making all sorts of noises she had never heard herself make before. While they’d had sex several times since her arrival here, and she had climaxed during each of these mating sessions, she had never experienced such a deliciously torturous build-up of pleasure before.

When her orgasm finally hit her, she grasped for Rem’s head and held onto the thick base of his horns while she ground her center to his mouth, coming apart as she cried out in the throes of the most intense release she had ever experienced.

Even after the climax ended, fading jolts of ecstasy kept seizing her, making her thrash slightly on the bed. She sighed softly as he withdrew his fingers from her center, still quivering and gasping for breath. He gathered her in his arms and pressed a kiss atop her head. Feeling delirious in the aftermath of the intense climax, she snuggled into his big strong arms and closed her eyes, allowing herself to float in the moment of bliss.

“Don’t fall asleep, my sweet mate,” Rem said, stroking her hair, “I am not finished with you yet.”

## Chapter 20

Rem’s cock ached as he held Tyra in his arms, but he planned to allow her enough time to recover. He licked his lips, savoring the taste of her essence, and his manhood hardened further.

Whenever she squirmed slightly in his lap, it was all he could do to refrain from pushing her down on the bed and shoving his length into the sweetness between her quivering thighs.

Eventually, her breathing became more regulated and she shifted back and peered up at him, her gaze filled with satisfaction. She looked fatigued, but he still didn't plan to allow her to sleep anytime soon. After being away from her for most of the day, he found he couldn't get enough of her. He longed to take her again and again.

A smile played about her lips and she sighed. "Mm. Rem, that was... unexpected. And wonderful. I feel as though I'm floating right now."

The scent of her arousal was strong in the air and he took a long inhale, desire heating his blood so intensely that he felt perspiration gathering about his temples. Fluxx, he needed to be inside her now. He eyed her pink, kissable lips and came to a quick decision.

He cupped her face and stared at her intently. "I want you to stand up, move to the center of the room, Tyra, and get down on your knees."

She gave him a quizzical look. "On my hands and knees?"

"No, just your knees." He guided her off the bed, helping her to stand up. "I'm going to teach you how to take a cock in your mouth."

Her pretty dark eyes widened and she flushed, though she offered no protest. A moment later, the scent of her essence increased in the air and he noticed her pressing her thighs together. Her nipples were tight pink buds and her sudden increasing breaths drew his attention to her ample bosom. Gods, she was a creature of exquisite beauty.

He watched as she got into place, her movements slow as she walked to the center of the room and then sank down on her knees. She peered at him, her eyes growing even wider, as he approached her while fisting his cock. His balls drew up tight and his length jerked when he felt her breath upon the tip of it.

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He pushed the tip toward her lips. “Open,” he commanded. “Open up and take me inside your mouth.”

\* \* \*

Tyra eyed Rem’s massive length dubiously. He was so huge, she had no idea how she would manage to suck his cock. Apprehension flowed through her, even as the quaking between her thighs reignited, causing her clit to throb unbearably despite the fact that she’d come only minutes ago.

Her nipples had grown so tight that they almost burned, and her breasts felt achy and heavy. She longed for Rem to reach out and caress her bosom, but she knew she must obey his order and start sucking his cock. First, she needed to take the huge appendage into her mouth. She exhaled a deep breath and then parted her lips. A drop of precum gleamed on the tip of his manhood, and as he nudged the tip into her mouth, she savored the salty essence of his seed.

Her heart pounded faster as she started taking him deeper, until the tip of his cock pressed against the back of her throat, nearly gagging her. She drew in a deep breath through her nose and steadied herself to commence pleasing her mate.

He groaned and laced his fingers through her hair. “Gods, Tyra. That feels so good.”

Warmed by his praise, she continued, and though her movements were a bit clumsy, she started bobbing her head forward and back as she ran her tongue down his hard length. Minutes passed as she kept sucking, spurred on by his sexy growls and moans. She liked that she was making him feel so good, liked that she was drawing

such noises of pleasure from him.

His cock seemed to harden further in her mouth and she struggled not to gag yet again as he shoved deep in her throat. He grasped her head and held her in place, then started driving in and out of her mouth.

“I’m going to climax soon,” he said, “and I’m going to erupt into the back of your throat. You’re to swallow every last drop, my sweet mate. I plan to shoot my seed inside of you on a frequent basis. In your mouth and in your tight little pussy as I mark you as mine over and over.”

His shocking words sent a thrill through her. She quivered in place as she accepted each hard thrust into her throat, she had no choice but to accept his size as he drove into her again and again, his growls increasing along with his pace.

The first spurt of his seed was a hot pulsing jet against the back of her throat. She struggled to swallow and it took several tries until she’d gulped it all down. Another pulse of his essence filled her and she did her best to swallow again. She couldn’t believe how much seed could erupt from his cock when he climaxed.

She had felt the warmth inside her pussy before, and whenever he came in her, his essence always dripped out of her and slid down her thighs, but she hadn’t realized how large the amount was until she was forced to swallow every last drop, per his orders.

When the spurts stopped coming, his length remained hard in her mouth, but he withdrew and cupped her face. He stroked her hair and peered at her with a gaze so affectionate that she felt as though she were about to swoon. A second later, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her back to the bed.

To her surprise, he pressed her upon the bed and kissed his way down her body. He



shoved her legs apart and began feasting on her again, though this time he brought her to a quick, hard release that made her writhe upon the bed and scream out his name.

Just when she didn't think she could take anymore pleasure, he settled his cock between her thighs and shoved hard and deep, stealing her breath with the rapid plunge. Oh God. She could scarcely catch her breath as he pounded into her.

His muscular green chest gleamed under a sheen of perspiration and occasionally the tips of his horns scraped over her lower thighs, though it didn't really hurt, it simply felt as though he were dragging his nails over her flesh. Goosebumps rose all over her body, even as heated waves engulfed her.

His nostrils flared and he emitted a fierce growl that shook her insides. "I'm about to fill you up again, little Tyra." His eyes darkened and then he erupted inside her in a torrent of pulsing liquid heat.

Breathless with desire, she couldn't even find the strength to lift her head as he withdrew from her center moments later. Her eyes fluttered shut and she kept floating, lost in a sea of requited pleasure, the aftermath of their mutual bliss buzzing through her like alcohol flowing in her blood.

She was barely cognizant as he proceeded to take care of her. He pressed a cool cloth to her center. At some point, he gave her a quick bath, dried her off, and dressed her in one of his oversized shirts. The last thing she remembered before falling asleep was his lips at her ear as he murmured something in his native tongue.

His voice was gentle and affectionate, and she imagined he was spilling his heart to her and confessing his love. It was a beautiful thought. God, how she hoped it was true, because the truth was, she was starting to fall in love with him.

He cared for her, made her feel safe, and it was nice to finally feel wanted. She had spent so many years feeling unwanted and uncertain, as well as frightened of her future. But now she finally had a place to call home and a sweet, albeit possessive, mate to call her very own.

## Chapter 21

“You look tired,” Rem’s mother said. “Are you feeling all right, Tyra?”

“Oh, I’m feeling just fine,” Tyra replied, her face flushing. Rem had kept her up rather late last night and she was definitely feeling the effects of it today, though she wasn’t about to complain. She had enjoyed every second of their time together.

“I hope that son of mine isn’t working you too hard. He has money, you know. He could afford to hire a housekeeper for you.” Alissina smiled. “If you would like, I can send one of our housekeepers over to help you tomorrow.”

“Oh, I appreciate the offer, really I do, but that’s not necessary. I truly enjoy keeping house and especially cooking. Of course, I might change my mind about wanting help after we have children,” she replied with a giggle as they approached a crowded square that contained dozens upon dozens of vendor booths.

Alissina grabbed for Tyra’s arm and stopped her in the street. “Children?” she asked with a wide grin. “Do you think you will have children soon? Are you trying?”

Tyra flushed. “I, um...” Her voice trailed off and her face heated further. She didn’t know how to respond.

“Ah, so you are trying,” Rem’s mother said, her voice filled with delight. “Well, I cannot wait to become a grandmother. I never thought Rem would take a mate so I was overjoyed when I learned he was taking a mail order bride from Earth.”

“Why did you think Rem would never take a mate?” Tyra couldn’t help but ask. She felt guilty, as the answer likely had something to do with the loss Rem had mentioned, the person he’d cared about who’d died because of the Xieandans. She knew she ought to hear this from Rem himself. Now that she’d asked the question, though, she wasn’t about to take it back.

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Alissina drew in a deep breath. “Oh, it’s only that his heart was broken long ago. Has he not mentioned this to you at all?”

“He told me he lost someone he cared about because of the Xieandans, though he did not elaborate. Is-is that related?” Her heart raced at the prospect as her suspicions started to grow.

“It probably isn’t my place to tell you,” Alissina said, though her voice remained cheerful. She wasn’t upset that Tyra had been prying. “He will likely tell you more about it when the time is right. But know that it happened many years ago, long before we even traveled to your solar system. I doubt he’s still grieving the female’s loss, especially now that he has you.” Her tone was warm and motherly. She patted Tyra on the arm and then beckoned her down a narrow street.

“Where are we going?” she asked, even as she continued processing Alissina’s admissions. Not only had Rem had his heart broken by a female, but it appeared that same female had perished because of the Xieandans.

“There’s a new dress shop down this way. They have the most fashionable gowns.”

Tyra glanced at her wrist comm. Rem had told her it would also permit her to make purchases, she simply needed to allow a shop owner to scan it. He’d also told her to buy whatever she wanted and not to worry about the cost, jokingly warning her that his mother would probably push the most expensive clothing items upon her, as the older woman had a taste for more refined items. She appreciated that Rem had allowed her to spend the day in the city with his mother, though she still felt a little strange over the prospect of spending lots of his money, even if Alissina had claimed

he was affluent.

Over the next few hours, Alissina whisked her into shop after shop. At first, Tyra tried to protest how many items the woman was insisting she buy—she wasn't used to having so many new things and had never owned a brand-new dress before—but eventually she gave up and decided it was easier to go along with Alissina's picks. They rented a hovering cart that followed them through the stores, a marvel of technology that left Tyra repeatedly amazed. It never bumped into anything and stayed about five feet behind them. She noticed several other shoppers being followed by the floating carts too.

The market area was colorful and filled with a mix of Marttiadoxalian males and human females, as well as the occasional Marttiadoxalian female. The males typically wore black or gray, and the females wore bright clothing, usually long elegant gowns made of layers of sheer fabric.

As Alissina guided Tyra into a bakery for a quick treat, someone called out their names from across the shop. They both turned to see Princess Esmay seated at a table with another human female.

"It's good to see you both!" Princess Esmay called out. "Please, won't you join us?"

"We'll be right there!" Alissina replied, then she turned to Tyra. "I take it you've met the human princess?"

"Oh yes. Rem has taken me to the palace twice now. She's made me feel very welcome. I do not recognize the woman she's sitting with though."

"Neither do I," Alissina said, "but I love making new friends. Come, let's put in our order and take a seat."

As they stood in line, Tyra noticed Chexxa and Frinik seated at a table nearby. Both males smiled and waved at her, though Alissina didn't notice them, as she was too busy studying the baked goods in the large glass display case. Not wanting to be rude, Tyra smiled at them very briefly as she returned their wave, then she joined Rem's mother in looking into the display case as she tried to decide what she wanted.

They both ordered fruit pies and tea, then ventured over to the princess' table. Introductions were made and Tyra learned the other human female's name was Kenzie and she'd been on Mars for two months now, having come here from Zone 26, which was the area on Earth formally known as Italy.

"It's nice to meet you," Tyra said, smiling warmly at Kenzie. "Does your mate work at the palace?"

Kenzie nodded. "Yes, he's one of King Vaath's new advisors, though he's currently on Earth helping with some new political appointments. Apparently, King Vaath is getting ready to appoint new governors for every zone on Earth." She flushed and looked from side to side, as if worried someone might overhear them.

Princess Esmay waved a hand in a dismissive manner. "Oh, it doesn't matter if anyone finds out about it, Kenzie. The new governors will be announced in several days."

"Wow, new governors for every zone? That's... shocking. Has something happened?"

"Well, as you probably know, many of the governors have raised taxes so high in their respective zones that it is impossible for most human families to make ends meet. This is one reason so many women have left Earth recently to come here—because by becoming a Martian's mate, their family's debts are forgiven and they receive that one-time payment of ten thousand galactic credits," Princess Esmay

said, tucking an errant strand of blonde hair behind her ear. “That’s certainly what brought me here.”

“Me too,” Kenzie said.

Tyra drew in a deep breath and prayed none of the women asked why she’d come to Mars. She’d been a bit nervous Alissina would ask her about her time on Earth and why she’d wished to leave and become a mail order bride to a Martian, but luckily, she hadn’t broached the subject.

Thankfully, a server arrived with Tyra and Alissina’s order, briefly interrupting their conversation. The four women sat in silence for about a minute, sipping tea and eating pie, until Princess Esmay cleared her throat and picked up where they’d left off.

“After King Vaath came to power, he started taking steps to help mend relations between Earth and Mars. In addition to installing new governors who are not corrupt like their former counterparts—all of whom were installed by King Vaath’s banished father—my mate intends to take a look at the mail order bride program. I believe he will soon start allowing Marttiadoxalian males to create personals that women on Earth will answer, rather than the current system that sees desperate women fleeing Earth for one reason or another, only to be randomly matched with a Marttiadoxalian male.”

Tyra’s mouth nearly dropped open as she listened to the princess talking about all the changes that would soon happen. It reminded her of the list she’d made that included all the known criminals in Bismarck. She had planned to share her list with Rem soon, in hopes that something might be done to quell the corruption and lawlessness that had often resulted in the innocent being preyed upon. She made a mental note to speak to Rem about what she’d learned today from the princess and Kenzie soon, as well as finally share her list with him.

“So,” Tyra said, “the new model for human mail order brides will be sort of like a dating service?”

“Yes, kind of, though the human women won’t get a chance to meet their prospective mates in person before they agree to travel to Mars to become their mates, but they will get to send one another messages, as well as speak via a video comm if they wish. The details are not all ironed out yet, but I am hopeful that the king will take my advice on the matter.” Princess Esmay’s eyes shone with mischief and she smiled. “I have a good feeling he will listen to me, though.”

Tyra was stunned. Circumstances were about to change on Earth. If new governors had been installed before her twenty-first birthday and law and order restored, which she hoped might happen in all of the zones if the new governors were indeed not corrupt, she might not have had to come to Mars in the first place.

But she’d been stuck in Bismarck, unable to afford a bus ticket out of the city. She had considered trying to report her uncle to the authorities, but he’d frequently bragged to her that most officers, including some Martian enforcers, were in league with his business practices. Since she’d seen uniformed enforcers come into his bar on occasion and speak to him in a friendly manner, she had assumed he was telling the truth, even though she had never been able to confirm it for herself.

If she wouldn’t have been forced to leave Earth though, she would have never met Rem. Her heart ached at the thought of being parted from him. As the conversation turned to safer topics, Tyra let her mind wander as she considered the difficult circumstances that had led her to Rem.



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While she wished she could erase some of her darker memories, she wasn't unhappy on Mars, or displeased with the male to whom she'd been randomly matched.

Rem. Her heart filled with warmth whenever she thought of him.

Was it fate that had led her into his loving arms? Sometimes she wondered if higher forces were at work, for she was starting to feel as though she truly belonged with him.

When it was time to leave, Tyra rose up and her gaze suddenly locked with Chexxa's. He was staring at her, and even though she'd just caught him doing so, he didn't look away. His eyes darkened and his nostrils flared. An uneasy feeling settled in Tyra's stomach and the back of her neck prickled. She looked away from him and followed Alissina out of the bakery. Thankfully, she hadn't noticed the odd interaction between Tyra and Chexxa.

As they finished shopping, Tyra couldn't help but keep glancing over her shoulder. She felt as though someone was watching her, but whenever she looked to see if her instincts were right, half expecting to discover Chexxa had followed her, she didn't see anything amiss.

## Chapter 22

“You're home early!”

Rem opened his arms as Tyra rushed toward him. He hugged her and then withdrew to inspect the new gown she was wearing. She blushed and gnawed on her bottom lip,

as if nervous over whether or not he would approve of the flowing green dress.

“Most of my new dresses are green,” she said. “Your mother says it’s becoming the fashion for human brides to wear clothing in the color of their Marttiadoxalian mates.”

“You look beautiful,” he said. “The color complements your eyes.”

She smiled. “Thanks. Um, your mother is still here. I hope you don’t mind, but she kept hinting that she would like to stay for dinner, so I invited both her and your father. They’re in the sitting room right now.”

He laced his fingers through hers and kissed the back of her hand, letting his lips linger upon her flesh. “That’s perfectly all right. You don’t need my permission to invite my parents over for dinner, though you must promise not to have them over every night.”

She chuckled. “I promise.”

“Do you need any help getting dinner ready?” he asked.

“No, it’ll just take me a minute to put it on the table. Your mother recommended I replicate something calledrallonak. She says it’s one of your favorites.”

“I’ll help you get everything on the table, my sweet mate. Come,” he said, leading her toward the kitchen. “The sooner we feed my parents, the sooner we’ll be alone, just the two of us.”

She appeared scandalized for a moment and looked around. “Sh, Rem. What if your parents hear you say that?”

“Then they will know that I cannot get enough of you,” he said, grinning when her cheeks turned an even darker pink and her neck became flushed too.

Dinner was a success, as far as Rem was concerned. His mother spent much of the time regaling Tyra with stories from his childhood, most of them embarrassing, of course, and Tyra shared a few tales about her own childhood on Earth, though he noticed she carefully kept to stories that occurred before the death of her father.

To Rem’s great relief, neither of his parents asked about her reasons for leaving her home planet. His parents asked a few general questions about Zone 15, such as inquiring about the climate, and nothing more.

When it came time for dessert, Tyra replicated an Earth dish called chocolate cake, which practically melted in his mouth. He was glad his replicator was the latest model and included many recipes from Earth cultures, in addition to traditional Marttiadoxalian dishes.

“Oh, bright stars,” his mother said, leaning back in her seat. “I am so full that I do not think I can move. Tyra, you made an excellent dinner. Thank you.”

“Yes, thank you for inviting us to dinner, Tyra,” his father said. “We enjoyed it very much.” He glanced at Rem’s mother and the lower line of his forehead ridges rose up. “But now it is time we depart. It is getting late and I am certain our son and his mate would appreciate their privacy.”

“But—”

“No arguments, Alissina. Remember what we talked about.”

Rem noticed Tyra repressing a smile when his mother sighed dramatically. “Very well. I suppose I am getting rather tired.” She straightened in her seat and smiled at

Tyra. “I enjoyed spending time with you and getting to know you better today. I can already see that you’ve made our son a very happy male.”

“Thank you, Alissina. I enjoyed our time together, as well, and I really appreciate you taking me shopping.”

They finished saying their farewells and Rem’s parents finally departed. After the door shut, he guided Tyra upstairs as he called out a verbal command to put the house into lockdown for the night.

As she got ready for bed, he ventured to his library and scanned the security report of her travels today. It was an automatically generated report, made possible by the wrist comm she had worn, that displayed images of her in the city with his mother. There were thousands of security cameras on the streets of Relliktron and in all public shops. He examined each image, telling himself he was only checking to ensure she’d been entirely safe during her trip out of the house.

Liar, a voice in the back of his mind whispered. He growled under his breath and continued looking at the images, even as he realized what he was truly doing—he was checking up on Tyra to ensure she hadn’t spoken to any young males.

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But his growls deepened when he came upon an image of her in a bakery, smiling and waving at Chexxa and Frinik, then another picture of her looking at Chexxa, her eyes wide with surprise, or perhaps it was fear. He couldn't be sure. But he knew one thing for certain—Tyra had smiled at the males and waved at them.

Alarm filled him when further images revealed Chexxa had followed Tyra and his mother for quite some time through the city as they'd continued their shopping excursion.

How could Rem have been so stupid? He should not have allowed his mate to travel into the city without him. She was young and beautiful, a prime target for a young and foolish male like Chexxa. Obviously, the male held some sort of infatuation for Tyra, otherwise he would not have followed her around for so long.

Rem proceeded to watch several video clips that the security report had included. The first video clip showed Chexxa and Frinik had smiled and waved at Tyra first in the bakery, before she had greeted them. This made him feel somewhat better, but not by much.

Several of the images and videos showed Tyra looking over her shoulder quite frequently, in whatever direction Chexxa was standing or hiding. If she knew she was being followed, why hadn't she informed Rem of the matter immediately upon his return home?

With yet another growl, he pushed away from his desk and went in search of Tyra. Just as he would not tolerate lies, he would not tolerate omissions of truth. She ought to have said something to him about what had happened today.

Why had she kept quiet?

His thoughts took a dark, jealous turn, and suddenly he felt as though he were back on Marttiadoxalia, on the night he discovered Bethamma's betrayal. Coldness and fury gripped him. Tyra was leaving her closet just as he entered the bedroom. She was wearing a new garment, a sheer nightgown that left little to the imagination.

When his gaze locked with hers, she gasped and took a step back.

"Rem? What is wrong?"

He reached her in three long strides and grasped her by the shoulders. "I know what happened in the shopping district today, Tyra. You will not be permitted to leave this house until I can trust you. Know that I also intend to deal with the male who was tempting you. He likely will not live to see another sunset."

## Chapter 23

"Rem, I don't understand. What are you talking about?" Worry and fear sliced through Tyra, making her shiver in her mate's firm hold. It sounded as though he were getting jealous again, but she hadn't done anything to warrant his suspicions. For heaven's sake, she had been with his mother all day. Unless...

Her stomach flipped. Had he somehow learned that she had smiled, for about one second, at Chexxa and Frinik? That had to be it. She couldn't imagine any other reason for his sudden anger. Her heart sank. Would it always be like this with Rem? Would she have to watch her every move, for fear that she might do one little thing to rouse her mate's suspicions and cause him to accuse her, whether directly or indirectly, of being unfaithful to him?

"Rem, please, you must listen to me. I—"

“You will stay here and wait for me.” He released her and turned to the door, but she bolted in front of him and put her hands upon his chest.

“No! Don’t leave, Rem. We need to talk about this.”

He picked her up and set her down behind him, then strode out the door. She tried to follow him, only for the door to slide shut in front of her. She banged on it, but it wouldn’t open. Dread seized her.

He had locked her inside the bedroom.

And, apparently, he was on his way to kill Chexxa and Frinik. Except, now that she thought about it, he had specifically mentioned dealing with one male. Not two. But that didn’t make any sense, as she had smiled and waved at both brothers.

Know that I also intend to deal with the male who was tempting you. He likely will not live to see another sunset.

Those were his exact words. Tears burned in her eyes as she banged on the door, her frustration and utter sense of helplessness growing with each moment.

“Damn you, Rem! You cannot treat me like this! And you cannot force me to stay in your house! I will not stand for it. I won’t!”

The door zipped open without warning and Rem immediately grabbed her. Shock and terror reverberated through her. She had thought he’d already left when she yelled out. Oh God. Had he heard every word? She really hoped not, but judging by the dark look filling his gaze, she had the sinking feeling that he had heard her tirade.

“I could force you to stay here forever,” he said in a stern tone, “here in this very room, and there would be nothing you could do about it.”

“I suppose you could,” she retorted, “if you want a prisoner instead of a mate.”

His nostrils flared and he leaned down, glaring at her with an intensity that left her chilled to the bone. “I will keep you locked up if I must,” he said, “but I will not allow you to betray me any further than you already have, nor will I be made out as a fool.”

Tears streamed down her face and her anger flared. “I’d say you’re doing a fine job of making a fool of yourself all on your own. Have you always been so prone to overreacting?” she hissed out.

“Females cannot always be trusted,” he said in a fierce tone, though there was an odd, faraway glint in his gaze. His fingers dug into her arms, but she drew in a deep breath and then stepped back quickly, yanking herself from his grasp.

She stared at him, aghast, as the pieces started falling in place. The conversation she’d had earlier in the day with Alissina about the female who’d broken Rem’s heart resurfaced in her mind. Apparently, not only had the female broken his heart, but she had also broken his trust. And now, many years later, the betrayal was still affecting Rem.



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“What was her name?” Tyra asked as she backed up. Each time she took a step, Rem pursued her, until he had her pinned against the wall. He placed his hands on either side of her and leaned in to stare at her, though he didn’t make a move to grab for her again. “Tell me,” she pressed. “What was her name? The female who betrayed you and then died, the female whose ghost still haunts you. I want to know her name!”

“Bethamma!” Rem roared. His expression, already hard, morphed into a look of pure rage. “My mother told you. Didn’t she?” His nostrils flared and his body tensed further.

“Not directly, but she confided that you’d had your heart broken a long time ago.” Tyra breathed out slowly, trying to gather her thoughts. She didn’t wish to cause a rift between Rem and his mother, even if Rem was once again acting like a jealous ass. “Look, your mother was only tactfully answering my questions. I’ll admit, I was prying into your past a bit, but only after your mother mentioned she was surprised you had taken a mate. I wanted to understand you better and you’ve been keeping this part of yourself a secret. Please don’t be mad at her.”

“You had no right to pry.”

“No right?” She scoffed. “No right? I’m only your mate!”

“You’ve kept secrets from me,” he said in an accusatory tone. “I know there is more to your story to explain why you left Earth. You have not told me everything. I can sense it.”

Her stomach roiled. How did he know? And did he suspect the darkest secret she was

keeping? The one that made her feel absolutely worthless. She blinked back a fresh wave of tears and returned Rem's severe glare.

In her desperation to keep this one secret, she found herself yelling out, "Why did you even decide to take a mate?" It didn't make sense to her. If he was so distrustful of females, why would he sign up to receive a bride from Earth?

"Because the king ordered me to take a human female!"

## Chapter 24

Tyra's breath left her in a painful whoosh. She stared at Rem, shocked to her very core. She didn't know how to reply to his shouted confession, so she simply stood against the wall, keeping as still as possible, as her heart plummeted to the floor.

He didn't want her. He had never wanted her. The only reason he'd taken her as his mate was because, for whatever reason, King Vaath had ordered it.

Her gaze dropped from Rem's and he started backing away from her. She wrapped her arms around herself and tried to brace herself against the grief that was rushing toward her. It didn't help. The agonizing emotion struck her with all the intensity of a blow to the stomach.

Rem turned and headed for the door. Even though she couldn't see his face, she felt the waves of anger rolling off him. The door opened upon his approach and closed immediately after he exited. She didn't follow to see if he'd locked her in again. She couldn't force herself to move.

After a few minutes of stunned silence, her legs gave out and she sank to the floor, where the remnants of her shattered heart taunted her. She had been so stupid to think she could find happiness with a complete stranger, especially one who came from

another world entirely.

Time passed slowly, each hour of separation from Rem dragging on like an eternity. Though he'd admitted to never wanting her, she still couldn't help missing him and grieving the loss of their union. Marttiadoxalians were said to always mate for life, but she couldn't fathom any circumstance in which their relationship might continue.

Would he send her away?

Would she be shipped back to Earth?

Feeling faint, she finally forced herself to her feet when dawn began to break through the trees. She pulled her old suitcase from the back of the closet and dragged it across the floor to the dresser that still contained the tattered clothing she'd brought from Earth. She changed into a pair of pants and a t-shirt, then slipped into her boots. She set about packing up her belongings, careful not to include anything that she'd purchased on Mars with Rem's galactic credits. She didn't want any reminders following her to... wherever she found herself when this all ended.

\* \* \*

The sound of Chexxa's screams echoed in Rem's mind, bringing him an unmistakable sense of satisfaction. His confrontation with the young male now over, Rem stalked through the darkened streets of Ressiktron as he headed home. But the closer he got to his house, the heavier his footsteps felt.

What had he done?

He paused as he replayed his argument with Tyra, as well as the confession he'd torn from Chexxa's throat.

“She didn’t know I was following her! She never saw me!”

Fluxx. Tyra hadn’t truly done anything to entice the young male into following her. Now that he’d had some time to calm down, he realized Tyra’s brief smile and wave to Chexxa and his brother didn’t signal an attempt at unfaithfulness on her part. Gods, how could he have accused Tyra of being tempted by Chexxa? She hadn’t known he was following her, yet he had reasoned she was being unfaithful just because she’d failed to tell him about Chexxa.

He thought of the images that had shown her looking over her shoulder. Given that Chexxa had been staring at her in the bakery, it was no wonder she’d been glancing behind her during the remainder of the shopping trip. She’d probably felt as though she were being watched. Marttiadoxalians often possessed such intuition. He supposed humans were capable of it as well.

Guilt settled upon him when he recalled the rest of his argument with Tyra. He should not have told her about the order from King Vaath. At least not in the manner he’d done so, shouting it at her and then leaving the room before he could tell her the rest of the truth—that he desired her beyond all reason, that now that he had her, he could not imagine a life devoid of her sweet presence.

He couldn’t deny the truth any longer.

He loved her.

Even though he hadn’t wished to take a mate, the first moment he’d looked upon her, he had felt an inexplicable need to take the sweet human as his. To hold her and protect her and take care of her.

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But he had failed her. He'd allowed Bethamma's ghost into their lives and treated Tyra unfairly. He cursed himself and quickened his pace, determined to right his wrongs. But would Tyra forgive him?

He cursed again and broke into a run.

\* \* \*

Alarm filled Rem when he found Tyra sitting quietly in their bedroom, dressed in tattered clothing, her suitcase at her feet. She didn't look up when he entered the room, but continued staring out the large window that faced the forest.

"Tyra."

She still didn't lift her eyes to his.

He knelt before her, gently grasped her chin, and directed her gaze to his. Her eyes were red-rimmed, as if she'd been sobbing, and he hated himself for causing her such pain. He would spend the rest of his life making amends to her, if only she would give him another chance.

"Did you kill them?" she asked. "Or one of them? I-I am unsure if you went after Chexxa or Frinik, or both of them, since I greeted them both in the bakery, though you seemed to only be talking about one male when you left."

Rem peered into her fearful gaze. "I went after Chexxa. There are surveillance cameras all over the city, and I saw security footage of Chexxa following you."

She drew back slightly, appearing shocked. “I-I felt as though someone was watching me, but whenever I turned around, I didn’t see anyone. He really followed me?”

“Yes. It would appear he was becoming infatuated with you. In fact, he admitted it when I confronted him.”

“I see. And now he’s dead, isn’t he?” Her lower lip quivered. “I cannot stay with you, Rem, when you are so intensely jealous.” She reached for her suitcase, but he pushed it out of her reach and cupped her face.

“He’s not dead. I did not kill him.”

Her eyes widened. “What? I thought you—”

“I wanted to kill him, and I went to his home fully intending to challenge him to a fight to the death.”

“What stopped you?” Some of the color was returning to her face, and a glimmer of hope shone in her eyes, the tiniest spark of optimism, but he didn’t fail to notice it.

“You,” he answered. “You stopped me. I remembered that despite what your uncle did to you, how cruelly he has treated you over the years, you still didn’t wish to see him put to death.”

“You spared Chexxa’s life? Truly?”

“Yes. I did inflict some injuries upon him while I was questioning him, though I assure you he will heal quickly.” The young male’s broken arm had probably already been set by a doctor. Given the advanced level of his people’s medical technology, Chexxa would likely be completely healed within a day or two.

“I am relieved to hear it,” she said quietly, and his heart broke when he noticed her lip quivering again. “I-I am sorry the king forced you to take a mate when you clearly didn’t wish to do so.” Her gaze dropped to his chest and she made to reach for her suitcase again, but he blocked her movements and tightened his hold on her face.

“Tyra, look at me,” he commanded.

She pressed her lips firmly together as she obeyed, anger flaring in the depths of her soulful dark eyes, alongside the visible heartbreak. His feelings of guilt increased and he longed to mend the gaping rift between them. How could he fix their mating union? He wasn’t certain, but he knew he must apologize. He also knew he must close the door on the past, on the hurts caused by Bethamma. Tyra deserved his trust.

“You are my heart, Tyra, and I cannot imagine being parted from you,” Rem said.

“You are my beloved mate.”

“But you didn’t want me,” she said, tears filling her eyes.

“I will admit I was angry when the king ordered me to take a human female as a mate. A long time ago, after Bethamma betrayed me by mating with another, despite our betrothal, my heart became hardened and I vowed that I would never enter into a mating union. But when I first looked upon you, Tyra, I was drawn to you with an intensity that defied logic. I thought I didn’t want a mate, but when I first stared into your eyes, it felt as though the world had ceased turning. All I wanted in that moment was you, my sweet mate. You. For as long as I live, I will never want another female. You are mine.”

He leaned in to press a kiss to her forehead, then he proceeded to brush the freshly fallen tears from her cheeks. To his relief, she didn’t pull away from him.

“Mine,” he whispered, in a tone as gentle as he could summon. “My sweet mate.”

## Chapter 25

“I want you, Tyra. Do you hear me? I want you.”

Rem’s words penetrated Tyra’s consciousness, causing hope to bloom in her heart.



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“Do you truly mean it? Do you swear it?” she asked, her voice wavering with emotion. Her throat burned so fiercely that speaking was difficult. She swallowed hard and peered at him, awaiting his answer with bated breath.

“Yes,” he said. “I truly mean it, and I swear it on the Gods.”

She started to grin, but then felt her smile faltering. Even though he wanted her, she couldn’t imagine living with a male who thought about killing any other male who looked her way for more than two seconds. While Chexxa had followed her, it disturbed her that Rem apparently didn’t trust her. Otherwise, why would he have checked up on her and watched security footage of her trip into the city? Her heart started sinking all over again.

As if reading her mind, he said, “I was wrong to ever distrust you, my sweet mate, and for that I am sorry. I am sorry for accusing you of being tempted by another male, and I am sorry for my controlling behavior. I have treated you poorly.” He paused and his forehead ridges bunched together, making him appear as though he were deep in concentration.

“If you’re trying to figure out if there’s anything else you need to apologize for, might I remind you that you threatened to keep me locked up,” she said.

He drew her closer. “I am sorry for that, too, Tyra. Gods, how I am sorry. I-I am certain there is more that I owe you an apology for, my sweet mate, but know that I want you, I desire you, and I love you.”

Her heart skipped a beat. She hadn’t expected him to profess love. His words hung in

the air between them, heavy but beautiful, and her spirits lifted at the sincerity in his dark gaze.

Hours ago, he had broken her heart, but as she stared into his eyes and his declaration of love echoed in her mind, the shards began to piece back together again. Well, he had been honest with her. Finally. Perhaps it was time she did the same. She opened her mouth to respond, only for him to place a finger to her lips, stilling her speech.

“It is all right if you do not love me, Tyra. I do not expect it. But if you stay here, stay with me, I vow that I will always take care of you and from this day forward I will strive to treat you with fairness. I vow that I will strive to make amends to you. I vow that I will never lock you up again, let alone threaten it. I vow that I will not accuse you of being unfaithful, or being tempted.”

“I do love you, you big ass,” she blurted out. “That is why this hurts so much.” She placed a hand over her heart. “If I didn’t love you, my world wouldn’t have gone so dark when you shouted the truth behind our mating union and then walked out that door. If I didn’t love you, I wouldn’t have been so filled with despair when I thought you didn’t want me.”

“Oh, Tyra,” he said, pressing his lips to hers. “If I could take your pain directly into my own heart, know that I would. Gods, I am sorry for the despair I caused you. I am a beast.”

She smiled and stroked the side of his face. “You are a beast, Rem,” she said, pressing a kiss to one of his cheeks, then his other cheek, before she pulled back to stare into his remorseful gaze. “But you are my beast.”

He clasped her hands, threading his fingers through hers and pulling her closer. “You aren’t leaving me,” he said, nodding at her suitcase. “This beast cannot live without you.”

At this moment, the doorbell rang, and the melodious tune reverberated through the house. A second later, the sound of pounding followed.

Rem growled and rose to his feet. It was early morning by now, in fact Tyra could see the first glimmer of dawn breaking through the trees. Who would come to call upon them at such an early hour? Worry for Rem suddenly filled her. Had he hurt Chexxa worse than he'd thought? Could he be in trouble for what he'd done to the young male?

The doorbell rang again and Tyra was fairly certain Rem cursed in his native tongue as he glanced over his shoulder, clearly torn between seeing who was at the door and finishing their conversation. She was just as torn. She didn't know much about the laws on Mars. Had Rem broken the law by harming Chexxa, even though the young male had practically stalked her yesterday?

Rem's wrist comm abruptly lit up and he looked down at it, then he broke into a smile. "Come," he said, guiding her out into the hallway. "It is only an old friend. But I know he will not go away until I assure him that all is well."

Confused, Tyra hurried downstairs with Rem.

\* \* \*

Rem opened the front door to find an anxious looking Jav standing on the porch. The huge, genetically enhanced warrior glanced from Tyra to Rem several times, his demeanor tense.

"Ah, Jav. You made it sound as though you would be gone for a long time, yet you've returned from your mission already. I hope I am the first to welcome you home," Rem said in a derisive tone.

“My unit just arrived back on Mars,” Jav said, “and as I was walking home, I crossed paths with a doctor who was on his way to treat an injured young male by the name of Chexxa.” Jav’s forehead ridges rose higher. “I followed the doctor, wanting to see Chexxa’s injuries for myself, as the doctor described them as serious. I was worried that perhaps a wild animal had ventured into the city. Imagine my surprise when I learned the truth.”

“Are you here to scold me, old friend?”

“No. I am here to ensure the safety of your mate.” Jav narrowed his eyes at Rem, though when he glanced at Tyra, his gaze softened. “Has your mate mistreated you? Are you all right?”

“I am fine,” Tyra replied immediately as she placed a hand upon Rem’s arm. “We had a disagreement, but we are... working through it.”

“Did Chexxa tell you that he spent the day following my mate around the city?” Rem asked, his annoyance flaring. While he hadn’t had good reason to treat Tyra so harshly, he’d been justified in pummeling Chexxa into a bloody mess. The male had dared to covet what belonged to him and taken his infatuation with Tyra too far when he’d trailed her through the streets of Ressiktron.

“Yes, he confessed his misdeed to me.” Jav shook his head slowly from side to side. “I am shocked you didn’t kill him outright or challenge him to a fight to the death. Why didn’t you?”

Rem put an arm around Tyra, drawing her close. “Because I knew it would upset my mate, and I trust that the young male will not go near her again. I told him if he ever so much as looked upon her again, I will sever his testicles from his body.”

From his peripheral vision, he noticed Tyra’s head snap up as she stared at him. He

looked down at her, meeting her shocked gaze. “I intend to keep you safe, my sweet mate. Do not worry though. I don’t believe he’ll be foolish enough to venture near you ever again.”

“I hope not,” she replied. “I suppose I ought to be relieved that you threatened to maim him, rather than kill him.”

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Jav cleared his throat and looked from Rem to Tyra, and it occurred to Rem that he ought to properly introduce them. Once the introductions were complete and Tyra again assured Jav that all was well, Jav took his leave.

Rem closed the door and then turned to Tyra, his heart swelling with affection for her. When she smiled up at him, his spirits danced.

“I have been a giant... ass,” he said, repeating the unusual name she had called him twice now, “and I am truly sorry for everything, Tyra, for every little hurt I have caused you.”

She reached up to stroke his chin. “I have already forgiven you.” She drew in a deep breath. “And it is my hope that we can start anew.”

He clasped her hands in his and kissed her forehead. “We can,” he said adamantly, “and our mating union will be built upon love, trust, and respect.”

“I like the sound of that, Rem.”

### Chapter 26

As soon as they reached their bedroom, Tyra came to a decision. She had been holding back certain truths from Rem, but now was the time to come clean. The time to unburden her soul.

“Rem, I want to tell you the full truth about why I left Earth.”

He led her to the bed, sat upon the mattress, and gathered her on his lap.

She looked at him pointedly. “You must promise me, even after I tell you, that you will not have my uncle killed.”

“What happened?” Rem asked in a wary tone as he tensed. “What did he do to you?”

“Promise first.” Her heart raced and her stomach clenched with nerves.

He growled. “Very well. I promise.”

“It was true what I told you about him not treating me well, and forcing me to work in his bar, but there’s more to it. After I started working there, he noticed that many of his patrons took notice of me. Many of them would grab me and try to kiss me, and some would even proposition me. That is, they asked for sex. I always said no, and whenever I refused, the men would offer me money.”

“Oh, Tyra. I am so sorry.” He ran a hand over her head, petting her. “You need not feel ashamed of what you did. I do not think badly of you. I promise.”

“No, you’re misunderstanding,” she said, though his acceptance of what he’d thought she’d been trying to tell him touched her, especially considering his recent bouts of jealousy. “I never accepted their proposals, but my uncle took notice of the attention the men were giving me and decided to capitalize upon it. He was planning to auction me off to the highest bidder on my twenty-first birthday. He had been planning it since I was about seventeen.” She shuddered. Uncle Sebastian truly was a vile man, and she was glad to be out of his reach now.

Rem’s eyes brimmed with shock. “Your own uncle meant to sell you? Gods, Tyra, I am so sorry.” He hugged her to his chest and continued stroking her hair.

“So you see, that is why I decided to leave Earth. I showed up at the Martian Affairs building in Bismarck, very early in the morning on my twenty-first birthday, as the auction was set to take place that night. I was so relieved when my application to become a mail order bride was accepted. A short while later, I found myself on a bus, headed for Fargo, where the spaceship was waiting to take me and the other brides to Mars.”

He pulled back slightly and then rested his forehead against hers. “Why did you not tell me about this sooner?” he asked, though his tone wasn’t accusatory. He asked the question in the gentlest voice she’d ever heard him use.

“Because I was ashamed, and afraid. My own uncle cared for me so little that he thought nothing of auctioning off my virginity to the highest bidder. I-I worried if you found out, that you might think there was something wrong with me, if my own flesh and blood cared so little about me.”

“I do not think there is anything wrong with you, my Tyra. You are my sweet mate and I intend to cherish you forever. I am only sorry that such a tragic circumstance led you to me.”

He kissed her then, a soft brush of his lips to her forehead. She loved when he kissed her like that, it truly made her feel cherished.

“Don’t forget that he is locked up now. He will never hurt you again. I will never let anyone harm you in such a way. I swear it on the Gods. You will be safe on Mars. I vow to protect you always. Always.”

She blinked back tears. “I-I know I am safe with you, Rem.”

“Thank you for telling me the full truth of why you left your home planet. I am touched that you have confided such a painful secret in me.” He swallowed hard and



studied the golden flecks in her eyes. “Please know that I aim to spend the rest of my life building happier memories with you, my sweet mate.”

She smiled as his words filled her with warmth. “I like the sound of that. I came to Mars hoping for a fresh start. I spent years planning my escape, in secret, of course, dreaming of the day I would finally arrive on this beautiful planet and meet my mate. I used to even dream that I would fall in love with my mate.” She sighed and placed a hand upon Rem’s chest, right over his heart.

Rem held her as the sun rose in a splash of orange brilliance through the trees. The sound of nighttime insects faded, to be replaced with the singing of birds. She basked in the safety of his embrace and snuggled deeper in his arms. He caressed her back and sometimes whispered to her in his native tongue, his voice a soothing rumble at her ear.

“This is your new home, Tyra,” he eventually said, breaking the silence. “A place where you are wanted, a place where you are loved.”

Indeed, the sun was shining on a brand-new day, she mused as she peered up at Rem, admiring the way the sunlight glinted off his massive horns. She repressed a yawn, fatigue starting to overtake her. She’d been up all night, worried sick over her relationship with Rem and whether or not he was out committing murder.

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But he'd shown mercy to a male who'd wronged him. And then he'd returned to her and helped mend her broken heart, speaking his truths and listening to hers with an open mind.

"Sleep, sweet Tyra," he murmured into her ear. "Sleep while I hold you."

She closed her eyes and drifted off, a deep sense of contentment sweeping over her, for she was securely ensconced in her mate's loving embrace.

### Chapter 27

"I love you and I vow to trust you from now on," Rem whispered in Tyra's ear. She was fast asleep, but it seemed his constant whisperings weren't disturbing her. Her breathing continued, steady and deep, and a sense of peace spread through him while he watched her sleeping.

Thank the Gods she had forgiven him. Thank the Gods they were getting a second chance. He promised himself he would not ruin it.

When he thought of Bethamma now, he didn't feel the flash of hurt he normally experienced. Instead, he felt a calm acceptance take root, a wisdom that told him there was nothing he could've done to change the female's mind or to save her life. He hadn't known what the Xieandans were planning until it was too late.

He pressed a kiss to Tyra's head and inhaled the fragrant scent of her hair. His cock began to stir when she shifted in his lap, but he ceased whispering to her in hopes that she would remain sleeping. After recent events, she needed her sleep.

He considered his promise not to have her uncle killed. He still raged at the knowledge that the man had been planning to sell her innocence. Gods, he wished he could travel to Earth and make her uncle suffer. But Rem would keep his promise. And he wouldn't leave Tyra's side.

The sun rose higher in the sky and it wasn't until late afternoon when his sweet mate stirred again on his lap. He kissed her cheek and then watched, waiting for her to open her eyes. When she did, she blinked up at him with a soft smile gracing her lips.

"Good morning, Rem," she said through a yawn.

He chuckled. "It is late afternoon."

She sighed and wiggled around in his lap, freezing when she rubbed over his hardness, the evidence of his building desire for her. "Well, good afternoon, then." In the next moment, she shifted around again, deliberately rubbing her bottom over his hardening cock. Her gaze turned heated and she parted her lips on a quick inhale.

"How did you sleep?" he asked.

"Like a log," she replied, then grinned when he stared at her in confusion, as he didn't quite comprehend her meaning. "But I'm awake now, and it seems you are too." She wiggled around yet again, and he repressed a growl as his length thickened and his balls drew up tight, desire heating his blood as the scent of her sudden arousal hit him. He marveled that she could be growing so wet between her thighs so soon after waking, though he wasn't about to question it or complain.

"Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to get something to eat?" he asked after her stomach suddenly growled, her well-being at the forefront of his mind, even though he would love nothing more than to claim her right now, to push her down upon the bed and worship every little part of her body before he sank himself inside her tight,

welcoming depths.

“You can feed me later,” she said, a glint of mischief entering her eyes. “Please, Rem, I-I need you right now. I can’t explain it, but I must feel you in me, I need to feel that we are still a mated pair.”

“We will always be a mated pair,” he reminded her. “Marttiadoxalians mate for life, in case you have forgotten, and you, my sweet Tyra, belong to me. For as long as I live, you will be my most precious possession. The love of my life. The mate of my heart.”

Her visage brightened. “Who would have thought that my big, bossy, grouchy mate was capable of uttering such poetic phrases?”

For a brief instant, he wondered if she could understand the Marttiadoxalian tongue, for he had uttered many flowery and heartfelt phrases to her while she was drifting off to sleep, as well as when she’d been deep in her slumber. But her next words revealed she hadn’t.

“The mate of my heart is quite possibly the sweetest thing you’ve ever said to me.” She reached for him and ran her hands down his horns, then lifted her face to his and parted her lips. “I am yours, Rem, and you are mine. Remember, we belong to one another. Now kiss me, kiss me before I explode.”

\* \* \*

Tyra’s center throbbled and whenever she squirmed upon Rem’s lap, she felt the heat of her growing need rubbing between her thighs. She was wet for him and that empty space inside of her ached to be filled up. She longed for him to press her down and make her feel as though she truly belonged to him, as though his heart only beat for her.

He deepened the kiss, tangling his tongue with hers as he growled into her mouth, causing her insides to vibrate and her pussy to clench. He proceeded to strip off her clothing, then rose from the bed just long enough to divest himself of his own attire.

A second later, he pressed his naked body to hers and resumed kissing her. He entered her in the next moment, shoving his cock deep inside her, and she parted her thighs wider, inviting him to shove even deeper. This was exactly what she'd wanted. She didn't need any lengthy foreplay this time, she simply wanted to feel him deep inside her, pounding away as he claimed her.

She moaned and then whimpered as he withdrew slightly from her center, only to plunge straight back inside, harder than before. He gripped her hips and set a rapid pace of driving into her, and she lifted her center as she eagerly met his thrusts.

"So wet," he murmured against her lips. "It makes me wonder what you were dreaming about."

She grinned. "Only about you."

He growled, a noise of resounding pleasure, and proceeded to plunge into her faster, in and out, claiming her, loving her, taking her as his. All the hurts that had driven them apart during the previous day faded under the intensity of their mutual desire.

They were joining together, their hearts connecting as one.

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Her vision blurred as her climax rushed over her, causing her insides to clench and pulse around Rem's enormous length. She cried out and raked her nails down his back, arching her center outward to accept him as deeply as she possibly could while she rode the waves of blinding ecstasy.

"Say it," he said, staring her down with a feral look. "Tell me who you belong to, Tyra. Say it!"

"I belong to you!" She gasped for air and jerked as the remnants of her orgasm started to fade, though he was still buried deep within her, as he hadn't found his release just yet. "Now you say it," she countered. "I want to hear you say it, Rem."

He leaned down, until his face was but an inch from hers. His visage was so serious that for a moment she feared he might chastise her for going too far, but then his eyes lit with a playful smile, even as his fingers dug into her hips and his cock pulsed huge and hard within her aching depths.

"I. Belong. To. You," he finally said.

He erupted within her, pounding her hard as he filled her with his seed, the warm liquid coating her insides. Dizziness assailed her and she remained almost entirely still beneath him as he finished. He pressed his lips to her forehead, kissing her with a gentleness that belied his recent savagery.

"I belong to you, my sweet mate."

Epilogue

Fifteen days later...

Tyra looked up from her book as Rem entered the sitting room. He had the day off work and she was looking forward to having him home all to herself. His green skin was gleaming from a recent shower and she thought he looked especially handsome today. She closed her book and grinned up at him.

“Is that one of the books you bought the other day while out shopping with Princess Esmay?”

She nodded. “Yes, and I’m almost finished,” she said, holding up the thick fantasy novel and waving it around briefly. “I can’t seem to put it down.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” He walked closer and gave her a warm smile. “Oh, I meant to tell you, I have some good news,” he said, tapping at his wrist comm. “I received a communication from Zone 15 this morning. The new governor wanted to extend his thanks to you for the list of criminals you provided. He says the entire zone, particularly the area of Bismarck, will be a much safer place for humans now.”

She straightened as excitement raced through her. She had given Rem the list a couple of days ago, hoping it would be helpful, considering that King Vaath wanted to improve circumstances on Earth, as well as human-Marttiadoxalian relations.

“I’m so glad to hear it,” she said. “Thank you for passing my message along to the new governor, Rem. I truly appreciate it.”

He nodded and gazed out the window as a flock of birds landed in the yard outside their home, a hundred bright yellow splotches in the green grass.

“Just so you know, I am also excited to have you all to myself today.” She waggled her eyebrows at him, but a second later the doorbell rang. She groaned. Who was

interrupting them now? They had specifically told his parents, as well as Jav, that they were busy today.

“He is earlier than I expected,” Rem said, appearing uncertain. He sank down onto the sofa next to her. “I just got off the video comm with the doctor, I did not expect him to arrive so soon.”

“Doctor?” she asked. “Are you feeling unwell?”

“No,” he said. “The doctor is here to treat you.”

“I’m feeling perfectly fine,” she said. “I don’t need to see a doctor.”

“Let me ask you something. Do you have any idea how old I am, Tyra?”

She stared at him, wondering if this was a trick question. She’d heard Marttiadoxalians had a longer lifespan than humans, but she had never really given it much thought. She was simply happy to be with him, for as long as the fates allowed.

“Umm... forty-five?” she ventured, recalling that he’d fought in the war against Earth, which had occurred about twenty years ago, when she’d been but an infant.

“Not even close,” he said with a grin. “I am ninety-seven.”

She felt her eyes go wide, and the book she’d been holding slid from her hands and dropped to the floor. “Did you say ninety-seven?” Disbelief swirled through her. How could he be so old and look so young and healthy? She was a bit miffed that she couldn’t spot a single wrinkle upon his handsome face. And his parents were still alive too, which meant the Marttiadoxalian lifespan was clearly a great deal longer than she would have ever suspected.



The doorbell rang again, but he made no move to admit the doctor just yet.

“Wait a second. What is the average lifespan for your people?”

“Marttiadoxalians usually live to the age of four hundred.”

She gaped at him, stunned into silence by his admission.

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“That is why the doctor is here today,” he continued. “Because my people have developed a treatment that allows our human females to live much longer lives than they would otherwise live. The doctor is here to administer your first treatment.”

“What-what kind of treatment?”

“Healing nanobots and a vitamin infusion. I promise it won’t hurt.” He rose to his feet. “You needn’t fear a thing. I’ll be right back, I’m going to answer the door before the doctor leaves.”

Tyra sank back in her seat, still shocked by her recent conversation with Rem. To her relief, the doctor had a kindly manner about him and he was in and out in less than twenty minutes. And, just as Rem had promised, the treatment didn’t hurt. In fact, she felt rather energized afterward.

“I apologize for not informing you of the doctor’s visit sooner. I had planned to schedule him to come administer your treatment in a few days, but he insisted on coming today.” Rem sat beside her and drew her hands into his.

“You needn’t apologize,” she said. “I’m not mad. I’m very surprised, but I’m not mad. How, er, exactly how long will I likely live now?”

“As long as you have a treatment about every thirty days, you should live as long as the average Marttiadoxalian.”

“Four hundred years?”

“Yes.” He lifted one of her hands to his lips, turned it slightly, and kissed the soft underside of her wrist. “By my estimates, we have about three hundred years remaining together.”

She sighed deeply, feigning exasperation.

“Well, then,” she said, “I suppose it’s a good thing I love you so much.”

“And that I love you,” he added, drawing her closer. “Now, come, my sweet mate. We’re going to spend the morning upstairs.”

“Just the morning?” She shrugged her shoulders in a dramatic fashion. “Well, I suppose I shouldn’t expect a full day out of you. I mean, you are kind of an old man.”

He growled and swept her up into his arms. “This old man is about to make you very, very sore, my sweet mate.”

Her breath caught at the feral gleam in his dark eyes.

“Promise?” she asked.

“Promise.”

THE END