



THE LOVE MACHINE

by

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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT *THE LOVE MACHINE*

“This refreshing science fiction novella is spicy, mysterious, and invigorating ... I greatly enjoyed reading *The Love Machine* and will keep the fabulous Ms. Marquis on my radar screen of up and coming authors to keep an eye out for.”
Francesca Hayne, Just Erotic Romance Reviews

Dedication

To the wild at heart.

Prologue

Maximillian sat in the observation room watching his prisoner on the video monitor. She squirmed in her restraints as if she could feel him studying her. He propped his boots up on the control panel and scratched his chin taking in her every move. *She was certainly a beauty, and very angry.*

Glancing at his plasma monitor on the desk, he identified her as Natasha Morrison, captured by local law enforcement after trying to smuggle a criminal off world. Current disposition was *at large*. He brought his boots down and typed in the correction, *captured*.

She looked as lovely and vulnerable as an ancient sacrifice spread out before a lusty and murderous god. A stirring rose within him, a strange and amazing feeling he'd never experienced before. He closed his eyes and let the thought of her kisses, with their gentle softness, roll over him. Before he knew it, he was intensely aroused, his cock filling the front of his pants.

Opening his eyes, he was shocked by the carnal charge of those images. He'd never experienced anything like it before, but there was something about this woman that made him want more than sex.

Leaning forward, he turned the plasma monitor off and closed his thoughts down. Who ever heard of an android having a girlfriend or settling down and getting married? Besides, he reminded himself, this particular prisoner was slated for

death. And delivering death was one thing he was very good at.

Chapter 1

The cell was a sterile icebox.

Natasha Morrison twisted her wrists in the padded handcuffs in a useless attempt to escape. She frowned and lifted her head as far as she could to look around her empty cell. It consisted of the cot she lay on and a metal chair bolted to the floor and that was it. Frustrated, she swore under her breath.

She couldn't remember being this uncomfortable in her whole life. She'd been lying on this cot for close to an hour now. Her wrist restraints didn't hurt, but they annoyed her, stretching her hands above her head and affixing her to the wall. She had been here so long, she was beginning to wonder if anyone was ever coming back. To make matters worse, she was nearly naked, stripped by the guards down to her fuchsia bra and panties to make sure she couldn't hide any weapons. Her dark blonde hair was loose and flowed off the cot, dangling close to the floor. She thought their stripping her for security reasons was a bunch of crap, because since then, the guards had been making extra rounds by her cell to peer in at her.

As she lay there, she wondered if her fugitive passenger had managed to steal a shuttle and escape. She hoped he did, at least one of them should escape the executioner's deadly probe. Natasha already accepted her fate, even if she was unsure of exactly what crime she had committed.

The air conditioning clicked on again, humming cool air onto her bare skin from a vent just above her. She shivered slightly and felt her nipples grow hard under the chilly stream of air. As they stiffened, they brushed against the fabric of her bra, arousing her and making her more aware of them. She shifted as best she could, trying to get away from the cold.

A passing guard strolled by her cell. He stared in at her.

"I haven't done anything wrong!" she shouted at him as he walked out of view. "When do I get to know why I'm being held here?"

As if in response to her question, a hydraulic door down the hall whooshed open and two sets of heavy boots made their way toward her.

Thank God. Now I can finally get some answers.

The men appeared at her cell door. The first one she recognized as William Steelman, an old acquaintance and the captain of the guard here on Penal Station Three, but the other man she couldn't see well enough to make out. She heard Steelman punch a code on the keyboard outside and the amber bars of her cell disappeared. A moment later, they entered and the other man came into view.

No, not a man. An android.

Natasha's blood chilled as she met his eyes. They were a solid, vibrant green and burned with malevolence. Slowly, she tore her gaze from his and ran her eyes down the rest of him. He must have been at least six foot three; a powerful wall of a man who filled out his black enforcer uniform like he'd been grown into it. His face was brutally handsome, boasting a square jaw, high cheekbones, and a strong noble nose. It was the kind of face both beautiful in its perfection and private in its savagery. His hair was the color of dark coffee; cut short and neatly groomed. Natasha had never laid eyes on a more attractive man.

What a cruel irony that not only was he not a man, but he was one of the most ruthless and fatal creations in the galaxy. He was a Stinger series android; a model created for the sole purpose of executing fugitives condemned to death while on the run. Natasha knew from the intergalactic newslines they were notoriously deadly, racking up impressive body counts on every planet that hosted a colony. And now here one was to collect her.

Natasha tossed her head to the android. "Why is he here?" she asked Steelman. "Is smuggling a capital offense now?"

Steelman let his eyes wander over her body and gave her a hungry grin. He rubbed his beer belly in a slow circle. "No, he just wants to ask you some questions about your last fare. You know, the man you transported off Earth without checking the wanteds?"

Natasha glared at him. "That was just a simple misunderstanding. He said he was cleared, and he had the paperwork to back it up."

The android stared down at her. "He lied, and the paperwork was a forgery." Then he turned to Steelman, his face cool and expressionless. "I want her released into my custody. I'll interrogate her on my ship."

"I don't know..." Steelman said, scratching the grey stubble on his chin thoughtfully. "That's not really proper protocol."

"How much do you want for it to become proper protocol?" the android said.

Natasha couldn't believe what she was hearing. Was she about to be sold under the table to a government killing machine? Had Steelman gone nuts? "Don't you dare sell me off to this robot!" she said, fighting her restraints with renewed panic. "He'll kill me!"

The android turned his head and fixed his penetrating green eyes on her. The look was so angry, so full of rage, that it caught her breath in her throat. *I'm as good as dead. He's going to kill me right here, and Steelman will probably help him dispose of my body.*

The android walked toward her, taking slow deliberate steps. When he reached her cot, he crouched down and leaned in close to her face. His lips barely brushed her cheek in a taunting nuzzle. Natasha's pulse pounded in her head as she struggled to pull back from him. He pulled back a little, but his lips were so close, they brushed her exposed cheek in feather light strokes as he spoke. "Don't ever call me a robot again. Do you understand me? I have a name. You call me Maximillian." His voice was a low, rumbling baritone in her ear.

Natasha tried to look away, but was frozen by his stunning emerald gaze. "Yes," she managed, a little breathier than she intended. "I understand you."

"Good," he said. He stood and turned to Steelman. He fished into his pocket and handed the other man a few gold credits. "Let's get her untied and loaded. Does she have any personal effects?"

"Yeah," Steelman said, and gave Natasha a knowing wink. "They're bagged up and ready to go. I'll give 'em to you when she's secured on board."

I am so screwed.

Steeleman advanced on her, tossing his keys playfully back and forth across his knuckles. He unlocked her restraints and she sat up, rubbing her wrists. She glared at Maximillian, who stood watching her silently. Then he broke eye contact, letting his gaze roam brazenly down her body, then up again. When he met her eyes again, he was smiling.

* * * *

The lounge of Maximillian's ship was a round, carpeted area fully equipped with a corner bar (which she was sure he never used), a plump leather couch, and a matching leather chair and ottoman. The plush carpet was a relaxing azure blue. The room was framed by beige concave walls. Each wall was fixed with small, round windows about every four feet.

As they entered, Natasha took advantage of a slight slack in his grip to pull her arm away. Seizing her momentary advantage, she sprinted over to a bar stool and lifted it with the legs pointed at him. He was on her in seconds. Panicked, she drove the chair at his head with all her might. With amazing speed and minimal effort, he knocked the chair aside, shattering it with his forearm.

He reached to restrain her but she dodged his grasp, slamming her foot into his ribs with a powerful roundhouse kick. Predictably, he was unfazed by the blow, but she came away in agony and limping.

He shook his head as she hobbled around the room hissing through her teeth. "Why don't you sit down before I tranquilize you and probe you for the information I want?"

Natasha limped over to the black leather ottoman and sat glaring at him. "Can I have some clothes?" she said, folding her arms. She was getting tired of being cold and almost naked. If he was planning to kill her, she would at least like to die with her clothes on.

He stopped in front of her and dropped a small brown satchel on the wingchair behind her. "What's in that?"

Natasha watched him warily. She'd lunge for it, but she was afraid it might make the bag seem too valuable, and she really didn't want him to think that. Thank goodness it had a small lock; maybe he'd at least respect that. "It's personal stuff. Nothing you'd be interested in."

“Open it.”

Natasha stared up at him and shook her head. “No, I’m sorry. I’m not going to do it.”

She could feel his gaze moving over her breasts and thighs. She was intensely uneasy, finding herself completely unable to read him as she could other men. Was it lust or anticipation of a vicious maiming burning in his luminous eyes? She concentrated on controlling her rising panic.

He moved his wrist out until it was right in front of her face. As she watched, a long, thin-bladed spike slid out. It flashed menacingly as it caught the artificial lights above. He reached past her and took the satchel. Holding the lock mechanism so she could see, he slowly thrust the tip of the spike into the small opening, breaking it instantly.

Forgetting her half-dressed state, Natasha shot to her feet. “That is private property you’re violating! There’s nothing in there that has anything to do with the fugitive you’re looking for!” she said, trying to grab for it.

The spike slid silently back into his wrist, leaving no indication in his flesh it had ever existed. He placed his hand over the buckle to unfasten it, and Natasha lunged for it again. He quickly pulled it away and held it out of reach. Taking it over to the center table, he tilted the contents out. All her personal effects tumbled onto the tabletop as color rushed to her cheeks.

A few raunchy sex magazines, some adult video disks, and her favorite silver dildo spilled onto the table for the entire world to see. He looked over at her as if he’d found a stash of weapons. “What a bad girl you are.”

Natasha sat back down on the ottoman and folded her arms. She shrugged. “It gets lonely on those long interplanetary flights. Something you wouldn’t know anything about.”

He looked back down at the table and delicately opened one of the magazines. Studying it in silence, he turned the pages slowly, running a wide, muscular hand down each glossy color sheet as he went. They crinkled under his touch. “Why would you think I know nothing about loneliness?”

Natasha climbed back up to the leather wingchair, nestling into a corner of its slick comfort. “You’re a machine. What could you possibly understand about human needs?”

He picked up the silver vibrator and walked over to her. He closed the distance between them with an easy, natural grace and she found herself forgetting for a moment he wasn’t human.

Natasha’s pulse raced and her mouth went dry. “What are you doing?”

He didn’t answer as he took a seat by her on the ottoman. “Why would a beautiful woman like you need this?” he said, examining the sex toy.

Natasha was suddenly more aware of her body. Her breasts felt fuller and her pussy throbbed lightly, hungry to be touched and filled. Long forgotten lust stirred in her, as images of him touching her eager sex with the toy flooded her mind. *Could he be trying to seduce me? That’s silly, he’s not capable of feelings like that.*

He switched the device on, and the sound startled her from her thoughts. It softly purred in his hand. Reaching out, he grabbed her ankle and gently pulled her leg toward him. Natasha resisted at first, trying to pull her leg free of his grip, but he held firm.

“What’s your name?” he said in a voice like warm honey.

“Natasha. Natasha Morrison.” Her breath was coming quickly, impossible to control.

Stroking the flesh of her inner thigh, he put the toy against her skin and let its gentle vibration awaken her senses.

The vibrator's hum thrilled her, and Natasha opened her legs slightly without thinking. His free hand caressed her other leg, encouraging her with mild pressure to spread them further. Her pussy ached to be touched as ripples of pleasure crept up her legs. She closed her eyes and let out a heavy sigh, running her hands seductively across her belly. A faint scent of Armani cologne teased her nose as he drew closer.

He moved the toy up, letting it caress her delicate skin, rotating it in slow, lazy circles. "How lovely you are, Natasha," he breathed, moving his lips against her throat as he roamed the device up her leg. Soon, it was touching the panel of her underwear, its tickling vibrations sending shock waves of desire all through her. Natasha's clitoris grew, becoming more sensitive to touch as each teasing pass of the toy brought her closer to orgasm.

Oh, please, please, please, don't stop yet, her mind cried as she twisted against him to fulfill her desire.

His mouth was all over her, her throat, her cheek, the tops of her breasts, and all her early fear of him melted into a cauldron of feral need. His burning green eyes looked down into hers, savoring her pleasant anguish.

The vibrator switched off and she groaned in protest.

"What planet did you take my fugitive Miles Foster to?" he said, an evil grin spreading across his lips.

Natasha frowned and pushed her body against his powerful chest. "Please finish what you started," she whispered to him. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she kissed him, gently parting his lips with her tongue. "Please."

He broke the kiss, and rubbed his hand over the moist panel of her panties. His tongue moved out licking his lips, as if remembering the feel of her mouth on his. "Where is he, Natasha?"

"I can't. He'll kill me if I tell you."

Maximillian ran his tongue across her lips and she quivered. “He won’t live long enough to kill you.” His fingers petted her pulsing clit, and all she could think of was release.

“Akron Nine” she said breathily. “I took him to the Akron Nine Mining Colony.”

He moved his lips down to the shell of her ear. “There’s a good girl,” he rumbled.

His fingers began dancing over her sex again, and Natasha felt the need driving her. Tossing her head back, she lifted her hips to meet his caresses as his touch became lighter and faster. The room melted away as the orgasm took her in a rushing explosion of thrashing ecstasy.

Chapter 2

Maximillian steered the ship through the atmospheric clouds until he could see the dry, red soil of Ackron Nine. The large white sun would be rising over the launch pad in just under an hour, so he slowed his speed to have enough light for the landing. As he cruised, he thought of his captive, Natasha, asleep back in his berthing.

What an exciting woman she was, he mused. His mind replayed vivid scenes of her sexual enjoyment and orgasm, feelings stirred for the first time in his life. He loved the smell of her sex and the rushing sound of her excited breath. The memory of her aroused him so much, he became instantly erect.

Setting the ship on autopilot, he reached down and unfastened his pants. His cock sprung free, stiff and wanting. The more he thought of her, the more aroused he became. His lust for her was building, an untamed needful thing that took on a life of its own. Wrapping his hand around his thick, hard cock, he massaged it in long steady strokes, imagining the pleasure of pushing his body through her hot, wet cunt.

Steamy delight charged his brain with every pump of his hand. To enhance his excitement, he replayed audio tapes in his head of her pleading and moans. The memory almost drove him to orgasm. He tightened his grip on his penis, stroking it faster and faster until he was at the threshold of release.

“Aren’t you supposed to be piloting the ship?” she said, interrupting his concentration. He glanced back and she gave him a wink and sly grin. She was still dressed in her bra and panties.

“It’s on autopilot,” he said, his voice sounded thick and husky. “I was just thinking about you.”

She broke into a smile. “Were you? Well, don’t let me interrupt.”

“Why are you up here, anyway?” he said, annoyed, forcing his erection back into his pants. Delicately, he fastened the buttons so as not to pinch himself. “I thought I told you to stay off the bridge.”

“Funny,” she said with a shrug. “I don’t remember that.” Natasha held up the leather miniskirt, pink midriff t-shirt, and black thigh boots he’d left for her in the room. “I came to ask you about this.”

He reached over to a glowing yellow button on the control panel and switched off the autopilot, taking the steering column back into his hands. “What about them?”

“Are you expecting me to wear this?”

Fixing his gaze on the computer’s digital approach pattern, he reached overhead and flipped on the auxiliary engines to slow the ship for landing. “I’m not expecting you to wear it, I’m telling you. You will wear it. You need to be as inconspicuous as possible when we’re down there asking questions, and unfortunately, the only females who live here are career women.” He glanced back at her again. “You need to get strapped in. We’ll be landing in a few minutes.”

“Why do I have to go down with you at all? You got the information you wanted; why not just let me go?”

“Of course,” he said in a flat tone, “you’d never lie to me.” He shot her a hard look.

She stared at him and scowled.

“Have a seat,” he commanded.

* * * *

Natasha stomped back to one of the jumper seats, pushed it down, and strapped herself in. Staying with Maximillian was a very dangerous thing. As soon as he found his fugitive, he was probably planning to kill her just for helping the man escape. She needed to watch for an opportunity to run. Unfortunately, escaping him wouldn't be easy.

Natasha watched his shadowed profile and thought him the sexiest man she'd ever met. She loved the way he touched her, warm and curious, and hungry. The lustful burn of his eyes had fired her blood like no other man had ever done. But he wasn't human, she reminded herself. In truth, he was a fraud, an enemy of every human in the galaxy. The true crime was that he was created to look, smell, and taste like the very things he hunted. Except, of course, those eyes. Eyes that burned into her soul and awoke feelings in her so powerfully carnal, that she had let him tease her to orgasm within hours of meeting him.

Remembering it made her skin flush. *Unfortunately*, she reminded herself, *you are nothing to him but a thrill ride. When he's done with you and captures his mark, you're as good as dead. You've got to get away from him as soon as possible.*

* * * *

The sex den was crowded and smoky, as they made their way over to one of the massive Kirillian bouncers guarding the entrance to the pleasure chambers. Maximillian (who had some special human contact lenses over his eyes to blend in) seemed to be completely at ease, which surprised Natasha. She guessed she had expected him to be confused by all the lights and noise. She didn't know why. *He goes all over the galaxy to kill*, she reminded herself. *Why would any of this intimidate him?*

The Kirillian must have been close to eight feet tall and towered over both of them. His right cheek was scarred by what looked to be an old knife wound, and his long black hair was pulled back in a ponytail.

He held up a thick gloved hand to Maximillian. "You can't take an outside girl into the dens. It has to be one of ours." He gave Natasha an appreciative smile. "Why don't you take this one across the street to *Pebbles*? They have all night rooms, and you can spend some time getting your money's worth out of this hot little bitch."

Natasha was about to protest, and say she wasn't what she appeared to be, when Maximillian squeezed her hand.

"Have you seen this man?" he asked the Kirillian, holding up a picture of the fugitive. "He owes me a lot of money."

The bouncer looked at the photo for a moment, and then glanced up at Maximillian, who was holding up a few gold credits.

"He was with Madam Batina last night. Her chamber is over there," the Kirillian said, gesturing to a closed red door on their right. He took the credits from Maximillian's hand and grinned at Natasha. "When you're done emptying his rod, come by and ride mine, honey."

Maximillian dragged her off toward the red door before she could give the bouncer a smart ass answer. As they reached it, Natasha glanced up at the stage. It had been empty when they'd arrived, but now it was occupied by an android female that looked like she'd definitely seen better days. Natasha guessed she was a much earlier series than Maximillian, and obviously designed for sex with her massive breasts and large buttocks. Most of her platinum blonde hair had been rubbed off over the years, and Natasha couldn't help but feel a little pity for her. A blue alien, with long white hair and an

enormous cock, was busy screwing her for the enjoyment of the shouting crowd.

Natasha watched until Maximillian pulled her into the madam's room. For a moment, she struggled to adjust her eyes to the murky red lights. There before them, sat a muscular Assyrian woman, her green skin difficult to make out in the half light. Even sitting, she looked well over six feet tall. She was lovely, in a strange, exotic way. Her long black hair was braided at the temples and its glossy thickness reminded Natasha of venomous snakes. She was topless, and her weighty breasts sagged slightly. Her skirts were hiked up to her hips, giving them a clear view of her aroused sex, which she leisurely stroked for their viewing pleasure.

She gave them a dangerous smile, exposing a mouth full of predatory teeth. "An android and a human, how interesting," she said. "Looking for some adventure? Me and her for you to watch?" she said, pointing a clawed finger at Natasha.

"No," Natasha said a little too hastily.

Maximillian shot her a look. "How did you know I was an android?" he asked the madam.

"Easy," she said. "I can't smell the salt on your skin. I can only detect the synthetic flesh they use on your kind." She closed her eyes and rubbed her swollen clit. "What do you want?" she said in a breathy whisper.

"We're looking for someone. He owes me money."

She opened her yellow reptilian eyes and studied him. "That's a lie," she said lazily. "He's a mark and you're a hunter. Are you going to pay me if I help you?"

"Of course," Maximillian said. "How much do you want?"

She laughed. "I don't want money. I want to see your cock. The bulge in your pants tells me you've been modified, and I want to see." She looked directly at Natasha, who was

having trouble taking her eyes off the AEssyrian's sex. "Don't you want to see it? Or have you already?"

The AEssyrian's bold lust was arousing, intoxicating, and Natasha felt her pussy grow slick and hot. "Yes," she said softly. "I'd like to see it, too."

Maximillian advanced toward the madam, stopping directly in front of her. He blinked hard and his human eyes flashed, changing back to their robotic green glow. Dropping his hands down to the buttons on his pants, he slowly began unfastening them.

Natasha moved in closer, transfixed by his catlike grace. He seemed completely at ease exposing himself.

Reaching inside his pants, he pulled his large, erect cock from its confines. It stood proudly, long and thick. Natasha thought it beautiful and inviting, and then she heard the Madam bark out a perverse laugh.

"That's not a standard issue dick for a Stinger series android," she said joyfully. "You've been upgraded."

"Yes," he said. His voice had a dreamy bedroom sound.

"Wouldn't you like to feel that nice piece of meat pumping into your pussy?" the madam asked Natasha, while licking her lips salaciously.

Natasha was at a loss for words; just looking at it made her body ache to be filled. All she could manage was a nod.

Maximillian slipped his cock back into his pants and buttoned it back up. "Now back to business," he said, pulling a small picture of his mark from his pants pocket and handing it to the madam. "Did my fugitive mention where he would be staying while he was here?"

The AEssyrian woman glanced at the picture and smiled lazily. With ever quickening fingers, she stroked herself to orgasm, her hips bucking in the thrusting rhythm of lust. When

her spasms had passed, she opened her eyes and said, “*Lilly’s Boarding House* on French Street.”

Natasha, transfixed by the madam’s shameless play, felt Maximillian’s hand close on her wrist as he dragged her out the door.

Chapter 3

The room at *Pebbles* was surprisingly clean. The smell of freshly laundered linens filled her senses as Natasha followed Maximillian into the room.

Breaking his grip on her hand, she immediately walked over to a chair and kicked off her thigh boots. Her ankles, slightly swollen from all the walking, loosened in relief. They were attractive boots, but not made for comfort. As she sat there rubbing her feet through the black shag carpet, she watched him. His handsomeness was so stunning, it was becoming harder and harder to remember he wasn't real, wasn't human. *Don't you sleep with him. He can't return those feelings. Besides, you need to focus on escaping before he finds his mark.*

He moved around the room silently, like a leopard, finally settling on the bed by the side table. He pulled a map from his breast pocket and studied it carefully.

As she watched him, Natasha remembered the exotic beauty of his penis. A warm rush filled her womb as she ran her hands absently up and down her legs. *What other sexy secrets do you hide?* "Is that true what she said?"

He looked up at her as if he'd never seen her before. He seemed all the more dangerous in this soft bedroom light. "Is what true, exactly?"

"That you had your penis...changed?"

He tossed the map on the table and laid back on the bed, his head and shoulders propped up by a pillow. "Yes, it's true."

"Why? It's not important to your job."

He was silent for a moment, watching her. "I like to fuck women with it. They come harder, and they love the size."

Natasha swallowed. "May I see it again?"

Without a word, he reached down and unbuttoned his pants. His long, thick cock was erect and sprung free of its confines. Natasha wasn't a penis expert, but it looked real enough to her. "Can I touch it?"

He grinned. "Please."

Natasha crept up on the bed next to him and bit her lip. Reaching out, she ran her fingers down the hard shaft. The skin felt like soft, warm velvet. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back, a low moan coming from his chest.

As she explored, she noticed some ridges on his cock, running about an inch from the base. "What are these?" she said, running her thumb along them.

He fixed his bottomless green eyes on her. "It's a tickler. It stimulates the clitoris during sex."

"Oh." It took everything she had not to mount him right then. She leaned down and took the mushroom head into her mouth. Running her tongue around the tip, she reveled in the musky taste of him. He groaned, interrupting her to slide his pants completely off his hips.

She continued licking and sucking his cock, running her hand down his shaft as she sucked hard on the tip. He opened his legs and she moved down to his balls, cupping and licking one, then the other. His moans were deep growls of masculine pleasure, and Natasha felt herself grow painfully hungry and wet. Finally, he exploded, thrusting his hips as his cock slid in and out of her mouth.

Natasha was now so lusty, she was desperate for relief. Peeling off her underwear, she moved her fingers through the hot folds of her throbbing pussy. A moment later, her hand was pushed away as his mouth latched onto the swollen nub of her clit. The sensation was so overpowering, she gasped and clutched the bed, pumping her hips in rhythm to the caress of his tongue. She could feel him, exploring, probing, a symphony of fingers and tongue. "Please," she breathed. "Please make me come."

Sensing her close to orgasm, he thrust his tongue deep inside her, and Natasha let out a gasp. Her body became a slave to his touch, wildly responding to every stroke and nibble. She couldn't get enough of him.

Soon the pleasure took her; the orgasm slamming into her senses with a force and power so intense, she was sure she'd never felt anything like it.

Laying there spent, the foggy edges of sleep seduced her. He kissed her, slowly rubbing her moist vaginal lips and trailing his mouth down to suckle her breasts. *Don't you fall in love with him*, she thought just before drifting off to sleep. *Don't you dare*.

Chapter 4

Natasha tried not to make eye contact with anyone in the crowded marketplace as she followed close behind Maximilian. The heavy pants, boots, and wide-brimmed hat he made her wear were itchy and uncomfortable, but they did the trick. She looked very mannish. And she hated it. At least dressed as a prostitute she was cooler, albeit only slightly more comfortable.

Everywhere she looked, someone was selling something. Cages, large and small, lined the walls, holding everything from treacherous alien animals to reworked androids modified for sex. All of the androids looked battered and badly used, and Natasha found herself feeling sorry for them. Surely they must think and feel, and why not? Maximilian obviously did.

More confusing still were her inexplicable feelings for him. With each passing day, she was growing closer and closer to him and her emotions were now as elusive and mysterious as he was.

He stopped by a food vendor so abruptly she bumped into him. "Sorry," she mumbled, trying to keep her voice low like a man's.

"I thought you might be hungry," he said, turning to look at her. His eyes looked surreal to her, disguised by an optical lens that made them appear normal. He searched her face.

Natasha smiled at him. "I'm starving," she admitted.

Turning to the nearest vendor, he bought her a meat and rice dish, and taking her arm, led her over to one of the battered benches to eat.

As she ate, she watched him scanning the crowd. "You think Foster would show up here?" she said, her words muffled by a mouthful of food.

He glanced at her plate as if to judge her progress. "He might."

"Would you kill him in front of all these people?"

"Yes, I would."

"Wouldn't that be dangerous for you? I mean, suppose some of these lowlives took offense to an android killing one of their own?"

"It wouldn't be dangerous for me, but it would for you. I'd have to get you out first."

Natasha stopped chewing and stared at him. "Why would you care what happened to me? All I am to you is a hostage until you find him. Right?"

Maximillian turned his full attention on her, staring at her for a full minute. "Are you finished eating?" he said finally.

Natasha wiped her mouth and tossed the plastic plate into a nearby trash bin. "Yeah," she said. "Let's go."

* * * *

Natasha sat at the vanity combing out her long, dark blonde hair. Her hazel eyes looked dull from fatigue and her lips looked pale. *Got to be stress*. From where she sat, she could see him sitting on the bed studying a small holographic map of *Lilly's*. She twisted in her seat so she could see him better. "Did it bother you seeing those other androids being sold as sex slaves?"

He glanced up at her, his face unreadable. "No," he said. "No more than it apparently bothered you transporting a convicted murderer off Earth for a few gold credits."

Natasha stopped brushing her hair. It felt as if he'd slapped her in the face. "You're mistaken," she said stiffly. "He was not a murderer. His paperwork said robbery and he was acquitted."

"Oh? And how do you know that? Because you ran his record through the system before you took his money?"

"Damn you. You know I didn't," she said, combing her fingers through her hair. "Who did he murder?"

"Two young college women about your age. I'd say you're lucky to be alive."

Natasha put her brush down, her stomach dropping. She felt horrible. She'd never have helped a murderer escape had she known, but Maximillian was right, all she'd cared about at the time was the money. Suddenly, everything, her capture by him, the fugitive, this planet, began to feel overwhelming. Tears fell from her eyes before she realized how miserable she felt. She covered her face with her hands and wept.

A moment later, he was next to her, pulling her into his embrace and whispering gentle words into her ear. "I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have told you that. I don't know why I wanted to hurt you."

Natasha wiped her tears with the back of her hand. "You're right. All I wanted was the money. I should have checked him out, but it was so much money and I hadn't worked in a while..."

He nuzzled her neck. "Don't worry, Natasha. He won't get off this planet alive."

Natasha gave him an anemic smile and touched his cheek. "Who would have thought you'd turn out to be such a nice guy?"

Squeezing her against his chest, he pulled her in close and kissed her. Natasha closed her eyes and let the desire wash over her. The sensation of his lips on hers and the decadent

feel of his powerful chest pressing into her breasts were almost dizzying. She was pulled into the seduction of his deadly, inhuman essence and it filled her with indescribable longing. She wanted him in ways she had never desired any other man. She wanted to be touched by his destructive energy, to be devoured and ignited by it, to see its breathtaking force and come out the other side unscathed.

His hands slid smoothly under her shirt, stroking her skin and seeking the fullness of her breasts. Natasha could hardly contain her excitement. She squirmed to get closer to him. His touch and lips were everywhere, and Natasha reveled in the pure, unspoiled joy he brought her.

She buried her face in his neck and inhaled his clean, hot scent. *Is this what love feels like?* she wondered. *This wild, desperate thing?*

Pulling her shirt off, he devoured her breasts. Licking and kissing them until Natasha thought she might orgasm from the pleasure of it alone. Licking down her belly, his mouth roamed down to her hot, lusty pussy. Hooking his thumbs into the sides of her panties, he peeled them off her hips, pressing passionate kisses along her hipbones. He petted her, gkiding his fingers over her aching mound until she gasped, begging him to fuck her.

His mouth found her lips, moving his tongue along hers in a gentle seduction. Natasha peeled his tunic off and reached down to unbutton his pants. Reaching inside, she pulled his stiff cock free. He moaned. A soft, gentle sound in her ear, and it sent warm chills down her neck. Taking his cock from her eager hands, he ran the mushroom tip through the velvety folds of her cunt.

"Yes, Max," she gasped. "Please fuck me." She moved her hips up, trying to impale herself on him.

He let out a low, rumbling laugh. With deliberate slowness, he dipped the tip into her wet pussy, torturing her with lust. She moaned and twisted in protest, trying to pump her hips up to take him all in, but he held her back. With agonizing care, he slid his cock into her, hesitating for a moment, and then pushed farther.

Natasha wrapped her legs around him as he lowered his weight on top of her, pushing his cock deep inside her. His next thrust was harder; a long, demanding stroke that made both their bodies shudder with ecstasy.

Natasha was lost at sea in a torrent of emotions that filled her with unspeakable happiness. As she ran her hands down the twisted muscles of his back, she felt the tickler gently vibrate against her engorged clit. The intensity of it caused her to thrust her body up uncontrollably, panting. Her orgasm took her in a ferocious primal spasm as his cock thrust deeper and deeper inside of her. Everything melted away in that fantastic moment of pure joy.

He moaned, taking his pleasure from her as she stroked and licked and kissed him. Then his orgasm came, a rushing passion that delighted and brought her to climax again. When he was spent, he rolled off her and sat with his back against the headboard. There was a long moment of silence, as she ran her hands over his massive pectorals and the rippled muscles of his stomach. She too was absorbed in thought.

“What are you thinking?” she asked.

He looked at her, wrapping one arm around her to pull her closer. “I don’t know,” he said. “Something is happening to me, and I’m not sure how to explain it.”

“Well, let me ask you a question,” she said, sitting up to see him better. “If I was your mark, would you be able to kill me?”

“Why are you asking me that?”

“Because I want to know how you feel. Answer the question honestly. Could you do it?”

Maximillian slipped out from under her and got up. He stalked over to the window and leaned against the sill. A breeze gently moved the curtains and tossed his hair. The red neon lights from below illuminated his handsome features and Natasha felt her body burn from wanting him. Watching him, she ached for his fierce, demanding sex. Her pussy throbbed remembering how intensely he’d loved her.

He stared down at the bustling space port and nearby brothels, seeming very far away. “I don’t know the answer to that, Natasha. I just don’t know.”

Chapter 5

Maximillian stalked through the strobe lit halls of *Bobbi's Peep Show*, pulling Natasha along by the hand. He'd gone by *Lilly's Boarding House* a few times, but so far, his mark remained elusive. According to some rumors, *Bobbi's Peep Show Parlor* was another of the fugitive's hangouts. Unfortunately, even after almost an hour of searching, there was still no sign of him. He was beginning to think the *AEssyrian* madam had lied to him; although for what reason, he couldn't imagine. She certainly wouldn't have any loyalties to a human murderer. Nevertheless, the logical next step was to continue his search in all the local haunts, and being a mining colony, Akron Nine had a lot of sleazy local hangouts. He'd just have to keep patrolling until he got word that the fugitive had either died, or left the planet.

Normally he would have searched all night, but then there was the issue of Natasha. Strangely, she had become something of a problem for him. For the first time ever, a human had moved him. He'd never experienced so much sex with the same partner and he was growing to like it. She awoke emotions in him he would have thought impossible only a few short weeks ago. Just looking at her was becoming an exercise in self-restraint. He wanted her all the time now, and these new feelings were very confusing.

Taking a sudden right, he pulled her into one of the peep show rooms and closed the door.

Natasha rubbed her wrist, frowning. "I'm getting really tired of you pulling me from one place to the other."

He took a seat on the metal folding chair, the only furniture in the room. "How else can I be sure you won't slip off when I'm not watching you?"

Natasha didn't answer him. Taking a few steps into the room, she looked around at the grey concrete walls and the full length curtained window in front of the chair. "What is this place?" she whispered, as if they'd entered a church.

He watched her breasts rise and fall with each rapid breath she took. Watching her, he felt charged and hungry to take her. Especially here, in this perverse, lifeless place where she looked so young and vulnerable. He held out a gold credit to her. "Put this in the fare box behind you."

"Why?"

"Don't think so much. Just do it."

Natasha stood for a moment, her eyes locked on his. She licked her lips and took the credit. She walked over to the fare box and deposited the money. The room filled with the metallic sound of it tinkling to the bottom. Directly in front of him, the curtains rose. Natasha walked over to stand beside his chair.

"Sit on my lap," he said.

She obediently straddled him and lowered herself into his lap facing the curtains. The show was already in progress before them. Two dark-haired, long legged women, dressed in bustiers, boots, and thongs, sported crops to spank their blindfolded captive with. Their captive was a white man with thinning blonde hair and a youthful face. Natasha thought him to be somewhere in his mid-thirties. He sat in a wooden chair in the middle of the room with his hands bound behind his back. His erection was a dark and angry pink, kept hard by the use of a small collar around its base. The women took turns

mounting his cock, bouncing up and down on it while the other smacked him with the crop on the thigh. The man moaned loudly as they tormented him.

Maximillian stroked his hands up her thighs, feeling her flesh quiver under his touch. Her skin was warm and soft, almost as if it invited his seduction. Finding the crotch of her underwear, he tickled her sex through the silky fabric. She rewarded him by opening her legs and leaning even more against his chest with a sigh.

He could smell her arousal mixed with the sweet scent of soap on her skin. He probed and explored her with his fingers, finding the swollen bud and teasing it with light, gentle strokes. She rested her head back against his shoulder murmuring love words to him in a delirium of pleasure.

Maximillian guided her to stand as he reached down and released his fiercely erect penis. Running his hands up under her miniskirt, he peeled her underwear off. Slowly, he guided her back down onto his lap, pushing her down onto his cock. Once inside her, she groaned and rotated her hips. He loved how wet and lusty she always was for him.

“Oh, yes, Max,” she breathed. “I love the way you feel inside my pussy.”

Reaching around to her swollen clit, he gently toyed with her sex, absorbed by the ceaseless pleasure of her body.

One of the women in the show drove her anus down on the man’s engorged penis, brutally slamming herself down in a wild frenzy of desire. The man leaned his head back, moaning so loud it filled the room with its needful resonance. But before the man could orgasm, the first woman lifted herself off him with a wicked smile.

The other woman with the crop unbound the man, and he seized her, pulling her on his cock. Rising from his chair, he slammed his cock deep inside her. His lust was ferocious,

exploding his thrusts into her as she screamed and cried out for more. The other woman had moved up behind the man, spanking his buttocks with the crop with increasing force as he approached his climax.

Maximillian was devoured by both the scene and the unbearable pleasure of his lover on his cock. His fingers played through her wet folds as she rocked against his hand in a desperate attempt to come. "Come for me, Natasha," he rumbled in her ear. Then he vibrated his penis deep inside her.

Natasha leaned her head back and sucked in her breath, overtaken by the pleasure. With his shaft gently humming inside her, he slid his hands under her shirt, pinching and rolling her hard nipples between his thumb and forefinger. "How is that, my sweet little bitch?" he said, softly biting her earlobe.

"Please don't stop; please don't stop," she whispered, thrusting back to meet him. With a final buck backward, she cried out her orgasm, throwing her head forward. Her body stiffened for a moment, and then slowly relaxed. Spent, she lay back against his chest panting.

The peep show curtains began to close, indicating the show was done, but Maximillian wasn't. His fierce erection stood proudly, slick from her hot pussy. He leaned down and kissed the back of her neck letting his tongue run small circles under her ear. His fingers found her swollen nub again, stroking it with a feather light touch, keeping it tender and hard.

Natasha looked back at him, her eyes half closed and dreamy with passion. "Put your cock in my ass, my love," she said. "Please..."

Kissing her shoulder, he lifted her hips and pointed the engorged tip of his penis against her butt. Slowly, he probed her, listening to her delighted gasps as he ventured deeper and deeper into her anal core. He rubbed the ruddy button of her clit until she was relaxed enough to get all of him inside her.

“Harder, Max,” she pleaded, pushing back against him. “Please fuck me harder. I love the feel of you inside me.”

Maximillian thrust his fingers into her wet cunt as he took her ass, adoring her ferocious longing. Harder and harder he drove into her, until his climax came upon him in a desperate charging rush. His final moments of pleasure made all the more glorious by the lusty, hungry music of Natasha screaming out his name.

Chapter 6

When they finally returned to the hotel room that night, Natasha was exhausted. She also felt deliciously used. Her breasts were tender from his passionate mauling and her pussy and butt felt wonderfully stretched. She sat down in an overstuffed chair and pulled off her skirt and boots, looking at him. As usual, he was sitting on the bed preoccupied with his small computer, eliminating areas of the city he had already searched. He had stripped off his uniform jacket and shirt, naked to the waist, and she paused to admire his rugged, perfect handsomeness.

His chest was a massive slab of powerful muscle, complimented by a chiseled, washboard stomach. He looked as if he'd been carved from stone, and she couldn't help thinking of all the animals in nature that hid their fatal talents behind a veil of benign beauty. His face tonight, though, looked grim and lost in thought.

Swinging one leg over the armrest, she said, "Do you feel anything when you fuck me?"

He continued working and didn't look up at her. "I feel pleasure."

"That's not what I mean. Obviously you feel that. I mean, do you feel anything for me as a woman?"

He looked up from his computer screen, his eyes two solid emerald lights. "What would you like me to tell you? That I love you?"

Natasha's chest tightened and a lump rose in her throat. "Forget it, Max, okay?" Jumping up, she stripped off her clothes and stomped into the shower.

She turned the water on and felt a wave of sorrow roll over her. She covered her face with her hands as hot tears ran down her cheeks. *What a total jerk he was. Who needed real men when you could get your feelings hurt by your android boyfriend?*

He came into the bathroom and she tried to hide her weeping. He pulled the shower curtain back and touched her cheek. She tried to pull away, but he seized her around the waist and pulled her against him, giving her a scorching, hungry kiss. Water sprayed off his face and shoulder as he leaned in, his tongue caressing hers.

Natasha wanted to resist, wanted to tell him what a complete and utter asshole he was, but she didn't. All she could focus on was his mouth.

Kissing a scalding trail of fire along her face, he sank to his knees trailing his tongue over her breasts and belly, until finally, he made his way to her greedy cunt. She moaned, feeling her pussy grow wet with the caresses of his tongue. He explored her slowly, lazily, his tongue dipping deeply inside her until she breathlessly quivered for her release.

Peeling off his pants and boots, he stepped into the shower with her. He pulled her into his arms, running gentle kisses down her forehead, nose, and chin. Taking the soap, he lathered up his hands and massaged them into her breasts.

She hissed at the tenderness of her nipples and he lightened his touch, bending to kiss each one in apology for his rough treatment.

As he stroked and massaged her, Natasha felt more confused than ever. *Was good sex all there was to this?* She was pretty convinced that it was, and why not? After all, he'd never misled her, never implied there was more here than met the eye.

The realization of it filled her with a new sadness. *He probably can't feel anything for you.*

Natasha suddenly realized how decadently aroused he had made her, but oddly, for the first time, she didn't feel like sleeping with him. "Max?" she said as he ran his fingers inside her wet pussy to stroke her clit.

"What?" he whispered. His erection was strong and fierce against her belly.

"I think I just want to get some sleep tonight. Okay?"

Looking up, he stared at her.

Could he be mad at me? Maybe sex is more important to him than I thought.

"What's the matter?" He sounded annoyed.

"I'm just tired, that's all."

"That's not what your body is telling me."

Natasha's blood rushed with adrenaline. "Well, that's what my mouth is telling you." Tearing herself from his embrace, she stepped out of the shower and grabbed a towel. Drying herself off, she made her way into the bedroom and pulled her shirt and panties on. She flopped on the bed on her stomach and closed her eyes, pretending to sleep.

A moment later, he stalked out casually rubbing water off his body with a white towel. She could feel his eyes boring into her, studying her as if she were a lab rat.

She felt his weight on the bed. He moved slowly, cautiously, as if he were trying not to wake her. A little while later, sleep claimed her.

Chapter 7

Natasha woke up and he was out, probably getting her some breakfast. Finally she had her chance. She dressed in her mini skirt and boots and crept out of the hotel room. Luckily, there weren't many people on the streets so early, and she made her way unnoticed through the dirty avenues of Ackron Nine to the space station. Sneaking into the main hanger, she located the master docking log and found his ship's slot. After a few tense moments walking down the hallways, she located it and slipped in through the open cargo hold.

The inside of the ship was cool and dark with only the hum of auxiliary power to fill the silence. Natasha walked through to the cockpit, anger charging her nerves. She was very aware of what would happen if he caught her. He'd certainly kill her on the spot. She settled into the command chair which smelled faintly of him—a manly scent of Armani cologne. Just that hint he might be near made her hungry and slick, and she found herself pining for the merciless drive of his vibrating cock.

Pushing those thoughts to the back of her mind, she scanned the controls for the ignition switch. A few moments later, she found a red button and clicked it on. Racking her brain, she tried to remember how he'd sequenced the launch when they'd left Earth. *I'll just have to wing it*, she thought, strapping herself in. Suddenly the engine clicked off.

Natasha looked up from buckling her harness and, before she could register what had happened, he slipped around in front of her, sitting back on the control panel. He folded his arms across his chest and gave her an angry look.

Natasha's heart pounded and her head felt light; she thought she might pass out. *He's definitely going to kill me now.*

With the main engines off, the ship wound down to its pre-ignition hum. A faint smell of hydraulic fuel and oil hung in the air around them.

"Where are you going?" he said matter-of-factly.

Icy fear ran through Natasha's heart. "I knew you were planning to kill me as soon as you got your mark. I decided to get away while I still could."

"What makes you think I'm going to kill you?"

Natasha felt lost and strangely defensive. *Who was he kidding?* "Isn't that what you do? Kill people?"

He ran his fingers through his dark brown hair. "I never threatened you. Why would you think that?"

Natasha threw her hands in the air. "Come on, Max! Don't act like killing isn't part of your programming."

"Natasha," he said. "I obviously don't perform only according to my programming. In case you haven't noticed, fucking isn't part of my programming either, but that doesn't stop me from doing it."

"So what are you saying?"

"What I'm saying is, just because I kill for a living, doesn't mean I kill everyone."

Natasha looked past him to the vast array of stars peppering the galaxy sky. He was making her feel foolish for mistrusting him, but she knew she had cause. "I'm afraid of you, Max," she said. "I can never read you and that bothers me."

Ignoring her comment, he reached over and unbuckled the pilot harness. "Come on. Let's get back to the room. You

have been a very bad girl and I need to teach you a lesson. And I know this is one lesson you'll never forget."

Natasha looked into those malevolent green eyes and felt her womb quiver.

* * * *

By the time they reached the hotel room, Maximillian could almost taste Natasha's arousal. With a hard shove, he pushed her inside. She stumbled forward a few steps and turned to glare at him.

He moved into the room, closing and locking the door behind him. "Get on the bed and take your skirt and panties off."

Natasha folded her arms and stood defiantly. "No," she said.

He moved closer, stopping a few inches from her without touching her. He stared into her eyes and gave her a suggestive grin. "Please," he whispered.

She hesitated for a moment, watching him like a nervous cat, and then did as he said. He walked over to the bed and sat on the edge near her. Reaching out, he pulled her over his legs face down and ran his hand over the round plumpness of her butt. Then he moved his hand down to her throbbing sex, gently exploring her labia with his fingers.

"You're so wet already," he murmured. His system charged with rampant, savage lust.

She squirmed, moaning softly under his touch.

Suddenly, he smacked her on the ass and she cried out in alarm. She struggled to get free but he held her fast. Despite her protests, he brought his hand down again and again enjoying the hearty smacking sound.

Natasha moved her hands over her bottom, trying to stem the heavy blows. "Max!" she yelled. "Stop it!"

"Are you ever going to try and steal my ship again?"

“No,” she groaned, trying to fight her way free. “I promise.”

Grinning, he stroked her eager cunt. “Would you like me to fuck you?”

Natasha eased off his lap and ran her hand down his face. She leaned forward and kissed him deeply, her tongue tenderly probing his mouth. He reveled in its decadence, and his cock throbbed to be buried inside her.

She broke the kiss but kept her lips close to his. “Yes,” she whispered, her breath hot against his lips. “I’d love for you to fuck me.”

The sexual rush stormed him and he gently bit the edge of her mouth. Pulling her into his embrace, he kissed her with a dark passionate. His hands came alive, touching her skin, stroking her throat, and breasts. She quivered as he caressed her; so eager for him, she whispered words into his ear that had no meaning.

He pulled her down to the floor and placed her on all fours. Opening the closet, he positioned the full-length mirror on the back of the door so they could see themselves. He knelt behind her, burying his mouth in her moist desire. She groaned and hung her head, her blonde hair draping over her face. She arched her back, lifting her hips higher for him.

Tasting her awoke a passion within him he’d never felt before. His mind rolled in her heady scent, sending a shocking charge into his cock. It grew painfully hard, tightening his balls into an uncomfortable, binding knot. His entire being became devoted to the pleasure he both gave her and received from her.

His tongue explored her, dipping deeply into her moist secret place. His hands had a will of their own, petting and feasting on the softness of her flesh. He ran his hands along her buttocks and over the small of her back. Sliding his hands back

down to her hips, he held them still while his tongue pushed into her, gently moving back and forth until she was at the threshold of orgasm. Then he stopped.

She groaned in protest, looking back at him with her beautiful mouth in a sexy pout. He mounted her, guiding his engorged cock into her pussy. Natasha licked her lips and looked at the mirror so she could watch him mount her. At first, he moved in a slow, steady rhythm, connecting with her backward thrusts. She was so close to release, so deliriously hungry, that she was driving his lust to a desperate pitch.

He watched her in the mirror, her head tossed back and eyes closed in sexual abandon. Then he vibrated his dick while buried deep inside her. She gasped in delight. She moaned and screamed, her tight pussy rippling along his shaft. The sensation was so powerful, he came harder and faster than he thought possible.

* * * *

Natasha lay next to him, luxuriating in the feel of cool cotton sheets against her skin. Her head rested on his chest as he gently toyed with a lock of her hair. She marveled at how strange it was not to hear a heartbeat beneath his ribs.

She traced small circles around his nipples with her fingertips. "How long have you been a hunter?"

"What you really mean to ask is how old am I."

She grinned. "Yeah, how old are you?"

"Two hundred and forty Earth years."

"When was the first time you ever..."

"Had sex?" he said, smiling. "Not long after I was created. The engineer who programmed me was a very lonely woman. She made sure to build in a sex drive so I could fulfill her."

Natasha sat up and looked down at him sadly. "That's kind of awful to use you like that."

He gave a dry, humorless laugh. "It didn't bother me. In fact, I'm grateful for it. Without that sex drive, I would never have been able to please you and take pleasure from your body. So I guess it worked out for everyone."

Natasha lay back on his chest and sighed. "Yes, I guess it did," she whispered.

A loud beep came from his computer and Maximillian pulled it off the bedside table to read his message. Natasha snuggled in close trying to read over his shoulder. "What is it?" she said finally.

"A message from a man named Marc Devon. Looks like we're taking a trip out to *Lilly's Boarding House*."

Chapter 8

The morning was dark and overcast as they made their way to *Lilly's Boarding House*. The place was actually a three-story local housing unit bought by a wealthy merchant to conduct his illicit business affairs. It towered over the street; its brick foundation spray painted with obscene alien symbols and local gang markings. Small windows ran up and down its face. All were open, and enraged screams of various fights filled the outside air.

Natasha looked over at Max, trying to read his mood, as they approached the front door. "I don't think your mark is still here. He's probably determined to get off this planet if he knows you're after him."

Maximillian remained silent as they entered, stopping short near an office door by the front hall. She moved a little closer to him and glanced into the office.

Marc Devon, the owner of *Lilly's Boarding House* according to his desk plate, was the creepiest man Natasha had ever seen. He was human, like most of the residents on Ackron Nine, but he was definitely at the far end of the evolutionary rung. He was short, fat and balding, and gave off the musty odor of rotting potatoes.

It was late afternoon judging by the shadows on the floor, and Natasha shifted her weight to her other foot, impatiently waiting for him to disconnect from his loud and angry interstellar transmission on the wall monitor. As was typical of

him, Maximillian leaned against the wall calm and patient. She, however, was more than anxious to leave.

Finally, Devon terminated the transmission and called out to them. "You still out there, android?"

Maximillian moved silently into the office, Natasha staying close behind. The office was an explosion of clutter and dust. Loose papers and log books were scattered around the desk and floor. Even the pictures on the wall were crooked. The only ventilation was a rickety old oscillating fan perched on a filing cabinet. It rattled loudly as it swiveled back and forth.

Maximillian fixed the man with a chilling stare. "You sent word you had information for me?"

Devon leaned back in his chair, making it creak. "That's right," he said. He paused to cast a brazen look at Natasha and she felt a small shudder crawl up her back. "We've located your mark, android. But I'm afraid he's already made it off world."

"Go on," Maximillian said.

Devon smiled broadly. "We even managed to place a tracker on the ship he stole."

"How much is your assistance going to cost me?"

"Ten thousand."

Maximillian considered the sum for a moment. He pulled out his blaster. "It won't be nearly as expensive for me if I just kill you right now."

Devon's face paled and melted into a mask of fear. "I heard you were an honorable man. You know—the kind who pays his debts."

"I'll give you three."

Devon looked as though he was going to protest, but kept his mouth shut. Wisely, Natasha thought.

"Three thousand it is then, android."

Maximillian fired off a shot just past the man's head, and the papers stacked behind him turned to dust. "My name is Maximillian," he said coolly, and stalked out the door with Natasha.

Chapter 9

Underway at last, Maximillian finished reprogramming the main computer and checked to make sure the tracking signal from the mark's ship was coming in clearly. Satisfied, he looked through the cockpit window marveling at the various array of merchant ships passing before him.

He let his mind drift as the relentless pull of the engines propelled him through space. He wondered how Natasha was sleeping and switched on a surveillance camera to check on her.

A grainy black and white vision of her appeared on his monitor. She lay on a small bed in the berthing area in just a t-shirt and panties. Her body was arched, her hand buried inside her underwear slowly stroking her greedy sex. *God, how he loved the bold audacity of her passion.* As he watched, he was lulled by her pleasure, lazily aroused and hungry to devour her. She was beautiful in her wantonness, and he luxuriated in the graceful movement of her hips, the serene expression of her face. His erection became a forceful, willful thing in his pants. A moment later, he put the ship on autopilot and left the cockpit to join her.

* * * *

By the time he reached the berthing, Natasha had already climaxed; her scent still everywhere. He loved how it charged him, ushering in thoughts of ravishing her much too willing

body. He sat on the edge of the bed, and she gave him a sleepy, satisfied grin.

"I have something to ask you," he said.

Natasha propped herself up on her elbow. "What?"

"I want to sample you. Will you let me?" She would probably refuse, and he expected it. This was no small thing he was asking for, and not without its risks.

Natasha's face shadowed with icy fear. "Why bother asking? You could do it by force if you wanted."

"I don't want to do it by force. I want you to trust me enough to allow me to do it with your permission."

She sat up and played with a thread on her t-shirt. "Won't it cause me irreversible brain damage?"

"No, you won't even know its happening. It's painless."

"What if I said no?"

"Then the answer would be no," he said. He propped up some travel pillows and reclined on the mattress next to her.

"Why do you want to do this?"

He looked into her face. She was so lovely and afraid, and it fueled his desire to have all of her. "I want to understand you completely. I want to bring us closer together."

"That doesn't really answer my question. Why?"

"Because I have feelings for you, Natasha, and I want to explore them. I want to get as close to you as I possibly can and this will do that."

She stopped toying with her shirt and met his eyes. He knew this was an enormous leap of trust for her. Or anyone, for that matter.

"All right," she whispered. "What do I have to do?"

He opened his arms in welcome and she embraced him. He squeezed her tightly against his chest and buried his face in her neck. She rested her head on his shoulder and sighed. "You don't need to do anything," he said. "Just stay very still."

Placing his right hand on the back of her neck, he released the metallic needle from his wrist and thrust it deep into her cerebral cortex. As he had told her, she felt nothing, and remained very quiet and still against him.

Maximillian felt the stillness fill him; the quiet lull before the data began to flow. Then it overtook him. Streams of images of her childhood, happy and sad birthdays, and a mother's loving embrace. Hot lust filled him as he touched her memories of their sexual unions. She was flowing into him, a warm river of intimate knowledge from a thousand different thoughts, feelings, and memories. Amongst the treasures in her mind, he found her desire for him mixed with deeper emotions of love and fear, and it surprised him how much he enjoyed exploring it. The realization of it sparked his own feelings, and he rolled in their electronic marriage, knowing true bliss for the first time since his creation. *Was this what love felt like? Have I finally achieved what none of my peers could ever dream of?*

Then there was a new image. It was an emotionally jarring one of a young man roughly touching and taking her body. Maximillian could feel her emotional upset and the physical pain of the man's invasion.

Maximillian tried to define this interaction. Was it rape? No, just a bullying betrayal of trust by someone she thought had loved her. Hot rage filled him as he thought of ways to kill the man. His fury flooded and poisoned her mind and he heard her gasp. She inhaled a rushing intake of breath and he quickly withdrew the probe.

The small wound in the back of her neck healed instantly. She opened her eyes and the shocking memory of the man filled them. He had unwittingly dredged it up from its dark hiding place, and it was now ravaging her emotions.

He kissed her, truly understanding her for the first time since they'd met. "I'm sorry, Natasha," he whispered into her ear. He gently rocked her in his arms like a wounded child. "I'm so very sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

Natasha wiped her eyes with her shirt sleeve and sniffled a few times. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yes, I did."

She leaned forward and kissed him. "What was it?"

He gently stroked her hair and smiled. "Love," he said. "I wanted to know what love was like. Now, finally, I think I do."

Chapter 10

Natasha stared out the window as the Solaret Space Station loomed into view. Maximillian sat in the command chair, taking directions from the station's docking captain. "What a prick," he mumbled under his breath when the transmission had ended. Without looking at her, he grabbed her hand and squeezed. Despite how miserable she felt, it was strangely comforting.

Everything had changed since their joining. A strange, moody sorrow followed her so persistently, she thought he had done something to her. Then the memory washed over her.

His name was Steve, and he had been the first man she had ever loved. As time went on in their relationship, however, it became apparent the only thing he wanted was the sex. She didn't think being used by him had had such a profound effect on her, but now she knew it did. And what it had taken her years to bury, Maximillian had uncovered in a matter of minutes. She still wasn't sure exactly how the memory made her feel.

Maximillian, on the other hand, had changed for the better. He was more demonstrative in his affection for her and that was very soothing. She looked down at his muscular hand holding hers and felt cared for.

They approached the docking bay and he connected his wrist probe into a female coupling on the control panel.

“You’d better take a seat and strap yourself in until we’re all hooked up,” he said.

Natasha repressed a jealous streak at his connection to the master computer and took her seat. He glanced at her, seeming to read her mind. He grinned and turned his attention back to the approaching slot.

“Max,” she said, watching him as he concentrated on the docking process.

“Yes, Natasha?”

“I have something very important to ask you,” she said, running her fingers through her hair. “Will you to let me go when we finish docking?”

“I can’t do that.”

Natasha frowned. His eyes seemed to be glowing from the power flowing into him through the machine port connection. “I want my freedom, Max. Surely you can understand that?”

The docking procedure was complete and he retracted the probe, disconnecting from the ship’s mainframe. The green “all clear” light illuminated on the dashboard in front of him. He looked over at her. “Let’s just see what happens, okay?”

“I don’t want to see what happens. I want you to promise me you’ll release me.”

He abruptly unbuckled his flight harness and twisted in his seat to address her. “I told you, I can’t make a promise like that. You have a death warrant on your head. Technically, you should have been killed long before now.”

Natasha’s blood rushed with rage. “What’s stopping you then? Why don’t you just do it? Isn’t that what your protocol is telling you?”

“Yes, it is.”

Snatching his wrist, she placed it at her throat and closed her eyes. "Do it! I'm not afraid to die. Go ahead and do it!"

Maximillian grabbed her under the jaw and leaned forward until his lips touched the side her face. He licked her skin, sending gentle shivers down her body. Her pussy responded immediately, growing wet and eager for him. "You know I can't," he breathed into her neck. His mouth found hers, kissing her with a haunting, sexual fire she hadn't noticed in him before.

With a loud snap, he unbuckled her seat harness and slid his hand under her shirt. She feebly tried to push him away, but she couldn't override her burning desire. She wanted him to take her more than she'd ever desired anything.

She leaned into him, matching the energy of his kiss with a charge of her own. She slid over onto his lap, straddling him backwards and ran her feverish mouth down his neck. The urgency of his erection pressed against the panel of her underwear and she let out a soft groan of desire.

"If you're going to kill me, do it now and get it over with. Please, Max, just don't sneak up on me in the dark," she whispered sadly.

His hands roamed under her shirt, massaging her breasts and belly. He squeezed her against him, pushing her down onto the mound in his pants. Taking his hands off her hips, he released his raging erection and pulled her panties aside to enter her.

Natasha arched her back and eased her body down, impaling herself on his cock. Taking her hips into his hands, he guided her back and forth in an easy, lusty rhythm. She couldn't believe the intensity of her desire when he touched her. Every cell of her body seemed to be fused with electric life.

He was relentless as he pumped deep into her with slow, easy strokes. His fingers moved into the thickness of her hair, gently pulling her head back so he could maul her neck with savage kisses.

As she gave herself over to the carnal delight, she felt the slight prick of his probe entering the back of her neck. At first it terrified her; its intimacy tearing down her barriers until she was stripped bare before the thrill of his stunning power. *This is it. He's finally going to finish me.* But death didn't swallow her. Instead she found herself floating on a chemical high as he guided her to the core of his being. A soothing, warm peace filled her and she relaxed. Then, in another moment, the raw emotion of love and physical pleasure charged her, filling her entire being with indescribable joy.

Natasha blinked her eyes as the last ripples of orgasm left her. A gray fog of confusion filled her mind and she could hardly believe she was still alive. Opening her mouth, she greedily took in a few gulps of air as he eased her off him. When she finally felt closer to normal, she shifted in her seat and looked at him. "What the hell just happened?" she said, her voice shaky.

He met her gaze with blazing green eyes. "I tried to kill you," he said darkly, "but I failed."

Chapter 11

The restaurant was all towering windows and metal floors, giving one the feeling of floating unrestrained in space. All the round dining tables were neatly set with gleaming silverware and stark white linens. Natasha felt self-conscious in her new blue jeans and yellow t-shirt. *Maybe a little underdressed.* Maximillian was dressed in his usual black uniform, so she guessed they could be underdressed together. She turned to him as they waited for someone to seat them. “I didn’t think you ate.”

“I don’t, but I’m sure they’ll have some nonorganic compound for me to ingest.”

“Oh,” she said, nodding. That sounded disgusting.

An older waiter dressed in a clean, blue cook’s uniform rushed over and grabbed two colorful menus off the podium. He directed them to a table right next to one of the large windows. The view was stunning and Natasha marveled at the massive cargo ships coming and going to the station among the endless array of stars.

When the waiter returned, Maximillian ordered a machine fuel and she ordered steak. The waiter left and she sipped her water, watching Max. “It was nice of you to get me these clothes and bring me here for dinner,” she said, smiling. “Thank you.”

His gaze swept the room, satisfied there was no danger, he looked at her again. “You’re welcome.”

Natasha raked her finger down the condensation on her water glass. "After you get your mark, then what?"

"You're free to go."

"I thought there was a death sentence on my head."

"There is, but I'll talk to the Judge's Council. I'll let them know you transported him not knowing his status and you helped me apprehend him."

"What happens with us?" she said.

The waiter appeared and set their plates before them, then rushed off to another table. Natasha sipped her water and avoided Maximillian's piercing gaze.

"There is no us, Natasha."

Natasha stared down at her meat, cutting it up into small bite-sized pieces. Suddenly, she wasn't very hungry. She put down her knife and fork.

He fixed her with a penetrating stare. "You didn't really think we were going to continue to see each other, did you?"

She pushed her plate back. "Yes, Max, I did. So what was all that joining crap about anyway? Why bother leading me on if you were just going to dump me?"

"I never led you on."

"The hell you didn't!" she yelled, standing up from the table. "What a stupid blunder it was to fall in love with you."

Maximillian stood, towering over her. "Sit back down," he growled.

"No, I don't think I will. I'm leaving and you can kill me if you want to. Just think, you'll finally get another chance and this time, you might actually succeed!" Natasha turned and pushed her chair off to the side so she could exit.

"I love you, too," he said.

Natasha froze. She turned around again to face him. "What did you say?"

He slowly sank back into his chair. "I said I love you. Now can we finish our dinner and have a civilized conversation without it erupting into an argument?"

Natasha lowered herself back down without taking her eyes off him. "Sure," she said softly. "Sure, let's have dinner."

Chapter 12

The first thing Natasha noticed about the bounty hunter was that he was a cyborg. His right arm was larger than the left—a great, powerful mechanized appendage that gave him a definite edge in catching his bounties. His legs looked mechanized too, although she couldn't be sure through his black and grey camouflage pants. Looking up from the drive hatch of his space glider, he wiped his greasy hands on a blue rag as they approached him.

When they were within a few feet, Maximillian pushed her a little farther behind him. "You Nathan Strong?"

"That's right. Who the hell are you?" the cyborg said.

Maximillian pulled a picture from his breast pocket. "My name is Maximillian and I'm hunting this man."

Nathan squinted at the photo, and Natasha studied the hardness of his face. She knew, from having traveled the galaxy, that hunting other people for a living was grueling work, and the evidence was carved into this man's worn face. Two long, jagged scars ran across his right cheekbone; one looked as if it had come close to taking out his eye. His light brown crew cut was showing signs of graying on the sides. He was wearing a black t-shirt that wrapped tightly around his muscular torso and a set of intergalactic identification tags around his neck. The latter just in case he should meet with an unfortunate end far from home, so family could be notified. Natasha used to wear them herself on her more dangerous jobs.

Nathan looked up from the picture, his gaze running over both of them. He lingered on Natasha, a slight grin curling the sides of his mouth. He tossed his head at her making her feel slightly uncomfortable. "Who's this?"

"My friend," Maximillian said in an icy tone. "Have you seen the man or not?"

The hostility seemed to make Nathan lose interest in her, and he turned his full attention back on Maximillian. "Yeah, I've seen him. He's staying in room fourteen, Red Sector. I would have taken him down, but I knew he was a government case from the wanteds, so I left him. He must be pretty hot; you showed up a lot faster than I expected."

"Is there a posted bounty on him yet?" Maximillian said.

The cyborg shook his head. "No, he's worthless to anyone but you."

"Do you know where he likes to hang out?" Natasha said, feeling Maximillian's eyes fall on her.

"Sure, honey," the cyborg said with a mischievous smile. "I saw him at the *Martian Playroom* last night. I'll say one thing for your mark, Max. He sure likes his sex on the wild side." Then he turned from them and headed back to his ship.

Maximillian turned and looked at her. "Care for a little exhibitionism?"

Natasha smiled and kissed him. "I thought you'd never ask."

* * * *

The *Martian Playroom* was in *Devon's Guide to Infamous Places* as one of the true havens for debauchery in the galaxy. The owners (who insisted on remaining anonymous) believed that a club which provided open and easy sex was the wave of the future. Judging from the profits the place generated, it looked as though their belief was right.

Entering the club, Natasha could feel the deep base of the music pounding throughout her body. Maximillian paid, and a bouncer in a formal white tuxedo pulled aside an indigo curtain revealing a blanket of writhing bodies engaged in various sex acts on the padded main level floor. Natasha moved closer to him and he squeezed her hand.

Leaning in close, he said, "Don't worry, lover. I won't let anything happen to you."

Before they could descend the steps to level one, a lovely redhead intercepted them. The woman was completely naked, and although slightly heavysset, was as voluptuous as any Natasha had ever seen. "I'm sorry," she said, with a private smile. "You can't come in with clothes. You'll have to check them in the cloak room."

Maximillian led Natasha over to the cloak room for them to undress. The rich, carnal sound of a woman nearby reaching climax made Natasha's pussy wet. The thoughts of Maximillian fucking her in front of all these people were making her really hot.

"How are we going to search this place for your fugitive without anyone catching on to what we're doing?" she said.

Standing by the cloak room, he peeled off his clothes, revealing the magnificent body underneath. He pulled her over and slowly stripped off her clothes, pausing here and there to kiss her on the lips and neck. "We'll just have to fuck our way from room to room."

When he was done undressing her, he wrapped his powerful arms around her, burying his face in her neck. He licked and kissed up to her ear, sending erotic chills all through her. "I have a feeling he's here," he whispered. "So stay close."

Natasha was so excited, she could barely keep from jumping him. "Okay. Lead the way."

Maximillian took her hand and led her out into the steamy, sinful center of level one. As they walked carefully, stepping over bodies, hands reached up to touch and tease them. Natasha looked down and blushed to see how fiercely erect Maximillian was.

Other than that, he seemed oblivious to the attention, gently brushing male and female hands aside as they made their way to the stairs leading to level two.

Level two looked to be more of a voyeur area. The space was a curving maze of small bedded sections where lovers had sex in plain view. Those who liked to watch would wander from alcove to alcove, either standing or sitting to observe on the chairs provided. The sounds and smells of sex were everywhere and Natasha was feverish with desire.

They came upon an empty bed, and Maximillian dragged her into the alcove. The bed looked surprisingly clean, with freshly laundered sheets giving off the faint scent of fabric softener.

Her heart thundered in her chest as he kissed her, running his fingers through her hair. He pulled her against him in a warm loving embrace and ran scalding kisses down her neck. Suddenly, he stopped and lay down on the bed on his back. He stroked his engorged penis slowly, and beckoned for her to join him.

Natasha climbed up on the mattress, aware of spectators slipping in to take a seat. Heat crawled into her cheeks as the excitement of the forbidden fired her loins. Maximillian guided her, laying her on her back on top of his chest. With his feet hooked around hers, he slowly opened her legs so those sitting would have a clear view of her glistening pussy. His hands massaged her breasts, kneading them and pinching the rosy nipples.

She could feel how wet she was, how excited by these curious strangers wanting to watch her and Maximillian make love. The energy in the room was so powerful, she could almost feel their eyes on her pussy, her lips, her skin.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispered. “They can’t take their eyes off you.”

Natasha squirmed, eager for him to enter her. Then a new sensation came. The feeling of someone softly licking and stroking her cunt and its seductive pleasure almost made her cry out. She shifted against him to see who was licking her but Maximillian stopped her.

“Don’t,” he said. “Just let them.”

More hands touched her, stroking her swollen labia and clit until her breath came in hungry pants. Maximillian’s cock slowly entered her, easing inch by inch into her throbbing channel. The world soon melted into a storm of ecstasy and Natasha gave herself over to her more primitive emotions. She struggled against his embrace and the many petting hands; she was hungry to come.

Someone’s wet tongue was tickling her clit and fondling Max’s cock, as it roamed randomly up and down their sexual union. Within the deepest core of her pussy, Maximillian vibrated his penis and Natasha caught her breath and arched her back. The orgasm that erupted inside her was so strong and unexpected, she cried out louder than she ever had before. Waves and waves of unspeakable pleasure soared through her womb and up her spine, shattering her thoughts into oblivion. Nothing mattered but the delight. Nothing consumed her like the magic of his talented cock and the feeling of everyone touching and enjoying her like a warm Sunday meal.

Then it was over; the spectators wandered off to watch another couple, and another.

Maximillian gently eased her off him onto the floor. Her body still tingled from the overflow of sensations. He sat on the edge of the bed and pulled her into a loving embrace. “Did you like that?” he mumbled into her ear.

She gave him a dreamy smile. “I’ll say. You certainly are a man of many talents.”

He kissed her. “Let’s go find our bad guy. From what I read on the playroom map, I’m guessing he’s going to be on level five.”

Chapter 13

The Sunshine Room on level five was not a place for the faint of heart. Contrary to its name, it was a dark, dungeon of a room with every torture device one could ever conceive of hanging from hooks on the walls. The only source of light were some wandering white and blue track lights, which were designed to offer almost no illumination at all. Apparently those with murkier sexual tastes preferred conducting their sins out of plain view.

The sharp, angry sound of a whip on flesh made Natasha start. Glancing over, she spotted a woman on her knees, her arms chained to two posts on either side of her. Her head was bowed forward in exhausted surrender. The man with a black leather face mask looked up at them.

“Can I help you?” the man said. “Do you want to punish or be punished?”

“Neither,” Maximillian said. “I’m looking for Miles Foster.”

The man slid his hand along the length of the bullwhip and began coiling it in his hand. He pulled his mask off, revealing himself as their quarry, Miles Foster.

Maximillian pulled Natasha behind him as the man took a few steps toward them. “She looks familiar,” he said, trying to see Natasha better from behind Maximillian.

“I was the smuggler who took you to Akron Nine,” she said, watching him carefully.

He rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully, then nodded. "That's right. I wonder why the machine hasn't killed you for aiding me? Must be the sex, huh?"

Wordlessly, Maximillian advanced on Miles, his face transformed into a savage mask of rage. Miles immediately understood the danger and bolted for the door with Maximillian in rapid pursuit. He seized Miles just before he reached the exit. Miles turned on him, grabbing Max to fling him back in order to gain some time to escape. Maximillian, however, proved just too strong and fast.

Reaching over the top of Miles' arms, Max seized his hands and ripped his quarry's hands off. With lightening speed, he snatched Miles' left hand and twisted it upward, maintaining the pressure until it was vertical to the floor. Angling the hand to the outside of the elbow, Maximillian forced the man to the ground. He held him in a wristlock and knelt to finish him off.

Miles thrashed as best he could, fighting for release. He moved his ankle up so he could reach a knife sheathed in his boot, which he somehow, still managed to be wearing. Freeing it, he took a slice at Maximillian's neck.

Natasha was seized with terror for his safety. "Max!" she yelled.

Maximillian dodged back from the knife's arch a second before it would have made contact. Holding his wrist by Miles' face, Maximillian released the long, pointed spike, and drove it toward the hand with the knife. In a last ditch attempt to stall his execution, Miles threw the knife at Natasha, catching her in the left shoulder.

The shock of the blow took her off-guard and she fell back. She could feel Max's luminous gaze on her and the burning pain from the wound. It seemed like all time stopped.

She looked back over at Max, and suddenly he was rising from the recently deceased body of Miles Foster.

Natasha fought against passing out. "I'm okay, I'm okay. I don't think it's very serious," she said, as Maximillian crouched down by her.

Patrons were beginning to crowd around them. Maximilian picked her up in his arms. The pain in her shoulder was so intense, she cried out. He whispered he was sorry, and carried her away murmuring something about taking care of everything. His voice sounded worried. She couldn't remember him ever having so much emotion in his voice before, and it sounded strange to her.

She could feel the edges of darkness coming. It now appeared she was going to faint no matter how hard she fought. Resigned, she gave herself over to it. The last thing she heard before she lost consciousness was Max saying, "I love you, Natasha. Please don't die on me." Then oblivion swallowed her whole.

Chapter 14

The only thing Natasha could focus on was the agonizing sting. It tore through her nervous system like an electric charge, radiating from her shoulder in sobering, throbbing waves. She forced her eyes open, trying to remember what had happened, and Maximillian filled her vision. He leaned over her, working with miraculous speed on her wound.

“I’m in so much pain,” she said, shocked by how feeble her voice sounded.

“Don’t worry. You’re going to be fine.” He sounded so certain that she relaxed and let herself believe him.

His mouth covered her wound, his tongue playing through the jagged edges of the cut. At first, the sharp misery of it was almost unbearable, but soon the pain drained away leaving her feeling as healthy as before she’d been injured.

Natasha sat up and looked around the space station’s infirmary. It was a small, sterile room with large floor to ceiling windows filled with a sea of twinkling stars. Three examining tables were set up next to each other, and she rested on the one closest to the sliding glass doors. Complex medical equipment was everywhere. Two medical androids stood back by the wall, their bodies stiff and their faces dazed.

“What happened?” she said, watching Maximillian wipe fresh blood from his hands with a white towel. Crimson smudges soiled its pristine cleanliness.

“You took a knife in the shoulder, but I removed it and repaired the wound.”

Natasha touched the area where the knife had been. Her shirt was soaked in blood, but there was no wound nor pain. “That’s amazing. How did you do that?”

Maximillian tossed his head at the two medical androids that still hadn’t moved from their spot. They watched him cautiously. “I have a healing agent in my saliva, and the rest I downloaded from them by force. I’m afraid they’re a little upset.”

She studied the medical androids again. Both were women, dark-haired, and short. Both also had rather plain features, neither ugly nor pretty. Natasha guessed no one would want a medical android to be too attractive. It might get stolen and reprogrammed for the sex trade. Of course, trying to steal a killing machine like Maximillian would most likely be suicide, so it didn’t matter how handsome he was. Besides, from experience, she knew his looks put people at ease, and made it easy to overlook what he really was.

Natasha grinned. The medics sure looked like they didn’t care much for Maximillian. They kept watching him like deer in the headlights. “Isn’t that like rape to them?”

Maximillian tossed the bloody towel in the laundry basket and shrugged. “I guess it is.”

“Don’t you think you should apologize to them?”

“Why? I wouldn’t mean it.”

Natasha scooted her legs off the examining table. She felt wonderful and energized. “Why didn’t you just let them do their job?”

“I didn’t trust them to have same sense of urgency I had.”

She jumped off the table and sauntered over to him. Wrapping her arms around him, she gave him a deep, pene-

trating kiss, then looked into his eyes. "You'd better be careful, Max. People might say we're in love."

He squeezed her close in a warm embrace. "Natasha," he said playfully. "You're such a tease."

They walked out of the infirmary into the silver passageway, and headed back to the ship. "Max, what are we going to do about my wanted status?" she said, glancing at him.

"I'll contact them when we get back to the ship with my report."

"What if they won't pardon me for my involvement with that fugitive?"

Maximillian stopped and turned to face her. "Let's not worry about that right now. We'll just take this one thing at a time."

In other words, Natasha, don't ask a question you may not want the answer to.

Chapter 15

He had been in the communications room for more than two hours, and Natasha was starting to fear the worst. *They said no. He's probably trying to figure out how to break the news to me that he's going to have to kill me after all.* She toyed with the idea of running but didn't have the will. The truth was she was madly in love with him, and no matter what her future held, she wanted to stay with him. There was no place *to* go anyway. She would never be able to find a place where she'd be happier.

Finally, he emerged, his face typically unreadable. He stalked over to the black leather chair and collapsed in it.

"Well?" she said, after he hadn't spoken for a full minute.

"Well what?"

Natasha scowled. "What did they say about my pardon?"

"Oh, that," he said. "They said okay."

She nodded, unable to believe how casual he was being.

"They said okay?" she repeated in a sarcastic tone. "Is that it?"

He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. "No."

"Max, this is really not funny. What else did they say, damn it?"

"They said yes."

Natasha sighed and stomped over to where he was sitting. Climbing up on top of him, she wedged herself between his body and the armrest. He groaned a complaint. Leaning in close to his ear, she said, "They said yes to what?"

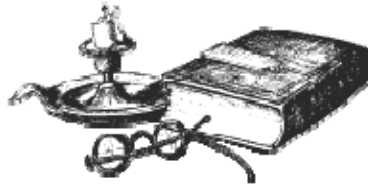
He opened his eyes and lifted his head to look at her. “They said yes to us getting married. That is, of course, if you agree.”

Natasha was so surprised, it felt as if the wind had been knocked out of her. “Of course, I’ll marry you. To tell you the truth, I thought you’d never ask.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle is a member of the Winter Park writers group, and has been a lifetime fan of both romance and science fiction.

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