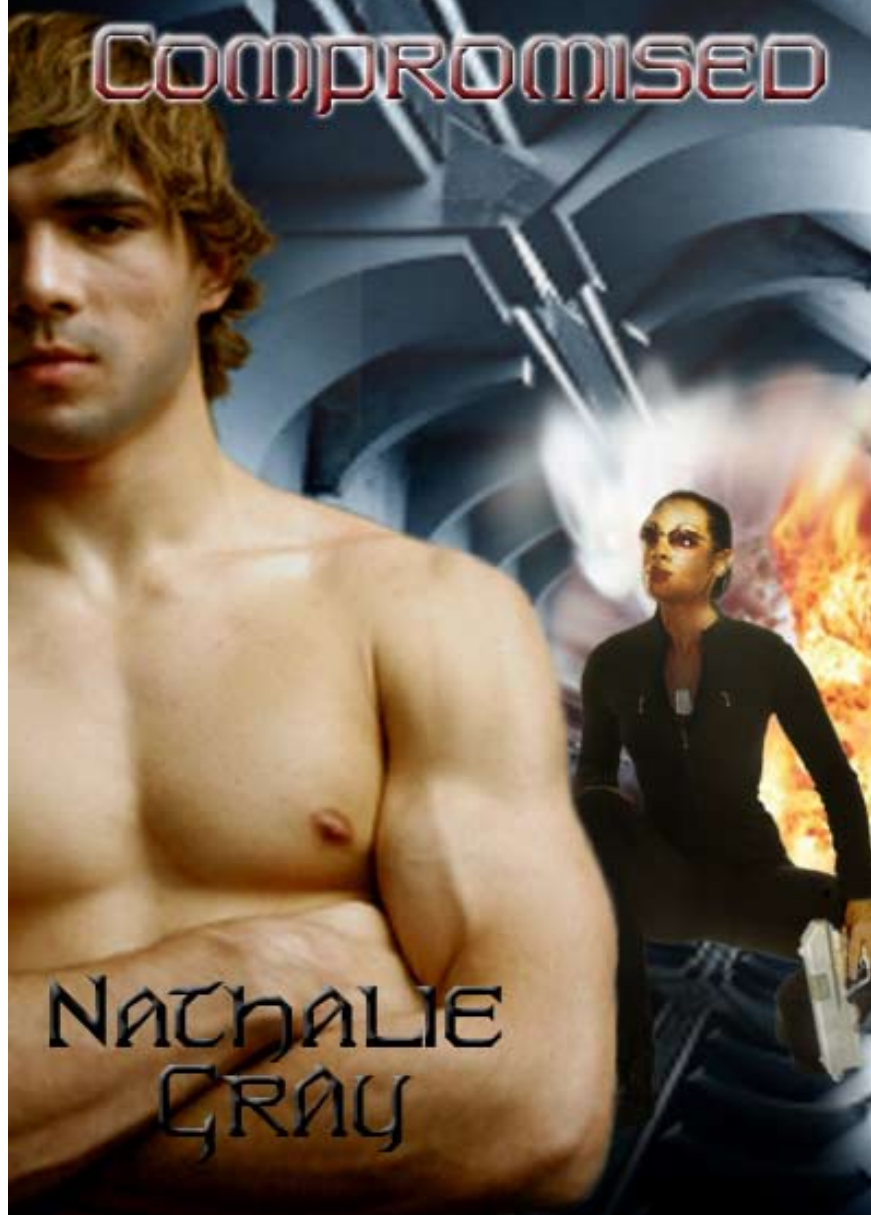


Red Sage Presents

COMPROMISED

NATHALIE
GRAY





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Compromised

* * *

by Nathalie Gray

To My Reader:

Jojo and Mat have had a false start. It happens. They loved each other but let things get in the way. Things like their dangerous jobs, their Type A personalities, and the fate of the entire human race. But when life throws them back at each other, they intend to make it work. And damn the torpedoes!

Compromised: Chapter 1

“Make me a door, Four.”

Four, a burly soldier more scarred than decorated, nodded at One and methodically burned through the space station’s exterior hatch. When the blowtorch punctured the thick plating, steam hissed out of the hull. He stepped back so the team could crowd around him, weapons drawn, eyes narrowed with practiced determination. Like a flea, their small ship would stay attached to the mammoth station, its adjustable boarding hatch clamped to the “door” they’d just made until they came back.

If they came back.

“Go,” One sub-voiced in the comms link strapped to his throat.

He waved the rest of the elite extraction team forward. Soundlessly they trooped two by two through the ruined hatch and swept the darkened passageway with their rifles, the laser designators drawing red zigzags against metal bulkheads, until the ten-man team had made it across.

Two looked at her watch and cringed. She hated sneaking in this way. Her preferred methods usually involved lots of ammo and explosives. But this time, they had to act quickly and with finesse. No choice. In barely two hours, their operative’s cover would be blown when his facial alterations would fade away to reveal his true identity. He had even less time if the bad guys started “playing” with him. What he’d learned about their neighbor’s latest expansion plans could make the difference between Earth as a free planet and Earth as a hunk of mined-out rock floating in space.

“Two,” One sub-voiced. “Report.”

Jojo rushed to the head of the team and crouched beside him. She scratched at the polymer VSL patch stuck to her nape, the Vital Stats Link relaying her status and position back to HQ. Her lifeline home. Her ball and chain.

“When we—”

A dry *clack* reverberated along the passageway. Blood sprayed across Four and her. One slumped against the bulkhead despite the

Kevlar helmet, shortened in back for firing in the prone position, a design flaw that had just killed him. His gloved hand twitched once then fell limp.

“Shit!” someone roared in the comms link.

Reacting as one, the team sprang to their feet and returned fire.

Jojo barely had time to plaster herself to the bulkhead when a pair of Exoskeleton Humanoid Life Forms, or “Elfs” as everyone called the vicious aliens, leveled their weapons and fired. A hail of tungsten-barite alloy rounds thudded on the plated deck and ricocheted here and there, creating sparks when they struck the tiny pot lights along the ceiling. Heavy tungsten shells for kinetic impact, and serrated barite splinters for maximum human-shredding effect—getting hit by one of these was like getting shot by concrete shells filled with razor blades. Not fun.

“Retreat,” Jojo snarled in the comms as she shoved Four behind her and backpedaled. She squeezed her trigger finger without pause until she’d rounded the corner. They should’ve used her methods, all barrels blazing and stun grenades leading the way!

How had the enemy discovered so soon her team had breached the station? Did this mean they’d already caught their inside man? Had he spilled his guts to them? She didn’t know of anyone who’d survived an alien interrogation. Damn.

“Alternate route!” Jojo barked over the approaching rapid fire. She checked back to make sure she got a collective nod of understanding.

Jojo turned and sprinted down the corridor, following the tiny monitor strapped to her forearm which showed their operative’s location as a yellow dot against the slate gray ship’s schematics. She didn’t know his identity, only that he was a fellow human, one of theirs. Her job consisted of hauling his ass back alive so he could share what he’d learned while disguised as one of the few human traders allowed on the alien station. She’d get him, dammit, and put as many holes in these alien scumbags as she could. She always got her man.

Well, except in love. She’d lost *that* one.

Alien rounds clunked around her and glanced off the deck on either side. Jojo tucked her head between her shoulders. The Elfs might be fast—anyone would be at eight feet tall—but they were poor shots because they lacked depth perception.

Five's voice cried out in pain over the comms, but they couldn't slow down or look back. Jojo hoped for his sake they'd killed him.

Her legs pumping madly, she cleared some sort of indoor terrace with steel columns and shimmering transparent vines dangling everywhere, then covered her team as they rushed past.

"Dazzler," someone yelled.

She squeezed her eyes shut a split second before the telltale thump of the grenade launcher announced someone had fired a dazzler grenade back at the aliens. The blinding laser show ought to occupy them and their sensitive eyes—all four of them—for a while.

"Go, go, go!" she growled, rushing past what remained of her team.

"Team Leader, this is HQ," said a man in her earpiece.

"Receiving," she replied, mentally cursing at the fool's timing. They shouldn't allow HQ onto the link while a team worked. Meddlesome politicians.

"The mission has been changed."

She wanted to curse but only gritted her teeth and waited for her new orders.

"Pull out immediately. HQ has received intel the target's been compromised."

Compromised? How the hell could they know that?

Like a bear trying to figure out how to work the lid off a honey jar, Four looked at her with his head cocked sideways and one of his "what the hell" expressions.

"We're barely a quadrant from the target, HQ, a matter of minutes. Advise."

"Stand by."

Stand by? Her men were being shot at!

"You have fifteen minutes then you're ordered to pull out with

or without the target. Over and out.”

Jojo cursed under her breath. *Cut your losses and run, more likely.*

Somewhere one deck below her feet, one of their own operatives had fifteen minutes to live. Not to mention the men she’d already lost coming here. She hated HQ with a passion just then.

The facial alterations must have degraded prematurely. Torture could do that. With the massive amount of endorphins a human brain would trigger, the guy would get a “high.” His body would start responding to all those stimulants—Elfs were very adept at that—and he’d start sweating like a pig, his nervous system firing off all kinds of automatic responses. Degradation would take a fraction of the expected duration. The procedure was still classified as “experimental” by HQ. She called it desperate at best.

With her forearm and its strapped-on monitor in front of her so she could keep an eye on the all-important yellow dot, Jojo dashed down a set of slippery metal stairs, shot a few rounds in case some alien had any fancy idea about her legs, and leaped over the last four steps. So they could achieve maximum penetration, humans had had to regress to gunpowder technology, no less. Firing shots of liquid hydrogen didn’t do shit against the aliens’ carapace-like outer shell. Good old bullets had to be used. What next? They’d start throwing rocks too?

A long corridor with silvery doors on either side stretched at least fifty feet to the left, while a hatch leading God knew where blocked the right. Large portions of the alien station didn’t show on her monitor.

Despite the mad pounding of her heart, she could hear someone screaming. A human voice. So the “interrogation” had already begun.

Shit.

According to her spotty schematics, the alien scumbags held their man nine doors down to the right. She was about to charge on when someone pulled her back by the extraction harness.

“Watch out,” Four grunted as he pointed at the hatch, which had

opened.

An entire squad of Elfs spilled out like upright weapon-toting black crabs. Gunfire from both sides thundered inside the corridor as tracer bullets zipped across the diminishing space between the two factions. Jojo roared and returned fire while backing down a few paces. Because of their size, the aliens couldn't stand more than two abreast, which gave plenty of opportunity for her team to put bullets into them. And they did. The acrid smell of smoke wafted to her despite the Nomex hood over her head and face.

Within seconds, her team had mowed the Elfs down. But at a terrible cost. Two of her teammates lay on the floor, posed in the way each had died. Jojo pushed the horrendous death rate far from her mind as she crept toward the door behind which their man was being tortured.

"We don't have much time before they send more in," Jojo subvoiced.

One of the problems with these nasty Elfs, there were always more. On top of eyeing Earth as their next mining ground, they could always be counted on to breed like nobody's business. Jojo didn't have enough fingers and toes to count everyone she knew whom the Elfs had killed. Left to their own devices, the Elfs would take over the goddamn galaxy!

Jojo kept her shoulder against the smooth wall-door-wall-door sequence as she crept down the passageway. A door opened in front of her and a particularly large Elf stepped out, its clawed feet clacking against the metal deck. It turned its beady eyes on her and Jojo swore the thing was laughing at her. They didn't even have real mouths, only bizarre jointed clefts that opened vertically. But still, she would've sworn to it.

It didn't even have time to draw whatever weapon it had at its "thigh" before she'd popped a few rounds in its ugly head. The Elf slouched forward, managed to take a swipe at her before collapsing in a hissing, dead-fish-smelling heap. Smelly in life and in death, but so much more satisfying in death.

Jojo waved her now five-man team on. "Secure the room."

Four entered the room first and pronounced it clear before letting out one long breath. Jojo could tell why after she'd stepped inside and took in the sorry scene before her.

Behind a thick pane of thermoplastic, a man sat strapped to a metal chair. She'd seen this apparatus before. A chamber designed to contain an array of nanobots firing electrical pulses, it electrocuted the occupant while never killing him or her. Barbaric, painful and effective.

With the amount of pain involved, there was no way in hell the guy's facial alterations would have held more than a few minutes. She suspected they'd already mostly faded.

With a curl to her lip, she motioned for Four to flick the switch down so the chamber would open and allow the nanobots to scatter about the room.

When the thermoplastic pane slid inside the wall, its occupant raised his head and looked directly at Jojo.

Her heart stopped.

There, right in front of her, sat one hell of a tough, daring operative, one who possessed intel Earth needed to survive, a man as handsome as he was shrewd, one gifted with amazingly skilled hands and an even more wicked mouth.

A man she knew by name actually, for they had spent a few years together pretending to be a normal couple.

Mathias Hørsen.

In all his naked glory, shiny with sweat, Mathias stared back at her through a veil of golden hair. He'd let his hair grow? And he looked as if he sorely needed a tan-in-a-can treatment too. He was paler than she remembered and his eyebrows looked too prominent. Vestiges of his "mask" no doubt.

With the speed of thought, their last time together flashed in vivid details in her mind. It could've been the day before instead of several years ago.

God, she'd missed him.

* * *

"Damn, you're good," Jojo murmured as Mat flicked his tongue

into a “come over here” curl.

She melted between her legs as he worked that magnificent organ on either side and into her engorged pussy. Each stroke triggered a tingle of pre-orgasm that bent her back off the mattress. She clawed her hands into his scalp, not giving a shit if she ripped all his gorgeous blond hair out in fistfuls. Anyway, Mat enjoyed it when she showed her appreciation. And appreciative she felt, damn it.

“Harder?”

His voice had always been the selling point for her. Rendered gravelly after taking a bullet across the throat, that voice could trigger her sprinkler system like nothing else. And when he murmured everything he wanted to do to her, adding all those delicious Danish words she didn’t understand—he could’ve been telling her how butt-ugly and dumb she was, and she wouldn’t have cared. Jojo couldn’t think of anything sexier. So what if some of his hair became uprooted in the process?

“Yeah, harder.”

As if he needed to ask.

Anchoring his elbows against the insides of her thighs, he spread her wide, wide enough for her to fear her hips would pop. Rolling her pelvis against his cleft chin, she made sure he knew just how thrilled she felt with his tongue-work. Fire lanced through her quads under his unyielding weight but she wouldn’t change a thing in the world.

No one can eat like Mathias Horsen.

With fingers increasingly demanding, he stretched her taut and used his thumbs to broaden her cleft to the burning point. Contrasting with the silkiness of his tongue, the dual stimulation forced a shameless groan from Jojo.

“My name,” he growled between her thighs.

As her sexual satisfaction built, she moaned his name, groaned and growled it, let it out in quick little keens that seemed to spur him into a feeding frenzy.

“Louder.”

“Mathias,” she panted. That he enjoyed hearing his name when he made love to her had stopped surprising Jojo. But it hadn’t stopped electrifying her.

Jojo relinquished the iron grip she had on his hair and clawed at the polymer headboard above her. The narrow bunk of his cabin creaked when she arched back and pulled herself by the hands to accentuate the pressure, to spread the fire heralding one helluva peak. While Mat brought her close, she purposefully let it swell to headache proportions, knowing when he would replace his mouth with his cock, the force of his opening thrust would rip the scream out of her. Just as he’d meant all along.

His shoulders bulged when he straightened so he could stare at her. His thick, broad chest and middle—the guy was built like a tree, solid all around—glistened with sweat as he roughly grabbed her by the crook of the knees and pulled her closer. Hanging heavy over his thighs, his thick cock looked about ready to explode.

“You’re holding back, Jojo,” he said, the warning in his hoarse voice served as added stimulant.

Before she could reply, he rubbed his thumb over her swollen clit and produced a sharp stab of pleasure through her whole belly. With his icy blue gaze on her, he slid a finger inside and exhorted a low moan of encouragement from her as a knowing smirk spread his mouth.

“I want to hear my name, and I want to hear it now.”

Jojo gritted her teeth as he fingered her sex and spread her honey around for what she knew was coming. A defiant lift of her chin made him scowl. Pulling his fingers away, he spread his knees, advanced over her push-up-like and stared hard while his thick cock hung between her thighs.

“Say it.”

When she didn’t, only stared right back at him, Mat tilted his hips so his glans rested snugly against her lips, waited there for a few seconds then stabbed in.

Though she let out a yelp of triumph, she didn’t say his name. Let him work for it.

Another piston-quick thrust made her see stars. Air left her in a great *humph* when Mat bore down with all his considerable weight, plunged his cock to the hilt, retreated then drove back in, increasingly harder, quicker, deeper.

“Say. My. Name,” came the growled command.

His mouth all over her neck, his teeth and lips and tongue merciless allies at conquering her flesh, he pounded himself into her until Jojo knew it was close. The climax, the pleasure, the scream. Everything.

She squeezed her eyes shut to sever the vision of his victorious grin as the first signs of orgasm cramped her butt and thighs, curled her toes and made tiny suns burst at the edges of her vision.

His name filled the cabin just as his seed did her womb.

Despite the thunderous swoosh of her heartbeat, she heard his whisper. “I love you. So damn much.”

* * *

“—immediately.”

Jojo shook her head, dismayed and horrified at her lapse of judgment. How could she phase out this way during a life-and-death extraction mission? *Goddamn, woman, get a grip.*

“Repeat command,” she said in her comms while Four tried to force the locking mechanism keeping Mat strapped to the chair.

“This is no longer an extraction. Enemy position is to be destroyed. Withdraw now.”

She could actually feel her face sagging as HQ relayed her new orders. What about the men she’d lost to get this far? Didn’t that count for anything? Didn’t HQ care that the all-important mission they’d planned at the highest echelons had killed half the extraction team? She suddenly felt... *expendable.*

“What about the target?”

“No longer relevant. You have eight minutes before Earth ships reach your coordinates. Kill box is five hundred miles. HQ out.”

Four stared at her for a full three seconds as the weight of HQ’s words sank in. They were to retreat immediately. Abandon the target—abandon Mat, for God’s sake.

“Orders?” Four asked, his scarred face red from trying to pull the restraints off Mat’s waist and shoulders. The silvery bands wouldn’t budge. Eight drew her serrated knife and went at the cord with a vengeance while two others fiddled with the alien console against the wall.

Eight minutes.

Snapping out of her trance, Jojo pushed the remainder of her team aside as she rushed to Mat, avoided his gaze—she needed to focus, dammit—and pushed the knife-happy Eight out of the way.

“Get the hell out! Now!”

They wanted her to abandon one of their own, leave him behind to be tortured to death. Because she knew Mathias enough to realize he wouldn’t talk. Ever. Hell, not even that. HQ were going to blow him up themselves. Talk about human sacrifice!

For the first time in her eleven-year career, she wasn’t going to obey orders.

Not this time.

* * *

He would’ve recognized those brown eyes anywhere.

Despite the black battle dress, the Nomex hood covering her head and face, the helmet and the uniform hiding her curvy body, Mat knew without a doubt it was his Jojo. The only woman he’d ever loved. Would ever love.

He watched with awe and quite a bit of arousal as she roared orders for an all-out retreat, shoving her soldiers around with the godly anger of a mom kicking her teen’s unwanted friends out the door. Only one hovered uncertainly near the chair, his scarred face tight with concern.

Her eyes grinned at the scarred soldier. “Just radio me when you’re back on the ship so I’ll stop worrying about you kids.”

With a quick nod, he pressed his own gun into Jojo’s hand and sprinted out of the interrogation room.

Mat knew what had just transpired over the comms. HQ had launched warships to destroy the alien station. Somehow they’d learned he’d been caught and couldn’t trust him to keep his mouth

shut at the hands of the Elfs. Not many folks could withstand their creative torture methods, but it still burned to think the bosses would deem him soft enough to spill the beans so damn fast.

“Go!” he urged when it became obvious Jojo would stay behind to get him out of the chair. “I’ll manage. Just go!”

“Shut up,” she snapped, kneeling, her hands just as rough as he remembered while she searched for the closing mechanism.

The old fire came roaring back. It didn’t really shock Mat to discover she still had that effect on him even six years after their breakup—more aptly, after his cowardly escape from their bed and her life.

Not his finest moment.

But he’d had no choice. It was either lose her or let them have her. And that, he’d never allow.

After mere seconds, she’d obviously decided her good old methods would work best. Guns pointed at the console against the wall, she fired at will. Sparks and smoke blew out of the busted plastic and metal instrument panel. The pressure from the silvery cords lessened.

One of the nasty crabbish Elfs burst into the room, huge silvery gun in hand.

“Watch out!”

Without turning her head away from her present activity—pulverizing the electrical board into a million twinkling bits—she spared but one second, arm at full extension, and put a pair of bullets in the alien’s forehead. It slumped to the floor, twitched then lay still.

When the restraints clicked off, Mat pushed against them and stood. Jojo gave him one of her guns. He thankfully wrapped his palm around it. Still warm. Too bad they couldn’t use the Elfs’ weapons as they only recognized their own individual owners.

But he had a way. He may be a liar and a sneaky bastard—a spy, in other words—but he was also farsighted and had already prepared a hasty retreat in case things turned ugly. They couldn’t get any uglier than this right now since they stood in the middle of a

kill box probably several hundred miles wide.

“The escape pods.” Mat rushed to the door, checking both ways and creeping out along the bulkhead. He’d been on the station long enough to know his way around. Plus, with the things he’d learned—HQ would bite its collective thumb when he told them what they’d almost lost—Mat wanted to make damn sure he got out of there alive. The addition of Jojo’s life hanging in the balance only served to crystallize his resolve. They had to make it out.

With Jojo on his heels, he followed the passageway back to the stairs, then aimed the gun at the hatch while Jojo activated the panel. Just like the old days. Damn, they made a good team!

That was before he’d been recruited in the intel department. He’d left his team behind, had been forced to leave her as well.

It barely took her a second to get the hatch wide open. They went running down a broad set of stairs, her boots making no sound, his naked feet squeaking on the rubber mats.

Clicks and clacks from above announced more Elfs were on the way. Amid the thunder of gunshots, Mat led them deeper into the station. They had mere minutes to get at the pod he’d rigged for such an eventuality.

Bullets ricocheted around them as they barreled across a narrow landing bay. Rows of round openings, one for each pod, lined the walls. Some were too high for humans to reach.

“It’s the second on the left, bottom row!”

Jojo skidded to a halt and plastered herself back against the bulkhead so she could provide all-round defense while he worked the levers and activated the sliding door. A metal chute gleamed at him through the gaping hole in the wall.

“Go!” she said without turning toward him.

Arguing with the obnoxiously stubborn woman would only waste the precious minutes they had left. He dove in, not caring which way he landed—head, feet or butt first.

With a curse, he landed in a heap inside the craft, its automatic launching sequence already counting down. Amber light gave everything a surreal feel. Alien numerals flashed green on the

black plastic panel and resembled clusters of glowworms twisting around.

“Hurry!” he yelled up into the chute a second before a pair of black boots coming at him made him jump back.

Jojo landed with the grace and supple strength of a black panther. So beautiful. His cock thought so too and came up to watch.

Whoa, down boy.

With battle instincts at eleven on the proverbial ten scale, both moved away from the chute as it irised shut, then scrambled inside the too-large anchoring niches. Mat clipped her in place then did the same for himself.

With a great lurch, the pod detached from the mooring clamps and slid down its own chute. With barely a breath to spare before the pod shot out of the station, the sheer change in velocity sent them slamming against the straps as the pod began its flight to whatever rendezvous point the Elves had once programmed into it. That was, before he’d tampered with the pod.

Good thing he was a prudent man. He’d taken care of this particular pod before his physical disguise had begun to fade. Who knew the sniffles—a common cold, dammit—would cause his mask to degrade at an alarming rate, forcing him to take chances? And one got him pinched.

And zapped and beaten and tortured.

He sure hadn’t counted on Jo-Ann Da Silva, his old flame—hell his current flame if he hadn’t been such a jackass—showing up with guns blazing to rescue him.

And disobeying orders in the process. Never a good thing back on autocratic, hysteria-prone Earth. Jojo would have it coming right in the teeth. Court martial to say the least, demotion for sure, possibly jail time.

He felt cheap enough already, damn her.

Why did she have to be so damn stubborn? She could’ve given him a gun and gotten the hell out of there. He would’ve managed the rest. Always had.

Instead, Jojo was risking everything to save his ass. He hated

being indebted. He absolutely *had* to save her ass in return.

Her glorious, rounded, solid ass.

Mat closed his eyes against the crazy spins of the pod. At a predetermined safe distance, attitude jets would stabilize their trajectory and allow them to get out of the niches. Until then, he had nothing to do but think.

Mm. Saving her ass. Maybe even win her back. His heart fluttered just at the thought. Would she take him back? He had to try. It'd be difficult. Damn well near impossible. That mission would prove challenging, tricky and complicated. The kind he loved best.

Plus, if there was one thing he'd learned, life without her wasn't worth fighting for.

Compromised: Chapter 2

Four's voice came broken and distorted but clear enough so she could make out the words "successful withdrawal". Anything else was gravy. The remnants of her team were safe. They'd escaped the kill box. Such a nice term the bosses used to delineate a three-dimensional area to be bombed and blasted until all that remained were sparkling fragments.

As if on cue, a deep tremor rocked the tubular craft and made the polymer panels squeak and groan. The amber light blinked and something clunked against the hull. For a second, Jojo feared they'd escaped the kill box of the exploding station just to die slowly inside a leaking escape pod.

But then the vast quiet of space settled back as though nothing had happened. As though no gigantic breach in the ceasefire had just pushed the two races closer to all-out war. Ha!

Things had really turned to shit. Quickly too. She'd disobeyed orders and there'd be hell to pay for it. The team had lost half its members, Planetary Commonwealth had temporarily "misplaced" an operative, and the crucial intel that had started the mad scramble in the first place was on its way to somewhere unknown. Not a good day for humanity.

Jojo blew air through pursed lips. She wished she could blow something up. That always made her feel better. Or at least shoot something. Maybe just a little kick then. Better than nothing.

Because she no longer had her team's little ship as relay, she was now out of comms range with HQ. Jojo pulled the useless earpiece out and pocketed it. When the crazy spinning ended and attitude jets fired to stabilize the pod, she clawed out of the anchoring niche so she could pull her helmet and hood off. Her hair felt clumpy and sweaty when she raked her fingers through it.

By her side, a still naked Mat padded across the pod so he could fiddle with the access panel. As far as escape pods went, this one was very nice and quite roomy because it had been meant for eight-foot-tall lobsters. Although it did make her feel as if she stood

inside a huge toilet paper roll made of vinyl and rubber. Some mental picture.

With his back to her, Mat tapped the smooth plastic covering in what appeared to be a logical sequence. So he'd learned to read the enemy language during their separated years. Not bad. Few humans could wrap their brains around the hundreds of ideograms Elfs used to communicate with one another, and even fewer could actually come in contact with the warlike race and keep their heads attached.

Mat's smooth back and butt gleamed under the amber light.

Jojo resisted the urge to slap it. Her palms tingled at the memory of his skin, his network of thick muscles, his silky cock. She joined him by the panel and whistled.

"You look like you know what you're doing. You've been busy."

"Earth destroying that station is going to start a war, you know."

Ah, that voice. She'd missed it so much.

"We've been at war for years," Jojo replied, stepping back and looking for a spot to sit and take her gear off. The ledge around the tubular escape pod would be perfect.

"What we've had with the Elfs is a 'trade disagreement.' That's what it's called, I think."

When he turned to give her one of his sardonic grins, the ones that looked half smirk, half grimace, a stab of regret made Jojo want to punch him. Or kiss him. Why did he have to leave?

He ran out on you. Keep that in mind when you start drooling.

Mat and she had spent over three years together, the best of her life despite the occasional friction their jobs imposed—one couldn't bring work back home when one killed people and blew things up for a living.

Nonetheless, he'd understood her, contrary to other men, and had never tried to change her or fix her or tell her she ought to find herself a nice safe job so he could play at Mister Man. Mat had taken her the way she was. Self-sufficient, cranky and flawed.

"What now?" she asked, suddenly struggling with a bad case of the "keep your hands off him" mental wrestling match. She hoped

she'd win against her rising desire. She also simultaneously prayed she'd cave in like a weak-kneed bimbo and let him make love to her to both their hearts' content. Sex with Mat had been great. Life with Mat had been, well....

"I don't know."

His gravelly voice added to his Viking look, a short but drop-dead gorgeous one. His eyes narrowed the way they used to when he was sitting on a good bit of intel he had no intention of sharing. The eyebrows were still a bit too thick for his normal face because the disguise still held in places. Lots of good it had done him.

"How about *you* tell me, what now?"

Her anger must have shown for he patted the air in a call for peace. Jojo had been known to go from zero to supernova in five seconds flat.

"Now we wait until HQ picks up your signal and sends the recovery teams." He patted the VSL patch similar to hers stuck to his nape.

"Don't you have a direct link to HQ?"

Mat shook his head. "Us lowly spies don't have links at all to HQ, in case we're caught and that juicy bit is tortured out of us. My VSL broadcasts only far enough for extraction teams to reel me back in."

So they had hours before recovery ships would spot her signal amid the jumble of others the explosion had surely triggered. Eight, possibly even twelve hours, depending on jump points. Should Mat have escaped alone, no one would've found him anytime soon. That thought tightened her throat and triggered a totally uncalled-for urge to protect him. Mathias Horsen could take very good care of himself. Always had.

"You haven't changed," she said.

"You're wrong, I *have* changed. This is the new me." He posed theatrically, a matador waiting for the charging bull, his compact body the drool-worthiest she'd seen since he'd left.

"I don't see anything new," Jojo replied, raking her hair back and leaning an elbow on the bulkhead. "Same old, same old. Ex-

cept for the hair. Way past regulations. I'd chop it all off in your sleep if we were still—"

If we were still together.

The old pang of sorrow hit her hard. She clamped her mouth shut and looked away.

Her pain seemed to reflect in his eyes for they darkened to that storm cloud gray so uncharacteristic of the usual icy blue. Mat's chest deflated with a long sigh.

"I messed up the good thing we had, didn't I?"

"Yep."

"Would groveling help?"

"Nope."

"Foot massage? Flattery? Sexual favor?"

Jojo couldn't stifle the short bark of laughter. Shaking her head, she turned around and meant to step away when Mat grabbed her by the back of her extraction harness and pulled her near.

"I've missed that harness," he murmured in her ear while his other hand circled her waist and squeezed a substantial fist around the quick-release clip.

Unlike its gaily-colored mountaineering counterparts, hers was a mean black affair with enough triple-strength stitching to yank someone thrice her size out of trouble. The Big Boss of all harnesses.

"I've missed it a lot."

Hot and shallow, his breath stirred strands of hair as he leaned his chin over her shoulder and slowly blew long, featherlight breaths on the exposed skin along her neck. Only he knew how to tease her there.

A long frisson of arousal tightened the back of her neck and shoulders. In her mind's eye, she imagined in vivid details Mat pushing her against the bulkhead and taking her hard. She *did* wear her harness, after all....

In a display of incredible strength, he hoisted her not-so-slight body against his own. His erection pressed against her lower back, which tingled as the pressure of the webbed belts increased.

Cramping with need, her thighs trembled.

“Don’t make me kick your butt, Mat.”

“And how would you manage that? Mm?”

Without waiting for a reply, he used the harness to swing her against the bulkhead and trap her there with his body. Adept fingers promptly found the space where she’d tucked her jacket in and then sneaked underneath all three layers of clothing she wore—cargo pants, Skinetics tactical bottom and, yes, lace thongs. She was still a woman, dammit!

An embarrassment of juices slicked her sex, but that only made his demanding hand all the more stimulating. With her hands under her shoulders as though she were doing push-ups against the bulkhead, Jojo arched her butt back into Mat.

With fingers both skilled and impatient, Mat slipped past the elastic of her thongs and followed her natural curve. But instead of dipping inside—something she wanted more than kicking his pretty ass—he stopped and let his palm rest against her mons. Slick with expectation, her pussy clenched impotently while he teased her.

“How many men have been there?” His middle finger stopped tormenting her and slid inside.

Jojo fought against the urge to hump his hand. “A few.” Without turning around, she reached back and squeezed her hand between them so she could fist his cock. “And how many women have been *there*?”

“None.”

“What?”

“They never felt right, even just looking at them. Not like you. So I didn’t bother.”

Hot and so deliberate, his finger injected heat into her belly as he stroked in and out, spreading her honey as if it were a precious ointment.

So he’s spent almost six years without a woman in his bed. Now that was self-discipline.

Didn’t explain why he’d left in the first place though.

“If I felt so damn right, why did you leave?” Jojo spoke through her teeth, not so much out of anger but to resist as much as she could the mounting arousal. Her brain stopped functioning when she got horny. She hadn’t been this turned on in years, so her mental capacity would be proportionally affected. With Mat, she needed all her faculties intact.

“Because I had temporarily misplaced my balls,” he replied with a trace of irritation that translated into more pressure on his finger. “But I found them again.”

’Kay....

“Small words, short sentences, okay? I’m just a dumb soldier.”

He stabbed his finger in. The sudden incursion forced a gasp from Jojo, followed by a long sigh that would’ve shamed her had she cared about her ego right then. She didn’t.

“Don’t talk like that. You’re not dumb and certainly not ‘just a soldier.’ I liked you a lot, so I had to leave. Us men, we do that. Just as when we pulled your ponytails back in school, that meant we liked you. We’re complex creatures.”

She meant to laugh at his moronic behavior—good old Mat—but ended up moaning instead when he accentuated the pressure and added another finger. Without relinquishing the iron grip he had on the back of her harness, he hoisted her a bit higher until she had to raise herself on the toes of her boots. Serious heat against her neck heralded Mat’s mouth as he nibbled and licked her lobe, the curl of her ear, the back of her neck.

“Spread your feet,” he murmured between long licks under her ear. His voice was a velvety rumble.

She did, allowing him to wedge his muscled thigh between hers. Half suspended by the harness and his thigh crammed between her legs, Jojo felt the power shift as surely as if a scale had tipped toward Mat. She felt herself instinctively sliding to him. Just like old times. And just like old times, she wanted it with a level of ferocity and depth that puzzled and frightened the independent woman in her, the experienced soldier and team leader.

“You saved my life.” Another sharp stab disrupted her ability

to draw breath. She started panting. “And I intend to save yours in return.”

Mat unclipped her harness, which loosened around her sternum and waist.

“I don’t need saving.”

“They’ll be waiting for you with handcuffs when they locate your signal. I don’t plan on letting them do it.”

HQ would locate her well enough with the patch stuck to her neck. The guy made no sense.

“We’ll talk about it later,” she said.

Jojo humphed when Mat suddenly released her and stepped back. He was already well on his way to removing her jacket by the time she’d faced him, her mouth parted and ready to clamp over his to bite and nibble and suck his beautiful, decadent lips. Muscles banded with the effort, he helped her get rid of the harness, the boots and various layers of garments. Finally, after twisting and cursing and stepping out of bunched clothes and discarded gear, Jojo straightened, naked, and clipped the harness back into place. Mat’s eyes narrowed.

“Just like old times, huh?”

“Jojo,” he breathed as though unable to say more than her name.

Visceral thrills tightened her nipples and made her want to tackle him to the ground and spear herself on his massive cock. She could. No problem. He’d let her do it too, let her “overpower” him physically and slam his butt to the deck.

But it would kill what they had, the implicit understanding of her need to have him be top dog. So she waited patiently while Mat took his time admiring her from her funny-shaped toes to her prominent chin. She let him establish the sequence and the timing, content to just wait for the signal, which always came.

Gleaming and agile, his tongue ran back and forth behind his teeth. She could spot a glimmer of it here and there.

Still, she waited for her sign, breathless. His intent gaze branded her all over again, as if he wanted to sear her image into his brain or remember how he’d enjoyed the sight of her body. No other man

had ever made her feel so sexy.

Come on, Mathias Horsen, you know what I'm waiting for.

Spreading his muscled legs to shoulder's width, Mat reached down and heaved his cock in a loose fist. Gaze still on hers, he pumped himself a couple of times.

A bead of sweat tickled down her spine. Jojo watched as he rubbed the pad of his thumb over his glans, the glistening invitation almost too tempting to resist. His compact chest and belly tightened. Not at all the washboard symmetry she tended to scoff at, Mat's middle was strong enough to wrap her legs around without worrying about breaking him in half. He'd always reminded her of a short Viking with a crew cut.

He let go of himself, put his palm against the bulkhead so he could lean over slightly, his hand creating a heat shadow against the vinyl panel. Then he planted his other fist on his hip, his expression one of "So, what are you waiting for?"

Finally!

Jojo avidly fisted his cock, already kneeling by the time she realized she'd moved.

"Whoa," Mat said as he pressed against her shoulder. "There's plenty to go around."

Not waiting for her throat to get accustomed to his broad cock, she wolfed him all down, glistening glans and veiny shaft.

God, she'd missed him.

* * *

Jojo's vigor proved both a pat on his manly ego and a blade across his heart. That she would pick up where they'd—he'd—left off surprised and thrilled him to his core. But while her sexual energy proved more than satisfying, he couldn't help wondering how much he'd hurt her when he'd left in the middle of the night. Like a thief. The pain in her eyes when she'd commented about cutting his hair.... He hadn't imagined it. He'd put it there in the first place.

But he'd be damned if he'd be adding to it or if he'd waste his chance to make it up to her. Nothing, no one, would come between Jo-Ann Da Silva and him. Not ever again. Especially not Planetary

Commonwealth. They'd done it the first time, forcing him to burn his bridges behind him so he wouldn't become a liability to them. He wouldn't be burning bridges this time.

Fuck them.

Mat closed his eyes when Jojo wrapped her lips around his cock and slid all the way down, her forehead coming in contact with his belly, her hands clutched on his ass like a drowning woman. How could he have let HQ come between them? He'd been such a complete turd.

"Ahh," he exhaled with her forceful handling. The woman knew how his systems worked.

When his toes wanted to curl up, he wrapped his hand over her shoulder and pulled out. The look she gave him!

"I wasn't done."

"But I nearly was," he replied as he fisted her tight black curls.

Of its own volition, his other hand joined the first and Mat knelt in front of her so he could fill his face with her thick mane.

"My hands have missed you like you wouldn't believe."

He ran a gentle thumb over the smooth skin of her cheekbones, the bridge of her nose, that small scar right at the edge of her mouth which made it look as if she constantly smirked. Warm and supple, her skin was the color and shine of coffee beans. Discovering her all over again would be a treat no man deserved.

His mouth rough on her throat and shoulder, his hands claiming her breasts even more so, Mat bit and licked until his tongue felt chafed. Closing her eyes, she sat on her heels and arched back. The harness lifted her breasts to his ravenous mouth and Mat almost lost it, almost pushed her back so he could make love to her hard and deep and make her scream his name. He loved hearing it in her mouth. A moan, a sigh or a sharp keen, she could modulate it into a plea and a command, both at once.

"Spread your knees," Mat urged with a nudge of his own.

With her eyes still tightly shut, Jojo widened her knees so he could squeeze his in between. Her sex felt so very wet when he slid his fingers over then inside her. Juices made his entry much more

cordial than he'd intended. Making her come with his hands had always been quite the workout for him. Jojo was a tough woman to please. All the more fun for him!

Slowly, deliberately, he circled her clit, dipped inside her tight channel, let her milk his finger a while before retreating and really going at her sensitive bud. He rubbed the thing as if there'd be no tomorrow.

Maybe there wouldn't be.

Even more honey rewarded his work, which he spread around her cleft, back and forth, anus to mons. Then back at the clit. Hip gyrations heralded her impending climax and Mat made sure he didn't waste a precious spasm of her delectable pussy when she did come.

"Ah, ahh."

The telltale signs were as he remembered. Her mouth tightened, her eyes narrowed to slits, and her shoulders drew in. She acted the same way—without the moans—on the firing range. Same focus. Same "let the lady work" placard outside the door.

Muscles twitched along her jaw. He nipped her there in the hope of eliciting a response. Jojo could have some pretty serious spikes which he loved to trigger. Did he ever get one now! A violent quiver rocked her forward where she collapsed on his chest, panting, her hands balled into fists as a climax rushed through her body.

Instead of letting her ride the solitary wave, he continued pumping his finger in and out, quick then slow, hard then gentle. She enthusiastically ground herself against his thigh, an accelerant to his already roaring desire. Pounding his cock into her would be heaven. But not now. Later. He had a lot to be forgiven for.

Rubber-coated metal deck wasn't the most comfortable surface in the world but it provided perfect grip for her knees when he pulled her legs wider apart and knelt behind her.

"Bend over for me."

She did. He indulged in a quick, irresistible bite on her fine ass, a bite that triggered a visible clenching along her cleft. Then he parted her with his thumbs and dove in.

His mouth brought her there again, he could tell. Arching her back, she pushed against his face and rolled her hips so he'd eat her front and back, side to side, inside and out.

More than happy to comply, Mat made love to Jojo with his tongue. Her subsequent cries of pleasure shredded what little composure he still clung to. Using the harness in a way it probably hadn't been meant, Mat stabbed his cock between her thighs and almost came on the spot when her vagina gripped him like a fist.

He pulled away so he'd last long enough to make her come again. He had almost six years to make up for. A quick screw wasn't *at all* in his plans.

"Mat," she snarled with a buck against him. He angled his hips so she wouldn't get anywhere near his dick.

"Later."

"*Mathias*," she repeated, stretching his name like the warning it was.

Her eyes were narrowed and fierce when she turned back to glare at him. Mat couldn't help the grin of Neanderthal pride stretching his face.

He had her right where he wanted her.

Compromised: Chapter 3

Oh, but he was enjoying himself too, the tease. To bring her so near but to leave her, primed and ready to ignite—

Should be laws against that, dammit.

His mouth landed on her pussy again and Jojo had to close her eyes and curl her hands into fists to keep from scratching at the rubber sprayed-on deck. The harness dug into her skin, produced sharp little pulls in all the right places, those places so damn hungry for Mat's robust treatment. Just thinking about his big hands fisted around the belt while he anchored her in front of him made her groan.

Another orgasm engulfed her and left her skin tingling as every nerve ending worked its microscopic ass off sending near-pain messages to a brain long beyond reason. When she looked back, she spotted a flush to his cheeks which she could just see above her backside. Like blue lasers, his eyes were fixed on her face while he ate her.

Erotic didn't begin to cover the look in those blue depths.

On all fours, with Mat behind her and his wicked mouth all over her, she couldn't imagine anything better. A feeling of solace enveloped Jojo, surprising against all that passionate intensity. They really made a good team.

A finger thrust into her pussy then another. She cried out.

"You know what I want to hear, Jo-Ann," Mat murmured.

On all fours too, he wrapped his muscled arm around her waist and palmed her breast, squeezing it while he pushed his fingers in and out of her with hard but precise movements.

"Yes," she hissed, steeling herself against the exhilarating onslaught. "Yes, yesss."

She knew what he wanted to hear. And how she longed to scream it for him. But he'd have to work for it first. Nothing that good came free.

With sweat connecting them from thighs to torso, Mat curled his spine so he could keep his hand on her sex while his other

rolled her nipple with merciless fingers. A deep and sudden thrust forced Jojo's spine into a curve. With her butt rolled upward, she pushed back against his hand, then moaned when he gave her what she wanted, a series of piston-fast jabs that made her see stars and bite her bottom lip.

"Don't stop."

But he did, the jerk.

"Argh, for Pete's sake!"

With a snarl, he pushed her butt aside so she'd roll over and kept one of her knees pinned against the deck with his bear paw of a hand clamped over it. Trapping her underneath his much greater weight, Mat released her leg and descended push-up-like until his broad chest nearly touched hers. Despite two hundred and thirty plus pounds of muscles pinning her in place, Jojo twisted until she could angle her pelvis just right and receive the magnificent cock hanging heavy between them.

"You give me what I want," Mat murmured against her neck. "And I give *you* what you want."

Muscles as thick and strong as iron bands played under his shiny skin. Strands of golden hair hung over his face with drops of sweat gliding down like spherical diamonds. One drop broke free and landed on her chin. Knowing it'd just kill Mat, Jojo licked the drop, making a big show of running her tongue over her upper lip and adding a faint sigh of contentment for good measure. His eyes darkened. A split second later, he thrust inside her.

His explosive entrance stretched her to the burning point.

Holy shit, it burns! After a moment, rapture lanced every part of her body. Jojo rolled her pelvis to grasp as much of his cock as possible. Mat fisted the webbed belt on her waist and anchored her for one epic ride. Ten inches of stiff, silky shaft pounded into her. That he meant for her to scream his name was clear. That she wanted to bust his eardrums with it was even more so.

After a brutal stab, he bent over, trapped her bottom lip and sucked it in. It tingled pleasantly when he released it.

"That's how much I missed you."

Thrust.

“Did you miss me too?”

Thrust. Thrust.

She was well beyond answering questions right then. If anyone would've wanted to get any government secret she happened to have, she would've spilled her pathetic guts all over them. Oh! So close.

Straightening, Mat yanked her over his lap and hooked her knees over his thick shoulders. He changed his grip on her harness so he could grab it in back and elevate her butt a few inches. Only her shoulders and back of the head touched the deck as he held her on his lap, each knee hooked over a muscular shoulder. When he put his glans right between her lips but didn't make a move to penetrate, Jojo knew her turn to deliver the goods had come.

His face between her knees looked flushed with exertion. His shoulders bulged, his biceps swelled, and his arms shook with the strain of keeping her sturdy body poised against the furious hammering for which her entire being clamored.

But before taking, she had to give.

Jojo first caressed her belly, slowly, deliberately, never stopping, never breaking eye contact with Mat, who watched her the way a lion would a gazelle. Saliva glistened on his lips. Sweat sparkled at his temples.

“How do you want it?” she asked.

“Be careful what games you play.” His gravelly voice was barely above a whisper. “I'm a deprived man.”

She let her fingers tease her nipples, tightening them even more. Rolling them between her fingers produced sharp twinges of pleasure-pain that spurred her on and triggered the urge to pinch and pull at them. She squeezed them together then released them so her breasts would bounce back to their respective places.

The precursor of one hell of an orgasm prickled her skin. It hit first in her back before the waves of ecstasy rolled through her. She clenched her thighs over his neck.

“Ohhh, Mat.”

He yanked her against him, his cock driving deep into her, pushing against her channel, molding her with his glans, stretching and unfolding her with his thickness and length, branding her with his glorious heat.

Jojo arched back.

His name echoed through the cramped space of the escape pod.

In a primeval roar of conquest, she yelled out his name.

Her man.

“Mathias!”

* * *

With an intensity bordering on wildness, Mat hammered into her tight, wet pussy as hard as he could, knowing she could take it, that she *wanted* to take it. Hearing his name triggered a massive spike of adrenaline, energy he transferred to his hips and back.

With his fists on the webbed belt, he gave her the accumulated loving he’d spent six years rehearsing in his head. All those years of looking at other women and finding faults with all of them. Too skinny, always too damn skinny. Too short, too tall, too funny or not funny enough. Too blonde, not enough shoulder, legs like toothpicks. None ever measured up.

None would scream his name the way she did.

He knocked his pelvis against her backside. Ground, stormed and rammed. He gave her his all, to the very last quarter inch. She took it all. Milked him and squeezed him so tight Mat saw stars.

When he came—exploded would be more accurate—the sheer magnitude of his climax nearly overcame him. Her cry joined his. He had no way of knowing for sure, but Mat could swear they stayed linked for hours. Panting, sweaty, happy.

“I’ve missed you bad,” he whispered against her sweaty back. “So bad.”

“So have I.” She collapsed onto her belly, where he followed. He was desperate to keep touching her, keep loving her.

“I—”

I love you.

Should he tell her this? Would she push him away? Mat ran

the pads of his fingers against her shoulder blade, down her spine. Tears welled in his eyes. He angrily willed them away.

“What were you going to say?”

He kissed her shoulder. “Nothing.”

He wanted nothing more than to curl up with her and sleep but there wasn’t time. HQ had probably already launched a recovery mission.

“Whew.” Jojo turned to him with a pronounced roll of her eyes. “That was—*whew*.”

Mat pulled out of her and sat on his heels. Damn. Having a heart attack wouldn’t hurt so much. He raked both hands in his hair and took big breaths to regulate his heartbeat.

Still puffing hard, he stood and padded to the compartment meant for supplies, which he’d prepared at the same time he’d reprogrammed the pod’s destination. The polymer door panel slid into the bulkhead with a click and revealed white vinyl bags lined inside the square cavity. After picking up two, he tossed one to Jojo, who caught it with the killer reflexes she was known for, and bit a strip off so he could pull out the big brother version of a restaurant moist towelette. He rubbed his face, neck, chest and armpits, folded it then dabbed his dick.

Jojo did the same with hers before stuffing it back into its envelope. He carried both crumpled wrappers to the disposal vent, put them in the chute and activated the vacuum. A muffled sucking sound indicated the chute had closed. Somewhere in their wake, two tiny vinyl envelopes would float around in space and add to the growing cosmic pollution.

“We need to talk,” he announced, trying not to sound too serious. He didn’t want to alert Jojo’s scalpel-sharp Bullshit Detector. He’d come up with a plan to get her out of trouble and knew for a fact she wouldn’t agree. Too bad, he could be just as stubborn as her.

Perhaps even more so.

* * *

Jojo studied the man’s profile as he sifted through the pile of

clothes for the stretch bottom. After a confirming look at her, he pulled them on. The dark gray microfiber molded his thighs and butt quite nicely, even if the thing was at least two sizes too small. Better than walking around naked. Not that she would have minded, but it was cold.

She donned her thongs, cargo pants and jacket, but left the undershirt for him. The harness and various gear lay in a black nylon heap on the deck. She'd strap it all back on later. She didn't need a gun around Mat.

"So what do we need to talk about?"

Mat sat on the ledge and tugged his sleeves up his forearms. He looked tight and uncomfortable.

"You, actually."

"Oh?"

He nodded. "You can't let them put you in jail, Jojo."

"You don't know if I'm going to jail or not. I disobeyed orders, yes, but it doesn't mean they won't listen to reason."

"HQ never listens to reason. They told you to get out and leave me behind. You didn't."

Jojo shrugged. True. She'd jeopardized her own life to get Mat back but she'd sent her team safely away first. This would count for something, right?

Right?

"You can't go back. I won't let you."

"What?" Jojo demanded as she clipped her boots back on.

"What the hell do you mean I can't go back? Where else am I supposed to go?"

Mat's gaze narrowed the way it did when he'd been plotting something for a while. She hated that look.

"The Elfs programmed this pod to land on one of their inhabited asteroids a few thousand light-years from here—"

Jojo raised her hand. "HQ will find us long before we get that far."

"But I reprogrammed it so it would stay in space for quite a bit longer," Mat cut back in. "There are enough supplies to last until

we reach Silverpoint Station.”

Silverpoint Station.

Understanding dawned on her. Followed by anger.

“Why am I *not* liking the way this conversation is going, Matthias? Why don’t you stop the spy talk and tell me what the hell is going on?”

Mat stood, his massive frame clearly tight with repressed anger. He clenched and unclenched his block-like fists.

“They’ll want to make an example of you, especially with the recent losses and desertions. And with the consequences of blowing up that Elf station, they’ll need to make sure people follow orders or else. Don’t you get it, Jojo? With your reputation, you’ll be the perfect scapegoat for them. And I’m not losing you twice. No way.”

“So,” Jojo snapped, standing and planting her fists on her hips. “You just get to decide where I go and don’t go? Has it ever crossed your mind that it’s not your decision to make?”

“I’m a guy, of course it hasn’t crossed my mind. But you know I’m right. It’s all over your face.”

True, the chances of HQ blaming her for the whole mess were high. Extremely high now that she thought of it this way. Her reputation of “shoot first and beat answers out of whatever’s left” had landed her in trouble enough times already.

What if this one last incident would push her into the undesirable category? Jojo scratched at her VSL patch, suddenly feeling as though the tiny transmitter were a snake about to bite her.

“We have to get rid of it,” Mat said, taking a step forward.

“Stay where you are.”

Her “team leader” voice seemed to surprise and infuriate him.

“They’ll be here within a few hours. We have to destroy it. Now.”

“No, we don’t.”

Jojo stepped back toward the pile of gear. She couldn’t believe how things were spiraling out of control. Adrenaline spiked through her veins.

“Get rid of it.”

“No.”

Mat’s tight mouth didn’t sit well with her. She’d seen this expression during many missions back when they worked on the same extraction team. His game face, the one he put on seconds before rushing headfirst into a gun battle.

Jojo barely had time to sidestep his furious charge. Spinning on the spot, she hand-chopped him on the back of the neck. For someone his size, he moved damn fast.

Mat caught her wrist and meant to twist it. Did he think she’d been born yesterday? A knee right where it counted bent him in half.

With a snarl, Jojo elbowed him under the jaw. She was lunging for the pile of gear when he seized her knee and brought her down with him. Grunting, she landed hard on her elbows and knees before collapsing under Mat’s bulk. Her hand almost reached to one of her guns. Dammit!

“You have to get rid of it, Jojo,” he urged as he tried to tear her patch off her nape.

Twisting, punching and thrashing under his weight, Jojo managed to wrench one leg free and kicked him in the side. She even used Mat as an anchor to propel her the few inches she needed to reach the gun.

He seized her waistband and tried to drag her back to him. Jojo rolled onto her back and pressed the muzzle of the gun against the bridge of his nose.

He froze.

“Don’t. Make. Me,” she growled low.

What the hell was going on with him? Couldn’t he see she *had* to go back? One just didn’t decide to quit and not go back! Unless one had changed camps—

The traitor.

“How could you turn on Earth this way,” she spat with one last jerk of her foot.

He let her go and slowly climbed back to his feet. But his anger

had disappeared. He had sat on the ledge, looking deflated and seething, and Jojo backpedaled against the opposite bulkhead and shook her head.

“Did the aliens get to you, Mat? Are you one of theirs now?”

He shook his head, his hair hanging in loose strands over his face. “I told you why. I don’t want to lose you. They forced me away from you once and I’ll be damned if I’m going to let them rip my chest open again.”

“You didn’t even know it would be my team to pull you out. So how come you had the pod rigged in advance? Tell me *that*.”

Yeah, explain all the technical stuff so I don’t have to ponder on the fact he wants to keep me bad enough to become a traitor.

“It doesn’t matter how or why I did it,” he replied, his hoarse voice shuddering. “Nothing matters now. Go ahead, you be the good soldier like I was the good spy and bring me back. They’ll know what I tried to do. They always get what they want.”

“I wouldn’t say anything to them, Mat,” she said quietly. “It won’t be part of my report.”

He snorted. “They’ll drug you.”

True. They would as part of the debrief process.

“People have died to get you back, Mat. It’s worth nothing to you?”

“No.”

“What do you mean, no? What’s wrong with you?”

“I’ve lived almost six years regretting what I did, six years hating them for making me give you up. So excuse me if the noble knight in me is out taking a shit while the backstabbing asshole they created takes over.” Mat crossed his arms and stared hard. “They took you from me then threw you back in my face when it suits them? I’m choosing you this time. Fuck them.”

The sudden and overwhelming urge to save him, the one that had engulfed her at the sight of Mat strapped to the metal chair in the Elf interrogation chamber, returned tenfold. The gun in her hand felt dumb, the black Nitron finish too rough.

High treason meant death. The thought of Mat strapped to a gur-

ney with a lethal cocktail being injected in him didn't sit too well with her. But what else could she do?

Betray Earth and side with the man she'd always loved? Or sacrifice him and save her planet?

Compromised: Chapter 4

Jojo's expression remained stony as she strapped the gun holster to her thigh, always keeping her back away from him. Not that he'd do anything. The fight had left him. He had nothing but seething hatred for the Planetary Commonwealth and their whole broken-egg-and-omelet politics. He hated the Elfs too. Those fuckers brought the worst out in humans.

While Jojo donned her gear, he watched what suspected would be the last time he'd enjoy the view of her fine figure and chiseled face, those luscious lips and tight curls. The void left behind when he'd been forced to leave her expanded to dangerous proportions, and Mat feared for a second he'd either go stark raving mad or fall into a catatonic state. Either way, he didn't care. Getting the needle would take away the pain of losing her twice.

"Did you purge the intel somewhere here when you were tinkering with the pod?" she asked.

He'd never heard her use that tone of voice on him before. It was the voice she reserved for the bad guys. Cold. Sharp.

He pointed to the compartment holding the various supplies. "The blue one."

Jojo retrieved the data clip and looked at it awhile before pocketing it. While she rummaged around the pod, clicking on panels and opening compartments, Mat watched her. How could he have left her? What sort of idiotic asshole dumped such a woman? Strong, smart and sexy. *What's wrong with you, man?*

At least this time, he'd been smart enough to try to keep her. He was losing her all over again but at least he'd tried.

After she turned around for one quick peek to make sure he still sat nice and quiet, Jojo crossed the pod and inspected the waste disposal vent. She held a tubular storage container in her hand and was screwing the cap off.

They'd lost a lot of time already. HQ had sent the teams by now. Contact must have been imminent. A sudden urge to break things balled his fists. Would she shoot him if he tried anything? Was he

willing to die finding out?

Hell yeah. It'd be better than living without her.

Mat stood.

Jojo spun on her heels and leveled the gun at him. "Stay where you are."

"No."

"Don't make me—Sit back over there."

"I won't lose you twice. So shoot if you have to. I don't care."

"Well, I do," she snapped.

Before Mat could do anything else, he watched stupefied as Jojo ripped the patch off her neck and, wincing, dumped it along with the data clip in the container, which she screwed tightly shut and slid in the vent.

"Silverpoint, right?"

She fisted the control. A sucking sound announced the tube had been jettisoned outside into the void of space. Within its core was enough intel to cut the Elfs right at the bottom pincers and give humankind a fighting chance. Coupled with the patch's transmitter powerful enough to register on any recovery team's radar, the tube would be easy to find.

Speechless wasn't a normal state for him. Despite his injured throat, Mathias Horsen, as vocal as they came, had a thing to say on just about anything. No subject was over his scathing wit, no interlocutor beyond his caustic repartee. Wisecracking had become an art for him. That he'd gotten himself in a world of trouble with his mouth alone should've been proof enough for HQ to keep him well away from their intelligence branch. Starting a fight without throwing a single punch was his specialty.

But right then, faced with Jo-Ann's look of sheer female determination, he was forced back on the ledge. He didn't sit, he *collapsed*.

And for the first time in his life, he had nothing to say.

"We're in shit now," she announced as she slid the gun back in its holster. After blowing air through pursed lips, she sat beside him and put her head between her knees.

“Jojo.” Mat could say nothing more than her name.

“Whew, shit.” Her voice came muffled through her fingers.

“Who knew desertion was so goddamn scary?”

* * *

Had she had a vid-captor, she would’ve recorded the look on Mat’s face. A gal would make a fortune selling pics of that expression. Pure stupefaction. Unadulterated male bafflement.

“Jo-Ann,” he murmured again.

She didn’t look up when he wrapped his arm around her shoulders and pulled her near. Nor did she stop him from angling her face toward his so he could look at her.

“What did you do?”

“Gave them a means of finding all that good stuff you learned from the enemy. All nice and safe and waiting for them.”

“But you won’t be able to go back to Earth now. You’ll be—like me, you’ll be branded a traitor.” He cupped her chin. “You’ve forsaken everything—”

“For you?” she finished for him. “Yeah.”

Mat blinked twice, seeming to process the words. Or the implicit meaning.

“What made you change your mind?”

His question was carefully modulated. She knew what he wanted to hear. But with the kind of sacrifice she’d just made, she thought she had a right to hear it first.

He nodded.

“Jojo,” he whispered. “I’ve loved you from day one. That never changed. Please believe me.”

“I do.”

“I was an ass.”

“You were.”

“But I learned.” He smiled that lopsided one she liked the most.

“You better prove to me I haven’t fallen in love with a fool.”

His blue eyes sparkled as she’d never seen them do before. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Yes, dammit, you will. Starting now.”

A growl rumbled in his chest when he gave her a bone-crushing hug. “And to say that I gave you up once. Man, what a moron I was. But you don’t have to agree.”

He pulled away to look at her. The vitality in those blue eyes could power a small station. Jojo shook her head.

“My life was peaceful with you gone. I could go in, extract the target, come back home and work on my hobbies.”

He looked hurt. “I didn’t even have sex for six years. And you have *hobbies*?”

“Yeah, I have hobbies.”

“Like what?”

“Ancient Japanese calligraphy.”

He seemed duly impressed. “Wow, you’ve become boring in those six years—ow!”

“I’ll show you boring,” she retorted after another punch to the shoulder that rocked him a bit off balance. A bit. Pushing against an oak tree would probably be easier.

Mat let her have her fun for a while—she knew he was baiting her and enjoyed every second—before abruptly grabbing her wrist and spinning her on the spot so he could sit back against the ledge with her trapped against him. She *humphed* when she was forced to straddle his lap. His expression turned from wicked to serious.

“We’re going to make it work, this thing we have, right? I’ll do what it takes. I don’t care who I piss off.”

“We’ll make it work.” With a pronounced roll of her hips, she added, “You’re too good to throw away. Plus, I’ve already invested too much time training you.”

Mat’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “*Training* me, huh?”

“Mmm-mm.”

“Training me to do what? This?”

Jojo sighed when he kissed her throat, gently, no biting or sucking, just a tender, loving kiss. She let her head loll back to give him more room. She’d missed him. Not just the brain-melting sex but him as a man. Some men couldn’t make the transition from Cro-Magnon with a gun to affectionate lover. Mat could, and he did it

well too.

“What else am I trained to do, Jojo?” he murmured against her neck. “What about this?”

While keeping one arm around her waist so she wouldn’t fall back, he snaked a hand between them and flicked the first button on her jacket. His lips were hot when he pressed them against her throat then between her breasts.

She returned the favor by kissing his chin, his neck, the thin scar from the injury that had made his hoarse voice so damn sexy. Stubble chafed her lips and the tip of her tongue. She didn’t care.

When he began murmuring Danish in her ear in a pearl necklace of whisper-kiss-whisper, the last piece of the puzzle fell into place. For the first time in a long time, she felt she’d finally reached a point in her life where she could affirm with certainty that she was happy. Not complete, not fulfilled. She was her own person, always would be. But with Mat by her side, she’d be happy. And nothing in her book surpassed happiness. One could be complete or fulfilled or even content, but true joy in life was precious and it was rare. She’d found it again.

Nothing would take it away.

“You realize,” she said between kisses, “That you’re stuck with me forever and ever until death pries my fingers off you.”

A chuckle rumbled in his chest. He pulled away. “I think you’re the one who’s stuck. It’ll take a forklift or a lot of ammo to drag me away from you. Unless you want to start me on some of your exciting hobbies, then I’m out of here.”

“Just kiss me.”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard right. You women think you’re the only ones who need to hear how the other feels about you. Well, surprise, surprise, guys want to hear it too, it’s just that we can’t admit it in front of our friends, see. It’d make us look bad. So spill the goods, Jo-Ann.”

She did. She told him what she wanted out of “their thing” as he’d called what they had. Shared her hopes and fears, her

dreams of living quietly somewhere away from Planetary Commonwealth's long arm. Together. Always. By the time she stopped talking, tears stung her eyes.

Mat tucked his bottom lip behind his teeth. "Man, Jojo, you're turning me on."

She snorted a very unladylike laugh. "Yeah, I spill my guts and all you want is to get in my pants."

"Oh I want more than to 'get in your pants'. I want to make love to the most beautiful gal in the system. The smartest, sexiest, toughest soldier alive. The woman I love, have *always* loved, for the record. Nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"Nothing wrong."

"Then just kiss me."

"Come get it."

Jojo yelped when Mat tipped her back and fell on top of her. The speed with which he dealt with both their clothes conveyed just how aroused he was. It also told her how he wanted this. She let him have it. She did nothing to deny his powerful handling nor did Jojo make her hands gentle when she filled them with Mat's hard, muscled form.

When he pinned her hands above her head, she didn't try to stop him. She probably could have. She didn't want to.

When his knee squeezed between her thighs, pressing against her pussy, crushing the sensitive flesh and rubbing up and down hard enough to make her groan in excitement, she didn't prevent him.

When he bit and sucked her nipples, she arched up against him so he'd do it harder. She made room for his hand as he cupped her mons, curled in his middle finger and entered her. In and out then in circles around her clit. Jojo made damn sure he had ample room to maneuver. She wanted him this way. She wanted him to *take* her.

And when he abandoned her pussy so he could guide his cock against her cleft, rub her with it, tease her, Jojo only gritted her teeth and readied herself. She knew what he'd do. How he'd do it. And what he'd demand in return.

Desire sharpened into burning need. With a growl, Mat pushed inside. Took her hard against the deck. Her sharp inhalation turned into a loud gasp.

“Oh god!”

“My name,” he whispered in between each thrust. “Say it.”

She didn’t play this time. She moaned it.

“Mat.”

Unabashedly, she whimpered his name over and over while his penetrations doubled in cadence and force. Soon, his hands anchored her by the hips. His thumbs dug in her flesh. She welcomed the claiming.

Locking her ankles behind his back, she made her voice loud, louder. Panting.

“Mat, Mat, Mat.”

She met each of his plunges with a forceful buck. He was close. She recognized the signs. Welcomed them. He put his elbows above her shoulders to keep her from sliding upward under his vigorous hip work. Spread his knees, curled his spine. Signs she wanted to learn all over again.

Jojo wanted to see his face while he made love to her. She’d missed it so much. Hair hung in sweaty strands and partly shielded his gaze. But there was no mistaking the set of his jaw or the thin line his mouth had become. He was there, at the edge.

A particularly deep thrust made her see stars. It also dislodged the hair from his face. She saw it. Blazing like twin, blue suns. His eyes shone with his love for her. He’d never leave her. He’d be there. Always.

Mat’s voice joined hers in a crescendo that ended in incoherence and breathlessness. Tiny pulsations preceded by a few seconds her own climax. She came like a bomb. A flag in gale force winds, pleasure unfurled in her, outward from her pussy, up her back, down her shaking limbs. She couldn’t think. Only feel.

Mat stopped when he pushed in to the end of her. The end of them both. His cock sheathed to the hilt, she locked her legs around him. He wasn’t going anywhere.

Jojo's breathing slowed, her heartbeat regularized. Mat rested on his elbows and smiled. Not mocking. Not lascivious. Just a quiet, contented smile that lit his whole face.

"Six years," he said, swallowed hard. "Six years to make up."

Jojo raked her hair back. His, too, for good measure. She liked him with his hair long, come to think of it. He looked even more like a Viking this way. Her very own sexy, short Viking.

"We'll need a bed," she murmured, cringing. "I'm too old for this."

Mat's laughter reverberated all the down to her vagina, which she squeezed around him, to his obvious delight.

"When we get to Silverpoint, I'll make it my own personal quest to find you the softest bed in the galaxy. I'll even bribe whoever I must to get a real, honest-to-goodness feather mattress."

"Where you going to find that, huh?"

"Never underestimate a man with ulterior motives." He smiled.

What could she answer to that? "I won't have much time for my hobby, will I?"

Mat shook his head. "*Feather* mattress, my love."

"Yeah, that's what I thought." Jojo smiled. "I needed a new hobby anyway."

Lowering his face to her throat, Mat murmured against her damp skin, "We both did."

About the author:

After a twelve-year career in the Canadian military (Army), where I learned English and the many uses of parachute cord and gun tape, I decided to recycle my skills and become a writer of erotic romance.

What can I say? I'm a late bloomer. To know more about my books, my real-life adventures or my opinions about nothing important, visit me at www.nathaliegray.com.



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