

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ANH LEOD *Ex Factor*



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Ex Factor

ISBN 9781419919251

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Ex Factor Copyright © 2009 Anh Leod

Edited by Helen Woodall.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication February 2009

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

EX FACTOR

Anh Leod

Chapter One

March, 2310. Terminal 132, Earth

The protesters were out again, the dirty, blue-haired witches demanding equal rights in the free markets. They didn't realize "free" had no meaning in relation to them. Columbo Balbane ignored the noise from their shouts, his muscles straining, sweat dampening his shirt despite the late winter cold enhanced by the icy air coming off the river where the public dock was located.

The mega-ship where he was enlisted as First Shipper hovered above the river, its only touchpoint a gangway leaning at a thirty-degree angle to link it to the cargo hold. Smoke still hung in the air from the warehouses in the shipping compound that the witches had burnt using fire spells. He pulled his overloaded hand truck backward, its heavy cargo too rare and expensive to trust to the automated system moving most of the edible cargo bound for the Jupiter system. Everything was jury-rigged thanks to the witches destroying their usual docking point.

A creaking noise in his elbow told Columbo he needed to take a short break. He leaned the hand truck back against his belly and caught his breath, his arms wrapped protectively around the topmost box, the one containing fresh cherries for the European governor. The other boxes held parts needed for refurbishing oxygen generators.

He spotted a Shipper Assistant at the top of the gangway, his mouth hanging open with shock at the sight of the witch protestors below. Witches were a common sight on this planet but Gort hailed from Mars.

"Take this for me!" Columbo called.

The younger man trotted down the gangway, his eyes wide on his freckled face. "You're the only one allowed to touch those."

Columbo glanced at the signs hovering above the blue heads. There must be twenty or more of the cursed mutants, wasting their time demanding rights Earth wouldn't give them. The protester's signs shimmered with magic, giving them the effect of neon.

Free trade, one of them begged in bright orange sparkles. *Sell not smuggle, we'll pay the taxes!* announced a sign with meter-high script above an elder's head. Columbo was amused to see witch hair went white with time, just like that of humans without the witch defect. It had come out of a genetic mutation in the United States a good three hundred years before. Some said the mutants were a military experiment gone wrong but with the country long since imploded into five or six smaller countries, who could say? The records were long lost on some outdated storage device if they had survived the second and third Civil Wars at all.

"Are you blind? Who knows what these witches will do next," Columbo snarled. "Get this into the hold. I have to see what's left on the dock."

The kid assented, straining to push the load. Columbo slapped his ass, making Gort jump. The hand truck wobbled but started moving up the gangway.

"And keep moving!" Columbo yelled. Carefully, he extended his arm, testing his elbow. The joint seemed fine now, so he jogged down the slick gangway and grabbed another hand truck full of precious fruit.

He was glad witches weren't allowed to travel. The random energy bursts emanating from their skin might turn a freighter into a fireball, whether they intended ill or not. However, there were those who muttered that now humanity had made first contact with not one but two alien species, human governments would not let the witches out to form alliances and perhaps overthrow hated governments. Suppression was safety, Columbo supposed, especially with a minority cursed with strange power.

When his precious cargo was stored in a refrigerated holding tank, he went back out into the chill air for another load. The protestors' shouts had grown even louder and the signs, if anything, sparkled more. He shook his head at the sheer mystery of the witches and their magic. When he was halfway up the gangway, he heard a squeal of

laughter and felt something whoosh past his left ear. He looked up to see a kaleidoscope of circling color. Blinking, he realized people, or rather witches, were airborne. Blue hair flying, expressions wild, cloaks catching the breeze, they had the grace of athletes.

How were they staying up? Columbo shaded his eyes and stared at the sky until the witches came into sharp focus. He saw they clung to brooms. Columbo realized with horror that the legends were true. Witches really could fly. He'd been raised on a small farm on Mars but he'd been told the same legends any human child would have heard for millennia.

One of the fliers swooped toward him. A woman, whose hair was shorter than the others, reminding him faintly of someone he'd left behind at home. Her eyes were wild as she increased her speed, aiming for him. Columbo held his ground, stepping in front of his precious hand truck topped with peaches. If he was out in the colonies he'd be armed but here on Earth, he had to stow his laser pistol. He pulled open a case at his belt, flicked open his initial-embossed knife. It didn't matter. A knife could still be a deadly weapon.

Just as she was about to reach him, the witch stuck out her tongue and pulled up her broom so that she rose, nearly vertical, into the air, laughing hysterically.

Columbo looked up, dumbfounded as she flew toward the dock. Should he stay and defend himself as necessary or get his cargo into the ship? He noticed the other witches were swirling around again, bouncing up and down on currents of air. Were they going to move in?

Shit. The short-haired witch was coming back his way. As the witch came closer, he saw she'd managed to break into a carton of precious strawberries. Had the protesters handed them off, distracting the dock personnel with their signs? Someone was going to get a reprimand.

He shifted his knife into throwing position, hoping to do...what? Knock the witch off her broom? Startle her? Maybe if he could shear off some of the broom's bristles it would damage whatever magic operated the abomination.

She sped up, one hand holding some kind of harness keeping her on the broom, the other with a fistful of strawberries. The succulent fruit was as red as her lips.

"Don't you dare, witch," he growled.

Just as she was reaching him, she pulled up hard and swayed back and forth in front of him, dancing in the breeze. Her expression was mocking but at him or at herself he didn't know.

"This protest is a joke," he snarled, his scalp feeling suddenly like it was being pricked by a thousand tiny needles. "We're taking our shipment and getting out of here. No witch goods allowed."

She smirked, her beautiful face losing some of its appeal. "We have our arrangements, Shipper."

"So you're just here to steal, then?" He touched his hair and felt it standing up stiffly, unusual even for his short haircut.

In response, she took a bite from one of the luscious strawberries, then licked her lips with a reddened tongue. He remembered a similar face with those luscious lips, those slanted eyes, that agile tongue. His cock came to life despite the tense situation, cooling his brain as the blood moved south.

She smiled and he realized his eyes must have gone a bit glassy. Shifting to relieve the press of his flesh against tight fabric, he tried to remain calm.

"What do you want, witch?"

"Just to be treated like anyone else." She took another bite of strawberry. He wasn't the only one with a sexual reaction to their encounter. Her nipples pressed in tight little buds against the sky blue fabric panel knotted around her melon-round breasts.

"While you act like a child?"

"Would a child share?" From her hovering perch just above him, she dropped a strawberry into the air.

Without thinking, he pointed his knife straight up and the strawberry slid down the point. As the strawberry split, there was a small explosion and a black cloud of foul air puffed from the ensorcelled fruit. He threw the knife without thinking. It somersaulted into the air. The witch caught it miraculously, dropping the other strawberries in the process. They fell to the deck, making wet plops. Reeking tendrils rose into the air, reaching his nose with unusual swiftness. He bent over coughing for only a moment. Standing tall was a force of will over battered lungs.

The witch, so familiar yet so very strange, cackled heartily and tilted her broom into the air. Her long skirt caught the air, giving him a glimpse of shapely legs as he struggled to draw breath and curse himself for not managing to stow another weapon in his crew uniform.

"Watch yourself, Shipper," she called. "Stay close to home and kiss the ones you love. Dangerous times are coming."

In answer to her words, he heard heavy boots pounding on the dock, coming toward the gangway. The witch stabbed his open knife into the fabric between her breasts until it held, then grabbed her harness with two hands and flew straight up into the clouds. She was probably one hell of a wildcat in bed, he realized but he'd never see her again. His heart was still committed anyway, to someone long gone from his bed but not in the least forgotten.

The Second Shipper dashed by, holding two crates of blueberries in his enormous brown fists, his face contorting with a coughing fit.

"That's it?" Columbo asked, his voice a grating rasp from the noxious fumes.

"Not quite." The man looked into the air anxiously and moved into a lope.

Columbo put his hands to his eyes and watched the half-dozen remaining witches on brooms speed away. Armed soldiers, pulling sidearms from their holsters, moved toward him. When he looked toward the protestors, he saw most had slinked away,

except a couple who had been grabbed by the soldiers who had stayed on land. They screamed as they were forced face-first onto the ground. Signs winked out of existence. They had been entirely built of illusion.

His earlink beeped.

"How much is left?" asked the captain, safe inside the freighter.

He touched his ear. "Just the strawberries, I think."

"Leave them."

"I agree. Who knows what the witches did to them," he said, remembering not only the foul smoke but also how the witch's red lips looked as her even, white teeth broke through the skin of a whole berry. Gods but how he missed the feel of soft lips on his cock. He missed *her*. Why had it taken a witch to remind him of how he missed his ex?

"Move in," the captain said. "We're departing in thirty seconds."

Colombo dashed up the gangway with his load, making it into the hold just as the sheet of thick alloy retracted into the base of the ship. His cock was heavy in his ship-issued trousers and for once he wished he bothered to wear briefs for support, even if he normally found them too confining.

* * * * *

June, 2309. Port City, Mars

The lollipop made a sucking sound as Columbo pulled it out of her channel. Teasy's large, gray eyes widened as he put the apple whisky-flavored pop against his tongue and swirled it around. The taste was as complex as she was and as delicious.

They were standing on Teasy's bed in her efficiency apartment. She could afford better but said she was never there and didn't have time to clean anything larger so why bother? He had her leaning against the wall, legs apart, naked.

Teasy's legs had thickened in the past year. She was no longer the sexy gazelle he'd first locked eyes with at a Port City shipper's bar. He'd thought she had to be off a ship,

though that blue hair made quite a statement in his crowd. You were asking for attention to be around space jockeys with a witch hairdo. Still, she didn't seem to be the kind of girl who demanded attention, the activist type.

Later, when he'd seen her work at the candy shop and factory she owned, he'd realized she was a calm, forceful businesswoman despite her youth but that night, she'd only been shy, then as the evening wore on, hungry for him.

She still had most of her appetite for sex, if not her killer legs. He didn't love her any less though and wished he could find a way to spend more time with her. Traveling off planet regularly was a hell of a way to make a living.

"For a guy who's sucking on a pussy pop, your thoughts look awfully far away," she said. Her voice was low-pitched and sensual.

"I'm debating what to do to you next," he said, raising his eyebrows. "Be quiet, woman."

Her eyes narrowed. "I hope you aren't planning to stick that thing anywhere else."

He grinned. "I don't think I'd like the taste if I went with my third favorite orifice."

She wrinkled her nose. He loved when she did that. She had a soft dash of honey-colored freckles across her nose, which was pert and cute. Sometimes it whistled when she slept but that was adorable too. He wanted to sleep beside her every night but he was lucky to wake up in her bed more than once a week. Usually he got bored and left when her employees started calling her to get orders for the next day's candy making.

"Which is your first favorite?"

"Hmmm." He tilted his head. "So hard to decide. I love your mouth against mine and on my cock. But nothing really beats your pussy. Still, I can't have a conversation with it."

She tapped his shoulder with the heel of her hand. "Enough of your philosophizing, tough guy. Let's stop talking about your cock and use it already!"

With a casual shrug, he tossed the lollipop aside, hardly noticing as it stuck on the side of her bedside table, and pressed his body into hers. He tucked his hands under her thighs and said. "Up."

She balanced on her toes then flexed her knees and jumped. He caught her, lifting her above his waist so he could lower her down his cock. They both sighed as they made intimate contact. The wall supported some of her weight as he took a step forward, balancing her and tried to thrust.

He made a face when things didn't quite slide as he had expected. "Ouch."

"What's wrong?" Teasy panted.

"I think I'm stuck."

"Stuck?"

"Yeah, maybe the sugar from the lollipop."

"Oh." Her arms reflexively tightened around his neck and her inner walls squeezed his cock.

"Shit." He put his forehead against hers. "It's been four days. You keep that up and I'll blow."

"Well, if you can't move..." she said.

"It's not going to do anything for you." He felt his cock swell when she did it again. And again. The girl had some powerful inner muscles.

"Don't you know anything about anatomy? When I tighten, my entire vagina gets a rush. Clit and all."

Now that she mentioned it, he noticed her breathing had gone a little ragged. He tried to pump, just a little, unsure how he was going to separate them when it was over. She moaned and he guessed it was working for her, just like her inner clenching and tightening and softening was doing wonders for him. He pressed her harder against the wall, really pulling and pushing as the pressure began to build in his scrotum. So close, he could feel his seed moving.

His cock pulled free, right to the tip. He grabbed her ass hard. She squeaked but then it turned into a gasp of pleasure when he pushed back in.

"Hard, like that?"

"Yes, please."

"Sweetlink!" He pushed in again, his ass working double time as he came close then closer to his end.

"Love is more powerful than sugar," she whispered, tightening her legs around his hips and sliding her hips in tandem with him.

"Let go, Teasy," he said. "Come with me."

"Yes," she agreed.

Her vocalizations intensified with each thrust. He tried to count, to take his mind off the pleasure so she'd have time to build and finish with him. He reached the number ten, then twenty. At thirty he started counting backward by accident, then skipped a few numbers in the race to forty.

"I'm going to come," he warned.

"Yes," she keened. "Now!"

She threw her head back. It banged dully against the wall as her legs tightened and she convulsed around him. He let his brain go and poured himself into her hot, wet channel. It was so good, always so good. So right. So *real*.

With his face buried against her shoulder, he didn't notice the strange, subtle shimmering of her skin, the tiny blue sparkles that almost could have been short hairs standing straight on her scalp but weren't.

Chapter Two

April, 2310. Harbor 3, Europa

"Why'd you put in for a hauler?" Gort asked. He was a beefy, puppy dog kind of kid, this Shipper Assistant. All kinds signed up for the entry-level position but few rejoined a second time. Gort was one of the six assistants on the mega-ship who might make it in this business. He had the physical strength at least.

Columbo shrugged and tilted his chair against the wall. Only the back legs were screwed into the rec room floor.

"Female trouble?" asked the kid. He was too young to have had much female trouble of his own.

"Isn't that always the way?" Columbo drank from his beer. It was some kind of European home brew but not bad. The alcohol content was higher than the Earth or Mars equivalent and a short, fast drunk was best on board when you had shift duties six days a week.

The kid leaned forward eagerly. "Tell me about her."

"You ever been with a woman?" Columbo asked.

The Second Communications Officer spoke up from the corner, his voice a little slurred. "Are you sure his balls have even descended yet?"

"I've been to third base!" Gort protested.

"Baseball," Columbo muttered. "Haven't seen a game in years."

"Ever had a blowjob?" the officer asked the Shipper Assistant.

Gort's ears pinkened. "Just a hand job."

"You're missing out," the officer said, then lapsed into stupefied silence.

Columbo raised an eyebrow and looked at his beer. Maybe the concoction was even stronger than he'd thought. Usually the officer could drink lesser men under the table. But he'd already been drinking when Columbo's shift ended.

He took a bite of the gooey noodles that were his dinner. "You're definitely missing out. My girl, my ex that is, Teasy, she could do things with her tongue that you wouldn't believe."

"Really?" The kid's ears were still pink but he was grinning now.

"Yeah." Columbo reflected. "Her mouth was like coming home, you know? All hot and sliding and electric. And her tongue. Shit, her tongue was a gift."

"What was so great about it?"

Columbo chuckled. "It was flexible, maybe a little longer than the average. She could dance around my cock with it like a demon, make me feel like I was on a roller-coaster ride of pleasure. *Fuck*. Makes me hard just thinking about it."

Gort's eyes had gone dreamy. "Why'd you let a girl like that go?"

"I didn't. She let me go."

"Did you cheat on her?"

Columbo shook his head and decided to go back to the beer. "Her cunt had me locked to her but tight. Nah, she ended things. She was working too hard and I wasn't around to help her. I guess she gave up. On herself too."

"Ate too much chocolate, gained weight?" the boy guessed. "Lost interest in sex?"

Columbo grinned. "Maybe you know something about women after all, kid. But to tell you the truth, it's been six months and she still isn't out of my head."

"Maybe you should try to get her back," Gort said reflectively.

"Another four months 'til we see Port City again," slurred the First Communications Officer.

"That's long enough to think of a good apology," said the kid. "And get her a really good present."

"I suppose," Columbo said. "Kid, you think like a woman."

"Unless she's found another man," the officer said. "They usually do if they're halfway decent. And no one wants shipper bums like us if they can do better."

"Columbo always attracts the ladies, though," the kid said, his cheeks taking on the color of his ears now. "I've noticed."

"You following me around or something?"

The kid smiled sheepishly. "Remember that witch protest last month? That broomstick witch wanted to bang you bad. I stood at the top of the gangway and watched you two."

"You could tell, huh? With all that experience?" Columbo said sarcastically.

"Yes," the kid said, not cowed. "Her eyes were hot. Her nipples were pushing out and she was wriggling on her broom like it was toasting her ass."

The officer laughed. "You're going to make me come in my shorts if you keep up that kind of talk."

"It's true," Gort protested. "I have perfect vision."

"Teasy has blue hair," Columbo said. "But she dyes it. A fashion statement."

"For solidarity or something?" slurred the officer. "She one of those Free Movementers?"

"I guess. People do that, right?"

"Especially in California Country," agreed the officer. "Damnedest thing. Can't figure it out."

"Maybe they figure if everyone's hair is blue, no one can be discriminated against," Columbo said.

"There's a vid star with blue hair," Gort said. "I have this one where she does it with three guys, in her pussy, ass and face. It's totally coosh."

Columbo rolled his eyes. "Is she a witch?"

"I don't think so. Don't they have some kind of crazy electromagnetic field around them? One of the guys had piercings on his cock. Lots of them and I don't think a witch pussy could take all that metal. They'd repel it."

"I've never been close enough to know if that was true," the officer said. "But I'd sure like to find out."

"Huh." Columbo reflected. "Teasy works with metal all the time. She's a candy cook, owns her own store."

"Coosh. I could do with some candy right now," Gort said, absently licking his lips.

So could Columbo but only to use it in some of the very creative ways he and Teasy had come up with together.

"In this one video, the blue-haired girl did it with this bald guy and they had a special effect where the guy's crotch hair went blue after they fucked. But that only happened in the one vid. It was part of the plot, I guess."

"I saw that one," the officer said. "I think she actually had an orgasm."

"Don't they always?" Gort asked.

"Nah, faking it most of the time. You got to get with a real woman, then you'll know."

"I wonder if she's done any new movies," the boy said. "We've got access right now since we're on-planet. Want to come look with me, Columbo?"

"You're the expert," Columbo said, pushing back his empty beer glass. He'd had about enough of this talk. His cock was throbbing and he needed some time alone, time to process his longings and think about Teasy again. "You load the vid and give me a report next break."

The kid looked at him oddly but since the officer followed him out Columbo figured he had a partner for his little jack-off party.

Columbo had deliberately left his relationship behind in Port City, not tracking Teasy in any way. Maybe he should look her up, find out what was going on, even buy

her a present like Gort had suggested. In four months when he made it back home, he'd see how he felt. Maybe there was room for a second chance.

* * * * *

June 2310. Terminal 5, Earth

Columbo lay on his side on his bunk, his hand sliding up and down his cock. He was ninety-five percent asleep and had no real idea what his hand was doing. His mind was stuck on Teasy. Eight months apart and she was still retaining her hold on his subconscious.

As First Shipper, he only shared quarters with one other man, the First Stores Support. The bunks could be sealed by a thin shield, useful in emergencies for trapping oxygen and allowing life support.

Columbo's crewmate had his shield down for privacy but since it was semitransparent he really wasn't getting any. The only thing blocked was the sound. Two silhouettes were visible behind the shield, causing Columbo's brain to wake at least halfway.

The corners of his mouth curled up. Did his crewmate have a woman in there? Yes, he did. She arched back, long wavy hair flowing, her nipples poking out. He could tell her thighs were slender and round, her hips flared from her waist, making her a perfect hourglass.

Had she just come aboard? Was she a new crew member, or a prostitute? He strained to hear noise but there wasn't any, only a dumb show as the woman fell forward to her knees and was mounted by the huge man with her.

"Coosh," Columbo whispered, amazed by the way the woman took the hard thrusts without rocking. She must have amazing upper body strength. His cock leaked fluid onto his hand.

Without thinking, he began to pump his fist in time with his crewmate's thrusts, enjoying his private peep show. If only he hadn't felt so numb, he'd go look for a woman of his own.

He rolled onto his back, a vision of Teasy moving on him, above him, in his mind's eye as he came close to orgasm. Sweat dampened the sheets as he gripped and slid and imagined, then fell apart.

A few minutes later, half asleep again, he became aware of a tapping on his shoulder.

"Your turn," said a soft voice.

He opened his eyes and saw that the hand on his shoulder was covered with pseudo-skin, the polymer overlay of a sim bot.

In a flash, he sat up. "W-what?"

"Your turn," said the sim bot female. "I am assigned to Beta C deck this shift."

His crewmate had been fucking the sim bot, he realized, not a real woman at all. Even though she wasn't human and her system took care of any hygiene issues, he wouldn't take sloppy seconds.

"No thanks."

"Are you sure? I am a free service for the crew."

"I know," Columbo said. "You were in here two weeks ago. Take me off your roster."

"Very well," said the sim bot. Her ebony hair slid from her shoulder to her back as she turned her head and walked away. He was off her roster and didn't even exist anymore.

Columbo wondered if Teasy had been able to dismiss him so completely as well.

* * * * *

July, 2310. Terminal 5, Earth

Since they'd only docked here a month ago, the surroundings were quite familiar to Columbo. Normally he stayed put on the ship but they were on a twelve-hour hold due to some kind of mechanical problem with the thrusters. The cargo yard here was small and understaffed so there wasn't anyone new or interesting to speak to in order to pass the time. At the edge of the cargo hold, he stared down the gangway to the dock, wondering if he could head out for no particular reason. All had been peaceful on their last trip. No demonstrations, no soldiers here on this part of the planet.

"Something going on out there?" his roommate asked, from his resting place on a barrel of prunes.

"No, just thinking of taking a couple of hours of shore leave to go for a walk." The gym on the mega-ship was well equipped and he made full use of it but there was nothing like making your body move through Earth's gravity to make a human feel alive.

"You got any civilian clothing? That uniform will make you stick out."

"Haven't heard anyone has much against us right now."

"There's a witch ghetto within walking distance. They always have a grudge against people who can get off-world."

"Don't know why they think things would be better for them someplace else," Columbo observed.

"Maybe they'd be better off with their own planet."

Columbo splayed his fingers on his hips. "Have to make it there first and there isn't much chance of that. Think I'll go for a walk."

"Enjoy." His roommate leaned back against the metal skin of the mega-ship and closed his eyes.

Columbo waved at the security guard standing watch opposite from his roommate and ambled down the gangway. This terminal was on a sea, rather than a river, on the edge of a city called Nice. He had to walk a good twenty minutes to get out of the

interplanet shipping compound, filled with warehouse after warehouse of stockpiled goods and into the city proper. Once he had left the gate with a one-hour pass issued by a guard, he was faced with a decision. Left or right.

The street to the left looked windier, more interesting. To the right the street appeared to lead to a more prosperous promenade. Was he looking to be a tourist or did he want local color?

One thing he wanted was a gift, if he could find one. A gift for Teasy. Three months of reflection on Gort's words had their effect on his psyche. In a month or so he'd be back in Port City, returned from his dash into long-term off-world shipping after his unexpected breakup. Yes, she'd ended things but she'd had plenty of time to regret it since, if she kept herself too busy with her job to find another lover. Despite everything that had gone wrong and an ego-crushing dump, she was still far and away the best sex he'd ever had and he missed her halfway to the point of madness.

He turned left. Teasy was, if nothing else, interesting. Her creativity in sex alone was a wonder and her past was filled with mystery. No wonder she felt enough of solidarity with witches to dye her hair blue. She seemed to have no past the way witches had no future.

All he knew was she had immigrated to Mars from Earth when she was fourteen. She never spoke of her family and he'd never run across anyone with the last name Rose in the cargo yards. Blessed with an entrepreneurial spirit and a gift for inventing appealing candy, she'd opened her shop and thrived. Their relationship was probably the only part of her life that wasn't a success.

He walked for twenty minutes, watching the sea wink in and out of sight as the road meandered its way uphill. It was only when the road started to descend again that he saw anything but people movers zipping along their tracks. There was something down at the base of the hill.

The edge of a tent was visible as he came closer. The light breeze that was coming off the water had become, Columbo had to admit, stronger gusts. Since the tent looked

protected, he decided to head down the grassy part of the hill, on the other side of the tracks and take a look.

When he reached the open field, he saw the yellow-striped tent was open to it and backed up against the hill.

"*Salut,*" said the man sitting on a chair under the tent awning. A greasy white braid hung down from a brown hat pulled across his forehead.

"*Salut,*" Columbo said back, recognizing a greeting that was archaic but still understandable.

The man was a trader, though it was doubtful he had any legal license. There were crates stacked against the back of the tent. Columbo recognized wine bottles and bundles of herbs, along with baskets full of vegetables he barely recognized since all his food was prepared in the mega-ship galley.

"Local?" Columbo asked, in Trader Standard.

The man gave a short nod and replied in kind. "You a cook? Many local delicacies here."

"No, I wanted a present."

"For who?"

Columbo shrugged. "A woman."

The man grinned, displaying perfect teeth that didn't quite match his weathered face and white hair. "I can help if you have the money."

Columbo pulled a handful of standard credit coins from a pouch at his belt. The trader bent down and pulled a wood box from underneath his chair, then opened it with a flourish.

* * * * *

An hour later, Columbo was back on the ship with a small box tucked safely inside his ship-issue jacket. He was pleased with the purchase but wondered if he'd ever get a

chance to offer it to Teasy. She might very well have found another lover in nine months, no matter what he told himself.

Feeling somehow depressed, he decided not to go back to his bunk despite the late hour and wandered into the Communication Office. The First Communications Officer was inside, sitting in front of a large bank of screens.

"Want to bend an elbow?" the man asked, turning to nod to Columbo. "I'm off duty in twenty-five minutes."

"Sure," Columbo shrugged. "Nothing better to do than drink."

"What brings you by?" There was a beeping from the console and the officer turned back for a moment.

"Thought I'd search the Port City newspapers. I've got two months' leave when we arrive next month and I don't have a place to live."

"Leaving the long haul?"

"It depends. But I've got two months leave to figure it out."

"Fair enough. Speaking of Port City, I'd set a scan on the name Teasy."

Columbo frowned. "Why?"

"It's an unusual name. Thought I might pick up news on your ex. You're always talking about her and I was curious. Maybe I thought I'd lay in a supply of candy for the next trip. I've only got four days leave."

He was going to try to make time with Teasy, Columbo realized. "What's got you so fascinated?" Obviously he was talking about her far too much.

The officer shrugged. "The blue hair, I suppose. I wanted to see what your ex looked like."

"It's dyed," Columbo snarled. "She's not a witch. I've never seen anyone work as hard as she does. Witches have it easy some ways. No one works so hard with their hands if they could cast a spell for whatever needed doing."

"If they could have whatever they wanted then why are they always protesting?" the officer said. "Really, I'm asking."

Columbo licked his wind-chapped lips. His body felt pleasantly loose after his long walk but he could do with that drink. "We can have that discussion when you're off shift."

He turned but before he could edge away the officer said, "I found some information that you might find interesting."

"Save it. I'll meet you in the lounge." Columbo realized he should put away his gift before anyone caught sight of it and started asking questions.

"Teasy doesn't have a candy store anymore," the officer said, ignoring his words.

"What?" Columbo sat down on the chair next to the officer. "What happened?"

"I don't know. But her name is attached to a business called *The Ex Factor* and it doesn't look like a candy store to me."

Chapter Three

August, 2310. Port City, Mars

"Is that him?" Marlin pushed her purple-tinged bangs out of her eyes and leaned closer to the monitor.

"Could it be anyone else?" Teasy Rose asked her employee.

He was the biggest badass who'd ever swaggered into *The Ex Factor* and she ought to know. Though she had ended their relationship ten months, three days, one hour and fifty-two minutes ago, she couldn't help adjusting the security-cam for a close-up.

Marlin leaned in until Teasy could feel the young woman's breath on her ear. "Wow. I can see why that one was memorable."

Columbo Balbane was six feet four inches of pure muscle. He had naturally golden skin that had no business being so pretty since he spent his time in deep space transporting cargo. Teasy had heard he hadn't spent much time planet-side since the breakup and it was just as well.

Merely looking at Mr. Walking Sex after all these months had business wiped clear from her mind. If he'd hung around Port City after she dumped him she would have had a hard time finding the concentration she needed to get her new business up and running. Not that she'd been thinking about changing anything about her life when they'd broken up. Then, she'd just been tired.

"I'm over him," she said flatly. Truth be told, she was kidding herself there. In a way this business was all about him. During those crazy first few weeks after the breakup she'd sold her candy store, telling herself it wasn't because he'd constantly complained she'd done nothing but work.

She had been tired of getting up in the middle of the night to mix up batches of truffles, dip expensive imported fruits into various mixtures and create toffees and

brittles. Columbo had always tried to hold her back for a quickie before she left but with her mind so focused on the intricate details of candy, she'd often said no.

Since morning sex was his favorite, her denials hadn't gone over very well. She'd ignored her body, her libido and her boyfriend for so long it had just seemed easier to end the misery instead of trying to rebuild. It wasn't until after he was gone that she realized she'd ended the wrong part of the equation.

"That isn't true," Marlin said. "I'd never seen you unfocused until we took the call from him on Thirdday."

Teasy was surprised to hear Marlin's assessment of her mental state. She wouldn't have started a new business if she hadn't liked to work. Three days after her candy store was finally out of her hands she had been bored to tears. At first, she had done nothing but experiment with her favorite recipes. In particular, she'd worked to perfect her blow bomb recipe. With Columbo gone so often, she'd integrated her sexual energy into her candy.

Oddly enough though, she hadn't wanted to eat any of the tempting treats once he was gone, or share their sexual uses with another man. Her mind wasn't on luscious candy but on *him*. Soon, she stopped creating sugary temptations and endlessly invented better breakup lines, better ways to have ended her relationship with Balbane. For instance, she should have orchestrated a final night of fabulous lovemaking before she'd called it off, one last bittersweet, massively orgasmic evening to live on in her memories. Sex had never been their problem. Communication on the other hand was not so great.

"On the contrary, I've been highly focused."

"At least on setting up his appointment," Marlin muttered.

Her breakup had ultimately birthed *The Ex Factor*. It was a safe place where people could go to tell off their exes, or have sex with them, or do whatever they needed to do to get closure. A psychological screening kept away the potential clients who wanted to kill their exes. However cathartic it might feel to them, Teasy wanted to avoid truly

troubled clients. She'd loaded a relationship counselor program through a fast-link but she was lacking real-life experience.

Potential clients filled out a survey and handed over pictures of their former beloveds. For big money clients with major obsessions she had sim bots that could be programmed with every detail of the former loves. The sim bots did a great job especially when the ex was a celebrity and she had lots of material to program into them. For less wealthy clients, she could set up a conversation using artificial intelligence and a voice reproducer. At least, that had been her two original options. Using her powers granted her more.

"He is a customer. We want him to be satisfied."

Most clients were like Columbo and offered less detail. They provided pictures and voice recordings. She'd been really surprised he'd kept a message she'd sent him when he was on a trip. Probably it had been an accident that he still had it.

He'd asked to leave his encounter open-ended. For a customer like him she now built a transfer spell to temporarily allow her employees to take on the physical image and voice of the former beloveds.

"Speaking of that, are you sure you should be playing yourself?"

"He'll never know." Really, he barely knew her at all, hadn't realized she'd worked so hard on her business because she was trying to prove to herself that she didn't need magic to get ahead. He hadn't even realized she was a witch.

"I hope you can pull it off," Marlin said. "At least cast a glamour on yourself, the way you would for any of us, okay?"

Teasy shook her head. "I don't look that different than I did when we were together. I'll be fine."

Marlin's eyebrows moved together until there was a deep hollow between them. "Are you sure you're over him? Maybe you really want him to see you now?"

“Of course not. We’ll give him what he’s paid for, just like with any other customer.” Teasy rose from her chair in the operations room and walked swiftly down the hall to the encounter chamber she’d set up for Columbo, wondering why he felt it necessary to see her again. He’d specified that his role-play be pre-breakup so maybe he wanted to see how it felt to dump her. The setting he’d chosen was her apartment so she’d had to cast a transformation spell on an encounter chamber. Now it would look like her home. In her old stubborn no-magic-use business, she’d never have accomplished so much so easily but she had to agree this way was much faster and left her time to exercise and eat better.

Plus, her type of magic was perfect for this business. She was an object worker, a transformer.

She blinked, realizing she weighed less than she had ten months ago. Would he comment? Would she have to refund his money? Her chest tightened. Why hadn’t she used an employee for this? She could have watched the meeting from the operations room. That would have given her the same satisfaction.

It was too late for second-guessing though, too late for fear. At least the long navy shift she wore, her uniform for all employees at her old store, hid the ten-pound weight loss pretty well.

Each encounter chamber had two entrances, a public one in a corridor that looked like Port City standard housing and a rear employee door. While rubbing her hands on her shift to remove the sweat on her palms, she went in the back way and quickly examined her room. Of course, since she knew her home well, it was no trouble to reproduce it. All she’d had to do was place generic plastic furnishings in the appropriate spot and cast the spell to make it look exactly like her studio in the Sky High Complex.

The sheer number of candy dishes in the room amazed her, now that she had time to take her first real look at the room she’d recreated. No wonder she had lost weight

when she'd tucked them away. Columbo had a serious sweet tooth and she'd enjoyed finding ways to integrate her products into her love play.

The bell rang. It was time. Customers were nervous when they came in so the front desk processed them as quickly as possible. She had never played the part of the ex before, so she'd had no idea that this side could be as nerve-racking.

Teasy took a quick look at herself in the mirror beside the door, making sure her makeup looked like it would have ten months ago. Her look had been sexier then, with full eye makeup and brighter lip stain. It was strange to see her old self in the mirror again but when she touched her stomach she reassured herself that the old belly bulge was gone even though her nerves had returned.

She took a deep breath, letting it out slowly through her nose. This would be over soon enough.

The door slid into the wall as she pressed the button. Just like that last time her palms were itching and she was afraid a hive was developing on her left breast. There were definitely nerves but there was also excitement. At first she didn't look directly at him, focusing on an insignia on the breast pocket of his sleeveless jumpsuit. One look at his massive bare biceps had her pussy growing damp. Had he removed the tattoo with her name? If he turned a little she'd be able to tell. She lifted her gaze to his face, meeting his eyes.

He stared blankly at her for a moment, then offered a tight-lipped smile. Teasy was paralyzed for a second too, then stood on her tiptoes and gave him a hug, which is what she remembered doing that last night, instead of the steamy kiss she had always offered him before. She hoped that was right.

His jumpsuit rubbed against her chest. Yes, she definitely had a hive. And not just a hive either but seriously engorged nipples. They sprang to life, tight and hard, thanks to her body's contact with his.

Was a hug what he had asked for on his questionnaire? Moonpellets, but she couldn't remember! One close look at him and her brain had turned to mush, just like it

always had. Until that last night, they'd always made love immediately before catching up and her treacherous response-trained nerves were jingling lust signals through her body.

She couldn't help the little moan that escaped her lips.

"Teasy," he muttered.

At least he was hugging her back. Instinctively, she turned her face into his neck, smelling that funny combination of sex-ready male and ship hangar she would always associate with him, no matter how many pilots swaggered in here to get closure with the women who'd dumped them by transmission while they were in deep space.

Teasy felt his hand at the back of her head, cradling yet compelling her toward him. He pressed his lips against hers, then his tongue was at the place her lips touched, forcing them apart. Her mouth opened greedily under his, accepting his passionate assault. The familiar details of taste and touch had her fighting her impulse to rub her pussy against his thick, muscled leg.

She opened her eyes. What was he reliving? Obviously not their last night. There hadn't been any passion that last night, only endings. Besides, she discouraged the customers who got into the habit of returning to *The Ex Factor* repeatedly, as if they were still dating their ex-loved one. Columbo's questionnaire had clearly indicated he wanted closure.

Maybe he'd had the idea that their last night together should have been more about sex than words.

With that thought, her brain was struck with a lightning bolt. She was probably going to have sex with Columbo Balbane! Had she lost her mind entirely? Could she make an excuse to run out and replace herself with one of the sim bots? No, it would take too much time to program one.

Her brain went mushy as Columbo moved just far enough away from her to slide his hands over her breasts. He plucked at her puckered nipples and she bit back a groan. This wasn't coosh. She had to keep her wits intact.

"Whoa, whoa," she gasped, pressing on his chest.

"What?"

Marlin's voice came over the intercom.

"Inside, big guy, inside the room. No one's interested in a floor show."

Her ex blinked, then seemed to realize they'd never actually stepped into the encounter chamber. "Right. Sorry. Ummm...Teasy? Let's go inside. I need to concentrate."

"Right." So did she. She waved to the camera she knew was positioned for full view of the encounter chamber door, then stepped aside so Columbo could enter. Now that she'd been broken out of her sex-haze, she could see his eyes had shadows underneath, like he had gone without sleep for days. What had happened to his natural vitality?

She frowned at his back as he moved into the center of the room. Was this a new aspect of Columbo's character? She'd never known him to be very serious before. They'd had constant friction over his desire to play and her desire to work. He'd never really understood the concept that her business was in Port City, that she wasn't on vacation every day she was here like he was.

A little confused, she hit the button to close the encounter chamber door.

"I'm amazed," Columbo said. "This looks just like her place."

Teasy crossed her arms over her chest. She needed to stay in character instead of responding. After all, if he'd said something like that ten months ago she'd have thought he was losing his mind.

Columbo turned back. "Are you a sim bot or a person?"

She held out her arms. "I'm a person, Columbo, of course. I called you here tonight so we could talk, really talk."

He frowned.

She rushed forward, meeting him next to her recliner, trying to remember what had happened that night. "I know you hate talking but I have to let you know how I'm feeling."

His full lower lip folded between his teeth. It was his thinking pose. Usually he came out of it with some kind of decision.

But until he spoke, she'd continue with her memories of that final night. "I'm not happy, Columbo. Are you?"

"Okay," he said, half to himself. "Let's try something new."

"Are you?" Teasy asked again, remembering he hadn't responded right away that night.

"I'm not happy, because I think you're killing yourself with work," he said.

Teasy blinked. Okay, that wasn't what he'd said that night. He was moving into his closure plans, which was healthy. She just had to flow with him and it would all be over soon. Her statistics showed that most of the encounters people paid for were less than twenty minutes, even when they included sex.

"Yes," he said, his voice deepening with passion. "Killing yourself. You've gained weight, you're pale, you have dark circles under your eyes and, well, frankly, you never even comb your hair anymore."

Teasy put her head to her blue mop of hair. Was she too groomed now? No, she'd fixed herself up before that last encounter. Besides, who was he to talk? He was the one with dark circles now. And his hair was cropped short too short to need grooming.

"Ummm," she said, casting about for what she would have said ten months ago. "My business is important to me."

"More important than your health? It's one thing if I'm not in perfect condition. My job has me working for months in a place with no true light and bad gravity. But you don't have that excuse."

She looked at Mr. Perfection and wanted to roll her eyes. So he had fabulous genes. Probably, his parents had engineered him, even if they'd never admitted it. She, on the other hand, was a mutt, an accident. You expected accidents to have flaws, like magical mutations, for instance.

"I'm sorry you feel that way," she said. She had to remember this was about his closure, not about reliving their breakup for herself.

He dropped to his knees next to her chair. She stepped back, startled by his display. Before, he'd always kept his passion for sex.

"I'm begging you, Teasy," he said, his eyes dark and serious. "Dump the business. Find a healthier career. You already can't keep up with me sexually like you used to. It's only going to get worse if you don't take care of yourself."

Was that why they hadn't had sex the last night she'd seen him, before she'd dumped him? Because she was too tired? Thinking back, she had to admit it was a distinct possibility. Hadn't the breakup occurred right after she'd had to fire her assistant manager and take on all his work for herself?

Still, all of this was irrelevant. This encounter was for him, not for her.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked.

He looked up at her. "I want things to go back to the way they used to be. I'd come into port, knock on your door. You'd be home, not at work."

"Did that make a difference?" Moonpellets, but she should have screened Columbo right off her client list! He wasn't looking for closure as far as she could tell.

"Of course. At work you'd have that worry line between your eyebrows, you'd be yelling at people. You'd tell me you'd meet me later and half the time I'd be asleep before you even came home."

She knew it was the truth.

"When you got home at a reasonable hour, you'd jump into my arms, wrap your legs around me." He smiled. "Half the time you'd have my jumpsuit off and your skirt

up and we'd just fuck against the wall next to your door. It was amazing. You blew the top of my head off."

"Most relationships don't stay hot forever," she pointed out, not sure if she was speaking as Teasy or as a relationship counselor.

"I think you chose the candy store over me," he said.

If only he knew she'd dumped it as soon as they broke up. But, maybe until she'd ended things, she hadn't realized what her priorities were. "You weren't here much at all. I had to keep busy."

"My runs were four days the last few months we were together. I was home four days, half the week. That's not so bad."

"No, it's not so bad," she agreed. Still, he'd never listened when she complained of her exhaustion, never seemed concerned or offered any help. His focus had been on his own need for sex and getting as much of it packed into four days as possible, as if he could store the sensation of their bodies merging for his days aboard the freighters.

He wrapped his hands around the backs of her calves but over the dress. She made herself stiffen, though she really wanted to melt. Was that appropriate? Probably, since that night she'd been trying to break up with him, not have sex.

"I've missed you," he said.

The same words were on the tip of her tongue but she forced herself to stay in character. "You were only gone four days."

"I know." His fingertips brushed down, pulled up the edge of the dress on one side.

She was barefoot like she had been that last night, her feet desperately sore after fourteen hours of standing at the store. His kiss on the top of one foot startled her. She pulled back, almost falling across the chair.

"Come," he said. "Sit down."

He stood and guided her into her recliner. It was a luxury purchase but it remolded to her body with every movement. When she was seated, he knelt down again took her foot in his hands. It looked tiny in his broad palms.

"Standing all day is murder on feet," he said. "I should have taken better care of you."

Why was this happening now and not ten months ago? She wanted to escape almost as much as she wanted to stay.

He reached into the breast pocket of his jumpsuit and pulled out a small bottle of oil that she recognized. Chocolate Torte edible oil, from her old Adult Candy line. Gently, he spritzed the scented oil on her feet. The rich smell of chocolate wafted up as he coated her toes with the light spray.

He set the bottle down on the tiled floor and glanced up at her with the slightest hint of a sly smile. She was sure her expression was total confusion mixed with equally total lust.

He began to massage her feet. Her pussy gushed cream as he hit a sensitive spot on her heel. His fingers worked up and down the sole. She might not work in a shop anymore, cooking all morning and serving customers the rest of the day but the massage was still heaven. Who knew a foot rub could be so erotic? Her head tilted back and the chair provided lumbar support.

He set her foot on the top of his thigh and picked up the other foot, giving it the same attention. When he worked into the bottom of her heel this time, she found herself having to move on the seat. The chair rearranged itself to support her legs. She'd spread them slightly without even realizing it.

"Do you like this?" he asked.

"Mmmm," she said. "More." Honestly, she might not have ended things if he'd recognized her exhaustion that night and done this for her. Sometimes a reworked closure with an old love could lead to a new beginning, couldn't it?

If the ex had their encounter with their *real* ex, not a simulation. Which was what she was supposed to be. She wondered how many of her customers used her services to practice before attempting a meeting with their real ex. Maybe she could work that into an advertising campaign?

Columbo smiled at her lazily and slid his fingers through her toes on both feet, stretching them, then pushed her feet toward her shins to stretch the tendons. "I bet if I'd done this each night you wouldn't have ended things."

Could he read minds now?

"This is better than sex," she agreed, then opened her eyes. Moonpellets, that wasn't the sort of thing a woman should ever admit to a man.

"I can prove you wrong," he said, one golden eyebrow arched.

"Try me," she said without thinking.

In one smooth motion, he picked her up and stepped across to the bed. Her body bumped against his chest under the jumpsuit, which was slowly changing color.

The bed in her studio was the kind that was supposed to be rotated into the wall during the day but back then she'd been too busy to hit the control, so she'd left it open in this simulation.

"I've missed this bed," he said, dropping her into the center.

Her shift had slid up to mid-thigh. She hoped he was too aroused to notice her weight loss and she wasn't going to stop what was coming. One thing about jumpsuits, they hid nothing. His erection tented the temperature-regulating fabric, which had changed color from yellow to orange to red as his body heat climbed. And she wanted to see his cock again, feel it pushing her body to its inner limit.

He wasn't going to be noticing anything but how tightly her pussy gripped him. Tight she would be, since she hadn't been with anyone since their last time together, four days before she'd dumped him.

There had been nights where she'd cried out her frustration in this bed since, but hadn't wanted to use a sim bot to replace him. It was better to feel. The hours she had worked had numbed her senses to the point where even food hadn't tasted the same and she couldn't remember the last time she'd had a decent orgasm before the end.

Maybe that's why they'd broken up, because she'd stopped fully enjoying him and after that, what was the point? Still, it hadn't been her fault that she'd been so tired.

It was hard to remember the details now, except for him. He was clear to her.

"Get rid of that nasty jumpsuit," she said. Her lips curved as the words came out. How often she'd been full of anticipation as she said them, desperate for her first look at that hard body.

He grinned. "Anxious?"

"It's been too long," she whispered. "Days and days, since I've seen you."

He turned away for a second. She saw him blink his eyes several times, as if a stray eyelash had drifted in. "I know, Teasy. It's been too long."

He reached down and brushed her bangs from her eyes. "I never really liked the color blue until I met you."

Few did in Port City, or anywhere else humankind lived, since blue was the color of witchcraft. Witches were scary and distant here on Mars. People assumed they'd never met one. They didn't know witches walked among them, better hidden but still present. After all, humans couldn't escape their own mutations.

Chapter Four

Witch-colored hair was notoriously impossible to hide. You couldn't dye it effectively or bespell it for very long. Teasy had chosen to conceal herself in the open, in deeds rather than appearance. It must be obvious to Columbo that she hadn't used any magic back when they'd been together and she knew what most people thought. They were both interested in and repelled by the mutant phenomenon and tended to think, who in their right mind would have the witch defect without using it? The intricacies of the witch world were closely held secrets though.

"Crazy genetic abnormality," she said with a smile.

"I've always wondered about that," he said, sitting down on the edge of the bed and letting the ends of her hair slip through her fingers. "There must be magic in your family."

She turned away so she didn't have to look at his familiar face. "I took the transporter here when I was fourteen. Worked my way up from lollipop designer to owner. My family isn't important to who I am."

"I know. I just wondered how you managed to get to Port City in the first place with witch hair. Once we weren't together I had a lot of time to think about you."

She blinked, feeling hot tears well up suddenly. Weren't men supposed to run right for the next woman instead of thinking about the one who was gone? Of course if she believed that, she'd never have started her new business. Her clientele was seventy percent men, after all. "Would you have dated me if I was a witch?"

He sat up and tugged open the collar of his jumpsuit. "We never should have met. Witches aren't supposed to travel. One stray spark and they could destroy a ship."

"I dyed my hair," she said. She'd been careful not to use her then feeble magic for six months before she ran away so its taint wouldn't be on her. Her hair was dyed as

well as she could manage and she'd covered it with kerchiefs for the entire flight, clipping synthetic blond bangs under the cloth so no one would get suspicious. The ruse had thankfully worked, just long enough to land her in port. "So I could come here without problems."

"I expect you do have magic." He grinned. "You bespelled me, at least."

"You think?" Was he teasing her now?

He didn't respond, just slid down next to her on the bed.

"Suit off," she said automatically.

"Right." He sat up and pulled the fabric completely apart, then tugged it off his broad, golden shoulders.

She sighed as his molded pecs were revealed, then his muscled arms were free and finally, the taut muscles of his abdomen came into view.

"You like, sweetlink?" he asked.

"Always." How could she have pushed this magnificent creature from her bed? It was hard to imagine how exhausted she'd been ten months ago. She put her hands on his chest and felt his steady warmth. "You're a beautiful man."

"Why don't you take that shift off?" he asked.

She had a better idea for the moment. Turning to her built-in bedside table, she reached for a small dish of red grains in two sizes. When Columbo saw what she was holding, his eyes hooded.

"Cherry blow bombs?" he asked.

She smiled. "Exactly."

His fingers fumbled against the fabric of his jumpsuit. It took him two tries to hook his thumbs in the sides and push it down his hips.

"All the way," she instructed, stirring the red granules with the tip of her finger.

He toed off his boots and pushed his jumpsuit to the floor. Now, all he had on was tiny black briefs, meant to create mystery as to the dimensions of the package under the

jumpsuit. In his case, it didn't work very well. His cock strained at the fabric, which was damp where his cock had leaked fluid in its excitement.

"Let me see it," she said.

He slid onto his knees, depressing the mattress until she had to spread her fingers to steady herself. The blow bombs spilled onto the sheet as he pushed down his briefs and his thick golden cock sprung into view. His body hair had been removed like most spacers for hygiene, so his cock looked extraordinarily large as it jutted toward her.

Teasy put her hand on the bed and heard a crunching noise.

"Moonpellets," she muttered, raising her fingers for a cleaning spell.

When she saw the shock in his eyes, she lowered her hand quickly and manually brushed the grains back into the bowl. Moonpellets! She'd never cast spells around him in the past! Hopefully he didn't recognize the shape of her gesture for what it was.

"Better use them fast. They stop working when they get damp," he said.

"These are improved," she said, glad he was focused on sex. "Only activated by saliva."

He scooted toward the wall and bent his knees. She leaned forward, noting his scrotum had already pulled tightly against his body and his cock was leaking again. How long had it been for him? Surely he hadn't been celibate like she had.

She formed her hand into a loose fist and stroked him from root to tip, relearning his golden skin and the taut strength of him underneath. He inhaled as she touched him. Her fingers moved to the side of his wrist. She felt his pulse jumping and smiled.

"Miss me?"

He exhaled. "It has been four days."

She bent her head, confused. He didn't know she was real. He expected to leave after this and go about his life. This was truly the last time she'd touch him.

Her grip went to his balls, massaging him lightly while her tongue touched his spongy cock head for the first time in ten months. She inhaled his musk, the cherry

candy close by. Her gaze lifted to his as she licked along his smooth skin, relearning the flared edge of his head, the veins that ran along his engorged cock, the way it met the smooth belly skin at the root. She circled to the underside and moved back, with little kitten licks until she'd covered every inch of his turgid flesh.

His hair made little scraping sounds against the paint on the wall as he leaned his head back. She felt the warmth of his feet and legs against her body as he moved them close to her. He was enveloping her and she could do the same for him.

She bent her head and wrapped her lips around his cock head, working it until it was slick and impossibly even larger. Then she opened her mouth and took him deep, an inch at a time until almost all of him was inside. Her throat relaxed and every so often she scraped him lightly with her teeth to change the sensation.

Columbo tucked her bangs behind her ears and massaged her head from her temples to her ears, gently changing her rhythm to suit him. She heard the wet sliding sounds of her mouth, the guttural encouragements he made under his breath.

Involuntarily, she swallowed. She felt him shudder.

"You okay?" she asked, pulling her mouth off him.

His face was screwed tight with concentration, his eyes closed. "It's been a while. I have to rebuild my stamina."

She nodded slowly. Maybe there hadn't been women since he'd been taking long shipping voyages but didn't he have any pleasure bots aboard? She licked his tip, tasting his pre-cum. He wouldn't last much longer.

She touched her fingers to the red grains in her bowl, then licked her fingers clean and applied her mouth to his cock. The grains activated, began to sizzle and pop in her mouth.

"Oh, yeah," he gasped. His hips thrust his cock deep into the recesses of her mouth.

All she could do was hold on, using her tongue to coat him with the popping blow bombs. He'd told her the sensation was intense but it was pretty obvious even without his verbal description.

His hands wrapped around her head, pulling her forward on his cock until he touched the back of her throat. She felt the sizzling in her mouth, the strong cherry taste overriding his musk.

What she needed was his leg between hers. She wanted to ride him, knew he wasn't going to last long enough for her to impale her pussy on his cock. As he pulled her head against him and thrust his hips, she loosened one hand from his thigh and pushed two fingers into her cream-filled pussy and finger-fucked herself, matching his rhythm.

Now, she was desperate to make him last a little longer so she could come with him. She pulled back.

"My nipples, Columbo," she begged.

He moved his hands from her head and pulled at the fabric across her breasts until it ripped apart, then shoved his hands into her bra and tightened his fingers around her nipples until they were in a hot vise. She used her thumb against her clit. Her tongue found the bowl against his left butt cheek and she licked into the bowl, gathering more blow bombs in her mouth.

"C'mon, Teasy, suck me," Columbo ordered, pinching her nipples until they were tight screws of pleasure and pain.

With one dramatic bob of her head, she covered his cock with her mouth and thrust her fingers into herself. Columbo's fingers slid from her nipples and pulled her head close. Four more times he tugged at her until she was dizzy with the movement but then her attention was focused purely on the hot nub of nerves under her thumb and the cock head scraping the back of her throat.

"Now," he said.

She crunched the larger grains between her molars. They exploded in her mouth, gently abrading his skin and sending him into the stratosphere. He groaned with relief,

his cock streaming cum down the back of her throat, just as her own body went on overload and she shuddered with release.

She managed to move some of the activated bombs to the head of his cock and the sensation against his skin rewarded her with another flow of cum.

"Yes," he muttered. "Fuck, yes."

She pulled her fingers from her pussy and used her hand to push his knees away from her ribs. Suddenly, she could breathe again. She hadn't realized he'd been compressing her with his passionate grip.

When she took her mouth off him, she realized he was still hard. His gaze met hers.

"What do you think?"

"I'm game," she said.

"I've never wanted to have sex with a sim bot," he said. "Would you tell me if you were one?"

"What?"

"No, you're too real," he muttered.

"Sim bots have fairly light programming," she said, surprised. If he didn't like sim-sex, he probably had been celibate the past ten months.

"You're human?"

"Of course. You can tell humans and bots apart."

"Good to know. I thought the technology might be less obvious in port," he said. He grabbed her arm in a swift grip and somehow managed to flip her onto her back.

In a lightning move, he was between her legs. Her shift was around her waist and he reached under to push the tattered fabric over her breasts.

"Don't," she said, suddenly panicked. He'd know she wasn't quite right when he saw her flat stomach.

His biceps flexed in front of her eyes and she saw that the tattoo with her name was still intact. The evidence that he wasn't over her was touching.

"I want skin," he said. "I need to examine you."

She squeezed her eyes shut as he pushed the shift over her breasts then tugged it over her face. The fabric made a soft plopping noise as it dropped to the tile next to the bed. Maybe he wouldn't notice. Her belly was always flatter when she was lying down anyway.

Since Columbo had broken the game, she wondered why he still wanted to have sex with his Teasy-substitute? Was this evidence of how strong a pull she still had on him or was he simply desperate to get laid?

When he rested a palm on each breast and plumped them together so he could run his tongue along the contours, she forgot to care about his reasons.

His tongue danced along the seam he'd created, then circled each breast slowly. He'd always said she had a perfect tongueful, making her laugh. It had amused her in turn that her breasts fit perfectly into his hands and they still did now despite her weight loss, which hadn't affected that part of her body.

When his tongue reached her nipples, he licked them and blew cool air until they stood in tight little peaks. Then he really began to play, flicking them with his teeth and tongue until cream coated the insides of her thighs and her hands were tangled in the sheets to give her some kind of anchor.

"Your legs are falling apart," he teased.

"That tells you what I want," she retorted, in a hot, breathless voice.

He chuckled, then his tongue danced down her stomach and circled her outie bellybutton. "Mmmm." He poked her with his sharp nose then kissed down her abdomen until he reached her hairless pussy.

She'd started removing the hair right before she'd come here, knowing the blue sheen of her private hair would give her away as a true witch. Luckily, her lovers had always liked the style and had never questioned it.

He took a deep breath then let it out slowly. "Damn, you smell good."

She was clean but hadn't used any perfumes. "I guess after smelling nothing but other space rats for months makes me smell like a bed of roses."

"You got that right, Teasy Rose. Bend your knees for me, sweetlink."

She complied, tilting her pelvis to give him greater access. He didn't move for a moment and she held her breath in anticipation. The drawer next to her bed squeaked as he opened it and she wondered what he was pulling out.

She heard a spraying noise, then something soft began to coat the insides of her pussy lips. "What are you doing?"

"I'm giving you the chocolate pussy treatment."

"Oh goddess." She leaned her head back, knowing what she was in for. One of the items she'd developed during her time as a candy shop owner was a chocolate hardening agent that she'd meant as a cock sheath.

Columbo had enjoyed the increased oral attention she'd offered even more than she enjoyed licking chocolate off every turgid inch she'd coated with the thin decadent membrane. But then he'd found another use. When he sprayed the chocolate on her inner lips, the substance dried so quickly that it forced her lips open, leaving her entirely vulnerable to him. Then, as he thrust into her, the chocolate began to melt, offering a lubricant they rarely needed unless he was interested in one of his marathon sessions. She hoped her body was prepared for one of those mind-blowing five orgasm events.

Once the chocolate membrane was stabilized, his mouth was back to her pussy, focused on her clit to avoid the chocolate. He kissed and licked, purred and ever so gently bit until she was writhing, her feet pressed to the mattress but the rest of her arched over the bed.

After she came back to herself, she saw him grinning down at her, a thin coating of chocolate on his chin. "That was only number two, sweetlink."

"I'm out of practice," she admitted.

"Wasn't there anyone else while I was gone?"

She shook her head no. "I never wanted anyone else." It had never been a matter of her not caring for him. It was the situation that was unworkable.

He ran his finger down her cheek. "I didn't either."

Her eyes met his and she had a sudden realization that she'd slipped, all but admitting it was the real her and that it was really ten months later and not four days. Back then, it had only been four days since their last marathon sexual encounter. She well remembered sitting in her rainbath stall, crying her eyes out, her body still humming with the aftermath of five little orgasms but still realizing she couldn't go on like this.

"Columbo," she said quickly. Moonpellets! Why had she said she was out of practice?

But it was too late, the light had gone on in his eyes, replacing the glazed passion. Still, his expression wasn't one of anger. "I knew all along something wasn't right, because I never told you what she said that night, so unless you were a mind reader you really were Teasy."

"There are mind readers," she pointed out.

"Yeah but it's illegal to employ them."

As a witch, she was illegal too but that hadn't stopped her. Still, there were other methods that would have worked legally for her business. "We could go out and interview the ex to get information."

"Most of them wouldn't speak to you and the others would get in touch with their exes and you'd lose the business."

He was right about that. She'd considered all those things as she was deciding how to operate *The Ex Factor*.

"Plus, I could see you lost weight." His finger drifted from her cheek, down her neck, until his hand curled possessively around her left breast.

She was pleased he'd noticed. "I had a lot more time to exercise after you."

"I'm glad you started taking care of yourself." The corners of his eyes drooped.

"It's not your fault," she said to reassure him. "I was obsessed with work. I easily could have afforded to hire another employee, even two or three but I wanted to do everything myself. I'm smarter about my limits now."

"You couldn't possibly manage this all alone," he commented with a look around.

He was wrong of course, she could have done it all with witchcraft and sim bots but he didn't know that. Moving away from that dangerous line of thought, she said, "I'm glad you knew who I was before we made love."

He tugged gently at her nipple. "Even if I hadn't, I'd have known who you were once I smelled your arousal. You can't fake that intimate scent."

She blinked. Yes, she could fake that, as long as she had the information. There was still one huge barrier between them and it was witchcraft.

Columbo let go of her nipple and leaned back, stretching until the muscles of his chest rippled. She had missed this manly display and couldn't help lifting a hand to trace the contours of his muscled torso.

"How many employees do you have here? Do you run more than one op at a time?"

She didn't like that her business was distracting him away from her body so she answered quickly and to the point. "Two employees, two ops."

His brow creased. "How can you possibly pull that off? Don't you need more monitoring?"

"It works," she said. "Have you forgotten my chocolate pussy?"

She wrapped her lithe leg around his back and arched against him, rubbing her still tingling clit against his strong hip.

"Goddess," she gasped, as the full force of her excitement hit. She couldn't help herself. The heat of his body began to melt the chocolate membrane again and she slid

against him, so involved in the sensations of her reawakened body that she almost missed the amusement in his eyes.

He ducked his head, capturing her right nipple in his mouth while she ground herself on his taut skin. The tug of her sensitive flesh sent sparks of heat down her body. Her legs shook and she had to wrap herself around him to keep going.

He released her nipple and took her mouth while she fought for purchase on the slippery chocolate trail. She opened herself to the carnality of his open-mouthed, tongue-thrusting kiss and tightened her legs. His arms wrapped around her, giving her the support to keep her in place as her orgasm took her spiraling from her body.

She let the air wisp from her lungs and collapsed against him, limp as a thin strip of licorice. Scents of chocolate and feminine satisfaction drifted in the air. Her mind barely registered his hands at her waist, pulling her to the left and settling her above his cock.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"Mmmm," she said, still floating on an orgasmic high.

He pulled her limp body onto his cock, the chocolate membrane stretching with him, forming a temporary sheath around his cock that would never survive his heat.

Her head fell back bonelessly as he tilted back and stroked into her. She found it hard to believe Columbo was inside her again as if the last ten months never happened.

Not only that, there were cameras on them, watching their every move. The thought gave her a thrill. She imagined Marlin magnifying her view, tightening the camera on their writhing forms on the bed.

Lifting her head from his shoulder, she winked at the direction of the camera before a particularly deep thrust sent her mind swimming again. Her channel held him, letting him pull back only with difficulty, wafting the air with a chocolate haze.

"I need to pound," he gasped. "I need it as tight as only your little pucker can make it."

He ripped her body off his and flipped her to the bed facedown, then spread her ass cheeks deep and thrust hard. She bit back a scream at the pain-pleasure sensation, then thrust her buttocks back against him when he slammed into her again. Resistance was impossible.

Her clit was desperate for attention but she had to use her hands to hold on to the sheets to stay in position.

"Touch me," she moaned. "Columbo, I need you to touch me."

He responded instantly, moving his hands from her hips to her nipples, squeezing and twisting them while her body took his weight. She kept pressing back into him, the chocolate on his cock soothing her passage, her arms supporting them both.

"My clit," she begged.

One hand moved to the back of her neck, pushing her hair aside to lick, bite and kiss, while the other snaked around her waist and smoothed its way down her bare pussy to find her needy button.

She thrust forward against his hand, then back to feel his smooth cock move deeper up her ass. Back and forth, back and forth until her trembling body began to lose its rhythm.

"Hold on," he said. "I'm almost there."

"I can't wait," she cried. Her arms were shaking. She wanted to give into her orgasm and collapse but if she held on just a little longer she knew it would be even better.

Cherry and chocolate scented the air along with the odors of their bodies. She'd so missed the smell of the heavy air but it was different this time, stronger, intoxicating.

It was her body, she realized, potentized by the magical current she sent through it on a regular basis now. The air was charged, active and dangerous. She needed to ground the space before something happened.

He thrust in spectacularly deep, his hands on the bed now, rubbing chocolate darkly against her white sheets. She arched back against him, her body now one sliding, caressing erotic being.

"I missed you," Columbo gasped. "How could you have let us go?"

She felt hot tears in her eyes. "I love you," she said simply. "But I was exhausted."

But she wasn't tired now, just strung out on a wire of electricity. Again, he lifted his hand, pressing the heel of his palm against her clit, rubbing hard. He knew she could take the pressure, which would have been exquisite torture earlier.

She rocked and cried, hearing him say, "I know, I know," over and over again until her ears filled with a heavy soundlessness and the top of her head blew.

Columbo blinked, thinking his vision had gone supernova when Teasy convulsed under him, squeezing his cock in a vise. His superb control kept him from going off, though he was close.

Still, not so close that he didn't notice the halo of sparks dancing around her head like a multi-colored crown. What was that? Some kind of candy dust he hadn't seen her apply?

There was a heavy foreign scent to the sparks that his senses picked up even over the already significant odors of sex and candy in the room. Teasy made a satisfied noise, almost a purr of satisfaction.

He stopped paying attention to the sparks as her voice brought him back to the main event. Her body continued to spasm, his balls tightened against his body. No time to think, it was time to feel. He pushed his hands into her hair, caressing her scalp. His hips pressed into her muscled round ass, sliding against her skin. His cock surged even deeper into her ass.

"Yessss," he keened as he exploded.

Teasy collapsed onto the bed as if the weight of his cum had pushed her balance over the edge. He rested against her, still inside. A sizzling noise drifted past his ear, then he felt a tiny prick on his forehead. He brushed his cheek with his hand, then moved his fingers into his line of vision. Tiny lights in primary colors danced around his skin, hissing and biting gently as they winked out of existence when they came into contact with his flesh.

His brain fastened on the reality of what was happening, the sudden realization of what the lights were. Not candy, no. No one would be foolish enough to market a product so close to what this was.

Witch light. Another old legend come to life. His Teasy, his once-and-forever sweetlink, was a *witch*.

Chapter Five

Teasy had been lying to him for years. That hurt even more than the realization of the truth that she had the witch defect.

She crawled forward on the bed until she was free of him, then crouched at his side, frantically trying to brush the stinging magical sparks from his skin. The sparks hissed when they touched him before vanishing into the air.

"Sorry, sorry," she said. "Experiment gone wrong."

"Candy?" he asked, hoping she wouldn't lie.

Her eyes met him, large and bright with tears. She bit her lip, then soothed the plump expanse with her tongue.

"Don't turn me on," he said, sliding onto the sheet. The sparks were all gone now, though his eyesight had dark dots dancing across it. "Tell me the truth."

She looked down at the bed, his brave girl not so brave now. Did she think he'd turn her in? Surely she'd committed crimes to get here. Space was supposed to be free of witches. But like any other contamination, it was sure to have leaked from Earth given enough time. He loved her too well to fear her anyway. When he'd seen her again it was like his old girlfriend was back, the one with the shy twinkle in her eye. How he'd missed her.

"I don't know what to say," she said.

"Start from the beginning." He pulled the corner of her sheet up from the floor where it had fallen and wrapped it around his waist. Her eyes had drifted toward the ceiling. "What are you looking at?"

When she didn't turn back to him, he followed her gaze, then looked around the room. He swore under his breath when he realized where they were. This was an Ops

room at *The Ex Factor*, not her apartment. She probably had surveillance on the room. People were watching and even if he wouldn't turn her in that didn't mean her security staff wouldn't.

"Okay, candy," he said.

Slowly, she turned her head and looked at him.

"Sorry, sweetlink. I think you're a little rusty on the old candy development business. Or maybe that product is old since you pulled it out of storage from ten months ago."

Her lips parted as if to speak, so he leaned forward, pressing his lips to hers. As he pushed her to the mattress, she felt soft and pliant but tasted slightly salty.

"Security?" he whispered as he moved his lips to her ear. He nibbled the pearly shell because he couldn't help himself, as much as he did it to hide his word.

She nodded and turned to kiss him. "But friendly."

He opened his eyes wide, hoping she would get his meaning. "Friendly to Teasy Rose, proprietor, or friendly to Teasy Rose, hereditary witch?"

She blinked. "I should leave you here so you can clean up. We'll refund the charge, of course, since I broke character."

"Where are you going?"

"My office. I need —" she fluttered a hand.

"When will I see you again?"

"I still live in the same apartment."

He nodded. "Tonight then. In three hours?"

Her gaze met his again but it was blank. Still, she agreed. "Yes."

He watched her climb out of bed, her legs glistening with the remains of the chocolate membrane against her sand-colored skin. Her blue hair caught the ceiling lights as she walked toward the sanitary closet and he wondered how he ever could have believed her color was a dye job.

Willful ignorance, he supposed. He wouldn't have wanted to believe she was a witch, that she'd have risked lives by coming here. Travel and shipping was his life and it was people like him she'd endangered. Also, he'd never seen any sign that she'd used magic. Certainly she'd worked herself into a sorry condition with hard labor.

Maybe she only had a smattering of power. Maybe sparks were the sum of her magic. Still, all it would take in space was a few sparks to ignite a fire when the air was already so warm and oxygen-rich.

The woman he thought he loved was careful, precise. How could she have risked a ship full of people, no matter how bad her homelife was?

He'd never seen a witch close up until that day on the gangway when he'd met the broomstick witch and reawakened all his longing and desire for Teasy. Witches were a mystery, rarely seen outside their ghettos. Rightly so, he'd been led to believe. But Teasy was so normal, just like him. Maybe the Earth government was wrong about them. Maybe they had disseminated misinformation for reasons of their own. After all, Teasy hadn't destroyed the transport ship that brought her here.

The sanitary closet door slid open and she slipped out. His gaze moved down her torso from narrow shoulders to wide hips and slimmed legs. This beautiful woman was a witch. She smiled tentatively at him but he couldn't change his expression. He felt frozen in the moment. Had it been a mistake to seek her out? Could missing her all these months be the most foolish trick he'd ever played on himself?

Still, for months he'd been unable to let go of the idea that she was his woman. *His*. As if there was no choice in the matter from the very beginning. After their one-night stand he'd gone looking for her candy shop, telling himself he wanted to stock up on treats for his next shipping trip. He'd taken one look at her in the candy shop that day more than two years ago and decided she was the one, blue hair and all. His cock had admittedly hardened at the sight of her curves under that shift she wore but her smile had lightened his soul and her melodic voice had made his heart skip a beat. She'd handed him licorice and he'd handed her his heart.

When he'd seen her today in the doorway, looking more like the woman he'd fallen for than the careworn woman she'd later become, his heart had skipped a beat all over again. And he had known it was her, not a simulation. He'd known all along.

More than just the scent of her arousal, there was a soul that couldn't be mimicked. He'd tried the pleasure bots, what spacer hadn't? Their silicone pleasures couldn't begin to match a real human. Even if she was a witch defect.

"You're beautiful," he said.

She smiled weakly and pulled her shift from the floor, then turned sideways to slip it on. Her ass was so luscious in this side view that he wanted to bite into it like it was some exotic Earth fruit.

But he needed to wait to fuck her again. He had three hours, enough to go back to his temporary quarters, clean up then grab the gift he'd chosen for her. First they'd have sex, then make plans and offer explanations. The order of events seemed appropriate to him.

* * * * *

Teasy noticed her hands were shaking when she sat down in front of the security system after saying goodbye to Columbo. She ignored the overflowing emotions that the trembling signified in her haste to systematically erase all evidence of the encounter between her and Columbo, making sure to write over each involved data pack manually so the information could never be recovered. If anyone questioned her behavior, she'd say she didn't want her personal life exposed in any kind of legal action. You never knew what would be subpoenaed in the courts here. Existence on a terraformed planet was more tenuous than on humanity's home world and laws were strict. The government could have its tentacles in every aspect of life if it chose and often did.

Like the rules against witches. She squeezed her eyes tightly, wishing she'd never begun to develop her powers, wishing she'd never taken the easy road with her new

business. How could she have thought she was thinking straight after the breakup with Columbo? How could she have trusted another human being, even if it was Marlin with her own set of secrets, with the truth?

Had her lack of control destroyed her amazing reunion? Columbo had been everything she thought she wanted and didn't have time and energy for. Now she had both but couldn't even manage to make love with him once and hide evidence of her powers. Damn witch defect.

As the last data pack was wiped clean, she wondered what had happened. Her body still hummed with pleasure. She could have experienced at least a couple more orgasms if Columbo's past experience was any predictor, if she hadn't messed things up.

Her fingers drifted to her pussy as she wondered why she'd never seen the colored sparks while she masturbated. Had he awakened some new aspect of the defect in her? Making sure the door was locked, she began to finger herself lightly with one hand and played with her nipples using the other.

She let her head fall back, lazily viewing an encounter onscreen in the second ops room between a hairy businessman and a sim bot Marlin had programmed to look like his ex-wife back on Earth. As he thrust his hips between the bot's artificially plumped lips, Teasy rocked her hips against her hand until her clit was a tight little button of raw nerve and pleasure.

She gave her clit a break to increase her anticipation and licked her fingers, tasting her excitement before pressing harder against her sensitive flesh. The businessman had the bot on all fours now. He leaned forward, licking the bot from pussy to ass, his own hindquarters waving in the air as if he were a dog with a tail.

Teasy's free hand tapped the keyboard, changing the angle so she could see the businessman's engorged purple cock. When he pushed his shocking thickness into the bot, Teasy fought back a gasp and rolled her hips, rocking in time with the businessman. His thrusts moved the bot forward until its head was pressed up against

the steel bedframe. He was going to damage her property but Teasy was too involved in her own coming pleasure to intervene. His face was turning red and he grunted with every movement. Teasy was out of breath, panting, gasping, her body electrifying. She mentally replaced the businessman's face with Columbo's and the idea of watching him slam his cock into the bot sent her over the edge. Her orgasm burst. Her pussy wept moisture onto her hand as the businessman pulled out of the bot and let his seed spill on the floor.

After Teasy caught her breath and shook out the kink in her neck, she remembered the purpose of her experiment. No telltale sparks fluttered around her temples or drifted down her body.

Why had they been there when she and Columbo were together? And why, she suddenly realized, had they only appeared when she and her ex actually had sex, not just shared oral pleasure?

It was a conundrum, to be sure and one for which she had no answer, could get no answer unless she found the other witches in Port City.

With a sigh, she turned off the monitors and went to start the cleanup process for both Ops chambers.

* * * * *

Three hours later, Teasy paced behind her apartment door. Columbo was late and she didn't know if she should have dressed to expect sex or an arrest for illegally transporting herself off Earth.

It wouldn't matter to the police that she had dreamed of the stars all her life, that she'd been raised on hair-raising tales of Port City in its early, lawless days. Her great-great-uncle had been here then and had only come back to Earth to retire when the air here had begun to torture his lungs.

The government had made this a safer place to live but she itched under the rules. Once again she regretted having begun to develop her powers. She couldn't leave Port City now. It would be too dangerous. The sparks had proved that.

The bell rang and she glanced at herself in the mirror. Pale skin, large gray eyes that looked frightened. She watched herself blink, told herself to toughen up. The face in the mirror didn't belong to some *exiwork* girl but to a successful businesswoman on her second entrepreneurial enterprise. The face belonged to a woman who'd had many orgasms today already. She had it all, or close enough. There was no room for fear. Besides, she had a secret weapon, a little naughty insurance. She touched the candy necklace at her throat.

The door slid open. Her lungs began to work again when she saw only Columbo.

"Everything okay?" Columbo asked.

Teasy cleared her dry throat. "You're late."

"Sorry," he said, shifting from one leg to the other. "I had to go to my storage locker to find this."

He pulled something out of the breast pocket of his denim vest. Teasy leaned forward to see what he was holding.

"It's jewelry," he said with a crooked grin. "Completely impractical."

"Did you just buy it?" Teasy asked, accepting the plastic-sealed box and motioning him in.

"No, it's just something I bought on Earth." He shrugged as the door slid closed behind him. "I guess I was thinking of you that day."

So he hadn't forgotten her. Maybe she had really broken his heart but he'd come to find her again. "I thought of you a lot."

He nodded. "It was hard to fix us when I was gone so much."

"And I was too tired. It's mostly my fault. I hate that I threw us away." She turned into the room and perched on the edge of her open bed to tear off the plastic. The box

was well wrapped to protect it from the hazards of space travel. Eventually, using her teeth, she made a tear in the plastic while Columbo stood next to her, his hand resting on her shoulder.

She stuck her finger into the hole and stretched it until she could slide the small box free. The box opened easily. It was all ordinary enough but what was inside definitely wasn't.

"Oh, Columbo, you were thinking of me," she whispered.

In the box rested a gold bracelet. She lifted it out, dangling the chain on one finger so the heart medallion hung free. The heart told her the bracelet had been for her and no other. Ever-moving blue fire danced inside the alien material. Blue, like her hair.

"What's it made of?"

Columbo sat next to her. "I have no idea but it's pretty."

She grinned at him. "It's better than pretty. It's special."

"I'm glad you like it."

"Is it fragile?" She wanted to wear it but not if it would get broken during bed play. There would be plenty of that tonight.

"I don't think so. It survived the trip."

She held out her wrist and wiggled it under his nose. "You put it on me."

The bracelet slid on easily, her skin electrifying at his gentle touch. The material must not have been gold at all but some alloy that stretched and remolded to her shape. It felt cool on her sensitized skin.

She lifted her wrist so the heart was at eye level. "It's mesmerizing." The blue smoke drifted in tiny circles inside the heart, making her vision swim as she tried to follow it.

"Just like you," he said.

The half-uncertain tone of his voice broke her concentration. She glanced up at him. "You think I'm mesmerizing?"

"Yes, you are. Not businesswoman Teasy, not witch Teasy, just you, Teasy, always could keep my attention. When you're being you and not someone tired and in charge, or a scared refugee or whatever you were."

"Do you want to hear my sad little story?"

He raised his eyebrows, indicating he was ready to listen. When she kept her gaze on him, he knelt next to the bed, resting his elbows by her thigh.

With a sigh, she lay back on the bed, holding up her arm so that she could watch the heart smoke drift.

She spoke the ancient words adopted by her people, the witches. "'Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true. But we know, when we will, to utter true things'."

"That sounds like one hell of a lot of crap," Columbo observed.

"It's from some Greek author of long ago. He claimed the Muses were speaking to him and those were their words. The witches took them for their own."

"Why?"

"When the witch defect first arose, the witches had serious power, power so great it was hard to hide. Witches were first discovered in an Earth country that was under a harsh dictatorship and witches were killed as soon as they were uncovered. They lied and hid as much as possible but they promised never to lead false lives among themselves, to themselves."

"So they lied only in public."

"Yes and I never lied to you, Columbo." She felt it necessary to repeat herself. "I never lied to you. And I never thought I was putting anyone in danger when I left Earth and came here. You see, I'm from a witch family but I never showed much evidence of power."

"Then what were those sparks?" Columbo rubbed his cheek against his arm. She could hear tiny *scritch scritch* noises as his beard brushed his skin.

"After we broke up, I realized you were right, about some things at least and I sold the store, which was built entirely on sweat labor by the way."

"I believe that."

"But then I got bored and I was obsessing about failed relationships, so I decided to found *The Ex Factor*. I discovered I did have more magic than I'd known. It happened quite by accident one day when one of my sim bots broke and I needed another girl." She dropped her arm to her chest then lifted her hand. "I was wishing I could just, you know, go poof and Marlin, my assistant, would be who I needed and then it happened."

Columbo looked up. "You worked a spell?"

"Yes, a wishing spell. After that I found I could do things. Just a couple of different kinds of tricks but very helpful for this business. I can put a false appearance on someone, or converting an object into something else. It's all temporary but my spells have gotten stronger and last longer."

"And now your body is behaving more like a true witch's?"

"I guess that's right. I'd certainly never seen those sparks on my skin before." She sighed, thinking of last chances and final meetings. "So we're doomed, I suppose."

"What do you mean?" He touched her leg.

"I obviously can't travel again. It's too dangerous and that's what you do. So we'd always be apart. I love you, you know but the situation is impossible."

"Don't give up," Columbo said. "Not that easily."

She dropped her hand to her belly. He crawled onto the bed and she sat up so she could rest her head on his shoulder. "We can't go on forever with half a relationship."

"Maybe I'll stay," he said slowly, his tone even.

"You?" She smiled. "You're the original space hustler. I can hardly imagine you doing anything else."

"Maybe I'll take all those candy toys of yours and open a new shop. A sex toy shop." He tilted his head and grinned.

"Our uses were always off label," Teasy said, touching the candy at her throat.

"There's an enormous untouched market," he said. "Your products were great, you just didn't hire enough help. I know how to sell and I know how to export. I can make more for my efforts than you did."

"I wish you'd had this big idea before I shut down my operation."

"You broke up with me," he reminded her, following her lead to touch the jewel-toned, edible beads around her throat.

"I wish I hadn't," she admitted. "I was just so tired and I couldn't see past the end of my nose. Maybe I was going through some kind of witch power adolescence too, since it was right after that my powers started to manifest in a mature way."

"Why did you leave Earth? You haven't explained that yet."

"I sort of did. I was an outsider in my own family. I had nothing to offer their work. They were artists, using their powers to craft magnificent art. It wouldn't surprise me if this heart wasn't my brother's piece."

"Really? The buyer made it quite clear that it was from Beta-C 1901."

"You can't sell anything openly that's witch made."

"True enough," he admitted. "And I bought it at a stall, not an approved shop. So you didn't fit in."

"Not at all. I was little more than a drudge, their buffer between art and the outside world. My mother died when I was eight and I was the oldest girl. I cooked and cleaned and kept up the bills, all without a word of thanks because I was less than them."

"You aren't less than anyone," Columbo said. "Look at all you've accomplished since. You're an amazing woman."

"Thank you." She looked up, finding their lips were only inches apart and bridged the gap to touch her mouth to his.

He took her hungrily, his tongue sweeping into her mouth with a faint scent of orange and cinnamon tea. She pushed her fingers into his spiky gold hair, holding him tightly.

When they broke apart to catch their breath, she said, "I missed you so much. I wish I hadn't ended things and I'm so glad you came back. I love you, Columbo."

He caressed her cheek, a tender look in his eye that she'd never quite seen before. "Those are exactly the words I hoped to hear from you. I love you too."

She smiled, touched her throat and armed her trap. "This necklace is a present for you."

"What is it?"

She widened her eyes. "It's coated with an arousal spell."

He rubbed the hard ridge in his pants against her hip. "You think I need it?"

"I put the necklace on right before you came in."

"Hmmm," he teased. "I noticed your nipples were hard."

She touched her forehead to his. "Now what?"

"Now you prove that you're mine again."

The intense look in her lover's eyes had Teasy's hips softening and her pussy juices flowing free. "Oh, Columbo."

His lips took hers again and she closed her eyes to fully capture the sensations of his warm lips, hot tongue and even hotter breath. He whispered words she couldn't understand between moments spent plundering the depths of her mouth.

Finally, they separated long enough for her to be able to hear him clearly.

"I won't leave you again," he whispered fiercely. "You're mine."

"Mine," she echoed, pulling open the snaps of his vest.

"Mine," he agreed, pulling up the soft butter yellow fabric of her shirt.

Underneath, her breasts were unbound. She heard a breath catch in Columbo's throat when he saw her.

"You're pleased with me?" she asked.

"You're perfect," he said.

She ached for his renewed touch and tugged at his vest until he raised his arms. Then his magnificent flesh was exposed, the hard ridged abdomen, the thick wall of pectoral muscles, the enormous shoulders and arms built by years of moving cargo in and out of ship holds.

"You haven't changed a bit," she said. "You're still perfection."

"I'm a working man," he said. "And that's what I'll be until the day I die, whatever my profession."

"Me too," she said. "A working woman, witchcraft or not."

"I know, sweetlink. You never take the easy way out and I can see your craft has a cost."

"Yes," she agreed. "If we're going to be together we're marooned here in Port City."

"I can think of worse things than being marooned," he murmured.

"Really?"

"Stand up," he commanded.

She did as he had asked, feeling a smile tickle the edges of her mouth. He tugged her long skirt down her hips, exposing midnight blue panties spun from rice and sugar.

"Vanilla?" he asked.

"Mint."

A little half smile played over his lips. "That's new."

"I whipped them up less than an hour ago. By hand."

"Delicious," he said and she had a feeling he was commenting on more than the edible panties.

Warmth spread through her body. He put out his arm as if to tuck it around her buttocks to pull her close to nibbling lips. She danced out of range.

"You have to be naked first."

"You aren't."

"But I will be. C'mon, Columbo, I want all of you sky-clad, worshipping my minty crotch."

He chuckled. "Does it tingle?"

She shimmied her hips as she admitted, "It's a side effect I hadn't thought of."

"Maybe you should spin a pair of those for me," he suggested.

"Maybe you should get busy," she countered, "before my pussy melts the sugar."

"We can't have that." Columbo stood and kicked off his boots, then his black canvas pants hit the floor so fast she almost missed his fingers moving. He was commando, of course and his cock sprang proudly free as soon as it was released from its confining space.

She reached her hand out, longing to touch his hardness but this time he stepped back.

"No, me first," he said. He knelt in front of her, completely, gloriously naked.

She pushed her hands into his thick, short golden hair. One wrist trailed a lighter gold chain over his scalp, followed by the smoky blue heart. It was like the sky and sun were inverted.

"It's hard to know where to start," he said. "At the sides, so that the panties will fall away?"

He flicked the spun, string-like edges of the candy bikini bottoms with his finger. "Or right over your sweet spot?"

He blew right where her labia protected her throbbing clit. She was so excited it was probably peeking out, pink and happy.

"Any preference?" he asked, turning her around. "Maybe here?" He poked a finger experimentally in the notch between her buttocks.

Teasy forced air into her lungs. "What good would that do?"

"You never know." He pulled her back around. "Maybe I'll just focus on my favorite spot."

"Which is?"

He ducked his head in answer. His tongue began to tease deeply between her spread legs, right outside the entrance to her channel. Her juices had already softened the spun sugar and in moments it had frayed to a spider web of mint. Inside her pussy, the tingling intensified as his tongue swept into her.

"This is a good product," Teasy gasped, letting her eyes close, her head fall back.

Columbo mumbled something but it was unintelligible since he had his face buried between her thighs. His tongue speared her again. Teasy felt her knees wobbling but his hands firmly gripped the backs of her thighs, so she was more or less safely upright. For as long as she wanted to be, at least.

"Are you ready to take this somewhere else?" she whispered.

Columbo speared her channel again, then began to lick rapidly up and down the panties, opening a minty path to her clit. Now she was in for it. She reached blindly for the chair at her desk. No luck, of course. It was at least three feet away.

Her eyes opened. Her fingers were touching the molded polymer! She glanced at the chair. Dear goddess, she had moved it with her mind.

Columbo moved his hands to her waist and gently pushed her back into the chair.

"Columbo?"

"What?" He pulled her to the edge so he could spread her legs wide.

The chair molded itself to her back, supporting her leaning position. "I moved the chair with my mind."

He lifted his mouth for a second. "Coosh." Then he went back to his licking.

She could feel the upper part of the panties begin to spider web. "Isn't it kind of a big deal?"

"I only care about the results. Enjoy," he ordered, then began a series of long, steady licks until the front of the panties was entirely gone and her pussy was bathed in a frothy, buzzing sensation from the mint.

"Oh, my," she gasped. Her clit felt almost like a small penis, it was so excited and erect.

Columbo played with the happy bundle of nerves, licking up one side then down the other, then taking it entirely into his mouth.

She convulsed unexpectedly, the contact sending waves of pleasure rushing over her. Her stomach muscles clenched tight. Her fingers and toes froze.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!"

"Oh yes," Columbo said, then went back to lightly stroking her pussy, bringing her down from her explosion.

When her breathing slowed, Columbo said, "Stand up."

"Do I have to?" Her eyes met his. He nodded. "Okay."

She wobbled on the heels of her feet as she stood. In a quick movement, he hooked his leg around the base of the chair and pulled it close, then sat down. Off balance again, she toppled, straddling him.

His smile was pure male satisfaction. "I love these times when we're in sync." His teeth tickled her neck as he bit gently on her necklace.

She pushed against his shoulders with her palms. "Like I could help this!"

He waggled his eyebrows. "Do you mind?"

She shook her head emphatically. "Hell, no. I want that cock inside me."

"Excellent." He grabbed her ass cheeks in his large hands and tugged her above his cock, which was straight and ready. Her abundant juices smoothing the way, she pressed down, bringing him inside her pussy. She shuddered with the perfect feeling of him filling her and almost came again.

Columbo rubbed his cheek against hers. "Not yet, sweetlink. Not yet."

He tilted his hips, pushing deeper inside. She took his movement for her own and pressed down. They rocked hard. She found her hands moving restlessly from his shoulders to his face to his hair, then to the back of the chair to regain a little balance. But it was impossible not to feel off kilter with him inside her, the ex-boyfriend she thought she had lost forever. The love she'd thought was gone.

"I love you," she said. "I always did."

"Even light years away, I couldn't escape the memories," Columbo said. "I couldn't escape you."

She punched his shoulders at the same time as she ground down hard on his cock. "Escape me?"

"You left me," he reminded her. "How was I to know you might take me back?"

Her laugh turned into a groan as the pleasure began to spiral up again. "As long as I have the energy for this you'll be safe."

"That necklace is amazing," he said. "It must have a stamina spell as well as an arousal one. You're going to make us rich!"

"I was teasing," she said.

His movement stilled. "You were?"

"Yes! You think I'd dare use witchcraft in a consumer product?" She gyrated to get him going again but he stayed still.

"I think," he said slowly, "you're a marketing genius."

She bit his neck. "Among other things."

"Like a sex goddess." He began to move again, long strokes that rubbed her clit with agonizing slowness.

"Exactly."

"I think it took a lot to suppress what you really are," Columbo said. "It's going to be okay now, even if you are an oddity in Port City."

"Don't count on it. Life gets complicated." She had to stop speaking. It was harder and harder to breathe and the tops of her breasts were glistening with sweat. His shoulders were slick under her hands. She heard a rasp in her lungs as they fought to bring in air.

Her pulse jumped, hard. Her mind began to soar and she went over, his hard cock still pumping away until her pussy's contractions brought him along with her. As she came down, she felt the electricity coursing on top of her skin. The sparks were back.

"The witch defect," she muttered.

"You're still my Teasy Rose." He pulled her face to his for a tender kiss, ignoring the sparks. "A woman first."

As a woman, she had no questions at all. She was in the right place, with the right man. As a witch, she wasn't so sure but there were others, she was sure of that. Unlike her they hid away and maybe they were near natives here, descendents of Earth who had immigrated to Mars in the early days but the witches were present if she could only identify them.

It was time to find others like her, now that she needed answers more than ever. And she couldn't regret any of her powers or her discovery of them, because it had given her the strength to take on a powerful male like Columbo again.

She pulled away from his mouth and pushed her hands through his hair. His gaze met hers.

"Everything okay?" he asked, a sleepy look in his eyes.

"You must be exhausted," she mused. "All that work and now all this play."

One side of his mouth pulled up. "I can take it."

"And I can take you." The witches could wait for now.

She rested her cheek against his chest, watching how his hands took on the fiery sparks as he stroked down her arms. They dissipated quickly and she wondered if they

were going into his body, or merely winking out of existence. Could you infect someone with magic?

"It's forever this time," he whispered in her ear. "I'm back."

It was about time, Teasy thought, smiling as the sparks vanished from sight.

About the Author

Anh Leod is a goddess-in-disguise who hopes readers will enjoy her romantic, erotic stories as much as she enjoys creating them. Her favorite things are love and chocolate. She writes about love because, after all, it's awfully hard to write about chocolate all the time.

She also writes as Heather Hiestand for Cerridwen Press.

Anh welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by Anh Leod

Aphrodite's Necklace

Bijou's Bond

Cherokee's Playmate

Claudia's Pleasure

Lucky Number Seven

Recreating John Doe

Also see the author's stories at Cerridwen Press, written under the pen name Heather Hiestand:

Cards Never Lie

One Juror Down



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com