



*A Breath of
Fresh Air*
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A Breath of Fresh Air
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Kar took a deep breath as the Danaus pierced the cloud cover and the surface of the fifth planet appeared beneath them. "If your little stunt lands us in the Guardians' jail, I will kick your ass."

Jay snorted at Kar's threat before he did land, setting the Danaus on the designated landing pad. The space port was crowded, leaving just enough space for the maneuver, but the ship always answered Jay's touch to perfection, and the landing went without a hitch.

"No way they'll identify the ship," he drawled, pivoting in his nav chair to face Kar. His grin was pure arrogance. "After the work I did reprogramming the ID codes, even the ship maker wouldn't recognize her."

He patted the navigation console as he said so, as though petting a favorite animal. Kar rolled his eyes at him.

"Easy for you to say. If you're wrong, all you risk is being sent back to the Lodge. They wouldn't be so lenient with Will and me."

Kar watched Jay's hand rise to scratch the lines tattooed around his neck. The gesture was almost automatic whenever the topic of the Lodge came up, as was Jay's suddenly closed-off expression.

"If you're scared," Jay started, his blue eyes very dark as they met Kar's, but he didn't go any further.

At that moment, Will entered the cockpit, practically bouncing in his excitement. He was the one who had talked Jay into this, and once Kar's two crewmen—his two lovers—had had their minds set on this, there had been nothing Kar could do or say to deter them. Sometimes, being the captain didn't seem to mean much.

"Are you two ready, then?" Will asked, grinning widely enough that the long scar on his cheek was no longer a straight line. "Come on, we're losing time!"

Jay was out of his chair in a blink, the grin firmly back in place. Kar passed a tired hand over his face, feeling the prickle of stubble beneath his fingers. He didn't care about this planet's festival, not when being here felt like tempting fate. After all, this had been the place of their most daring heist, and they were back a solar year to the day after they had barely escaped the Guardians. Then again, it was precisely because of the date that they were here, celebrating the anniversary of their coming together, and if Kar didn't play along, he had a feeling he wouldn't get laid in quite some time as punishment.

Sighing, he stood from his chair and shook his head, resigned. "Let's go see what this festival is all about, then."

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As soon as the doors of the Danaus opened and the three of them peeked out, it became clear that they were overdressed. Every other visitor approaching the registration desk was bare-chested if they were male, or wearing gauzy blouses if

they were female. Will glanced at Jay, an eyebrow raised in a silent question. Jay answered with a lazy grin. As one, they tugged their shirts over their heads and threw them into the cargo bay before following Kar down the ramp. He gave them a small eye roll when he noticed, but the hint of a smile curling his lips also showed he didn't mind the view.

The registration went without problem. Of the three of them, only Jay's ID was real – it was useless to try to forge an ID for someone who wore tattoos from the Lodge. The attendant gave a start when he saw the black lines on Jay's neck, and he bowed his head low as he welcomed 'Sir Jake' to the planet. Jay gritted his teeth but said nothing. Neither Will nor Kar were offered the same welcome.

Just past the registration desk, a short man wearing white wings and a pink bed sheet was handing out brochures. Will took one, and started reading aloud as they reached the town's main street.

"The Fertile Moon Festival is the union of an old religious festival on Terra Prime and a natural event occurring on Reillian Seven's only moon."

The street was so busy that another reveler bumped into Will, making him stumble. Jay's hand caught his left shoulder just half a second before Kar's gripped his right arm. The lingering touches sent a shiver down his back. He flashed a smile at each of them before resuming his reading, loud enough so that they would hear him over the joyous songs that were broadcasted through the town.

"Back on Terra Prime, revealing one's feelings to another person could only be done once a year, on a special day called 'Valiant Times Day,' for it required much courage to risk—"

This time Will would have fallen flat on his face if Jay and Kar hadn't still been holding him. He glanced back, catching only a glimpse of the woman who had crashed into him before she disappeared into the crowd. He blinked at what he saw of her, however, which was a lot. Taking a good look around him for the first time, he realized that she wasn't the only one wearing no more than scraps of fabric around her waist and chest, leaving the rest of her exposed to eyes, and a few daring hands. The men were dressed—or not dressed—in a similar fashion, but while the women's short skirts were loose and flowing, the fabric covering the men was adjusted tightly, and left very little to the imagination.

"Well, that's..." He blinked, tearing his gaze away from pale, round, firm-looking breasts that a too-small scrap of fabric failed to cover properly. His cheeks felt as though they were on fire. "Interesting."

At his side, Kar snorted. "Interesting?" he repeated. "I'd have said indecent."

But when Will glanced at him, Kar's eyes were detailing the well-muscled ass of a man walking a few steps in front of them. Will laughed and would have poked fun at him, but Jay chuckled on his other side.

"You two make me laugh. This is *nothing*. There's a festival like this one on a third of the planets the Lodge controls, and for most of them clothes are completely optional."

Will's surprise at hearing Jay mention the Lodge so casually didn't last, blown away by the rest of his comment.

"What do you mean, optional?" The heat in his face wasn't abating in the slightest. He cleared his throat and leaned in to ask more quietly, "You mean they go around naked?"

Jay nodded, laughing quietly when he met Will's wide eyes. "I bet they didn't have any orgy festival on your planet, huh?"

Before Will could come up with a coherent reply, or even summon enough blood back to his brain to think beyond the images Jay's words has created in his mind, Kar's hand squeezed his shoulder. Will shivered, unconsciously pushing back against Kar, seeking more contact.

"Over there," Kar said, pointing to one side of the street with his free hand. "That looks like a bar. Let's get out of this crowd."

A few minutes later, the three of them were seated around a small table on the bar's second floor, from which they had a plunging view onto the informal parade. They each had a pint of local beer in front of them, but Will was too busy staring to think of drinking. From above, the amount of exposed flesh seemed even more overwhelming.

"Did you know it would be like this?" Kar asked, and a glance his way revealed that the question was directed at Jay, who shrugged.

"I didn't *know*," he said after taking a sip of his beer. "But I suspected. What did *you* expect with a name like 'Fertile Moon Festival'?"

Kar's reply was a quiet grunt, drowned in a large gulp of beer. He set his glass down again with a loud clank. "Whatever I expected, an orgy wasn't part of it."

Once again, the word caused flashes of naked bodies and intertwining limbs to dance through Will's mind. His mouth suddenly felt very dry, and he took a sip of alcohol. It was cool, but too sweet, and didn't help much.

"Well, I have a feeling at least one person here wouldn't mind all that much," Jay said, chuckling, and when Will met his amused gaze, there was no doubt whom he meant.

"That's not true!" he sputtered, heat once again flooding his face and now extending down his chest. "I'm not... I wouldn't..." Unable to keep looking at Jay, he dropped his gaze to the table, and the brochure he had left there. He picked it up with trembling hands. "It doesn't say anything about orgies in here," he said, scanning the text. "Just about how they mixed the Terra Prime festival and the mating season of the laineards on the moon, so that all who..."

His voice trailed off as he finished reading silently. He blinked several times. Surely they couldn't mean...

Kar pulled the brochure from his hands and snorted after a few seconds. "So that all who declare their feelings during the festival may experience the joy of being

welcomed by the open arms and hearts of those for whom they feel attraction and desire." He quirked an eyebrow at Jay. "Translation?"

"Fucking with whatever partners you wish with no consequence or fear of rejection." Jay raised his glass in a toast. "Sounds like an orgy to me."

He sounded amused, but not shocked or aroused, and Will could only wonder if he had participated in those other festivals. He wasn't sure he wanted to know.

"But there's got to be more than that," Will protested weakly, taking hold of the brochure again. "Dances, or contests, or..."

Once again, words failed him. Letting the piece of paper fall to the table, he rubbed both hands up his arms, chasing away the goosebumps that had erupted over his skin. It was merely because he was cold, he told himself. Not because he was intrigued by the "Most creative position" contest or the "Best taste" one. Not at all, no.

"Usually, festivals like this get rowdier at nightfall," Jay said idly as he sipped on his beer. "In broad daylight, people don't do much more than steal touches, but when it gets dark..."

His grin was practically obscene. Will swallowed hard and tried not to imagine what things were like at nightfall, tried not to think of Jay sliding through the crowd, nude and glorious, and calling to Will with a crooked finger and an inviting smile. There would be other hands on them as they came together, and—

"All right, we're out of here." Voice gruff, Kar was already pushing his chair back and standing.

"But..." Will blinked wildly and looked around them for an excuse, anything, to stay a little longer. He gestured at the glass in front of Kar. "You haven't even finished your drink!"

"I never cared for watered-down beer," Kar replied, then his eyes narrowed, pinning Will down. "Don't tell me you actually want to stay and—"

"Of course not," Will interrupted hurriedly. He almost knocked over his own unfinished glass when he stood. "This is all... indecent. Like you said."

Somehow, as both Jay and Kar peered at him, Will had a feeling he wasn't fooling either of them.

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After spending months at a time in a closed ship with two other people, Jay had become very good at reading their expressions, reactions, even the inflections of their voices—and that had been *before* he slept with them.

Moments after they entered the city, he could tell that Kar was not only out of his element, he also found the whole festival distasteful. Remnants of Jay's education reminded him that Carellese natives were often prudish in their attitudes. His knowledge of Kar said it was simpler than that: if he was interested in someone, Kar

only had eyes for that person—or persons, as the case may be. Jay had expected Kar's reaction, and he wasn't overly surprised when the captain cut their visit short.

Will's reaction was what Jay had been curious about. Will would soon be twenty, he'd been traveling on Kar's ship for a year and half, had adapted very fast to having two lovers in his bed—or inside him—but in many things he was still naïve. A waitress flirting with him in a bar could make him blush and stutter without even trying very hard, and while he wasn't shy about initiating sex, he sometimes looked at Jay and Kar when they were together as though he were both embarrassed to watch and unable to look away. The contrast always made Jay want to grin.

It was this same mix of lustful need and awkwardness that permeated each of Will's steps as they returned to the ship, as well as each of the stolen glances he cast at the crowd around them. He was returning to the Danaus because that was what Kar had ordered and because the well-raised boy inside him probably insisted it was the right thing to do, but deep down, he wouldn't have minded staying a little longer, Jay was sure.

Jay had made up his mind before they reached the ship again. He observed Kar and Will from the corner of his eye, and couldn't help but grin at the thought of what was to come. Of course, he wasn't the only one who had become good at reading expressions, and Kar noticed. While Will was busy closing the door, Kar leaned in close to Jay, his voice low and wary.

"Whenever you get that look, you're planning something. Should I be worried?"

Jay laughed and grinned at him. "Not worried, no. I just thought as anniversaries go, this one was kind of a bust. But maybe a little reenactment..."

He didn't complete the offer, but Kar understood what he meant and asked, "How low would we have to go?"

They started walking toward the cockpit, Will following a few feet behind them. "Upper atmosphere, I'd think," Jay said quietly. "A few seconds at most if I open all the vents. Not enough to get the attention of the Guardians."

"Not all the vents," Kar said, clucking his tongue. "The cockpit—"

"True. Seal it off until I get us where we won't be bothered."

Kar nodded. They'd reached the cockpit. His hand curled on Jay's upper arm, heavy and tight, stopping him and angling his body toward Kar's. His free hand settled at the back of Jay's head and pulled him for a fast, harsh kiss that made Jay grin widely when he pulled back.

"See you two in a few, then," he said, and winked at Will before turning to the cockpit. Kar didn't let go of his arm, however. When Jay looked at him askance, Kar gave him a lopsided smile.

"It's been a while since I took my ship for a ride," Kar said. His eyes were bright, shining. "Why don't I take her for a breath of fresh air, and you and Will just... relax for a bit?"

A sharp intake of breath behind them made it clear that Will had just caught on with the program. Clever boy. Kar glanced at him, and his smile sharpened. "I won't be long," he said as he stepped inside the cockpit. "Keep some for me."

Jay laughed.

~*~

Kar closed the airtight door behind him and, before setting a course for the planet's largest moon, made sure part of the screen wall facing him displayed the camera from his quarters. It was the largest cabin, although not by much, and the three of them had been sharing it for a year. It didn't take long before Jay and Will appeared, and Kar kept an eye on them as they undressed each other, stealing sweet kisses and naughty touches.

When he maneuvered the Danaus into the moon's atmosphere and opened the aeration vents, they were already on the bed, kissing and stroking each other to full hardness, lazy movements that were only a promise for more. Kar could tell the very moment when the pheromones hit them, flooding their bodies with that heated and all-consuming desire he remembered so well. Their gestures were faster, suddenly, less controlled, and the need that was still their own but amplified beyond thought was shining in every touch of gentle fingertips against Will's scarred cheek, every nip of not-so-careful teeth against Jay's tattooed neck.

Kar had to let go of the navigation controls for an instant to unbutton his pants and relieve the pressure on his cock. He wasn't under the influence of the pheromones, not yet, but he was already aching, and more than ready to join them.

Raising the volume of the video feed with one hand, he closed the vents with the other and navigated away from the moon. He plotted the first jump while listening to the moans Jay pulled from Will, as expertly as ever, by swallowing hard around his cock. Kar wasn't sure if they had purposefully arranged themselves to give the camera—and him—the best possible view, but he was grateful for it, even if it meant he had to redo his calculations twice before entering the jump coordinates in the computer.

None too soon, the ship was far enough from the gravity pull of the moon to jump. Kar placed his thumb on the button and prepared to give the customary warning, but the spectacle playing out on the screen made his throat turn dry in an instant. Jay had just let go of Will's cock with a wet popping noise, despite Will's pleas to be allowed to come. Under Kar's fascinated gaze—he'd never, ever tire of watching them together—Jay pushed back Will's thighs, folding him in two and exposing his ass to the camera. Jay's fingers were already there, twisting, stretching, opening Will and drawing the sweetest sounds from his lips.

"Please... can't wait... need you... inside..."

With arms and legs, Will drew Jay to him, over him, their bodies aligned with that familiarity that made everything easier but still made stars shine in both their eyes at that first slow slide in.

Kar pushed the jump button just as Jay stilled, ready to pull back. The ship shuddered, lurched, jumped—and the acceleration shoved Jay deeper inside Will.

They both howled, backs rigid for an instant before they started rutting against each other, their movements little more than a blur. If Kar's hand hadn't been clenched at the base of his cock, he would have come from the sight and their moans alone.

"Just two more jumps," he muttered to himself, forcing his gaze away from the screen. "Just two more jumps and we'll be far enough from everything. Just two."

In the end, one more jump was all he could manage before he had to join them. It was hours before the effects of the pheromones dissipated, but then they didn't really need aphrodisiacs, did they?

About the Author

Kallysten's most exciting accomplishment to date was to cross a few thousand miles and an ocean to pursue (and catch!) the love of her life. She has been writing for fifteen years, and always enjoyed sharing her stories and listening to the readers' reactions. She has followed her muse into space, into the past and the future, into worlds filled with vampires and magic, and can't wait to see where they will find love next.

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