

Turns

Treva Harte

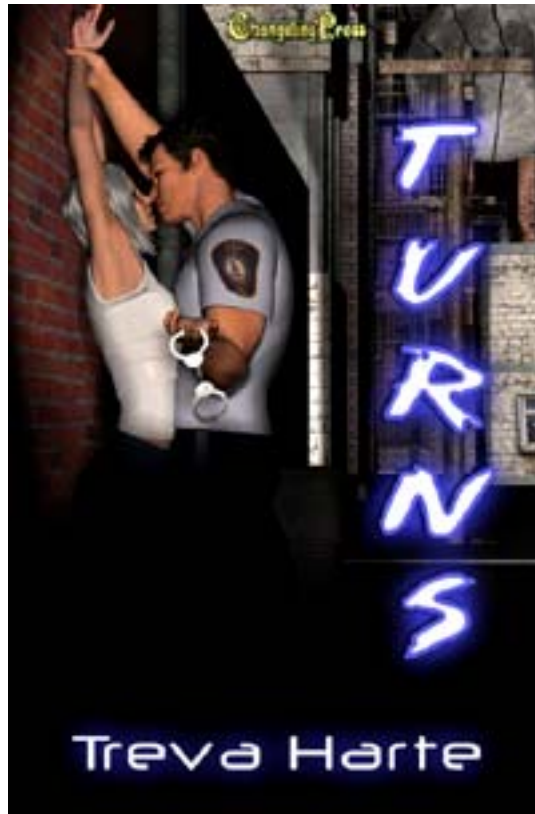
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Chapter One

Washington, D.C., 2054, 2 a.m.

C.J. woke up with an ache in his swollen knee and one in his equally swollen cock. Burning hell, this was an outrage! He was a skill player. Everyone knew injuries came with the territory, but even a player with a bad knee should have someone to take care of his hard-on.

He slowly maneuvered himself further up on the bed, trying not to jar anything, but needing to move. It wasn't just pent up sex. This was different from the usual restlessness you got when you woke up at two in the morning. His skin felt itchy. Hot. He didn't know how to name the craving inside him. How do you describe the sudden ache to be something, someone else? To crawl out of your skin and leave it behind?

"You're losing it. Cabin fever has hit bad, superstar." C.J. stared down at his fingers, suddenly clenched into a fist. Leave everything behind? There was nothing wrong with being Christian Joyce. Burn it, people would slit throats for the chance to be him. So he had a little injury? People recovered from worse accidents all the time. Of course recovery was a bit more urgent in his case than most people. The team playoffs rested on his ability to get healthy. That's why many, many doctors had worked on him after the knee snapped. Many, many doctors for a long, long time.

But all that was over. Now he just had to wait until he recovered and he'd be back on the field, back in the money... the big, big money... and back to his enviable life.

All it took was toughing it out a few more weeks. C.J. knew his lips were curling back into something that was more like a snarl than a smile. He was tough. He'd done more difficult things. Waiting on that elusive recovery was easy. Cake. All cake.

His stomach rumbled, distracting him from everything else.

To hell with cake. He licked his lips and shut his eyes. Pizza. Good, old-fashioned pizza, just like the ones Mom used to make from Grandma's old family recipe. Nothing fancy, but nothing artificial. Just loads of fresh tomato sauce oozing out of that perfect crust, hot cheese trailing in long, fragrant strings when you lifted the first, hot slice off the pan. He'd never been able to wait until it cooled and he'd always burned his tongue. It had been worth it. He salivated, caught up in the memory of taste and smell, of pungent herbs and spicy pepperoni, a memory strong enough to make a man forget anything that hurt, including a throbbing knee and cock.

C.J. opened his eyes and glanced over at the bathroom. Now that he was awake for sure, he knew what he needed to do next, although it was almost too much effort on his own. He'd refused to hire a nurse to watch over his every move. He didn't want people to see him like this and then turn and sell the news to gossip zines. He especially didn't want people to watch and wonder if he could damn well make it to the toidy by himself.

Of course, he didn't enjoy the painful half-crawl out of bed without an audience, either. Delaying the inevitable, he stayed in bed while he punched the code into his portable unit to call out.

"Grandpa John's."

"I want a sausage pizza with extra cheese. Real cheese. No, wait. Make it pepperoni."

"You got the money, we got the pizza with the real cheese. Even pepperoni."

"You deliver?"

"Not hardly. Who delivers pizza anymore? We can't afford it."

"Listen, I'll pay extra."

"Store policy."

"But I'm Christian Joyce!"

“And I’m the Queen of the May, funny boy. Listen, you pick the pizza up or you don’t get it. We already have lines out the door. Place closes in an hour.” The unit clicked off.

He glared at the lazily blinking box. But he wanted a pizza! Food. Was that too much to ask? A few weeks ago he could have had any delicacy he wanted without asking.

Lips thinned, he stretched over to pick up the business listings disc. Pain snarled up his leg as he jostled it, but he willed it away, refusing to pause until he snapped the listings disc into place. He wasn’t going to let some spindly pizza maker thwart him. Maybe he couldn’t get the store to send him pizza. Maybe he couldn’t get to the pizza himself. But he could still get pizza.

Errand runners... He stared down at the rows upon rows of possibilities in the listings.

They were scruffy, desperate little street rats, the lot of them, only a notch or two above the typical homeless. He’d made use of enough of their services in the past few days and didn’t like any of them. But for a large enough fee he could find an errand runner to head for hell and back again. Pizza should be easy.

C.J. stared down at the list of names flashing in front of him.

There. That one had an address close by. He pressed the code.

* * *

“Burn it, Lucy. You’ve been staying with me for weeks now. What’s wrong with you?” Harris stared at her, his jaw tightening with his outrage. “You’re not the same woman any more.”

Lucy had a wild desire to laugh at that statement. If Harris only knew! Instead she controlled the giggle and stared at Harris.

She’d thought that jaw tightening habit was cute once. Two or three weeks ago. A lifetime before. Now her fists clenched as she resisted the urge to give that chin of his a good jab. *Bad idea. Bad.* She should calm down. She ought to be smart and soothe his

ego. If she took the blame on this one, told him how wonderful he was and how wrong she'd been, this would all blow over. Lucy took a deep breath. *Smart. Stay smart.*

"Awww, I am sorry. Sweetie, it's not me. It's you."

Oops. Reverse that! Too late. Her stupid mouth had gone ahead and told the truth again. Now it stubbornly refused to open up and try to backtrack. Instead she stared wordlessly at her soon to be ex. She watched Harris blink as he turned the words over and realized what she'd said. Then she watched his face turn red.

"You bitch!" He stood up. He slammed his hands down on the counter. Very dramatic. Very attention-getting. In fact, there were people all over the bar staring at them. "Who owns the loft? Who pays the bills around here?"

"Who has the keys to the loft and the car right now?"

Oh oh. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Lucy scrambled down from her bar stool, too.

"Is there a problem here?" The bartender, with shoulders like a kill player's, came toward them.

"No problem." Harris tried to calm down, do his usual "I'm in charge here" routine for the peasants. Well, damn it, this was one peasant who was revolting.

"Big problem." Lucy pointed her finger at Harris.

"Oh?" The bartender turned toward Harris. "I noticed you've been knocking back a few, mister."

That was exactly why Lucy had the keys. She clutched the jumble of metal in her pocket, calming down with the cool touch of those tickets to escape.

"No, it's not like that. This woman is my girlfriend. *Was* my girlfriend."

"I never met him before tonight. I never want to see him again. And I'm out of here." Lucy took her chance and headed for the bar door as Harris began to explain to the other man.

She began to sniffle as she threw herself into the car, her hands shaking as she shoved the metal bar into the ignite unit. As she sped down the crowded Georgetown streets, she fought off tears. Driving around here took concentration.

Some of the people yelled as she directed the car through the torn up streets. But they all moved out of her way eventually, shoving themselves up tight against someone else in the crowd. The masses absorbed the tiny bubble of a car, opening and then constricting behind her, rather the way she imagined the insides of a boa constrictor used to work on its prey, way back when such snakes existed.

Lucy sniffled again. No, distraction wasn't going to work. She couldn't think about anything else, including the dangers of city traffic. Stupid. The whole thing was stupid. Why was she forced to be with that man? She was tired of her fate. She was tired of being bound to whatever whim of fortune or genetics or whatever it was that tied her to...

She skidded the car to a halt in the parking space under the building where Harris owned his tasteful City loft. She fumbled at the elevator, shoving the ultrasound pass into the slot.

The threatened tears had turned to real sobbing now. Lucy hoped security wouldn't see her. They already thought she was trouble since no one else in the building looked quite as scruffy as she did. By rights she should be one of the masses outside, huddling for warmth and shelter. She certainly wasn't one of the elite who escaped early death and starvation with money.

Then again, she wasn't quite like the other humans out there, either. The noise of the crowds outside faded as the elevator ascended up higher, gradually distancing itself from those below. Lucy stared outside, peering through the transparent sides of the small boxed enclosure. Would she want to be one of the normal humans outside? Even here, in the well-guarded building, she could see a few strays who dared to stand nearby. Where else could they go? They had to go somewhere. It was too small a world, with too many people in it. Lucy shuddered. No. Her life had its problems, but she didn't want to be one of them.

Harris wouldn't have given the outsiders another thought. The city plagues and problems of the poor had never been one of his concerns.

What a mismatch they'd been, she and Harris. But when she'd first seen him, she'd known. The moment they'd met at that other bar, three weeks ago, she'd been ready to live with him. He'd been more than ready to have her move in. It didn't matter that they were totally incompatible. He'd asked her to stay about halfway through their first shared drink.

They couldn't help themselves. They had to be together, no matter what they turned into later.

"Why do I have to realize all this now?" Lucy wailed as she stumbled into the condo.

It was so much easier to forget. She always did. Each time she met "the one," they were both excited and thrilled all over again. Until "the one" disappeared and was replaced.

She hated her life. She didn't want to stay a scruffy little errand runner, waiting to find herself. She didn't want to be dependent on some snotty law firm associate named Harris. She really didn't want to be stuck in Lucy's skin much longer. And Lucy especially didn't want to remember everything so clearly.

"Oh, God. I hope he changes soon." Lucy looked into the huge hall mirror. Men used to find her gilt white hair fascinating. Now it just looked wild. She had circles under her eyes. Her nose was red. "How long have I been this way anyhow?"

There would be another Harris for her. Or another Mike or Joe or whatever his name turned out to be. Another man but the same one. The one she'd just *know* was her mate. The one she'd love. The one who would leave again.

Or the one who made her leave. The pattern had gone on her whole life. No matter what else changed, that was a constant. The person she loved was always here and then gone again within weeks.

Lucy stared at herself. Damn it, call her shallow. She knew why she was upset. It wasn't that she would mind having yet another same old/brand new man in her life, even knowing the arrangement was temporary. She was just tired of being trapped in her own role as Lucy, the slightly eccentric errand runner who was just doing this job

until she found herself. She didn't want to find herself any more. She wanted to be the one who went away. The one her soul mate had to look for. And, while she was at it, she wanted someone who wouldn't care if she changed or stayed the same. Someone who wanted her always and forever, no matter what she was.

Not the same woman, indeed.

She was starting to look old. Tired. Sick. She was finding herself all right -- and loathing what she found. Lucy wanted to change herself, not the lovers around her.

"When will it be *my* turn?"

As if that was the cue, the portable communication unit trilled.

* * *

"Never mind. You're too late."

"I just got your message!"

"I needed someone when I called, not an hour later. The pizza place is closed now."

"Stupid c-unit has been acting weird lately. It must've given me a delayed response."

"Well, that's too bad for someone in your business. Anyhow, I don't need you."

"If you were in such a hurry why didn't you call someone else?"

"I did. No one else would take the job at two a.m." Her client -- her almost-client -- did not look happy. He didn't look as angry as Harris had at the bar but...

Click. Oh, no. Not him. No, no, no. He already looked mad at her. This time she wouldn't have to wait three weeks before they started fighting. Noooo. But the vibration inside her told her this guy was the one.

She shifted her feet restlessly. She couldn't remember when she last had so strong an urge unwind inside her chest, her belly, her pussy...

"Listen. You're hungry?" Lucy rubbed the back of her neck. There was no arguing with genetics or chemistry or whatever it was. She had to stay with him. "I can fix you something."

"You cook?" He looked her over, clearly suspecting she was either too stupid or too capable of poisoning him.

"Yeah. And not just in bed, either."

For a moment his face changed from icy scowl to something -- interested? Startled? Different, anyhow. Now! Now he'd know she was the one. But he scowled instead. "I don't have anything here to cook."

Burn it, when was the man going to acknowledge her? Lucy almost tapped her foot. "Fine. I'll go get something."

"Pizza."

"Great." What all night store stocked up something as old-fashioned as pizza? "Listen, buddy, as long as I'm doing this, what's your name?"

"C.J. Christian Joyce."

"Yeah, right." Lucy snorted and then looked again. It was hard to tell if the man was tall when he was huddled on the sofa, but he did look hulking. His face was shadowed but --

"Take a better look." He clicked on a light, set to dim.

Oooo. He had the café au lait skin most people of polyglot ancestry did. Pretty, but not unusual. However, the blue eyes against the dark skin were startling, even more startling live than when you saw it on the media screen. No one could fake those eyes.

"Whoa. Maybe you really are the infamous AntiChrist."

The slash of a smile almost warmed up the severity of the face. Burn it, he was handsome. Scary handsome, but handsome. She could see where the nickname came from. She bet other skill players shivered when he directed that look at them. She was lucky he was just annoyed, not enraged. His intensity was almost overwhelming as it was.

"You think I don't know who I am?"

The vibration in her was almost a buzz, it was so strong now. Despite it not making sense, this guy was the one. He was here. All her body parts were tingling now.

She could actually feel moistness between her thighs. She'd never been so aware of her mate before. Burn it, if he didn't drag her to bed soon, she'd have to drag him.

AntiChrist Christian Joyce. The most famous, wealthiest athlete in the world.

What had the turn done to them this time? And how had it happened? She'd think about that later. Much later.

Rip my clothes off, C.J. Let me bite that tight tush you're sitting on.

The stupid man just sat there, looking totally unmoved while she turned into a fireball in front of him.

But he did look like he really wanted that pizza. Who would have thought pizza would be so important to someone like him? No matter. She could work with that.

"Fine, Mr. Maybe You're Really Christian Joyce. I'll see what I can come up with by way of pizza."

Chapter Two

"Here it is." She showed C.J. the thin container. The smell made him swallow hard.

"Thanks." He fumbled, fishing for some credit issue money by the table near the couch.

"Not so fast." She brushed by him, carrying the pizza away from his grasp. He almost whimpered.

"What are you doing?" he called after her, suddenly terrified.

She disappeared into the kitchen.

He hadn't waited just to have an errand runner throw his pizza away... or eat it herself! Cursing under his breath, he levered himself up on one leg and hopped to the kitchen, grunting at each hop.

By the time he got there, she had a knife -- his kitchen knife -- and was chopping up vegetables.

"You couldn't get vegetables at the store?" He leaned against the wall and spent some reserve energy refusing to look like every bone in his body was screaming with pain.

"Yeah. But they didn't look like real vegetables. I figured, you want this pizza this bad, you want it with real peppers and mushrooms for a topping. So I stopped at a fresh veg store and ordered authentic. Since I've decided you really are Christian Joyce, you can afford it." The knife blade flashed up and then down, dicing up the colorful heap of food before her.

Real peppers and mushrooms. Dear heaven, he almost wept at the idea. When had he last watched someone chop up vegetables for him? Years ago when he was a

kid. On the days Mom had time and thought he needed some cheering up. It was one of her ways to show she loved him.

He could almost get choked up at the memory -- and the sight of another woman doing the same thing for him. If he didn't remember why this woman was here and that she was probably angling for a nice tip, he'd start thinking she cared, too. Memories were sneaky things.

"What about the pepperoni?"

She shook her head. "Pepperoni is never real. That I got at Grandpa John's, no problem."

"But they were closed."

"They were only closed until I banged on the back door and used your debit card to bribe the folks to fix me a pizza. Don't remind me about how much trouble you are. I still have a knife here."

He cleared his throat, suddenly not quite sure what to say. Thanks was probably the right thing. Even though something about the errand runner made him want to snap and snarl, there was no reason for him to get snotty. He could imagine what Mom would have thought of his manners. "I -- this was nice of you. Really."

She glanced over at him and almost smiled. Suddenly she looked mischievous instead of sulky. Cute. Approachable. "Don't always count on me being nice."

He almost smiled back. Fixing food for him was pretty nice. But how not nice was she? He thought about edging a little closer.

Shit. A few almost sexy words out of her mouth and what's-her-name... Lucy... changed from being a necessary nuisance to something else. He wasn't sure yet what the something else might be, but he wanted to find out. Her baggy pants slipped a millimeter down as she reached to put the knife into the washsink. His interest level slipped up a notch.

"Care to join me, Lucy?"

This time she did smile. Cute didn't even cover it. He blinked at her dimples. Who had dimples any more?

"If you say please."

Oh, I think you'd please me just fine.

"Any woman who can fix up a pizza gets a please from me any time she wants."

"Then I'd be honored to join you."

* * *

"Yeah. Oh, yeah. Pizza might even be better than sex." He almost scalded his tongue when he said the words. His cock tightened, reminding him he was lying.

What was it with this woman? She was dressed in a shirt that looked like she had stolen it from her very much bigger brother. Her ripped pants slipped low on her hips. But it was that odd, questioning stare that was getting to him most. He'd dealt with loony fans before but not ones that, despite everything, made him break out in a sweat. He kept wanting to see what was under those pants. If they just slipped low enough... panties or nothing? Either way would be good.

OK, he was interested in her underwear. That was normal and healthy. But why did he want to throw her down and bang her brains out this second? He hadn't wanted to screw anyone this much this fast even back in his early days, before he realized he could have whoever he wanted, however he wanted, whenever he wanted.

"Whatever gets you going." She sounded as skeptical about the better than sex statement as he was. "I'd think a guy with your money could get plenty of pizza with hot sex on top."

Was that a hint for him? Much as he wanted to think so, he decided not. She looked like she was enjoying her meal way too much, shoving big bites of pizza into her mouth, hardly pausing long enough to catch the melted cheese and deep red sauce on her lips. He wondered how it would taste to lick rich tomato sauce from those lips. He stared at her mouth a moment, then realized if she kept eating at the rate she was now, she'd finish off more of the damn pizza than he could. Now that would be a shame.

So C.J. just smiled, even though his cock was starting to tell him to forget all the rationalizations and jump her. What was wrong with him tonight? Even though he wasn't quite as lucky all the time as she and he wanted to think, he came close enough

to allow him to be picky. Damned picky. He wasn't desperate. Shouldn't be desperate. Because she definitely wasn't his type.

He took another bite of pizza, rather than a bite out of her, just to prove it.

Still, she had nice hair. White and wild. Made him want to tangle his fingers in it. And he could almost smell her perfume -- some wild, musky scent that women got into wearing nowadays to tease a man. It smelled like sex. Or trouble.

It was starting to make him decide he could ignore the smell and taste of his long-awaited treat after all, since there was another, tastier treat in sight. That was wrong. Just wrong.

"It's good pizza, considering." He should've just told her to go. He'd never be thinking about what was under her clothes if he'd just tipped her and shoved her out the door. Instead he'd let her sit cross-legged on the floor beneath his position on the couch and chomp on a precious slice of pepperoni and cheese. His mistake.

His aching, growing mistake.

"Considering what?" Lucy mumbled through the mouthful, scowling up at him. "That isn't a comment about my cooking, is it?"

She was feisty for a crazy errand runner who liked looking at him a little longer than was polite.

"Just considering."

"So." She didn't say anything more. Her stare was making him itchy again. The pizza and the company, such as it was, had soothed him down at first. He'd almost forgotten his antsy cabin fever until she started those needs up again with her... whatever it was she was doing to him by just being there.

"So?" C.J. almost growled the word. That might be rude, but he was starting to feel damn rude.

Not just rude. He was restless, almost the way he had been earlier. But he knew what he wanted now. Sex. He needed some bad. There had been a little slap and tickle with the nurses in the hospital but that had been over a week ago and had just left him wanting some full body contact with a woman.

Maybe this woman. He tried to hang onto his sanity. Not his type, remember?

Forget his type. She looked scruffy and a little too intense but -- burn it, there was something about her. Like her availability. That had to be the reason. He'd gotten used to expensive, put-together, eager women. She wasn't any of that, but she was here and they weren't. That was probably enough.

Sex. What was so complicated about sex? He could ask her for some. She'd say yes or no. They'd have some or not, then she'd leave. And after that he could finish his pizza.

"Have you figured it out yet?" She leaned forward, put the palm of her hand against his arm.

C.J. huffed a little. The contact, slight as it was, sizzled against his skin. His body tensed. What was he worried about? He never had problems getting a woman. Why not go ahead?

"I think I understand by now, babe." He lowered his voice, watched her eyes dilate a little.

Yeah. Oh, yeah. They'd work something out.

She spoke in a breathy voice that sent spiraling fire straight to his cock. "Then can we stop playing games? You're still my bond mate. You know what we want. Let's have sex and seal the bond again."

Sex. His body revved up at the word.

"I can't get you naked when you're sitting over there." C.J. unfastened a few inches of his shirt and watched her quiver. "Come here, Lucy."

Lucy -- that was her name. Lucy. He hadn't forgotten everything while his body went into red alert. In fact, his brain kept screaming at him over the red haze of his suddenly freed lust. Go away, brain. This was not the time to think -- not while his cock pulsed and hardened inside his pants.

Bond mate? His rapidly diminishing brain screamed the words like a warning. Damn brain, interrupting something important.

Lucy strolled toward him, already halfway out of her pants. Whoa. She was one of those rare women who definitely looked better undressed than clothed. In another minute he'd rip her shirt off and make sure. All of a sudden he was convinced he was heading for the best sex of his life.

Of course he was always convinced of that when a woman was about to spread her legs in front of him. And, dear heaven, her legs and thighs looked so damn good.

His brain shrieked, refusing to give in, so C.J. cleared his throat and muttered, "What do you mean, bond mate?"

Lucy stopped unfastening his pants. Damn it, her fingers were so close to where he wanted them to be! He wanted to feel them pressing, tickling...

Instead she started staring again, giving him the look that made him want to scream with frustration and just plain desire. "You. Me. Do you realize how many times we've done this together?"

"No. I don't want to hear this." No, no, no. He wanted to fuck her. He'd suspected she was a little off center. If she started talking about past lives and reincarnation and expected him to listen --

Forget talk. He could smell her. He knew how aroused she was. He reached for her, faster than she could speak. Her head turned his way, her lips parting in an unnaturally slow motion. Ah. He'd been here before. His senses heightened, sometimes amazingly, while he was on the skill playing field. That was just survival. He'd never felt adrenaline shift and alter his perceptions in the bedroom.

But this time it did. He knew he must be moving fast -- faster than normal humans did. But it seemed as if Lucy was being slow. He'd ripped her clothes off before she had done more than take two breaths. The scent of her arousal came through even stronger. She liked what he -- they -- were doing. He knew it even before he heard her broken sigh.

He slid inside her before she could say anything more. Anything that might make him stop. Ahhh, yeah. He shivered as his nerve endings shot the message to the

rest of his body. Hot, tight, wet. C.J. buried his face against her neck and just savored. All those sensations, ratcheted up as high as they could go, screamed with joy.

"But C.J. --"

"Just shut up for a minute, please. I have to fuck you. Have to." He cut off her next words with a hard kiss. Damn, he'd said please, right? That was as polite as he could be right now. Didn't she understand how important it was to move inside her, yes, just that way, fast and claiming.

"Keep going. Oh, more!" Lucy moaned the words and arched up under him.

Oh yeah. She knew. She was there with him.

Heat and joy washed over him, the way it did sometimes when everything clicked on the skill field and millions were chanting his name. A roar of jumbled noise blasted over him this time too, blocking any thought. Not chants this time but the sound of his heart pounding and lungs screaming with the effort of pounding into this woman. Of making her completely his.

More. More, more, more.

"Faster. Oh, faster." She whimpered the words, as if she was totally in tune with his mind and body. Perfect. What she wanted was --

He slipped one notch deeper into lust. Dark whirling needs poured through him as the words and the thoughts slipped away. More. Faster. Harder. Good.

Lava was flowing up from his cock, signaling hot pleasure to come. Come.

"Ahhhhh." He spilled long and satisfyingly, tightly wedged inside that wriggling little body of hers. She squeezed tightly and groaned.

Even after she had drained everything, he buried his face between her breasts, panting hard, unwilling to pull out right away. She was too right. Just too good. He waited as time shifted back to its usual slower pace.

He paused to check out his surroundings now that everything was going back to the way they should be. Lucy. That was what he was surrounded by. His hands were still all over her, his body plastered to hers. It was too much effort to move away like a

gentleman. He grunted as he shifted, giving her just enough room to breathe. Burn it, she still felt too good to leave.

The musky scent and taste of her hadn't been fake. He tasted her sweat-salty skin with the tip of his tongue just to be sure. Ahh, that was really her essence. The taste, touch and look were perfect. He raised his head just enough to get a good peek. Yup. Lucy looked perfect, stretched out all sated and rumped on his couch, completely exhausted.

It was almost too bad when she opened her eyes, trying to focus.

He leaned his head back against her breast, listening to her heart slowing down, bit by bit, back into calm. Normal. Everything was normal again.

"Not bad." He sat up finally, pushed his hair back from his face and tried to ignore the sudden agony now shooting up from his leg. Ecstasy was over. Burn it, even the leg was going back to normal.

He gritted his teeth and spoke through the pain. Time to get rid of her. Sexy or not, there was something odd about the woman. "Don't worry. The hot sex on top was great, but I'll give you a tip for the pizza, too."

She pulled herself into a sitting position and then hit him -- hard -- in the shoulder.

He'd braced himself for the pain in his knee but not for that blow. C.J. yelped and grabbed her fists. "What was that about?"

She looked outraged. Genuinely furious. "The change. I didn't turn. Neither did you. Why are you playing with me? You must not have done it right. Are you some kind of virgin?"

"Burn it!" C.J. hadn't blushed in years. He sure wasn't going to now. "What's wrong with you? You seemed to like what I was doing a few minutes ago. All that panting and moaning was fake?"

"Oh, that." She waved her hand. "That was sex. It was very nice --"

"Nice?"

"All right, it was very, very nice. But it wasn't important. Not unless we changed."

"I'm going to regret asking this, I know it." C.J. could feel the regret turning into a headache already. "But what exactly are you talking about?"

"You and me. The chemistry. We're bond mates, I just know it. And I'm dying for a change. Just dying. Why didn't you do it for me?"

C.J. rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Lucy. I have no idea what you're talking about. Back up a few more steps."

"Whew." Lucy's face squinched up as if she was getting a headache, too. "You really don't get it. Everything wiped totally clean for you with this turn, didn't it?"

"Looo-seee."

"Fine, fine. I'll explain. You and I. We're mutants. Bond mates. We..." She stopped and took another deep breath. "Let me back up some more."

She leaned closer to him and started to speak more slowly. C.J. would have resented being treated like the village idiot except that he became fascinated with how her lips parted on each word.

Damn cock. It kept distracting him.

"Have you ever heard that in every relationship, the partners have to grow and change?"

"That sounds like something from the women mags, but I've heard of that."

"Yeah, well, we just take the concept to extremes."

"We who?"

"You and I. Mutants. Bond mates. Transformers. We turn." Lucy sighed. "You must have heard something about this, Mr. Super AntiChrist. People do talk about us, even if they've never seen us. We're the kind of mutants who transform, change into someone else every few weeks or months. You and I have a more powerful bond than some. Usually we change every few weeks. We can't help ourselves."

"We can't?" C.J. cleared his throat. Gently. He had to say this very, very gently. "Lucy, sweetheart, listen --"

"I know things just changed again for you but you must remember, C.J. Please! You and I had a huge fight just a few hours ago. OK, it wasn't sex, but the emotions were pretty powerful anyhow, and we're sensitive enough that sometimes we don't need sex as the catalyst. You turned. I didn't."

She waited. *C'mon, click in. C'mon, C.J.!*

"I'm sensitive?" C.J. looked like he'd bit into an anchovy in the pizza. "Lucy. Hon. I like you. I really do. But you're talking about an urban legend. It's as crazy as when people used to believe in hexes and -- and chocolate being bad for your health. Mutants don't exist. Not the way you describe it."

He was always the same. You might want to slobber over him one minute, but in the next he'd make you want to kick him. Burn it! Lucy's fists clenched. But no, beating sense into her bond mate never worked. Unfortunately.

"C.J. --"

The entrance buzzer sounded a harsh metallic trill. Lucy jumped.

"What?" C.J. barked.

"Looking for Lucy Spivak." The transmission from the outside was clear. The voice sounded as if the man who belonged to the voice was already in the room.

"Oh, no." Lucy stared blankly at C.J.

"You worried about a visitor?"

"Yes. No. Well, that's not the problem. I mean, I'm not exactly worried about a visitor because I know that voice."

"Come in then, visitor for Lucy Spivak." C.J. stared at her while he spoke. If he timed this right, maybe he could ease her out without a noisy argument. She wouldn't yell in front of someone she knew, would she? "You know, Lucy, maybe all this isn't working out."

"Well, things got more complicated than I expected." Lucy could hear the door opening in the outer room. "See, I made a little mistake just now. You aren't Harris. My bond mate."

“No, I’m not.”

“No, you’re not.” The footsteps reached the threshold to the room they sat in.

“Because I am.”

Chapter Three

He didn't look like anything to get excited over. Lucy had gone pale when Harris entered the room but C.J. would swear it wasn't from the thrill of seeing this guy. Who could get excited about a pale little worm with stringy hair and an old-fashioned tie?

Who wore ties nowadays unless you were a lawyer? And why would Lucy want to be with a lawyer?

"Harris." C.J. opened his mouth to keep on talking and say, "Have you come to take her away?"

Before he could speak, Harris glared at Lucy and said, "I've come to take you out of here."

"Hey, wait a minute!" C.J. straightened up, ignoring the twinges the change in posture gave him.

"Why?" Lucy glared back at Harris.

Maybe this bond mate thing wasn't all Lucy had made it sound like. C.J. couldn't imagine a worse fate than being stuck forever with someone who was trying to freeze him over with her stare. Then again, Harris looked to be lowering the temperature plenty over on his side.

"You didn't quite get me arrested this time, Lucy. It was a good try, though."

"If you weren't such an idiot, there wouldn't have been any problem at all."

"Excuse me." C.J. cleared his throat.

"Not now, AntiChrist." Lucy cleared her own throat. Louder. "Excuse *me*. After screaming at Harris and eating pizza, I think I'm going to be sick."

She wasn't kidding. She ran for his lav where she was thoroughly, noisily sick. C.J. fought the urge to drag himself up and try to help. Even if he could make it there without falling, what could you do for someone erupting in a toilet except maybe hold

her head? He noticed Harris didn't seem too anxious to go take care of his bond mate, either.

"Listen. Lucy does what she wants, weasel." C.J. said it in his calmest, deadliest tone.

Even if what she wanted was to hang around in his house, being sick in his lav, in between babbling nonsense. He wasn't going to let Harris tell either of them what to do. If anyone was going to give orders, he'd tell Lucy what was going to happen. Later. Privately.

Harris swallowed. "It's not that I'm bossy. It's just that -- well, Lucy and I need each other. We go back a long way. A long, long way. You wouldn't understand."

"Lucy says you're her bond mate." No wonder Lucy was ill. C.J.'s own stomach was a little queasy at the idea.

He waited for the man to laugh, look puzzled -- to deny the whole thing. This guy might be a weasel but he looked like he kept a firm hold on reality.

"Oh." Harris blinked rapidly. "Well. Ah. If she told you that... I am, actually."

"Oh, burning, beautiful --" The security buzzer shrilled through the room for the second unnerving time within the hour. C.J. pressed it, ready to snarl or beat on someone. "What?"

"Metro Police. Can we come in?"

"Well, this has been an evening... now a morning... to remember. I guess this visit makes everything even more special." C.J. stared at the window. The red and violet sun was rising. A lovely new day filled with slightly less lovely new people. "Come on in, MPs."

You didn't refuse the Metro Police unless you wanted to handle major trouble for a major amount of time. What mess had these two dragged him into now?

* * *

They were huge men, built to intimidate. C.J. had met bigger and more intimidating men on the skill field, but that didn't mean he didn't know how to be cautious.

"Well, these papers seem to be in order." The tallest, oldest MP looked as if he suspected a forgery. C.J. was getting a little tired of people doubting who he was. Had people forgotten what he looked like already? He hadn't been out of the games that long. The MP eyed Lucy and Harris. "What about these two?"

"We don't bring our identity papers for impromptu visits." Harris adjusted his tie.

"Visits at this time of day?" The younger MP's face and body language was as skeptical as the first MP's. He was even taller than the first guy and built more like a mountain wall of a kill player. C.J. would hate to meet either of them on a playing field. Their fists alone would be formidable without the added help of MP issued stunners, restraints and the rest. "Why would you two be here?"

"I'm an informal kind of guy." C.J. couldn't help tweaking them a little. He remembered his younger days and the garbage MPs used to hand him when he got a little wild. He would stay within legal, but he didn't see any need to make things easy. "Friends can drop in any time."

"You sure these two are your friends?" The older MP leaned forward, one eyebrow slightly raised. "These type don't usually have friends. They're scammers, always out for themselves and ready to burn the rest of us."

"What do you mean by type?" Lucy looked hostile. "Harris and I aren't a *type*. He's a lawyer. I'm an errand runner. How do we fit together?"

"A lawyer, an errand runner and one of the most famous skill players of all time." The younger MP shook his head. C.J. almost smiled. It might be at an inconvenient moment, but at least someone tonight recognized him. "How do you all fit? Makes me wonder. Where did you all come from and why?"

Harris cleared his throat. Sweat glistened on his forehead. "Actually --"

"Actually, we're tracking some people we heard might be mutants. Scamming mutants. But then again, like he said, those type always are. They don't stay anywhere long enough to get anything they own honestly." The younger MP moved closer to

Harris and his stupid, expensive tie. He ran a finger down the sleeve of Harris' equally ridiculous, equally expensive jacket.

"Mutants? C'mon. Err, c'mon, officers. Are you trying to scam me instead?"

Let them go. Why protect a weasel? C.J. fought the urge to say something. You never really tried to discourage MPs. That was always a mistake. He didn't owe Harris anything. In fact, he wanted them both out.

Then he looked at Lucy. At Lucy's face that tried so hard to look calm. He knew better. Lucy was scared. He could almost hear the scream she was fighting, nearly feel the hands that were gripping the edge of her baggy pants just a little too tightly.

Shit. I have to do something.

* * *

They were going to be taken. Taken and tried and tested for mutant qualities. Lucy stared down at her hands. She'd rather die. She might die from their tests. She'd heard the rumors. Everyone in their world listened to those rumors. Transformers didn't last long under tests.

"Do I have to explain everything? Isn't it obvious why they're here?" C.J. sounded amused. The laughter in his voice cut through her rising panic. "I asked them here."

"Why?" The old MP almost pounced on the words.

Why indeed? Lucy stared over at him.

"I wanted something special. You know." C.J. paused.

They knew? What did they know?

"A threesome." He finished the sentence.

"With... them?" For the first time the oldest MP looked a little shocked.

Lucy bit back a sudden giggle. Then she cleared her throat, visualizing the possibilities. With C.J. in front and Harris behind she wouldn't actually have to see Harris. The lawyer's best attributes weren't in his face...

And she could see C.J. Every inch of him. She could feel his hands on her skin and his breath on her body. She almost shivered, but this time it wasn't with fear. Every hormone in her began to scream.

Lucy clutched her hands. Burn it, she was on such edge it was a wonder she didn't start transforming in front of them all. That would never do.

* * *

"I love them. Both of them," C.J. answered promptly, trying not to think about Harris' tie and thinning hair. "They're my best friends. You wouldn't believe what they can do in bed."

"You're right. I don't think I would believe it," he answered. Burn his skeptical hide. "Ahem. You don't mind if we check out some further identification to see you are who you say you are?"

"Not at all." C.J. could feel the AntiChrist killer smile curling up on his lips. "Absolutely not. What do you want -- my permanent government card, the birth cert, confirmation from the doctor who delivered me?"

"Err, the first two will be legally sufficient." The man looked a little shaken, but held tight.

"I also have pictures of me from when I was a baby up to when I won the first skill ring. My family archives a lot." *And that proves I'm not what Harris and you say I am, Lucy. I know where I come from.*

"Oh." The MP paused, processing.

"Once I do that, unless you show me you have a good reason for staying here, I'd suggest it's time to leave." C.J. spoke in his ice voice. The one that always worked.

* * *

"The MPs are right, you know. You two are nothing but scammers." C.J. didn't like saying it. The words were almost like kicking someone homeless out of his way in the streets. Necessary sometimes, but still nasty. He didn't care about Harris, but Lucy... burn it, why was he still worried about Lucy?

"No. We are who we say we are. We're all re-created with certain skills at the start and we don't remember anything about our past." Lucy was looking disappointed. At him, of course. The guy who had just tossed the MPs out and saved her.

C.J. swallowed the hurt down. "C'mon. A lawyer? You turned into a real lawyer for what? Two weeks?"

"Three. And I didn't start out knowing I was a mutant. I started out thinking I am exactly who I said I am. It's a little like having temporary amnesia. You can remember things like how to walk and talk but not everything -- and at first you believe you are who you appear to be. Who wouldn't? I'm Egbert Harris, corporate lawyer." Harris drew himself up.

"Egbert?"

"Who would make up a name like Egbert?"

"But you don't know anything about law! What law firm would hire you?"

"I thought I did know. But -- well, I didn't mention this to you at the time, Lucy, but... ah, I was recently dispensed with by one of the omni-law firms in town. I've been thinking about checking into some short-term employment centers." Harris stopped and shook his head a little, as if to try to clear out the fantasy from the reality.

"Oh. Hmmm. The loft and the fancy dinners... I guess we're living on credit?" Lucy looked thoughtful.

"How did you get credit?" C.J. asked at the same moment.

"I'm good with computers."

"I knew it. You are a scammer. You faked a credit history," C.J. growled.

"I didn't know it was fake. At first. I just thought there was a glitch in my credit history. So I helped it along a little." Harris tried to smile at his angry host.

"I have to admit, that was as fancy as I've lived in about a decade of past lives." Lucy shrugged. "Usually we're fringers. We've waited tables, been performance artists, bodyguards --"

"You were hired as a bodyguard?" C.J. eyed the tiny person before him. "Who would ever hire you?"

"I was Bruno then, a 280 pound slab of beef."

"You were a *guy*?" The more he heard, the harder it was to put together.

"I've been everything. Harris and I have looked like every person, been any and every gender, sexual preference, hair color, nationality." Lucy threw her hands out. "Why aren't you getting this? We are real. It's just our reality changes a lot more often than most people's."

"Everything starts off fresh. But after a few weeks, we start remembering the past. Then we know there's trouble ahead. Like those MPs after us. Do you know what it's like for a mutant who gets pinned?" Harris looked as sick as Lucy had not long ago. "Plus we get the itch."

"The itch," C.J. repeated. He remembered that desperate need to do something, be something else. It had been like an itch he couldn't scratch.

"Yeah. We need to change. It's not like we get to choose whether we do or not. We need it. Bad." Harris tapped Lucy on the shoulder. "Like I do right now."

"Stop pestering me about it, Harris. I can't seem to help you right now."

The crazy almost-logic was getting C.J. crazy, too. The thought of Lucy transforming that guy with sex... C.J. cleared his throat. It was time to put an end to all this. "Well, I appreciate all the honesty, I think. But when it comes to it, this doesn't mean anything to me. You've been wrong, Lucy. Wrong about me."

"You think so?" Lucy didn't look concerned.

C.J. tried calm. She didn't have to act so superior. He almost hated taking the disdainful look off her face, though. He'd kind of gotten used to her snotty attitude.

"Yeah. I wasn't kidding about the archives. I don't transform. I never have."

"You just mean you haven't yet. C.J., when was the last time you saw your parents?"

"Not long. Uh, about a year ago. Once I got famous, they said they wanted to -- ah -- tour the world. They knew I'd be fine on my own."

"And how often do you communicate now that they're touring?"

"What is your problem? Last month. I got a message on the unit last month."

"Right. C.J., I have news. You may never see your parents again."

"Burn it, don't say that! They love me. I love them."

"I bet they do. How long did they stay for you? Twenty years? More. That's a lot of love for a transformer. But they should have told you the truth before they left."

"You're crazy."

His parents -- they'd never -- But when was the last time he had actually, truly seen them? Even in a digi-phot? No. That was stupid. Lucy was confusing him. They were his parents, burn it. Parents stayed solid. Safe. Predictable. Taking this world tour was the wildest thing they'd ever done in their lives. He'd had to coax them to go.

Hadn't he?

"And you're a wonder. It's been so long for Harris and me, I've forgotten what it was like to have the first change."

C.J. could feel his blood pressure sizzling up through his ears. That old saying "hot under the collar" -- that wasn't half of it. Everything was getting hot. If she called him some kind of a virgin again, he wasn't going to be answerable for what happened next.

"Lucy, you're doing it again." He heard Harris, faintly, through the anger hissing in his brain. "Creating all that adrenaline. You're so frighteningly good at that. Burn it, I'm about ready to turn just from watching that muscle-bound cretin react to you."

"You should see what happens when we have sex, Harris. Talk about adrenaline! I've never experienced anything like that before."

"He's not seeing us when we have sex." C.J. knew he meant the growl to his words.

Lucy laughed. Men turned pale -- like Harris was right now -- when the AntiChrist got mad but *she* giggled. "You said you wanted a threesome, C.J."

"I'm not asking to see the two of you, believe me!" Harris almost yelped.

"He's not seeing any more of us at all." C.J. dragged himself up and stood, concentrating on not swaying forward. He prayed he still looked tough enough,

because in another minute he was afraid he'd lose his balance and land on the floor.
"Harris is leaving right now."

"But --" Harris started to argue.

"Right. Now."

* * *

"Wow. Impressive." Lucy didn't want to be impressed. How did the man clear a room when the toughest physical act he could manage was to raise himself up on his elbows? Well, that and the sex. Some of the sex acts he'd done were pretty tough. But he hadn't done them in front of an audience. She had the feeling that threesome talk was never going to happen. C.J. was more one on one.

"Come here."

She took a step toward him before she remembered not to be impressed. What was he going to do, zap her with his mind death ray? "Why?"

"I'm going to either spank you or fuck you. Depends on how fast you move over here."

Her pussy quivered. Stupid thing. Lucy stuck her chin out. "How do you know which one I'd like most?"

She was walking toward him. How did he do that?

He smiled, that killer, scary grin. The one that should make her shake with fear. Her knees trembled, all right, but she wasn't scared. Not too much. Before she knew she was close enough, his hand snaked out, fast. Yes, he definitely was an athlete. He gripped her tightly. "I guess I'll have to experiment."

* * *

Her wrists were so tiny that it took just one hand to hold her down. She twisted under him, looking ready to spit.

He laughed. Did it matter if she really was angry or just pretending? He knew what they wanted. Well, what he wanted. Sex. Hot, sweaty sex.

She wanted adrenaline. He'd give her adrenaline, too.

"Listen to me, AntiChrist --"

“Shut up. Just shut up.” Maybe you couldn’t just tear into a woman the way you did a tasty meal. Especially one who was ready to bite back.

He nipped her shoulder instead. Just a nibble really. She did hiss. And then she bit him back. Harder. He shuddered against her mouth, let his free hand tangle into that wild hair.

She was dainty and fierce. For a moment he fought himself. He kissed that smooth skin. He shouldn’t mark it. He should lick it, just like that. He should touch her neck and her breasts.

She writhed under him and scratched his chest. Wriggled her body tight against him. To hell with foreplay.

He dove into her. No more finesse. Just this rage of need, this drive to slide into that tight welcome she gave. She arched up under him.

Sparks danced before his eyes. He was going to combust. Her hips swayed and jiggled a rhythm he matched. The air he sucked into his lungs felt like a hot blade as he swallowed down.

Heat, more heat, everywhere. Inside her. Deep inside her. He needed that. For just a moment he felt the cool rush of wind. As if he was at the edge of some height. As if he could step off a cliff and float, weightless and calm, above all the chaos in his body.

Change. Every atom in his body screamed for it. Plunge into her. Transform yourself. Heat and life. Delicious coolness. Sex and freedom and *change*.

She moaned into his ear and the moment twisted away. He was back inside his same burning, sweaty, eager skin. The boiling inside him erupted, burning away whatever weird moment he’d had away from two bodies locked together.

It was all about his need and hers then. Nothing else. Nothing else mattered until he’d emptied himself inside Lucy. He sped up, thrusting hard and wild, and she whimpered and matched him, beat for beat.

Oh, damn it! His whole body locked and went rigid as he came, deep inside her.

The best. That was the best. She was the best. Oh dear heaven, yes. White-hot lightning flashed before his eyes and then, for just a second the world went black from the intensity of their mutual climax.

When he regained his sight, he realized they were panting together, both trying to reclaim sanity.

It took another second or two, but he remembered what he needed to tell her. What he'd expected to tell her. "You were wrong, Lucy. You don't change one damn thing with me. You stay just as slick and tight and wet as ever." He whispered it into her ear. "Every single, fucking time."

"I think I know why I don't change."

"So do I." *Admit it, Lucy. Even if this isn't some weird kind of scam, at least admit I don't change. That I can't make anyone change. We're together just because it feels so damn good to be that way. So really damn good.*

"I've been sick."

"That's not it. Besides, you sure don't act sick when we're locked together and you're making all those little breathy noises."

"No, I mean I've figured it all out. I can't believe it but... I'm pregnant."

"Yeee-oooow." He almost shot up out of the bed and then winced. He wasn't sure if the wince was entirely from the pain in his knee. *"What did you just say?"*

* * *

What was she going to do? She wanted him again. Bad. Harris had never, ever made her this... this hormone-driven. Even with his injury, C.J. was so damn perfect. Those muscled, tasty shoulders. Those equally muscled, tasty ass cheeks. Just the thought made her go a little weak.

Hormones. It could be pregnancy making her lust, not that body. She looked at the body in question again. Then Lucy licked her lips. Right.

He was a walking, talking mass of testosterone, meant to make anyone melt into a pool of quivering sexual goo when he came within eyeshot. She couldn't blame that on her pregnancy.

She wanted some of that testosterone pumping inside her.

There were a few problems with wanting him, starting with him squealing like a bleeding hog when she said she was with child. She knew he thought she was maybe just short of insane, and that would be when he was feeling tolerant. How could she blame him? She'd infuriated him and baffled him and told him things that mainstream folks had never experienced before.

But he wasn't mainstream. He was like her. He was. When they exploded together, she could almost feel the strain inside him when he didn't turn. He was meant to change, to become all the limitless possibilities there were out there.

She blinked and re-thought. No. Thank God he didn't turn. That was the only thing she had going for her right now. She had to be practical. She needed C.J. just as he was. C.J. and his fancy condo and his endless supply of money.

What else could she do? After a long time of chances and changes... she was stuck. She had to stay who she was. But who ever heard of a pregnant errand runner? Lucy stroked her belly. A baby. Transformers were supposed to think hard before they got pregnant. You had to stay the same for nine months and probably longer to get a baby raised up right. She wasn't entirely sure she could stand it. She'd never stayed the same this long before. Could she stick it out for months, maybe years? Twenty years. That's how long C.J.'s parents had managed. Her parents hadn't bothered to try. They dumped her with the local authorities when she was an infant and moved on.

And now she'd just stumbled on into motherhood without knowing. Then she stumbled in on a man who wasn't the father of her baby. A man who thought he wasn't a transformer.

What if he wasn't?

What if she was wrong, just the way he'd been telling her for hours now?

What if, whether she was right or wrong, he kicked her out? She would if she was C.J.

"Lucy. Lucy, I have to get out of here." His voice echoed her worst thoughts.

"How? Your knee is going to be a problem with that."

She ought to offer to leave before he threw her to the MPs. She would. Lucy cleared her throat to make the offer.

C.J. said, "I have painkillers, a brace and crutches. I'll do fine. I just need to get some air."

"Outside air? Outside air is why you pay money to get the filtered air in here. You sure don't go to the effort of painkillers, braces and crutches to get some."

"Lucy, just stop. Stop." C.J. wasn't yelling at her. He wasn't even really paying attention to her. Instead he was shooting an injection of something directly into his knee -- ick -- and strapping a brace over it.

"C.J. --"

"Please. Don't talk." He looked up at her and her breath caught.

"I'll go." The words finally came out. She couldn't stand that trapped look in his eyes. "It's all right, Christian. I can manage on my own."

"No. Don't. I just -- I just need to sort things out." He hauled himself up -- ahhh, he was tall -- and balanced himself while he picked up the crutches near his bed.

She wanted to stay. Who wouldn't want to stay here instead of outside? Outside was harsh and unforgiving. But --

"You don't have to leave. I'm the one who should leave." She wasn't going to scam him. He might not believe that, but she couldn't. First of all, you never scammed one of your own and, whether he believed it or not, he was.

Poor C.J. She could almost feel the indecision. When was the last time he'd ever been that uncertain?

Oh, he was adorable when he was uneasy. Which was the second reason she couldn't scam him. She couldn't because he was C.J. and, embarrassing as it might be, she cared about him. She couldn't hurt him.

He was funny when he wasn't annoying, endearing when he wasn't frightening. He could even laugh at himself sometimes. Damn, she liked the whole package. She didn't want to damage it. Burn it, she didn't even want to change him.

"No. Not you. I'm leaving." The confusion in his eyes vanished. He gave her a long, commanding glare. "You are staying here until I get back. Understand?"

"Yes, your Majesty. Whatever you say." Should it feel good to be commanded to do what you wanted to do? To know he wanted you to stay?

"I mean it, Lucy."

"I know you do."

"That isn't saying you're going to do what I told you to do."

"No, it isn't, is it?"

"When I have time, I'm probably going to spank you. I never thought I was into that kind of thing, but I could be wrong." He leaned, just a second, against the wall, gathering strength.

"Well, admitting you're wrong is a big step for you." She should shut up, but she just couldn't help it. She loved to see how he would react, even when she had no idea what he'd do.

The faintly lost look was totally gone from his face. His eyes gleamed. "You're an instigator, aren't you, Lucy." It wasn't a question.

"Always have been." Wasn't she the one who always got things spiraling out of control? The one who started off the turn? "It's my job."

"So you're telling me some things about you never do change, no matter what. I like that." C.J. smiled. "Just like I'm going to like smacking your ass."

"Think not, AntiChrist."

"My hand. Your ass." His look warmed her all over. "Your tight, delectable ass. You know, I think we're both going to like this once I get back. You said I didn't know which you'd like more. The fuck or the spanking. We can figure it out after a few sessions."

His hand, her ass... her -- her foot! He swaggered out -- AntiChrist Joyce was actually able to swagger on crutches. The door slid shut behind him. He might never come back.

He might never come back, but Lucy smiled into the mirror anyhow. "Well, all right, maybe you could spank me just this once."

She might be wrong, but she had the feeling he would be back to collect. And that it wouldn't matter if she'd agreed or not. She was already wishing he'd come back. She might even be weak enough to let him do whatever he wanted.

That is, if she was stupid enough to stay. She wasn't that stupid, right? Lucy hesitated, her finger already frozen on the door's exit button.

The door slid open again. She dropped her hand down, but she knew it was too late for him not to have seen. Wonderful. Right now his smirk was as big as his ego.

"Lucy, I decided we better not wait for the spanking. If I warm your ass enough, you won't be walking much of anywhere."

"Oh, sure. Manhandle me. You're bigger and stronger --" She fainted, knowing perfectly well his reach was longer.

He grinned, all glitter without warmth. Gripped her by the shoulder, he pulled her to a chair. "You want me to."

"Who says?" She wiggled, trying to ignore that betraying little warmth that was starting up from her pussy and beginning to spread.

"I don't have to say. This does." And she was spread over him without any more effort. She ignored his pained grunt as she kicked out with her feet, tried to ignore how easily he pulled her pants down.

"You do have such a pretty ass. And such white skin." His voice was almost reverent.

Lucy bit her lip. If he was going to get sweet on her, what would she do?

Whack!

All right. She didn't have to worry about sweet.

"It makes those red marks really stand out." He was back to sounding his sarcastic, athlete of the year self.

"Sadist!"

Whack! The sting made her wiggle against him. It was just pain. Not the sneaky little thrill she got from feeling his hard penis brushing her stomach. No, not at all.

"You can still say big words. Must mean I'm not spanking hard enough."

Whack! Whack!

She wasn't going to cry. She wasn't going to give in. She wasn't going to let her pussy rub against that hard leg. Not even if she was tingling front and back, now, needing a little relief from the pain and pleasure he had created.

His teeth fastened on her aching butt.

"Ow!"

"You look good enough to eat. Hmmm..."

She was sore. Sore and angry and warmth was spreading uncomfortably over her body. Why did those stupid words make her whimper?

His fingers brushed against where she wanted them. She could ride them and arch that hot butt up in the air and --

He could feel how wet she was. Well, then, it was time to do something about it. She wiggled against him, ready for something to start.

"But not right now." The stupid idiot righted her up, held onto her until her buckled knees straightened and then he smiled. "When I get back. If you behave while I'm gone. Now you just wait here, darling."

This time, when he left, Lucy had to sag against the door to catch her breath. Idiot. Ass abuser.

How did he know her so well?

* * *

He hadn't been outside since the injury. He'd dreaded the first time he stepped out the door. But the lurking photogs, the people he'd expected to find waiting on his every move, weren't there.

Maybe they'd given up. Maybe an injured C.J. wasn't news. C.J. scowled. What sort of idiot was he to suddenly miss the idea of gossip?

The crutches clanked against the corner of the building. Where was he going to go? Even with the painkillers, he could feel twinges grabbing at his leg. Soon the pain would twist his whole body. He couldn't drag himself around the crowded streets for long.

But staying in those rooms with Lucy. Lucy with all her weird revelations...

Sweat broke out on his forehead. The doctors had told him what to expect if he decided to take a stroll. Of course this time they had to be right. The dizziness hit him as hard as the baddest skill player he'd ever collided with.

"Well, big boy, now what? You plan to stay here and puke on the street corner?" The words echoing in his head sounded like his almost gone commonsense.

But the voice sounded like Lucy.

"I thought I told you not to follow me." Just perfect. He was going to crumple up in front of her.

"Someone had to and I was the only one around. Come on. Duck in here." Her shoulder was surprisingly steady as she half-walked, half-shoved him into the tiny blind alley. "Lean against the wall."

"Shit. I'll go one better." He let himself slide down the wall and breathed hard through his nose.

"I wouldn't sit on the ground, C.J. You dunno what's been here before."

He hit the ground hard but the dizziness receded just a moment. "I'll take my chances."

She knelt down in front of him, looking concerned. She didn't have to be. Once on the ground, his queasiness edged away. He swallowed. "Under other circumstances, you on your knees in front of me could have a certain appeal. But as it is, maybe one of us could stand up. I think that would be you right now."

"You can be so annoying, you know that?" She didn't move. "Even when you turn green in front of me, you have to act in control."

"Absolutely. In fact, especially when I turn green in front of you." He took another breath. Held it. Let it out. "I suppose fair is fair. I almost got to see you lose your last meal in front of me."

"If we stay here much longer, I might try again. This place stinks." She made a face. "I really, really hate the outside."

"Yeah, you really do, don't you."

"I've had to stay a lot closer to it than you all my life." She paused. "Lives."

"You didn't have to come out this time."

"Don't be stupid. I had to see you were all right."

She called him stupid. She'd tagged along even though he'd needed to escape. She glared at him in that garbage-infested dark corner as if she wanted to slowly disembowel him. That was when he gave in.

He loved the amused warmth he got from just looking at her. He wanted to laugh when she glared at him or sassed him. He was as insane as she was, but he wanted her. He didn't know quite how, but he knew she meant more than a tasty sex bounce.

"Kiss me, Lucy."

"What? A second ago you were threatening to throw up. Why would I want to do that?" She came closer anyhow. Threaded her fingers in his hair so tight that it hurt. "You are such an idiot."

"Right." Their mouths came together. Hot, wet, desperate. Teeth scraped. It hurt. He fumbled for her shoulder, dug his fingers in, not sure he could let go. She banged against his knee and he damn near howled. But they didn't stop. Couldn't stop. This was something that should last forever. Painful and tart, too real and aching and intense to be pleasant.

It was perfect.

"How much to get in on a little bit of that?" a voice yelled, almost in their ear.

C.J. snarled. "Get out of here before you die, fool."

"All right. Can't help asking with a display like that!" The guy backed off fast.

It was quiet again. As quiet as any place on the noisy, crowded outside streets was. They looked at each other.

What was he supposed to say? Words like “you’re mine” and more echoed in his head. *Lucy. Ah, Lucy.* He cleared his throat and said the other thing on his mind. The safer thing. “I need a drink.”

“I think I do too.” Lucy looked as dazed as he was. At least he wasn’t nauseous any longer.

He wanted to kiss her again, just for the way she looked. Dazzled. Over him.

Then she blinked and looked like her old self... still a little dizzy, but not dazed. “Except I can’t because of the baby.”

Burn it. What had he been thinking? Another kiss and things were going to get serious. Too serious.

She still wasn’t his type. And she really wasn’t his type with a baby coming. That was a complication you didn’t just fall into because someone kissed you like a fantasy come true.

“I know where to go,” C.J. said. “It’s not far at all.”

Chapter Four

The corner bar winked its lights, displaying its location to one and all. The glittering sparkle spilled out all over the neighborhood, cutting through the early morning deep haze, and inviting anyone to enter. He'd gone to the bar a few times when he first arrived here. It was quiet enough and open all the time.

It was someplace else. That was what he needed right now. Someplace else to just be quiet for a moment. Quiet and peaceful, unlike the turmoil in his current world.

He didn't want to talk to his little shadow, the one that had helped stir up so much. So he pretended she didn't exist as he made his way to sanctuary.

What was he going to do now? A few hours ago, all he had to worry about was one joint in his whole body. Now he had a pregnant woman and -- and his whole self to rethink.

She kept pushing him. Trying to make him change. Turn. That was what she called it. Why would he want to? His life was pretty damn perfect now. He had just one little problem with the knee, but once that was fixed, his life would be exactly right. He didn't want change. He didn't want Lucy. Not really. That kiss... That was sex. It had to be.

She'd mess everything up if he let her.

He stumbled a little at the threshold of the bar. It was quiet there, just the way he remembered. Dark. Quiet. They played the screen -- everyone kept the screen on -- but at least the sound on it was low and almost soothing. That was the atmosphere he needed. That and several tall shootings of whatever they had. Who cared if it was early morning? He needed some stimulation right now.

"C.J., over here!" a woman's voice called to him.

Did he know her? She was a looker. Built the way he liked his women -- big on top, narrow-waisted, long-legged. He probably did know her.

"Come on!" she called again.

She certainly knew him. After his sudden brush with anonymity, he could handle being around someone who knew him for what he was.

He was the AntiChrist. Not some dizzy invalid who was falling for a delusional errand runner. Maybe Lucy was right and the outside was a crazy place. He'd breathed in too much outside air and gone temporarily insane. He'd get his old self back fast enough.

"Why not?"

"I can think of a few reasons why," Lucy snarled at his elbow.

"Worried about competition?" C.J. asked.

She snorted. "Let her try." He knew she'd answer that way. Lucy hated losing as much as he did, but she hated showing she was afraid even more.

He straightened, suddenly feeling more like himself than he had for a long time.

He'd show Lucy what he was really like. He'd show himself.

"Hello, sweetness." The woman in front of him didn't look sweet. She looked like sin. The kind of sin any man wouldn't mind being tempted by. That tiny dress that looked like a man's jacket didn't hide much of anything.

"Hello yourself." She tapped her finger at the bar and, sure enough, the tender almost raced up to wait on her. "My man wants something strong."

Her man? He waited for Lucy to claw her eyes out but Lucy stayed oddly quiet.

The woman looked at him as the tender scurried away and smiled. "You don't mind me calling you that, do you?"

He swallowed his unease and automatically smiled his most predatory smile.

"Why would any man mind?"

"Well, we didn't leave last time under the right circumstances. I was afraid you might still be angry with me." Her lips pouted, just the right way. He ought to be thinking about biting them right now.

The tender gave that mouth an appreciative look as he shoved the glass at C.J. C.J. reminded himself to look appreciative, too.

"How could I be angry with someone like you?" He did want her, right? He checked his inner interest level. Yes, he still had a definite reaction to that body. Lucy hadn't yet managed to change his feelings on everything he thought important. But something was definitely off. He did want this gorgeous woman. Some. Not the way he would have a few hours ago, but enough to keep looking interested and sip his drink.

But why wasn't he already calculating how quickly he could get inside her?

"Well, I wasn't myself then. You got me so -- so heated up that I transformed, right in the hall outside your place. That was embarrassing. I haven't done that in years, but I couldn't control myself." She shuddered, delicately, and licked those pouting lips. "I'm grateful no one was there. This whole turn has been a very strange experience. No amnesia at all, but definitely a new me. You're one of us, C.J., but your transforming powers are unusual. You can do things the two of us can't. Very interesting."

"I knew it was you, you asshole," Lucy almost hissed. The tender, who had come back with the drink, hastily walked away.

"Transformed?" C.J. wrapped his fingers around the drink glass the tender had shoved at him. He was not getting a good feeling about this. He wasn't escaping his problems after all. He couldn't run, walk or hobble from them. His gut was telling him so.

"Transformed. Hi again, C.J."

"Harris?"

"You can call me Harri, if you want. Short for Harriet, this time."

"No. Absolutely no. I'm out of here." C.J. raised himself up by the arms, balancing against the table.

It could still be some kind of elaborate scam. But it was starting to feel too real. Reality had shifted, like it or not. Transformers existed.

"I'd vote for leaving myself." Lucy's words broke into his thoughts.

"You don't really want out of here." Harri held onto him. C.J. could see the tender looking over, trying not to stare.

"I'm really tired of being told what I really think and want and am."

He wished Harri didn't smell so good. And that she didn't lean over and show off those breasts. She was setting off a perfectly natural reaction and he didn't appreciate it.

"But you don't want out." Harri glanced down at C.J.'s pants and gave a slow smile. Lucy looked too. She didn't smile at all. Stupid cock! "You may want out of the rest of your life, but you're curious. You want to know what it would be like. To transform."

"I'm not having sex with you just so I can prove I'm not some mutant."

"No. Not just for that." Harri winked. Just like any woman would wink. "Sit down for a while, C.J. Let's be honest here."

"Honest with a scammer?"

"No scams. Transformers never scam each other." Harri leaned forward and put his -- her -- hand on C.J.'s leg. "Tell me, how long are you going to try to scam yourself about that injury?"

"I'm -- I'm going to be fine. The doctors said I'd be fine."

"Did they?"

"They said if I do things right, I could play the finals. I do the skill games, not the kill ones. Skill players aren't nearly as brutal. I'll manage just fine. No one is going to try to kill me."

"They won't have to try. Maybe you can play the finals. Maybe. With lots of painkiller. If you do, I bet that's the last game you'll ever play. The last time you'll ever walk. Look at yourself, Christian! Really look."

As if on cue, the screen in the corner of the bar cranked up louder. Apparently the tender was now doing his best to ignore his only customers. The holograms nodded sagely as the gamescore played in the background.

"Yes, Brett, the Angels of Death are struggling... Another dropped kick and failure to pick up..."

"... their star player's injury has been a big blow to the whole team." Brett nodded, looking as sad as if he'd taken the hit to the knee instead of C.J.

C.J. grunted. Brett had always been damned pompous, even when he was a second-tier kill player. It was lucky he still had enough teeth to talk, given the way the players used to pile on him. Everyone had been more than happy to give old Brett an extra bash.

Without warning the screen flashed back to a familiar body crumpled on the ground. Players swarmed around the image of C.J., with hooked sticks and benches flying.

"Ow." Lucy winced.

"Lucky for you they muted out what I was saying." C.J. leaned back a little in his chair, trying to distance himself from the past's disaster. "It was a little more than ow."

"Weeks after this ugly scene, we're still waiting word on whether the AntiChrist will be coming back for the playoffs." The first sportmenter looked almost as grave and vapid as Brett. Where did they get these guys? Some cyborg robotic store?

"I have to wonder if they are even going to make the playoffs. They've lost their heart as well as their guts without him." Brett looked absurdly pleased to have come up with that sentence.

"Turn that down, burn it!" C.J. yelled and the screen's noise level almost immediately lessened.

C.J. turned away, letting the screen mumble away in the background, while he turned his attention back to the present.

C.J. looked down at his still throbbing, still huge knee. How many injuries had he seen? What did he know about knee injuries? There'd been Monarch Evans when the Destroyers had crunched down hard on him. He remembered the screams when the medics started work on him on the field. And Bets Handy. And --

Shit.

He'd never really play skill games again. He'd probably never walk right again.

"Transformed or not, the life you know is over, Christian. Admit it." Harri whispered the words in his ear.

Fuck that seductive little purr that made it sound all right to be limping for the rest of his life. He wanted to fling that little hand off his leg.

But that would mean Harri had gotten to him. That he'd admitted she was right. No. Everything else was crumbling around him, but he didn't have to do that.

"My life will be just fine, thanks. I don't need to make myself over to be happy. If I never play another game, I'll still be the AntiChrist."

Lucy kept staring at him. She'd always spoken up before. Why wasn't she saying anything now?

"You mean used to be the AntiChrist. There will be a new one to take your place the second you give up the game. You want to stay around and see that?"

Get out. Get away.

C.J. kept still. Breathed through his nose and stayed calm, just like when he was about to puke from the pain. He could do this. He wasn't going to let this scammer get to him.

His hand brushed Lucy's knee. Harri looked over at him and laughed. "You think Lucy would stay with you if she had any way to get out?"

They both glanced over at Lucy. Lucy sat perfectly still. No reaction. None at all.

Why aren't you talking, Lucy?

"Shut up." C.J. said it for her.

"So you're worried about her. You feel a little protective about her. Guess what, AntiChrist? You're worried about the person she is right now. What about when she turns -- and she will turn again. What then? Do you think you'll like that person, too?"

"Burn it, you've been with her for -- well, I don't know how long. Don't you worry about her?" And aren't I a hero for asking after trying to shut her out.

"I've been bond mates with her since we met in the orphanage a long, long time ago. Before either of us knew how to turn." Harri's eyelids drifted down, hiding her eyes.

"Don't!" Lucy's voice was strangled. "We promised we'd never talk about that."

"We saved each other then before it was too late. You know, C.J., the world outside is an ugly place. You haven't been in it for a long time, so maybe you've forgotten. People die early, much earlier than our ancestors did. They die nasty. That is, unless they can change before they get old and withered and breathe in too much pollution."

"And you'd throw Lucy out into that? Because she can't change right now?"

"Hasn't she tried to throw me out? The minute she saw you, she forgot all about me. There aren't many of us. We haven't met that many transformers... we haven't met any other transformers in years. She got lucky when she found you. But it's not you she wants. It's someone who understands and can keep her nicely until she has the kid."

C.J. stared down at the soft little hand still on his thigh. The truth he'd been trying to run from slid through him like a stab from that vegetable kitchen knife that Lucy was so good with. The realization was piercing but true, even though he didn't want it.

There was something more than sex and survival between Lucy and him. Even when he'd tried to deny it, Lucy had hung on. She cared about him. Fixed him pizza. Followed him when he staggered out. There had to be something more than survival there. Something that made the two of them right together. Right for each other. He wanted her with him.

But that's the way he saw it. Lucy was a survivor. No doubt about that. She'd never said anything different. And she still wasn't saying anything at all now.

"But I'll be fair, C.J. What about that threesome you suggested before? We could all get what we need out of that relationship. And, you know, I am the other parent of that baby. I have some rights, don't you think?"

I think you're still a weasel and it's lucky you're a female this time or I'd do my best to take you apart for that.

The chair crashed to the floor as Lucy took off.

C.J. half-rose and his knee gave him a ten second warning that it wasn't happy.

"Shit." He stared after her, wondering how long it would take for him to hobble to the door. Was it even worth it to try? She'd be in trouble before he even stood all the way up.

Chapter Five

"We had just a few more questions, Miss Spivak." The hand on her wrist was as tight and unyielding as reinforced cuffs.

Could fear really strangle someone? Was this what it was like to be trapped? The MPs took a half-step closer. There was no C.J. to protect her now. Of course not. They'd been waiting for her to be vulnerable. She should have known. MPs never went away. They just circled back and pounced when you weren't expecting it. Now she had no reinforcements, no one to get her away.

No one on the street had even looked up when they muscled her against the wall. It wasn't smart to interfere with MPs. Besides, they were used to it around this neighborhood. That was why wealthy people like the AntiChrist lived here. MPs were everywhere. It was a secure area.

Security was overrated.

"Why do you bother asking me? Why not just custodian me and be done with it?" No point in trying to be tactful. They were practically salivating as they moved in on her. After all, they knew they had a walking, talking mutant on their hands. What a coup!

She'd been a fool to take off running. A few minutes ago she'd thought listening to her former bond mate and her present lov -- and C.J. -- gradually destroy everything C.J. hoped for was the worst thing she had to face today. What had she known about worst?

"We needed to know a little more about your background."

Sure. They wanted to use mind-drugs and electro-probes to find out about her background.

"Try my errand runner agency. You know they need refs for my work." That might give her a little time, not that the agency really knew much about her. But Harris had made up a nice background when she applied.

"We have. There are a few... discrepancies."

"I don't know what you're talking about." If only she could run. But of course they'd blocked any exit. She was boxed in. No escape.

She and the baby were both trapped.

A baby. She hadn't thought of her condition as anything but a problem until now. But it was more than that. She had a baby to think about. It wasn't just her. It was her baby.

As realization slapped her, Lucy fought the need to double up and howl with fear.

"Hello, Sarge. Detective." Someone had finally arrived to talk to them. Maybe he'd come to intervene. She looked up and whatever slight hope she had flickered out. It was another MP. This one was bigger than the others, all solid muscle, and with even colder blue eyes. His voice was devoid of any emotion. "Well, gentlemen, what do we have here?"

She resisted the sudden urge to blubber. Three against one made very bad odds. And the third was the scariest of them all.

"Lieutenant." The youngest one spoke first. "She's a possible Unreg 14-7. There's probably a few hard misdeems, if not absolute felonies."

"Yeah?" Lt. Nasty looked mildly interested. Her skin prickled when she saw the almost human emotion on his face. "What's on the records?"

C.J.! She screamed his name inside her mind. But transformer powers didn't extend to telepathy. And what could he do even if he did hear? MPs held all the power. Even if he bashed their faces in, that only meant the network of MPs would be after them for the rest of their lives.

I love you.

"There's not much yet. Give us a few hours and she'll tell us more."

Maybe he wouldn't care even if he did know. I can remember our last moments together with him ogling another transformer. Jerk.

I love him anyhow.

"You're here doing a pickup on nothing?" The lieutenant scowled and Lucy tried hard not to shiver. It wasn't her fault these guys were here. She'd be happy to have them gone. "The two of you are on this woman with suspicion only?"

The two of them looked at each other and then back at the superior officer. The hand on her wrist slackened, just a little, for the first time. But Lucy knew better than to try to take off with the three of them next to her. Besides, her legs were shaking so hard, she wasn't sure she could move.

"Not exactly... well, her behavior was suspicious, Lieutenant." The older MP had finally cracked. At least she heard the faintest uncertainty in his voice.

"Right. Half the people on this street are damn suspicious. But we don't haul them all in for a free stay in a warm cell until we know they're worth keeping there. Right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're dismissed. I'll talk to this suspicious person for a minute more." He turned toward Lucy and Lucy's breath caught in her throat.

This one. Click.

Oh, no. Pregnancy hormones were making her lose what was left of her mind. *Not* this one. Not an MP.

"But sir --"

Click.

"Dismissed."

"Yes, sir. But keep an eye on her. She's tricky."

The lieutenant almost laughed. She was just about sure of it. There was a slight twitch in his jaw that might have been a smile -- or a muscle spasm. "I think I can manage to keep this one where I want her."

She and the lieutenant kept staring at each other as the others drifted away. No one bothered them. It was almost like they were alone together. Then again, crowds on the street carefully avoided getting too close to an MP uniform.

"I guess I am going crazy." Lucy spoke out loud, still not breaking eye contact.

"Too late." He put his hand under her elbow and swung her around. His other hand pressed lightly on the small of her back. It might have looked like an arrest to an outsider. But his touch was warm and comforting. "Not only are you crazy, but you're an idiot."

"Thanks."

"We both were idiots. You, for running away, thinking Harri's offer might be accepted."

"Thanks. And why were you an idiot?"

"For thinking the same thing."

"I thought --" Lucy cleared her throat and tried again. "I thought you didn't want to transform."

"It wasn't so bad once I let go." For a second he looked almost dreamy, remembering.

So it had been good for him. Lucy tried to remember what the first time had been like. A relief. She remembered that above all. That, and the feeling of rightness. But she had been a scared little adolescent, desperate to leave. C.J. had been in a different place. A much better place.

"You chose to let go." She wanted his turn to be the right thing. "No one made you do it. When the time is right, a transformer chooses to turn. Apparently you can even choose what to turn into. Amazing."

"My choices were limited when I saw you were about to be hauled off by those MPs. I had to make sure you were going to go free and stay free."

"Most people wouldn't care."

"What did you think? I was just going to turn around and leave you there?"

"Well, Harris would've. Harri. Whoever. I might've myself." Lucy matched him step for step down the street. "You didn't forget about me even after your turn."

He smiled down at her, but the warmth retreated from his eyes again. They looked cool and assessing. Watchful. "How do you know I'm not Harris?"

She almost stumbled. No. It could have been, of course, but no. He didn't feel like Harris. He didn't act like Harris. No!

"You... you're not." She couldn't help the faint uncertainty in her voice. If she was that wrong, she was wrong about everything with this man. She was so sure she knew him, no matter what else changed. The feelings she had couldn't be given so easily.

She was right. Of course she was right. This was different than bond mates. This was something more. "You aren't Harris."

"A transformer can completely transform, right?"

"Well, yes."

"C.J. kept saying he wasn't a transformer, right?"

"Yes, but --" She hesitated. A real MP might set up a trap like this. A scam for a scammer. On the other hand, if he was her old bond mate, she'd never be forgiven. In fact, if this MP was anyone but the person she thought he was, she'd be in trouble.

So what? She was always in trouble. She might just as well go ahead and say it. "I just didn't know before. I said we change completely but I didn't realize how there's something... something that stays each time we turn. Something essential. You're the AntiChrist. You're the man I'm in love with. No matter what, part of you will always be."

There was a long pause. All right. She hadn't died after saying she loved him. That was good. His face didn't soften after her little love confession. That was bad.

"If I was the AntiChrist, then you're out that nice place to stay Harri said you were looking for."

"Harri's a liar."

"Was she?"

Lucy rubbed her face and picked her words more carefully. "I guess it wasn't really a lie. Not from her point of view. Up until you that would be mostly what I was looking for from a bond mate. A chance to keep the turn going and safety for a while." She and her old bond mate had clung to each other because they had no one else. They hadn't known any better because there was no better to be had.

But this was different. Now she knew.

The two of them turned a corner. Lucy slowed a step, not refusing to come along, but making him turn back to look at her. "So where are we going right now? Are you finding me a nice warm cell?"

"Maybe I should. We don't really have anywhere else to go." He paused. The smile was almost there now, way deep down. "Sorry. I didn't have time to think everything out."

"MPs usually can get quarters issued to them."

"MPs usually have a headquarters to go to and some kind of badge."

"You really didn't think this one through."

"You were in trouble. I had to get you out of it. I knew there would be time to think later."

Lucy blinked. She wasn't just surprised at the words -- she was almost ready to cry. No one ever rescued her. Not that he really needed to start, of course. "I've learned to look after myself. Besides, if you intend to save me all the time, you're going to be in a lot of trouble, too."

"I'm afraid of that. But I just don't see any way around it. I may smack your butt afterward, but I'm not going to let anyone else touch you."

He wasn't going to say he loved her. But he didn't need to say the words. He'd already showed her.

Lucy smiled. "That's almost romantic of you."

He grimaced as if she'd hit him, so she changed the subject. "Hey, what is your name nowadays, Lieutenant?"

"Starr. Lt. Jamieson Starr of the 72nd Precinct, 3rd District, Capitol Metropolitan Police."

Starr. It fit.

"Very impressive. But don't you think a transformer could get in trouble impersonating an MP?"

"Who is impersonating? I transformed. This is who I am. It's my reality. That's what you told me before."

"Yeah, but my reality isn't the same as an MP's reality."

He ignored her and rolled right on. "Besides, the MP force could use a few people with some different points of view. Just to even the balance a little."

"Right. I hope they see it that way when they realize who you are."

"I'll worry about that when it happens. The force is always short-staffed. It may be a long time before anyone thinks to look. Especially because I intend to be a very impressive MP." He blocked a drunk who stumbled past with his shoulder. The man staggered out of range and Lt. Starr didn't even notice. "Just wait."

Lucy had the disturbing feeling he was absolutely right. She was impressed already. Scared witless, but impressed.

"In the meantime, we don't have anywhere to go."

"I have the feeling you have a plan, Lucy."

He was starting to know her too well. A bond mate like that could become a real pain. She'd never be able to get away with anything. She glanced down at his hard body. Then again, there were compensations.

"Well, maybe. I know an empty condo. The owner isn't coming back and no one is going to disturb us there for a few days." Lucy smiled at him sweetly. "I could use some leftover pizza. I'm starving and we aren't going to be able to afford the real stuff for a long time."

Forget pizza. They'd be back where there was a big bed and room to play. Lucy thought about hot sex and rumpled sheets. Love bites and then soft kisses. Those cold eyes of his began to heat. He was thinking about what was coming, too.

"Well, eventually the MPs are going to go there to look for me."

"You? Why? You proved to them the AntiChrist wasn't a mutant."

"Yeah, but as soon as the naked lieutenant I bashed over the head comes to, he's going to remember he's seen me somewhere before. The AntiChrist is pretty easy to identify."

"You knocked out an MP? How did you knock out someone big enough to fill that uniform -- especially with a bad knee?"

"I have to admit for a minute or two I thought I might be close to the Big, Final Transformation, but I surprised him. Besides, I needed the uniform too badly to fight fair."

"Burn it, Starr! Are you crazy?" Lucy took a deep breath. "Listen, maybe we better not go back. There are scanners and security everywhere in that building."

"I could use some of the things that are still there. Some non-traceable credit issue... some old digi-photos of my parents."

"Then let me go by myself. They won't ID you that way."

He kept talking as if that suggestion wasn't even worth considering. "I don't think the guy is going to be entirely conscious by tonight so we're safe enough for now. And I could use the privacy."

He almost smiled at her again. His hand stayed solid on her back. She could feel her knees starting to tremble. "You get noisy when you make love, Lucy. Fortunately, I've got the regulation cuff restraints and gag."

"Pervert." Lucy imagined herself up against the wall, unable to squirm or cry out, with him sinking deep into her. The wall was filthy. The sex might get a little rough. Oh oh. She shifted her feet a little, realizing he wasn't the only pervert in the group.

"Lucy, you're panting."

He opened the fastening to her pants and slid his hand under her pantlets. Now they both knew she was wet. He moved his hand, just a little, just enough to graze that sensitive clit. She gasped.

Since it was obvious she sort of liked the idea, she leaned forward and stretched up on her toes until their lips met. Delicately, she sank her teeth into his bottom lip.

They both shivered. One of them moaned, just a little. His hands closed on her, no longer keeping her safe. Now they were grasping, greedy. The almost familiar lines of his body were hard against her. His erection rubbed against her in just the right spot and just the right way. She'd enjoy getting to know this new body of his.

Click.

She screamed, just the way he'd planned, the monster. She shuddered and moaned, beyond games or worrying about who might look, riding his hand shamelessly.

"Don't tease, man. Just do me," she whimpered.

He was panting in her ear. His fingers fastened hard on her clit and he tugged, just a little. *Agggh*. Quick, sharp, maybe too quickly, maybe too sharply. She climaxed.

"Starr!" She saw stars all around her -- and his own face, every line as tight and sharp as her climax. The climax that kept going and going, wracking her with shudder after shudder. Making her cry out softly, again and again.

When she was finally done, he carefully slid her pants back up while she lay against the wall in shivering exhaustion. He carefully adjusted his own dark pants. She'd never thought she'd see a hard-on in uniform.

Jerk. He had held off for himself.

Then again, that meant there was all the more for her when they did get someplace private. Lucy fought a triumphant grin.

"You bit me, woman." His voice sounded a little ragged.

"You liked it." Lucy bit his square chin for good measure. "I don't suppose you'd let me bind and gag you instead."

"You are so right. I'm in charge when we play bad MP and captured little mutant girl. Besides, if we enter the building with you in restraints, maybe security will think you've been custodianed during an investigation." One broad finger slid between the

gape of her pants and skin. It spread open the top of the crack between her buttocks, tickling. Promising. Burn it, she was already getting wet again.

She squirmed. "You'll enjoy that, won't you? God knows what other sick things you'll do to me while I'm helpless to resist."

This time he grinned. "Just remember whenever we have pizza that the hot sex always has me on top."

She gave up. Leaned against him. Funny how the right MP could make all the difference in how you felt about being captured. She tugged on his arm, more than ready to hurry back.

"Well, lover, when we play our games you're noisy, too. So let's go shock the neighbors for a few hours."

Treva Harte

Treva Harte has always been an overachiever. She also collects things. First it was degrees. First a B.A. in English, then she decided to go back for a Master's degree. Not content with that, she added a J.D. Now an attorney for the US government, she's added a husband, also an attorney, and two children to her collection. She's continuing her ways as an overachiever, having started her own publishing company, and continuing to write her wonderfully off beat tales of passion and possibilities -- in her spare time.