



A Mutual Discovery—Marie Harte

A Mutual Discovery by Marie Harte

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A Mutual Discovery

Shelby Ballentine sat on the cold floor and glared from the locked door to the man responsible for her incarceration. “If you’d been thinking with your brain instead of your glands, I’d be spending my liberty off this stinkin’ ship, instead of stuck in here with you.”

Seated on the lone bed, Garrett Sanders shrugged. Shelby swore to herself, irritated she couldn’t stop from noticing how his muscles bunched and tightened with every movement of that perfect body. His decontamination suit consisted only of a pair of very thin trousers.

She crossed her arms over her chest, aware her own thin one piece would reveal more about her reaction to his nearness than she wanted. But at least it covered her from neck to knee.

“Come on, Shelby. Why don’t you finally admit it? You’ve been waiting for a chance for us to be together.”

He flashed her that smile, the one that had enamored half the crew, both female and male, of the *Space Ship Lorie*. He’d been that charming his entire life, since they’d first played together as schoolmates. Since she’d first fallen headlong into love with the sought-after jerk.

“You wish.” She snorted. A good thing he had no telepathic skills. The *S.S. Lorie*, the Earth’s first orbiting transport ship, tolerated telekinetics and normals only. As one of a handful of telekinetics, Shelby supposed she should have felt closer to Garrett, another of her kind.

Instead, he annoyed her with that charming smile, captivating stare, and kissable mouth.

She shoved a hank of hair from her face, aware of Garrett’s intent gaze. “What?” she snapped.

“Is that color real? I’ve always wondered,” he murmured.

Not as if it’s any of your business. She flushed, irritated at the pleasure she felt because he thought about her. “Yeah, so what?”

“So I like it. That red looks like fire.”

She so wished her body would stop responding to every little thing he said. “It’s a recessive trait, one linked to my abilities,” she granted, allowing the somewhat normal conversation to continue. After all, because of his stupidity, they were now stuck together in this bland, musty room for the next twenty-four hours. *With a bed.* And a televiewer, she hurried to add. Plenty of entertainment to be had with one’s clothes on.

“So what’s your deal?” she asked him. “Why did you volunteer for this assignment? I thought you were all set to marry some bimbo on Earth.”

He smirked. “Bimbo, huh? You really have a poor opinion of me, don’t you?”

She sniffed. “I don’t care who you marry or don’t marry. Just seems like a waste to get hitched with someone you don’t know.”

“Just what I said to my parents,” he said with a sly smile that told her she was missing the joke. “When I rejected the anonymous match, they drafted me for the *Lorie.*”

Startled, she eyed him with curiosity. “Me too. I mean, I also refused an arranged marriage, so my parents sent me here to clear the way for their more dutiful daughters.” Hence her rejection of all things male.

He shook his head. “You’d think being the sole telekinetics in our families would grant us more consideration. I mean, this job gave my family a crapload of currency.”

“Yeah.” Shelby was still fuming about that. All the work she did out here in space, and her money-grubbing family reaped the rewards. “This is the first time off I’ve had in six months.”

He flinched. “I’m really sorry. I know you won’t believe this, but it was an accident.” He looked left and right, saw the camera in the corner of the room above them, and concentrated. In seconds, the camera shorted and snapped off its frame.

She gasped. “Why did you do that?”

“You really want to be stuck together like specimens under a microscope?”

He had a point. “No, I guess not.”

“About being stuck here with me...”

“I know all about it.” An incoming package had been red flagged as having possible contaminants. And Garrett, Mr. Shipper of the Month, had shifted it to her table where she’d unwittingly opened it.

He flushed, and she found his reticence interesting. “I was distracted.”

She stared, openmouthed. “Distracted? Tell me something I don’t know. I’m here, aren’t I?” Truthfully, she should have double-checked the marker. But Garrett never made mistakes. Or at least, he never used to.

“Mike pissed me off.” He frowned.

“Mike from Inner Service?”

“Yeah.”

Mike gave her the creeps. Every time she turned around, she saw him staring at her. “What did he do?”

He growled, “He’s so into you it’s not funny.”

Jealousy? That, she hadn’t expected. “Huh?”

“Yeah, he’s got it really bad for the ‘hottie with the hot hair.’ I told him to go fu—ah, to take his interests elsewhere. That you were spoken for.”

She blinked, not sure how to respond. Needing to release the tension steadily building within her, she stood and began to pace.

“Spoken for, hmm?” she asked.

He said nothing, and she turned to ask him again but froze at the hungry look on his face. Garrett’s gaze traveled from her head to her toes and lingered at various spots in between.

“Yeah,” he said in a thick voice. He coughed to clear his throat but didn’t look away. “Spoken for.”

“By who? You?” she asked in amazement. “The man who’s had more fun than a three ringed circus come to town? The man who satisfied Jen, Layla, and Benita *in a row* last weekend?” Her slutty best friends. She hadn’t spoken to any of them in days.

To her astonishment, he laughed.

“I don’t think that’s funny,” she bit out. She wanted to punch something in frustration. To desire a man so much in demand irked her, but no more than knowing how much he flitted from woman to woman without pause. Hell. She’d been in love with Garrett for years, but she had yet to admit it to anyone but herself. And she still hid her feelings behind forced dislike.

“No, it really is funny. I was getting a lot of flak from Harry and his crew. They, ah, they seem to have a thing for blue eyes in sector three.”

She couldn't blame them, she thought, as she stared into eyes that matched the sapphires of her favorite ring. Understanding dawned. "So Jen and the others covered for you last weekend to protect you from Harry's crew? What about all the other women you've been spending time with since you arrived?"

He stood and crossed to her with a smile on his face. It didn't escape her notice that up close he dwarfed her, and that she liked it. "You seem to know an awful lot about my love life." Garrett trailed a finger over her cheek, and her gaze unconsciously sought the bed all too close.

"I—I, ah, there's not much else to do on board ship."

"Sure there is." He looked past her at the bed then met her startled gaze. "I mean, from the bed we have clear sight of the televiewer. I bet we can see what's on at home from here."

She blew out a breath, annoyed that just when she thought she knew what he was thinking, she didn't. For the briefest second, she'd thought he meant to suggest something else they might do...

"Are you telling me you haven't been with anyone since you boarded?" she asked, unable to stop herself from putting yet another foot in her mouth.

"Nope. Just waiting for a stubborn little 'hot-hair' to come to her senses and say yes. This mistake is the best thing that's ever happened to me."

"Say yes to what exactly?" Her heart raced. Could she really believe a man like Garrett, with those bold blue eyes, dark, thick hair, and chiseled frame, wasn't interested in anyone but her? For years she'd pined for him, only to watch him smile and laugh with other girls while she did her best to ignore him.

"How about a date?"

"Ah, a date?" Caught in his stare, she couldn't think. When his mouth suddenly covered hers, she was in no way prepared for the stunning heat that filled her body.

He lifted his mouth to rasp, "Yeah. One that involves some male groveling, more truth telling, and some mutual intimate discovery." He groaned and pulled her closer, so that she could feel every part of him against her. "There's been no one but you since you turned down our marriage, Shelby."

She blinked at him, stunned. "*What?* That was you?"

He nodded. “I turned it down too, until they told me who I’d rejected. I’ve been in love with you since you broke my space garage in third grade, but you’ve never give me the time of day.”

Love? She kissed him again, melting in his arms. “Oh no, you don’t. I’ve loved *you* since the day you pulled my hair in kindergarten,” she breathed.

He tugged her hair again. “Still love me?”

“Why don’t we work on that *mutual intimate discovery* and find out?”

And they did.

Marie Harte is a multipublished author of over two dozen stories. Her next book for Samhain, *In Plain Sight*, is a shapeshifting, red hot romance due out in June. You can read more at www.marieharte.com and at her blog, <http://marieharte.blogspot.com>.