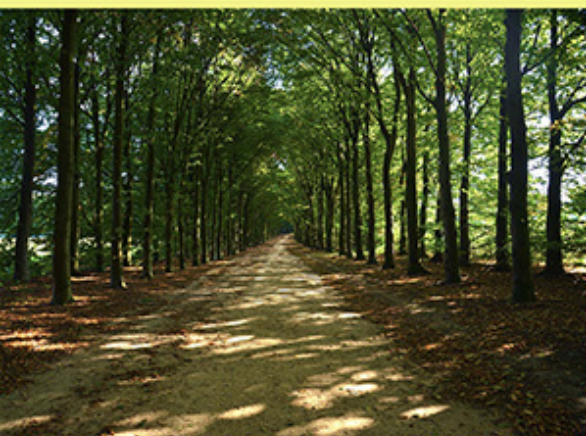


LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

HELP! MY LOVER'S AN ALIEN

Carol Pedroso

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

HELP! MY LOVER'S AN ALIEN

By Carol Pedroso

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

Head and shoulders shot in color. The male is wearing a black hood and what looks like a cloak. Only part of his face is visible as there is a partial mask on the hood but it shows a pale face with high cheekbones. The best features are his startling blue eyes that draw you in.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I am part of an elite unit. I am from a world which, up until [?] years ago, was unknown to you and your kind. I have been sent to your world on a twofold mission. First, to ascertain if Earth will make a good ally, and second (and more personal), is to search for my other half. I have felt the pull and have started showing the signs. This makes me dangerous to myself and vulnerable to my enemies. I need to find him or them ASAP.

No hard BDSM, non-con, or slavery please.

Sincerely,

Yvonne

Story Info

Genre: science fiction

Tags: magic users, military men, aliens, m-preg, homophobia, mixed martial arts, trainer

Content Warnings: some violence

Word Count: 34,556

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Yvonne for her wonderful prompt; without that, I wouldn't have had a story to tell.

Next I want to thank Christine for her wonderful beta reading. She always manages to find the holes in my stories and doesn't even rub my nose in my sometimes glaringly obvious mistakes.

I would also like to thank Alishea for her editing and the rest of the DRitC team for all their hard work.

Lastly I would like to thank my family and friends for all their support and love.

HELP! MY LOVER'S AN ALIEN

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Chapter 1

Lor looked up from writing his latest report as Piet approached; the engineer was grinning and Lor just knew his patience was about to be tested.

“There you go,” Piet said, as he handed over Lor’s personal comm unit.

Lor strapped it on his wrist while Piet made himself comfortable sitting on the edge of the station Lor was using.

“So what did it do—or not do—this time that made you decide to fry it?” Piet asked, pretending rather pathetically to look at his comm unit, as though it was just a throwaway question.

Lor gritted his teeth. It was the second time he had had to get Piet to repair his comm unit in the last 128 cycles. He didn’t want Piet to know that his magic was slipping out of his control. He was a master level mage, the highest level of their people, and the youngest to ever reach said level. He couldn’t let it get out that he was a possible danger to anyone, including himself.

The comm unit had just been the latest casualty since they started this mission. The first had been a light that sat beside his bed, then a pair of his favorite pants that he happened to be holding during a flare up—it got turned into a skirt—and lastly he had managed to dye his own hair green. It was lucky for him that all this happened in his room, and he looked in the mirror before he went out. Add to that the two times he had fried his comm unit, and he was starting to get very worried. The only person he told anything to was Minister Mora; as his superior, the other being had to be aware of what was happening with his crew.

He sneered at Piet and adopted his trademark cold mask. “What my comm did, or did not do, is none of your business. If you could remove yourself from my station, I need to finish this report before the final mission briefing.”

Piet jumped down and hurried off; people always did when Lor used that voice. Piet was probably worried he would be next instead of the comm unit.

Lor shook his head and returned to his report. Once he was sure he was unobserved, he removed his comm unit and secured it with a strand of magic twisted in the fabric just under his waistband, making sure it didn’t touch his skin. He hoped that would protect it if his magic flared up again and that no one would notice.

He was just finishing his report when the call went out ship-wide that all crew were to report for a briefing.

Sighing, he closed the program he was using and strapped his comm unit back on his wrist as he headed out the door.

There were seven of them, including Lor, sitting round a long table. Minister Mora sat at the head with his mate, Ziel, at his left and Lor at his right. Also on Lor's side of the table was Piet—who was trying to keep his distance. On the other side were the twins, Dyra and Dyla, with their mate, Ver, sitting between them.

Mora stood to take his place by the screen on the wall. "Right, let's start with a ship's report. Piet, how are the engines holding up?"

Piet looked down at his data pad. "Engines are fine, and we are good with keeping this speed up until we enter Earth's airspace."

Mora nodded his thanks and looked at the twins. "Dyra, how long until we reach Earth's airspace, and Dyla, are the comm systems ready?"

One twin nodded. "Yes, the comm system is fully operational, and we are only waiting to get into comm range. Dyra?" She looked at her twin.

"We will be in comm range in two cycles and will be in Earth's airspace in four cycles."

Mora nodded his thanks again before turning to the last person. "Ver, are the weapons fully functioning but ready to go off-line? We don't want any mistakes to lead to any misunderstandings."

Ver nodded. "Yes, sir, everything is ready and fully functioning. I have coded the weapons to turn on and off at a voice command by yourself, Second Lor, or myself."

"That's good then," Mora stated. "And of course Ziel." Mora smiled at his mate. "How are the kitchens holding up? Will the food we have stored last until we are ready to leave for home?"

"The food will be fine. Of course, it will only last if we keep Ver out of the storage cabinet."

Everyone but Lor laughed as Ver blushed.

"So, as everything is taken care of, now onto this mission. As you all know, we are being sent because the Earth made contact with us via a space probe ten

rotations ago. We managed to make contact via the probe, and over five rotations, we learned a lot about them as a species. Then, four rotations were spent organizing this mission.

“Earth is run by one central government and policed by the military who answer to said government. The president is the head of the government, but all decisions are made by a majority vote. As it’s all in the briefing pack, I won’t go into any more detail.

“Now to go over a few things. Please remember that two rotations are the equivalent to one Earth-year, and four cycles equals one and a half Earth-hours. So for example, Lor, how old are you?”

“I am sixty rotations, sir,” Lor replied.

“That means Lor is thirty Earth-years old, which is considered young even by their standards.

“Now you were all sent a file with what we have learned about humans. It included their military, a bit of anatomy, and some basics on languages. Titles are important; we will be meeting with Ambassador Marston and his wife, Mrs. Eve Marston, who have been sent as representatives of the president. They are going to host us for a welcoming meal at one of their military buildings where we will be staying, and then we will be given a brief tour.

“Have you all been given the spell for translation?” Everyone nodded. “Good, keep it activated at all times. Lor, you’re still okay casting it for Ziel?” Lor nodded. “Right, the last thing is to remind you all that we are guests of the humans. Please, as far as possible, respect their customs, please watch what you say and do, and please do not start any trouble. I do not want to be telling your families why I have had to leave you behind in a human prison.”

“*Warning! Approaching Earth’s airspace!*” came the voice of the computer, echoing though the room.

“Okay, stations everyone,” Mora called, and they all filed out of the room.

Lor watched as the Earth grew bigger on his private view screen. He could feel his magic trying to come to the surface. It was as though something was calling to it, and whatever it was, was on Earth.

Sighing, he turned his attention back to his room. They had each been given a small amount of time to change into their guard uniforms. Earth was a lot

cooler than their home planet so their uniform consisted of a long-sleeved top, thick pants, and a cloak with a detachable hood. He had donned his cloak and was just settling his hood when his comm unit went off.

“Lor, report to the minister,” came Piet’s voice.

“Received,” Lor said, before checking his hood again and heading out of the room.

“Minister,” Lor said as he approached Mora.

“Ah Lor, I wanted to ask you a personal favor before we arrive on Earth. I want you to stay with Ziel at any time he is not by my side.”

“Of course, Minister. I’m sure Ziel will want to stay with you most of the time though.”

“I may have to attend meetings where Ziel cannot accompany me. I will expect him to stay with you.”

“Yes, Minister,” Lor said and took his seat just as the computer warned they were now approaching the landing site.

As they disembarked the ship, they moved into a sort of formation. Mora and Lor were at the front with Ziel in the middle of them, the twins Dyra and Dyla came next, and Piet and Ver brought up the rear.

They were met by a short male and an even smaller female. The couple were followed by a younger male; all of them were smiling and looked welcoming.

“Welcome,” the lead male said once he was near enough to be heard. “I’m Ambassador Victor Marston, but please call me Victor. This is my wife, Evelyn, and my son, Vance. I hope your stay on Earth will be all you expect and that we will have the chance to get to know each other. We have asked the military guest suites where you will be staying to prepare a meal. Do you wish to go there now? I was hoping to give you a tour of the military building after you’re refreshed.”

Mora nodded and shook the hand of the ambassador. “I am Minister Mora and this is my mate, Ziel. Next to him is my second-in-command and head guard, Lor. Behind us are Dyra and Dyla, and behind them are Piet and Ver.

“We would be honored to share a meal with you and your family.”

The ambassador seemed relieved and led the way out of the landing area and toward a large glass building. After passing through the security checks, they were led out and got their first proper view of the compound that would be their home for the next two Earth-months.

A road stretched out in front of them and to the left and right were two large buildings. The ambassador and his family led the way past the one on the left and to a smaller building connected to it.

“This is the guest building,” the ambassador said. “It should have everything you need from the specifications you sent us; however, if we have missed anything, please let me know.”

Chapter 2

The building they entered was made almost entirely of what looked like mirrors, but once they were inside, Lor saw the view out was unobstructed.

They headed down a short hallway and entered a room that held a long table surrounded by chairs. Another table stood against the nearest wall, on it was vast amounts of food, all laid out on trays and platters.

The ambassador indicated the food. "Because we weren't sure what you would like of our food, I had the kitchen prepare what we call a buffet meal. It means that they have provided a variety of foods and you can help yourselves to whatever you wish to eat. Plates and bowls are at one end with eating utensils; all you have to do is start there and make your way along."

The minister nodded and led the way. Lor was third in line; after picking up a plate and fork, he started studying the food on offer. Someone had put signs on the plates saying what they were. There was mixed salad, rice, pasta, chicken, pork, beef, and much more.

Lor chose something called hummus, some chicken, and some salad. He chose them because they at least partially resembled food he would eat at home.

The hummus didn't have a lot of taste, but it wasn't bad; the chicken was nice, but dry; and the salad was very plain. As a first meal, it wasn't bad, but he didn't think he would be asking for any recipes for his mother just yet.

Ziel, of course, ate a bit of everything and kept enticing Mora into trying things he found to his liking. For such a small male, Ziel could really pack away the food, and as he loved to prepare food, he was always looking for new things to taste. He was asking the ambassador endless questions, but when he realized that Mrs. Marston liked to cook, he turned his attention to her. By the end of the meal, they were firm friends, and Eve Marston was promising to visit again the next afternoon to tell Ziel more.

When the food was finished, the group were shown to their rooms and given time to freshen up before they met the ambassador by the entrance.

"Eve and Vance send their apologies, but they had prior engagements they couldn't cancel. Shall we start the tour?"

After the minister had nodded, the ambassador led the way out the door.

As they entered the main compound building, the ambassador kept up a running commentary. He told them the building was over three hundred years

old and had been used as many things to do with the military. For the last hundred years, it had been used as a training and research facility. Military personnel were sent to be trained before being deployed and were also sent for regular refresher training. New techniques were always being developed, and they wanted their military people to be up to date.

“This is our tactical research center,” the ambassador was saying as they entered a large room. “We’re developing a lot of different technologies at the moment. But the main project is a transporter. We’re working on breaking down someone’s molecular structure and then putting them back together again in a different location. Unfortunately early tests haven’t been successful so far.

“My son Vance is the head researcher here and will be pleased to give you a more detailed rundown on our research during your stay.

“We are also working on various devices to make homelife easier on people. Some of these include: a food making device, robots that are able to help with household chores, and three-D holographic transmitters which will allow people in different countries to communicate better—for example, a child would be able to perform a dance for a relative, and it would be like the relative was watching it live.”

Lor looked around the small room. He saw a few devices that he was sure had no function within a household. They looked more as though they were weapons, but Lor thought it better not to mention his observation.

The next room was full of trees at various stages of growth. “This is our arboretum; trees are endangered on Earth due to more homes being constructed—what with the growing population—and other buildings or businesses. To try and fight this problem, we are trying to perfect a serum that can be put into the water. It’s the aim to make the trees grow faster, so we can keep the ecological balance from tipping too far off. We’ve already developed air purifiers that take the carbon dioxide out of the air and replace it with oxygen, but they can only do so much. Trees do this naturally, and so we are trying to plant new forests as quickly as possible.”

Lor looked around and saw Ziel looking in wonder at the trees and listening carefully to everything the ambassador said about them. Lor smiled to himself; Ziel had always liked plants, and he could see him and the minister spending a fair bit of time in this place before they headed home.

The last room of the tour, before they were going to head outside, was some sort of training room. The floor was covered in colored mats, and humans were

dotted around the room in pairs. They seemed to be doing some sort of hand-to-hand combat.

In the center of the room was a male human calling out orders.

He shouted something to a male that had just been pinned to the mat. The male stood up and faced the male in charge.

Lor watched as a fight ensued. Since the ambassador didn't intervene, he assumed it was part of the training. The male in charge had the other pinned within four moves.

"What did he do wrong?" he called out to the other males.

He wasn't anticipating your moves, thought Lor.

A blond put his hand in the air. "Yes, Gilbert?"

"He didn't anticipate your moves, sir," the male—Gilbert—said and Lor hid a smile.

"Yes that's correct," the male responded with a nod. "Now, you come and show them how it's done."

Gilbert flushed so bright Lor could see his skin change color even from his post near the door. As the two males faced off against each other, the male in charge turned, and his eyes met Lor's. Lor could have sworn he stopped breathing. The male had very short brown hair and was shorter than Lor, but the thing that caught Lor's attention was the male's eyes. They shone the brightest shade of green Lor had ever seen.

Mate!

This was what his magic had been trying to tell him.

Lor was astounded. Of course, he had heard of mages finding their mates in other species, but those species usually had some magical talent. As far as they had found so far, Earth had no magically talented people at all. This was a mystery he needed to solve and quickly.

Green Eyes shook his head as though he were trying to clear something, and that moment of inattention led to the other man tripping him and nearly having him pinned. Lor had to fight the urge to go and defend his mate. His magic wanted to flare and stop Gilbert—to rip him to pieces for even touching what was his, let alone hurting him.

Green Eyes recovered quickly though, and within a few moves, he had the upper hand again. Within a few more moves, he had Gilbert pinned to the mat.

The ambassador let out a piercing whistle and Green Eyes turned to see what was happening. At a signal Lor couldn't see, the ambassador had Green Eyes handing the trainees over to someone else and heading in their direction.

Lor stopped breathing again as the vision came nearer. The male was taller than Lor had originally thought, and lean—but you could see the muscles moving under the thin top he was wearing.

Ambassador Marston pulled the male nearer as he approached and turned to face Minister Mora. “This is our head trainer, Mr. Dillon Stewart. He is the top mixed-martial-arts teacher in the country and has been employed by the military since he was eighteen.”

Lor tuned out the rest of the ambassador's words as he thought quickly of a way to get to know the male better. He sent a quiet message to the minister's comm unit and was grateful when Mora glanced down and then nodded almost imperceptibly.

Mora waited for the ambassador to finish before speaking, “That was an impressive display. Would it be acceptable if Mr. Stewart accompanied us on the rest of our tour? My guards may have some questions for him.”

When the ambassador agreed, Dillon nodded but insisted he would meet them outside as soon as he had changed clothes.

Chapter 3

Dillon's day had been going from bad to worse. He had woken up late, and the only reason he wasn't late for the first training session of the day was because he had finished late the day before and had decided to stay in the compound barracks rather than cycle all the way home to his apartment.

A trip to the communal showers had turned into him having to bear a round of teasing when he realized he had grabbed a hand towel and not a bath towel to dry himself with. The men had a field day yanking his chain until someone took pity on him and let him borrow their towel.

Then, he arrived at the first session only to be told to expect visitors being given a tour at some time during the day. He had heard that the aliens they had been communicating with for years were finally visiting, but he knew almost nothing about them and didn't know what to expect. As he wasn't part of the military, he didn't have access to certain information, but on the plus side, as only an employee of the military, he had a lot more freedom than his trainees.

The first session went well. Some of the trainees in this mixed-martial-arts course were improving enough he would be able to graduate them to a higher course set soon. The only thing they really needed to work on was their egos; overconfidence was never a good thing when fighting or defending.

Lunch was a quick sub in the compound canteen. He also used the time to try and find out what he could about these visitors. All he could glean was they'd arrived and been taken to the compound guest suites—which had been built entirely with them in mind last year. Apparently, the ambassador and his wife were hosting them for lunch, and then the aliens had agreed to a tour of the compound. He found out there were seven guests and that they were mostly tall. So in all, he had found out nothing useful and went back to work irritated at the military and their love of secrets. The whole planet knew about the visitors, but the military had kept all other details classified.

There were only four in his next session. They were learning the advanced techniques, but like the previous lot, they were getting cocky.

He split the men into pairs and set them a sequence of moves to go through while he watched.

Dillon heard the door open and shut, but he ignored it to concentrate on the trainees. After the third time of Timothy Harrison being pinned, he called a halt.

“Harrison, get out here,” he called, and the burly man moved slowly up to him. “Now, you go through the moves with me, and I expect you to try harder.”

Harrison nodded and they took up their positions. The fight was over quickly, and he had Harrison pinned to the mat.

“What did he do wrong?” he called out to the watching men, who were now sniggering at their poor teammate.

Harold Gilbert put his hand in the air. “Yes, Gilbert?”

“He didn’t anticipate your moves, sir,” the man said, raising an eyebrow and looking far too cocky for Dillon’s liking.

“Yes, that’s correct,” Dillon responded with nod. “Now, you come and show them how it’s done. No sequence; first one pinned loses.” Gilbert flushed but stepped forward as ordered.

As Dillon circled Gilbert, he quickly flicked his eyes to check on the visitors without losing track of his opponent. But suddenly, he was captured by a stunning pair of blue eyes. He was brought back to the present when Gilbert nearly got the drop on him. He righted himself and soon pressed things to his advantage. His greater experience meant he knew when to take a hit and when to press forward. It didn’t take long for him to have Gilbert pinned to the mat and the rest of the trainees cheering him.

A shrill whistle pierced the noise and he looked back toward the visitors. Ambassador Vincent Marston was motioning him over.

“Colins,” he called and waited for the man to head his way. “Take over and finish with ten laps of the room.” Gerald Colins nodded while the rest of the men groaned at the mention of laps. “You all need to remember to watch your opponent and anticipate. Use the laps as thinking time,” he told them before turning and jogging over to the visitors. He was startled when he was caught by his arm and pulled nearer by Vincent.

“This is our head trainer, Mr. Dillon Stewart.” Ambassador Vincent sounded so much like a proud father that Dillon had to stop himself from blushing. Vincent had been there when no one else had been, and he owed him a lot. He listened as Vincent continued, “He is the top mixed-martial-arts teacher in the country and has been employed by the military since he was eighteen. He isn’t actually part of the military but is an outside employee.

“Dillon, these are the visitors from Debhunder I’m sure you’ve heard about. This is Minister Mora and his mate, Ziel.”

Dillon nodded respectfully to both aliens. "Welcome to Earth," he said.

"Would it be acceptable if Mr. Stewart accompanied us on the rest of our tour? My guards may have some questions for him," the minister asked, surprising both Dillon and Vincent.

Vincent agreed and turned to Dillon, but Dillon spoke first.

"Sir, I could meet you in a few minutes, if that's okay? I just need to wash and change."

"Yes, we'll see you in fifteen minutes at the west entrance." And with that Vincent led the group away.

Dillon had a five-minute shower and roughly dried off before dressing and hurrying out of the room.

He met up with the group just as they were exiting the building, and he noticed Blue Eyes was watching him intently.

Ignoring the impulse to raise an eyebrow at the staring alien, he turned to give his attention to Vincent and the alien minister.

"Ah, good. I thought you'd be here already," Vincent said with a fond smile. "Now, we were just going to head out to see the grounds. I thought we'd start with the outside training arena and maybe the track area."

Dillon nodded and fell into step next to Vincent.

As they walked, Blue Eyes moved up to walk beside him. The hood and cloak it was wearing covered it from head to toe; all Dillon could see was its face. It had high cheekbones and full pink lips. But the best feature was definitely the blue eyes that had first grabbed Dillon's attention. The eyes seemed to glow with an inner light that was trying to draw Dillon in.

Blinking, he realized the alien was speaking. Its voice was low and compelled Dillon to lean closer to hear properly.

"I was impressed with what I saw, Mr. Stewart," the alien was saying. "I think some of your moves could be integrated into our style of fighting. I would very much like to speak to you further."

Dillon nodded. "If you get the okay from Ambassador Marston, then I will tell you all you want to know."

The alien frowned. "What does 'get the okay' mean?"

Dillon fought the urge to giggle; the alien seemed to bring out the teenager in him. "It means you need to get Ambassador Marston to tell me that I have permission to give you the information you are requesting," he answered, speaking as clearly as he knew how. "I can't give out military information without permission, or I may lose my job, and I would get in to trouble with the government."

The alien nodded.

Dillon was then distracted by a question from the alien minister. "Mr. Stewart, how long have you been doing this mixed martial arts?"

"I started when I was five, sir. My father taught me until I was ten, and then I joined a local class. I've won numerous awards. The military approached me when I was eighteen and asked me to lead a few courses for them in self-defense. After the courses finished, they asked me to stay on and train more people. I now run four courses here at the compound: one is a beginner's course, two are intermediate, and one is for advanced. The course you witnessed was for my advanced trainees."

The minister was nodding as Dillon spoke. "Thank you, Mr. Stewart. I think some of my guards would be interested in learning a few moves from you."

Dillon smiled. "As I was just telling your guard here, I would need permission from the ambassador, but I would be more than willing."

Vincent had obviously been listening in. "Oh my boy, you have my wholehearted permission to teach whomever you please. The minister and his party have been given total access to the compound and its facilities."

"Yes, sir," Dillon said to Vincent, then turned to the minister. "In that case, I would be privileged to show your guards a few moves. Maybe they can show me something new as well."

The minister seemed to like this idea, as he turned back to Vincent, and they started an animated discussion on the value of sharing training and other information.

"Seems I may be seeing more of you then?" Blue Eyes said, drawing Dillon's attention again.

"Very likely, I'd say," Dillon said, trying hard not to stare at those blue eyes. They were very distracting, and every time the alien leaned in, a strange feeling would go through Dillon.

By this time, they had reached the training arena. It really wasn't much more than a cleared grass circle.

At Vincent's prompting, Dillon took up the commentary.

"I mainly use this area in the summer to teach my students how to conserve their energy in hot conditions and how not to end up passing out from heat exhaustion. Military personnel have to be able to fight and defend themselves in different locations and so in different climates. So I also use this area occasionally in the winter to teach in the rain and snow. Whatever the weather, the course is still taught in the shorts and T-shirts you saw us in when we were inside. This teaches tolerance and encourages the students to defeat their opponent as efficiently as possible—if for no other reason than to get back inside where it's warm."

The minister chuckled. "I wish we could try that, but our planet is constantly hot. Earth feels cool to us, and I believe this is your spring season at the moment?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes it is. The spring and summer are very hot, but in the autumn and winter, the temperature drops into minus figures."

Blue Eyes leaned into Dillon again. "Minus figures?" he asked.

Dillon gritted his teeth as a shiver went through him before turning his head and replying in a low voice, "The higher the temperature in numbers, the hotter the weather. If the numbers go down to less than zero—or minus figures—it means that to go outside without adequate covering is dangerous."

Blue Eyes nodded and they both turned back to the conversation.

The last stop was the track area. It was sectioned off into a long jump sandpit, a high jump, short and long distance tracks, and other areas that could be used for a variety of events.

Dillon listened as Vincent explained each event to the minister and jumped when Blue Eyes leaned in again—the alien definitely had no concept of personal space, and Dillon couldn't work out why it seemed intent on only talking to him. He couldn't even tell if it was male or female. *Do the aliens even have genders?* The low voice kept sending shivers—that Dillon now realized were signs of arousal—through him. God, he needed to get out of there, fast.

"Why are there separate tracks for the short and long distance running? Surely a better use of space would have been to just put a mark at the

appropriate point on the longer track to indicate where the short distance runners should stop?"

Dillon had to admit the alien had a point, and it actually annoyed him that he couldn't answer the question. "I'm afraid I don't know the answer to your question. The tracks have always been laid out this way and no one has thought to change it. I suppose it could be because the short distance is run faster than the long distance. Taking the corners at full speed could be dangerous to the runners."

The alien seemed to run this through for a few moments and then nodded. "That makes some sense."

The tour finished soon after, and Dillon took his leave to return to his own training.

The end of the day couldn't come soon enough, and he rushed out and home as soon as he could. He just wanted to relax in a hot bath and sleep in his own bed.

Chapter 4

Dillon came out of the shower and headed for his locker. After another exhausting day, all he wanted was to go home and fall into bed. First though, he needed to get that damn alien out of his mind. He hadn't seen Blue Eyes since the tour the day before and he was glad. *He really was glad...*

He'd just dropped his towel when a voice spoke behind him.

"Nice to see more of you, Mr. Stewart."

Dillon spun around into a defensive crouch.

Sitting calmly on the opposite bench was the one individual he didn't want to see. Its mouth was turned up in a small smile.

Dillon scowled, standing up to reach behind him into his locker. Feeling around until he found his jeans, he pulled them on over his still damp skin without taking his eyes off his visitor. He didn't know what the alien was capable of, and although he had to admit to a certain curiosity, he wasn't stupid enough not to be at least a bit worried about what the alien was planning on doing here with him alone.

Once he was mostly dressed, he took a good look at his visitor. The alien still had its black hood and cloak on, so all Dillon could see was its face and those damn blue eyes. He felt as though he could fall into them and happily get lost forever—Dillon shook his head, *what was he thinking?*

"How can I help you?" Dillon asked, trying to be respectful. He tucked a knife in the back of his jeans where it would still be accessible.

"Well, you could help me in many ways," the guard answered, and moved so fast Dillon didn't have time to react. He found himself pinned against the lockers by an unseen force while the alien leaned over him.

"If you don't move away now, guest or no guest, I will hurt you to get free," Dillon said with what he hoped was believable confidence. Inside, he was now getting more frightened than anything, and that annoyed him. He couldn't move a muscle, and memories of being pinned before rose up and threatened to engulf him.

Lor paused at the tone of the human's voice. His magic was pushing him to just throw the man down and take what he wanted, but his better sense knew

that would be a mistake. There was something else niggling his mind. He pushed his magic back as hard as he could, so he could look clearly at the beautiful man he had pinned against the metal boxes.

When he looked into the human's eyes, he was appalled by what he saw there. The man was scared of him. Moving quickly, he stepped back. His cloak tangled his legs, and he cursed as he ended up sitting heavily back on the bench where he had started.

"I apologize," he said, trying to put as much sincerity into his tone as possible. "I did not mean you any harm. From my research, I thought this was how human males initiate courtship."

"Courtship?" the man asked.

But Lor wasn't listening; he stood and offered a short bow of respect, still talking fast. "I will take my leave of you and hope I have not given offense to you in any way. Again, I offer my apologies." With his last words, he made a swift exit, letting the door bang shut in his haste to get out of the room.

Dillon stood frozen for a few seconds after the guard left, but then shook himself and moved to the door.

Man, that guard must have moved fast, Dillon thought. Looking both ways at the door, there was no one to be seen in the hallway.

Moving back to his locker, he finished dressing and decided that the day had been long and strange enough. He still just wanted to go home and sleep. Everything else could be dealt with in the morning. After all, the poor guard had looked mortified—from what Dillon could see of its face of course—and it'd left so quickly that it must have been embarrassed.

Initiate courtship? Dillon snorted to himself. *Who called trying to get laid that anymore?* He'd only heard of courtship in the old romance movies his mother insisted on watching when he was younger.

Shaking his head, Dillon headed out the door and home to a well-earned sleep.

"He was terrified. What am I going to do?" Lor was pacing around the room he'd been assigned. It was large with a separate area for dining and an en suite bathroom.

The flickering hologram in the middle of the room chuckled. “Lor, darling, when will you learn to think first and not jump in with both feet?”

“It is not funny, Mother. He is my other half. I need him. My magic is taking over, and I do not know how long I can keep control.”

“Hmmm,” his mother replied, turning serious. Lor loved his mother; as far he was concerned, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever, and would ever, meet. Her black hair was braided neatly, and her pale skin glowed with health. She wore her usual home clothes, what the humans would call a sari, paired with leather-thong sandals.

“I think the first thing you need to do is some more in-depth research. Remember, we may know our other halves when we meet them, but the humans may not. You were given access to their databases, were you not? Look up courtship on them, and read all the different articles about it. It may be that customs differ in different parts of Earth.”

Lor thought for a moment, but he had to admit his mother was probably right—as usual!

His mother had obviously guessed what he was thinking because, when he looked at her again, she was smirking.

“Okay, Mother. I will do as you suggest. I will call again when I can.”

After trading farewells, Lor moved to the computer interface in the room. Tapping it to wake up the screen, he started by typing in *courtship*.

He was shocked when almost all the links predated the year 2000. The current Earth-year of 3050 had only one link.

Selecting that link, he accessed the intergalactic interspecies translating dictionary; it stated:

Courtship – this is an old Earth word for when a male of the species wanted to make it known that he wished to take a female into his protection. Humans call this marriage. The courtship consisted of the male making the female’s family aware of how he will provide for the female and how he will care for her in a way she is accustomed to. The couple would be allowed to spend time with each other to see that they are compatible. These meetings would always take place with another person present to ensure the female was kept pure until the marriage.

NB: for more information, also see *dating*...

Lor clicked the dating link and was even more shocked by what he read.

Over the next few hours, he learned about being gay/bi/straight, romance, and body language. He also found out that if he had followed his magic's instincts he would have ended up in a lot of trouble. Forcing someone was a high crime and he was sure Minister Mora wouldn't have protected him. Even on his own planet, forcing someone was outlawed and severely punished. He would have to work harder on his control; he couldn't do what his magic wanted him to. He knew his magic would react to his mate, but this was much stronger than he had expected. Since he was the highest level mage on his planet, there was no one he could go to to ask questions. But he should be able to access the ship's database. Maybe there was something from a previous mage of his level on there.

Closing the computer interface, Lor fell into his bed and lay thinking for a long time. He then did some strong control exercises before finally falling into a deep sleep.

Chapter 5

Dillon arrived in the locker room and was unnerved when all conversation stopped the second he entered.

“What’s going on?” he asked the nearest of his trainees.

The man didn’t answer but pointed to the bench in front of Dillon’s locker. Looking where the man pointed, Dillon barely held in a gasp.

There sat a huge bouquet of roses. They were all the colors of the rainbow—plus a few that he wasn’t sure what they were called.

“Who’s the lucky bastard then?” he asked, looking around at the gathered men. No one seemed to want to answer him, so in the end, he reached for the envelope tucked in the top of the flowers.

A jolt went through him when he saw his own name written in a graceful cursive script. Opening it, he read the simple white card:

To Mr. Stewart,

Please accept these as a full apology for my actions yesterday. I hope you will do me the honor of allowing me to take you on a date.

Lor

Dillon swallowed as he looked around at the milling men. “Okay, who opened the card and read it?” he asked. “I know at least one of you wouldn’t have been able to resist.”

Finally one and then two hands went up.

“Harrison and Langston, you’re both to give me ten laps of the room before training today.” Both men nodded glumly. Dillon turned to the rest of the men, some of whom were smirking until they caught his gaze. “As for the rest of you, you’re going to give me twenty laps before training and let it be a lesson to you all to be honest. I know you all read the card but only Harrison and Langston owned up.”

Dillon ignored the complaining as he changed and headed out to warm up.

How could he accept a date invitation from an alien, whose species he knew nothing about? Hell, the person wasn’t even human. He didn’t even know the gender of his admirer.

Brushing off the disturbing thoughts, he started his usual routine of jogging slowly round the room followed by a set of stretches.

Halfway through the training session, Blue Eyes—no, Lor—came in with another alien following. Dillon indicated for one of the trainees to take over the routine and stepped toward the door to meet the visitors.

“How can I help you?” Dillon asked, pointedly looking at Lor. He was pleased to see the slight flush to the pale skin of Lor’s face.

Dillon was surprised when the other alien stepped forward. Looking more closely, Dillon saw it was the small alien that had been introduced as Ziel. Dillon was sure he was also connected to the alien minister somehow. “Minister Mora asks that Lor and myself be allowed to join your training session. The minister is always worried about me and it was thought that your defense tactics might be better suited to my strengths. Mora couldn’t be here himself, and so Lor accompanied me as my guard.”

Dillon looked at both aliens. They were both still wearing their hoods and cloaks, but the new visitor was definitely shorter and slimmer than Lor.

“I don’t see that as a problem. I can take you both through some basic moves, but you’ll have to lose the hoods and cloaks. I may be able to show you some moves you can do while wearing them, but to start off with, it’s better to only wear clothes that won’t trip you up.” He directed his last words to Lor, remembering how the alien had tripped on his cloak in his haste to get away from him.

Lor flushed again. “Of course. That is no problem. We both wore training clothes in the hope you would agree to our request.”

“Well, you can both put your outer clothes over on that bench, and we’ll work over on that side of the room to stay out of the way of the others.”

Lor and Ziel followed Dillon and started to remove their hoods. Lor’s was first to come off. Dillon almost gasped when he saw the long braid of black hair hanging down Lor’s back. It reached right to the top of his ass. He turned quickly so Lor wouldn’t catch him looking but found himself looking into the amused, amber eyes of Ziel.

The smaller alien smiled at him as it removed its hood revealing a similar long braid, but its hair was blond.

Ziel’s eyes flicked behind Dillon, and he turned to see Lor had removed the cloak. Dillon almost swallowed his tongue when he got his first good look at Lor.

The alien must have stood at least seven feet tall: it was lean, and the pale skin on its face definitely extended to its arms. Dillon wondered if the rest of it was just as pale. It was wearing what looked like a T-shirt and skintight pants, all in black.

Pulling himself together, Dillon put on his teaching face and tried not to let the aliens see anything was affecting him. He really prayed nothing showed on his face.

“Right, question time first, followed by the rules of the training room.

“I need to know more about you both. I know nothing of your species, so I have quite a few queries. First, I’m sure you’re aware about the physiology of humans by now. Human males have two main sensitive places, the groin and the stomach. Do you have anywhere I should be aware of? I ask this because I can tailor the training I give you to defend those places and to exploit them on your opponent. Does your species even recognize male and female gender?” He tried to sound casual by throwing his most important query in at the end.

Lor barked out a laugh. “Of course we recognize male and female genders. Did you not read the information we sent before the start of this visit?”

Dillon bristled at the alien’s laughter. “No, I didn’t read any information. I don’t have access to it because, if you remember from the introductions, I’m only employed by the military. I’m an outsider and therefore I don’t have the clearance. The only reason we are even speaking is because your minister requested to find out more about the training and asked me to tag along on your tour. I wasn’t even introduced to you. Only to Minister Mora and Ziel”

Ziel prodded Lor while nodding at Dillon. “Of course, please excuse Lor. He is always speaking before he thinks. As Lor was saying, we do have genders. We are male, and Dyra and Dyla are twins and the only females in our group. Besides myself and Mora, our guards are Lor, Ver, Piet, and the twins. They also run the ship we came on as part of their duties. Lor is the second-in-command and head guard. Piet is third in command and is our engineer. Ver is the tactical officer, and the twins are in charge of communications and piloting the ship. I am usually to be found in the kitchen.

“As for your question on sensitive places, we have the same as you, but we have the magical ability to shield those areas. The only way to get past those shields is to cause enough of a distraction that the other participant loses concentration.

“The reason my mate has asked for me to learn is because my magic is weak and therefore it is more difficult for me to shield for an extended period of time, such as during a fight. As I said, Lor is here as my guard. Oh, and of course to see you. You seem to have gained his attention.”

Ziel ducked quickly at this last comment, just as Lor went to grab him. Without thinking, Dillon tripped Lor up and had him flat on the floor within two breaths. He twisted one arm up behind Lor’s back while pushing his face down.

“First rule, we do not attack those weaker than us—no matter how much they annoy us.” The last part of his comment was directed at Ziel, who had the grace to look a bit guilty. “We only fight in this room when we are training.”

Pulling Lor to his feet he continued, “Now second rule, no magic is to be used in this room. I don’t know what your abilities are, and I don’t know what you mean by magic. But whatever it is, you’re not to use it, is that understood?” He waited for both men to nod, before letting out a shrill whistle. When the trainees looked over, he called out, “Langston, come over here please. I need a willing victim.”

Langston was about the size of Ziel, just a little more broad across the chest. Ziel could almost pass for a young woman in Dillon’s eyes, but there was something about him that, now that he was looking properly, definitely showed Ziel to be male.

Dillon got Langston to help him show Ziel and Lor a few simple moves that Ziel could use against a bigger opponent. He then got Ziel to practice on Lor. He had to admit to having fun watching the big alien being pinned by the smaller one again and again. Of course Lor wasn’t allowed to fight back with anything, except for the moves Dillon had given him to use, so...

“So Mr. Stewart, when do I get to go up against you?” Lor asked when Dillon called time and told the rest of the trainees to head for lunch.

Dillon looked Lor up and down. “Do you really think you could take me already? You’ve only been shown the basics.”

“Yes, Lor, you don’t want to be put on the floor yet again do you? Of course it could be you just want to get Mr. Stewart on top of you again,” Ziel called from his place on the side bench where he was rubbing a towel over his face. The males had replaced their cloaks but not their hoods.

Lor growled at Ziel and the towel Ziel was holding suddenly flipped up and landed over the smaller male’s face.

Dillon acted quickly. “Lor, apologize this instant and you can do five running laps of the room before you leave. If you want to return you will remember the rule I gave you about no magic within the training room—You’ll be doing the laps with him if I see you poke your tongue out like that again, Ziel. Honestly I’ve taught children who behave better than you two.”

“I hope you two are behaving and not causing any embarrassment to this mission!” came a voice from the doorway.

All three turned, and Dillon saw the head alien—Minister Mora—standing there. Ziel’s face lit up and Dillon watched in amusement as the male ran across the room and threw himself into the minister’s arms. The minister was obviously used to it as Ziel was caught with ease.

“So, my mate, did you learn anything useful?” the minister asked as he set Ziel down. Dillon just had time to see the mischievous smirk on Ziel’s face before the minister hit the floor with Ziel sitting on top of him.

Lor doubled over laughing and Dillon just stood there staring. After a moment, the minister started laughing too and easily lifted his mate up and stood.

“If you’ll excuse us, I think I need a word with my mate,” the minister said as he ushered a giggling Ziel out the door.

“Will he be okay?” Dillon asked, he was worried that Ziel may in trouble for embarrassing the minister.

“Yes, he will be fine. Mora would never hurt Ziel; he is devoted to his mate’s happiness. It is the way of our people. When we find our other half, our only goal is to protect them and make them happy. Higher level mages usually find their mates from the lower levels because they balance each other out.”

“May I ask what level you are?” Dillon asked as he was getting rather curious about the big alien.

“Well, if you agree to go on a date with me, I can tell you all you want to know about me and my people. Isn’t that the way it works?”

Dillon looked at Lor and thought about what the male could mean. Did he just want to get to know a human? Or did he want to see what screwing around with a human would be like? Or did he have some reason for getting to know Dillon specifically?

“Why do you want me to go on a date with you? Yesterday you practically tried to attack me in the locker room. Give me one good reason why I should trust you not to do that again?”

“You are my mate!”

Those four words shocked Dillon so much he froze in place. He couldn't move or speak.

Lor looked at him worriedly. “Was that not the right answer? The research I did told me that honesty is always best when wanting to date someone. I would be grateful if you would answer me.”

Dillon had to smile at that statement. Lor sounded so formal.

“I will go on one date with you. But I want it understood that I will not be intimate with you. If that is what you're looking for out of this idea of yours, then you're going to be disappointed.”

“I am not sure what you mean. My research showed that human couples dated to get to know each other. It did not specify the number of dates required before marriage. But...”

“*Marriage!*” Dillon yelled.

Lor stopped talking and looked at him warily. “Yes, that is what humans call it when a couple decide to spend the rest of their lives together is it not? You are my mate. I want you to stay with me for the rest of our lives.”

Dillon was sure he was going to wake up soon and this would all be a dream. But then he stopped to actually listen to what Lor had said. Lor wanted someone to balance him. He wanted to get to know Dillon and then spend the rest of his life with him. Isn't that what Dillon had been looking for? He had only recently been thinking that he was getting sick of men who were only after a quick fuck and wanted nothing to do with him outside the bedroom. Wasn't he just wishing that he could meet the perfect man that wanted him for himself and not what he could give him or for his body?

But he isn't a man, he's an alien, a voice whispered in his mind. *So much the better,* he snapped back. *Look where dating humans has gotten me so far.*

“Let's start with one date and get to know each other. After that, we'll see what happens.”

“That sounds acceptable. Where should we meet?”

“I'll tell you what. Why don't we go have a shower and we can go get some lunch. You're in the guest suites across the street aren't you?” Lor nodded. “Good. I'll meet you by the entrance in half an hour.”

“I will see you there,” Lor said and moved out of the room. Dillon looked after him for a moment before getting himself in gear and heading for a quick shower and hoping his regular clothes weren't too creased from their time in his locker.

Chapter 6

Lor paced just inside the entrance to the building he and the others were staying in. It had only been fifteen Earth-minutes, but it felt like he had been waiting for many rotations.

Finally he saw movement on the other side of the glass doors; looking up, he saw Dillon headed his way. His mate looked beautiful. He wore blue pants and a green top that Lor just knew would match those green eyes that had captured his attention when he first saw him.

Dillon caught sight of him and waved with a smile as he pushed the door open.

As Dillon came nearer, Lor held his breath; he did not have a clue what to say or do. From a young age, he had always known what was expected of him, but in this situation, he was on his own.

He now had to convince this male that they were meant to be together for the rest of their lives. He had to convince Dillon to give up everything he had ever known and move to an alien world.

No pressure there!

Lor snapped out of his thoughts with a gasp when he felt a light touch on his arm.

“Hi, hope you weren’t waiting long,” Dillon said, giving Lor a smile that stole his breath all over again. “Is the food hall still open? Or do we need to go next door to the barracks for dinner?”

Lor frowned. “I do not know. How would we find out?”

Dillon laughed. “We can just go and check ourselves,” he said and hooked his arm through Lor’s as they moved toward the hallway.

Lor froze at the contact. He had not expected Dillon to touch him voluntarily after how he had behaved so far. That he had made Lor very happy. But Dillon must have felt his reaction because he too froze and snatched his hand away as though he had been burned.

“I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have touched you without permission.”

Lor stopped his babbling by grabbing his hand and putting it back where it had been. “I like you touching me,” he said. “You can touch me however you wish, whenever you wish.”

Lor smiled to himself when Dillon blushed and didn't move his hand again.

Lor tried to think of what to say; his mind had gone completely blank, and he was starting to panic. Then he remembered his research from the night before.

“So,” he said, looking down at Dillon. “Do you come here often?”

Dillon's mouth opened and then he doubled over laughing. It seemed every time he almost got control of himself he started again. Finally he stopped and was wiping his eyes.

Lor took the opportunity to ask, “Why did you laugh?”

Dillon chuckled again before answering. “Let me guess, you looked up dating on the Earth database?”

“Of course I did. I did not know what I had done wrong when I saw you alone.” He then added, “Of course you have my apologies again for that. I did not realize how what I did could be interpreted until I had read about people being forced on your database.”

Dillon frowned, then shook his head. “Oh, don't worry, all is forgiven. You just took me by surprise and brought up a few bad memories. Nothing for you to worry about. Now your choice of language, that I can help you with. The line you just used, where did you find it?”

“I looked up things to say on a first date.”

“Well that's your problem then. The database has given you a list of pickup lines.” When Lor frowned Dillon continued, “They are lines people—usually men—use to get another person to have sex with them. Other favorites are ‘You must be new here. I never forget a beautiful face’ and ‘Has anyone ever said your eyes are as beautiful as the stars slash moon slash sun?’.”

“And other humans are actually intimate with humans that use these pickup lines?” Lor asked, fascinated.

“If they're stupid enough. Now the question is, why did you need to look up what to say to me?”

“Well, I did not want to make a mistake again.” Then Lor sighed. “But it seems I have anyway.”

Dillon squeezed his arm. “No you haven't made a mistake. You just need to ignore some of what you've read. I would prefer you are honest with me and speak your mind.”

Lor nodded as they reached the door to the food hall. They entered to find it empty of people. There were, however, two long tables full of steaming food laid out against one wall.

Dillon sniffed. “Mmmm, this all smells wonderful.” He pulled Lor over to look at the tables. “Wow they really want to give you a choice, don’t they?”

Lor looked; there was a huge array of deep dishes holding a variety of food, all with bright lights hanging over them. Same as the day before, each dish was labelled to say what it contained. There was; chicken tikka—with a warning saying it was spicy—beef casserole, vegetarian lasagna, and many more.

“What would you like?” Lor asked. Wanting to try and find out more about Dillon and thinking he could start with food.

“Well, they have most of my favorites here. So I think I’ll go for some casserole, with some rice.” Dillon pointed to the food as he spoke. Then he fetched a plate and dished himself up a good portion.

Lor was still looking at each dish when Dillon asked, “Do you want some help choosing?”

“I would be most appreciative of your help,” Lor responded.

Dillon put his plate down and started looking over the choices. “What sort of food do you enjoy? Do you like, meat, vegetables? Spicy, mild?”

“What does spicy mean?” Lor asked.

“Hmm, spicy means when you eat the food it feels extra hot in your mouth. It’s hard to explain. It’s not hot as in the food has been heated too much; it’s hot as in it tricks your taste buds into thinking your mouth is burning.”

“I do not like the sound of that. I do like meat and vegetables, but I would not like to try spicy. You choose for me please.”

Dillon seemed to think for a while and then chose two foods to add to Lor’s plate.

When they sat, Lor asked, “What did you choose for me?”

Dillon pointed to each food. “You’ve got rice and chicken carbonara. They’re two of my favorites, along with this lovely casserole,” he said pointing with his fork at his own plate. “Here, want to try some?” he scooped up some casserole from his own plate and held it out to Lor.

Lor didn’t need to be asked twice. He leaned forward and licked the offering off the utensil. He watched Dillon’s eyes darken, smiling he sat back. “That is nice. Maybe I will try it again next time.”

Dillon nodded silently and went back to eating his food. Lor ate his food with relish, licking the food from his fork and moaning in pleasure. He flicked the occasional glance at Dillon to see him biting his lip and blushing, refusing to look up from his food. He could see he was getting to his human. He wasn't sure on everything, but he was sure of that.

When they had finished their food, Lor tried to think of something to say again, remembering what Dillon said about being honest. "I would like to know more about you," he said.

"What would you like to know?"

"Everything," Lor said quickly. "I want to know everything about you."

Dillon smiled. "Well first, is there somewhere more comfortable to sit around here? These chairs are okay for a while but get a little uncomfortable after too long."

Lor thought for a moment and had an idea. "There is a seating area in the accommodation they gave me. Would that be acceptable?"

"Are you asking me to come to your room?" Dillon asked, smiling.

Lor took the smile to be a good sign and nodded.

"Okay, lead the way."

Lor jumped up and headed for the door; he only stopped when he heard chuckling.

"Slow down, speedy, I haven't got your long legs," Dillon was saying between chuckles.

Lor frowned as he puzzled out what Dillon could mean. How could Dillon have his legs? Then he started to realize what he meant.

"Sorry, I did not realize I was going so fast." Lor shook his head; would he do anything right this night?

Dillon caught up to him and Lor held out his hand. Dillon smiled and took the offered hand. Pulling him along, Lor started off again but tried to shorten his stride slightly to match his mate's.

Dillon's mind was in a whirl. He was on his way to an alien's bedroom. He wasn't sure what would happen when they got there. And yet he wasn't worried. For some reason he couldn't explain, he trusted Lor. The alien seemed

so earnest and honest. And of course he was fucking gorgeous. What man would say no to following the hot male anywhere he asked them to go? Of course, there was the added bonus that Lor was the first alien he had met, and he wasn't going to pass up the chance to find out more about his species and more about him personally. No one he knew would pass up that chance. Oh, and did he mention Lor was hot?

They hurried along a few hallways and up two flights of stairs before arriving at a door bearing the number two on it.

Lor pressed his hand to the access panel, and the door slid silently open. Lor went to enter but then seemed to think of something. He stood to one side and bowed slightly. "After you. Guests first."

Dillon couldn't help chuckling quietly. Lor was a mixture of curious child and old fashioned gentleman. Entering the room, Dillon couldn't help the gasp. The suite Lor had been given was bigger than his apartment.

Lor stopped behind him. "I hope everything is acceptable." He sounded nervous, and Dillon turned to find him clasping and unclasping his hands.

Taking pity on the male, Dillon took his hands and pulled him further into the room. Spying the seating area Lor had spoken about, Dillon headed there and sat in one of the comfy chairs. Placing his left ankle on his right knee, he placed his chin on his hand and looked at Lor.

"So, where do you want me to start?" he asked, with a smile.

Lor stood for a moment before removing his cloak and sitting in the other chair. After looking thoughtful, he asked, "What were you like as a young human?"

"Well, if you listen to what other people tell you, then I was a little rebel: never did as I was told and completely refused to conform to any stereotypes. I've lived on one military compound or another since the age of fifteen. It's only this year that I managed to save enough to rent a small apartment outside the compound—I spent a lot of money paying back people I thought I owed when I first got my trust fund money and my wages weren't enough at the time for rent and everything else. I like having somewhere to escape to."

"From what I understand, don't human children have to live with their parents until they are adults at eighteen Earth-years? Were your parents in the military?"

Dillon laughed and even to himself it sounded bitter.

“No, my parents weren’t in the military. Ummm, my parents threw me out of their home when I was fourteen. It’s not really a nice story for a first date. Why don’t you tell me more about yourself?”

But Lor seemed to be more curious now. “Please, I wish to know more. The more I know about you the more I will be able to understand you.”

Dillon thought about it. If he told Lor about his parents, would it scare the alien away? Would he still want to get to know Dillon? Or would he be like other boyfriends and decide he wasn’t worth the trouble?

May as well get it all out in the open now, save any disappointments later.

“My parents are antigovernment, antitechnology, and antigays.” Dillon watched the understanding starting to dawn in Lor’s eyes. He thought about the best way to explain so Lor would understand the language as well as the meaning. “I worked out at a young age that I preferred people of my own gender, but I knew my father’s views on the subject, and so I hid my feelings. I dated a girl to please my father, but what he didn’t know was she was my best friend and knew everything. Unfortunately I wasn’t careful enough, and my father caught me with a boy when I was fourteen. Let’s just say he didn’t take it very well, and I had to move away from home. I spent a year on the streets before I was found by Vincent—Ambassador Marston—and his wife when they were out for a walk one evening. I tried to pick his pocket to get money to eat; they took pity on me and took me home with them. Vincent was an officer in the military back then. He had a lot of influence and used it to get named as my guardian. I continued my training in mixed martial arts and finally was offered a job at eighteen, as Vincent told you when he introduced us. The rest, as they say, is history.”

Dillon finished talking, but in his head, he had gone back to the day his father had caught him. It had been a lovely summer’s day, and he thought his father was at work. He had been making out with one of his classmates in his bedroom when the bedroom door had burst open. His father had sent the boy, Kenneth, home and then ordered Dillon downstairs. His brother, Martin, had been in the living room, and at his father’s order, Martin held him down as their father beat Dillon to within an inch of his life. They then drove him to the roughest area of town and dumped him out of the car. He was lucky to have survived the night, let alone the year that he was alone on the streets. He didn’t want to think about the things he had done to survive; it had taken a lot of therapy to even begin to forgive himself for most of it.

He was brought back to the present by a touch on his arm. He flinched away instinctually before remembering where he was and with whom. Lor was looking at him in concern, and he wanted to deflect any questions.

“So now you know a bit about me. Tell me about yourself—and your planet. Remember, I haven’t been told anything about it or you.” He tried to smile and hoped it looked better than he felt.

Lor gave him a searching look before nodding. “Well, my home planet is called Debhunder. It is constantly hot there. Even in what you would call winter, the heat could burn you if you go outside without the proper protection. The cloaks and hoods we wear can be spelled to keep the wearer cool when needed, so our bodies do not overheat. In the case of Earth, our cloaks have been spelled to keep us warm. This planet is very cold to us.

“As for a bit about me. I grew up with my mother and father. I was tested when I was twenty rotations and found to have a lot of potential. I was put into training for the elite guard, and I quickly rose through the levels. I am now the highest ranking mage on my planet. I am also the youngest mage to reach this level in over two thousand rotations. I am trained in magical combat, but also in hand-to-hand combat as well. Sometimes a well-placed fist can be more effective than even the greatest magic.”

Dillon grinned at the last comment, then frowned as he thought over what Lor had said. “What’s a rotation?” he asked.

“A rotation is the same as six of your Earth-months.”

Dillon’s eyes went wide. “So you joined the elite guards at ten Earth-years old?”

“Yes, that would have been my age. Twenty rotations is when we come into our magic and the test is needed to ensure any younglings are trained to control what magic they have.”

Dillon thought about it. It made sense, but to put a child into guard training? He shuddered.

“Can I ask a questions about your parents?” Lor asked.

Dillon thought about it for a moment. He had promised to tell Lor about himself but some things were really not first date material. Human or nonhuman date.

“You can ask, but I don’t make any promises that I will answer,” Dillon settled for saying.

Lor nodded. "I understand. But I am curious. I had to study your laws before we arrived. Minister Mora did not want us to get into trouble by mistake. One of your laws is that young do not become adults until they reach the Earth-age of eighteen. How were your parents able to put you on the streets without the law getting involved?"

Since it dealt with law more than anything personal Dillon answered, "One thing you will need to remember on Earth is money buys everything. The laws are made by the rich. My parents may be against a lot of things, but they have invested their money wisely and have made more than enough to buy their way out of trouble. They declared me a runaway and gave the police a picture of me so they could look for me. That was the end of their responsibilities. I later found out the picture they gave the police was of a family wedding the month before I was thrown out. I was dressed in nice clothes, with my hair cut and styled. Living on the streets meant I couldn't wash very often, my hair grew longer, and my clothes were ruined. There was no way anyone could recognize the boy in the photo as being me. Therefore, when I was found by Vincent and Eve they were surprised my name was in the system. Apparently it didn't take much convincing to get my parents to sign me over to them. Vincent has never spoken about that visit to my parents, but he was very angry when he returned."

A sudden noise echoed through the compound.

"I heard that noise about sixty-four cycles ago," Lor said glancing at a device on his wrist.

Dillon jumped up. "That's the warning signal to say that the gates will be locking in ten minutes. I have to go, or I'll have to stay in the barracks tonight. It was great talking to you."

Just as Dillon was about to reach the door, he found his arm caught by Lor.

"I remember one thing from my research. A good date usually ends with a kiss."

Dillon looked hard at the alien that seemed intent on getting to know him. He seemed genuine. Dillon decided to do a test of his own.

"Okay then, kiss me." He shrugged.

Dillon was expecting a gentlemanly peck on the cheek or lips. It would have fitted with how Lor had behaved so far. But that's not what he got. What he got was a kiss that made his toes curl and took his breath away. He gasped at the

feelings coursing through him and Lor took advantage of this to slip his tongue into Dillon's mouth. Dillon would have sworn the kiss lasted for hours, but in reality it was probably only a minute at most.

A second warning alarm sounded, breaking them apart. Dillon was panting for breath and trying to think of something to say.

Lor seemed to be glowing in the dim light of the room.

"When can I see you again?" Lor asked.

Dillon thought quickly. "Tomorrow I can meet you at the entrance, same time as tonight. Or of course you and your fellow guards are welcome at my training sessions." Dillon glanced down at his watch. "I have got to go. See you tomorrow?" As soon as Lor nodded Dillon reached up on tiptoes and kissed his cheek before running out the door.

Running full speed, he made it just as the guards were about to lock the gates. One waved him through, telling him to not cut it so close next time, and the gates locked behind him.

Deciding to take the bus, he headed down the street still trying to wrap his mind around what had happened that evening.

Chapter 7

Dillon called Vincent the next morning.

“Hey there, sport. Bit early isn’t it?” Vincent greeted him.

“Hi. Sorry, but I have a few questions about the visitors. Can I meet you?”

“Of course, my boy. What about the park in half an hour? Give me time to escape Eve”—Dillon heard Eve call Vincent a rude name in the background and grinned—“and get there,” Vincent finished.

Twenty minutes later, Dillon was sitting on a park bench reading his phone’s Kindle app as the sun rose over the horizon when Vincent walked up.

“So what’s on your mind, son?” Vincent asked. Dillon loved it when Vincent called him son. Vincent had been more of a father to him than his own and was always there when he was needed.

“Well, one of the minister’s guards Lor has expressed an interest in getting to know me better,” Dillon started.

“Yes, the minister has told me about Lor. We had a meeting yesterday and he wanted to make sure I wouldn’t get in the way of Lor getting to know you.”

Dillon was surprised. “Well, that’s good and saves me explaining that. Well, the reason I wanted to talk to you was, firstly, to find out if there’s anything I should not be telling him, or any of them, even if they ask, and secondly, I wanted to know what restrictions have been put on their movements. I mean are they confined to the compound?”

Vincent nodded. “Good questions. I’ll forward you the briefing material the military sent to everyone else, soon as I get home. It’s actually my fault you were missed out.” Vincent looked a bit guilty. “I keep forgetting you’re not part of the military. You’re always at the compound and even sleep there occasionally. And since your last boyfriend was military too...”

Dillon held up a hand. “I am not discussing David. He made his choice when he decided to take that transfer overseas and tell me he wasn’t ready to settle for just one man.”

Vincent nodded. “Well anyway, in answer to your questions, firstly, there are no limits to what you can tell them. The only information they don’t have

access to is classified way above your level, and some is even above mine too. Secondly, there are no restrictions on their movements as long as they are accompanied. We can't keep them prisoner if we want them to get know humans as a whole species and not just the military.

“My only concern is how they look. Their clothes remind me of the monks of old. I don't know why they wear them. Do they have some sort of meaning? I mean it's not that cold at this time of year. And their skin is so pale, it's almost white. “

“Oh, I know what you mean. I had Lor and Ziel in a training session yesterday.” For some reason Dillon didn't mention the fact he knew the cloaks were spelled, something told him to be careful how much information he gave away of what Lor had told him—even to Vincent for now. “What about if I get them some clothes? I can find something that will keep them warm but allow them to blend in and get to know humans better than if they stood out too obviously as different. It's just, I was thinking of taking Lor and Ziel out today. Ziel was talking during training about cooking and there's a new cook shop just opened in the mall. Lor is his guard so...”

“Sounds like a great idea. I assume you've got a plan for your training sessions today?”—Dillon nodded—“Good. I would suggest taking someone else with you too. Just to keep up the protection. But otherwise, just make sure they both get permission from their minister. As Ziel's mate, Mora is very protective of him, and I don't want a war on our hands if anything happens to Ziel.”

Dillon shuddered. The Earth couldn't afford war. Their military would never be a match against beings that could use magic, even if Dillon still wasn't sure what that magic entailed yet. He and Lor had not gotten that far. He wasn't sure if the military—or Vincent—knew about the aliens magical abilities. He couldn't think of a way of asking Vincent without sounding suspicious so he would ask Lor first, before he said anything to anyone else.

“I'll take Harry Gilbert with us. He'll scare off any trouble.”

Dillon and Vincent firmed up the plans and then went their separate ways. Vincent had the day off—unless there was an emergency—and Dillon had calls to make to cover his sessions and get a message to Lor and Ziel.

Lor was surprised to get a message relayed to him in his accommodation early in the morning. The message was from Dillon and was an offer to take

Lor and Ziel out for the afternoon. Lor read the message twice and then headed next door to knock on the minister's room.

Mora answered the door and waved him inside. "What can I help you with?" Mora asked.

Lor explained the message and Mora agreed readily, especially as both of them could see the excitement on Ziel's face at the prospect of getting out of the compound.

"I have more meetings today," Mora said. "Their military wants to know a bit more about our magical abilities, so they can see if it can be used to enhance their technology. In return, they will give us any technology we want as long as it's not weapons. I, of course, have said that we will not allow our mages to enhance any weapons they have, and so we are in agreement so far."

"Sounds like a mutually beneficial idea," Lor said. "Mr. Stewart has asked that Ziel and I be ready by midday Earth-time. He also said that if we are interested, there is a beginners training session this morning and we are welcome to attend. It starts in just over two and a half cycles."

"Ziel, do you wish to train more?" Mora asked.

"Yes, please, my mate. I enjoyed learning the human's techniques, and Mr. Stewart is a good teacher." Ziel grinned and added, "Of course getting the opportunity to put Lor here in his place made it entertaining too."

Lor flushed and Mora laughed. These were two of the few people who could get away with teasing him and bringing out his more relaxed side. Dillon was fast becoming a third.

"But even better was putting you in your place last night, my mate," Ziel almost purred. Then it was Lor's turn to laugh as Mora turned pink.

Mora scowled at the laughing pair. "You two haven't really grown up since you were younglings."

Lor smiled fondly as he watched Ziel mock attack Mora. Ziel was only two rotations—one Earth-year—older than Lor, and they had lived near one another as younglings. He had been present when Ziel and Mora had met and realized they were mates.

"I will return when I have changed into more appropriate clothing," Lor said to the room at large, knowing the two mates were too wrapped up in each other to listen.

Shaking his head, he headed out the door, wondering if he would ever be like that with Dillon.

As they headed for the training room, Ziel was bouncing on his toes like an excited youngling.

“I wonder what we will learn this time,” Ziel said excitedly.

Lor rolled his eyes. “You would have learned most of the moves he has taught you so far rotations ago if you had listened to me when I tried to teach you.”

“But I like his way of teaching better. It does not involve me getting bruised as much as the way you used.”

Lor had to admit—but only to himself—that Ziel had a point.

Entering the training room, they saw a group of five males talking, but there was no sign of Dillon.

One of the men noticed them and headed over to them. “Hi, I’m Harry. The boss told me to look out for you two possibly turning up. He just stepped out for a moment. He said to tell you to set your outer garments over on the bench and join us when you’re ready.”

With a wave, the male jogged back to the group and Lor led Ziel over to the bench. They had just set their cloaks and hoods down and were heading over to the group when Dillon entered the room.

“Right,” he said, clapping his hands for attention. “Now everyone’s here we can begin. Since this is the first session of a new course and you’re all beginners, I will introduce myself.

“My name is Dillon Stewart, but in this room, I am Mr. Stewart or Sir. A fun fact about me is that I am not a member of the military; I am employed by them to make sure you lot can defend yourselves and not end up dead. That means that I don’t give a shit what your current rank is and or who your parents are. In this room, I am in charge, and if you don’t listen and obey, you will be thrown out.

“Now, I’m sure you’ve all met Harold Gilbert as well. He is my second here, so if he tells you to do something, you do it.

“First, Mr. Gilbert and I will show you a set of moves, and then you will copy them in pairs. Any questions?”

Lor had to use all his control to not burst out laughing; Dillon had effectively cut down to size any male in the room who thought they were in for an easy time. He also found that watching Dillon take control like that was arousing, and he didn't appreciate having to fidget around to make his pants more comfortable.

Dillon and the male called Harry demonstrated various moves and got the trainees to copy them, each taking turns on who did which set.

At the end of the session, one male asked for a proper demonstration of what level they could reach.

Dillon and Harry moved into a clear section of the room, and without any warning, Harry attacked. Harry was almost as tall as Lor and much wider. Anyone would assume he was the stronger male and therefore the most likely to win over Dillon's slim frame. The fight was short but fierce. The two males went through all the moves they'd shown in the session so far and then moved on to trying in earnest to best each other. Dillon won the bout, but it was a hard earned victory, and Harry put up a good effort. Both males were sweating, and the new trainees were watching with varying expressions of awe as they watched the bigger man get pinned to the floor. Lor was now hiding behind Ziel as much as possible to ensure no one saw how aroused he was by his mate's display of strength.

After he sent the trainees off to the locker room, Dillon headed over to Lor and Ziel.

“I'm glad you came,” he said to them. “Are you taking me up on the outing idea?”

“Oh, yes please.” Ziel spoke before Lor even opened his mouth.

Dillon grinned. “Tell you what. Why don't you both go shower and change then meet me at the entrance to the guest suites?” He went to turn then remembered something. “Oh, I nearly forgot. I got permission from the ambassador for this trip, but he had two concerns. One was protection, so I am bringing Harry with us, just as a precaution. And the other concern was your clothes. They do rather make you stand out, and the ambassador feels you would get a better sense of how humans interact if you blended in.” He went

over to the door and grabbed a bag he'd left there when he entered. "Here are some clothes that I think will keep you warm enough, but allow you to blend in as well. I hope they're acceptable."

"Of course. It sounds like a good idea. It is something we would not have thought of," Ziel answered and took the bag. "We will see you at the entrance."

Dillon had to grin as Ziel grabbed Lor's hand and dragged the poor male over to their things and barely gave him time to dress before grabbing him again and pulling him to the door.

Dillon chuckled as he headed for the shower.

"So, where we taking them?" Harry asked as they headed for the guest suites.

"Well, Ziel seems to really love to cook, so I thought we'd head for that new cooking shop in the mall. They do lots of stuff there and apparently they do demos too."

Harry nodded.

Lor and Ziel were waiting for them, and Dillon had to take a moment to look at Lor in the clothes he'd given him.

Lor was wearing dark blue jeans that hugged his legs, paired with a blue long-sleeved T-shirt that matched his eyes and an open, blue denim jacket. Ziel was wearing the same clothes but in black with a yellow T-shirt. Dillon was glad he'd managed to guess their sizes right, although Lor's T-shirt was a bit tight—not that Dillon was going to complain.

Dillon smiled. "I see you two are ready. Shall we head out, and we can stop somewhere for some lunch."

The foursome headed for the gate, and Dillon and Harry showed their IDs to get past the guards.

They stopped at a fast-food restaurant for lunch. Ziel seemed to really love his burger and fries, and Dillon had to laugh when Lor had trouble with his. Every time Lor bit into one end, the burger tried to slide out the other.

After lunch, they headed for the shop Dillon had heard about.

As soon as they entered, Ziel let out a squeal. "Wow, this is great."

He rushed off, and at a panicked look from Lor, they all went after him. They found Ziel gushing over a self-heating wok, with an amused sales assistant standing nearby.

When Ziel saw them, he grabbed Lor. "Look Lor, this heats up on its own. I wouldn't need to concentrate on it so much, and there would be less chance of me burning the food."

"I'm sure if you see anything you want Mora will send someone to get it for you before we go home. We cannot get anything today." Lor said.

Dillon's heart broke a bit at the disappointed look on Ziel's face. As Ziel dragged Lor off to look at something else Dillon pulled the sales assistant to one side.

Handing over his ID he said, "Put that item on my credit and have it sent as soon as possible to the compound. Get it there within the next hour and you can add a twenty-five percent tip."

The young man's eyes lit up. "Yes, sir."

Dillon chuckled and moved to see what else Ziel would fall in love with.

They spent over an hour looking round the cook shop and watching a demonstration of some nonstick bakeware.

Lor had finally convinced Ziel that he would get the chance to look again sometime before they left for home. Dillon had helped as well by telling Ziel that he could look all the items up on the compound database and even order things to be delivered too.

They were walking down the street when Ziel nearly bumped into a man coming the other way.

"Oh, I do apologize," Ziel said immediately, just as Lor pulled him out the way with an arm round his shoulders.

"Fucking faggots. You shouldn't be allowed out on the streets," the man muttered.

Dillon recognized the voice immediately and so must have Harry as he was just as quick as Dillon to place himself between the man and their charges.

"I am sorry, sir," Dillon said between gritted teeth. "But I think you should apologize for that comment. These men are guests of Ambassador Marston and the president. As such, they are to be treated with respect."

“Guests? You mean those aliens? Well then they shouldn’t even be allowed on the planet.” The man turned on Dillon. “And you should know I never apologize for anything.”

The man pushed past Dillon and Harry and stormed off down the street.

“Who was that? He seemed to know you,” Lor asked Dillon.

Dillon sighed. “That was my father. Although he will deny I exist now if asked.”

“That man is one of your parents?” Ziel asked in a horrified voice. “How then can he treat you with such disrespect? And what did that word he called us mean?”

Harry came to Dillon’s rescue. “That man is not fit to be a parent, and he doesn’t like what Dillon does. So he decided that Dillon is no longer his son. As for the word he said, can we just leave it at the fact it is an insulting word and not let it ruin the rest of our outing?”

Ziel nodded and they continued looking in the shop windows. Lor saw an art shop, and Ziel dragged him inside, saying he knew Lor would want to look as he loved to draw. Dillon filed the information away and watched as Lor’s stern face broke into one of awe as he looked at the supplies on offer. Dillon ended up making a few more secret purchases, but these he decided to have delivered to his apartment, for later.

When a warning tone went off on Dillon’s phone telling them it was nearly time for dinner, they decided to head back to the compound.

The guards stopped Dillon as they entered. “A delivery arrived for you, sir.”

Dillon looked at the store name on the box and grinned.

“Here you go, Ziel. Consider this a welcome-to-Earth gift.”

Ziel looked at the box curiously. After a bit of trouble with the tape, he got it opened. The guards jumped as Ziel let out a high-pitched scream when he saw what was in the box. Suddenly Dillon found himself on the receiving end of one of Ziel’s hugs.

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you,” Ziel was repeating, and he only let go of Dillon when Lor finally pulled him off.

Dillon was shaking his head. “Come on. Let’s get you back to your mate and you can tell him all about your adventure.”

They headed for the guest suites, and as Dillon was about to take his leave, Lor stopped him. "Please join me for dinner?"

Dillon nodded. "Of course." Dillon turned to Harry. "I'll see you tomorrow for training."

Harry nodded, and Lor turned to him, smiling "Thank you for accompanying us. We enjoyed seeing more of your planet."

Harry nodded again and waved as he walked away.

Ziel ran off to find his Mora as soon as they entered the building. Lor and Dillon headed straight for the food hall.

The selection was the same as the day before. This time Lor tried the casserole and Dillon had sweet-and-sour stir-fry.

Lor was surprised when Dillon picked up a forkful of his food and offered Lor a taste. Ziel and Mora entered the room just as Lor was leaning forward to accept the offering.

"Oh, look. Now they are feeding each other. Lor is turning into a lovesick youngling," Ziel said to Mora, just loudly enough that Lor and Dillon would hear.

Lor scowled over at his friend, but Dillon was already laughing.

Ziel waved a finger in Lor's face. "Now remember when I met Mora? You teased me without mercy. Well, now it is my turn."

This made Dillon laugh harder, and even Lor had to crack a smile.

Ziel and Mora joined them with their food and the four spoke about all they had seen on their trip out. Mora also thanked Dillon again for the wok he bought Ziel and said he was sure it would get a lot of use.

After dinner, Dillon accepted Lor's invitation to talk in his room again. This time they were sitting together on a soft couch. Dillon was trying to suppress the amusement he felt as he watched Lor trying to sneak an arm around him while they spoke. He had found out that Lor was sixty rotations—thirty Earth-years—old and had in turn told Lor he was twenty-eight years old. He had also found out only the higher military ranks knew about the alien's magic, and they wanted to keep it that way, for now.

In the end, he took pity on the alien's efforts and pulled Lor's arm over his shoulders.

It had the added bonus of giving him the courage he needed to address the elephant in the room. "I feel I should apologize for my father's rude words earlier," he began.

Lor held up a hand to stop him. "You do not have to apologize for the words of another. He is responsible for what he says, not you. But I must ask, what did that word he used mean?"

Dillon winced. "Faggot is a derogatory term for a gay man. I don't know where it started and have never been able to find out, but it has been used for centuries as an insult. Other insults are queer and abomination."

Lor shook his head. "But this male was your father? He had a part in making you?" Dillon nodded. "So how can he call you these derogatory terms? On my planet younglings are loved by their parents. Our magic chooses our mate and our job to a certain extent, therefore parents accept whomever is chosen for their youngling. Even after the testing when younglings find out their level of magic and what their calling may be, their parents still support them and love them."

"I'm afraid it doesn't work that way here. People choose their mates/partners themselves. Sometimes it is based on love, and sometimes marriages are entered into for political reasons. Same-sex partnerships are more accepted now than centuries ago, but there are still people who cling to the old ways, and there always will be. Some of these relationships last and some break down and end with the two people splitting up to find someone else.

"Sadly, some parents look on their children as assets to be used to make them more money or to promote their place in society. You heard my speech at the beginning of the training session? I always say that because some of the trainees are only in the military because of who their parents are. Normally they wouldn't have even been accepted. For example, William Summers, whom you met today; his father is an admiral in the navy. That's how he got to bypass the normal tests and got straight into training. If, however, he doesn't come up to my standards, he will be staying at beginner level for a long time, and he can't complete his military training without passing my course. That's why I refused to accept a rank from the military. I chose to stay an employee so I can't be influenced by military politics."

"Can they not take your job away if you do not do as they wish?"

“They can. But they know I don’t really need this job. I came into a trust fund when I turned twenty-five. It was left to me by my father’s mother. It means that I get enough money each month to live comfortably for the rest of my life. It also means I can donate my wages from the military to a few local charities that take in children that are living on the streets.”

Lor was stunned. His mate had survived some appalling things, and now he gave what he could to aid younglings in the same situation.

Lor was positive he was already halfway in love with this generous man, and it wouldn’t take much to send him falling the rest of the way.

“May I kiss you?” he asked. He didn’t want to do anything that may scare his mate away again.

“Of course.” Dillon smiled.

The kiss started off soft and chaste, but it couldn’t stay that way. Lor’s magic was pushing for more, so he carefully let himself go a bit further, deepening the kiss. He was pleased when Dillon answered with a passion that equaled what he was feeling.

A touch on his bare skin surprised him. Dillon had managed to untuck his T-shirt and was caressing the skin of his lower back. Oh, how he wanted this male.

But first Dillon needed to understand what it would mean if he allowed Lor to claim him.

“Please I want you... I need you...” Dillon moaned and Lor had to force himself to move back, just a short way, and look down at his mate.

“We need to talk first,” he said.

Chapter 8

Dillon groaned. “Nothing good is ever started with those words.”

Lor chuckled, then sobered. “You need to understand some things about my species before we go any further.”

Dillon nodded and sat up straighter. He wanted to know more about Lor.

“You know that my species has magic.”—Dillon nodded—“Well, I need to explain what that may mean for you and me. I told you our magic decides who is best suited to us as a mate. That mate can be anyone: older, younger, male, female, or, in some cases, a different species. My magic has chosen you.”

Dillon went to say something, but Lor held up a hand. “Please let me finish, and I will answer your questions.”

Dillon nodded again and relaxed back on the couch.

“What this means is that if we are intimate my magic will bind to you. Now the effects vary from couple to couple. Some couples get the ability to hear each in their minds. Sometimes the stronger mage’s magic adds to the weaker mate’s. One couple I know can join their magic together to make both of them stronger. Lastly, I’ve heard of some benign events like the weaker mage ending up with a hair color to suit the stronger mage’s preference. The effects are different and unique to each couple and of course depend on their gender, magical abilities, and species.

“What I am trying to say is, I do not know what will happen if you agree to join with me. One thing I can tell you is that mates cannot be apart for any length of time. Once joined, the mates will always want to be with each other. Do you understand now? I need you. But more than that, I love you.”

Dillon was speechless during Lor’s explanation, but his last words and the way he looked away as he said he loved him almost broke Dillon’s heart.

Dillon thought hard before he replied. Here was a male offering him everything he had ever wanted from a relationship. Commitment, love, and of course Lor was hot. But he was also kind and patient. Dillon had learned that by watching how he interacted with Ziel. He couldn’t say he was fully in love but he could say he was drawn to this alien, and he was at least halfway in love with him. There was just one question he wanted answered.

“I have one big question before I even think about making this sort of decision. If I was to become your mate, would you be faithful to just me?”

Lor’s shocked face gave Dillon the answer before Lor even spoke, “Of course I would just be faithful to you. What sort of male do you think I am? I would never—”

Dillon cut him off with a kiss. Why second guess himself? His heart told him this male was genuine, alien or not. His mind tried to argue that he was moving too fast and on too little information. He told his head to go fuck itself and followed his heart, something he had never done before in his life. He just hoped he wasn’t wrong.

Lor quickly responded to the kiss. Before Dillon could blink, he was on his back on the couch with Lor leaning over him, still kissing the breath out of him.

Lor pulled away, causing Dillon to growl in frustration. “Tell me you are sure. Please?”

Dillon cupped Lor’s cheek and looked deep into his eyes, willing him to see what he said was true. “I give myself to you freely and without condition.” He remembered the words from a book he’d read somewhere, and for some reason they seemed suited to this situation.

It must have been the right thing to say, because Lor’s face lit up and he dived down to resume kissing Dillon to within an inch of his life.

Lor couldn’t ask again. He had his answer, and he released the leash he had been keeping on his magic. He felt his magic pushing out and trying to merge with Dillon. He heard Dillon gasp and looked to see an expression of wonder on Dillon’s face.

“You’re glowing,” Dillon whispered, reaching a hand up to trail along Lor’s cheek.

“It is my magic coming to the surface; it wants to join with you. *I* want to join with you.”

Both of them couldn’t wait, and hands bumped into each other as they tried to strip each other’s clothes off as fast as possible. Lor’s top went sailing just before he managed to rip Dillon’s shirt down the front to get to his chest. He leaned down and bit into Dillon’s nipple, causing him to arch up, and giving Lor the perfect angle to rip his pants and underwear off in one go.

Using his superior strength, Lor picked Dillon up and carried him to the bed. He laid him gently on the sheets and leaned over to claim another scorching kiss. Dillon's hands were running over every bit of Lor's body he could reach. When Lor felt Dillon's short nails raking over his back, he arched and cried out. Dillon latched onto Lor's pants and pulled them down over his ass, running his nails over the globes and causing Lor to pant as he lost the ability to draw a full breath.

Pinning Dillon to the bed, Lor kissed his way down Dillon's body enjoying every reaction he managed to wring from his human.

"You. Are. The. Most. Beautiful. Male. I. Have. Ever. Seen," Lor said, spacing each word out with a kiss to Dillon's hard cock.

Dillon writhed under Lor as his body was played like a gifted musician's instrument. Dillon could feel a heat emanating from Lor and filling every part of his body. He could only assume it was Lor's magic; whatever it was, it was making his body hypersensitive to every touch and kiss.

"I want to see you," he managed to pant out when Lor paused in his kisses. Lor knelt back to give Dillon a view of this body. Dillon hadn't even realized he was worried 'til he felt the relief that Lor's cock looked just the same as a human's—although he was longer and thicker than Dillon had ever taken before. He was going to feel glorious inside him.

"Now. I need you now," Dillon said, looking up into Lor's eyes; he was on edge and harder than he had ever been before, and if Lor didn't get in him soon, he would come without him.

He felt slick fingers stroke him and then move toward his hole, massaging his sensitive skin as they went. He arched his back, lifting his ass and pulling his legs back to his chest, trying to get Lor to hurry.

"Yes," he moaned, when Lor finally rimmed his hole and started pushing one finger into him.

"More. Now," Dillon demanded, and Lor chuckled but met his demands. "I'm not made of china. Harder, come on." Dillon liked to be treated gently, but Lor was treating him like some fragile maid. Sometimes he just needed to be fucked hard and this was one of those times. "Come on, show me what you've got. I can feel your magic against me; let go."

Finally Lor's control seemed to snap, and two then three fingers plunged into Dillon, making him arch his back even further in pleasure and in an attempt to get more of Lor inside him.

Lor removed his fingers, and Dillon felt the head of Lor's cock pressing into him. He groaned long and loud. He didn't care who heard him or knew what they were doing. Nothing had ever felt this good. And he was sure nothing would ever feel this good again.

Dillon had never barebacked with anyone before, but he didn't think that was the reason for the wonderful sensations he was feeling. It was all Lor, and his heart felt like it was expanding. But the male was still holding back a bit.

He grabbed onto Lor's neck and dragged the male in for a wet, passionate kiss.

"We can go for soft and tender another time," he gasped into Lor's ear. "I want you to take me and own me. Please, I need you to show how much you want me."

Lor growled and took him at his word. He pounded into Dillon's ass, hard and fast.

"Oh. Yes... More... Harder... Don't stop... Please." Dillon couldn't make a coherent sentence, but he thought he got his point across as Lor responded to everything he said by thrusting harder and faster.

Finally Dillon could feel the buildup in his balls. "I'm going to come. Don't stop, please," he begged.

Lor reached down and grasped Dillon's cock. Two hard pulls, and Dillon was coming in strong spurts all over his chest.

Lor froze inside him, and Dillon felt warmth spreading through him. It started in his ass but spread through his entire body. He felt like he was lying in the sun on a beach somewhere, relaxed and carefree for the first time in his life.

As suddenly as it had started, it stopped, and all Dillon felt was so very satisfied and tired.

He felt covers being pulled over him. Then Lor's arms were round him, and he was being pulled into a warm, loving embrace.

"Sleep, my love," Lor whispered, and Dillon did as he was told, closing his eyes and falling into a deep sleep.

Chapter 9

Lor watched his mate sleep and breathed a sigh of relief. He had been so worried that Dillon wouldn't accept him. He knew he still had to work to make Dillon happy and they were going to have their work cut out moving Dillon to a new planet and getting him settled. But Lor believed that as long as they had each other, everything else would drop into place.

He would have to sleep to replenish his magic soon. Joining with Dillon had taken a lot out of him, and he was exhausted. But he didn't want to waste a moment of time that he could spend watching and learning every dip and curve of his mate.

His internal argument was interrupted by a buzzing coming from their discarded clothes. A few moments of searching turned up a small device that resembled Lor's comm with Harry's name and picture flashing on the screen. After looking over the controls, Lor hit the Accept Call button and Harry's face filled the screen.

"Good evening," Lor greeted.

The human looked at Lor in shock. "Why are you answering Dillon's cell?" Harry demanded, and Lor was stunned at the anger in Harry's voice.

"Dillon is asleep and is unlikely to wake before morning," Lor started.

"If Dillon's asleep, I ask again what are you doing answering his cell phone, and what's more, what are you doing there at all?"

Lor frowned in confusion at Harry's questions.

"I answered this device because I saw your name and I thought you may worry if no one answered. As for why I am here, this is the accommodation your military gave me."

Lor realized something he had said seemed to have made the situation worse, because Harry's face went even redder. "What is Dillon doing asleep in your room? What did you do to him?"

Lor finally had enough. "That information is none of your business." Dillon should have the choice of who to tell about their joining when he was ready. "Unless you have a message for me to give to Dillon, I think—" Lor didn't get any further because the screen of the device went blank.

Shrugging at the human's strange behavior, he went back to bed and cuddled up to his new mate.

Dillon woke slowly. He was warm and comfortable. It took a while for the previous night to catch up with him. When it did, he sat up and looked around the room he was in.

"Lor," he called.

Lor's head poked out from the bathroom. "Yes, my mate?"

Dillon let out the breath he had been holding. What had he thought? That Lor would run off in the middle of the night? This was his room for heaven's sake. He gave himself a mental shake and looked at the big alien.

"Nothing, I just wondered where you were. I was going to give you a morning hug."

Lor grinned and headed back to the bed. Dillon was then enfolded in a warm, tight hug.

"Morning," Lor said and kissed him until he was breathless.

Dillon glanced at the clock and saw the time. "Damn, I have a training session soon. I need to get to the locker room and shower."

Lor smiled at him. "May I join you?" he asked.

"Of course. You're always welcome. Will Ziel be coming with us?"

"No, Mora is taking him to the arboretum to find out more about the trees there."

Dillon laughed as he thought about the serious staff in the arboretum dealing with the enthusiastic alien.

"Grab what you need, and you can change in the locker room with me," he told Lor as he quickly grabbed his clothes from the night before, ignoring his shirt which was beyond repair.

Lor nodded and rushed to a dresser to find the clothes he needed to take and to get dressed.

Within half an hour, Dillon was showing Lor around the locker room and then waiting while the big alien changed.

“I need to shower after last night. If the men guess I didn’t go home last night, I’ll be forced to punish them for their teasing. So I will meet you in the training room in ten minutes.” Lor nodded, and Dillon grabbed a towel from his locker as Lor headed out of the room.

He was just finishing his shower when he heard someone entering the shower room. When a hand landed on his shoulder and yanked him round, he reacted instinctively and brought his fist up in a right hook that sent his assailant flying.

Dillon grabbed his towel and dried his face before wrapping it round his hips and going to see just who was trying to molest him in the shower.

He stopped short when he saw Harry kneeling on the tiled floor holding a hand over his bloody nose.

“Harry,” Dillon said, concern for his friend clear in his voice. “What on earth were you doing trying to grab me like that? You know what my response is to that sort of thing.”

Harry accepted the hand Dillon offered to pull himself up, but he then pushed away from him.

“Well, I would have spoken to you last night, but that alien answered your cell. Apparently you were asleep, and I quote ‘unlikely to wake before morning’ end quote.”

Dillon blushed. “I was rather tired last night. Lor didn’t say he’d spoken to you, but we were late getting up this morning.” Dillon glanced at the wall clock. “Shit, Harry, you know we have a training session in less than five minutes. I need to get dressed.”

Dillon headed back to his locker with Harry trailing after him.

“What are you thinking, Dill? You stayed the night with that thing. Please tell me you didn’t fuck him or, even worse, let him fuck you.”

Dillon rounded on his friend. “What I did or didn’t do last night is none of your business. Now we have a session to get to, and if you’re late, you will be running so many laps you’ll still be here when I start the next session. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir!” Harry shot him a furious glare before storming out of the room. Dillon took the opportunity to lean against his locker and take a breath.

What was up with Harry? He had never seen his friend act like that before. Sure he hadn’t liked any of Dillon’s boyfriends. But that was only because he

hadn't thought they were good enough for Dillon. He'd never reacted like that though; he'd just been there for Dillon when the relationships fell apart—as they always did.

Sighing and putting the questions away for another time, he headed out to face his trainees.

The next three weeks passed in much the same way as their first. Lor would accompany Dillon to all his training sessions, sometimes bringing Ziel if Mora was busy. Between sessions, they would dine together, and they spent each night in each other's arms. Dillon had been ecstatic when Lor had agreed to bottom, and he had made sure that his mate was screaming for more by the time they both came.

On Dillon's days off, he would take Lor, and sometimes Ziel, to see the sights of the city. They went to museums and art galleries. They visited restaurants—much to Ziel's delight—and tried every type of cuisine Dillon could think of. Both Dillon and Lor learned more about each other and their planets.

The only stain on the wonderful time Dillon was having was Harry. Since the argument in the locker room, Harry had avoided Dillon. He came to training and did as he was told, but any time Dillon tried to talk to him about what was wrong, he made some excuse and left. He had also refused to go on the outings with Lor and Ziel. Dillon had had to ask Timmy Harrison to accompany them.

Everything was perfect until one morning four weeks after their mating. Lor woke up with a sense of foreboding; he couldn't seem to shake the feeling that something was going to happen.

He tried to talk Dillon into just staying in their room. He knew Dillon had been feeling achy and sick over the last two weeks, but Dillon had training sessions to run and his mate was nothing if not honorable. Dillon assured Lor it was just a cold and he would be fine.

He followed Dillon to the main building. Just as Dillon was pushing the main door open there was an explosion that rocked the entire building. Air came rushing out of the open door, Dillon and Lor were thrown six feet in the air and about ten feet backward, away from the building. Lor muttered some very quick spells and managed to slow their descent. He landed first and turned to catch Dillon as his mate barreled straight at him.

He laid Dillon on the ground only to find him unconscious. “No, come on, mate. Wake up,” Lor was calling, shaking Dillon by his shoulders.

People were running everywhere. Shouts of “Bomb!” and “Intruders!” could be heard as people ran into the building.

Someone put a hand on Lor’s shoulder, and Lor spun around with a growl. He only stopped when he saw it was Mora.

“Please help me,” he begged his friend. He was in such a panic he couldn’t focus enough to use his magic effectively.

Mora knelt down and muttered over Dillon’s still form, it only took a few moments, but it felt like longer to Lor.

Mora sat back and laid his hand back on Lor’s shoulder. “He is fine. His body has shut down to protect against another attack is all. Look he is starting to wake now.”

Lor let out a cry as he saw Dillon stirring. Blurry green eyes blinked up at him and Dillon smiled.

“Hey, what happened?” he asked, his voice sounding rough. “I feel like I’ve gone ten rounds with Harry.”

Lor chuckled in relief. He must be okay if he was joking.

“A bomb went off in the main building,” Mora was saying to Dillon.

“Shit. I have got to help. Vincent may have been in there. What about Harry and Timmy? What if there’s another bomb somewhere?” Dillon said as he tried to rise only to fall down again with a groan.

“You are going nowhere but back to our accommodation,” Lor said firmly, and to head off any arguments, he picked Dillon up and headed back the way they’d come. “I am sure your military have procedures in place to deal with this kind of situation. I promise I will find out about the ambassador and your friends.”

Lor carried his mate back to their room and tucked him into the bed. He then used a sneaky spell to put Dillon to sleep so he knew the human couldn’t sneak away again as soon as his back was turned. His mate looked so fragile when he was asleep. He wished he knew if there had been any changes since their joining, but nothing had become apparent yet.

It only took a few calls to find the ambassador and also Timmy. Harry, however, was missing and hadn’t been seen since the day before.

Lor found himself shaking at the thought that he had nearly lost his mate before they had started their life together. If Dillon had gone in the building earlier, as was his habit, he could have been caught in the heart of the explosion, and who knows if he would have survived?

A knock on the door shocked Lor out of his morbid thoughts. Upon answering, he found the ambassador standing outside wringing his hands.

“Please, I need to see him for myself. I have to know he’s okay.” The male sounded close to tears and Lor waved him into the room.

“He is asleep, Ambassador. I did not want him trying to leave when I was not watching,” Lor said.

“Please call me Vincent. We’re practically family, and he definitely would’ve tried to leave. You have come to know him well in such a short time. I’m glad you two met. He’s been so happy these past weeks.”

“It makes me happy to ensure he is happy. Have you found anything else out about the bomb?”

Vincent shook his head. “Not much. It was set in the locker room and there was a timer set for ten minutes before the training session started. One trainee was still in the locker room when the bomb went off. Luckily he was in the toilet cubicle, which meant he was protected from the worst of the blast. He has broken bones and other injuries but he’ll survive. The blast was enough to take out most of the locker room, and part of the training room. Of course because the training room is at the front of the building, it also blew out the windows and caused the ceiling to collapse in the lobby.”

“So what will happen now?” Lor asked.

“Well, now we start an investigation in to who planted the bomb and how they got it into the compound. The consensus so far is that the intended targets were you, Dillon, or even maybe Ziel. You’re the only three who should have been in that room at that time. The trainees are usually finished and out before Dillon gets changed; only you and Ziel stay near him. There are times the others run late of course but the person who planted the bomb had to be aiming for someone who they were sure would be in that room at that time. Ziel has been included in the possible targets because there was meant to be a meeting this morning, so the minister should have been busy and Ziel should have been with you and Dillon.

“The compound has been put in to total lockdown, effective immediately. No one goes in and no one goes out.”

Lor looked at his sleeping mate. “I will find out who did this, and when I do I will rip them to pieces for putting my mate in danger.”

Vincent nodded his agreement, and Lor could see an answering anger in the male's eyes.

Chapter 10

The investigation led to one dead end after another. Dillon was going mad being confined to the compound.

Lor tried his best to keep him calm, but Dillon wasn't having any of it.

"Why hasn't anyone taken the credit for this?" Dillon raged one afternoon, two weeks after the explosion. "Why can't they find any leads? Why won't anyone tell me what's going on? Why hasn't anyone been able to find Harry? There are rumors going round that Harry is responsible, but that can't be true. It can't, can it? Oh God." Dillon clapped a hand over his mouth and ran for the bathroom.

Lor rushed after him and rubbed gently on his back until he had emptied the contents of his stomach and there was nothing else to come up.

"You have got to calm down, my mate," Lor said softly. "You are making yourself ill by worrying about things you cannot change. I know you are worried about your friend, but Vincent is doing everything he can to find him and clear his name.

"Should you not see someone to check this illness?"

Dillon shook his head. "I'm fine. As you said, I'm just worried, and this cold is lingering because I'm run-down. There's nothing a doctor can give me for a cold; they still haven't found a cure for it, even now."

Their conversation was interrupted by the computer console in the room coming to life. Lor helped Dillon to rise and handed him a damp washcloth as he led Dillon to the couch. Both of them looked at the screen and the breaking news that had caused it to activate.

"An explosion has rocked the president's house just hours after the president left for his annual vacation. So far no fatalities have been reported but at least four people have been taken to the hospital with minor injuries. Police have closed down the city and handed over control to the military. The military is saying they will be investigating, but there is no danger to the city. They are calling for citizens to not panic and to please stay in their homes as much as possible.

"In a message to the press, a group calling themselves 'People Responsible for Independence and Citizenship' has taken responsibility for the bombing and another that apparently happened on a military compound..."

The broadcast continued as Lor dropped onto the couch next to Dillon. His mate had gone even paler at the mention of the group taking responsibility.

“Dillon, love? This is good, is it not? Now the military have a lead to follow. You wanted someone to claim responsibility.”

Dillon shook his head. “Why did it have to be this group?”

“Why, what is it about this group?”

Dillon looked at Lor and Lor was shocked to see tears running down his normally strong mate's face.

“That group was set up by and is run by my father, Trevor Stewart. I used to shorten it when I was younger. If you take the first letters of the main words it makes the word *prick*, just without the K. I always thought it was a good name for a group of idiots and bigots. It won't take long for the military to make the connection. When they do, I will be the first one suspected of passing information and probably even of setting the bomb here.”

Lor sat back in shock. “But you were nearly killed by the bomb here. How could they think you would set a bomb to detonate when you would normally be in the place it was being set off in?”

“But I wasn't in the place. I was conveniently not where I would usually be that day. By setting that bomb off at the president's home when he wasn't there, the group is basically saying, they don't want to kill anyone, just make a statement.

“What doesn't make sense is this isn't like my father. He is usually spouting off about how all military and government officials should be lined up and shot. In the last few decades, the group has included gays, aliens, and technology companies in the list. They believe that without technology, the Earth wouldn't be able to contact any alien worlds, and therefore, we would be left alone. In the case of gays, that purist argument has been going on for centuries. The groups official line is as old as time; they believe gays are wrong because they can't reproduce naturally and therefore what's the point of the relationship? Relationships are to repopulate the Earth.

“This is a setup.” Dillon finished dropping his head to his hands.

Lor was appalled; how could humans be so advanced and yet so backward at the same time?

“We will work something out, my mate,” he said, hoping he wasn't making promises he couldn't keep. “You should go and rest a bit and then try and eat

something. You are still very ill, and I am worried. I will contact Vincent about the group.”

Dillon nodded tiredly and slowly made his way to the bed. After he was settled, he held up his arms, “Hold me, please?” he asked. Lor’s heart broke a little at the pleading tone, and he settled beside Dillon to hold him as he fell into a fitful sleep.

Lor watched Dillon sleep. He couldn’t believe that any parent could put a youngling—even an adult one—through this trauma.

His thoughts were broken into by the buzzing of Dillon’s cell going off on the bedside cabinet.

When Lor saw the name he quickly answered. “Harry, Dillon has been so worried about you. Are you okay? Where are you?”

“Stop talking and listen. I don’t have long.” Harry sounded terrified. “You need to meet me at three twenty-four Tenth Street. Don’t tell anyone where you’re going and don’t bring anyone with you. I will be there in half an hour. Be there and maybe we can get Dillon out of the mess he’s got himself into.”

Before Lor could say anything in reply, Harry had cut the signal.

Lor looked at the blank screen. What should he do? He could get out of the compound, that wasn’t a problem. Looking up the address was easy too. But should he go alone? What if it was a trap? Would his magic be enough of a defense? What would happen if he took someone with him?

He finally moved to the computer console and looked up the address Harry had given him. The location was estimated to be within fifteen minutes walking distance. He didn’t have long to make up his mind.

After a few more minutes of thinking, Lor had made a decision. He sent a message to Vincent telling him exactly what Harry had said and told him to meet him near the gates immediately. He received the acknowledgement as he was heading out the door. At the last minute he remembered to leave a note for Dillon. He simply said he had gone to visit Mora and would be back soon.

Vincent was waiting for him, and Lor muttered the spell he knew would make them both invisible. After sneaking past the guards, Lor used a spell to unlock the gate and they slipped out.

Vincent knew a shortcut, so Lor hurried along beside the fuming man. For an older man, Vincent looked like he could and would kill anyone who got in his way anytime soon.

When they arrived, they saw Harry straightaway, but Vincent stopped Lor from dropping the spell.

“Let’s look around a bit first. I want to make sure he is alone and that this isn’t a trap.” Lor nodded and they walked the perimeter. After they found nothing, Vincent spoke again, “Okay, drop the spell on yourself but leave me invisible. If he tries anything, I will have the advantage.”

Lor agreed and positioned himself right next to Harry before dropping the spell.

“Argh,” Harry yelled when Lor suddenly appeared next to him. “You freak. Why’d you have to do that?”

Lor was taken aback by the vehemence in the human’s tone. He knew Harry was a good friend of Dillon’s, and so he had assumed they shared views on the alien visitors. It was looking like that assumption was wrong. This meeting was starting to take on a whole different feeling.

“Where have you been? Dillon has been worried sick about you,” Lor said, trying to reach the part of Harry that was Dillon’s friend.

“Like I care what that alien-loving slut worries about. I was sent here to give you a message. I was told to tell you: If you want to save your human plaything, you’re to gather up him and all the *visitors* you came with and leave this planet, never to return. Also you’re to send out a message to all the planets you’re in contact with telling them Earth is not welcoming visitors any more. Any ships seen in Earth’s airspace will be shot down. And just in case you’re wondering how, we now have operatives within the military. By the time you send out the message, we will have control of the planet’s weapons.”

When Harry was finished, Lor was doing everything he could to control his magic and anger. He wanted to wring the neck of the stupid, bigoted—he had learned some new words being mated to Dillon—small-minded bastard.

Harry must have seen something in Lor’s eyes because he took a step backward in fear. But he came up against an invisible wall.

“What—” he started but was cut off by a blow to his head that sent him plummeting to the ground.

Lor dropped the spell on Vincent and saw the furious male standing over the unconscious form on the ground and rubbing his knuckles. “Damn, he has a hard head,” Vincent muttered before kicking Harry and turning to Lor.

“We need to get back to the compound; this was a trap,” Vincent said.

Lor frowned. “Even if this was a trap, it did not work. I am fine and you were here to stop him from hurting me.”

“He wasn’t here to hurt you. He was here to get you away from the compound. That can only mean they are going after Dillon.”

Lor thought about it as he picked up Harry under Vincent’s instructions and recited the invisibility spell again to cover them all. How could anyone get to Dillon? The compound was locked down; no one could get in or out—well except him, but he had magic.

As though he had read Lor’s thoughts, Vincent started talking, “As soon as I saw the broadcast this morning, I knew there was some sort of setup in the works. That group was set up by Dillon’s father and that man never did anything good. Just getting Dillon and your group to leave Earth would never be enough. He has wanted Dillon dead since he found out he was gay. If he can set Dillon up to take the fall for these bombings, then Dillon will be arrested and put in military prison. His father has enough of his group inside the prison—most of which I had a hand in putting there—that he would be able to ensure Dillon would be dead within days of being shut away.”

Lor quickened his step; every second he was away from his mate was a second when the enemy could get to him. Especially with how much he had worried himself sick over that traitor Harry.

Chapter 11

Dillon had woken to banging on the room door. “Compound security. Open up.”

He pulled himself out of the bed and yanked on a clean T-shirt before heading to the door, fighting nausea all the way.

The banging continued even as he pulled the door open.

“No need to break the door down, I’m moving as fast as I can,” he said, but found himself pushed back as four security guards pushed into the room.

“We have reason to believe you’re a danger to this compound and its personnel. You will come with us.”

“Okay just let me get dressed and throw up again, then we can go—” But Dillon was cut off as a needle was jabbed into his arm. “What the fuck? I would have come with you. I just needed to tell my mate about...” The world went black and his last thought was about Lor.

Lor dropped the spell as they slipped back into the compound and dumped Harry on the ground. He heard Vincent calling for the guards, but he was already running for his room. He arrived to find the door open and no Dillon.

“*No!*” he bellowed.

He ran out the room and next door only to find Mora and Ziel’s room empty. Checking the other rooms, he found Piet, Ver, Dyla, and Dyra missing as well.

By this time, Vincent had found him, and he grabbed the human by his shirt front. “Where are my mate and my crew?”

“I don’t know where Dillon is, but I may know where the others are,” Vincent said.

Lor dropped him. “Talk and walk—quickly.”

Vincent led the way down to the ground floor and then to another set of steps behind the reception desk. “I told Mora and Ziel about the safe room in the basement in case anything went wrong in the compound.”

At the bottom of the stairs was a huge door. Vincent placed his palm on the reader and a green light lit up, but the door didn’t open. Instead a screen came

to life, and Mora's face appeared. "Who is it and who is with you?" he demanded.

"It's Vincent and Lor. Let us in."

The door beeped and Lor slid in as soon as the gap was wide enough. He looked around wildly; nearly everyone was there, but there was no sign of Dillon or Ver.

"Where is Ver?" he demanded. "And where is my mate?"

Mora was already shaking his head. "I don't know where the others are. All I know is Ziel, Piet, and I arrived back from a walk around the compound to see Ver being led away by a guard. Ver saw us before the guard and signaled for us to run, so we came here. We met Dyla and Dyra on the way."

Lor dropped to his knees as his magic tried to take control. His magic wanted to find their mate and rip open anyone who had hurt him.

As soon as he had control, he stood and spun to face Vincent. "Why would you allow this to happen? Where would they be taken?"

Vincent was already shaking his head. "I didn't know." He held up a hand. "I don't run this compound. I am just here to meet with you and exchange information, but I know who would know where they are. Major Princeton runs the compound guards as though they are his personal guards. If anyone knows what the guards have done, he will. Come on," he said and turned toward the door.

"One thing that we have as an advantage is not many know about your magical abilities." He must have seen Mora's glare at Lor. "Oh, Dillon tells me everything—well okay, I had to get this out of him when he was ill, but... He is the closest thing I have to another son; my wife couldn't have any more children after we had Vance. I am telling you to use any and all abilities you have to find my son."

"Just get us to this Major Princeton, and we will get him to talk," Lor said.

Vincent led the way out and over to the main building. They were stopped by security as soon as they tried to enter. "Sorry sir, but the visitors are to be detained," one guard said to Vincent.

Vincent glared at the guard until the male stepped back. "These visitors are under my authority and therefore under my protection. We are going to see Major Princeton. If you wish to try and stop me, by all means try. I should warn you that my son is not the only master of mixed martial arts in the family. It

would be embarrassing for a big young man like you to be bested by a sixty-year-old, now wouldn't it?"

The guard looked around for support, but the others had backed off at Vincent's threat. The guards waved them in, and they proceeded the rest of the way unchallenged.

Vincent banged once on an office door before opening it and leading the way inside. The male behind the desk stood and looked outraged at the intrusion.

"Vincent, what is the meaning of this. Why would you bring these dangerous creatures in here? I left orders for them to be detained."

"Well," said Vincent leaning against the edge of the desk, "that answers my first question about who gave the orders for my visitors to be detained. Now my next question is, what have you done with my son?"

The major stopped spluttering and went pale. "I don't know what you mean. I haven't given any orders concerning your son. I gave orders for the visitors to be detained, nothing more. They were to have been taken down to the holding cells in the basement of this building." The male was talking far too fast by the end, and his words were running into one another.

Mora glanced at his wrist comm. "Looks like Ver is on his way here."

The door opened again and admitted Ver. "Their cells here are easier to break out of than my bedroom was back home," Ver declared, straightening his clothes. Two cries of relief preceded Dyla and Dyra throwing themselves at Ver and hugging the life out of him.

Lor grabbed Ver's arm. "What about Dillon? Wasn't he with you?"

Ver frowned. "Dillon? No, he wasn't in the cells." Ver's eyes went wide. "But there was talk about the traitor being found and that he was to be taken for special questioning at a secure location."

Lor spun on the major. "Where is my mate? You will regret anything that happens to him," he growled.

The major stared openmouthed at Ver and Lor. "How did you get out of those cells? They're meant to be escape proof." He turned to Lor. "And what do you mean your mate? Dillon is military. I will do whatever I feel is necessary to protect this compound and this planet."

Vincent got in the major's face. "My son is not a traitor nor is he part of the military. He is a civilian and therefore accountable to civilian laws and police.

You have no right to detain him, other than to hand him over to the proper authority. Now, *where is my son?*” The major stepped back away from Vincent’s yelling.

“I’ve told you I don’t have any idea what you’re on about.” The major was sweating, and Lor could see his eyes darting around as though looking for an escape route.

“I’ve had enough of this,” Lor said, moving forward. He placed one hand on the major’s head and the other on Vincent’s. A few muttered words and both males stiffened as Lor started riffling through the major’s thoughts and sending the relevant ones straight to Vincent’s mind. The major tried to fight but Lor used another spell to freeze him in place. When he had all he thought they would need, he released both spells and ducked as the major swung at him.

The male didn’t get the chance to try again as Vincent stepped in. In three moves he had the major laid out on the floor, unconscious.

“Come on. We can leave the garbage for the guards. They will do as I say until they get different orders. That much authority I do have—for now. I know where Dillon is, and I’m going to need all of you to help me get him out.”

Vincent took off at a run and the others all followed behind.

Chapter 12

Dillon woke up slowly. He shook his head trying to clear the remnants of sleep. He realized he was lying down and tried to bring his hand up to rub his eyes only to find his arms were shackled to the surface he was on. Checking the rest of his body, he found his ankles were shackled too and there was a band across his middle pinning him down completely.

He considered calling out to find out who was holding him but decided to wait and see what happened first. It wasn't long before there was the sound of a door opening nearby.

"I see you're awake, Mr. Stewart. I was starting to worry the guards had overdosed you." The voice sounded formal and stiff. A man moved into Dillon's view; he wore the white coat of a doctor and was making notes on a clipboard.

"Now, can you tell me your date of birth and current mailing address?" the doctor asked, pen poised.

"No," Dillon stated.

The doctor frowned. "What do you mean, no? Can't you remember?"

"Oh, I remember. You asked if I could tell you. The answer is no. My address has been classified information since I was fifteen. Ambassador Vincent didn't want my father finding me. And as for my date of birth, that is none of your business and I refuse to tell you."

The doctor went red in the face. "You are a detainee here. You don't have the right to refuse to answer my questions. If you do try and refuse, you will be made to answer. Now I have your date of birth here. Please confirm it."

Dillon recited his date of birth, deciding to pick his battles carefully until he knew where he was and why.

After answering a few more personal questions—not including his current address—the doctor was satisfied and left Dillon alone again.

The doctor returned with two guards, one of whom unlocked the shackles while the other kept a weapon trained on Dillon. Dillon's hands were recuffed behind him and he was escorted down a corridor.

They arrived in another corridor that held cells at regular intervals. Dillon was shoved into one, and the door was slammed shut.

“Hey, what about these cuffs?” he called, but all the reply he got was laughter.

When he was sure he was alone, Dillon started working his shoulders. Not many people knew, but Dillon was actually double jointed. One of the few advantages of this condition was that he could pop his joints in and out of their sockets at will. It was painful, but bearable.

With a few moves, he popped his shoulders out of their sockets, and before the pain could get too bad, he slipped his arms under his ass and rolled on the floor to get his legs through and then brought his arms to the front of his body. He popped his shoulders back in and the pain disappeared immediately. Breathing hard, he sat down on one of three beds that were in the cell and dropped his head to his hands.

What was he going to do? He didn't know where he was. He had no way of contacting anyone. He didn't know what was going to happen to him.

His thoughts were scattered when he heard the cell door being opened again. He brought his knees up to cover his hands and sat back on the bed.

A guard pushed a large swearing man into the cell and slammed the door after him. The man held onto the bars and shouted a few obscenities at the retreating guard but then gave up and turned. His gaze fixed on Dillon.

“So you're the new inmate. Pretty little thing aren't you?” The man leered, towering over Dillon.

“Don't get any ideas,” Dillon said more calmly than he felt. “You really don't want to be made to look like an idiot, do you?”

The man raised an eyebrow and leaned in as though to kiss Dillon. Dillon brought his legs up and kicked the man straight in the groin. As the man folded up, Dillon kicked him in the head and the man flipped backward, whacking solidly into the floor, unconscious.

Dillon breathed a sigh of relief for the reprieve and stayed huddled on the bed watching the man for any sign that he was waking up for round two.

Dillon woke from a doze to hear the cell door being opened.

“Breakfast,” the guard called and shoved a tray in the room before slamming the door again.

The man on the floor stirred and sniffed as the food came to a stop near him. He glared at Dillon then pulled the entire tray over to himself. Dillon figured he was going hungry, but then he still felt nauseated, and so he really didn't care about getting any food.

After the man had finished, he stood and Dillon tensed ready for another fight, but the man just moved to the little sink at the side of the cell.

The rest of the day was uneventful until the guard herded another man into the cell and slammed the door.

"Joe," the new man said to the other man with a nod.

"Rob," Joe said, returning the nod.

"This the pretty faggot that Stewart wanted dealt with?" Rob asked with a head jerk toward Dillon. "Why is he still sitting there? Why haven't you started yet? Major Princeton said we wouldn't have long before someone was bound to come looking for him."

At those words, Dillon's blood ran cold; his father was behind all this? And what was Major Princeton's role in this? His hands were still cuffed and had actually started bleeding from where he had tried to twist his wrists free but the cuffs were too tight. He knew it wouldn't do him any good to call out. The guards had to be in on it to have put these men in with him—by the sound of it, at Princeton's orders.

"I tried to start but he blindsided me," Joe said in disgust, obviously not liking that he had to admit Dillon had got the drop on him. "Watch out for his feet. The bugger is quick," he added as they both approached Dillon warily.

Dillon was still trying to think clearly. His stomach was rumbling with both hunger and nausea. He didn't know how long it had been since he had last eaten. He was sure whatever drugs he had been given weren't helping how tired he was or the dizziness he was feeling.

Dillon tried to shift on the bed to get a better position, but that proved to be a mistake as his stomach cramped and his head spun. Rob was surprisingly fast and grabbed his feet before he could recover his senses. He found himself being pulled off the bed and hung upside down by his legs. Joe then started raining blows down on Dillon's legs and groin. He was also kicking Dillon in the face and chest. Dillon tried to raise his hands to protect his face but then he saw a kick being aimed for his stomach. Somewhere in the back of his mind, a voice was telling him to protect his stomach. If this stomach illness he had been

suffering with was more than a cold, then being kicked—and or punched—could make it ten times worse. A few moments debate with himself made the decision that he would rather his face was messed up than have a possible illness made worse and not be able to recover at all, if he—by some miracle—got away. Bruises and bones healed, internal injuries were more unknown still.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside the cell and the door swung open again.

All Dillon could think was that more were coming to finish him off. All he wanted was to be back in the arms of his mate.

Chapter 13

Lor was running behind Vincent when he heard Mora and Ziel starting to argue.

“You are not coming with us. You will go back to the ship with the twins. I need to know you are safe,” Mora was saying.

“But Dillon is my friend also. I want to help him as I know he would help me if I needed him to.”

Lor saw Mora stop and pull Ziel into a hug, “I know, my mate, but I must insist. Please go to the ship with Dyra and Dyla. Help them to check the ship and make sure we have everything we will need for leaving this planet as soon as we can.”

Ziel nodded against Mora’s chest. “Okay, my mate. But please do not get hurt or I will be very angry with you.”

Ziel and the twins veered off toward the landing site as soon as they were outside. Vincent stopped to speak to the guards on duty. “Major Princeton is in his office. He may even be awake by now. I want him placed under arrest for crimes against the military. I want him locked up. He is to talk to no one until I have filed the charges with the president. If this is not done, I will assume any guard disobeying me is a traitor too. Is that understood?” The guards snapped to attention and turned to carry out his orders.

Vincent turned and carried on running until they got to the gates.

“Open the gates now. Anyone who wants to argue with me about where my visitors and I can and can’t go will be arrested and taken away either willingly or unconscious. Take your pick.”

One guard stepped up. “Ambassador, you know the compound is on lockdown. No one can leave at this—” The guard stopped speaking when Vincent’s fist met his face and sent him unconscious to the floor.

“Who’s next?” Vincent asked. Lor had to try not to let hysterical laughter bubble up past the fear in his heart as all the guards started shaking their heads and one very quickly opened the gate. He was getting a new respect for the human his mate considered his father. He also wanted to have a long talk with Vincent about just who he was to have such authority.

“Come on. I have a car round the corner.”

Luckily the car Vincent took them to was large enough for all five of them to get in. As soon as the doors were shut, Vincent hit a pedal and the car sped off, causing Lor to grab onto a handle above the door.

The journey was short, but each passing minute felt like an eternity. They pulled up outside what looked like an abandoned building in the middle of what also looked like an abandoned neighborhood.

Vincent brought the car to a stop with a screeching noise and they all piled out.

Vincent waved his ID over the access panel by the big main doors, but the red light stayed lit.

“Fucking bastards! How did they manage to set up a security that my ID can’t breach?” Vincent muttered, turning to Lor. “Get us in and quickly.”

Lor nodded, and after a shared look with Ver and Mora, they joined hands and started muttering quickly. The lock on the door fizzed and spat sparks out before flashing red and green as the door swung open.

An alarm blared inside and personnel were running toward the front door, weapons drawn.

“I am Ambassador Marston,” Vincent called out in a loud voice. “You are holding my son here. I want to be taken to him now, or I will find him myself. God help any of you that get in my way.”

One male pushed to the front. He wore a long white coat and had a groveling expression on his face. “I am Doctor Kalvins, and I am sorry, Ambassador, but we do not to have anyone by your name here at this time. This is a high security prison for traitors.”

Vincent gripped the front of the doctor’s shirt and pulled him up close. “Listen to me, you bastard. You are going to take me to Dillon Stewart, now.”

The male’s eyes widened at the name and then his face went deathly white.

“D-D-Dillon Stew-w-w-wart is your son? I was told he was a traitor,” he stuttered.

“My son is no traitor. Now take us to him.”

Vincent dropped him and Kalvins ran off as soon as he found his footing. He led them down so many corridors Lor wondered if he even knew what way he was meant to be going.

Eventually they entered a corridor that was lined by doors, each door had a number on it and a small barred window in it. As he passed, Lor saw inside some of the cells and wished he hadn't. Some of the humans behind the doors looked to barely be alive. Some were bleeding, some were just curled up, but all were thin and obviously underfed.

What had they had time to do to Dillon? His mate was already ill and weak. Surely they wouldn't hurt an ill human?

Finally they arrived at a door and Lor's magic rose and pushed his control to its limits. The sound of Dillon sobbing and of flesh hitting flesh echoed through the barred window.

Lor roared in fury and shoved everyone out of his way as he approached the door. The doctor who had led them cowered back as Lor set his magic loose and the door crashed inward.

What he saw when he entered the room caused Lor to lose the very last bit of his control. He lashed out at the male who was holding his mate first. He knocked the male away from his mate and into the far wall of the cell with a crash. As he did this, he used another spell to freeze Dillon until he saw Mora reach him. Vincent was there too, pulling Dillon to the floor. Lor then concentrated on the two males now cowering against the wall. Using his magic he pulled them both up like puppets and pinned them to the wall.

"Why are you hurting this male?" he demanded.

"We were paid to," one male sobbed, hanging uselessly from his magical bindings.

"Who paid you?" Lor demanded.

"A man called Stewart paid us a visit. He said if we killed the man that the guards would take us to, we would be doing our world a great service. He said the man was a traitor, but due to lack of evidence, he couldn't be convicted. He said our sentences would be wiped out, and we would be released with enough money to start over. We didn't believe him, but then we were contacted by Major Princeton, and he confirmed everything Stewart had said."

Lor snorted his thought on the prospects of these males being let out. With a last bit of magic, he knocked both males unconscious.

He let them drop and turned to check on Dillon. He rushed over when he saw Mora leaning over him still muttering spells to unlock the cuffs on Dillon's

wrists. He shoved his way in and took over from Mora. Dillon was his mate, and he would stabilize him enough to be moved, not anyone else. He could see bruises all over Dillon except his stomach and part of his groin area. Lor used his magic to dull the pain and then he set a few of the broken bones he found.

He knew in the back of his mind that he was going to pay for using raw magic with no backup later, but at that moment, his only thought was helping his mate.

Vaguely he heard shouting behind him, but he only registered snatches of the words.

“That is my son... ..wait ’til I have him out of here and better... Heads are going to roll for this... ..no idea who you’re messing with... ..full investigation into the running of this facility... I saw the condition of some of your inmates... ..cease whatever you’re doing here, immediately... I do have that authority...”

Mora finally got Lor’s attention by kneeling on the opposite side of Dillon and laying a hand over Lor’s where he was still trying to push as much magic into Dillon as he could.

“Lor, we need to move him. Let us get him back to the compound. As soon as he can be moved more, we will make arrangements to return home. I assume you and he have spoken about going home?”

Lor nodded as he stared down at Dillon. “Yes. He is worried about leaving Vincent and Eve. But otherwise he said nothing is keeping him on Earth, and he has always wanted to explore the stars.”

Mora patted his hand and rose. Lor took a deep breath and picked Dillon up.

Vincent was there as he turned. “How is he? Please tell me he’s going to be okay.”

Lor shifted slightly so he could free a hand to pat Vincent on the shoulder. “He will be fine. He is badly bruised and he had a few broken bones, but I have partially mended those, and I have eased the pain. Now we need to get him to some medical help for the rest.”

Vincent nodded fast and led the way out of the cell. Lor saw that the doctor was still waiting there, wringing his hands. “Please, I’m a doctor. Let me look at him.”

Vincent rounded on him with a growl. “You work in a secret military prison, and you expect me to trust you with my son? I can only guess at what

you do to get inmates to talk, the drugs you use, or worse the torture. Don't think I'm stupid. You are getting nowhere near my son. Now move!"

The group left with no one else trying to speak to them. Lor cradled Dillon on his lap for the entire journey back to the compound. He wanted to just take Dillon straight to the ship and go home, but he knew Dillon needed to be checked properly. He would wait, but as soon as they were able, they were going home to start a proper life together somewhere safe.

They found the compound quiet, and Lor was surprised when the guards saluted Vincent smartly.

"Ambassador, Major Harrison sends his best wishes for your son and asks that you update him as soon as you have seen to your son's health."

Vincent looked stunned for a moment. "Major Harrison? I was only gone two hours and Timmy manages to get himself promoted?" He let out a sigh. "Very well, inform the *major* I will be along shortly."

Vincent led the way across the compound and to a small building Lor hadn't visited before. A small sign by the door said "Medical Center." The group pushed inside and were met by a middle-aged human male.

"Vincent, I was told to be ready for Dillon as a casualty. What's going on?" the male said.

"Fred, there's too much to explain now, but as you can see Dillon has been beaten and maybe drugged. I'll fill you in on the rest when you've checked and treated him."

Fred nodded and waved the group forward. He led them into a small room and had Lor settle his mate on a small bed.

Lor looked on in worry as Fred used all manner of instruments to prod and poke Dillon. He took blood by sticking some painful instrument in Dillon's arm, and Lor had to wince in pain even though it wasn't him being poked.

Drugged? Lor hadn't even thought of that when he was numbing the pain and healing the bones. His species would just knock someone out with magic; they would never give someone an unknown substance. Lor shuddered at the thought. The other species on his planet used potions sometimes, but he had never known them to be harmful or be used as a weapon.

Fred was examining Dillon's bruises and had reached his stomach, where he was frowning. Lor didn't understand Dillon. Why had he protected his stomach

and not another part that he could have reached with cuffed hands? And why was Fred taking so long over an undamaged area? What was so interesting?

Finally Fred looked up. "I want everyone out of this room except Vincent."

Lor shook his head. "He is my mate. I am not leaving him. Not again. He is never leaving my sight again."

Fred looked at him for a long moment before nodding. "Okay, you and Vincent stay. The rest of you, out. You can wait in the reception area."

After the door was shut, Fred rounded on Lor.

"You said he's your mate? Since you're alien to us, what does that mean?"

Lor frowned. "It means he is my other half. He completes me. I think in your terms you would call Dillon my husband."

"Have you had sex with him? Been intimate with him?"

Lor scowled. "That is none of your business."

"It's important. Please answer the question."

"Fine. Yes, we have been intimate. Now, why do you need to know our personal business?"

"I'll show you," Fred said and pulled a screen over to the bed. He picked up a handheld device and after pressing a few buttons the screen came to life. He moved the hand with the small device over Dillon's body and then stopped near Dillon's unbruised abdomen. On the screen was a flashing white light, and after Fred tapped a few buttons, the image cleared a bit to show an outline glowing around the flashing light.

Lor looked over at Vincent. The human had gone pale and was shaking. Lor moved quickly and wrapped an arm around Vincent's shoulders.

"Is that what I think it is?" Vincent asked Fred.

Fred nodded. "Congratulations, Vincent, you're going to be a granddad."

Lor was still figuring out what the males were talking about when Vincent went slack in his grip and he had to lower the now unconscious male to the floor.

Chapter 14

Lor watched as Fred waved a small bottle under Vincent's nose that made him start coughing. He helped Vincent sit up and then looked at Fred. The doctor seemed to find something immensely amusing.

“What is going on? And what is a granddad?” Lor asked. He was exhausted and close to sleep, but he wanted to know that Dillon was okay.

Fred looked at Lor. “It means you're going to be a father. I assume you know what that means?”

Lor stared at Fred and then turned to stare at Dillon. A father? But that would mean that...

“A child?” Lor whispered, just as the world went black.

Dillon woke to find Ziel dozing in a chair nearby. Careful not to wake the sleeping alien, he looked around and worked out he must be in the medical center on the compound. He'd recognize Fred's decorating talents anywhere. The walls were a shade of green and there were posters everywhere advertising things Dillon didn't want to look at.

He worked slowly, flexing each muscle and cataloguing the aches and pains he felt. No broken bones, that was a surprise!

He must have moved too much because Ziel startled awake, blinking in the dim morning light of the room. His eyes focused on Dillon and he grinned. “You are awake. That is great. How do you feel? I have to get Vincent and Doctor Fred.” Ziel was babbling so much Dillon had to grin.

Then he felt the familiar nausea in his stomach. “Ziel, please, I need to throw up. Find something quick,” Dillon said frantically, cutting off Ziel.

Ziel stopped, but instead of getting Dillon what he'd ask for, the alien placed a hand on Dillon's lower abdomen, and he felt the nausea ease off, then stop altogether. Dillon looked at Ziel in astonishment. “How did you do that?” he asked.

Ziel blushed. “Um, you know we all have magic. Well my magic specializes in healing. Healers actually have the least magical abilities—usually we are levels one and two—but we are the most respected and protected group. Mages

rarely get ill but even magical beings break bones and get ill occasionally. Healers can link with a mage's own magic and use it to heal them, repairing damage from the inside out. I do not have the ability to heal broken bones; my healing specialty is usually what I have been told you call obstetrics. I help beings who are pregnant.”

Dillon looked at Ziel with new eyes. The alien had always just seemed almost like an excited kid, one who enjoyed cooking and asking unending questions. Now Dillon was seeing a side of Ziel that commanded respect.

“So you look after the females who need care when they have their younglings?”

“I look after some females yes...” Ziel agreed, but his voice trailed off as though there was more that he wasn't sure whether to say or not.

“But there's more,” Dillon prodded. He was always curious and he had the sudden thought that maybe males could get pregnant on Debhunder.

Ziel shook his head. Obviously he wasn't going to talk so Dillon changed the subject. “Where's Lor? I must admit I thought he would be here. Don't tell me you actually got him to leave?” Dillon tried to keep his tone light but it had hurt not to see his mate when he woke.

“Oh, I almost forgot. He is asleep in the next room. He exhausted himself using too much magic.” Dillon had to smile at how Ziel sounded while telling Dillon about what had happened—even though he was a bit worried about Lor now. “Being a level five mage, he actually can heal broken bones—even though healing is not his specialty—but it takes a lot out of him. Add to that, the way he helped Mora and Ver get into the prison you were in, then he beat up the men who were hurting you. Well as soon as he found out about the baby, his body finally had enough, and he fell asleep on the floor. He...” Ziel stopped with a look of horror on his face.

Dillon thought back over what he had said and then realized, “Baby? What baby?”

Ziel shook his head hard and clapped his hands over his mouth, Dillon thought back over the last few weeks. The nausea and aches. Then he thought about how Ziel had cured his nausea with a small touch of magic, but Ziel specialized in obstetrics. Things finally fell into place and Dillon was shocked he hadn't at least had an inkling of an idea before. Of course he was a man, so why would he think of it? But then his lover/husband was a magical alien so he should have thought of all the possibilities.

He put a hand on his abdomen and thought about the possibilities. If the military found out, he would be turned in to a specimen to be examined and investigated. The child would most likely be taken from him, by force if necessary.

He was glad the he and Lor had discussed Dillon leaving Earth and going home with Lor. After some in-depth conversations, Dillon had agreed to leave. Although he would miss Vincent, Eve, and Vance, he also knew he had no other ties to Earth—his job with the military would be over now, after the way he had just been treated. Lor, on the other hand, had an entire family on Debhunder, plus a job he loved, and friends. Dillon was going to give his attorney a list of where his trust fund money should go each month and tell him to sell his apartment and split the proceeds between the same charities too.

Dillon was still thinking when a heavenly voice spoke from the doorway, “Good morning, my mate.”

He turned to see Lor standing there, looking just the same as always. Smiling, Dillon held out a hand waiting for Lor to come and sit with him to speak, “Morning, but it’s not good until I get my morning kiss.”

Lor grinned and leaned down to rectify his oversight.

When he let Dillon up for air, Lor turned serious. “We need to talk,” he said.

Dillon thought about letting him try and find the words to talk about the baby but he took pity instead. Lor looked like a kid sitting outside the principal’s office waiting to find out their punishment. “It wouldn’t have anything to do with the fact you’ve managed to knock me up, would it? You know, getting me pregnant,” he added when Lor looked confused.

Dillon had to laugh at the expression on Lor’s face. He only wished he had a camera. Then he regretted laughing as the nausea returned with a vengeance. Ziel was quick to lay a hand on Dillon’s stomach and the feeling receded, but he could still feel it there, waiting to pounce like a stalking tiger. He hoped that he could find a more permanent solution soon, or he would be hanging around Ziel a lot.

“Thanks,” Dillon gasped out to Ziel, when he could speak again. He then turned to Lor. “Any ideas on how this happened? I mean I know how but what I mean is... Oh you must know what I mean. I’m a man; we don’t have the right internal organs to create or grow a baby.”

Lor scratched his head. “Um, I think we need to talk to Fred. He hasn’t explained it to me yet. I’ve only just woken up.”

Dillon nodded, seeing his cell on the bedside table he picked it up and tapped a few buttons.

Vincent answered almost straightaway. “Dillon, are you feeling better?”

“I’m feeling better than I should... Grandad!” He just couldn’t help the teasing comment slipping out.

Vincent grinned. “They told you? That’s great.”

“Yep they told me. But we need more information, so can you find Fred and bring him here? I know this is new to him but the premise of pregnancy should be the same and we need to sort some things out—quickly.”

Vincent agreed and hung up.

Within half an hour, Dillon, Ziel, and Lor had been joined by Mora, Fred, and Vincent.

Dillon started the discussion, “First, Fred, please tell me how on earth did I, as a male, end up pregnant. And please don’t start with any jokes about the birds and the bees.”

Fred took a breath. “I did some scans while you were asleep. From what I can see a—for want of a better word—a sack has grown just under your large intestines, against your bladder. Now most of this is going to be guess work, but from what I can make out, from what Ziel has explained, and from my own scans, when you and Lor were intimate, his semen must have been absorbed through your rectum walls and, from what information Ziel has given me, Lor’s magic flowed through your body picking up some of your DNA at the same time. The magic combined both your DNAs and... well the rest you can work out for yourself. Apparently there are other species on their planet that this has happened to.”

Dillon listened then thought of something. “Please tell me there is no record of your scans?”

Fred shook his head. “Vincent helped me to ensure all records of any scans were wiped before they could be picked up by the backup system.”

Dillon nodded. “Good, I don’t want them to try and stop me leaving Earth.”

Vincent let out a cry. "You're leaving Earth?"

Dillon stared at the man he considered his father. "How can I stay here? The child would be taken, and we would both be looked on as specimens to be examined and experimented on. And anyway of course I would go with my mate."

Vincent looked devastated. "I guess I hadn't thought that far ahead. But of course you're right. I don't know what Eve, Vance, and I will do. My career is over and Vance will be kicked out by association. Although I know he was trying to get out anyway. The military are trying to get him to work more on weapons rather than the things that will help the citizens."

Mora had been listening with seeming more interest as Vincent spoke. "You know you could all come with us," he said, causing everyone to look at him. "Debhunder always welcomes all species. Also, I have met and spoken with your son many times over the time we have been here. His ideas are nothing short of brilliant and his inventions would greatly benefit my people. We can get the supplies he needs and fund his work."

Vincent stared openmouthed at Mora. Finally he spoke, "I will certainly tell him about your offer, and I will also have to speak to Eve. How long do we have?"

Dillon thought about what he needed to do and how long he would need to finalize a few things. "I think we need three days. That will give Eve and Vance time to make a decision, and give us all time to put our affairs in order." He turned to Lor. "Also I would like to show you my apartment and pick up a few personal items."

Lor smiled. "I would be honored to see where you have lived."

Dillon grinned. "Great." He turned to Fred. "So is there anything you can do for this nausea? And is there anything I should avoid, not eat, not do, et cetera?"

Fred went on to explain all the rules of pregnancy and Dillon started to wish he hadn't asked.

Dillon took Lor to his apartment. They'd stopped at his attorney's office on the way and had left instructions for anything left in the apartment in three days' time to be sold and split as Dillon had instructed for the rest of the money.

When they arrived at Dillon's apartment, Dillon was surprised when Lor pulled him into a fierce hug. He buried his face in Dillon's shoulder and just clung.

"Hey, what's wrong, love?" Dillon asked alarmed at Lor's sudden behavior.

"I almost lost you," came the muffled reply. "I did not know where you were, or even if you were alive. Then when we found you, you were so badly hurt. Now knowing you were pregnant as well, I could have lost you and our youngling."

Dillon held Lor tight and spoke calmly until Lor relaxed. "I won't leave you. I'm coming home with you, and you will be there to protect me and our child. No more worrying. You hear me?"

Lor smiled and nodded. Dillon pulled him into a long, slow kiss that left them both breathless. "That is just a preview of what you may get later," Dillon whispered in Lor's ear, causing the other male to smile, and Dillon grinned.

He gave Lor a quick tour of the apartment: bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and small living room. He then left Lor to explore while he found a case to use.

He packed his clothes and books first, then he moved on to a small cabinet in the living room. In it were pictures of his family in happier times, and pictures of Vincent, Eve, and Vance.

The last thing he did was dig out a small ornate box from a drawer by his bed. He sat on the bed and looked at the contents.

"What is that?" Lor asked, startling Dillon.

"Oh, this is what a distant uncle left me when he died. At first I didn't know who he was but Vincent found out for me. He was the only other man in my family to be openly gay. He was married for twenty years before his husband died. When he heard my dad had thrown me out, he changed his will. Apparently he was going to contact me but didn't get the chance. He died of a heart attack and his lawyer was the one who contacted me instead."

Opening the box he picked up the rings it contained. Dillon had an idea, taking Lor's hand he slipped one of the rings on the third finger of his left hand. Looking into Lor's eyes, he said, "Please wear this ring to show we are mated and that we will always be together."

Lor's eyes filled with tears. "I would be honored to wear this ring if you do the same." And so saying he picked up the other ring and slid it onto the same

finger as Dillon had. Dillon took it as fate that both rings fit perfectly; he hoped his uncle would be happy for him.

“Come on, let’s get back. We need to get ready for the departure. Seeing as everything has gone quicker than expected, we should be able to leave tomorrow instead of waiting longer and taking any chances of people finding out anything we don’t want them knowing.” Dillon stood and held out his hand to his mate.

Chapter 15

The day of the departure dawned clear and sunny. Dillon was standing at the window of their room on the ship and Lor was watching him from the bed. The view was good for Lor as Dillon was naked, just how he always liked to see his mate. They had decided to sleep on the ship as Mora wanted to be able to protect Ziel better and everyone wanted to be able to leave if they felt threatened again in any way.

The last three days had been busy making sure everything was done and the hope of an early departure had been lost. Lor had assured Dillon he would still be able to contact Earth by sending text documents. This would be of help if the lawyers had any questions.

Dillon had been happier since Vincent, Eve, and Vance had decided to take Mora up on his offer and join them.

“Are you ready, my mate?” Lor asked, getting Dillon to turn back to him.

“Yes, I’m fine. Just still tired, but at least the sickness seems to have eased off. Ziel’s magic is working wonders.”

Lor held his arms out, and Dillon smiled before moving to join him on the bed. They snuggled together until they were interrupted by the alarm Dillon had set.

Dillon sighed as he pulled himself out the bed. Lor could see it was hard work for him to even get up, let alone get showered, dressed and be ready to leave within the next two hours.

Lor had an idea. “Mate, come stand here,” he said pointing to the space in front of him.

Dillon frowned but did as he asked. “We don’t have much time you know.”

Lor placed a hand on Dillon’s face. “Close your eyes, love.” He sometimes liked using the human endearments that he’d found on the database. When Dillon had closed his eyes, Lor muttered a few fast spells and Dillon gasped. Opening his eyes Dillon looked down to see he was now clean and dressed in his favorite clothes.

Smiling, he flung his arms round Lor and hugged him tight. “You’re handy to have around at times,” he whispered and then giggled at Lor’s growl.

Getting all the luggage on the small ship was a test of Mora and Piet's patience. But finally they had everything stowed neatly away and Vincent, Eve, and Vance had been found a spare cabin to share.

Major Timmy Harrison had been instrumental in helping them to keep everything quiet and hidden from the higher ups in the military. The military knew the aliens were leaving, and they were happy. They knew that they had made a bad impression, but Vincent and Timmy had managed to assure them that the aliens would be willing to visit again in the future, once Earth had made a few changes to their security. The military had disavowed all knowledge of Major Princeton's actions and Dillon's father, brother, and mother had all been taken in for questioning. Dillon and Vincent had said though that there wasn't enough evidence to make anything stick and so they were likely to be released soon.

All the paperwork with the lawyers had been done on paper only—not on any computer. Nondisclosure agreements, along with a large paycheck, had ensured they kept quiet and followed the instructions to do nothing until after the group had left the planet.

Vance had made copies of all his research, and Timmy had even managed to get his hands on some of the materials they may need to make prototypes and such. Vincent had used his contacts in the arboretum to get some tree cuttings for Ziel, along with instructions on how to build an arboretum of their own—which earned him a squeal and a hug.

Everything was set and they were ready to leave.

"I'm going to miss you all," Timmy was saying to Vincent and Dillon. Lor and the rest of the alien crew had gone to get the ship ready to go, leaving the humans to say their good-byes alone.

"We'll stay in touch, and who knows, you could always come and visit one day," Vincent said, giving the young man a hug. "First, you need to get this compound whipped into shape. Kick some ass and use everything Dillon has taught you if you have to. Plus you need to find out just how deep the corruption has spread. If or when any aliens visit again, there can't be a repeat of this. Just because the major has mysteriously died, that doesn't end it. Someone had to have him killed."

Timmy nodded, and after giving Dillon one last hug, he headed back behind the safe line so he wouldn't get hurt as the ship took off.

Lor strapped Dillon into a chair on the bridge, the other humans had decided to watch the takeoff from the observation lounge, but Lor wanted Dillon nearby.

Ziel had taken the seat next to Dillon to help if he started feeling nauseous again. No one was sure how flying would affect Dillon's body.

"Final warning," Mora called out and Lor took his seat next to his superior.

"Dyla, please tell Earth we are ready for takeoff. Dyra, please set all systems to green and on Dyla's mark engage all engines." Setting all systems to green meant the weapons would be online, they now knew some humans posed a threat to them and they wanted to be ready to defend themselves if they needed to.

"Yes, sir," both females said.

Earth replied that they were cleared to launch and Dyra finished flipping all the switches to green. The ship slowly rose into the air and was soon leaving the compound behind.

Lor watched out the corner of his eyes as Dillon stared at the main screen, and he wondered what Dillon was thinking.

Dillon was stunned as he watched the compound getting smaller, then his stomach cramped and he took a deep breath, trying to battle the nausea.

"Stay calm and breathe," Ziel said quietly and laid a hand on Dillon muttering the now familiar words that dampened the nausea down to something Dillon could manage to control himself.

"We are now exiting Earth's airspace," came the voice of one of the twins—Dillon still couldn't tell them apart. He looked away from Ziel to see the Earth getting smaller. This was it; he would almost certainly never return to Earth again. This was the start of his new life.

He laid a hand over the small bump he was starting to get, then he looked over at Lor to see him smiling over at him. He had his husband, his baby, and his family here with him. He didn't need anything else.

They arrived on Debhunder in six Earth-hours and landed on the surface. Lor had shown Dillon pictures of what to expect during the journey but nothing prepared him for the barren surface of the planet. The sun beat down on the

hard unforgiving ground, and as they unloaded the ship, Dillon was sweating standing in the heat. He had borrowed one of Mora's cloaks and hoods, as they were nearest in size, but even with the spell on it, he could still feel the unrelenting heat of the planet. Lor, Ver, and Piet worked together to spell the luggage to follow them, and they hurried toward a tunnel in the side of a mountain they had landed near.

As soon as Dillon entered the tunnel, he felt the immediate relief of coolness.

A pair of guards appeared as they rounded a corner, but as soon as they saw Mora they bowed respectfully and stood aside.

Dillon made a mental note to ask Lor more questions about the hierarchy of the planet; he didn't want to insult someone by mistake.

"This is where we part ways for a while. Lor will show you all where you'll be staying," Mora said as he led Ziel and the twins up a side corridor. Apparently there were reports to file.

Ziel called over his shoulder, "If you need me, Lor knows how to contact me." And with a wave, they were gone.

Piet and Ver took their leave next at another corridor, saying they wanted to get something decent to eat and then Ver would go looking for his mates to see if they were finished. He confided he hated anything to do with reports.

Lor continued for a while more before heading down a long corridor that opened out at the end. Dillon and the rest of the humans gasped. Before them was a complete landscape of green grass, a flowing river, and flowers. There seemed to be some sort of light emanating from the ceiling of the never ending cavern.

"Welcome to my home country," Lor said. "This country is called Timmeck and is ruled by Mora and Ziel. We could not tell you on Earth as there was a worry that Mora could be taken as a bargaining tool to get us to use our magic for them."

Dillon was only half listening; he was still staring at the wonderful view. In the distance, he could see houses, and he could even hear children—younglings—playing somewhere.

"Come, my—our—home is this way." Lor led them down a paved path toward the river. He continued to talk as they walked. "The house next to mine is empty and so will be your home Vincent, unless you wish to move of course.

“Now Timmeck is one of four countries that make up Debhunder. The other three are Murfiad, Zhern, and Grijheh. I will ensure you have full access to our database, and you can study the history and current events of the different places. “

Lor finally stopped outside two small two-story cottages. One was colored blue and the other was a dark purple. Lor pushed a few buttons by the door of the purple house and had Vincent, Eve, and Vance place their palms on a pad so the house would open for them.

As Vincent and his family entered the house, with promises to meet up after they were settled, their luggage followed them and the door shut.

Dillon then found himself getting the full attention of his mate.

He let out a yelp when Lor swept him into his arms and carried him to the other cottage. The door opened unprompted; Lor carried him inside and laid him on the couch.

“I read it is a human custom to be carried across the threshold,” Lor whispered in Dillon’s ear, eliciting a shiver. “Welcome home, my mate.”

Lor then took his mouth in a kiss that seemed to go on and on.

Epilogue

Six months later

“If you ever touch me again I will kill you. Do you understand?” Dillon yelled at Lor, as another pain ripped through his abdomen.

The pains had started the day before, right in the middle of a training session Dillon was giving Ziel. It felt like the baby was trying to push its way through Dillon’s stomach to get out.

All Dillon could think of was a sci-fi film he had seen once, and the alien being born hadn’t been a nice sight.

Ziel had sent for Lor immediately, and they had worked together to get Dillon to the interspecies medical center.

Dillon had been under the care of the center since a month after he arrived on the planet. They had found out that magic no longer worked on the nausea, and Lor had brought him to the center when he couldn’t keep any food or drink down for long.

Dillon had been shocked to be introduced to a doctor from an unpronounceable planet. He was blue—at least all the skin Dillon could see was—with green eyes and red hair. His name was also unpronounceable, but he said Dillon could call him Bill. The other thing was Bill only had three fingers; it looked to Dillon as though someone had taken a human hand and melded the little finger to the ring finger and the index to the middle finger. It made for an odd feeling when he was being examined.

Bill had managed to find a potion of some sort that had stopped Dillon’s nausea, and Dillon had gained weight rapidly after that. He had continued training Ziel, using Lor and Vincent as demonstration aids most of the time as he could barely waddle let alone train. It had already been decided that Dillon would set up mixed martial arts courses for any being who wanted to learn—after he had given birth and gotten back to full fitness.

Dillon had so far met four different species mated to other mages—not including Bill of course, who had been the first. All the beings were interested in hearing about Earth, and Dillon found he spent a lot of time in the meadow near their home just sitting and chatting to other mates.

Another pain brought him out of his trip down memory lane and screaming into the present. Lor was petting his head like he was a dog, and he turned to snarl at him, "If you can't be useful, please leave me alone."

Lor rolled his eyes and just moved out of Bill's way as he approached.

"Right, Dillon, it's going to go just as we discussed, okay?"

"Just get on with it, please," Dillon begged.

"Okay, here we go."

Dillon felt the prick of a tiny needle in his thigh and the pain was numbed down to a dull ache. He had already been warned that the pain couldn't be numbed completely because of his biology. The injection would also freeze him from the waist down so he couldn't move a muscle. A piece of material, like leather, was slipped between his teeth and Bill picked up a sharp tool, similar to a scalpel. Lor was at his side instantly and Dillon gripped his hand as Bill made the first incision. Dull pain ripped through him and he tried to moan round the material. It felt like his stomach was cramping up completely. But there was no relief to be had. Magic had been tried as an alternative but it turned out the baby made Dillon immune to certain types of magic. And of course it was just Dillon's luck it had to include the pain-reducing spells. Bill had therefore researched Earth medicine and managed to combine several different substances to work with Dillon's new biology.

Then he heard a high-pitched scream.

"Congratulations. It is female," Bill said as the baby was handed to Ziel, and Bill turned his attention back to Dillon. "Just let me close you up and you can hold her."

Dillon didn't feel Bill closing the incision. He had already been shown the alien technology that would seal the wound completely with almost no scar. His attention was on his daughter as Ziel cleaned her and wrapped her in a pink blanket.

Dillon felt another prick on his thigh, and feeling started coming back to all his limbs, but now there was no pain. He reached up to take the baby.

Ziel handed her over with joy on his face. Dillon looked down into the face of his and Lor's child for the first time, and he felt the joy and love in his heart. Lor leaned in from the other side, and they both just stared for the longest time.

"Adelaide," Dillon said. "Hello, Adelaide."

Lor nodded; they had discussed names for both male and female. Dillon had asked that if the baby was a girl that she be named after his grandmother who had left him his trust fund. Lor had readily agreed, and they had then both agreed to shorten it to Ada so it was easier for people to say and spell.

Adelaide was peering up at them with glowing green eyes. She was human in appearance but her skin had the same paleness of Lor. Her hair was brown, and she was currently trying to kick her way out of the blanket covering her.

He felt Lor slide onto the bed beside him, and then Lor wrapped his arms round both him and Adelaide so they were together as a family. This was the start of something beautiful, and Dillon just knew that Adelaide was going to be important in the future.

There was a flash and Dillon looked up to see Ziel had Vincent's very old Polaroid camera. The photo was dispensed and Dillon told Lor to shake it until the picture appeared. Slowly a picture of the three of them was revealed. Their first family portrait.

"Let's cover you up properly," Bill said, and pulled the blanket that had been covering Dillon's groin up to cover his stomach as well. "You have people waiting outside. Can they come in?"

Dillon looked at Lor and Lor nodded. "Let them in," he said.

The door was opened to Mora, Vincent, Eve, Vance, Piet, Ver, and the twins, all crowding round. They all filed in and Dillon found himself surrounded by friends and family.

Looking around, he couldn't think of any way he could be happier than he was at that moment in time. This was the life he wanted to live forever.

Lor leaned down and kissed him softly.

"I love you, my mate," Lor whispered. "You and the little one are mine now and always."

"We give ourselves to you freely and without condition," Dillon replied, rewording what he had said at their first joining. This got him another, much longer, kiss.

The End

Author Bio

Carol is a stay-at-home mum to a hyperactive ten-year-old, as well as an active volunteer within her community.

She started writing gay romance when she came across the Wednesday Brief Writers' Group on one of their member's websites. She has since started her own blog and also posts to other websites.

She lives in the South East of the UK and enjoys all sorts of activities, including crocheting, cross-stitch, and of course lots of reading.

She is very thankful to her husband and daughter for all their support and for not complaining too much when she ignores them for long periods of time.

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