

While embarking on separate quests in pursuit of duty, an honorable Warrior and a courageous Healer plunge together into danger and adventure to find redemption, and a love neither expected. Ronan Macaulester is a tough warrior from the planet Maxxon, known for its overabundance of men, its fierce warrior culture, and its vast riches. He has traveled to the backwater planet Ares seeking his brother. When he finds his brother murdered, he flees to the coast, hoping to catch the inter-galactic shuttle, his only means of escape from a planet where outsiders are not welcome. He stumbles upon Galatea (Lata) Riesling, whose virginity is being auctioned in a religious rite. Ronan cannot leave her to this degradation. Raised on a planet with too few women, he's been trained first and foremost to protect women. Galatea is a courageous and intelligent woman who wants to find a way to pull her planet out of poverty and ignorance. She will undergo the humiliation of the auction because she believes she can only help her countrywomen by working within the constraints of her society's strict religious customs. Ronan delays his escape, winning Galatea at the auction, but awakening the ire of her countrymen. While fleeing the Temple after the auction, Ronan is seriously wounded. Galatea, a renowned Healer, insists on traveling with him to tend his injury. They share a kiss while waiting to pay the auction ransom and Galatea finds herself becoming fascinated with this man who is unlike any other she's ever known. But her lifelong goal of improving the lives of her fellow Areans precludes any thought of her leaving the planet, and she knows Ronan's life is forfeit if he stays. Ronan enjoys their shared kiss, but it convinces him that the sooner he leaves her, the better. Though he enjoys women, he never becomes emotionally involved. He's never resolved the guilt he feels over the death of his first love. On the hurried and dangerous journey, sexual tension simmers between them. Galatea knows well enough how to entice Ronan. He, meanwhile, suffers under the torment of knowing it is his right under their customs to take her at any time. Only his own honor stops him, as he knows they cannot be mated for life as his customs require. When they stop for a night, Galatea tries to convince him to perform the Initiation rite. Ronan fights the temptation. In his culture, a man takes a virgin only when he intends to mate for life. Despite his intentions, Ronan succumbs to her. After they make love, Galatea realizes that, in giving her body, she has risked her heart - a heart she cannot give away if she is to fulfill her goals on her home planet. Ronan realizes that Galatea has awakened emotions he'd thought had died with his first love. They arrive at the coast to discover the shuttle has been driven off by the Temple guard. They find a scientist who has developed a risky, untried transport which may allow them to catch up with the shuttle. But Ronan's protective side emerges, and he refuses to allow Galatea to go with him on the experimental transport. Galatea fumes at his decision, but accepts it because her goals require her presence on Ares. Then she discovers she could help her people more by leaving the planet to establish economic links and trade elsewhere than by staying behind. She convinces Ronan to modify his protective instincts and, together, they take the dangerous journey to rendezvous with the shuttle. In choosing to embark on this adventure, Galatea learns she has the courage and the ability to save not only her countrywomen, but also the man whose heart she has claimed. Ronan learns that he can only truly love someone who matches his strength with her own.

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