

Loose Id

The Cyborg Recruitment Project

SARA RUSTAN

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LooseId®

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Published by
Loose Id LLC
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-2924
Carson City NV 89701-1215
www.loose-id.com

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ISBN 978-1-59632-470-1

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Sherri Lynne
Cover Artist: April Martinez



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Chapter One

“So what makes you think I’m impotent?” Thorgan asked, his voice tightly controlled.

Jolie looked everywhere in the lounge of the small space station except at him. She just couldn’t meet his eyes right now. If she did, she just knew she’d break out in a horribly unprofessional blush, a blush that would make her feel even more young and incompetent.

Even though she was used to dealing with cyborgs – humans enhanced with improved mechanical and computer functions – Thorgan was a particularly intimidating example. He was huge and muscular, with craggy, masculine features that made her think about professional wrestlers and mercenary soldiers. The information in his file said that he had most of the strength and speed enhancements required by soldiers, so that made sense. You needed a strong body to support the stresses of those mods. And that imposing wall of muscle and testosterone and duplinium bones and computerized reflexes was glaring at her like she’d just attacked his masculinity.

Oh, wait a minute. She *had* attacked his masculinity. This wasn’t good.

She chewed on her bottom lip. “Um, we have intelligence information that leads us to believe...” She took a deep breath and tried again. “Other Union cyborgs tell us that one of the standard techniques that the Union uses to control their cyborgs is to install hardware

that makes an erection impossible, and then promise to fix it if the cyborgs work for decades with no pay.”

She flicked a glance at Thorgan’s face. His face still looked like a storm cloud – a very big storm cloud, since the top of Jolie’s head probably wouldn’t even reach to his chin. He made the small, shabby lounge seem even smaller. But she couldn’t tell how he felt about hearing her claim.

“We’ll fix what they did for free, if you join the Federation,” she said in a rush.

Dead silence.

“But if you’re not one of the cyborgs with this problem, I’ll just be on my way.” She stood up and started edging toward the door, panic flooding through her mind. If he really wasn’t impotent, she had nothing to offer him. She was several parsecs away from the Union-Federation border, deep into enemy territory. He could turn her into the Union. Goddess, she might end up doing hard labor in some asteroid belt work camp.

He gestured sharply, and she stopped dead. “Sit down,” he barked. “I’m not done talking to you.”

She slumped back into the hard chair, and put her trembling hands into her lap.

He leaned back and put his hands behind his head, his long legs stretched out in front of him, his intense gaze taking in every last twitch of her face, she was sure. She had never been very good at acting, or even normal social interactions. What had made her think she could do this job? She must have been crazy.

“So, who are you, anyway?” he drawled. “Besides a scared little rabbit who shouldn’t have come into this space station by herself without backup.” A slight, wicked grin twitched one corner of his mouth. “Very large, strong backup.”

Okay, she could handle this question. She cleared her throat. “I’m a cyborg doctor. I install and maintain cyborg systems and monitor the health of the cyborgs in my care. I have a degree from Altima University and did a residence –”

“Stop,” he said. “I don’t want to hear about all your degrees and training.” His eyebrows rose. “So why did they send a cyborg doctor all the way out here? If it was to act as an expert witness, I don’t know why I’d believe you any more than some vanilla Federation agent.”

Now was the time for her sales pitch. They’d gone over how she was supposed to introduce this to the patient – uh, Thorgan – but she’d blown the whole first part of the routine. She tried to adopt a cheery, friendly look, and chirped, “I have my medical equipment with me. If you’re prepared to sign up with us, I can offer you the reversal in a state-of-the art, portable medical facility, certified by the top medical board of the Federation Cyborg Medical Council. We’re prepared to do tune-ups and...”

Thorgan stood up and stepped toward her, a definite threat in the tension of his massive, muscular body, his dark blue eyes narrowed on her face.

Her voice trailed away, as her throat tightened and her eyes widened in terror.

“You’re saying you have the equipment to fix me *here? Now?*” he snapped.

“Yes.” Her voice was a breathy croak. “Yes, I can even do the procedure today. It takes less than an hour.”

Strong emotions passed over his face, but Jolie couldn’t decipher them. She could guess, though. If she were a horny cyborg who had been rendered incapable of sex by his bosses, and just offered a fix, she thought she knew how *she* would feel. Anger, betrayal, anticipation...

“Why did you decide to offer *me* this deal?”

“You’re by yourself on this space station with no other Union personnel around. It was a lot simpler than trying to contact a cyborg surrounded by people, or trying to extract a cyborg from an inhabited world.”

He nodded. “How will I know that you’ve really fixed me?”

Jolie could feel her eyes widen even farther, and her gaze darted from side to side, but she saw only ancient cerastic benches and an outmoded entertainment console – no rescue.

And that blush, the one she'd been trying to avoid through this whole interview, that blush made her face feel like it was on fire. "Uh, I think you should be able to tell in the...the usual way."

He looked her up and down slowly. She was sure he was imagining her naked. A wicked, teasing smile spread over his craggy features, giving his face a sort of boyish charm. "My *usual* way is by having sex. With a woman." He turned around and sat back down on his chair, made a steeple out of his fingers and looked at her over them. "At least that's what I did before the Union put me out of commission six years ago. And it looks like you qualify. As a woman, I mean."

Oh, no. He wasn't suggesting... He wasn't thinking... He couldn't be. Not her. She wasn't that kind of woman. Men didn't just demand to fuck her. This wasn't, of course, the typical situation. She looked wildly around the room, as though some other female would pop out of the air, when she knew perfectly well that they were alone on this space station, without another woman within millions of miles.

His voice was smooth as butter now. "I'll accept your offer – if you put yourself totally in my hands sexually." He nodded, his lips twisted in thought. "Yes, you agree to be my sex toy and I'll sign up." There was more wicked amusement on his face.

Jolie's stomach dropped. She had to sign him. If she went back without him on the first mission of the Cyborg Recruitment Project, the Federation Intelligence Agency would cancel the whole project. She'd lose her job, and her friend Welther would be devastated at losing the chance to rescue his fellow cyborgs.

There was no other option here. She knew that sex with her was bound to be disappointing, mediocre at best. Ranall had made it clear that she had no skill in bed. But she was up against the wall – so to speak. On the other hand, it was only sex. Surely she could lie there and think of the Federation. Or something.

She looked at that impressive body, and her own body parts started tingling. There were undoubtedly women who would *pay* to be his sex toy. She took a deep breath and said, “Agreed. But you have to sign first.”

He tilted his head and looked at her curiously. “With a contingency that if the procedure fails, I’m not bound by the agreement.”

If it failed. She was pretty sure that meant if he failed to get an erection. It shouldn’t have anything to do with her failure to actually come. She could live with that. It looked like she would have to. “It’s a deal.”

She hoped the news of this deal never got out. She would never live it down.

* * * * *

Thorgan let the water of the shower sluice over his skin, and fisted his flaccid cock. As usual, nothing happened. No erection, no arousal, nothing but sensitive skin slightly irritated by the friction. As usual, he gave up the attempt.

Six years ago he had gone to great lengths to try to get it up. Now that he knew that it was those Union assholes who had installed his mods who had deliberately robbed him of his ability to have sex... Well, they were lucky they were several systems away, otherwise the temptation to make them pay might have been irresistible. He swung a heavy fist at the side of the shower, imagining it was meeting their smirking, falsely sympathetic, lying, *ugly* faces.

There was an ominous cracking sound, and pieces of the wall covering flaked off on his skin. Shit. Now he’d have to fix – He stopped dead.

Hey, he was leaving. He was defecting and working for the other side. He didn’t have to fix anything on this godforsaken space station ever again. Hell, he could trash the whole place if he wanted to. Now there was something to think about. Did he want to?

He sighed and turned off the water. Despite the fact that they had lied, cheated, and stolen from him, he took pride in his work. Even though he was going to be working for the

Federation now, he wouldn't trash the place. Besides, anything major would be reported directly back to headquarters, and if he didn't respond, someone would be here in two shakes of a prosti's ass.

Now that fate or luck or sheer chance had given him this opportunity, he didn't want to blow it by doing something stupid. He had six years without sex to make up for, starting with the little cyborg doctor. When he got to wherever they were taking him in the Federation, he was going to have sex with a different woman every night, and act out all those fantasies that he had spent so long polishing.

Meanwhile, there were a lot of loose ends to take care of in the next day. He pulled a fresh jumpsuit off the shelf and stepped into it, then opened a carry case on the bed. He didn't have very many personal belongings – a collection of his favorite music and vid recordings, a few sets of clothes, his holo-shaping tools. It wasn't much to show for thirty years of life.

Thorgan had never been very political. He had always assumed that the Federation was just like the Union, except with a different set of suits at the top. It's not like he got to hear unbiased reporting in the Union, anyway. The only news that was reported was news that was favorable to the Union. Watching the news vids, you'd think the Federation had never won anything. But he noticed that over the last ten years the Union territory had shrunk along the boundary with the Federation, so he suspected they weren't hearing the whole story.

He picked up his latest holo sculpture from the shelf near his narrow bed. It was supposed to be an abstract, but looking at it now, the shapes reminded him of a woman, the deep rose, the opening petals, the soft curves of a female body. It was a good thing a psych-adjuster had never seen it.

A wide grin spread across his face as he placed the sculpture in his carry case. Soon, very soon – tomorrow at 14:00 – he would have a chance to experience a real woman. His eyes half closed as he imagined that cyborg doctor – what did she say her name was? Julie?

No, Jolie. He imagined what her body looked like under that prim uniform. She wasn't the voluptuous sort that he used to be attracted to, but she wasn't a dried up stick either. If his guess was right – and his enhanced cyborg senses made him pretty good at guessing – her breasts would make comfortable handfuls, and even that uniform couldn't hide a sweet, rounded ass.

And she was definitely going to be a lot of fun to tease. When he remembered how big her hazel eyes had gotten when he told her he wanted her to be his sex toy, he almost laughed out loud.

He had seen her checking him out surreptitiously. She might be shy, but she was attracted to him. Although it had been six long years since he last had the chance to indulge, he could still recognize the signs of sexual attraction – the wide irises, the faint flush, the heat. Hell, he wouldn't be surprised if he was more aware of her physical attraction than she was. He definitely had the impression that she wasn't in touch with her sexual side. Yet. That was something that would surely be different after tomorrow.

Enough anticipation for now. He could indulge in that tonight before going to sleep. Right now he had to arrange to send anonymous notes to old friends and the remaining members of his family to let them know that he was leaving, and set all the station systems up for unattended operation.

And after that, he could tease Jolie over dinner in the galley. It was going to be fun to find out what else would make her blush.

Chapter Two

Jolie carefully went down the checklist of systems on her portable medical unit, a rectangular box almost like a coffin, but filled with electronics and software interfaces, and nanotech medical devices. These units were cleverly and carefully laid out, but they were certainly more difficult to work with than full-size units, even though this was the largest portable model. There weren't nearly as many options for tools, of course, and some of the procedures weren't fully automated. But at least when she was dealing with the equipment, she didn't have to look at the very large, very male cyborg sitting in the chair a foot away.

In a minute she was going to have to ask him to undress and get into the unit. He was going to be naked. Completely naked. And she just knew she was going to blush beet red. Which was just silly, because in a few hours she was going to be having sex with him. They were going to be as up close and personal as it was possible to be. So blushing now would be foolish.

She could feel the heat sneaking up her face, and took a sidelong glance at Thorgan. He was looking right at her, and winked. She hastily turned back to the medical unit.

Of course, it's not as if he didn't know that she blushed. A lot. She had been red pretty much the whole hour they had spent together last night, before she had finally fled to her

bedroom compartment. He must think she was completely inexperienced and naïve. He had made remarks with double meanings and asked questions about her sexual preferences until her face felt like it was burning up.

She could imagine what her parents would think if they could see her now. They hadn't wanted her to specialize in cyborg medicine, saying that she would have to associate with...undesirable types. Large, muscular, naked cyborgs were probably just the sort of type they were afraid of for their protected little girl. But Jolie had a mind of her own, and had made her own decisions about her work. Decisions that had conspired together to get her to this point – having sex with a stranger, a cyborg. A smile flickered over her face, as one part of her thought that might be the best benefit of her career so far.

She clicked on the last item on her checklist, and carefully took a deep breath, hoping he wouldn't hear. She flipped open the partial cover for the unit, which helped to maintain a carefully controlled atmosphere, and said, "Please remove your clothes and lie down inside." She kept her gaze glued straight ahead, but she could see him pull his shirt off with her peripheral vision. He leaned over to pull down his pants, and then straightened up. She had to look at him now.

Jolie turned toward him. She didn't look below his face, but she couldn't avoid taking in the image of his whole figure. And he was big all over. Really big. It took all of her self-control not to look lower and gape. But she did indeed blush. It felt like a hot flush covered her entire body. So nice to get *that* over with. Not.

He grinned at her and raised his eyebrows. "Like what you see?"

She scowled at him, but didn't answer the question. There was no point in encouraging him. He seemed to have a high enough opinion of himself without her adding to it. "Would you climb inside, please?"

The problem with this part of the process was that his powerful thighs and muscled ass were mere inches from her as he climbed into the med-unit. Now a lot more than her skin

was hot. She felt like she was melting inside, between her thighs, and her nipples were rubbing against her uniform in a highly unprofessional way.

She tapped the switch to interface him with the unit. "Close your eyes."

He smiled at her and made a kissing motion with his lips, and then closed his eyes.

With a sense of relief she touched the screen to release the sedative. It wasn't actually required for this particular operation, which was mainly a software upgrade and fairly trivial. But in Jolie's experience men tended to get very nervous when you were tinkering with their equipment. She did better work herself when she didn't have to worry about patient anxiety and answer silly questions.

Not to mention that now that he was safely knocked out, she could finally allow herself to enjoy looking at his gorgeous body. And it *was* gorgeous.

If you liked them big and muscular and strong and really, really male. And Jolie did.

There wasn't an inch to spare in the med-unit, even though this was the large portable version. His chest was so broad that his arms had to lie across the top of his chest instead of at his sides. His thighs and abdomen were heavily muscled. He must work out regularly, even though he was isolated here on this station. It was hard to keep up that amount of muscle when you were weightless on a regular basis, as Jolie knew well from her other cyborg patients.

Almost against her will, her gaze was drawn to that part of his anatomy that she had so carefully avoided looking at a few minutes earlier. His cock was curled against his right thigh, dark red, wrapped around with bluish veins. It was thick and long, even though it was soft. How much bigger would it get when it was erect? She had heard that if they started out big, they didn't get much bigger. That was probably a good thing, in this case. Because she wasn't sure she could handle something much bigger.

Her hand reached out as though to touch, and she pulled it back sharply. Now *that* really would be unprofessional. She only had to wait an hour or so to find out how it felt.

All of her boyfriends – all three of them – had been cerebral types, rather than the big, physical men she admired. She could never convince herself that a man who was that attractive could possibly be interested in her, so she had limited herself to men she thought were more in her league.

She had never been as attracted to any of her old boyfriends as she was to Thorgan. Maybe she would finally be able to achieve an orgasm with a man. She could only hope. But if she didn't, she had gotten really good at faking it. In her limited experience, men tended to blame the woman if the woman didn't come. One of her partners had actually gotten angry with her. So she had learned to moan and thrash with the best of them.

Her mouth felt dry in anticipation, and she licked her lips. Orgasm or no orgasm, she was looking forward to touching...him.

But first she had to get that equipment fixed. She turned to the console of the med-unit and prepared to go to work.

* * * * *

Thorgan gradually drifted back to consciousness. Was it all over or hadn't she started yet? A quick check of his computer clock showed that an hour had passed. He ran down his internal checklist, and all systems were functional. When he asked for recent changes, a list of interesting items showed up. He now had control over some switches that would allow him to control all the body functions that had just been turned back on. Hmm. He could think of some interesting possibilities for play.

He had very accurate life-form sensors, since he had the basic mercenary package, so he could tell that Jolie was standing right over him.

But before officially joining the conscious world, he was going to do a little thought experiment. If she hadn't been able to fix him, if there was some problem, or if she thought to... to cheat him somehow, he wanted to know before he had to look at her apologetic face.

He used his cyborg controls to keep his breathing and respiration in sleep mode, and imagined Jolie naked. Instead of standing over him in that prissy doctor's uniform, she was standing over him naked, the fullness of her breasts hanging right over him, topped with – hmm, should he go for large brown nipples, or smaller pink areolas, and erect nipples? The pink, definitely the pink with her fair skin and tendency to blush. So her nipples were mere inches from his mouth, and her hand was reaching toward his dick.

His cock swelled, the blood rushing into it. Goddess, it felt good to get a hard-on after six years, *six years* of impotence. His breathing was struggling against the artificial slowness imposed on it. He wanted to be breathing harder and faster. So he released the controls and opened his eyes.

She was leaning over him, but her eyes weren't fastened on his face. Mr. Happy was getting all *her* attention. She was blushing again – and her eyes were really, really big.

He resisted the urge to laugh. He didn't want to infuriate the only source of sex for several million miles. But he did lift an eyebrow and drawl, "Like what you see?" She never had answered the last time he'd asked.

She didn't answer this time either, but stepped back hastily. "I see that everything is functioning normally." Her voice was breathless and a tad creaky.

"I can get out of this coffin now?"

"Sure." She stepped back further, and waved a hand. "You're all done here."

He sat up, grasped the edges of the unit, and swung his legs over and down, all in one seamless movement. His erection pointed straight at her, like some armed, female-seeking missile.

Her eyes were big and dark, and her breathing was uneven. A quick scan of her body showed that her breasts and groin were already hotter than normal. And she was chewing on her lower lip.

He stepped closer to her and could see her restrain an instinctive desire to move backward. She had her share of courage, this little cyborg doctor. One more step and his hands were cradling her face, his cock nestled against her abdomen, his thighs framing her body.

She looked up at him and licked her lips. "What are you going to do to me?"

He chuckled. "Oh, pretty much everything, eventually. Right now, I'm just going to kiss you."

He could feel her relax a bit. She was definitely on the skittish side. He was going to have to take things slowly. He might even need to make use of those new mods, because after six years of abstinence, his body would prefer to be buried deeply inside her right now. Hey, slow, fast, he'd take it however he could get it and count himself lucky.

He lowered his head toward her lips and gently stroked them with his tongue. Her eyes drifted closed, and she breathed out with a soft whimper. He circled her lips and gently worked himself between them. Her body sagged against his, and she wrapped her arms around his neck. Goddess, she tasted good. Sweet, rich, heady, and arousing.

He lifted her bottom with his hands, pulling her tighter against his throbbing cock, holding her entire weight with his arms. She wrapped her legs around him, trembling against his chest.

Splitting his attention with an effort, he kept his mouth locked on hers, thrusting and licking and sucking, while another part of his brain envisioned the room as he carried her toward his sleeping compartment.

He was not going to have his first sex in six years on the hard, cold floor of the temporary medical lab.

Chapter Three

As Thorgan carried Jolie towards his sleeping compartment, she started tensing up despite how good it felt to be wrapped around his body. It wasn't like she even knew the guy. Or was that a good thing? Because the sex that she'd had with men she did know hadn't been that good. And she'd never have to see him again after she delivered him to the Federation, so the chance for future embarrassment was low.

He broke away from the kiss far enough to peer down at her face. "Hey, you can relax. I'm not going to drop you. I'm rated for three hundred pounds and you're nowhere near that."

Jolie kept her gaze fastened on his chest. "I didn't think you were going to drop me." She sniffed. "I've seen your chart and know your capabilities perfectly well. I *am* a cyborg doctor."

"So why are you all tense and nervous?"

Jolie tried to think of some answer to that wouldn't reveal her many inadequacies. Something close to the truth, but not quite there. "I...I'm not used to having sex with strangers." That was certainly the truth. She couldn't remember ever having a chance to have sex with a stranger before.

They had reached his compartment, which he pushed open with one foot. Inside he let her slide down his body onto the bed. He frowned down at her. “So what does that mean? You want to play get-acquainted games? Share our childhood traumas before you’re willing to keep your side of the bargain?”

Her eyes opened wide. “No, no. That wasn’t what I meant at all. I just meant that I’m a little nervous because I’m not used to this. That’s all.”

There was a note of alarm in his voice. “You’re not some kind of *virgin*, are you?”

“No, of course not. I’ve had boyfriends.” She wished she could have kept that defensive note out of her voice.

“Nobody now, right?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“I didn’t think so.” He crossed his arms, grinned, and wiggled his hips at her. “Not with the way you were checking me out.”

“I wasn’t checking you out!”

“Tsk, ts.” He shook his head. “A doctor lying to her patient. How sad.”

Jolie sputtered in frustration. “You...you aren’t my patient!”

He sighed loudly. “And now you’re denying our relationship.”

“We don’t have a relationship!” she said between gritted teeth.

“Of course we have a relationship. You’re my sex toy. That’s a relationship.” He looked down his nose at her, his eyes sparkling with humor.

He was awfully cute when he teased her like that. Because it was suddenly obvious to Jolie that he *was* teasing her. It seemed to be one of his favorite things, teasing. At least she wasn’t feeling tense now.

She scooted back against the pillows, and waved a languid hand. “So start playing with me. I’m waiting.”

He looked at her for a moment, and then suddenly dived toward her. When his large, naked body covered hers, Jolie squeaked.

“You may have noticed that *I* am totally naked, while you are still unfortunately clothed.” His warm lips nuzzled her neck, and then he rolled off her onto his side.

His hand stroked down her body starting at her neck, massaging the mounds of her breasts, caressing the curve of her waist, kneading her bottom. Then he gave her a little shove. “So your first task as sex toy is to strip. Slowly. Being as sexy as possible.” He looked a bit doubtfully at her medical uniform.

She slid off the bed and stood in the middle of the small room. She wasn’t sure she knew how to be sexy. But she’d seen vids. Surely she could act the part just once. She looked over at Thorgan, lounging on the pillows piled on the bed, all powerful muscle and sleek skin and rock-hard erection, and the place between her legs throbbed and grew moist.

His eyes half-closed, he slowly moved his hand to his cock, and gave it a full, heavy stroke with his fist. “If you’re good enough,” he drawled, “I may even let you taste this later.” He gave it another firm stroke, then put his hands behind his head and thrust his hips a little, just enough to make his shaft stand out tall and proud.

A wave of heat rolled through Jolie, making her nipples bud, her pussy cream, and her mouth dry. She would indeed like a taste of that.

“But only if you’re really good.” His voice was husky, but she could recognize that underlying note in his voice now.

Goddess damn it. He was teasing her again.

Okay, *now* she was motivated. She was going to tease him back. Viciously.

Unfortunately she didn’t have much to work with. Thorgan was right. This uniform was not good for doing a sexy strip-tease. She shook her head, tossing her hair back and forth to make it full and loose, and then she bent forward and rolled up, giving him a heavy-

lidded, sultry look. Or what she hoped was heavy-lidded and sultry. She twisted and rotated her spine, giving her hips a swing.

He licked his lips, and whistled lightly in approval.

Hey, this wasn't that hard. And it was arousing to know he was watching her and thinking about sex. With her. Because she was definitely thinking about sex with him.

Keeping up a bump and grind with her hips, she slowly unfastened the front of the uniform, running her finger along the visible flesh and dipping suggestively underneath. Then she slipped the dress off her right shoulder, and coyly turned sideways so he couldn't immediately see the extra skin. Running her hand through her hair, she looked at him through half-open eyes, flashed him the sight of the top half of her breast, and turned away again.

The downside of teasing him this way – if you could call it a downside – was that she was probably making herself as horny as she was making him. The teaser teased. Because right now she wanted nothing more than to sink herself onto that hard-on he was taunting her with. She was pretty sure that this next hour was going to make all of the stress associated with this job worthwhile.

Putting her hands on her hips, she inched the skirt of her uniform up until the edge was level with the bottom of her ass. Peering over her shoulder to watch him, she rolled her butt. Vavoom. Vavoom. Oh, yeah. The look on his face was priceless. This really *was* working. And then she leaned forward, displaying her pussy to him barely covered with a thin layer of Ekartis silk underwear. She could see him crawling toward her across the bed through the upside-down V of her legs, an extremely *focused* look on his face.

Apparently even horny cyborgs had their limits.

She hurriedly straightened up and turned around. "I'm not done stripping."

"Yes. You. Are."

He leaped from the bed to land right beside her, as though he were some kind of big cat about to play with a mouse. With the enhanced speed of a cyborg, he had her out of the uniform in seconds – or maybe nanoseconds – and was back on the bed with her in his arms so fast she missed exactly how he did it. She must have blinked.

His hot skin and heavy muscles pressed her into the bed, as he nibbled his way from her neck down to her politely waiting nipples. When his mouth fastened onto the rosy nub, it was almost like having his mouth on her clit, the connection was that direct. She moaned and writhed, trying to get even closer to his body, to relieve the yearning pressure by rubbing against him.

He carefully, leisurely licked, tweaked – *teased* – first one nipple, then the other. One hand was braced on the bed, the other massaged and stroked her skin on the way to her soft, moist, center. A finger dipped inside, then circled around her clit, never quite touching it. She writhed and twisted, trying to get something, anything, to brush against that spot.

But he was in control and his hand moved away each time. Time for another approach.

She tapped him on the shoulder. “Hey, buddy.”

He popped off her nipple and looked toward her face.

“Didn’t you promise me a taste of that big cock of yours? Hmm?” She raised an eyebrow. “I’m pretty sure that I was good enough, since you didn’t even let me finish.”

There was a calculating look on his face. “Okay, but I get to eat you at the same time.”

There went her plan to tease him to distraction and make him lose control. Well, she could still do it, but he’d be able to tease her right back. But she could hardly complain. There was probably some law against complaining about having a horny cyborg’s tongue on her tender bits. Or there ought to be. “Fine with me.”

In a flash, he had flipped them both over and turned her around, so that he was on the bottom with her facing his thick, jutting rod. She’d just have to get used to these sudden changes of position. Except this was just a short-term arrangement. No point in getting used

to *anything*. And her mouth dipped toward the velvety, glistening head, already anticipating the taste and texture.

Her mouth closed around his thickness, just as his tongue swiped a long wet stroke over her wet, tender folds and her tiny shaft, and she shuddered with reaction, as intoxicating arousal surged through her. It was a good thing that he was holding her in position, because she might just have collapsed if she'd had to support herself on her own.

So they settled down to exchanging sucks and strokes and licks, sending heat and pleasure higher than Jolie had ever felt before. This time, she'd be able to go all the way. She knew it.

She could feel Thorgan's balls draw tight, and his cock quiver. He was close to orgasm. With another one of those lightning-fast moves, he flipped them over and around again, and impaled himself in her, his big cock filling her impossibly full. Goddess, that felt good!

He pulled back and slammed forward again in one long thrust, her inner muscles clamping tight around him. She closed her eyes and gripped his tight glutes with her hands, feeling his muscles work as he pumped in and out.

Resting his weight on one hand, with the other he twisted her nipple with the exact pressure that she needed to drive a shimmering wave of anticipation to the peak.

With one last savage thrust, he cried out and she felt his cock spasm, filling her with his come – while Jolie's glittering peak fizzled and sputtered and started winding down. The back of her throat grew tight with tears, as she pumped her hips and clenched her inner muscles and moaned rhythmically. She had done this so many times before that it was automatic.

Thorgan collapsed, half on the bed, half leaning on top of Jolie. His breathing was heavy and labored. They lay there while her heartbeat and breathing slowed to normal, sweaty flesh against sweaty flesh.

Then he rolled to the side and rested his head on his hand. “So, just out of curiosity, do you *ever* come with a man?”

Chapter Four

Jolie tensed all over at Thorgan's question. She was *not* in the mood to deal with being labeled frigid and blamed for not coming. She was lying naked in bed right after having sweaty, explosive sex. It was not the best situation for maintaining boundaries – and lying her teeth off. But she could only try. Crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes, she said, "Are you implying that I didn't come? Because I resent the implication that I was faking it." That's right. Try to put *him* on the defensive. It was worth a try, at least.

But Thorgan just rolled his eyes. "Hello? Have you forgotten who – what – I am? I've seen lots of female orgasms with my cyborg senses. Because until I figured out I wasn't going to get it up again, I spent a lot of time pleasuring my former girlfriend. And I know damn well that you didn't come." He sat up and crossed his arms, too. "So why don't you answer the question?"

Jolie just firmed her lips and looked away.

"I'll take that as a no." He frowned. "What about with a vibrator?"

She blushed. She had done a striptease – or part of one – without blushing. She had *sex* with the guy without blushing. Now she blushed. "Do we really have to dissect my sexual inadequacies right now?" She glared at him.

“Yes. We do.” He settled back against the wall. “Because I fully intend to have more sex with you, and I like to do things right. So I’ll assume that’s a ‘yes’ with the vibrator.” He narrowed his eyes in thought. “What about women?”

“What do you mean?” Was he asking what she thought he was asking?

“Hmm. So no experience with women.”

Dammit. She wished he would stop doing that. She didn’t answer his questions, but somehow he seemed to be getting his answers all the same.

“When you’re using the vibrator, what’s your favorite fantasy?”

She slid off the bed and tightened her hands into fists. “Get this through your rock-hard head. I will *not* discuss my fantasies with you,” she said through gritted teeth.

“Yes, you will,” he said confidently.

A bell clanged from the speakers in the corner of the room.

Thorgan flicked his fingers and a computer status screen appeared on one wall, which he inspected briefly. “But not right now.” He stood up, picked up her clothes, and tossed them to her. “We’ve got to leave immediately. An inspection ship is on the way and will be here in two hours.”

Saved by the bell.

* * * * *

Twenty minutes later Jolie’s ship was heading toward the closest jump point at top speed. She was in the pilot’s seat, probably only because Thorgan didn’t want to waste time arguing about it. She looked at him from the corner of her eyes. He still looked ticked off about the five minutes’ delay from her shower.

Hey, this was a *small* ship, with only sponge bath facilities and a dry shower. Technically, a dry shower got you clean. But you sure didn’t feel clean. And she was going to be cooped up with Thorgan for at least a couple of days.

Giving him plenty of time to grill her on her sexual fantasies. Or would he just give up? The facilities on this ship weren't exactly conducive to hot, sweaty sex, consisting of two narrow bunks, a tiny galley, and the control cabin. On the other hand, until half an hour ago Thorgan hadn't had sex in six years, and he seemed to be the persistent type.

Jolie wasn't sure what she wanted. Nah, that was a lie. What she *wanted* was to have screaming, explosive sex and come for hours. But if she had to choose between no sex and dissecting her sexual reactions and still failing... Frankly, she'd take "no sex."

Thorgan's deep voice interrupted her. "Have you done a full systems check? Can this model dissipate the ion trail?"

She bristled. This was *her* ship. "I'm perfectly capable of piloting this vehicle."

He sighed. "Yeah, yeah. I'm sure you've had the usual layman's course in piloting small craft, right?"

Without looking at him, she gave a stiff nod.

"Well, I'm a professional deep-space operator, with both commercial and military training in multiple types of craft. *And* I'm a milspec cyborg, with reaction times typically ten times faster than yours and the ability to soft-sync with the controls." He raised an eyebrow. "Which of us do you think has a better chance of evading Union kestrels if they send them after us?"

She rubbed her temples, and consciously tried to relax the surge of irritation that flowed through her. Because he was right. This was no time to be getting all territorial and huffy, just because he was a testosterone-soaked male. Let's face it, if it was a female cyborg that she had rescued, she would have handed the controls over without a peep. Of course, considering her personal proclivities, she wouldn't have been feeling like a sexual failure with a female cyborg – and therefore wouldn't be feeling so defensive. But she couldn't let that interfere with doing what was right.

She locked the console into temporary automatic mode, and shoved her seat back. “You’re right. You should have the pilot’s seat. Swap with me.”

He smiled at her. “Good girl.”

She looked at him in amazement and shook her head. He liked pushing all her buttons. He had to. Because nobody could rile her so often accidentally.

There was barely room for one person in the short distance between their seats. Considering Thorgan’s size, their bodies had to press against each other as they squeezed through to exchange seats. He stopped halfway and didn’t let her pass. When she looked up in exasperation, he smiled down at her, and tilted up her chin with his thumb. Heat flashed through her, and all those susceptible body parts felt like they were melting. She could feel his swelling erection against her abdomen.

He lowered his head to press a soft, sweet kiss on her lips, and then flicked her nose and moved on – making sure to keep that physical contact until the last second.

He settled into the pilot’s seat and buckled and plugged in with practiced, efficient movements. He was clearly an expert at this. “We’re heading for JX5?” he asked.

“That was the plan they gave me.”

A map of the system snapped into place in the front of the cabin, rotating and zooming at Thorgan’s commands. After a minute of study, he said, “It’s the closest jump point, but it’s all out in the open. No place to hide. I’m going to head for JM7. If we get any pursuit, that asteroid belt could come in useful.”

Jolie scanned the records for JM7. “But it doesn’t come out very far into Federation space. It will take us almost a week more to make the two extra jumps.”

“We have enough fuel to make it to a refueling stop, so it’s just a matter of extra time and some money.” He raised an eyebrow at her. “They *did* give you a refueling budget, right?”

She nodded.

“And if we’re followed...”

Her eyes widened. “Followed? You think they’ll follow us? The FIA told me that they wouldn’t follow me into Federation space.”

He snorted. “They’re not supposed to. But if you think that the Union patrols always do what they’re supposed to, you’ve been consuming too many pollyanna drugs.” He settled against the padded back of the chair. “If they think I hooked up with some smuggler operating on the edges of the Union-Federation border shipping black market goods, they’re more likely to let me go than if they think I’m defecting with the assistance of FIA.”

Jolie felt like she was in a different universe than the one she was familiar with. Smugglers? Black market? The Federation Intelligence Agency had told her this was a foolproof, straightforward operation, a simple matter of dashing in, grabbing the cyborg, and returning to the Federation. Had they lied to her?

“A jump to the middle of Federation space has ‘FIA’ written all over it. A jump to the edge says ‘smuggler.’ So we’re going to the edge.”

She wished that she knew Thorgan better, knew more about smugglers and Union raids into Federation space, knew more about her employer. Because right now she felt incompetent to make any decisions at all. She was out of her league in more ways than one.

* * * * *

Two hours later, a mere fifteen minutes from the JM7 jump point, the distinctive signature of a Union inspection ship showed up on the monitors, heading in their direction. The tension level in the control cabin of Jolie’s little ship ratcheted up a whole bunch of notches.

Thorgan knew that the inspection ship – probably a cruiser class Prander several years old, judging by past visits – wouldn’t be able to catch up with them before they hit the jump point. The question was whether they would be able to follow them. Unfortunately, the

Union ship was close enough to be able to read their craft's emissions, so their jump target would be obvious. But would they follow?

"Strap in for jump," he told Jolie.

She gave him a quick glance. "They can't catch us, can they?"

"Not on this side. If they had been a few minutes earlier, we might have had to hide among the asteroids, but now we're better off making a run for it."

"They know we're here?"

"Oh, yeah. If we can see them, they can see us even better. Their equipment is much better than what we have on this runabout."

Proof of that came moments later when the Union hailed them on the inter-ship communicator. "Identify yourself, or prepare to be treated as an enemy combatant."

She nibbled on a fingernail. "Will they know this is a Federation ship?"

He hesitated. "I'm not sure. The company that makes these is in the Federation, so it had to have come from there originally. But there's some flow of goods and vehicles across the border, so it's conceivable that a legitimate Union citizen might own one. But since we're not answering their hail, we have to be either smugglers or Federation."

"Couldn't we have a broken communicator?"

"Oh, I suppose it's vaguely possible that we could be stupider than a grazbeast in heat and taking a jump with a broken communicator." He shook his head. "But if I were them, I'd go for one of the other two options."

For the next fifteen minutes, Thorgan watched as the distance between them and the Union ship steadily narrowed. There wasn't anything he could do about it, but it was still nerve-racking to watch. He could see that Jolie was wound tighter than a disrupter coil, too, but at least she was staying quiet. He liked that in a woman. There was nothing that could drive you to drink quicker on the bridge of a ship than pointless female chatter.

Finally, with a roar of their engines, they hit the jump point. Space twisted around them. For a couple of nano-seconds they ceased existing. Thorgan's body objected violently to the reconstitution, and he controlled his nausea with an effort.

Jolie was slumped against her seat, her face pasty and her breathing fast.

"Well, that wasn't too bad," Thorgan said.

Jolie opened her eyes to look at him with befuddled amazement. "Huh? Not bad? You could have fooled me."

Once the systems were recovered from the jump, he headed for the nearest planet. They could hide on the other side while waiting to see if they had been followed. He kept his eyes on the ship's sensor readouts, looking for signs of smugglers. He knew that they used this system – he had caught their energy signatures as they zipped past his space station on the way to this jump point – but he wasn't sure exactly where. They had some of the same contradictory needs for concealment and the lack of it as sex workers. They didn't want to be so obvious that they could be easily picked up by the law, but they needed to be available for their customers.

A large, island continent had some tell-tale traces of ship emissions trailing toward a spot on one coast. That was probably the smuggler base. Thorgan ducked behind one of the two moons and matched trajectories with it so that they were hovering on the side away from the jump exit.

Jolie was gripping the arms of her seat so hard that her knuckles were white. She whispered, "Did they follow us?"

"That's what we're waiting to find out." He turned back to monitor the external viewers. "And you can stop whispering. The sound of our voices won't be picked up."

She cleared her throat. "I knew that. I... It just felt strange to talk out loud."

"Relax, sweetheart. We'll probably be sitting here for a while. Why don't you get up and stretch? You could bring me some rations, while you're at it."

She bristled at that, but unstrapped and stomped off. He repressed a snicker. She was distracted from her anxiety by irritation at him, which had been his goal. It was fun to push her buttons. She was bundle of contradictions, the little doctor. She was sweet and warm and soft inside, but covered with prickles and defensiveness. He would enjoy finding his way to her soft, sweet center.

At that thought parts of his anatomy stirred to life, and he enjoyed the feeling before reluctantly using his cyborg controls to prevent arousal. This was not the time to be distracted. He glanced at the chronometer. But in, oh, about one point five hours...

A small ship took off from the probable location of the smuggler base, and he kept a close eye on it until it disappeared behind a thick layer of clouds. Had the smugglers detected their ship? He would guess they had. But what would they do about it? Normally, smugglers weren't aggressive with unknown ships, unless they were indulging in a bit of piracy.

They sat there, breathing in and out, all their attention glued to the readouts, colorfully coded holographic figures floating on the wall. The minute arrived when the Union ship should appear if it was following them, and Thorgan leaned forward, all his muscles tense. A tiny light flickered to the side of the jump point, and disappeared. That couldn't have been the inspection ship. It would have had a much larger, much easier to read signature. "Analyze activity at MZ72 LX39."

"Transient light from unknown source. Possible reflection from asteroid or dust. No sign of human craft or jump drives." The computer's voice was flat and monotonous.

Thorgan pounded his fists against the arms of the pilot's seat in frustration. If there was anything worse than being followed by the Union ship, it was not *knowing* whether or not they had been followed. That anomalous flicker might be a coincidence. But believe in too many coincidences in dangerous situations like this, and he just might end up coincidentally dead.

Jolie waved a hand to capture his attention. "So. Did they follow us or not?"

“I’m not sure,” he snapped.

“Not sure?” She frowned. “How can you not be sure?”

He took a deep breath. No need to take his frustration out on Jolie. It certainly wasn’t *her* fault that the equipment on this ship wasn’t quite good enough for their needs. “At about the time the Union would have come through the jump point, there was a tiny flash of light nearby. Unfortunately, our sensors aren’t good enough to tell what it was. But it *wasn’t* the inspection ship. We can cross that one off the list.”

“But what else could it be?”

“Well, it might be –” Messages flashed on the control screen and Thorgan broke off. “Goddess damn it! Here come the smugglers with the welcome wagon.”

The viewscreen showed a shabby old Slotnik cruiser heading toward them from the other side of the moon. It looked like it should have been retired several decades ago, but he was sure that was just protective coloring. Smugglers put all their credits into speed and function. Appearance was the least of their concerns.

Thorgan grabbed Jolie’s shoulder. “Let me do the talking. Don’t say anything unless you have to.”

“But –”

“These people are dangerous. If they don’t like our story, they’ll blow us out of the water without a second’s hesitation.”

Jolie nodded. “Got it. I won’t say a word.”

The communicator hummed. “Identify yourselves.”

Even though Thorgan knew what he was going to say, had known it when he made the decision to come this way, his mind still frantically turned over the possibilities. But no brilliant alternatives came to him. “I’m a Union cyborg – uh, *former* Union cyborg – looking to go into business for myself. We’re just passing through on our way to a business opportunity in the Lorden sector.” The Lorden sector was a hard-scrabble area of the

Federation, known for the high level of crime, corruption, and depravity. He hoped it would give them the message that he was one of them.

There was no response for a very long fifteen seconds. Were they aiming their ship-to-ship guns? He flicked on the cyborg functions to keep him cool and collected. Finally, another message crackled. "How many aboard? Who else is with you?"

"Just me and my girlfriend."

Jolie rolled her eyes at that one, but kept silent.

Another ten seconds of silence. No doubt they were communicating with the boss. "We will escort you to our base. Any attempt to flee or signs of arming and we will destroy you. Understand?"

"Understand." Thorgan turned the sound pickup off, slumped back in his seat, and sighed in relief, setting the automatic pilot to follow the smuggler's ship.

Jolie's eyes were wide, her skin pale. "We're going to the smuggler base?" Her voice was high and thin.

"Yeah."

"But isn't that...dangerous?"

What was the FIA thinking, sending such an innocent on this job? If – make that *when* – they finished this run, he was going to have words with *somebody*. Meanwhile... He gave Jolie a smile that he hoped was reassuring. "Not as dangerous as the alternative. If we play this right, we should be okay. You have to remember that smugglers are business people first, criminals second."

"What about my equipment? The medical unit?"

Damn. That was pretty valuable and might tempt someone to a bit of piracy. "Can it be locked down so that nobody can use it?"

"It's already coded to my DNA and iris pattern. Obviously, someone with the right equipment could change that, but I doubt that anybody on this smuggler base would have it."

He frowned. "Some of these smugglers are pretty sophisticated. But I think the odds are against it. I don't imagine that much medical hardware goes through here. The hot products in this sector are jewels, duplinium, and pharmaceuticals." He tapped his fingers on the console. "We're going to have to play this one by ear. I'll do my best to save your unit, but our lives come first."

"Of course," she murmured.

The ship entered the atmosphere, with all of the rattles and hums of a planetary landing. Several minutes later, they landed in an area surrounded by a security dome. Thorgan initiated the sequence to shut down and open the doors, and unfastened himself from the pilot's seat.

He grabbed Jolie's hand, pulled her after him, and they stepped out onto the landing pad of the smuggling base.

Chapter Five

The smuggler's planet – the fifth planet circling the star Jemala, or Jemala 5 – was a dry, dusty place, with no visible vegetation. Since humans lived on the surface there must be water someplace, but Jolie saw no signs of it. It was easy to see why there were no large-scale settlements – the cost of terraforming such an inhospitable planet would be very high.

The smugglers themselves were a taciturn, rough lot of unwashed males with the heavy, guttural accents of the Lorden sector. Several brutish guards carrying disrupter guns ushered them into the squalid common room of the cramped base, where a marginally cleaner and more intelligent-looking boss interrogated them about where they had come from and where they were going.

It was easy to let Thorgan do all the talking. She was concentrating too hard on breathing through her mouth to reduce the impact of the concentrated body odor. But after Thorgan fed them his truly creative story, they were abruptly ushered into quarters that were apparently kept empty for occasional “guests.” A slinky robe hanging on a hook and the stale hint of strong perfume told Jolie that sex workers had been among the past occupants.

With the clank of the primitive bar on the other side of the door locking them in, Jolie put her hands on her hips and glared at Thorgan. “Couldn’t you have come up with some other explanation? Did I *have* to have a virulent, communicable disease?”

Thorgan interrupted his exploration of the closets to look over at her. “I didn’t have a lot of time to come up with a believable story. It worked, didn’t it?”

“Yes, but now we’re *locked* in. Together.”

He shrugged. “I don’t see the problem with that. You’re still my contracted sex toy, right? This is as good a place as any to have sex. It’s probably more comfortable than the bunk on your ship.” He opened the door to the tiny refresher facility, shook his head, and closed it again.

“Sex? We’re in the middle of a *smuggling* base, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

Thorgan pulled out a drawer by the bed. “So? There’s nothing else to do here.” He rummaged through the contents of the drawer, snatched up a small box, and flipped it open. “Yes! This will come in handy.”

“What? Something to help us escape?” she asked with heavy sarcasm.

“No, something to help with the sex,” he said with exaggerated patience. “We’re not going to be able to escape from here. They’ll let us go – eventually.”

She sighed, and nibbled on a finger. “Are you sure about that?” She hoped her voice didn’t sound as shaky as it felt.

He set the box down on a counter and was in front of her in a couple of long steps. With one hand he pulled her against his body; with the other he tilted up her chin. “Relax, sweetheart.” He bent his head until his lips touched hers, firm and warm. She melted against his large, solid, very masculine body, and his tongue delicately thrust into her mouth, flooding her with his taste.

His mouth reluctantly pulled back from hers, and he said, “These smugglers prefer to keep things on a business-like basis, and I’ve given them as many reasons as I could think of to let us move on. So they probably will.”

“Probably? *Probably?*”

He touched a couple of fingers to her mouth. “Shhh, shhh. Nothing in life is absolutely certain. So let’s enjoy ourselves now, okay?”

She closed her eyes and sagged against him. He did have a point. If she was going to be executed tomorrow, she’d much rather have sex with Thorgan than sit around worrying. At least she could take her mind off one set of problems. She kissed his chest and looked up at him. “You’re right.” She straightened her shoulders. “What would you like me to do?”

He burst into laughter. “Fun. We’re supposed to be having *fun*. You sound like you’re volunteering for a suicide mission.”

She glowered at him, stepped back, and crossed her arms. “It’s easy for you to talk.”

“Yes, it is. And it’s easy for me to do lots of other things, too.” With that he sank down on the bed and pulled her against his body, nestling her between his legs.

He was so big and strong compared to her. In contrast she felt small and weak – and it wasn’t necessarily a bad feeling, because it also made her very aware of being a woman. In this position his swelling cock was pressing right against her. Her breathing deepened, and her nipples tightened.

His craggy, masculine face was only inches away. A surge of shyness came over her, and she had to fight the urge to look away. They had spent six hours together since having sex earlier that day, and getting to know him better was having the odd effect of making her less comfortable.

He examined her thoughtfully, resting his powerful hands on her shoulders. His deep blue eyes darkened with lust and he slowly moistened his lips, then leaned forward and brushed her mouth with his. Not a full kiss – just enough to tease and tantalize.

His hands moved down her back, exploring the shape of her body, until they came to rest on her ass. He cupped her curves and pulled her against his rigid erection.

She closed her eyes at the wave of lust, cream pooling between her thighs. Then he cupped her mound with one hand and her eyes flew open.

“Yes, that’s making you hot,” he murmured.

She rolled her eyes. “It doesn’t take cyborg senses to recognize *that*.”

His lips twitched. “No, but I can see it in more than one way. My heat and infrared recognition senses detect it, in addition to the normal human senses.”

She grasped his cock through the stretchy fabric of his jumpsuit. “My, my. You’re feeling a bit hot yourself – and I can detect it with only my inferior human equipment.”

He snorted. “You’re a sassy little thing, aren’t you?” He ground his cock into her hand.

“What, you forgot to put ‘no sassing’ in the contract? Tsk, tsk.”

He laughed. “I guess I just wasn’t thinking.” He unfastened the front opening of her shirt and pulled it off over her head.

She was standing there half-naked, while he was still dressed. But then his big, warm hands cupped her breasts and all thoughts left her head. He circled each nipple with a thumb, and then rhythmically tugged both of them. His hands could have been on her clit instead, the reaction so strong and so immediate. Her pussy swelled and creamed, and when he moved one of his hands down to cup her mound, having his hand there was an intense relief. But it wasn’t enough. She wanted more, harder, and rubbed herself against him.

“Uh, uh. None of that. New rule – no coming until I tell you.”

She scowled. “What? I thought the whole point was to make me come.”

He raised an eyebrow. “I’m deciding what the goal is, and *my* rule is that you can’t come. Until I give you permission.”

She crossed her arms and glared at him.

He nodded. "I was afraid of this. You're such a prickly little thing." He sighed, dramatically, and pulled her pants off in one swift movement, leaving her entirely naked. Then he picked her up and tossed her on the bed.

"Hey, buster. How about a little respect here?"

He rummaged in the drawer next to the bed and pulled out some black, stretchy bands. He knelt on the bed next to her, and, moving so quickly she could hardly see it, she felt her arms pulled straight and her wrists being fastened to the corners of the bed.

"Hey! What are you doing?" She thrashed and kicked with her feet, and actually landed a kick on his thigh, but he hardly seemed to notice.

"I've decided that a little bondage would be just the thing."

"*You've* decided?"

"What part of 'you're my sex toy' didn't you understand?" He grasped her ankle and fastened it, too, though more loosely than her wrists.

When all four limbs were fastened, and she lay heaving and panting on the bed, glaring at him, he stood back and admired his work while he stripped off his own clothes. She was suddenly aware that she was completely exposed to him, and could do nothing at all to cover up or turn away. Oddly enough, the thought caused her whole body to flush, and her pussy to swell even more.

"Very nice," he murmured, his gaze running over her body. "And you like it, too. I thought you would."

"Oooh, you just wait. I'll...I'll...get even."

"So what are you going to do? Tie me up and suck my cock?" He raised an insolent eyebrow. "I could live with that."

She just narrowed her eyes and firmed her lips.

"Very pretty," he said, stroking her labia with one finger, his touch tantalizingly light. "Really wet." He slowly inserted his finger. "And hot."

She breathed in sharply, and couldn't help thrusting her hips up to increase the pressure.

"Tsk, tsk. If you keep that up, I'll have to punish you. A good spanking might be just the thing for a sassy little sex toy."

An image of herself laid over his lap, his hand swatting her bottom, flashed through her mind, and she could feel the heat building where his hand touched her.

"Well, well." She could hear the teasing note in his voice – *again*. "Looks like I may have to spank you anyway, just on general principle."

She made an effort to speak without gasping. "And just what general principle would *that* be?"

"Oh, you know, the principle of having fun." He pulled his hand away, and moved onto the bed, the heavy weight of his firmly muscled body pressing her into the mattress, the hair on his chest abrading her sensitized nipples.

"Uh, fun..." She was having a hard time keeping track of the conversation. What had they been talking about? Because the thick ridge of his erection was pressing against her clit and her body was too happy about that to...remember...

His mouth covered hers, his tongue thrusting inside. She moved to wrap her arms around him, and couldn't because of the bonds. So she just relaxed and concentrated on the sensations flooding through her body.

She slipped her tongue into his mouth, into the soft, wet, tasty cavern. Her tongue dueled with his, arousing her to new sensitivity. She squirmed against him, trying to press her body against his at every possible spot.

His lips moved from her mouth down her cheek to the soft, thin skin of her neck. She closed her eyes and rolled back her head to give him easier access. He nibbled his way down to her nipples, swirling his tongue around one while he tugged and twisted the other one.

Moaning, she twisted and rotated her pelvis, trying to relieve the building need, the throbbing pressure in her pussy, but his body wasn't close enough where it counted. Sliding down her body while his fingers continued to tweak and torment her nipples, he fluttered the shaft of her clit with his tongue. Hot cream flowed out of her, her labia swelled, and pleasure pulsed through her. Just when she was sure she was ready to come, he backed off.

She opened her eyes to look down her body to where he was resting his head on his hands, looking up at her. "What? Why'd you stop?"

"You were getting close to coming. Remember the rule? No coming?"

"You're not serious."

"I certainly am serious." He shook his head, making his tight dark curls bounce. "Aren't I always serious?"

"No. You're almost never serious." She really wanted to cross her arms and glare at him, but she was still tied down, so she had to be satisfied with a simple glare.

"Hmm. You might be right about that." He tapped his mouth with a finger, then held it to his nose and, closing his eyes, breathed deeply. "Ah. Essence of Jolie. How nice."

"So, are you going to untie me?"

He looked surprised. "Untie you? Certainly not. I'm not at all done with you."

"What, you're just going to torment me for hours and not let me come?"

He nodded. "Yes, that's about it. Except that if you're very good, I might let you come at the end. Maybe."

"Oh, goddess. What did I do to deserve this?"

He smiled. "I know the answer to that one. You liberated a horny cyborg." He moved around the bed to the side, picked up the box sitting on the table, and sat down at her side. He took something out and put it on the finger of his left hand, and then emptied the remaining contents into his palm.

She craned her head to the side trying to see, but wasn't close enough. "What's that?"

“Nipple rings.” He tugged on one of her nipples, and then stretched a small band around it.

She frowned down at her nipple. “What does it do?”

“Stimulates the nipples in response to the control ring.” He held up his hand to show her a ring on his first finger.

“Uh, I think my nipples are sensitive enough. That shouldn’t be necessary.”

“But I only have two hands,” he said patiently. “I can’t touch all of your erogenous zones at the same time.” He fastened a ring on the other nipple.

The rings fit snugly, making her more aware of her nipples, like a gentle finger pinch. Then he turned the control ring. They tightened and tingled and she almost arched off the bed. Thorgan twisted the ring again, and she slumped back on the bed, breathing hard.

“Yes, I think that should do it,” he said cheerily. And settled down to stimulate her in a methodical fashion.

He teased and tormented and stimulated every erogenous zone, including some that she didn’t even know she had. His fingers stroked and pumped and thrust, his tongue fluttered and laved and licked, and the nipple rings just kept on going.

A while later Jolie was almost swearing, she was so overstimulated and oversensitive. “Stop it. Just stop it. Let me out of here.”

“I think I’m almost done here.” He licked her clit again, while his fingers pumped inside her.

Once again, she could feel things tightening, her body purring as arousal steamed through her. They had already gone through this routine three times, and she had no expectation that this time would be any different.

But it was.

He pulled out his fingers, repositioned himself, and slowly worked his broad shaft into her sheath. Her sex clenched around the massive intrusion, sopping wet and overstimulated.

The infernal nipple rings were tingling and tightening away, and his fingers were still on her clit. Finally, he was all the way in. Jolie's vision was going black as the blazing ecstasy spiraled up her spine.

He pulled back and pounded forward. Then again. The next time he withdrew, he said, "Come. Now." And drove deep in one thrust.

Jolie came.

Chapter Six

When Jolie came back to consciousness from being lost in sensation and the aftermath of the explosive orgasm, she was cuddled up against Thorgan's side, her right leg draped bonelessly over his.

Affection and gratitude and liking for him expanded inside her, filling the empty corners of her heart, until she deliberately put a brake on it. They didn't have a relationship. They were having sex. Just because he had done a better job, been more skillful and...and less selfish than her previous boyfriends, was no reason to start hoping for more.

But even though she tried, she couldn't keep herself from imagining. Imagining Thorgan declaring undying love for her. Imagining him refusing to even consider going out with other women because he only wanted Jolie. Imagining them settling down as a couple.

After all, something good had to happen to her sooner or later, right? She couldn't spend her entire life striking out, could she?

Thorgan stirred beside her. "I figured I was better than those dickheads you must have had for boyfriends."

Oooh, talk about a bucket of cold water. Forget undying love. Forget the explosive orgasm. Their arrival back at Monnegan couldn't come soon enough. She sat up, crossed her

arms, and tried to think of something clever and cutting – yet truthful – to say. “It wasn’t bad,” she said dismissively.

He put his hands behind his head and stretched out, the picture of male arrogance. “Oh, it was a lot better than ‘not bad.’ It was the best sex you’ve ever had.” His eyes were twinkling, a smile lifting the corner of his mouth.

She raised her eyebrows. “And how would you know that?”

“It was the first time you’ve ever come with a man. I think that alone gets it the trophy.”

“And you’re taking credit for the whole thing, are you?” She shrugged. “I suspect that the sex would be just as good with anybody who did what you did.”

He laughed. “Girl, you are so full of it. The *point* is that nobody else *did* it.”

She pounded her fist on his chest. “Of all the arrogant sons of –”

“It’s sad.” He sighed. “Just because you can’t honestly disagree, you resort to physical abuse. Taking advantage –”

“Taking advantage of *you*?”

“-- of the fact that I can’t fight back. I’m too big and strong. I couldn’t fight with you.” He adopted an exaggerated expression of nobility.

She narrowed her eyes and examined him carefully. “You are a piece of work. A real piece of work.”

With one of those sudden cyborg-quick moves of his, he rolled her over so that she was underneath him again. His lips nibbled along her cheek until he reached her mouth, licking and tasting and sensuously exploring. She melted underneath him. Again.

Unfortunately, a knock sounded at the door. “We’ve come to a decision. You can come out now.”

The bottom of her stomach dropped. They might have decided to take her ship and med-unit and execute them both. Or sell them to the plectran mines.

Thorgan seemed to know what she was thinking because he shook his head at her. “Don’t waste your emotions.”

Minutes later, dry-showered, dressed, he released the lock on the door and they filed out of the room, Jolie’s heart thudding in her chest.

The head of the smugglers, a short, broad man with a scar across his face, spoke very quickly in his heavily accented Standard. “We release you, since no benefit in keeping.” He frowned, his heavy eyebrows shading his eyes. “If you betray us, we find and kill you both. Believe that.”

Thorgan didn’t trust him. That would have been foolish. The smuggler seemed inclined to let them pass through with only one of Thorgan’s sculptures and a vague promise of future consideration, and frankly the whole thing worried him. It shouldn’t have been quite so easy – they should have asked for more.

He would be very careful on the next leg of the trip. It was always possible that they would hijack the ship somewhere farther away from their own base. But at this point, it seemed they had gotten away with their skins and their ship and their equipment intact, so he was counting his blessings.

The rest of the trip back to the FIA base should be routine – unless that mysterious flash of light turned out to be a problem, and the Union had followed them. But there was nothing he could do about that except be extra careful, which he was already doing.

So there should be plenty of time to... He glanced at Jolie’s sweet ass, climbing into the ship ahead of him. His pants suddenly felt too tight, as his cock stirred to life. So far, making up for lost time with her had been a true pleasure – and he had barely touched his long list of fantasies.

As she settled into the co-pilot’s seat, Jolie glanced at his bulge and shook her head. “Can’t you wait until we’re safely away from here?”

He rolled his eyes. “Of course. You probably know my controls better than I do.” He sat down and stroked his erection slowly, sensuously, circling the head, and gave her a heavy-lidded, lustful leer. “But twenty-four hours ago this was impossible, so I think you can allow me my little enjoyments, can’t you?”

She flushed, and looked away. “As long as it doesn’t interfere with your performance –”

He snickered.

“You know perfectly well I didn’t mean *that* kind of performance.” She crossed her arms and fastened her eyes on the ship’s readout.

“Sorry, sweetheart. You’re just so cute when you’re all riled up.” He managed to draw her attention back to him, and smiled in apology. Then he turned back to the takeoff procedures, and let his arousal subside.

* * * * *

Jolie wasn’t used to living with somebody else, and Thorgan was a very large and noticeable somebody else. Sure, she could poke around in the onboard computer and listen to music and play games. But that got old fast. And somehow, even when she was absorbed in a virtual reality romantic story, some part of her was aware of Thorgan just a few feet away. He must be giving off clouds of hormones or pheromones. Goddess knows she seemed to get horny at the least little thing.

If you could call a sweaty, half-naked, exercising cyborg a little thing.

There was only one room with open space – and “open” meant maybe fifty square feet. Thorgan was religious about working out, and when he was using the built-in exercising equipment, Jolie had to either lie on the bunk watching, or hide out in the tiny control cabin keeping an eye on boring ship status reports or using the computer.

When she did watch him, her gaze fastened to glistening, sculpted muscles and a truly beautiful butt, he almost always ended up with a massive erection – which he then would

have to “take care of” in the most convenient way. The most convenient way being the services of his contracted sex toy, of course.

The exercise equipment came in handy for those activities, too. It was amazing what a sex-starved cyborg could think of to do with a few all-purpose rings and benches and chains – and a woman.

Two days after leaving the base, sprawled on the floor after yet another vigorous post-exercise pounding and multiple orgasm, she rolled over on her front, and poked the mountain of cyborg lying next to her. “So, what did you do on that space station besides exercise and work?”

He rolled his eyes. “I guess it’s time for bonding and caring and sharing, huh?”

“Hey, if you want to be all male and non-communicative, just say so. Nobody here really wants to know you anyway.” She pressed her lips together in exasperation.

He rolled to his side, revealing rippling abdominal muscles. “Sorry. You didn’t deserve that. I had a girlfriend once who drove me nuts by talking everything to death. She always wanted to talk about the status of our ‘relationship’ and analyzed everything.” He smiled sheepishly. “I still have the automatic reaction ‘here we go again.’ But you’re not at all like her, and I shouldn’t have said that.” He stroked her hair off her forehead. “You’re easy company; I enjoy hanging around with you.”

She smiled, made a kiss motion with her mouth, and turned her face away. Sometimes he was such a jerk, and other times he was so sweet. Maybe it was a mistake to try to get to know him better. Getting along with someone she was stuck with – in more ways than one – for a week was one thing. Getting attached was another. And she knew it would be a mistake to get attached. Maybe if she told herself that often enough it would do some good. But she doubted it.

She raised an eyebrow. “So, are you going to answer the question?”

“Well, the Union Cyborg Corps treated me pretty well. I had a couple of weeks off every six months, and a weekend trip to the closest settled planet every two weeks, so I wasn’t totally isolated.” He shrugged. “Cyborg enhancements are expensive. They didn’t want to lose their investment. I followed the cyborg Olympics, and free-fall *glabol*, exercised, read. I played a little air guitar, and holo-sculpted.” He rushed through the last few words. “Tell me what you do on your time off, when you’re not a doctor.”

Jolie sat up. “Holo-sculpt? *You* holo-sculpt? That sculpture you gave to the smuggler captain was one of yours, wasn’t it? I thought it was some major artist.”

His lips quirked in a smile. “No, no big artist. As a bargaining chip it worked better if the smugglers didn’t know that, though.”

“But that was a beautiful piece.” She looked over at his storage locker. “Do you have any more with you?”

That look of bashful insecurity sat oddly on Thorgan’s craggy features. “Just a few small pieces.”

“Show me.”

“Well...”

She crossed her arms and gave him a mockly stern look. “Or no more sex for you.”

With a snort, and a sideways glance to tell her that he was letting her get away with the threat just this once, he pulled his duffle out of the locker. The fingerlocks opened at his touch, and he pulled out a box and opened it up, removed a small cylindrical object, and placed it in her hand.

She held it up at eye level and examined it closely. “It’s absolutely beautiful. But what is it?”

“It’s my impression of a Formian fire beast.” He touched it gently and turned it in her fingers. “See, this shape here is the head; these are the tail feathers.”

She turned it around and around, the shapes seeming to change with the different positions. “Do you always work so small?”

“No. But the size doesn’t seem that important when the sculpting tools are computers and I can zoom my vision in to any level. I actually picture this one as about this big...” He gestured with his hands, indicating a size about half his height. “But there’s no point in storing them larger when space is limited.”

She handed the fire beast back to him. “I’d like to see it full size to appreciate the details. Can I see the others?”

One by one she looked at the five other miniature sculptures and admired them all. When he finally put them all away, she abruptly said, “I’m going to take a nap.”

She curled up on the top bunk facing the wall. She was so silly. One part of her was cheering at finding things to admire in Thorgan. Another part was saying *damn*, because she didn’t want to like him. It was dangerous for her peace of mind. Yet another part worried that he *was* too good for her, and if she did end up wanting him, she would have no chance.

She was smart enough to be a doctor. Why couldn’t she be smart about people and relationships, too?

* * * * *

Jolie and Thorgan spend the rest of the week passing through two more jump points, traveling in between, and...having lots of sex. She would never look at the pilot seat in the same way again. They had sex in the narrow bunk, on the floor, on the narrow table in the galley area, in both seats in the control cabin, and in the med-unit in the hold.

She would never have been able to imagine so many creative uses for such a small space.

Inevitably, she got to know Thorgan pretty well. Jolie told him about her family and her training and experience as a doctor, and why she joined Welther’s special project.

Thorgan told her what it was like living in the Union, about being a police officer and why he decided to apply to the Union's cyborg program.

She thought she did a good job of keeping things light and playful, and not letting Thorgan know that her feelings were getting deeper. He seemed to be avoiding those kinds of conversations himself, which made it easy.

They stopped twice at refueling stations and to take on better provisions than the condensed and tasteless nutritional stores that they had onboard. They didn't linger either time, leaving as soon as possible and avoiding conversations with other people. Thorgan was still worried about being followed. He had seen another flicker of unexplained light after the jump away from the smuggling base, and was anxious to get back to the protection of the FIA.

Jolie felt incompetent to judge whether they were in any danger or not, and just left those worries to Thorgan. He clearly knew a lot more about all of it than she did, and she was busy keeping her emotions off the rollercoaster.

And then there was the problem that if Thorgan just *looked* at her in the right way, she started melting, her nipples tightening and her pussy creaming. That made it hard to stick to rational trains of thought.

When they were only a few hours away from Monnegan, Jolie's home planet, and the FIA base, it got hard to keep up the light and playful tone. Jolie was aware that this was the last time they would...*make love* on this trip; possibly it was the last time she would have sex with Thorgan. Ever. Her contracted time as his sex toy was at an end.

After the usual explosive sex, they collapsed in the inadequate lower bunk, Thorgan's leg braced on the floor to provide support. Jolie snuggled against him, her face tucked into his neck. She breathed deeply of his scent, storing the details to remember later. His muscular arm curved around her body; his hand absently stroked her back. The now-familiar

aftermath of a mind-blowing orgasm throbbed between her thighs, and the air was redolent of sex and body fluids.

She ought to ask him if she would see him after they landed, but she just couldn't bring herself to do it. She was too afraid of the answer.

Taking a deep breath, she pulled away from his beautiful body.

He looked down and smiled, but she knew him well enough to recognize that there was a note of tension and constraint in that smile. "So, I guess we'd better prepare for arrival."

She nodded. "Yeah. There's a lot to do." She rolled off him and stood up. "I'll take the first turn in the shower."

The shower was a tiny space, hardly big enough to hold Thorgan, and it didn't even have real water. But unless you wanted to hang out in the hold, it was the only privacy available. Jolie leaned against the wall and allowed a few tears to escape, and then concentrated on breathing and relaxing until she was sure she wasn't going to cry.

She would *not* be needy and clinging. She would get through this with her self-respect intact. If it killed her.

Chapter Seven

Thorgan strode down the hallway of the FIA base, listening to the FIA employees who were going to debrief them – Jon Harder, Stara Thrushman, and Welther Graf. Jolie was trailing along behind them, not participating much in the discussion. How was she feeling about the end of their...arrangement? Women did have a tendency to get attached, in his experience. He hoped she wasn't going to be a problem. He liked Jolie. She was fun to talk to, fun to tease, and the sex had been great. But he had six years of celibacy to make up for. He had plans.

Jon Harder, the Director's assistant, ushered them into a luxurious conference room, and they all settled around the table. Jolie slumped into the chair closest to the door, and let her duffle bag slide to the floor. He had never seen her look so tired, so she must not have gotten much sleep last night. He hadn't slept that well himself, wondering what he would end up doing for the FIA, worrying about his new life on a new planet – and trying not to think about Jolie and the last week with her.

Jon Harder opened up a tablet computer, whose screen was projected on the wall. "Computer, record. Debriefing session for the first mission of the Cyborg Recruitment Project. Present – Jon Harder, Stara Thrushman, Welther Graf, Jolie Blakney, and Thorgan

D’Emry.” He gave a nod to Jolie. “First, Jolie Blakney will describe her preparations and initial contact with Thorgan D’Emry.”

She licked her lips and described her preparations for the trip, the routine spaceflight, and initial contact with Thorgan. She finished up with, “Thorgan D’Emry accepted the offer of a contract with the Federation Intelligence Agency. The validated contract has been recorded and entered into FIA records.”

Jon touched a few spots on the computer, and the contract was linked into the debriefing record. He nodded thoughtfully. “So, Thorgan, you accepted the contract without changes?”

Jolie glanced quickly at Thorgan. She was probably wondering whether he would say anything about their private agreement. But they weren’t going to hear anything about that from him. He owed her that much, at least.

He avoided looking at her, and said calmly, “Well, I considered demanding a few changes, but negotiating time was limited and I didn’t want to take the chance.”

Jon exchanged looks with Stara. She cleared her throat. “The offer to...uh, restore your function was a convincing one, was it?”

Thorgan nodded slowly and drawled, “Yes, I’d say it was convincing.” He put his hands together, pointed up. “But I think we can make the package even more attractive, if you’ll allow me to consult on the next mission. I have a personal interest in helping other cyborgs who were cheated as I was, and I certainly know the Union well enough to help make the mission more acceptable.” He quirked an eyebrow. “There *is* going to be a next mission, isn’t there?”

“That’s partly dependent on what the Director thinks of the report, but --” Jon glanced at Stara and smiled. “-- I think that I can predict that there will be another mission.”

Thorgan could feel a wave of relaxation flow through the room. Things were looking good for Jolie’s job – and hopefully his. Although his contract hadn’t actually specified that

he'd work on this project, it was one which he felt would use his knowledge and experience well.

Jolie and Thorgan took turns describing the rest of the mission. When Jon called an end to the debriefing session, Thorgan's head was aching and Jolie slumped back against her seat and closed her eyes.

The men all headed for the door, exchanging the typical small talk of new acquaintances, when Welther said, "I suppose you're counting the minutes until you can connect with some of the local beauties."

Thorgan laughed, conscious that Jolie was sitting there listening. But he wasn't going to lie or pretend just because she was there. "You're damn right. I plan on a new woman every night."

Jolie swiveled her chair around to look at Thorgan. It was harder than he had expected to meet her eyes, and he couldn't read the expression. Was that reproach on her face, or was it just his sense of guilt? At the very least, it wasn't polite to talk about future sexual partners in front of the woman to whom he'd made love just a few hours ago. He could feel his face get hot, and then he looked away.

Welther glanced between them curiously, and then turned to Thorgan. "Why don't I pick you up at your temporary living quarters to take you to my favorite bar, Body Extensions?" He glanced at his chronometer. "Shall we say eight?"

"Sure," Thorgan said. "Sounds good to me." He hesitated, then looked at Jolie. "I'll be seeing you around, I'm sure."

"Oh, I'm sure," Jolie said, with a note of...sarcasm?

Shit. He'd really made a mess of that. They should have talked about this earlier today, yesterday. Sometime, anyway. He hadn't wanted to hurt Jolie, and he was pretty sure he had. They were going to be working together, so he'd have to work this out with her now, and something told him it had just gotten a lot tougher.

* * * * *

Jolie should have been glad to get back to her normal life and her own apartment, uncluttered with the space-consuming body of a large, very male, and sometimes irritatingly stupid cyborg. But as she sat at her kitchen table, sipping a cup of hot kaff, her apartment only seemed empty and stunningly quiet.

She had a rather urgent bit of damage control to handle. It looked like Thorgan was going to be working with her on Welther's project. So she had to figure out how to arrange – or re-arrange – people's perceptions and understanding of what had happened between her and Thorgan so that she could live with it. She had to make sure that Thorgan, in particular, did not think of her as that un-sexy doctor that he had to drop when better opportunities were available. And she had to make sure that Welther and everybody else connected with the project thought about their little "arrangement" in the right way. Because she was damn sure they wouldn't be able to keep this secret. Welther was already suspicious.

Almost as important as that goal – or maybe *more* important? – was that she could forget ever having a relationship with Thorgan if he felt like he had "dropped" her. She had been on the other end of that one enough to realize that her odds of ever having a relationship with him would vanish, because he'd unconsciously set her value as a partner somewhere down with the other charity cases.

And Jolie was honest enough with herself to realize that she *did* want to be with Thorgan – but only if they could meet on equal terms. She could not tolerate being someone he felt like he was lowering himself to be with.

She took a sip of hot kaff, set the cup on the table, and pulled her computer over. Time was important in this operation. The longer perceptions had to crystallize, the harder it would be to reform them.

First she had to talk to Welther and find out what happened last night. She tapped his entry in her contact list, and her computer contacted his.

“Hello, Jolie?” he said.

“Welther, my *friend*. How’d things go last night?”

“Okay, I guess. We didn’t stay long, since Thorgan had a lot he wanted to do to get settled in his new place.” There was a significant pause. “What’s up with the two of you anyway?”

“There were a few things we left out of the official report.”

“Somehow, I’m not surprised.”

“Thorgan agreed to the Federation contract – but only if I’d have sex with him.”

Welther growled. “Geeze, Jolie. You didn’t have to go that far for the mission. You should have told him to get lost.”

“You know, it was partly your fault. I knew how much this mission meant to you.”

Welther’s voice got a few notches louder. “*My fault?*” He made an exaggerated sob. “Way to guilt trip a guy. Sure, I’m anxious to save as many Union cyborgs as we can, but I never asked you to screw them.” There was a few seconds of silence. “There’s something you’re not telling me. I can feel the vibes from here. You wanted to have sex with him, didn’t you?”

“Well,” Jolie hedged, “define ‘wanted’ for me.”

“Damn. I knew it. And he’s going out looking for women. You want me to beat him up?”

Jolie snorted. “No. But I think that we were shortsighted to not anticipate something like this. We should be better prepared for the sexual needs of the newly re-activated cyborg on the next mission.”

Welther blew out noisily. “You’re saying that the FIA should get into providing sexual services? That’s not going to go over well with the brass, but you’re right. We need to do something for our...upgraded cyborgs. But what about the two of you? You’re going to have to work together, you know.”

“Yes, I know.” She sighed. “I have a plan, but I’m going to need your help. First, you have to promise to bring Thorgan to Body Extensions tonight...”

After finishing up with Welther, she called her friend Malia, who also acted as her receptionist for the FIA. Malia would know exactly what she needed to do to jazz up her appearance. She had been begging Jolie for years to let her fix her up. Jolie was finally going to give her a free hand. This was serious. This was war.

Luckily Malia was free, because there was barely enough time to get everything done. Jolie had been putting away a big portion of her paycheck for years, and it was a good thing, because she had never spent so much money in one day before in her life. A new hairdo, skin and eye treatments, new clothes, and last but not least, instructions from Malia on how to move to attract men.

When they were finished, Jolie stared at the two of them in the bedroom mirror. She wouldn’t have recognized herself. She looked beautiful and sexy, just like the women she had secretly envied for years. Her hair fluttered in multi-colored wisps around her face; her brown eyes looked dark and mysterious; the tightly fitted, skimpy shirt revealed the delicate swell of her breasts and exposed her belly, where an emerald glittered. She turned around to get the rear view. Most of her back was bare, and the fabric of her shorts clung to her curves so much that it was sexier than plain nakedness would have been.

Malia smiled in triumph. “I told you that you’d be a knockout.”

* * * * *

When Jolie sashayed into Body Extensions, it took all of her self-control to keep from fleeing back to the car that brought her and Malia. This was one of the places where she hung out with Welther. She knew a lot of these people, and it was hard to show up looking so unlike herself. And she had a strong presentiment that what she was going to do would hurt, hurt like hell.

But she knew this plan was a good one, a necessary one, and she couldn't think of any reasonable alternatives. So she strode in as though she was some kind of sex goddess.

Body Extensions was a bar and club that catered to cyborgs of all kinds, particularly those with strength and speed enhancements. Some of the regulars were of average build, but even more were men with the physique to support the stronger mods. So a lot of big, strong men hung out here – and the groupies they attracted.

Jolie had never been counted as one of the groupies. She had the excuse of hanging out with her friend Welther, and her professional interest too, of course. The prim, dowdy clothes she used to wear were as good as an announcement that she wasn't in the market. Hopefully, that was about to change.

Several of the usual barflies glanced in her direction, and then back in shock, their mouths almost dropping open. It looked like one of her goals had been achieved. Now, if it would only work on Thorgan...

She saw Welther and Thorgan sitting at "their" table toward the back, and she pulled Malia in that direction.

Malia whispered, "That's him, with Welther?"

"Yes."

"He's a looker, all right. You sure you don't want to make a play for him instead?"

Jolie rolled her eyes. "I told you. This *is* a play for him. The direct route wouldn't work right now."

"Still, it seems like a waste."

"I'm thinking long term, here. So back me up, okay?" Jolie waved her hand, and got Welther's attention. The surprised look on his face was priceless, and worth all the money and time she'd spent today.

He touched Thorgan's arm, and pointed to her. Thorgan turned to look at her, a kind of controlled blankness on his face that told her he was probably still feeling defensive. Then he

saw her, and his expression changed in a blink to astonishment, followed immediately by lust. Jolie could have cheered. Her new image was working.

She fastened a grin on her face, and when she reached their table gave determinedly friendly kisses on the cheek to both of them, then slid into a seat. “Hey, Welther, Thorgan. How’re you doing? Recovered yet from the trip?”

Thorgan said, “I didn’t sleep as well as I hoped last night, but the apartment is comfortable.” His gaze slid from her face down to the large amount of chest her shirt revealed, and her nipples tightened.

Jolie nodded sympathetically. “Yeah, when you’re used to fucking like a bunny, it’s hard to go cold turkey.”

Thorgan blanched, then turned dark red. Welther’s eyes widened and he looked like he was trying to melt into his seat.

Jolie feigned surprise. “What? You didn’t tell Welther about our little sex deal?” She frowned. “I was happy to take one for the team. Don’t get me wrong, Thorgan’s a great lover, and I’d give him a recommendation any day. But we really need to make sure that someone a bit more prepared for that sort of assignment goes on the next mission. Don’t you agree, Thorgan?”

He looked confused, as though he wasn’t sure he understood what was going on. “Uh, I guess that’s something that should be considered.”

“Meanwhile, if you want to pick somebody up for easy sex, Sharly’s a good bet. She’s a real cyborg groupie. She’ll sleep with anyone with duplinium bones and basic reflex enhancements. No? Well, you could always try...what do you think, Welther? Do you think he’s big enough for Phyllian? No, I was afraid not. She really likes that huge man-mountain look. I know!” She gestured to a tall, willowy blonde, who obligingly ambled over. “Chane? This is Thorgan. He’s a milspec cyborg, looking for...company.” She lifted a meaningful eyebrow.

It looked like Thorgan was gritting his teeth, but he managed to greet Chane with a grudging, “Pleased to meet you.”

Chane glanced between the two of them, shrugged, and sat down. She was one of the nicer regulars at Body Extensions, and if Thorgan was going to pick up the locals, she wasn’t a bad place to start.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me...” Jolie looked at Malia, who was hovering behind her. “Malia is going to introduce me to a friend who comes *highly* recommended.” She fluttered her eyelashes, and draped an arm around Thorgan as she stood up. She whispered in his ear, “Good luck.” And she sauntered away, pulling Malia behind her.

She tried very hard to not think about Thorgan with Chane, but it was like trying to not think about a pink elephant. She couldn’t stop the images of his sculpted, muscular ass pumping away on top of Chane, of his thick cock fucking Chane’s mouth, his big, sensitive fingers tweaking Chane’s nipples. She had to do something to keep from obsessing, of feeling betrayed and slighted when she had no right.

A few yards away, she said to Malia between grim lips, “Now you really have to introduce me to somebody. Make him big and hot and a good lover.”

Malia groaned. “I’ve created a monster. Do you have to do this tonight?”

“Yes. I’ve made a schedule, and it’s important that Thorgan see me with another man.” She paused. “And if he’s going to go home with somebody else, so am I. Believe me, it’s necessary.”

“Yes, but... Oh, hell. I’ll introduce you to Genj. He’s a nice guy, and in between girlfriends. I just hope you don’t regret this.”

Jolie hoped so, too.

Chapter Eight

Thorgan swiveled in his office chair, restless and dissatisfied. He had chewed out the FIA staff for sending Jolie off on a mission for which she wasn't well prepared. He had ranted on and on about their shortsightedness in not anticipating the sexual needs of the newly enabled cyborgs – i.e. *him*. He had demanded a home of his own, and pointed out the lacks in their program to integrate him into the FIA and Federation civilian life. But somehow, even after letting off rather excessive amounts of spleen – he was convinced that he had seen Jon scuttle around the corner this morning at the mere sight of him – he still was unsatisfied.

Welther and Jon had been friendly and helpful, but somehow he still felt...lonely. It was odd, because he'd spent years on that space station with only himself for company. Yet somehow, here, on a planet with almost a billion inhabitants, he was conscious of the lack of people in his life.

He leaned back and put his feet on his desk. It was probably due to his lack of sexual satisfaction. In fact, he was *positive* it had something to do with his lack of good, cathartic sex. He had totally hated Jolie introducing Chane. Something about having a past partner introduce someone for him to have sex with was just *wrong*. But he had felt compelled to indulge, considering that he had several times, in public, claimed that he was going to sleep

with a different woman each night. But although Chane seemed to be a nice woman – for someone who was into picking up men just because they were cyborgs – it hadn't been satisfying. At all.

And this was the point where his mind had a tendency to skitter off in any available direction. Because he just didn't want to think about the fact that sex with Jolie had been entirely and completely satisfying. Why couldn't they just go back to the way things were aboard that tiny little ship of hers?

The row of sculptures neatly lined up on his desk caught his eye. He'd intended to give one to Jolie and never got around to it. He'd give one to her now, and see how she felt about getting back together.

Several minutes later in front of the cyborg medical center where Jolie worked, that idea didn't seem quite as shiny. He hesitated. Her attitude at Body Expressions the other night didn't leave much room for suggesting that they get together. In fact, you might say she had gone to a lot of trouble to make it impossible. He scratched the back of his neck. Did he want to take the risk of getting shot down? Although he hadn't been addressing the question to any particular part of his anatomy, his dick jumped at the idea of sex with Jolie. So he sighed and pushed the door open.

The young woman with curly dark hair sitting behind a counter looked familiar, but Thorgan couldn't quite place her. Without looking up from her computer she asked, "Do you have an appointment?"

"No, I'm here to see Jolie. I'm a friend."

"Your name?"

"Thorgan D'Emry."

She jerked around to face him. "Oh, *you*." She frowned. "I'll see if Dr. Blakney wants to see you." She disappeared through a door, and he heard the muffled murmur of voices.

He restlessly tapped his fingers on his arms. What had this receptionist – Malia, her nametag said – heard about him? It didn't sound like it was exactly positive. Had Jolie said something, or was it just the usual rumor mill? That scene at Body Expressions... His memories clicked into place, and he realized that this was the friend who had been with Jolie.

Malia returned, and waved him through the door. "You can go in." Her tone made it clear that she disapproved.

He stepped inside and closed the door behind him. Jolie sat behind a small, utilitarian desk with a computer. When she looked over and saw him, she blushed.

It was strange, but that blush caused the blood to pound in his veins and his cock to harden. She looked so...cute, cuddly almost, and a similar blush had often been the start of some excellent sex.

With two long strides, he was standing next to her and bending down to cover her lips with his. He could feel her melt, and she moaned at the back of her throat. Her arms went around his neck, and he pulled her up against his body, perching on the edge of the desk.

His slipped his tongue into her mouth, and gripped her ass to pull her against his throbbing erection. Damn, that felt good. She tasted like sex, like warmth and humor and Jolie.

Then she put her hands between them and pushed, pulling her mouth away from his. "Put me down."

He nuzzled her soft, smooth cheek with his lips. "Why? You know you want me. You can't hide that from me."

She managed to get her feet on the ground and pushed harder on his chest. "I may want you, but that doesn't mean I have to indulge." She narrowed her eyes. "Now step back before I call the guards."

He reluctantly released his hold on her and stood up. "We had a good time together. I don't see why we can't keep it up."

She raised an eyebrow. "Thorgan, I wouldn't think of interfering with your plan to have sex with a different woman every night."

"I get it. You're jealous, and want to get even."

"Jealous? What do I have to be jealous of? We had an arrangement – an arrangement for your sexual convenience, I might add – and the arrangement is over."

"Yes, but...I want to have sex with you." He frowned, and touched the side of her cheek with his finger. "It's not as much fun with other women."

"So Chane didn't work out well for you?"

His face grew hot. "You know, it's just not natural for you to be so...so..."

"Is 'honest' the word you're looking for?"

"Aw, Jolie. Come on. We could have a good time together."

Her face was tight; he guessed she was angry. "Give me a call when you've finished the grand plan to screw every woman in Tradilla. If I'm still free, I might even go out with you."

Unfortunately, his grand plan didn't seem nearly so important since he couldn't have the one woman he wanted right now. He crossed his arms and drummed his fingers against his biceps. What could he say to make her change her mind?

She scowled. "Which reminds me – I have a complaint. You trained me to come when you tell me to." She put her hands on her hips and glared. "That's really not very useful when I'm having sex with somebody else."

He really didn't want to hear about her having sex with somebody else. So he shrugged. "It's not a problem for me. Have sex with me and it's not an issue for you either."

She snorted. "I see you're not denying it."

“It wasn’t intentional.” He rubbed his temples. “It’s never happened before. But what can I do about it now? For what it’s worth, I’m sorry.”

She moved to sit behind her desk, no doubt feeling more comfortable with a piece of furniture between them. “Okay, you’re sorry. Fine. Was there some purpose to this visit, or were you just looking for a quickie?”

Everything he said or did to Jolie was going wrong. He should probably quit while she was still talking to him. He examined her for any hint of softening, but she just looked ticked off. “I didn’t mean to bother you, it’s just that I saw you and... Well.” He pulled the sculpture out of his pocket. “I wanted to give you this. To remember me.” He took her hand and wrapped her fingers around the sculpture.

Jolie held the sculpture up to look at, and murmured, “The fire beast. It was always my favorite.” She carefully set it down on her desk. “Thank you.” She took a deep breath. “I didn’t intend to fight with you. You took me by surprise.” She looked down and fiddled with her computer, then looked up. “It just wouldn’t work for me to make love to you one night, and see you with somebody else the next night, particularly since we’re working on the same team. You can understand that, can’t you?”

He nodded. “Yes, I do understand. It really wasn’t fair of me to ask, it’s just that... I miss you.”

She smiled back, but there was an element of sadness in it. “I miss you, too,” she whispered.

* * * * *

After Thorgan left, Jolie slumped in her seat and closed her eyes. It had been so hard not to give in to the desire to be with Thorgan again. Part of her was still convinced that saying “no” was one of the stupidest things she’d ever done. But the sane part of her knew that it would destroy her emotionally to be a casual fuckbuddy for Thorgan. Ironically, if she hadn’t cared for him, it would have been great fun.

She heard the door open and close, and opened her eyes to see Malia looking at her with concern. "Are you okay?" Malia asked.

She smiled with an effort. "Sure. Looks like my plan worked just great."

"How? He's decided he loves you and wants to marry you?"

She knew Malia hadn't intended to make things worse, but her question felt like a blow to her heart. She cleared her throat. "No, he wants to have sex with me. Which means that he's not thinking of me as the loser that he dumped."

Malia shook her head. "You know, I thought you were nuts when you told me your crazy scheme, but I was so glad to get a chance to dress you up and make you look sexy that I let it pass."

"Well, it worked didn't it?"

"The makeover, sure, that was a good idea. But *pushing* him into having sex with somebody else? Hell, girl. You love the man. It's like you were trying to hurt yourself before he could get around to it, and that's just nuts."

Totally and completely against her will, Jolie burst into tears, wrenching sobs that came from deep inside.

"Oh, damn," Malia said, and wrapped her arms around her. "Don't pay any attention to me. I'm just an idiot."

Jolie's crying gradually subsided. She took one last deep breath and slumped into her seat, fumbling for tissues to wipe her face. "No, you're right. It was a stupid plan. And being with Genj was just more stupidity. It didn't make me feel better, it made me feel worse. He wasn't Thorgan. After intensely mediocre sex with those old boyfriends, with Thorgan it was...wonderful. I thought it was something I had learned to do, that I could have it with anybody." She rubbed her eyes. "I was wrong."

Malia nodded. "Yeah, it's all about the person. Though why you had to pick such a dense, chauvinist –"

“He’s not dense,” Jolie interrupted, then smiled sheepishly. “At least most of the time. And a lot of that attitude is like...like a game that he plays. He likes to tease.”

“Well, better you than me, girlfriend. But what are you going to do now?”

Jolie rested her head on her hands. “I don’t know. I’ve screwed everything up. It will kill me to watch Thorgan run through all the groupies at Body Extensions.” She turned to the computer controls and tapped the screen on. “Where’s the job list? Maybe I’ll request a transfer to some moon in the next sector.”

Malia groaned. “How did you ever graduate from medical school? Or did that big lummoX really fuck your brains out? Because you’re not thinking very rationally right now.” She spoke very slowly and clearly. “You want Thorgan. Thorgan is here. You need to stay here. Got it?”

“But...but...”

“Give it at least a couple of weeks. You only met each other ten days ago, right?”

Jolie shrugged. “You *know* that.”

“He hasn’t even had a chance to get used to the idea that he wants you. Maybe he’s a little slow. He is a man, after all. Give him a little time before you write him off. In fact, I want you to promise me you won’t make any life-altering decisions for at least two weeks. Okay?” Malia looked sternly at Jolie and waited for a response.

Jolie slumped in her chair and sighed. “Maybe you’re right.”

“I know I’m right. Do you promise?”

“Oh, all right. Two weeks.” Surely she could live through two weeks.

* * * * *

The FIA’s exercise facility was top-notch, filled with all possible tools to test and exercise Thorgan’s computer-enhanced reflexes and perceptions. He couldn’t get release with

Jolie, so he might as well work himself into the ground. He started with the basic weight machines, moved on to the sparring exercisers, then the weapons sims.

Then for a more motivational experience, he turned off the safety features and set the weapons to actual damage. Sure, it wouldn't really hurt him. They didn't put those sims out for just any wacko to come in and knock himself off. At least, they didn't in the Union, and from the options available on the room setup screen, the Federation was on the same wavelength.

Government bureaucracies had a lot in common no matter where you found them. Didn't matter whether they were in favor of individual rights and open markets like the Federation, or for regimented safety nets and government assigned jobs like the Union. They still weren't going to give you the opportunity to off yourself in their facilities.

Not that he wanted to do that, anyway. But he wanted the buzz that edge of danger would give him. He was working off some serious frustration here. So he dialed up the risk as high as it would go and turned on the "individual firefight" training sim.

After five minutes of vigorous rolling and sliding and ducking and shooting holograph enemies hiding behind holograph bushes, he was just starting to get to the point of feeling challenged, when some bozo entered the room and slapped the emergency halt sensor.

He swung around to give the idiot a piece of his mind, and pulled up short when he realized that the idiot was Welther. So instead he just stood there, breathing hard and glaring. "Hey, what's the idea? I was in the middle of something here."

Welther touched the door-close sensor, crossed his arms, and leaned against the wall. "I need to talk to you. About Jolie."

Dammit, the woman wouldn't have sex with him and was making his life miserable, and now her *friends* were getting on his case, too. He narrowed his eyes. "What about Jolie?"

"You took advantage of her. You forced her to have sex with you for signing the FIA contract. You hurt her." Welther's voice was tight and hard.

“Is that what she said? Because if she did –”

“No, she didn’t say that...exactly.” Welther hesitated. “But you can’t deny that you said you wouldn’t sign unless she had sex with you.”

“Dammit, I didn’t really mean it. The woman obviously had the hots for me, so I figured I’d make it easy for her to do what she wanted to do anyway.” He blew out in frustration. “I would have signed even if she said no.”

Welther raised an eyebrow. “But she didn’t know that, did she?”

Thorgan bit his lip.

“Well? Did she?”

Thorgan turned away and grabbed the towel hanging on a hook. “No. She didn’t realize that.”

Welther moved closer, a bit too close.

Thorgan resisted the urge to step back.

“But that’s not the biggest problem.” He leaned even closer, resting his hand on the wall behind Thorgan. “What the blazing *hell* are you doing sleeping with other women with a woman like Jolie around? Do you *realize* what that’s doing to her?”

Thorgan stood up to maximum height and glared at Welther. “I *told* her it was just short term. I never, ever lied to her.” He looked to the side and his voice dropped. “Besides...she doesn’t want me now, anyway.”

Welther looked at him in disgust. “I guess your brains – no, let’s make that your emotions – have rotted from being stuck out in the middle of space for too long. Of course she’s not going to be one of a crowd of women you’re sleeping with.” He stepped back and drew a deep breath. “You know, I think that little...problem...the Union foisted on you arrested your development. But it’s time to grow up now. You’re not an eighteen-year-old who’s just discovered sex and wants to get his score as high as possible anymore.” Shaking his

head, he moved to the room's exit, and looked back at Thorgan. "Tell me one thing. How did sex with Chane compare with sex with Jolie?"

Thorgan flushed. "It's none of your damn business."

Welther nodded. "Well, just imagine the next few months filled with that – and compare it with spending that time with Jolie." He narrowed his eyes. "And remember that if you do anything – and I mean *anything* – to hurt Jolie, I'll take you apart piece by piece."

Thorgan growled, "Well, Welther, if you think so highly of her, why aren't you with her yourself?"

Welther's face blanched. "I wish, I really, really wish it was me she loved." He clenched his fists, then stalked to the exit. Without looking at Thorgan, he snarled, "You've been warned," and left, closing the door quietly behind him.

Thorgan slumped against the wall and slid down until he was sitting on the floor. Did Jolie love him?

The blood rushed away from his head, and he rested it against his knees. Maybe Welther was right. He'd been playing in the minor leagues, thinking only about his score, while she'd been in a whole different league.

Dammit. He was going to have to spend some serious time thinking about women and sex and relationships – and it was so much frigging work.

Chapter Nine

Jolie went home early. FIA owed her time anyway. Hell, they owed her a lot more than time. They owed her a cyborg boyfriend. She snickered, wondering what Micky in procurement would say if she put *that* on a requisition. With her luck, she'd probably get referred to some headshrink.

When she stepped into her apartment, she immediately wished that she had gone somewhere else. The place was too empty and quiet. The pictures that she had carefully selected now looked bland and meaningless; the furniture was conventional and uncreative. She breathed hard, trying to relax the tightness in her chest, and acknowledging that the real problem with the place was that Thorgan wasn't in it.

Despite the fact that he could be so blind and macho sometimes, she felt alive around him – even if it was the kind of alive that made sticking your finger in a power socket look like a good deal.

Damn, damn, damn. She had to stop thinking about the big oaf.

Restlessly, she wandered to the window overlooking the courtyard in the middle of the complex. It was a small private park, with trees and carefully designed pools and a waterfall, and benches suitable for reading. If it wasn't for the danger of being interrupted by random

members of the complex, it would have been a good place for her now. Busy. She needed to find something to keep herself busy. And her thoughts off you-know-who.

She was always complaining that there wasn't enough time to organize and clean. The truth was that there was plenty of time – she just didn't like doing it. So this was an ideal time to take care of that bedroom closet. It was what she deserved for being so damn silly as to get stuck on that... you know. That person she wasn't thinking about.

She grimly opened the closet and the carefully stacked pile of papers and boxes slid down onto the floor. Okay. This was a good thing. Now she had to do *something* with all of it.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she started making piles in a circle all around her. Things to throw out there; things to keep here; things she couldn't decide about in front...

She was about half through sorting the big pile, when she heard a soft “snick” from the living room. Was that the door? She had closed it, hadn't she? Frowning, she headed for the living room and stepped from the hallway into the central space. An arm grabbed her around the waist, and a hand was pressed over her mouth.

Panicked, she struggled and thrashed, trying to get her leg up for a kick, but the person holding her was too strong. In fact, her struggles had no effect on him whatsoever. With this kind of strength, this must be a cyborg. She stopped moving. “Who are you?” she tried to ask, but the words were hardly comprehensible through that immovable hand.

Could this be one of her patients? A patron of Body Extensions turned stalker? A burglar interrupted by her unexpected afternoon off?

There was no response from her captor, but after a flurry of disorienting motion, she found herself slumped on her couch, that beige, bland, overly conventional piece of furniture she had glowered at earlier.

The cyborg standing in front of her, stone-faced, was nobody she remembered seeing before. Of course, she probably didn't remember *everybody* she'd ever been in contact with.

His hair was black and short, and his shirt was more roughly shaped than usual. No, this wasn't somebody from Body Extensions. Nobody from there would be caught dead dressed in that badly shaped uniform.

Mr. Stoneface snapped in a low voice, "Where is he?"

She blinked. "Who?"

"Don't try to lie to me. The cyborg you stole."

Everything came together in a flash. This had to be a Union agent, looking for Thorgan. "Stole?" She shook her head. "I'm a cyborg doctor. I don't steal them, I treat them," she said patiently.

"Don't play games with me." He glared. "I can crush you with one hand. Tell me where Thorgan D'Emry is."

It struck her that she could probably answer this question without doing any particular harm. It seemed like a better idea to say something than refuse completely. She examined him for weapons, but had no idea if the bulge under his arm and the similar one in his right pocket qualified. It's not like he *needed* weapons, with the military mods she was sure that he had. "Oh, *Thorgan*. He should be at FIA headquarters down on Jurnalina Street. Would you like directions?" She fluttered her eyelashes in a pretense of helpfulness. "Are you a friend of his?"

"Shut up." His voice was rough. He also looked as though he wasn't sure what to do next.

She shook her head. What was the Union thinking to send such an idiot after Thorgan? This was the sort of low-wattage cyborg that gave cyborgs a bad rep.

Stoneface touched a spot on his belt – a communicator, no doubt.

A disembodied voice spoke. "Status?"

"Target isn't at this location. The woman who piloted the ship is here. What shall I do now?"

She could hear the impatience in the voice when it answered. "Have her call the cyborg and ask him to come to her residence. Capture the cyborg when he arrives. Kill her if she gives you any trouble."

Ookay. That let her know what the stakes were here. Her stomach was feeling queasy as it sank in that she might not get out of this alive.

Mr. Dolt Stoneface turned to her, pulled out a stun gun, and aimed it at her. "Call Thorgan D'Emry. Ask him to come here. Don't tell him anything, or try to give him clues that I'm here, or I'll shoot you."

She unhooked the communicator button from her belt, tapped Thorgan's shortcut, and waited a few seconds for him to respond.

"Jolie, what's up?"

"Hey, Thorgan, remember what I said earlier about wanting to get together for a quickie soon? How about right now? You up for some afternoon delight?"

Dead silence, then a cautious voice. "Jolie? Is that you?"

"I'm right in the middle of something now. A light is flashing that I need to take care of. How soon can you get here?" She sure hoped she wasn't overestimating the stupidity of Stoneface, because anybody with two neurons to rub together would probably have picked up that there was some serious subtext in that message. He was glaring at her and taking a step closer, but she was still alive, so her guess was that that second neuron was definitely missing in action.

Thorgan's voice was calm, but she knew him well enough to detect the underlying tension. "I'll be there as soon as I can. Why don't you slip into something more comfortable?"

"I'm at 718 Theremin Group. I'll be looking forward to your arrival." She pretended to tap the communicator to turn it off, then turned to Stoneface and said loudly, "Did you follow us from the Penthian system?"

"Shut up, bitch." He reached to grab her communicator.

Handing it to him palm down, she turned it off with her thumb, hoping he wouldn't notice.

Now that Thorgan was on his way, Stoneface no longer needed to keep her alive. Her heart thudded in her chest. She had to distract him enough to make him forget that.

* * * * *

Thorgan had been exploring the city on foot, thinking about himself and Jolie, when she had called. He heard Jolie's question about following them from the Penthian systems, and the connection to her communicator clicked off. Jolie was in danger, life-threatening danger, and it was because of him. He felt adrenaline flood his body, and turned on full-battle cyborg mode.

He might have only minutes to rescue her. Every second counted. He turned into a cyborg pillar, letting pedestrian traffic flow around him, as he pulled up a visual display of the local map with Jolie's location pinpointed.

He made an emergency call to the FIA situation manager and everybody he'd ever spoken to at FIA headquarters, and announced, "A Union agent is in Jolie's apartment. She called and asked me to come, so presumably he's looking for me. I'm only a quarter klick away, ETA five minutes. Request download of Jolie's residence." A second later he was examining the images and diagrams of the Theremin residence. "Will leave communicator open, but on silent mode. Computer messages to me only."

With a burst of speed, he headed down the street, weaving around anyone in his way. He leaped over the fence guarding the light vehicle rails, and with a brief pause to time the vehicles whizzing by, leaped over the tracks to the other side, and onward.

In full-battle mode, the hormonal and physical effects of emotions were strictly controlled, but he could still *feel*. And he was profoundly grateful that he had been walking through the city, because that walk had placed him that much closer to the Union miscreant

who was threatening *his* woman. The woman he cared about. The only woman he wanted to have sex with.

He reached the Theremin structure and dashed through the entrance into the inside courtyard, where he paused to survey the situation. Jolie's unit was pinpointed in the downloaded plans, and he matched them against the reality. The windowed doors leading onto her balcony were not curtained, but from this distance he couldn't see or hear anything useful. Luckily the surface of the building and the balcony structure offered more than enough toe- and foot-holds to get up to the balcony.

He swung himself over the railing, concentrating on not making even the slightest noise. If he was correct in assuming that the Union had sent another cyborg after him, his opponent probably had equal if not superior hearing and fighting capability. It would certainly be wise to assume that.

He stood against the wall next to the glass doors, and listened. He caught the low rumble of conversations, and increased the volume and applied noise filtering until he could hear the words clearly.

Jolie said, "So, do you have any nighttime discomfort with the duplinium femur augmentation?"

Thorgan wrinkled his brow in confusion. She was giving this guy a medical consultation?

A rough, low voice responded. "Only when I spend too much time in the gym."

There was a brief pause, and Thorgan wished he had his viewing extensions with him. This was one conversation that he would give a week's pay to see.

Then he heard Jolie's voice again. "Well, you should probably adjust the exertion level in your onboard warning system –"

"Shut up. You're just trying to get me to talk." He growled. "Hey...I don't need you at all anymore, maybe I'll just –"

He was out of time. Thorgan jumped through the window feet first, arm up to protect his face. His battle comp pumped more adrenaline through his system, and time seemed to run both lightning fast and like molasses at the same time.

* * * * *

When Thorgan burst through the glass, Jolie ducked and tucked herself into a tight ball. If Stoneface managed to grab her and use her as a hostage, he would be way ahead. As long as she could stay out of his hands, you could think of this as two against one. Or maybe one point two against one. She couldn't exactly count herself as equal to a cyborg. And in order to count as anything at all, she'd have to figure out some way to be useful in a cyborg-to-cyborg fight.

As she inched backward to crouch under the table, nothing was coming to mind. Thorgan hurled himself at Stoneface in a flying kick, but Stoneface flipped to the side, so that the kick punched a hole in the wall. As Thorgan pulled himself back, Stoneface leaped toward him, hands outstretched. Thorgan tucked and rolled up, as though he was swimming through the air. It was hard to watch. The kicks and punches rarely seemed to connect – with a cyborg anyway. Her walls and pictures were receiving quite a bit of damage.

Dammit, she ought to be able to do something to help. If this was one of her patients who was out of control... That was it! The spray sedative which she kept in her bag at all times.

She snaked her hand to the upper surface of the table, feeling around for her medical bag. She reached the edge of the soft fabric, hooked it, and pulled it down. Turning her attention from the whirling cyborgs, she fished out a small cylinder just as a hand grasped her shoulder and yanked her out from under the table.

A moment later, Stoneface had her back against his chest, one arm around her waist and a hand around her throat.

"Stop!" Stoneface yelled.

Thorgan froze.

“Do what I say, or I’ll kill the woman.”

Jolie’s blood pounded in her veins. She forgot to breathe. She felt intensely, frighteningly alive, and couldn’t believe that she might be dead in seconds. She gripped the sedative tightly, holding on to the slender hope that it offered.

All of Thorgan’s cold, computerized attention was focused on Stoneface. “If you kill her, there will be nothing to hold me back. So you had better be careful to not kill her, or you’ll be in trouble.”

Jolie twisted her neck to look up at Stoneface. He wrinkled his forehead in confusion. The attempt to get his one neuron to process that bit of logic was apparently rather painful. He chewed on his lower lip. “I’m the one with the hostage. I tell you what to do; you don’t tell me what to do.” He looked pleased at having come up with that masterpiece of reasoning.

“But are you capable of telling me what to do?”

Stoneface scowled. “You’re insulting me, aren’t you?”

“No, no,” Jolie said soothingly. “I’m sure he was talking about me. I’m always doing something wrong.” She wriggled her arms around in his grasp, trying to get her right hand against his body.

“Don’t move,” Stoneface ordered, gripping her even tighter against him.

“Sorry. Just trying to get comfortable.” She twisted her hand and pushed the spray release, hoping it would be effective through layers of clothing.

Stoneface grabbed her hand and pulled it roughly out in front of her at an awkward angle. “What’d you do?” He pried her fingers open with his hand. “What’s this?”

“Ah, perfume? You don’t smell very good?”

Stoneface turned dark with anger. “You’re making fun of me.”

Thorgan nodded. “Yeah, she’s a real ball-buster.”

For a second it looked like Stoneface was about to nod in agreement, then he pulled his arm back to punch Jolie.

Jolie flinched, even though she knew intellectually that it would do no good. One punch would be strong enough to shatter her skull.

Thorgan surged toward him, but Stoneface's face went even blanker – and before he could release the punch, he slumped to the ground, dropping Jolie on the way down.

Relief flooded her, making her knees feel like rubber, and she sank to the floor next to him.

Thorgan kneeled beside her, and felt Stoneface's pulse. "What did you give him?" he asked.

"A sedative. He should be out for half an hour."

"Good girl." He smiled at Jolie. "I was starting to get worried there. I was afraid he might end up killing you from sheer stupidity."

"No, he wasn't exactly the sharpest laser in the tool cabinet, was he?" She narrowed her eyes at Thorgan. "But you've got to stop calling me a girl. I'm not a girl. I'm a woman."

Thorgan leaned back. "I've been calling you a girl since I met you because it's so much fun to see you react. *Now* you finally tell me to stop?" He pulled her to him. "You have an amazing sense of timing. It's one of the things that I love about you."

His mouth descended on hers.

Adrenaline was still running through her system, plus enough relief to make her shaky, but when Thorgan rolled her on top of him and cupped her face with his hands, it was all forgotten in a surge of arousal. Her body was melting on his, conforming to all of that tough, velvet-covered muscle and... Wait a minute. She pulled her mouth away enough to speak. "What did you say?"

"You have an amazing sense of timing?"

"No, the other part."

“Oh. I guess you mean ‘that’s one of the things I love about you.’”

“Yes, that part.” She sat up on top of him, her softness cradled against his rigid shaft.
“So, what other things do you love about me?”

“You want the list *now*?”

She nodded. “Seems like as good a time as any.”

“Well, except for the fact that the FIA is about three seconds from your front door – including your friend Welther. They’ve come to rescue you.”

“Aargh.” Jolie stood up, and the doorbell rang.

“I let them know everything is under control,” Thorgan said.

She glanced at his erection. “I think you lied.”

He sighed. “Just trying to enjoy every nanosecond before flipping the switch.”

Maybe she should think about getting some mods herself, because it would sure come in handy to be able to turn off the arousal flooding through her system. Shaking her head, she stepped over Stoneface, and went to the door to let them in.

Chapter Nine

Jolie picked up the pile of clothes she had unpacked just a few days ago and dropped it into her bag. The unconscious Stoneface had been carried out of her apartment, his communicator and everything he carried cataloged and handed over to a team of agents assigned to handle further investigation and determine the location of the Union ship. Someone somewhere was going to make political hay out of this incident, Jolie was sure. Meanwhile, it didn't seem smart to stay in an unprotected apartment. FIA housing would be much safer.

Thorgan, leaning against the open doorway watching her, cleared his throat. “We need to talk.”

She glanced at him, taking in his determined expression, then turned back to her packing. “Yes, we do.” Had Thorgan changed his mind? Did he want a commitment? Something was different, it was clear.

“When I realized that a Union goon had you...” His voice trailed off, and then he took a deep breath. “Jolie, I was afraid that he'd kill you before –”

She shook her head. “Hush.” Tapping a finger to her lips, she whispered, “Later,” and looked significantly at the FIA employees in the next room. She wanted privacy for this

discussion, no matter which way it turned out. Raising her voice slightly, she asked, “So, you think they’re stupid enough to come here again?”

Thorgan hesitated. “It’s hard to say. Not everybody in the Union Merchant Marine is stupid. It’s just that... Well, their system isn’t designed to promote people who are smart and skilled. The higher-ups think of the people underneath them as competitors, so they make sure that none of the people underneath them are better than they are.” He shrugged. “It’s one of the reasons I was on that isolated space station. It only took my lieutenant about two weeks to get me transferred as far away from him as possible – and nobody else wanted to take the risk of accepting a competent underling. So they put me off by myself, where I had no chance to compete for my boss’s job.”

Jon Harder poked his head around the corner. “Huh. I’d always wondered why the lower ranks of that organization were so incompetent. I wonder if we could...” His eyes glazed over, probably turning over some way to use that piece of information. Then he shook his head, and focused on Jolie. “Done packing? Let’s get out of here.”

They were shuttled back to the FIA residence, and dropped off in the protected docking bay. There was an awkward moment when Jon offered to carry Jolie’s bags up to her new apartment. Thorgan said, “No, I’ll take them up.”

Jon hesitated, and looked at Jolie.

She pretended not to notice and said, “Thanks, Thorgan.”

There was no conversation on the way to Jolie’s assigned living unit, but the tension was palpable. Jolie didn’t know how to feel. Part of her believed that Thorgan was going to tell her that he wanted only her; another part feared that he wouldn’t, that things would somehow end up being the same between them. The minutes crawled as they crossed through the halls and went up in the elevator. Thorgan’s expression was hard to read.

Jolie keyed open the door and stepped aside to let him in. He dumped the bags on the floor, and wrapped his arms around her. She rested her face on his broad chest and just

breathed. Tension flowed out, tension from the life-threatening danger, tension from wanting Thorgan and not having him, tension from not knowing what to do. As long as she was pressed tightly against him, breathing him in, everything was okay.

He kissed the top of her head. "Jolie, I'm sorry. I've been such a thickheaded idiot." His voice was low and rough, and he sounded much less sure of himself than usual.

Jolie rubbed her hands up and down his back and over his firm, rounded glutes. "I haven't been making the brightest decisions myself."

"Will you forgive me?"

"What do you want from me? What are you offering?"

He gently tilted her head up with his hand, and brushed her lips with his, the back of his fingers stroking her cheek. "You can have whatever you want. All I want is you. I don't want to sleep with a different woman every night. I only want to be with you, sleep with you, have sex with you. I love *you*. I would sign a lifetime contract tomorrow, but I'll take whatever you're willing to give me."

Jolie's heart expanded in her chest, driving joy throughout her body with its deep, powerful strokes. She was dizzy with relief. She pulled his head down so that she could kiss him, giving him his answer. She couldn't get enough of his velvety lips, his intense flavor, the sharing of their tongues. His response just pushed her passion higher.

He kissed his way to her ear and murmured, "Is that a yes on the marriage contract, or would you rather just live together?"

"What if I said I just wanted to go out for a while?" Jolie twisted to see his reaction.

One expression after another raced across his face. He didn't look happy at the idea, but he took a deep breath, and said, "If that's what you want."

"No, I don't think I do." She reached up to kiss him lightly. "Let's live together."

"Get married in six months?"

"We'll see."

He pulled her even tighter against his body, pressing the hard ridge of his erection against the softness of her body. She was aching to get him inside her, wanting, needing to be as physically close as possible.

Just then the unit's communication system blared, "Security check. Please acknowledge presence in unit."

"Aw, hell." She stomped over and palmed the switch. "Jolie Blakney, acknowledging."

The light turned green, and the system announced, "Next check, thirty minutes."

Thorgan crossed his arms, drumming his fingers on his biceps. "We need to go someplace else. This is not going to work."

* * * * *

By the time the next security check occurred, they were a good part of the continent away. They both had hazard time off, and Thorgan had convinced Jon that they would be safer and able to dispense with intrusive security checks in a different location.

That the particular location he had in mind was a beautiful, isolated vacation spot was obviously incidental to the safety issues.

Jon had just laughed and looked at them curiously. Jolie blushed, but didn't explain.

They were finally alone, in a small but nicely furnished cabin buried in the steep mountains that formed the backbone of the continent. The delay had made Jolie feel a bit shy, so she vanished into the shower as soon as they arrived. The hot water needling over her flesh only made her thoughts drift even more to sex. It hardly seemed possible that it had only been four days since she and Thorgan had last been together. It seemed more like four months. Her nipples were tight buds, and she was aching and wet between her thighs. The anticipation was wonderful, but it was time. Time to be with her lover. Time to make love. Would it be different than just "having sex"?

She slipped into a robe and left the bathroom. Thorgan was lounging on a chair in the bedroom, dressed in a deep-red velvet robe.

The robe emphasized the muscular strength of his shoulders and the broad expanse of his chest. He stood up and shrugged off the robe to reveal a massive erection. The golden light caressed his form as though he were a piece of sculpture.

Thorgan's body made things tighten deep inside her. He was so beautiful. Her pussy throbbed in hungry anticipation. She licked her lip.

Thorgan raised an eyebrow. "Like what you see?"

Jolie whistled. "Yeah."

"Good." He grinned and walked toward her.

Her heart thudded in her chest. He kneeled in front of her, gently parted her robe, and slid his hands down her body. He smelled of clean skin and potent arousal, and his eyes were a blue so deep they were almost black.

His hands nudged her legs apart with light pressure, and he edged closer until he was nestled against her. He tilted his head up to look at her, and whispered, "Kiss me."

His lips were flushed with blood, moist and plump.

She bent her head down and brought her lips to his, feather soft. A stroke of her tongue along the seam, and his mouth opened. His tongue stroked hers, tasting of heat, rich and complex, all Thorgan.

He angled his head and deepened the kiss. His mouth enveloped hers, and pleasure surged through her body. Her sex became swollen and moist. He moaned and stroked up her sensitized skin from her ass to her waist. Then his hands curved around the weight of her breasts, and his thumbs circled her nipples. She gasped at the electric effect on her throbbing core.

He pulled his mouth from her, and she whimpered at the loss. His heavy-lidded eyes gazed at her, and then he lifted her breast with one hand, leaned forward and sucked her nipple into his mouth.

Her body leaped in reaction, and her hands gripped his head, her fingers threading through his silky hair.

His hand slid down her belly, through her moist curls, and lightly stroked her creamy sex. One finger circled her clit and while another worked its way inside, and she shuddered hungrily as her muscles clenched. He worked her for several more cycles, stroking clit and sheath and sucking her nipples, and ribbons of hot, electric arousal curled around her core and up her spine.

He pulled away from her nipple. "Oh, yeah, baby. That's it," he said hoarsely. "You're hot now."

Jolie couldn't answer. She could barely breathe.

His hand moved away from her core, and he leaned back from her and stood up.

"Hmm. There was something I promised you, oh, a long time ago."

"Huh?" She shook her head to clear the fog of arousal.

He sat on the edge of the bed, and pulled her toward him, draping her over his lap against his cock, which was hot enough to brand her and hard as a duplinium rod.

She squirmed, trying to look over her shoulder at him, but the pressure of his hand on her back kept her from moving. "What are you doing?"

His other hand, the one that had been cupping her ass, gave her butt a swift slap.

She shrieked in shock and anger.

"Giving you that spanking I promised you the first day we met." His voice was filled with dark humor, and even more serious intent; his hand caressed the tingling flesh of her ass, a finger working down the crack to toy with her entrance.

She thrashed, trying in vain to escape his iron control of her body. “Why the hell are you doing that, you son of a bitch? I’ll...I’ll get you...” she sputtered.

His hand lifted, and she tensed. Another slap stung her tender skin, and she snarled.

He growled back. “That’s for forcing me to sleep with Chane.” He explored her creamy flesh, and slowly ran his finger up past the puckered opening of her anus. Pleasure surged through her, unwilling, decadent. He leaned close to her ear, and whispered, “And because you like it.”

“You bastard! I...do...not...like...it!” she cried.

Two slaps in quick succession left her bottom sore and her sex throbbing. She squirmed again, but this time trying to press her clit against the rock-hard, velvety cock underneath her belly.

“And that’s for having sex with somebody besides me. And for lying about not liking the spanking.”

Jolie tried to snarl in anger, but she was pretty sure that it came out as a moan instead. She needed him inside her *now*. “You’re dead meat when we finish here, but if you don’t fuck me now, you’ll be twice as dead.”

Thorgan snorted. “You never give up, do you?” He spanked her twice more in quick succession, and it felt like blood and heat was flooding her ass and spilling over into her already engorged sex.

She whimpered.

He picked her up and twirled her around so that she was lying flat on her back on the bed. She tried to keep breathing.

He lifted up her hips so that the head of his erection was pressed against her opening. He moved just enough to dip it into her moist opening, the movement tantalizingly shallow and unsatisfying.

She snarled. “In me. Now.”

And he drove his thickness into her, tunneling through her tight, swollen passage, working in every last inch of his massive shaft.

She felt like she had melted into a puddle of cream and hormones and sex. Then he pulled back, leaving her yearning to be stuffed full again. He obliged, of course, slamming into her over and over again. And every instant she was aware that it was Thorgan who was doing this to her, Thorgan, the man she loved, who loved her, and it was almost more than she could bear.

Anticipation grew in shimmering waves, mounting ever higher, ever stronger, threatening to swamp her.

One last stroke pounded into her and he growled, "Come, now."

Orgasm tore through her in an explosion of heat and her mind spun away, drowning in the spasms of her body.

He collapsed next to her, one arm and a leg holding her tightly cuddled next to him. Gradually, consciousness returned, consciousness and the realization that she was happier than she'd ever been before.

This was where she belonged.

But there was something she had left undone. She licked his salty skin, and shifted to murmur in his ear, "I love you."

"I know," he said, that note in his voice that had become so familiar. He was teasing again.

She swatted him.

He rolled her over, resting his weight on his arms and knees, and kissed her, moving his lips gently over hers. "I love you too."

 THE END 

Sara Rustan

Sara has always read voraciously, vastly preferring the world in books to reality. There have been times she and reality have barely been on speaking terms. After working as a programmer for several large corporations, she decided to follow her dream instead, and started to write. She is particularly interested in speculating about how human nature will be tweaked in the far future, but finds any kind of fantasy absorbing. Clean up after her three sons and husband, or create fascinating worlds of fantasy...? It's a tough decision, but those dust bunnies deserve a life, too.