

# Mission: **POSSESSION**



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## **Mary Winter**

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Hugh has put his marketing talents to work for the store he owns with his friends, The Fantastic Five. He knows a hunk when he sees one, and the broken action figure has model material written all over his muscled body. Hugh repairs him and places the figure in the center of his new ad campaign. But when Hugh finishes taking the photos, the figure, magically returned to life, comes out from behind the camera and into Hugh's life.

A model before he was a soldier and then an enchanted action figure, Talon is no stranger to the camera. The handsome man behind it, however, is completely new and all his. Talon is determined to show Hugh that a picture is worth a thousand kisses. But inside his chest beats the heart of a hero, and when he interrupts a robbery, he's wounded, and Talon might lose not only his magazine-cover good looks, but Hugh.

## Prologue

Getting a good shot off around Sawyer was like working with a fidgety model -- damn exhausting. "Quit showing off, damn it," Talon growled under his breath. His brother-in-arms hung halfway out the vehicle's passenger window, whooping and hollering as if this were some kind of amusement park ride. It wasn't. They were supposed to clear the area for the General's convoy, and the Dragon's men weren't cooperating.

And to think, he'd given up a life as a promising model to do this. All his dreams about patriotism and duty gone up in smoke and punctuated with the rat-a-tat-tat of anti-aircraft gunfire. At least here, as a toy, his battles made someone happy. Or at least he figured there was a child, a kid, someone directing the scenes. Mack and Sawyer walked around as if they were still human, but Talon knew better. He kept his thoughts quiet, but he figured if this were heaven he wouldn't have a plastic non-anatomically correct dick.

In the driver's seat of the armored personnel carrier, Mack swore. He cranked the wheel, pulling the vehicle sharply to the right. Sawyer yelled some more, and Talon wished he'd just shut up. This was serious.

A spray of bullets erupted around them. Glass shattered. A shard cut across Talon's cheek, and he ducked to avoid further injury. Next to him, Brice yelped. Talon glanced over and saw a large chunk of glass had torn the sleeve of Brice's uniform and cut into his biceps. Damn, that had to sting.

Tires squealed.

Talon looked up just enough to see a Humvee screech to a halt sideways on the road. Insurgents poured out of the vehicle, and once again he fired out the window at

them. At least this time Sawyer seemed to have glued himself to the side of the armored personnel carrier, giving Talon a clear shot.

"Hang on," Mack yelled. He cranked the wheel again, this time sending the vehicle skittering across the road on two wheels. The smell of burnt rubber filled the air. The vehicle righted itself with a thud and rattle.

"Yeehaw!" Sawyer yelled, pumping his fist in the air. "Take that, you bastards."

An explosion rocked the building behind them.

Talon had just enough sense of mind to duck as a wave of heat tossed embers and concrete at them. The force from the blast lifted the back axle. The vehicle tilted onto its front wheels, then up into the air, almost as if it had been lifted by an invisible hand. He thought back to his toy theory, that some child had picked them up and now hurled them through the air.

They hung there.

Talon peered out the window. He'd taken plenty of science to get into the Air Force and knew that gravity worked one hundred percent of the time and right now it wasn't. What the hell?

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than the vehicle went end over end -- definitely not natural -- and started to fall top down. It dropped to the ground with the sickening crunch of metal on concrete. The impact jolted him, and he felt something break along his ankle. He cried out, the sound lost amid the groaning from his friends and the sound of debris hitting the vehicle.

"Report!" Mack's voice penetrated the haze of pain threatening to pull him under.

Talon opened his mouth, spitting blood from where he'd bitten his lip. He tried to form words, his tongue feeling thick and heavy from the massive amounts of dust and ashes he'd inhaled while they were falling. He spat again.

"Report!" Mack ordered again.

"Here," he croaked, but somewhere nearby a building fell, the clatter obscuring his words.

Darkness beckoned. Talon tried to fight it, wanted to remain strong. He reached for Brice, his fingers unhooking the lap belt with a click that nearly went unheard in the commotion. Brice's hand touched his, a brief moment of contact, before the other man passed out.

"Brice?" Talon touched his friend's shoulder, not wanting to shake him in case there were internal injuries.

What the hell was he thinking? They were toys! He curled his fingers around his friend's shoulder and started to shake him.

But what if he were wrong? What if he were the one with delusions and they were real men like the others thought? Except when had a real man had a molded plastic dick? And if he were just a toy, then why did his ankle hurt like a sonofabitch?

Sawyer groaned from the front seat.

"Sawyer?" Not hearing the man's shouts and war whoops was odd to say the least. "Mack?" His voice sounded rough, his tongue still thick in his mouth. When neither man replied, Talon feared he hadn't spoken at all.

The blessed darkness still called to him. It sang a siren song of relief and oblivion. He'd given into it once before, only then he'd been in a desert and trapped in the wreckage of a fighter jet. He had to stay strong.

It didn't matter. Death gave him no choice. The welcoming blackness descended, and all at once, Talon knew nothing at all.

\* \* \*

Talon stared at the rolling fog covering the floor. A quick check of his position found him sitting against the wall, one knee drawn toward his chest and his foot flat on the floor. He couldn't feel his other foot. He lifted a leg to check on it, but the fog rose with his leg, obscuring the view.

"Just believe that it's fallen asleep. That's why you don't feel it." An older man suddenly appeared in front of Talon. He wore white robes, his gray hair in a curly riot around his head. A beard and mustache completed the Moses-esque look, and Talon realized he'd been right all along.

"The Toymaker," he breathed, unable to disguise the awe in his voice. If toy lore were true, and at the moment, Talon had no reason to doubt it, then he was staring at a toy's equivalent to God.

"You're smarter than your other friends," he said with a grin.

"You've seen Mack and Sawyer? Is Brice all right?" He started to stand, but then thought better of it. Not only was he in the presence of the deity, but presumably he'd lost a foot. He'd always been rational, logical, and Sawyer had always thought he'd been too serious.

"They are in the same place as you," the Toymaker replied. Strangely enough, his cryptic words reassured Talon. He'd never been a spiritual man, figuring God had too many problems in the world to deal with an individual. Yet, seeing the Toymaker standing before him made him feel something... a sense that maybe there was some kind of plan and he had a part in it.

"What's going to happen to me?" If the Toymaker, like the God he'd known of as a human, were all-knowing, then the Toymaker probably knew that according to that human God, Talon hadn't been good. He'd simply been a man doing what he needed to do.

"I have a mission, and you're perfect for it. You're a bit more astute than your friends, so I'll let you keep all your memories. Let's just say that heroic heart of yours is going to be put to the test." The Toymaker winked.

He winked. The teasing gesture in the deity's face certainly wasn't something Talon had expected to see. His heart pounded harder in his chest. Except, he was a toy. He shouldn't have a heart, and he pressed his fingers to his sternum to test that theory.

"So what do you think? Are you *up* for it?"

When he'd been human, they'd used that term with a far more carnal meaning. The Toymaker couldn't be suggesting... oh, but from the too-knowing glint in his eye, Talon realized he *was* suggesting. There was one thing Talon missed being a plastic action figure, and that was sex. "I think I can be persuaded," he said, answering the



Toymaker's teasing with his own. For a deity, Talon really liked him and wondered if it was blasphemy to think about them going out for beers together.

"Probably so, but I'll let it slide."

Talon realized the Toymaker could read his thoughts. "Well, you're the boss. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it."

"Good!" The Toymaker waved his hand in a dramatic gesture, and the welcoming blackness descended again. "Don't worry. You'll wake for the good parts," he chuckled, and those were the last words Talon heard.

## Chapter One

Hugh tore the sheet of newsprint from the tablet he held in his lap and crumpled it. Tossing it in the general direction of the trashcan, he grumbled under his breath. Adrian, his business partner, was worried about slumping profits at their store, The Fantastic Five. Hugh wanted to create a marketing campaign that would knock customers' socks off and the money right out of their wallets.

The rough sketch in his mind failed to come together. He wanted something to combine the interests in comics and movies. The action hero figures they kept in inventory, with the exception of the ones restored by The Field Medic, a division of their store, were all commercial figures. He couldn't use those in his ad campaign. He needed someone new.

But who?

The model repair bug hadn't bit him lately. His tools were put away, only a few figures thrown in a box next to them. Frowning, he rose from his stool and rested the tablet and his pencil on the drafting table nearby. Maybe it was time to see what he had. If nothing else, he could use them in a prototype until he found the perfect figure for his ad campaign.

Just crafting a plan had him feeling better. Adrian worried too much. Mack helped him with that, and slowly, Adrian was learning to live in the moment. Dean had found a new lease on life with the arrival of Sawyer, and a part of Hugh's mind wondered if this figure wouldn't finally put a little spark into his sex life.

He laughed. Who the hell was he kidding?

Out of habit, he rubbed his index finger over the scar high on his cheek that had ended his modeling career and sent him into marketing. If he couldn't star in the ads, then he could make them. Hooking up with Adrian and Dean in college had changed

his plans a bit, and he found himself investing in their shop. His thoughts carried him to the box of action figures and he opened it.

The top one, a staid, almost businessman-like brown-haired guy, looked like someone his friend Van would like. The lawyer worked entirely too hard, and something had been bothering him lately. Hugh figured Van would tell them when he was ready. He'd always been the secretive member of the group.

Somehow, Hugh had amassed three identical blond male figures. Now that had possibilities if they would come to life for him. He watched them for a moment, thinking they might, and when they didn't he chuckled and tossed them back into the box. But not before seeing the toy in the bottom.

Aha! That one would do nicely. The plastic man was missing a foot and the scar high on his left cheek was nearly a mirror to Hugh's own. Hugh traced it with his fingers. "Were you in a car accident too, buddy?" Of course, the action figure didn't answer, and frankly, for all his friends' romantic successes, Hugh thought he'd probably have a heart attack if the toy miraculously transformed in front of his eyes. "I think you'll do."

*Good. I think you'll do, too.* The masculine voice, as rich as the dark chocolate color of the man's hair, echoed in Hugh's mind.

"You didn't just talk to me." Hugh set the figure down on his drafting table next to his sketchpad.

*Nice drawings.*

"Stop it!" Hugh said, then realized he'd just gotten flustered with something made out of plastic. Dragging his fingers through his auburn hair, he shook his head and headed for the door. "Okay, I'm done. I'm going to go the gym, maybe cook some dinner. Either way I'm not going to touch you the rest of the night." He flipped the light switch, plunging the room into darkness.

*That's a pity.*

Hugh closed the door behind him with a final click. No matter what Adrian and Dean believed, action figures weren't coming to life for all of them. To think otherwise was just plain silly.

So why did the image of the toy on his table mock him?

He went down the hall to his bedroom and put on a pair of shorts and his sneakers. Grabbing his mp3 player, he strapped it to his arm. Forget about the gym. He needed a good run.

Two hours later, exhausted from his run and full from dinner, Hugh gave into the inevitable and opened the door to his workroom. The figure still lay on the table next to his sketchpad. Hugh wheeled over a low table draped with a blue cloth that he used for product shoots and set the toy on it. "Okay, buddy. Apparently you're our shop's next ad man. Tell me who you want to be." He sat on his rolling stool, pencil in hand, and waited.

Thankfully, his marketing knack hadn't left him, and his pencil moved across the sketchpad. Hugh kept his gaze focused on the figure's brown eyes, trying to get inside his mind. Sure, he might be an inanimate object, but everything had a story. That was one thing marketing had taught Hugh. His gift was to bring the story to life.

He looked down at his sketchpad and smiled. A man, obviously this figure, stood in a classic comic book pose, his hands on his hips. He wore a mostly black spandex outfit with stripes going diagonally across his broad chest. The black and white drawing couldn't convey much color, and Hugh imagined the stripes contrasted with a neon top.

Fantastic Man.

It had the cheesy quality of an old seventies comic book that would hearken collectors back to their younger years. Hugh thought it looked retro enough to capture the younger generation's attention, too. He grinned.

Before the newfound hero could star in a campaign, he needed his foot fixed. That small job wouldn't take very long at all. Setting his notebook aside, he grabbed the

toy. A quick tug unfastened the snap of the dark green pants the toy wore and pulled them down his legs. Though he was made out of plastic, the man in Hugh's hands had awesome muscle definition. Hugh thought about his hours in the gym. He hadn't been able to get anything near this kind of perfection. It'd look good in the marketing campaign.

Hugh found his workbench under a stack of fashion magazines and sketches. "Sorry, buddy, this is going to hurt." He grabbed a large bowl and filled it from the sink in the room then heated it in the microwave. When the water was nearly boiling, he dropped the toy into it.

*You're lucky I know how to swim.*

"Too much hand action hasn't made me blind. I've gone crazy," Hugh muttered to himself. He pulled the figure out of the water, plucked the broken foot joint free with a pair of pliers. After heating the spare foot to soften the plastic, he popped it into the new joint. There, the figure was as good as new. These newer figures were so much easier to work with than the older ones that required drilling and extensive work to replace parts.

*Thanks, man. The foot feels better, so I'll forgive you the scalding water.*

"I bet." Oh boy, there he was again, talking to the toy. At least he hadn't given him a name or something... like Talon.

Now, where had that thought come from? Um, yeah, he really needed to get out, get laid, get something. Grabbing a hand towel, he wiped the last of the water away. Hugh dried his hands, then rummaged in his clothing box for the suit. He found one almost like the drawing he'd made and shimmied the toy into the spandex outfit. A pair of black boots and... perfect!

Adrian and Dean would cream their jeans when they saw his new marketing campaign.

Grinning from ear to ear, he swapped out the dark cloth on his photography table for a light blue one, even grabbed a small urban diorama he'd mocked up for one of his campaigns six months ago, and settled the figure in the center of it. Hugh checked

the scene through his camera's viewfinder. He snapped a couple of shots. Then a few more after making some minor adjustments. Soon, he hummed a tune only he heard punctuated by the click of the digital camera.

Once more, Hugh found himself lost in what he loved -- his marketing. His last relationship hadn't understood that facet of his personality. Normally when he took pictures a cloud hung over him, reminding him of that past romantic failure. All of them, really, because when push came to shove, his love of beauty and of commercial art far outstripped his ability to love anyone else. He paused, staring at the plastic man dressed in a spandex suit. From the strong line of his jaw to the slightly ruffled cut of his molded dark brown hair, the man radiated an intensity with which Hugh could identify.

He half expected the toy to come to life, walking right off the table. Hugh snapped a couple more pictures. It was foolish to think that. While he couldn't explain what had happened to Adrian and Dean, he knew better than to expect such a perfect happily ever after for himself. His work had been the only lover he'd needed.

*You're as driven as I am.*

Not driven, Hugh decided. Possessive. His work, his life -- all of it had to be within his controls. He could do that in marketing -- craft the perfect plan, then send it out to a hopefully adoring public. That was the only part he couldn't predict -- how people would react to his creations. So it was up to him to make everything as perfect as possible.

*I used to be like that.*

"Shut up!" Hugh yelled at the chocolate-sweet voice in his mind. "You're just a toy." He rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes, thinking maybe he should call it a night. He turned and set the camera on a table behind him.

When he looked at the figure again, the suit had draped off of one shoulder, revealing a fair amount of skin. How had that happened? He stomped to the table and picked up the figure by the waist. Hugh touched the shoulder and it felt... warm? What the hell! He was truly going crazy. He tugged the spandex outfit into place only to

watch it slide down the toy's arm again. Maybe the material had stretched or something.

Some pictures for the ladies might not be a bad thing. Trying not to grin at his idea, Hugh half undressed the figure. He picked up the camera, playing with angles and zooming in on the shot. Just a bare hand in front of a bare chest. The next shot just a face. Hugh was in his element. Inspired, he grabbed more clothing, adjusting the look to include jeans.

*I haven't had this much fun since my modeling days.*

Modeling. The word sparked Hugh's imagination, and he found a pair of white briefs that he'd purchased on a whim online. They were modeled after designer underwear, and he had to admit that, while the plastic man might not be anatomically correct, he filled the briefs out nicely.

Hugh took more pictures. His mind wandered to what might happen if he left the room and returned to find a man standing there instead of a toy. He bet the new arrival would be over six feet tall, broad-shouldered and lean-hipped just the way Hugh liked his men. Those strong, masculine feet promised that other appendages would be large as well, and he wouldn't mind tracing every muscled ridge of the man's abdomen with his tongue.

*Talon. My name is Talon. And you can do that any time.*

Hugh ignored the voice. It was well past midnight. He chalked it up to little sleep and his own overactive imagination. If he thought about it too much... Hugh shook his head and adjusted the shot. To be honest, he wasn't quite sure he wanted to wake up to a stranger in his house.

He set down his camera and backed away from the table. Rubbing the bridge of his nose, he stared at the scene before him. A half dressed action figure. Some made to scale props including a small comic book. A spandex outfit. If it weren't for his job drawing up marketing, he'd think he was a geek with way too much time on his hands.

Hugh headed for the door. He'd had a late night. He was going to bed. When he woke up, there'd better not be a strange man in his house. Because frankly, that was

some freaky shit Adrian and Dean had had happen to them, and he wasn't quite sure he was ready.



## Chapter Two

After eight hours of restless sleep, Hugh returned to his workroom to find everything exactly as he'd left it. Frankly, he wasn't sure whether to be relieved or royally pissed off. Adrian had pieced together a toy and gotten himself a man. Somehow Dean had found Sawyer, even though Dean hadn't been the one to actually *fix* the action figure that Sawyer had been. So why the hell didn't he get the same treatment? Sure, he wasn't quite sure he *wanted* a man that way, but he certainly wouldn't turn one down.

Grousing to himself, Hugh cleaned up his workroom. He never left it in such a mess as he had last night. Every so often he glanced over his shoulder to see the figure still sitting there. Had it moved?

He tried to remember and had to admit to himself that secretly he wanted Talon, as the name had come to him last night, to come to life and be his happily ever after. For Talon to do that meant that he would be one heck of a guy. Hugh needed someone like that. He lived for his job, plus some time with his buddies. Anything else came in a distant second in his life. So it would take a spectacular guy to compete.

Satisfied that he'd put everything away, Hugh grabbed the figure off the table. For some unknown reason, he carried it to his workbench. "Okay, buddy, let's see how good you look."

He waited a heartbeat, two, expecting some sort of smart-ass answer in his mind. The toy, or at least that imaginary mental voice, remained silent.

Hugh shook his head. He fired up his computer and connected the digital camera. Moments later, he pulled the photos into a folder on his hard drive and scanned through them. Not bad. Some weren't good either, but he thought he saw a few

he could work with. A bit of graphics work, some touch ups, and he might have a viable ad campaign.

As they usually did when he worked like this, slogans ran through his mind. Hugh turned on an Internet radio station, the snappy pop of 80s music filling his workroom. He thought he heard a mental groan and attributed it to his muse and not the action figure perched on top of his monitor.

He worked with his graphics program, bold colors crossing the screen. He blended slogans in with the pictures. Layer upon layer of advertising creativity filled his screen until... finally! He had something he thought he might be willing to put into a magazine. He printed it out before he changed his mind, tweaked it a bit, then printed the new version. He studied his work, certain that he'd be presenting his best to his co-owners and friends later today. Pushing the chair back, he stood and, with one last lingering look at the toy, hurried down the hall to the bedroom to change and get ready to open the store.

\* \* \*

By noon Hugh had convinced himself that what had happened to Adrian and Dean had been a fluke. Both his friends were in the shop today, their lovers along with them, and Hugh battled an inexplicable surge of jealousy every time he looked at them. Why should they end up with someone when he, once again, was left alone? The fact that he'd long joked he was married to his marketing, his pursuit of beauty and perfection, haunted him.

The bell above the door jingled, and Hugh looked up from the comic he was perusing to greet the customer.

The man stopped just inside the door. He wore a tight tan camouflage shirt and a pair of cargo pants tucked into black boots. Though he bore no visible weaponry, from the sharp angles of the man's face and the well-defined muscles beneath the T-shirt, Hugh had no doubts the customer could be a walking weapon. A scar ran along his cheekbone, and absently, Hugh stroked his own.

The figure had had a scar just like that.

Oh, no. Oh, hell, no!

Yet, as the man walked toward the counter, Hugh took in the newcomer's dark chocolate hair, cut military short, the slash of dark brows over deep brown eyes, and the well-proportioned body. His fingers itched to trace the man's frame to see if it was like holding the figure on his desk.

"Hello. Welcome to The Fantastic Five," he managed to croak.

"Hi." The man stopped by the counter, and up close the paper-thin shirt left little to the imagination. "I understand that you restore old action figures."

"We do." Just being around this stranger shattered his equilibrium. In his mind, he imagined taking sensual pictures of this flesh and blood man, and knew the end results would be extraordinary.

"Good." The stranger smiled, revealing a dimple in his right cheek that had Hugh's cock at full mast. Although stern, his countenance radiated a stark sensuality. With a hint of laughter dancing in his eyes, the man was knock-your-socks-and-the-rest-of-your-clothes-off gorgeous. He leaned in close, and Hugh focused on the man's full, sensuous lips. "So, can you bring them to life, too?"

"What?" Hugh jerked upright and backed three paces away from the counter. "You're joking. Who are you?" The more Hugh looked at the stranger, the more he knew the answer. "Talon?"

Talon's smile grew even wider. "Thought I was getting through to you." He reached across the counter and grabbed Hugh's right hand. Turning it over to reveal the palm, Talon stroked the length of each finger. "You know, I remember your hands touching me, arranging me into poses, and all I could think about was that I wanted to be human for you. Do you know how long I've had a plastic dick?"

Hugh coughed in a futile attempt to cover his laughter. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Adrian stepping from the comics room. Hugh yanked his hand away. "So you're looking for the new Captain Future doll. Let me see if we have some in the back. If you'll come with me."

"Gladly," Talon said, and Hugh had a sinking feeling that the man had focused on the word "come."

Hugh stepped out from behind the counter, trying to act nonchalant as he led Talon back toward the storeroom and the office. On the desk shared by the shop's four partners were the pictures he'd taken last night. Though Dean had only given them a passing glance, he'd approved. Hugh wondered what Talon would think of the photographs. Well, there was only one way to find out.

"I'm not looking for the Captain Future doll," Talon said as soon as they entered the short hallway leading to the storeroom and the office. He grabbed Hugh's arm and quickly spun them both so he pinned Hugh against the wall.

Hugh swallowed hard. Being overpowered was one of his biggest fantasies and Talon, in his military outfit, looked perfect for the job. "What are you going to do?" he asked, his voice little more than a gravelly growl.

"Whatever I want to." Talon's smug assurance made Hugh's cock hard. "After all, it's been years since I've had a good fuck."

"Who said anything about --"

Talon slanted his mouth across Hugh's, swallowing his protests in a carnal mating of lips and tongue. No hesitation showed in the taut line of his body or the way he plunged his tongue into Hugh's mouth.

Hugh lifted his hands, half intending to shove Talon away. Self-confidence was sexy, but the man was pouring it on a bit thick. But then he thrust his hips against Hugh. As soon as the zippers on their pants touched, Hugh knew the man had what probably would be the biggest rod he'd ever experienced. There was no way in hell he was shoving Talon away now.

Talon exuded the "fuck me, I'm yours" male model mentality that made Hugh so horny. He'd gone into marketing to simply be around it. Beauty, perfection, the idea that the body could be a tool, and, oh, how it could be used. He curled the fingers of his left hand over the back of Talon's neck and pulled their lips even closer. His right hand found the curve of Talon's deliciously tight ass through the cargo pants and squeezed.

Hugh swallowed Talon's moan.

The shop. Adrian. The fact that they could be walked in on at any moment faded from Hugh's mind. He'd spent the last night fantasizing about the model, half hoping he'd come to life. Now that he had, Hugh was determined to enjoy every moment of it. He lifted his hand enough to tug Talon's shirt free and splay his fingers on the hot skin of the man's back.

Hugh tore his lips away and swallowed a harsh breath. He shoved Talon's shirt up around his armpits, then leaned forward to lick one dusky nipple. The taste of freshly washed male skin filled his mouth, reminding him of the decadence of nights spent licking his partner from head to toe and mutual blowjobs. He kissed and licked each of Talon's nipples in turn.

Hugh dropped to his knees. Deftly unfastening Talon's khaki pants, he shoved them down over his lean hips. Talon's cock rose from a nest of dark brown curls, full and uncut, eager for Hugh's attention. Grinning, Hugh stroked the man from base to tip, then back again.

Above him, Talon groaned.

Hugh just had to have a taste. Normally he wasn't a fan of hasty, hidden blowjobs. However, after having Talon appear in his shop, a flesh and blood man, why the hell not? Everything else about the situation was fantastic. The sex might as well be, too.

Leaning forward, he sucked the end of Talon's cock. The thick shaft filled his mouth, stretching his cheeks as Hugh took more of it into his mouth. His own dick throbbed thinking about having such a big shaft delving into his body, and Hugh reached between Talon's legs to fondle his balls.

"Oh, God," Talon groaned. "So good."

Hugh smiled around Talon's dick. He'd been told he gave head like a god. Using his tongue, he played with the sensitive place just behind the crown.

Talon's fingers convulsed on the back of Hugh's head. Shudders ran the length of his body. His hips thrust into Hugh's mouth, and, eagerly, Hugh took him deeper.

He felt Talon slip past the muscles at the base of his throat. Walking his fingers along Talon's perineum, he found the sensitive spot and pushed.

Talon moaned. "It's been so long." His knees locked, and with a last jerk of his hips, he spilled wave after wave of cum into Hugh's throat.

Hugh swallowed it, unconcerned about the lack of protection. It wasn't like toys could get STDs, after all. He grinned and finished cleaning Talon's half-hard cock.

"Sorry." Talon swallowed hard. "It's been a long time."

"How long, exactly?" Hugh sat back on his heels and adjusted his erection in his jeans. Licking his lips, he tasted Talon's essence. He wondered if he could ask for a little reciprocal loving.

"What year is it?" Talon pulled up his pants.

Hugh watched him fasten them, aware that Talon's long, tapered fingers could probably play his body like a violin. "2008."

Talon's eyes widened. "It's been over a decade. The last time I had sex was the night before I shipped out to Desert Storm."

"Desert Storm?" Hugh made some mental calculations. "Shit, that was back in 1990. You've been a toy for eighteen years?" He backed away, the sudden need for truth overriding his initial impulse to take Talon home and fuck him until they both couldn't walk. He drew a shaky breath. He had imagined, figured that Sawyer and Mack had had lives before becoming toys. They'd dropped veiled hints every now and then. But to actually stand in front of a real live human-turned-toy-turned-human... shit! This was getting way too deep for him.

"Yeah, that sounds about right. You're taking this pretty well," Talon said.

Hugh shrugged. "Let's just say it's not a surprise." He went to the door and closed his fingers around the knob. "We better get into the other storeroom in case Adrian comes looking for us."

Talon nodded. "Look, I didn't expect --"

"Don't worry about it."

Talon's hand clamped down on Hugh's arm hard. "Thank you. I won't deny that I want you, and I'd like to return the favor. When your hands were positioning me last night, I knew..." He drew a shuddering breath. "I'd like to model for you. For real this time."

Hugh stepped back, aware of Talon's fingers curled around his forearm. "I think you could. You're handsome enough, and that scar gives you a bad boy look that the women would go for."

"It's not the women I'm worried about. Scar? Where?"

"On your cheek. You don't know?"

Talon released Hugh to bring his fingers to his cheekbone. Gingerly, he traced the skin there, frowning when he reached the end of the scar. "Must be from the car accident," he muttered.

"Car accident?"

Talon nodded. "My team, we were ambushed. Mack was driving, and Sawyer riding shotgun as always. Brice and I were in the backseat, and when the window broke glass cut my cheek." He stuck out his leg. "I also lost my foot, but I see you fixed that."

Hugh stared at the black jungle boots on the man's feet. "Guess I did." Standing here, he had a hard time believing that Talon had once been a toy. "Did you say Mack and Sawyer?" Could it be that all four friends would come back for him and his friends? And that left Brice for Van. Hugh grinned.

"Yeah, Mack was our leader. Sawyer was a big guy, had these crazy tattoos on his face."

Hugh laughed and grabbed Talon's arm. "Come on. There's a couple of guys I think you ought to meet." He yanked Talon through the doorway, not bothering to close it behind him. Shoving Talon into the storeroom, he whispered, "Wait here." Then scurried back into the shop.

Mack and Sawyer were in the back room working on restoring a couple of action figures. Walking through the shop, Hugh nodded at Adrian who had taken his place

behind the cash register. His friend gave him a bemused grin. Dean wasn't the only one known for catching a quickie when he could. Hugh stepped into the back room.

"Hey, guys, can I get your help for a moment?"

Mack set down the figure and wiped his hands on a rag. "Sure. You need both of us?"

Sawyer stopped working and swiveled on his chair.

"Yeah. There's a big box in the storeroom. Someone might have to hold the ladder."

"But you don't have a ladd -- oh!" Mack chuckled, and Hugh knew the man was probably thinking that Hugh was going to run interference for a back room liaison between Mack and Adrian. Sawyer was just cover. Well, Hugh hoped he wouldn't be too disappointed. He led them both back past the front counter, where once again, Adrian gave them a strange look, but said nothing as they passed.

Hugh led them into the storeroom. Talon wasn't standing right inside where he'd been, and for a moment Hugh feared the man had left. "There's someone here I think you should meet." He pitched his voice loud enough to carry beyond the large shelf full of inventory. Rustling answered him, and a few moments later, Talon appeared.

Hugh felt like Santa Claus as he watched Talon's eyes widen. "Mack? Sawyer?" His voice grew rough, and he crossed the space between them, giving both men a huge bear hug.

For long moments there was nothing but tight embraces and lots of backslapping, but then Talon stepped back and looked around. "So Brice isn't here?"

Mack shook his head. "He must be the last one. I'm not sure if you've met Van yet. He's the fourth partner in the shop. Guess they're going to be the next to hook up. So how long have you been back?"

"This is my first day."

"Oh, so I should leave you two alone." Mack winked at Hugh. "Go easy on him. It's probably been a few years since he's had sex."



"I know," Hugh replied.

Mack clapped him on the shoulder. "Well, you don't have to go easy on Pretty Boy. He can take it, I'm sure." Sawyer joined in Mack's laughter, and Hugh had to wonder what kind of relationship these men, who had only known each other as toys, had.

"Look, do you guys want to go out and get some lunch or something? I'm sure the others wouldn't mind." Here he stood, wanting to get to know Talon better, and instead, he was shoving him out the door with his friends.

"Let's go to the Mexican restaurant down the street," Sawyer offered. "I bet Talon would like a margarita."

"I bet Talon would like to get laid," Mack said drolly. "But food is all we're giving him."

"Just come back before the shop closes. I would like to take him home tonight," Hugh countered.

"Only tonight?" Laughing, Mack left the room with Sawyer and Talon in tow.

Hugh met Adrian before he'd left. "Who was that? Another toy come to life?" Adrian asked, looking around Hugh at his lover.

"Yep. Freaky, huh?" Hugh watched the men leave, the bell above the door jingling merrily. Somehow, though he had known what had happened with Adrian and Dean, the thought of an action figure coming to life for *him* just seemed way too surreal. He shook his head.

"You act like you're not happy about it. Come on, weren't you the one telling me a few months ago how much you needed to get laid?" Adrian steered them back to the front and once again took up his post behind the cash register.

"Well, yeah, but..."

"There's no 'buts' about it. Well, there is, but that wasn't the kind you meant." Adrian laughed at his own joke.

Words tumbled in his mind, not quite ready to be vocalized. In the past he'd gone after beauty, passion, those things that made the marketing campaigns he

designed sizzle. He liked his men that way, too -- flashy, straight-forward. And while Talon was sexy, he had layers and a personality. Of course, saying that made it sound like Hugh demeaned the male models with which he worked. Fuck! Why did things have to be so difficult?

"Earth to Hugh. Paging Hugh." Adrian's voice cut into Hugh's thoughts.

"Sorry. Got lost for a moment."

"No doubt picturing someone naked." Adrian chuckled.

Yeah... no! Damn it! Getting a taste of Talon had only whetted his appetite for more. Even now, his dick throbbed thinking about Talon's full lips wrapping around his shaft. "You guys know how I hate being set up." That wasn't quite the reason for his disquiet, but it was good enough.

"No one set you up. Look, I'm sure Mack and Sawyer are thrilled that they have their buddy back. And yeah, I guess that means that Van is next. Except no one asked for this. No one sat down with a big chart and decided which man got which toy." The bell above the door rang, interrupting Adrian.

In the conversation's lull, Hugh had to admit his friend was right. All he'd been doing was trying to create a new advertising campaign... wait, he hadn't shown the pictures to Adrian. "Hey, I totally forgot. Let me show you what I was working on for the shop last night." Before Adrian could reply, Hugh dashed back to the office and grabbed the pictures he'd printed off. He returned, and while the customer browsed their selection of gaming books, handed the pictures to Adrian. "Take a look at those."

Adrian did, flipping through the pictures. No doubt he recognized Talon, though he said nothing. "These are nice. What were you thinking of?"

Happy to be back on more comfortable conversational ground, Hugh detailed his plans, starting with some posters and a print campaign in local papers, moving out into some science fiction magazines to drive their web business. He even talked about some viral marketing from small videos on YouTube.

The guys returned, their laughter mingling with the bells above the door.

Adrian glanced at his watch. "That was quick. You guys made it back in less than an hour." He flashed a grin at the men before turning his attention back to Hugh. "Just keep me posted about all of that. You know most of it went over my head. Why don't you take the rest of the afternoon off? You and Talon can head on home."

Talon stopped across from the counter, his buddies still good-naturedly teasing him. "If you don't have work to do," he said to Hugh.

"Nothing that can't wait. Let's go." Talking with Adrian might not have sorted out his thoughts, but he knew that going home with Talon meant one thing -- an afternoon of sex.

## Chapter Three

Meeting up with Mack and Sawyer had given Talon a high better than any he'd ever felt before. Even being on some top class modeling jobs -- he'd once modeled underwear for Calvin Klein -- had never given him the on top of the world feeling he experienced now. He walked out of the shop with Hugh and resisted the urge to tip his head back and feel the sun on his face. Damn, life was good!

"Thanks," he said as Hugh led them to his car.

Hugh stopped. "For introducing you to your friends? You're welcome."

"Yeah. Seeing them again was like nothing else. We're all human." He held out his arms and stared at them, spreading his big-fingered hands wide. "I had no idea." He felt like a kid given tickets to Disneyland. Just being in this body, able to smell the air tinged with the exhaust from cars, listen to the roars of their motors, the hum of tires against the pavement... He was alive!

Talon paused by the front fender. He turned to face Hugh. "So if you suddenly found yourself alive after years as a toy, what would you do?" The blowjob he'd received in the storeroom had taken the edge off. Crossing his arms over his chest, Talon stared at Hugh. After a lifetime in the military, he was used to making the first move. Letting someone else do it first added an edge.

Hugh paused. His gaze slid along the length of Talon's body, pausing at the fly of his pants, before dropping down to his boots and back to his face. "Eat and fuck?" Hugh arched an eyebrow.

Talon laughed. "I'd say your place or mine." He shrugged his shoulders.

"My place. Let's go."

Talon's cock hardened just thinking about getting Hugh back to his house and continuing what they started in the storeroom. They got into Hugh's car, where he

flipped open his cell phone and ordered pizza. A few moments after they pulled into the driveway, the pizza arrived, and Hugh paid.

Once inside, they dove into the pizza. Nearly half an hour later the boxes sat empty between them, and four empty beer bottles marked the four corners of the table. Talon leaned back in his chair and belched. "Yeah, that was good."

Hugh rose to his feet. "I know what's better." He unbuttoned his shirt and dropped it to the ground. His hands dropped to the waistband of his jeans. He toed off shoes and then let his jeans fall to the ground. Stepping out of his briefs and removing his socks, he padded naked toward the bedroom.

Talon stared at Hugh's muscled ass. The man must spend hours in the gym, because his body was sculpted to perfection. Standing, he half-ran down the hall, following Hugh and ending up in his bedroom. A huge, king-sized bed dominated the room. The dark wood headboard matched two large dressers and the nightstands flanking the bed. A rich burgundy comforter covered the mattress, and matching curtains hung from the window. This looked like a sensual, masculine room.

Talon loved it immediately.

He bent and unlaced his boots, carefully removing them and setting them to the side. It took him only a moment to strip off his clothes. Naked, he walked up behind Hugh. They were the same height, and his cock nestled against Hugh's ass.

Talon nipped Hugh's ear. "Feed or fuck, huh? Looks like we're fucking." He wrapped his arm around Hugh and flattened a palm on his chest.

Hugh grabbed Talon's hand and pulled it down until he wrapped Talon's fingers around his cock. "We're fucking," he confirmed.

Instant lust shot through Talon at Hugh's words. He squeezed Hugh's shaft, his other hand flattening across Hugh's sternum. His lips found the side of Hugh's neck, and he spent his time nibbling a trail from earlobe to shoulder and back again. All the while, his fingers worked a delicious rhythm along the length of Hugh's cock.

Mmm, he would trade all the modeling contracts in the world for this. Being human again, feeling the slide of flesh against flesh, knowing that he could thrust inside his lover's body. Yeah, life was damn good at this moment.

Hugh reached behind him to grab Talon's ass. His fingers worked impatiently, kneading the muscled globes. "The bed," he urged.

Talon smiled against Hugh's muscled shoulder. "You impatient? It's been years for me. Surely you can wait." He reached beneath Hugh's cock to fondle his balls and the sensitive skin behind. "Years." He punctuated his words with a flick of his fingers.

Hugh's strangled groan was music to Talon's ears.

Slowly, he walked Hugh forward to the bed. Talon gave a final squeeze, then stepped back. A gentle shove sent Hugh tumbling face-first to the bed. "Roll over," Talon ordered, his voice thick with passion.

Hugh did, lacing his fingers and resting them behind his head. Talon stood between Hugh's parted knees and looked down at him, this mouth-watering specimen of a man. From exquisite muscling along his torso to the arrow of hair leading to his cock, which rose full and hard, he looked like a gay man's wet dream. Hell, probably a straight woman's too, and Talon battled giddy laughter because right now, Hugh was his. All his.

Talon rested one knee on the mattress, feeling it dip beneath his weight. He ignored the pounding in his shaft, the fierce need to fuck and come and find release after all those years of enforced celibacy. Reaching down, he couldn't resist stroking his own rod, thinking that a plastic dick had nothing on the real thing. Oh yeah, it felt good to be a *man* again.

"I'm going to make you beg. And you're going to shout my name when you come." Talon leaned forward to trace a single finger behind Hugh's balls. "I'm going to suck you deep. You want that?"

Hugh nodded, and his cock twitched.

Carefully, each move slow and deliberate, Talon crawled onto the bed. His legs hung off the end, but that didn't matter right now. Propping his head up on his hand,

he caressed patterns around Hugh's nipples, down over his abs, then back again. He listened to the cadence of Hugh's breathing change, the hitches when Talon got to a sensitive spot. And then, he leaned forward and did the same thing with his mouth.

Talon took his time savoring Hugh's taste and textures. From the dimpled skin around his pert, male nipples, to the smooth hairless flesh over rippled abs, Hugh's body was a contrast in textures. The wiry brown hair starting at Hugh's navel and working downward hinted at what his chest would look like if he didn't keep it smooth. The musky smell of his body was mingled with the salty taste of man, and Talon loved it. If he looked deep enough he probably loved Hugh.

He didn't dwell on that thought, not when Hugh fisted his hand in Talon's hair and pushed his head lower. Grinning, Talon licked pre-cum from the tip of Hugh's cock, eliciting a strangled moan from the man. Slowly, just as Hugh had done in the storeroom, Talon wrapped his lips around the man's shaft, then lowered his head until he'd taken everything.

His lips nestled against the base of Hugh's cock, the coarse hair tickling his nose. Swallowing, he worked his throat muscles against Hugh's shaft. Just as slowly as he had before, he pulled away until the head rested against his lips. Mmm... perfection. He had always loved giving blowjobs, feeling the heavy weight on his lips. Discovering each man's cock, the veins along the shaft, the little nuances of flesh and the way the crown flared, had always seemed like a grand adventure to Talon. And he turned his attention to learning Hugh as if he were memorizing a map for a mission.

Oh, yeah. Hugh bucked his hips, trying to go deeper, and, relaxing his throat muscles, Talon took him there. His fingers played gently with Hugh's balls, fondling the sacs before reaching up to feather his fingers across Hugh's nipples. Somehow, he'd moved from his side to in between Hugh's knees, the position allowing him to stretch across Hugh's body. Fingers tangled in his hair, curled on his shoulder, cupped the back of his head, while Hugh fucked his mouth.

Hugh's uninhibited response brought Talon to a fever pitch. He willed his cock to behave, focusing his attention on Hugh. *Come for me.* Talon sent the mental

command, redoubling his efforts. He focused his touch on the areas that he knew Hugh liked.

"Talon!" Hugh rasped.

Talon tongued the sensitive knot of nerves just behind the crown of Hugh's penis. Another stroke of his fingers against Hugh's perineum, and suddenly Hugh pumped his hips, the head of his cock sliding deeper into Talon's throat. A long, shuddering growl erupted from Hugh's chest as his cock twitched, streams of cum spilling down Talon's throat.

Talon swallowed, using his tongue to lick the salty essence from Hugh's skin. His own balls felt full to bursting, the need to spill himself inside Hugh's body nearly overwhelming. Hugh's orgasm seemed to last forever, his cock only going semi-hard in Talon's mouth. Satiating Hugh might take all afternoon. Talon slid his lips free and grinned. "Roll over," he ordered as he backed from the bed.

Hugh turned onto his stomach, shifting so that he lay lengthwise on the bed, his arms braced just beneath the pillows. Looking over his shoulder, he watched Talon standing there, stroking his cock, fingers tightening around the base. Talon looked like a man about ready to explode.

"Got lube?"

Hugh reached into his nightstand and tossed a small bottle and a couple of condoms toward his feet. Picking them up, Talon effortlessly sheathed himself -- *some things you never forget*, he mused -- and coated his rod with slippery liquid. Then he moved, bracing himself at Hugh's entrance.

Hugh lifted his ass, moaning as the broad head of Talon's cock pressed against his sphincter. It slipped past the ring of muscles, and both men groaned. So hot, so tight. He'd nearly forgotten what it felt like to have the muscles clamping around his rod, feeling them pulse as he plunged his way deeper. The lube made penetration easy, and though he tried to hold back, soon Talon was buried balls-deep inside Hugh.

He rested there for a moment, his weight braced on his arms, his legs tangled alongside Hugh's. Dipping his head, he kissed between Hugh's shoulder blades, tasting



the sweat on his skin. The smell of sex surrounded them, the heavy breathing, the low noises. He'd missed it. God damn, he'd missed it.

A sense of awe moved through him that somehow, he'd been given this chance, and slowly, so slowly that Hugh lifted his ass, not wanting it to end, Talon pulled out again until just his head pressed against Hugh's opening. This time, Talon couldn't wait. He plunged forward, the satisfying smack of flesh against flesh filling the room.

Talon tipped his head back and resisted the urge to shout in triumph. Sex with Hugh surpassed everything he'd ever wanted. He settled into a steady rhythm, trying so hard to make this last. Muscles tightened around his cock. The pillow muffled Hugh's moans of pleasure.

*Hell, yeah!* Release boiled up from deep inside him. His balls tightened, an all-too-familiar pressure starting just behind them. Nostrils flaring, he tensed his jaw. One thrust. Two. He tried to hold back and failed. As their bodies came together, his cock twitched. For a moment he felt as if he grew bigger, longer. Hugh's muffled shout announced his release, and beneath Talon his body jerked and twitched.

"Yes!" Talon roared as he came. Seed rushed from the end of his cock, so hard it felt like he was going to black out. His vision went dark around the edges, and he slumped onto Hugh, who grunted in response.

Neither man said anything. Panting breaths filled the room, the sweaty sex smell hovering in the air like ambrosia.

"So was this worth becoming human for?" Hugh asked when their breathing had returned somewhat to normal.

"Yeah," Talon replied. "Hell, yeah."

## Chapter Four

Night had fallen, bringing with it a delivery of Chinese food, and now, bare-chested, Talon made the most ridiculous pose he could think of for the camera. "What about this?" He flexed his biceps and tried a brooding-sexy look that only earned him guffaws from Hugh.

"Not quite the look I was going for." Hugh raised the camera. "Unbutton your pants."

Talon obeyed, his cock hardening at the thought of what was about to happen. Sure, they'd spent most of the afternoon in bed having sex in nearly every conceivable way imaginable. Famished, they'd eventually made their way to the living room and the delivered food. Hugh mentioned his work, and that's why he stood here, unbuttoning his pants just enough for his shaft to peek through the parted fabric. "Like this?" He adjusted himself to give Hugh a better view.

Below the camera, Hugh showed he liked the view -- a lot. His throat worked, and he changed angles. "Maybe if I use the zoom lens?"

Talon eased a bit more flesh into view. He flattened his palms on his ass and leaned back with a "want this?" look in his eyes. He'd used this pose on an underwear campaign that had been widely circulated before he'd been deployed.

"Yeah, that's good." The camera clicked.

Talon twisted his body, changing poses with each snap. How easy it was to get back into this, to imagine the camera as a lover, and wanting to show his best for it. His breathing grew shallow. This time it wasn't the camera he showed off for, but the man behind. The fact that the images got captured on film was a bonus.

Talon bent and started to slide his pants over his hips.

"Show me your ass." Hugh's gravelly command came like a verbal caress.

Ever the obliging model, Talon turned. He spread his legs, knowing as he bent over he revealed his balls to Hugh. Through the course of several more photographs, Talon dropped his pants and several shots later had him standing with them tangled around his ankles. He turned to give Hugh a three-quarter profile, his hand wrapped around his dick.

“Good. Stroke yourself.”

Closing his eyes, Talon let his head tip back. His lips parted, his fingers moving up and down his shaft. In his mind, Hugh knelt at his feet, warm breath teasing his hair and skin. Big hands would cup his thighs, and Talon knew the anticipation of waiting for the first touch of Hugh’s lips against his shaft.

“Damn, that’s hot.” Hugh’s voice played right into his fantasy.

Rising onto his knees, Hugh would brush the softest of kisses against the head of his cock, using one of those oh-so-talented hands to cup his shaft and bring it to his lips. A lick, a suck, and Talon shuddered thinking about the warm wetness awaiting him. Thinking about the pull of Hugh’s lips caused a groan to rumble through Talon’s chest, and he knew when Hugh finally took him into his mouth, he’d come.

Talon’s hips bucked. Warm drops of pre-cum slid over the ends of his fingers. If he didn’t stop soon, he’d end up jacking off in front of Hugh and his camera. The thought of having that caught on film made his balls tighten. In all his years of modeling, he’d only done one or two porn films, and both times, it was knowing that his actions would be caught on film for anyone to watch that made his orgasms all the sweeter. Sometimes he was a kinky bastard.

“Wait.” Hugh’s rough command stilled Talon’s hand. He heard the clink of the camera being set aside, the slow steps that brought Hugh to him. Then, just like in his fantasy, Hugh knelt by his feet. He brought his hands to Talon’s cock, stroking, touching, and the gentle touches nearly drove Talon mad.

“You like giving head, don’t you?” He shuddered. Finding a giving partner, one who wanted to worship him like a Greek statue, took his breath away.

“Only to you.” Hugh flicked his thumb across the end of Talon’s rod.

Talon sucked in his breath, his balls drawn tight. Another touch, the caress of Hugh's breath, and he knew he was going to come. "Please," he whispered, and in the distant part of his mind he realized he'd begged. He'd never had to beg for sex before.

"What do you want?" With each word Hugh lowered his lips until they hovered a millimeter away from heaven.

"Suck my dick. Please," he groaned. He bent forward, curling his fingers against the back of Hugh's head. Watching the man dip his head, the contrast of Hugh's light brown hair with his dark, had to be the most erotic thing he'd ever seen. Hugh opened his mouth, wrapping those delectable lips around his prick, and sucked it deep.

Talon bucked his hips.

Hugh grabbed his ass, half-stilling his movements, half steadying himself. Eyes closed, lashes fanned across his cheeks, Hugh looked like a determined man. His lips and tongue moved along the length of Talon's cock.

He hoped, he prayed, that Mack and Sawyer had experienced something similar when they'd returned, because every man deserved to get a blowjob like this. It was pure bliss. Hugh knew all of Talon's sensitive spots, caressing the skin behind his balls, playing with his sacs and tonguing that exact nerve beneath the crown that would send him over the edge. Swallowing hard, he willed himself not to come.

Hugh released his cock. Sitting back on his heels, he reached for the camera and stood. "I think I want to get some pictures of you sucking my dick." Hugh arranged the camera on the table, setting the timer to take several shots in a row. He took a step away from the table, trying to position them in the best light. Cupping his shaft, he pointed it at Talon. "I think you want this."

"Yeah." Talon dropped to his knees and crawled forward. He reached for Hugh, stroking his fingers along the underside of Hugh's shaft.

Hugh tensed his jaw and cupped the back of Talon's head, keeping him from pulling back. "Suck it!"

Obediently, Talon bent forward, battling the groan rising in his chest. He paused right in front of Hugh's dick, teasing the tip with his breath. He stuck out his tongue and made a show of licking a bead of pre-cum from the tip.

The camera whirled.

Talon moaned, drawing the salty drop into his mouth and licking his lips. He curled his fingers around Hugh's balls, then wrapped his lips around the tip like he would a Popsicle. He hollowed his cheeks and took Hugh deep.

The camera clicked.

Each frame intensified Hugh's arousal. He loved knowing that he directed the shot and what the final product would be. Thrusting his hips at Talon, he curled his fingers into the man's silky black hair. Damn, this would make a good shot. He almost wished he'd brought out his video camera, then Talon relaxed his throat, and Hugh slid his cock deeper.

The camera shot another frame, and Hugh barely noticed. He focused on driving his shaft into Talon's mouth, the man's fingers working his balls. Giving, or receiving, a blowjob had never felt this good.

Talon walked his fingers over Hugh's perineum, the gentle pressure staving off Hugh's impending orgasm. Looking down, watching Talon's head bob back and forth, stole Hugh's breath away. For all his jokes about an action figure coming to life for him, he couldn't imagine a more considerate, thorough lover than Talon. He swallowed back the tide of emotion. Right now, he could really love Talon.

Talon leaned back on his heels, pulling his lips away from Hugh's shaft. "I haven't heard the camera in a bit. Are you wanting to get more shots?"

Hugh's dick twitched. Damn, when it came to posing, Talon was a regular camera-whore. "I don't think we need the camera anymore." He tightened his fingers in Talon's hair, drawing his mouth back to his shaft.

Talon smiled. "Good." He ducked away, Hugh's fingers pulling in Talon's hair as he stepped back. Talon grabbed Hugh's shoulders. He spun Hugh, bending him over and flattening his hands on the table. Tracing his fingers along Hugh's spine, Talon

made appreciative noises. "I think I know what you need." He traced the cleft of Hugh's ass.

Hugh shivered. Damn, he'd never had a lover who made him as horny as Talon had. Looking over his shoulder, he tossed Talon an easy grin. "You think?"

"Yeah, I do." He eased closer, nestling his cock between Hugh's buttocks.

"Then show me!" Hugh ordered. He knew it would be rough, the saliva probably close to drying on Talon's cock, but right now he wanted the pain as much as the pleasure.

Talon shifted behind him, positioning the head of his cock at Hugh's entrance. Reaching around his hip, he stroked Hugh's shaft, and Hugh leaned into the touch. Talon's head breached Hugh, and a long shudder raced through him. Slowly, so slowly Hugh thought he was going to die, Talon impaled himself. Their bodies were flush, Talon's fingers strong on Hugh's cock, and he could do nothing but stand there and enjoy the sensation of being filled.

"You like that?" Talon's dark-chocolate voice rasped in Hugh's ear.

"Yes," Hugh answered.

"Good." Talon pulled out, and Hugh gave himself over to the sensation. There were no cameras, no shots, no angles, nothing but pure pleasure. When it came to pictures, he possessed them; he owned the artwork and the images. Now, with Talon pumping into him, Hugh had the feeling that the situation was reversed. This time the model possessed him.

His cock twitched, and he reached down to curl his fingers around the base of his shaft to stave off his orgasm.

"Don't!" Talon punctuated the word with a thrust of his hips.

Hugh snarled. Reaching behind him, he grabbed Talon's ass. No one told him whether he could come or not. Talon was *his* model. He gave the tight globes a squeeze that had Talon's shaft twitching deep inside him.

Just like that, Hugh took control. He focused on the man behind him, listening to his breathy groans and the slap of flesh against flesh. Feeling Talon's cock deep inside

him only reinforced Hugh's belief that somehow the possessor had become the possessed.

And he liked it.

Closing his eyes, Hugh focused on the tiny nuances, the flare of Talon's crown against his anus, the feel of each vein, and the slap of Talon's balls against his ass. He smelled the scent of sweat and sex. Reaching down, he cupped himself, tugging on his balls, and the hell with anything Talon said.

Talon bent his head to Hugh's shoulder. Lips and tongue moved over his skin, reminding Hugh of how good Talon gave head. Closing his eyes, Hugh gave himself over to Talon. His balls tightened, and he didn't fight the release that boiled from him. His lower back tingled, his muscles locked, and in a surge of pleasure hard enough to blow the top of his head off, Hugh came. His cock twitched, shooting cum all over his hand. He cried out, the wordless sound echoing in the room. Behind him, Talon rode him mercilessly, the sweat slickening their bodies making each penetration a silken slide to heaven.

Talon stiffened. His teeth grazed Hugh's shoulder. Talon grabbed Hugh's waist, reaching around to slide along the arrow of hair leading to his shaft. Hugh leaned against him, knowing that all-consuming need to pour yourself into another person. Just knowing that Talon found his release sent a powerful surge of possessiveness through Hugh.

He might have laughed and thought it silly, but the idea of Talon coming to life just for him seemed more and more plausible. They fit together perfectly. Talon cried out. He filled Hugh with the warm rush of his cum, the pressure triggering mini-quakes of another orgasm. Hugh moaned, his shaft twitching in his palm. He braced his free hand on the table. Slumping against him, Talon threatened to take them both to the floor in a tangle of limbs.

"That was some photo shoot," Talon said. "We'll have to do it again sometime." Pressing a brief kiss to Hugh's neck, he pulled away. Moments later he was cleaning up and pulling on his pants, leaving Hugh to wonder who possessed whom.

\* \* \*

Later that evening, laughter filled Hugh's living room. Hugh and Talon sat on the couch, not quite touching, while Mack and Adrian sprawled on the floor. Hugh's laptop sat open on the table between them, the multimedia projector pointing to a screen standing at the other end. There, a slide show displayed several photos of Talon the action figure and Talon the man. Hugh had spent the afternoon adding text and graphics, making up mock ads to show to Adrian.

He glanced across the room at the images of Talon, wondering what he thought of his pictures blown up to near movie-screen size. If it bothered him, he didn't show any signs. Instead, with his arm casually slung across the back of the couch, his finger traced a lazy pattern on the back of Hugh's neck and shoulder.

"What do you think?" Hugh asked Adrian. "A print and web campaign, including some banner rotations at popular gaming sites. Talon's really talented. I think he'll make the perfect spokesmodel for The Fantastic Five."

"He always was too pretty for his own good," Mack rumbled, but affection laced the teasing words, taking their sting away.

"You're just jealous," Talon mocked back. "Not everyone can be as pretty as I am."

"Some men like their lovers rough." Mack made a show of sliding his hand along Adrian's thigh, and the two men shared a heated glance.

"Hey, back to me. I'm the one that's going to make the shop a shitload of money."

The four men shared a laugh, but turned their attention back to the screen.

"I'd really like to make Talon our spokesmodel," Hugh repeated. "I could see him doing some personal appearances. We could probably have someone make him up a costume that matches the one on the figure. With his body, I'm sure we'd have men, and women, flocking to the store. What do you think?"

Hugh turned to Talon, surprised to see the guarded expression on his face. He would have thought his lover would be overjoyed at the prospect of modeling again



and working in the industry. They hadn't talked about jobs. Heck, they hadn't talked about much of anything, since they were spending their time fucking like rabbits.

Okay, so he didn't think. He'd assumed, and he knew all about what was said when someone did that. He sighed.

"You're okay with this, right? I thought you'd be happy to model again."

"I am," Talon replied, though the affirmation didn't reach his eyes. "But it's a comic shop. The superhero gig I can get, but a sexy super hero? Don't you think your mostly male clientele will be offended or put off by it?"

Okay, so Talon's objections were business ones. Hugh immediately launched into his spiel on how he thought it would work. Considering that one of the largest untapped markets for comics and games was women, and most of the boys and men who visited the shops liked to picture themselves as bad-ass heroes, it should have been a no-brainer. Before he finished, Adrian and Mack were nodding their heads. Hugh wished Talon looked as believing.

"I'll take your word for it," he said.

Being in the military, and then a toy, Talon probably thought he didn't know enough about the business to comment. Though models usually had a sense of career, or at least the good ones did. Hugh frowned, then quickly smoothed his expression. "Anybody want a beer?" He started to stand.

Talon rested his hand on Hugh's thigh. That simple touch sent heat shooting right to his groin. Sucking in a breath, he sat back down, wishing Talon would slide his fingers a few inches higher. Once again, Mack and Adrian shared a look. Hey, at least they weren't groping each other in public like Dean and Sawyer.

"I'll get them." Talon's fingers slid away, leaving Hugh feeling bereft.

Hugh watched Talon disappear into the dining room. "You guys like the pictures, right?"

"Yeah. You know I've always trusted your marketing sense," Adrian said.

"Thanks. I appreciate that."

"Got to admit I always thought Talon had talent, though he always was moody. I think, even when we were in the team together, that he knew a bit more about his former life than we did. I know I blocked it out. But Talon always obsessed about not having a working cock. Poor guy. I would have thought he'd be thrilled about your relationship. It's obvious you two aren't wasting any time." Mack winked at Hugh.

Hugh didn't reply, not really wanting to share with them how long his dry spell had been before Talon had arrived. Talon quickly returned, four opened beers in his hands. He set the bottles down on the table, using the coasters there, and sat back down. He kept his hands in his lap. Hugh admitted he missed Talon's touch.

\* \* \*

Talon listened to the men talk, wishing he weren't so prickly about being a model. What did he know about selling comics? Maybe the picture of him bare-chested with his spandex suit around his waist would bring customers to The Fantastic Five. Maybe it wouldn't, and Hugh just enjoyed showing off his handsome boy toy.

He was being uncharitable, and yet couldn't stop the thoughts from filling his mind. Adrian and Hugh discussed marketing venues, various campaigns that had worked well in the past. Finally, Mack stood and headed for the kitchen. He caught Talon's eye and gave a slight nod.

Talon followed his friend and former commanding officer from the room.

"Hey, you okay with all of this?" Mack, always astute, asked. "I know you talked about your modeling. I'd think you would be busting at the seams."

"Yeah, me, too," Talon mumbled.

"So tell him. Say 'look dude, you just want me for my body or what?'" Mack grinned a cheesy grin. "It is a hot body. You can't blame a guy." He winked.

In spite of trying to hold it in, Talon laughed. Mack's exaggerated leer only made his words all the funnier. "I wish it were that easy."

"Why isn't it? You like the guy, right? You're afraid if you say something that he might leave. You're gorgeous. You're human. You have options now. It's not like if Hugh's tired of you he's going to stick you in his toy box and leave." Mack gripped his

friend's shoulder. "Tell you what. I'll get Adrian out of here and you and Hugh can talk, fuck, whatever. You always were the moody one. I'm sure you'll figure it out." Mack released his friend then turned toward the living room.

Talon watched him leave, deciding that was probably why Mack was their commander. He made plans, stuck to them, and they usually worked out. Sawyer always went off half-cocked, and he thought too much. Brice, well, he was a good ol' boy who seemed to not let anything bother him. Talon shrugged and followed Mack back to the living room. Adrian and Hugh finished their conversation, Mack making it clear he wanted to get Adrian away for some private time. Soon, the lovers had left, and he was alone with Hugh once more.

"I'm human now, you know. I'm going to get old and ugly." Talon rubbed his chin. He'd seen a recent poster of Harrison Ford in the shop, and hoped he'd age as gracefully as the actor had.

"Is that what this is about?" Hugh leaned back on the couch, arms crossed over his chest. Reaching out, he patted the cushion next to him. "Because right now you're pretty damn hot." He made a show of surveying Talon from head to toe.

That heated look made it tough for Talon to concentrate on what he wanted to say. The projector still sent an image of him, half stripping out of his super hero costume, to the board. "Is that how you see me?"

Hugh uncrossed his arms and leaned forward, elbows braced on his knees. "What'd Mack say to you?" Anger laced his voice. "Look, if you're worried about your career, don't. Sure, doing work for the shop might be a small job, but I bet it will lead to more. I know some guys. If you really want to model we can make that happen. But you have to work with me."

"And if I don't want to model?" Talon leaned against the wall. *It's mission time.* Looking at Hugh, thinking about the strong plane of his jaw, the tender way he'd kissed and sucked Talon's cock, Talon reminded himself that he'd been given a mission. The Toymaker had sent him here for a reason. Whether it was just to bolster the shop's sales

or to fall in love, Talon didn't know. Moody he might be; however, theology was way out of his league. He simply did what he had to do and tried to be a good guy doing it.

"Is that what this is about?" Hugh stood and flipped off the projector. The image disappeared from view and the fan slowed, leaving the room in silence. "We can try something else, if you want. If you don't like the pictures..."

"It's not about the damn pictures," Talon snapped. "It's about you and me."

Hugh stared dumbfounded at him. "What about us?"

Talon growled and fisted his hands. Was Hugh truly so shallow he thought about nothing other than himself and his advertising? Did he really see Talon as a possession, something to use and discard? He backed up, not quite certain he knew the man standing across from him. "You don't have a fucking clue, do you?" Talon shook his head. "I thought Sawyer could be dense. You beat him by a mile."

"Damn it, if you have something to say, just come out and say it. Don't stand there and insult me." Hugh braced his feet shoulder-width apart. Crossing his arms over his chest, he glared at Talon. "If you want out, there's the door." He glanced toward the front door, then quickly back at Talon. Hurt, quickly masked, flashed through his eyes.

There. Hugh didn't want him to go. "Do you want me? Or do you want the half-naked man you took photographs of? Because here I am." He plucked at his plain, white T-shirt. Dragging his fingers through his hair, he made it stand up on end. Stubble covered his jaw, and he knew he looked like an everyday guy, certainly not model material. Not without a shower, a shave, and a better outfit.

"What kind of dumbass question is that? Of course I want you. I like you. I think it's funny as hell that action figures keep coming to life for my friends and I. It's worked out well for Adrian and Dean, so I'm not going to argue. We're good together. Yeah, the sex is hot, but I thought you shared my artistic vision, too. Maybe I was wrong." Hugh strode forward, pushing past Talon in the doorway. He went down the hall to his studio, shutting the door behind him with a resounding bang.

“Thanks, Mack. That went well.” Talon went to the couch and sat down, the still-running laptop mocking him with the pictures Hugh had taken.

## Chapter Five

Hugh didn't want to be an ass. He liked Talon, he genuinely did. Probably more than he realized if he'd only stop to examine his feelings. He just wasn't used to thinking along those lines. Never had to before, and never needed to, really. Until now.

Talon's awkward conversation about what if he weren't a model bothered Hugh. Sitting in his studio, staring at the same layout that he'd been playing with for the last two days, Hugh wondered if he could come up with an answer. He liked Talon, as a friend, as a lover, maybe even more. But if Talon weren't a model... well, he'd still be the same Talon. Thinking anything different was just stupid.

Hugh shoved away from the desk and swiveled in his chair. Damn it, if Talon wasn't going to come to him, then he was going to Talon.

Balling his hands into fists, Hugh burst to his feet. Offering Talon the job of modeling for the store had seemed like the perfect solution. Talon gained a job. Hugh gained a model. And both of them could take advantage of their mutual attraction. Maybe Talon needed to find another job. He shook his head. In just the short time Talon had been here, Hugh couldn't imagine his home without the other man. And that, more than anything, should probably tell Hugh all he needed to know. He cared for Talon deeply.

Hugh strode down the hall, the scent of simmering spaghetti sauce and baking garlic bread pulling him forward. Talon was a hell of a cook. If he left, he'd take his culinary skills with him.

Just beyond the dining room's doorway, Hugh stopped. He watched Talon move around the kitchen like a virtuoso, humming under his breath. A dishtowel had been tucked into the waistband of his jeans, and Hugh wanted to step forward and use it to tug Talon into his arms.

His body hardened, a reminder of the two days it'd been since they'd had sex.

His mouth watered, more from the thought of taking Talon's shaft into his mouth than the delicious meal.

A model. A cook. Talon was a man of many talents, not the least of which was his exceptional ability as a lover.

Hugh smiled. He strolled forward, fingers already working at the buttons on his shirt. Slipping it from his shoulders, he tugged it free of his jeans. He hung it over the end of a dining room chair.

Talon appeared not to notice. He stirred the spaghetti sauce. The timer on the oven dinged, and with efficient movements, he pulled the garlic bread out. Putting it on the counter, he turned his attention back to the spaghetti. All without making any gesture that might indicate he knew Hugh stood there, watching.

The pressure of standing there, unseen and unheard, rode Hugh with the need to say something, to do something just so Talon would acknowledge him. "Hey," he called out. He gripped the waistband of his jeans, intending to flip open the buttons and shove them down his hips.

Talon grunted. He turned off the stove burner.

Hugh grabbed the dish towel hanging from Talon's waistband. He stepped forward, pinning Talon against the counter.

"If you keep this up, dinner won't be served." Talon reached for the pan.

"I don't want food." Hugh closed his fingers around Talon's wrist, keeping him from grabbing the strainer. At that moment, his stomach chose to rumble.

Talon laughed. "I think your body disagrees with you."

Hugh rocked his erection into Talon's ass. "Not this part."

Talon chuckled some more. "At least let me get the pasta drained. I don't like soggy noodles." He turned his head.

And Hugh met him halfway, pressing a quick, hard kiss to Talon's mouth. For a moment it was like the past few days had never happened. Talon softened, moaned, deepening the kiss with a swipe of his lips.

The oven timer dinged.

Talon pulled away. He shoved past Hugh's arm, moving to drain the pasta, and forcing Hugh to step back unless he wanted to get between the hot pan and the stove.

"Hey, what was that about?" Hugh said. Once Talon got the pasta drained he stepped forward again.

"I have to get dinner finished."

On a photo shoot Talon's focus would be an asset. Here, it was maddening. "There's dinner and then there's other things." Hugh laid his hand on Talon's shoulder, not liking the miniscule flinch of Talon's muscles.

Talon sighed. His eyes closed, lashes fanning against his cheeks. A flash of pain crossed his features, the expression making Hugh want to lean forward and brush his lips across Talon's cheeks, his lips, anything to soothe him.

"You're more than just a model to me," Hugh said, figuring probably the only way to lay this to rest was to actually say what he thought. Not something he did easily.

Talon stilled.

Damn it, he wasn't going to make this easy. Drawing a deep breath, Hugh continued. "You're a friend, my lover. And if you weren't a model that wouldn't change. I don't know why you're being so stubborn about this!" He closed his eyes, half-afraid he'd pushed Talon too far.

Instead, the other man turned and braced his hands on the counter behind him. He stared, the disbelieving look in his eyes hitting Hugh in the gut. His nostrils flared. He opened his sensual lips, then closed them again. With a shake of his head, he released the counter and crossed his arms over his chest.

Taking silence as a sign of assent, Hugh touched the palm of his hand to Talon's chest. He stepped forward, tangling their legs together. The hard plane of Talon's thigh pressed against the fly of Hugh's jeans. Reaching up, he pressed his lips against Talon's cheek. "Look," he whispered. "I know you may not believe me. You may think I'm just saying this so I get laid. But it's the truth. Why don't we eat?"



Talon's throat worked and finally, he nodded. His arms relaxed. He turned back to the stove and silently dished up their plates.

Hugh carried his to the table. He sat down next to Talon. If his lover still looked wary, at least he didn't appear pissed off anymore, and that, to Hugh's mind, was a good thing.

\* \* \*

Three days later, Talon and Hugh manned the front counter of the shop. Though Talon wasn't quite ready to return Hugh's advances, even though his cock ached to do so, he thought Hugh had been serious. Hugh hadn't even worked in his studio. Instead, they'd played racquetball, went jogging in the park... anything but do modeling things.

"You want something to drink? I'm going to run over to the gas station across the street." Talon ducked through the opening in the counter and headed toward the front door.

"A bottle of water would be great. Adrian's going to buy some more tomorrow, but we're out until then."

"Sure." Thankful to have something he could do for Hugh -- his lover seemed lost ever since their kind-of-fight -- Talon ducked out the door. He jogged across the street.

Once at the gas station, he held open the door for a mother carrying a toddler. He hurried toward the coolers in the back. Surprisingly for early afternoon, few people patronized the store. A few cars sat on the drive, choosing to pay at the pump for the gas. Other than himself and the mother, a young white man loitered in the corner. He wore a sweatshirt and a baseball cap, his jeans dirty and torn, as were his sneakers. An older man worked behind the counter.

Talon opened the glass cooler door, drawing the chilled air into his lungs. The frigid blast felt good in contrast to the hot, humid day outside. He stood there for a moment, trying to decide which brand of water to buy. He closed the door, remembering that they were out, and decided to get a case from the display behind him instead.

He stopped at the end of the aisle. In the mother's arms, the toddler wriggled, wanting to be put down.

"Just a moment," she said, juggling her purse on her arm. She set her son down.

The young man lunged.

"Watch out!" Talon yelled.

The youth reached for her purse.

She yanked it back. The strap broke and it fell to the ground, hitting with a thud. Contents spilled, tossing makeup and feminine products over the floor along with the woman's billfold.

The guy reached for it.

Talon closed his hands over the boy's arm. It felt like a stick with hardly any muscle on it. Taking in the young man's gaunt frame, Talon wondered if he might have reasons other than greed to steal. "You don't want to do that."

The boy tried to yank his hand away. "Don't tell me what to do, man!"

Talon tightened his grip, not wanting to let the youth get away. Raising his gaze, he looked at the clerk, hoping the man would hit the button to summon the cops.

The youth exhibited surprising strength, shoving Talon backwards against the freezer doors. His head smacked the glass hard enough to rattle it. Gritting his teeth, he vaulted toward the young man.

The thug swung, his fist catching Talon on the jaw hard enough to crack his head around, momentarily stunning him. The youth grabbed him and shoved him through the freezer door.

The woman screamed.

Glass shattered.

Talon landed against the racks hard enough to jostle several plastic bottles from the display. Pop bottles fell, caps bouncing off and spraying sticky, fizzy liquid all over the floor. A bottle of water tumbled from a top shelf to hit him on the head.

"Damn," Talon growled, wondering where the heck his macho soldier-boy persona had gone. Blood trickled from a cut on his forehead, stinging his left eye and pulling his attention away from the tiny scratches on his neck and arms.

He tried to stand, the world tilting on its axis. Without thinking he grabbed the door, releasing it as a shard of glass pierced his hand.

The momentary distraction gave the youth the opening he needed. Wrenching his arm, the thug yanked it free. He backed a couple of steps away and reached into a hoodie pocket. Whipping out his gun, he waved it at Talon. "Stay down!"

Wobbling, Talon gestured for the mother and child to get out of the way. "Go!" he hissed, stepping toward the perp. *Call the cops!*

The clerk stood frozen behind the counter, hands clenched.

"You don't want to do this." Talon kept his breathing even. He nodded toward the mother, who bundled up her toddler and rushed away from the candy aisle, leaving her purse on the floor. He felt like hell, but keeping the woman and her child safe was the top priority. That meant he had to keep the criminal focused on him.

"You don't know what I want." The boy inched closer to the purse.

"I know you don't want to hurt anyone." Hell, the kid looked like he was barely old enough to vote. "I know you don't want to go to jail." Holding out his bloody hand, he moved to intercept the young man, wanting to keep him from stealing the woman's money.

He kept his gaze not on the gun, but on the boy's face. The kid's eyes flicked back and forth. His finger wavered on the trigger.

*If I get shot I won't have told Hugh I love him.* The thought floated through his mind, quickly shoved aside, lest it interfere with what he needed to do. His training kept him centered. He watched, waiting for an opening.

At last the clerk moved, fingers inching under the counter.

Talon didn't nod, didn't give any sign that the authorities were on the way. He finally moved near enough to the purse to kick it away from the criminal. He did, sending it skittering over the floor. The kid raised the gun.

Talon launched himself at the young man. Together they tumbled to the ground, hitting a rack of potato chips and sending the bags crumpling to the floor. Talon rolled, trying to pin the perp beneath him. He easily outweighed the kid by probably fifty pounds. Using his strength, he maneuvered the guy beneath him.

The metal stand toppled over and hit Talon on the back of the head. Talon released his grip for a moment, and like a slippery eel, the kid slipped free. Jumping to his feet, he squeezed the trigger.

The gun fired.

The mother screamed.

Behind the counter, the clerk ducked.

Talon rolled and came up on the balls of his feet, only to crumple to the ground. Ignoring the pain in his knee -- he was sure he'd had worse -- he tried to rise. He couldn't.

Sirens wailed.

From behind the counter, the clerk dashed forward, intercepting the kid before he could get out of the gas station. Talon gritted his teeth against the pain, his hand clamped around his bloody knee, and checked to be sure both the clerk and the mother and toddler were all right.

A police officer paused beside Talon, his keen eyes missing nothing. "An ambulance is on the way. You going to hang in there?" He waited just long enough for Talon's weary nod, then went to talk to the clerk.

Talon fought the pain. Shit, his leg felt like it was broken. Blood covered his fingers where he tried to staunch the bleeding. His head ached.

More sirens wailed and moments later paramedics came to his side. He gave himself willingly over to their ministrations, knowing surely Hugh would see the commotion and come for him. Because if something happened, he'd always regret not telling Hugh how he felt.

## Chapter Six

Hugh grabbed a comic from the new shipment and thumbed through it. It seemed Talon had been gone for a while, but he was known for wandering on his shopping trips. They'd gone to the mall to get him some jeans, and for hours Talon had marveled over the video games and electronics.

"Hey, what's going on over at the gas station?" Mack said.

"Huh?" Hugh grunted. He put down the comic, swiveling on the stool to look out the window. Several cop cars sat haphazardly in the parking lot. Uniformed officers swarmed the premises. A couple of them stood near the curb talking to a young woman clutching a toddler. The mess of cars and officers made it difficult to see anything else.

Talon. He didn't see Talon.

An ambulance sat in the middle of the driveway, lights flashing. From across the street, he couldn't see where the paramedics were, or if they were working on anyone.

Oh, God, he couldn't see Talon.

Hugh wobbled on the stool, reaching out for the counter to steady himself. "Talon went over there."

"Fuck!" Mack's pithy curse was nearly drowned out by the ambulance sirens winding up. Someone rapped twice on the back of the vehicle, and it tore out of the parking lot, lights and sirens blazing.

Hugh still didn't see Talon. He bolted from his stool, shoving past Mack toward the door.

"Call us if you need anything." Mack's words barely registered as Hugh hit the door running.

He pounded across the street, dodging cars. Tires squealed. Someone blared their horn. Hugh barely heard. All he could think about was Talon, striding out the door on his way to get some water... and now, Hugh feared he'd never see him again.

No! He couldn't think like this. Talon was military trained. Surely he retained his knowledge through his transition into action figure and into human. He'd listened to the guys -- Mack, Sawyer, and Talon -- trading war stories, both from their time as toys and as men. If someone had tried to rob the convenience store -- this wasn't the first time that had happened -- Talon would know what to do. How to stay safe. Hugh hoped.

Drawing a deep breath, he skidded to a stop a few feet from a parked cruiser.

"Sir, stay back," a young officer said.

"My friend. He came to the store. Is he all right? I just saw the ambulance leave," Hugh said. It hurt to call Talon his friend, but he was wary of saying anything more. His lover? His partner? With his feelings left unspoken, he wasn't quite sure that he and Talon were anything but friends, though he wanted more.

"What's your friend's name?" The officer glanced back at the store before turning his attention back to Hugh.

"Talon."

"You family?" At the officer's question, Hugh's stomach sank.

He nodded. "I'm the only one he has." Sure, Mack and Sawyer waited back at the comic shop, and they might qualify for family more than he would.

"He was injured and went by ambulance to the hospital."

Hugh's world tilted. The cement rushed up to hit him, and only the officer's arm kept him from falling over. "How bad?" His voice croaked.

"He'll live. You don't look well. I don't suggest you drive yourself."

"No. I won't. Thank you." Hugh stumbled away, aware the officers had more work to do. Talon had been injured. And Hugh hadn't even asked what had happened, though with the police cars there he could guess.

"Hey, your friend saved my life," a woman called.

Hugh stopped and turned. There by the front of the convenience store stood the young mother with her toddler.

"He kept me from being robbed. He's a hero."

Hugh grinned. Yeah, he knew that all along about Talon -- he was nothing but a big damn hero. "Thanks," he called to the woman. "Glad you're all right." He turned and bolted across the street, deciding it was time to tell his hero a little something about the way things were.

\* \* \*

By the time Mack had driven Hugh to the hospital, some of Hugh's bravado had faded. It took only a moment to stop by the information desk. They arrive at the floor to find out he'd been sent to surgery. Now there wasn't anything left but the waiting, which grated on Hugh's nerves. He paced the surgical waiting room like a caged tiger, playing the last few days over and over in his mind. If only there were something he could...

"Hey, sit down. You're making me dizzy," Mack said. His fingers squeezed Hugh's arm.

Hugh paused and stared out the huge windows overlooking part of the city. "I can't. Too keyed up."

"You're worried. It's normal. But he'll be fine."

"How do you know?" Hugh sank into a chair and dragged his fingers through his hair. "He's been shot, for Christ's sake! Sure, it's just his leg, but how do you know he'll be all right? How do you know he won't --"

"Hey! He will. He's tough." Mack curled his fingers into Hugh's arm, keeping him from bouncing back to his feet to resume his pacing.

"Talon Jameson's family?" a female voice called.

"That's you, buddy." Mack released Hugh's hand and patted him on the back. "Give 'em hell. Tell Talon to leave the hero shit for someone else." He grinned.

Buoyed by Mack's words, Hugh crossed the carpeted waiting room. A few other families sat in groups, also waiting for loved ones. They looked up as he passed, then quickly turned their attention back to what they were doing.

"He okay?" Hugh asked the tall, brunette woman.

"I'm Dr. Campfield." She held out her hand and Hugh shook it, surprised at her strong, firm grip. "Talon came through surgery on his knee. It was very routine. The bullet was removed and with a bit of rehabilitation, he should heal just fine. Give us about twenty minutes, and we'll have him in a room so you can visit."

Hugh locked his knees to keep them from buckling. The words were exactly what he wanted to hear. He could have sagged with relief. "Thank you. Thank you."

"No problem. We'll call down when he's in his room." She pointed at a phone sitting on a nearby table.

Hugh turned back and gave Mack a thumbs up. He resisted the urge to whoop or punch his fist in the air. Talon had made it. He would live!

Hugh sat back down next to Talon's friend. "Apparently everything went well. We can see him in probably about twenty minutes or so."

"Great. See, I told you." Mack bared his teeth in a feral grin.

Hugh pulled his cell phone from his pocket and flipped it open. Dialing the shop, he relayed the news to Sawyer, who promised to tell everyone. After receiving congratulations from Sawyer, Hugh hung up.

About that time the phone on the desk rang. Hugh answered it, received the instructions, and moments later, Mack and he went to the room.

Once there, Hugh stopped outside, bracing himself for the sight of his wounded lover. He stepped inside Talon's hospital room, forcing a smile he didn't quite feel on his face. Talon lay in the bed, a cast around his right leg. An IV ran into his left arm, and a few bandages covered his face. Several large bruises marred his face, and butterfly bandages held together the smaller cuts. A gauze pad had been taped near his temple, probably over the worst wound.

"I look like hell, don't I?" Talon gestured to the chair by the bed. "Sit."



Hugh followed orders, still not quite grasping the extent of Talon's injuries. His lover looked like he'd gone through a brawl. He glanced at Mack, who was leaning against the doorframe with his arms crossed over his chest. Probably with his military experience he'd seen, and maybe even experienced, worse.

"Hope the other guy looks just as bad," Mack drawled.

Talon started to laugh, then stopped himself with a hand on his side.

"Do you need anything?" Hugh leaned forward, grabbing the rail of the bed. He noticed a control lying on the side of the bed. "Do we need to call the nurse?"

Talon groaned, but reached for Hugh's hand. He touched Hugh's fingers. "Ribs hurt. Sorry." He licked his dry lips. "Water?"

Mack straightened and went to the pitcher of water sitting on the tray next to the bed. He poured a glass, then handed it to Hugh to hold. Hugh took it and tried not to feel like a heel that he needed assistance catering to his lover's most basic needs. He bent the straw and held the glass to Talon's lips.

Talon took a few, slow sips. "Better," he croaked.

Hugh set the water down, so many words rumbling through his chest. "When you didn't come back, I thought I'd lost you."

"I'll be out in the waiting room if you need anything. I'll be back later." Mack stepped out of the room, leaving them alone.

"You're a hero, you know. A young woman at the gas station said you saved her life." Hugh tangled his fingers with Talon's, needing to touch him, needing the reassurance that he was still alive. He stared at Talon's puffy, wounded face. In all his days as a photographer, he'd never seen a more beautiful sight. "I'm just glad you saved yourself." His breath caught as Talon captured Hugh's gaze with his own.

Heat flashed between them. Fierce protectiveness welled up deep inside Hugh. This was *his* lover, *his* partner for life. "I love you," Hugh rasped, his throat suddenly tight with emotions. "I love you so goddamn much."

Talon's jaw dropped. He gasped, the sound so much like pain that Hugh leaned forward in his chair. "You okay? Do you --"

"I'm looking at the only thing I need." Talon drew a deep breath. Tiny pain lines bracketed his eyes, and his jaw was tense. "When I heard that gun go off and saw the blood, I thought..." Talon swallowed hard. "I thought I'd die without getting the chance to tell you that I love you."

A burst of joy stole the breath from Hugh's lungs. "I love you, too."

"What about modeling? I'm not sure how I'll look once I get out of here. From what I've seen, it's pretty bad."

"I don't care. You could look like Rocky Balboa after fifteen rounds with Ivan Drago, and I'd still take pictures of you. I love you, and I want to capture every single moment forever. I don't care if you model professionally. Whatever you want to do, I'll support you all the way."

Talon smiled and slid down in the bed. His fingers loosened their grip on Hugh's enough for him to settle under the light sheet and blanket covering his legs. "Good. I can rest now." His eyelids fluttered.

Hugh helped adjust the bed, lowering it a bit for Talon's comfort. He reached for Talon's fingers, holding them through the bed's railing. He watched his lover's eyes flutter closed and then deep, even breathing took over, signaling sleep.

Moments later a nurse came in to check on them, glanced at their tangled fingers, but said nothing except to ring her if he needed anything.

Hugh promised he would, settling in to wait. At the moment, he didn't even care that he didn't get to seal his words of love with a kiss. Healing needed to come first.

Hugh glanced up at the sound of someone entering Talon's room, realizing nearly half an hour had passed since Talon had fallen asleep.

Mack stopped just inside and glanced at his sleeping friend. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah. He loves me. Isn't that something?"

Mack chuckled. "Yeah, it is. Quite a hell of a lot, really. Adrian called, and I filled him in. He said I could stay as long as you needed me, but I think you're going to be fine."

"I'm good." Hugh glanced at the still-sleeping Talon. Truth was, at the moment, he felt better than he had a right to. And once Talon was healed, he was locking both of them in a room and making love until they couldn't walk straight.

"I'm going to head home then. If you need anything you know where we're at."

"Have a good night, and thanks."

"Just take care of Talon. That's all that matters."

"Yep, it is." When Hugh glanced at the doorway again Mack was gone. He focused his attention on Talon. "Taking care of you is the most important thing."

\* \* \*

Talon heard words as if they came from a thousand miles away, muffled by thick cotton. Something about taking care of him... Mack's voice... Hugh. He grinned in his sleep, thinking about the man he loved who loved him back. And the drugs had kicked in before he could kiss Hugh. He ached too much to do more, though he wanted to.

"I bet you do." The voice rumbled through Talon's half-dreaming, half-waking state. His muscles stiffened. He recognized the masculine voice. The Toymaker.

"Don't take me away," he blurted.

The Toymaker laughed. "Now, why would I do that now that you've completed your mission? And don't worry. You'll be model pretty once more." Reaching out, the Toymaker tapped Talon on the nose.

"Hey!" Talon braced himself for the surge of pain. The scuffle had cut his face up pretty bad, but the bruising and puffiness... were gone? He reached up and touched his face. Nothing hurt. His cuts appeared healed. Cheekbones, nasal bridge, all of his features appeared hale and healthy. The heavy weight of the cast on his leg pulled his attention back to it.

"Can't do everything." With a shrug, the Toymaker disappeared.

Talon's eyes flew open. "My face!"

"What?" Sleep fogged Hugh's voice.

Talon blinked, getting his bearings in the semi-dark hospital room. Low lighting allowed him to see Hugh sitting by the bed, looking as if he'd slept there.

"Is there a mirror?" Talon asked. He started to rip off the bandages.

"Hey, you shouldn't be doing that. Leave those bandages on. Let me get the lights." Hugh rose unsteadily from the chair, fumbling for the switch. He raised the lights, then slid out a tray from beneath the table and flipped up a mirror. "There." He looked to Talon, then to the pile of bandages in his lap. Hugh's eyes widened. "Those must have been some drugs the hospital gave you."

Talon tilted the mirror. His reflection, as perfect as it had been, complete with the tiny scar on his cheekbone, looked back at him. Gone were the scratches, the bruises and the puffiness. "The Toymaker did it. He really did." Talon traced the bridge of his nose.

"Who?"

"The Toy... oh never mind. I can model. Once my leg is healed." Talon lifted the cast. "I'll be good as new." Even his ribs felt better. *Thank you, Toymaker.* "I want to go home." He pressed the call button.

"I don't know about that. The doctors said you --"

The nurse's voice interrupted Hugh's words. "How can I help you?"

"I'd like to go home," Talon said.

A resigned pause filled the air. "We'll see what the doctor says in the morning," she replied.

Talon relented, but not for long. The clock said it was nearly three in the morning. Only a few more hours, and the doctor would be here. A few more hours, and he could go home with the man he loved. "Have you been here all night?"

Hugh nodded.

"Come here. I think you deserve a kiss for that."

"I don't know if I can 'just' kiss you."

Hugh's admission sent a rush of blood to his cock. Thankful he wasn't hooked up to any monitors, he flipped back the sheet and blanket, not caring that his erection tented the hospital gown. By the time Hugh crossed the room, Talon had lowered the railing on the bed. He swung his legs over and pulled Hugh between his thighs.

Never wanting anything more in his life, Talon ran his fingers over Hugh's arm. "Come here." He trailed his fingers over Hugh's shirt. The rumpled fabric testified to a night spent in the chair. Stubble covered Hugh's jaw.

"I am here."

"Kiss me," Talon ordered.

Careful, Hugh bent forward, capturing Talon's upturned lips. Talon relished the gentle brush of lips. He slid his fingers to the nape of Hugh's neck, holding him. His cast-covered leg moved just enough to allow Talon to curl his fingers into the hardness of Hugh's thigh.

Against his lips, Hugh groaned.

Talon took advantage, sweeping his tongue across Hugh's lower lip. He sucked at it, drawing it into his mouth. Then he returned the kiss with fervor, sliding his tongue into Hugh's mouth. He tasted and tempted, ignoring his erection. Now wasn't the time for hot sex, it was a time to convey his feelings, his love. He paused long enough to draw a quick breath, then resumed the kiss.

A soft, feminine "oh" barely registered in his consciousness. Oh, yeah, the nurse probably checking on him. Footsteps backed out of the room and the door clicked shut.

He changed the angle of his kiss, drawing Hugh's tongue into his mouth. He suckled it, imagining it was Hugh's cock. Having him there, feeling him warm and solid next to him -- the only thing that could be better would be the cast off his leg and both of them naked.

"When we get home..." Hugh's husky voice was as arousing as a warm puff of air over his hard cock.

"I know," Talon rasped. "I know."

## Epilogue

The hiss of brats on the grill, the clink of beer bottles coming out of the ice-filled cooler, sounded like a perfect Saturday evening. With the shop closed, everyone could hang out at Adrian's house -- he had the biggest backyard -- and relax. Talon sat in the chair with his cast-covered leg propped on an empty cooler in front of him, thinking how much of a lucky man he really was. Hugh stood by the grill chatting with Adrian and Mack about something. Probably him, and Talon didn't mind.

He grinned and raised his beer bottle in salute when Hugh glanced in his direction.

"So I guess I'm the odd man out." Van took a long pull from his beer bottle. Resting it on the arm of his lawn chair, he stared toward the corner and away from the other guys. "Sawyer told me there was one more of you guys."

Talon finished off his beer. "Brice. And while I'm not going to talk about fate or destiny, I am going to say that if he's your man, and it looks like he is, then you'll like him."

"What's he like?" Van leaned forward in his chair, elbows braced on his knees. He held the beer bottle loosely between his legs, thumb moving over the rim.

Talon wondered if Van knew how much his thumb looked as if it caressed the head of a cock. He chose not to say. "Brice was all business. I have no idea what he did as a man. We didn't talk about that too much. Brice knew his stuff, that's for sure. He could shoot, though, and didn't mind putting a bullet in the bad guys. He just was more intellectual, more polished than the rest of us. I wouldn't be surprised if he attended Princeton or some Ivy League school."

"Yale," Van muttered. "Only a Yale man will do."

“Well, if anyone can fix you up, the Toymaker can.” Talon drained the last of his beer bottle. He stood, deciding that it might need to be water for the rest of the night with the painkillers he still was taking.

“I hope so. I sure hope so.”

Talon smiled at him, thinking that the Toymaker could probably make a lot of things happen. Even an action figure graduate from Yale.

## **Mary Winter**

Mary commutes between her dream home near the Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri, and her current residence in Iowa. She lives with a menagerie of animals including an opinionated horse and a cat who was a dog in a past life. When not writing spicy tales of erotic romance, she enjoys writing science fiction and fantasy, spending time with her horse, and enjoying the outdoors. Lucky for her, her partner (hero) shares these same passions, and usually both of them can be found in their respective dens writing.

You can contact Mary at [mary@marywinter.com](mailto:mary@marywinter.com) or visit her site at [www.marywinter.com](http://www.marywinter.com).