



THE ZONE: HOT ZONE

Barbara Karmazin

Loose Id.®

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Tarina Morrison stopped in the doorway of her living room. Every stick of furniture had been shoved into one corner in order to make room for the sofa-sized tattoo bed in the center. The lid had been thrown back. A bright golden light illuminated the white, padded interior. The acrid odor of recently sprayed disinfectant tickled her nose.

Dragos waited beside the glowing chamber. He'd chosen to appear in the deceptively generic shape of a melon-sized Orange PC instead of one of the more elaborate shapes he owned as a quantum computer.

She glared at him. "Ugh. The damn thing looks just like a coffin."

Dragos morphed his translume shell into the twisted shape of a gargoyle, standing exactly twelve inches tall on his stubby, clawed legs. Just like one of the archaic transformer toys, he had the ability to shift his shape into different body types and then refold back into his normal form of a flat silver case, like an intricate, interlocking 3-D jigsaw puzzle. "I assure you. This is not a coffin."

She rolled her eyes at the lumpy green protrusions and bat wings on his back. A gargoyle? Dragos was getting more and more creative every day. Served her right. After all,

she was the one who had programmed his quantum database with her warped sense of humor and collection of old SF and Horror vids.

Tarina suppressed another shudder at the thought of climbing inside the box. Unfortunately, no matter how much she hated tats, there was no getting around it. If she wanted to earn her finders fee, she had to accept a full body tattoo in order to infiltrate the Rapture Commune's space habitat. There was no way to fake that. Their security setup would spot a temporary dye job within the first five seconds.

She shrugged. Besides, it wasn't every day she got herself a contract to retrieve a spoiled rich bitch from an ultra-secret religious commune living on a private space station habitat.

All she had to worry about after she got inside the commune's space station was getting the stupid twit out alive and coherent. The more difficult job of deprogramming the young woman's mind from a year's worth of brainwashing would be handled by the mental health team waiting at her parents' orbital mansion.

Despite his oddball appearance, she knew Dragos would never set anything up to harm her. Might as well get this over with.

She climbed into the tattoo bed. The lid sealed itself over her with an ominous hiss. A few seconds later sleeping gas sent her to a happy dreamland where Dragos danced across the horizon like a demented faun.

A droning whisper filled her mind. Words, phrases, thoughts and information in an endless loop that made garbled sense. This is your new name, your birthday, your address and your past. Remember it.

She opened her eyes. The lid stood wide open above her. Had something gone wrong? She lifted her hand. A filigree of black thorns spiraled down her skin in graceful loops.

Dragos sat on the edge of the tattoo bed with his stubby green legs crossed at the ankles in an unconscious parody of a prim old lady. He arched a miniscule eyebrow and then folded his gargoyle wings behind his back with a metallic snap. "What is your name?"

"Jennifer Collins." She blinked. *That's not my name. My name is Tarina Morrison.*

"Dragos, you are one clever devil." She chuckled. "You reprogrammed the tattoo bed to feed my brain the false identity information while I was under the anesthetic."

Dragos jumped down into the tattoo bed and sat on her leg. This newest morph was his best one yet. Gargoyle scales rubbed against her skin. A tiny tendril of smoke trickled from the corner of his nostril. "Phase two of programming initiated. In two hours and forty minutes, you will board the shuttlecraft. Four hours later, you'll enter the commune with the newest batch of hopeful initiates."

She hated this part. Going in blind like this without direct access to weapons, electronic back-up gear and Net access put her and Dragos in a very vulnerable position. Hopefully, the commune's security scan wasn't accurate enough to figure out he was a quantum computer instead of a rich girl's souped-up comp-phone PC.

* * * * *

The newest batch of bedazzled initiates milled around inside the shuttle bay, waiting to go through Rapture's elaborate security clearance and decontamination procedures. Sloane Witherspoon carefully balanced the awkward bundle of confiscated personal computers, cell phones and gearboards in his arms. He stumbled down the steps past them, twisted his ankle on a patch of loose gravel, spun around in a circle, staggered sideways, did a high kick, and lost his grip on everything in a brilliant display of windmilling arms. Shrieking initiates scattered like a flock of hens from the onslaught of bouncing computers, phones, boards and clips.

Then, for the grand finale, he performed a perfect belly flop on the cold hard grid of the metal deck plating. Judging by the way this fall knocked the breath out of him in a satisfying *oomph*, he figured he rated at least a nine on a scale of ten.

The last thing he'd dreamed of when he enrolled in Clown School on a dare was incorporating the skills from that training into his undercover persona as an accident-prone geek. Clown School was a lot more difficult than he anticipated. Much harder than the usual self-defense training. He had to maintain himself in peak physical condition and use exact timing in order to perform each stunt without injury.

The security team sorting through the initiates shifted their weapons to the side. They looked him over with sneers on their faces and laughed like hyenas. Exactly as he'd planned. They had him pegged as a clumsy geek not worth guarding against.

One of the initiates broke loose from the pack. She knelt beside him. He pulled his arms and legs in from their awkward sprawl and rolled over onto his back.

"Are you all right?" She brushed the hair away from his face.

Intelligent brown eyes gazed back at him. Whoa! This one wasn't zoned out and brainwashed like the rest of the initiates. She wore her straight blond-brown hair in a simple braid. A worried frown etched her brow.

She smelled delicious, too. Like flowers, spice and mulled wine.

A strong pulse throbbed in the jugular vein beneath her chin.

His fangs started to unfold.

Down boy!

Sloane sucked in a deep breath. He forced the fangs back into their slots.

Not good. He'd just fed a half-hour ago.

Mind you, the artificial blood substitute didn't have the same kick as fresh, but he'd been drinking that three times a day ever since he'd been accepted into Homicide's Special Ops Division without any cravings whatsoever. Hell, he'd even gotten used to the putrid

taste and disgusting stench of the artificial crap, like drinking from a day-old corpse. A clothespin over his nose usually toned his gut reaction down to a mere shudder every other swallow.

Now was not the time to fall off the wagon. Vampirism was a viral infection, an infection they'd learned to control and incorporate into the law enforcement field six months after the discovery of that virus.

Sloane managed a weak smile. His face felt like it was on fire. He hated how that happened every time he met a woman he liked. "I'm fine. Thank you."

The last thing he needed to do was break his cover, even though she had the most intelligent eyes he'd seen in a woman in his entire life. Women with brains had always been his fatal weakness.

The woman tilted her head to the side. "Are you sure?" She rose to her feet and held out her hand.

He grabbed her hand and let her pull him to his feet. Her grip was strong and sure. Exactly what he'd always loved in a woman. No girly-girls for him. He wanted a woman who could hold her own in a sparring match.

He waved her away. "Better get back with the group. I can pick this mess up myself."

What the hell was she doing here? This one had more brains in her little finger than this latest batch of twenty-five spoiled rich-bitch girls, all starry-eyed with vapid smiles for Orion Lapthorne's hot guru cock and charismatic promises. He shook his head.

* * * * *

Tarina stood in the initiates' line and maintained a vacant stare. Goosebumps roughened her skin and turned her nipples into stiff dime-sized nubs.

They'd taken everything from her, her clothes, money, ID cards and Dragos. Of course, Dragos had morphed into the streamlined case of a rich girl's silver-embossed softtech

personal computer/cell phone, its database filled with mindless ring tones and the latest fad gaming systems. Later, after she'd been assigned a place to sleep and they put the lights out for the night, he'd escape from the storage bin and sneak inside to see her and update her on his progress.

The line inched its way down a long yellow corridor into the next room. Billows of wet steam flowed from the open doorway. A hatchet-faced woman wearing a plain white shirt and pants stood beside the door with a databoard in her hand.

Tarina shuffled forward. She was entering a new life, free from worldly considerations. Pure bullshit.

That geek who had fallen in the docking bay looked promising. Maybe she could seduce him and convince him to help her escape. So what if he was clumsy and blushed like a teenager when his eyes met hers. Of all the guys here, he was the only one who saw her as a person instead of two naked breasts and a wide-open cunt. Plus, he had a pretty decent build under his tan coveralls.

Hatchet Face stood at the doorway with sneering eyes. She passed out douche and enema bags. "Master Orion requires every woman to be as clean and pure in her body as she is in her thoughts when she enters his divine presence."

Did everyone here believe this crap? Tarina accepted her allotted cleansing devices without comment. She stepped over the threshold into the slippery white-tiled floor of the communal shower. A line of naked females waited by the toilets. Black thorn tattoos adorned their backs, arms, legs and bellies. Another profusion of naked females soaped their tattooed bodies within the steaming showers. Was she the only sane woman in this lousy excuse for a sixth-rate porno movie set? At least the water was hot. She hated cold showers.

* * * * *

Sloane placed yet another generic PC on the table beside his tools. It shouldn't take long, maybe twenty minutes, to wipe the hard drive clean and get it ready for the commune

to sell along with the rest of the “donated” PCs, cell phones and gameboards from their newest crop of initiates.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes. What would he find when he hacked into this one’s personal files? He knew it was hers. One side effect of vampirism was an acute sense of smell that enabled vampires to find nourishment.

The woman’s unique scent clung to the sleek silver casing. Would he find drivel, or would he find research notes from her Master’s degree course in robotics or genetic engineering? She couldn’t be more than twenty-three years old, twenty-four at the most. Would she think he was too old for her at thirty-five?

Damn it! He couldn’t get her face out of his mind. It was hopeless. He wasn’t one of the over-muscled jocks or pretty boys who ran this commune under Orion Laphorne’s absolute control. No way in hell would he have a chance to get close to her here.

But then again, six months of celibacy while surrounded by half-naked, drop dead gorgeous women would give any guy a raging hard-on. That’s what was wrong with him. His frustrated hormones had decided to wreak havoc on him just because the only halfway intelligent woman in the commune had smiled at him and touched his face.

His cock rose in urgent demand behind the thick Velcro fastening of his pants. He leaned back, unsealed the coverall from neck to groin. His overheated flesh bounced out in the cool air. He sighed with relief. Much better.

Sloane closed his eyes and slowly stroked himself. Did she like Italian food? Would she accept a long, leisurely dinner with wine, followed by a night out at the retro blues club? They’d sit and sip wine and listen to the sultry sax wailing in the background. They’d get up and slow dance. She’d lay her head on his shoulder. He’d hold her close and rest his hand on the lower curve of her spine, just above her lovely buttocks. She’d lean into him and brush herself against his erection. Soft, warm body in his arms. Pliant hips swaying against him.

And afterwards, he'd take her home. She'd invite him into her apartment, disarm her security system and they'd walk inside. He'd wait while she reset the security. She'd invite him into her kitchen. They'd drink coffee, chat and laugh. She'd lean over him for a kiss. He'd pull her down into his lap and prolong the kiss. She'd wiggle upon his erection and lean into him for more. He'd unbutton her blouse and slide his hand inside to the soft warm skin of her breast.

She'd turn her head to the side giving him easy access to her throat.

Sloane's fangs unfolded. He sighed. Harder and faster he stroked himself. His cock jerked and jumped between his hands like a jackrabbit and...

He opened his eyes. *Too late*. He'd shot his load all over the floor. Damn, he was hard up. Most times he didn't come until he'd visualized himself going for the final thrust inside his fantasy lover.

"Not bad. I rate you at least a ten on a scale of one to fifteen for effort."

He swiveled his head around and glared at his quantum computer, Ivy League. "How long have you been here?"

Ivy morphed into the shape of retro-college coed. Horn-rimmed glasses appeared on her tiny nose. Smooth brown hair grew out of her scalp and flowed into a sleek bun. A red pleated skirt and white oxford shirt morphed over her curvy body. Of course, the fact that she stood only twelve inches tall gave her the appearance of a sprite instead of a woman.

Ivy climbed onto the shelf. She fluffed her skirt out and crossed her legs. "I've been here long enough to watch you jack off while that other quantum computer morphed into a rat and snuck away. I didn't know you had that much semen in your genitals."

He stuffed his maligned "genitals" into his coveralls and let the Velcro seam close again. His heart pounded in his chest like a runaway rocket. The new initiate he'd been fantasizing about had genius-level capabilities if she had a quantum computer working with her. And he didn't even know her name.

“Ivy?”

“Yes.”

“Did you send a drone to follow this wandering computer?”

“Of course.”

His heart slowed to a normal pace. Ivy’s surveillance programming was top notch. “Good. The partner of that computer is very important to our investigation. Obviously, she’s working undercover just like I am. Find her. Talk to the other computer. Exchange data and ask them to meet me on Deck 4 tomorrow morning. We need to collaborate.”

Ivy nodded. “No problem, hot shot.”

“One more thing.”

She cocked her head to the side. “What?”

“Find out her real name, please.”

Ivy grinned. “Will do. I think her computer’s cute, too. I can’t wait to get to know him better.”

* * * * *

Orion Lapthorne strolled past the line of trembling initiates. Tall, blond and blue-eyed, he had the chiseled symmetrical features of a Michelangelo sculpture. Perfection that looked suspiciously like the direct result of extensive plastic surgery

Tarina smothered a sigh and tried not to slouch. The only good thing about the full-body tattoo was the fact that even though she was naked, she didn’t feel naked. The tattoo actually concealed more of her body than the three-string swimkini showcased in last month’s Fashion Maven ezine. The few distorted glimpses in the shiny surfaces of the metal-walled corridors of the swirling lines from neck to ankle gave the tattoo the appearance of a sleeveless body stocking.

She rolled her eyes. This bastard had all the wrong clichés about Dom/sub life down pat. He must have been kicked out of Dom school and decided to form his cult based on his stupid ideas. A true Dom finds out what turns on his sub and uses his knowledge to create their relationship based on mutual pleasure.

Their fearless cult master needed new handmaidens for his inner court. Two had taken ill and died a few days ago under mysterious circumstances. Of course, every initiate signed an organ donor card when they joined. A card with a discreet “donation” block that said all money received from the sale of these organs went into the commune’s coffers.

Two remaining handmaidens strutted beside him. Black translucent skirts showcased the intricate thorn and vine swirls of the tattoos outlining their pubic mounds and buttocks. Gold rings dangled from pierced clits. The tattoos thickened into dark, twisted vines that spiraled across their taut bellies and blossomed into a riot of thorns to caress the golden chains fastened to their pierced nipples. And, for the finishing touch, gold butt plugs peeked out from the clefts of their ass cheeks.

The guru donned a new pair of surgical gloves each time he “examined” a new initiate’s genitals. Christ on a stick! This guy had some serious issues about hygiene. He lifted the left breast on the red-haired woman standing beside Tarina, frowned at the mole under her nipple, shook his head and moved on.

Oh crud. Now it was her turn to endure his wonderful attentions.

Orion stopped in front of Tarina. He smothered a bored yawn. She stretched her lips into a suitably devoted smile and braced herself.

Sure enough. He grabbed her breasts, twisted them, gave cruel pinches to her nipples, then stepped back and gestured at her to assume the correct position for the final portion of his personal exam.

She turned around, spread her legs apart, bent down and grabbed her ankles.

The white miniskirt she wore flipped up over her back and gave him an unobstructed view of her charms. In addition to a shower, she'd had to use a douche and enema in order to cleanse her body properly before tonight's inspection.

Talk about cold and inhumane. Right now she felt like a slab of meat displayed on a butcher counter. The snapping sound of Orion donning a fresh pair of surgical gloves to protect his perfect hands greeted her ears.

She bit back her gasp at the sudden squirt of cold lube on her ass. He inserted his finger into her vagina first, then jabbed another rough finger into her anus with no finesse. Tarina sucked in a couple of deep breaths and relaxed her muscles under his demeaning assault. Her mission was more important than a few moments of humiliation.

One of his current handmaidens, the blond one, was her quarry. If she wanted to get this woman out, then she damn well better meet the qualifications to join high and mighty guru Orion's exalted inner circle.

A stinging slap on her ass told her to stand up and turn around again. She complied and widened her eyes with simpering adoration.

Orion yawned and displayed his perfect tonsils. "Wax her first. Hairy cunts are disgustingly unhygienic. Thin those eyebrows out, too. Then put her with the special group. She has possibilities. Put her on the list for tomorrow night's session."

He started to walk away, stopped and spoke over his shoulder. "If the security team wants to break her in for me first, make sure she has another douche and enema before I try her out. I abhor the stench of stale semen."

* * * * *

Sloane edged down the corridor. A line of cleaning bots took up most of the space, leaving gleaming, damp trails across the floor, ceiling and walls. Not that he was complaining. The bots kept the place spotless and eliminated the endless drudgery of scrubbing down every deck, cubicle and corridor on the space station.

He placed his hand on the glowing lock panel for the supply room. The door opened. Dr. Ingelson whirled around. "How many times have I told you to not to do that? What if I'd been in the middle of transferring organs into their FedEx delivery cartons?"

Sloane ducked his head and flashed an apologetic smile. "Sorry. I thought you weren't doing anything critical 'cause three of the cleaning bots just came out."

Dr. Ingelson cleared the screen he'd been working on. "What do you need from here?"

Perfect timing. Ivy had had more than enough time to hack into the system in her current disguise as a cleaning bot. Hopefully, she'd snagged the proof he needed in order to authorize a police raid on the space station.

Sloane handed Ingelson a printout of today's schedule for him. "A shipment of artificial blood packs arrived on yesterday's shuttle. I'm supposed to replace the stale-dated packs in the escape pods with fresh ones."

"All right." Ingelson crumpled the printout into a ball and tossed it in the recycle slot. Then he went to the medical supply cabinet and placed his hand on the lock panel. "It's just as well that I'm here." The door slid back. He reached inside the refrigerated compartment and started yanking out the hermetically sealed pouches. "How many do you need? I have to file a report and account for every one of them. Did you file a disposal report for the stale-dated packs already?"

* * * * *

Having an overeager woman drip hot wax on her pussy and eyebrows, then rip away the dried strips of wax and pubic hair with gleeful snorts was not what she'd anticipated for this assignment. Tarina dug her fingernails into the gurney's padded sides and counted ceiling tiles to keep from screaming.

Finally, her tormentor gave a stinging slap on her pubes. "Lift your ass, girlie! I don't have all day."

Tarina bit back a nasty response. She clenched her hands into fists at her side, braced her feet in the stirrups and lifted her butt.

The woman held up a butt plug. She squeezed lubricating gel over her tool. A smile of wicked anticipation lit up her face. A smile that deepened into unholy glee.

Breathe. Stare at the ceiling.

Then she jammed the silicone butt plug into Tarina's anus.

Don't think about the pain. Relax. Accept it. Don't try to push the damn thing out.

The woman stepped back and gave a satisfied grunt. "You're finished."

Tarina hurriedly climbed off the gurney. The woman gave her a tube of aloe gel to be used "as needed". She grabbed it and staggered out of the infirmary before Hatchet Face tried to apply more wax just for fun. One thing for sure, when she handed the errant daughter to her parents, she intended to bill them a substantial fee for all the pain and suffering endured on this job.

Grunts, groans and the slapping sounds of flesh against flesh from the next room echoed into the corridor. Tarina strode past that section as fast as she could, wincing with the way her chafed labia burned under her flimsy skirt. At least getting her pussy waxed had kept her out of the orgy room where twelve security officers were occupied with breaking in the newest crop of initiates.

Down one more deck into another corridor. The door at the very end slid open at her approach. Motion detectors and vidcams guaranteed zero privacy for all initiates. A narrow cot was the only item of furniture inside the gleaming metal cubicle. She had just enough space to step inside. As soon as she plopped on the cot, the door slid shut and the ceiling light vanished.

The hell with that. I don't need any lights to do what I have to do next. Tarina flipped her skirt up, spread her legs apart and carefully applied the gel. Soft hisses escaped from her mouth with each stroke on her abused flesh.

A tiny hand touched her ankle. She almost went through the ceiling. Then she sagged back and grinned. Dragos had found her. Good! She carefully capped the gel tube, swung her legs onto the cot and stretched out as if she were going to sleep. Even though they had the lights out, they probably had listening devices planted in the cubicles.

Two small figures plopped onto the cot beside her and walked up to her head.

Wait a minute! Dragos didn't have the ability to split himself in half! Where the hell did he find another quantum computer with his kind of morphing capabilities? Unless... there was another operative working undercover here.

One of the computers walked around her head and sat down by her left ear. The other sat down by her right ear. Tiny electrodes fastened onto her scalp. She closed her eyes. Slow and easy, she breathed, letting her mind settle into the state of alphawave meditation for a direct neural interface.

Drago's golden eyes appeared out of the darkness first. Warm, intelligent and friendly. Dragon eyes. Dragon wings unfurled and flapped behind his vast body, a body strong enough to carry her for a thousand miles without tiring.

A second dragon appeared, with cool green eyes. A dragon that craned her head back and admired the delicate scales tracing her well-muscled body. She purred. *Oh yes. I like this shape.*

Tarina pictured herself beside the new dragon. She leaned against the massive snout, propped her elbow on the dragon's nose and stared into those eyes. The black slit in the middle irised wide with mutual curiosity. *I'm Tarina.* She gestured at Dragos waiting behind her. *I assume you've already met Dragos. Who are you and what are you doing here?*

The dragon chuckled. *My name's Ivy League. My human partner is Roane.* The image of a roaring twenties college coed danced in the back of Tarina's mind along with the cute geek who'd tripped and fell in the habitat's loading docks.

Ohmigawd. He's working undercover too?

Ivy League preened. Her scales glittered with prismatic sparks. *Fooled you, didn't he? He went to Clown School. Perfect pratfalls are an artform.*

Oh yes. I would never have tagged him as an operative in a million years. Tarina scratched Ivy behind her ear. *I'm a PI. My job is to retrieve one of Orion's lucky handmaidens and bring her back safe and sound to her parents. Why are you and Sloane here?*

Sloane works for the Homicide Special Ops Division.

Oh shit. Homicide?

Yes.

Wait a minute. Special Ops? Does that mean what I think it means?

Yes it does. Sloane's one of the legal vampires.

Tarina stopped and shook her head. *Holy shit.* A shy geek just didn't fit her image of a suave and debonair vamp oozing sex from every pore.

Ivy nudged her hand. Tarina blinked. *Sorry.* Then she resumed scratching behind Ivy's ear. *Does this mean our illustrious guru is a rogue vampire?*

Nah. He's just an asshole.

Tarina scratched harder. Ivy's left rear leg thumped on the ground hard enough to make it feel like a mild earthquake under her. She grinned. Ivy was really getting into this mental image of herself as a dragon. *So? What's the plan? I suppose this means Sloane and I need to coordinate our operations.*

Yes. Sloane wants to talk to you tomorrow right after breakfast. Here's where he wants to meet you. A schematic of the space station's interior floor plan appeared in holographic clarity above the dragon's head, with a bright red arrow pointing at a cubicle on Deck 4.

* * * * *

Tarina. Pretty name. Other than her name and the fact that she was a PI doing a simple retrieval job, Ivy had pretty much left him on his own here.

Sloane leaned against the barracks wall beside her, close enough to see her pulse beating beneath the delicate skin at the base of her throat.

Close enough to see the stiff peaks of her nipples. Her breasts were just the right size to fit in his hands, not too large and not too small. They were perfect. Just like her quiet smile.

His cock felt like it was going to burst through his coveralls. "Hi."

She slanted a wary glance at his face.

"You're not as clumsy as you were yesterday in the loading dock."

He swiped his hand through his hair and managed a half-shrug with one shoulder. With the corridor vidcam recording everything they said and did, he had to keep in character. "I pulled an all-nighter working on computers. I was tired, that's why I missed my step then. I'm fine now."

Laughter gleamed in Tarina's eyes. Dark eyes filled with secrets and keen intelligence.

His hands were sweating now. He wiped them on his pants legs. "Your eyebrows look different."

She struck a pose. "Orion sent me to sick bay for a wax job."

His heart slammed against his chest. If Orion had sent her for a wax job, then he planned to add her to his special harem of handmaidens. "Ouch!"

She snorted and crossed her arms. That made her breasts stick up even more. "My body is a living temple to serve the master."

He swallowed against the sudden tightness in his throat. "I liked your eyebrows the way they were. I have some aloe gel you can use if you want. It's in my room."

"Thanks. Barbie doll eyebrows were never my thing." She shrugged. "Sounds good. I already used up the tube they gave me in sick bay."

He gulped. His room. Had Ivy told her he was a vampire? Did this mean she wasn't afraid to be alone with him?

Yeah. Right. She needed to be alone in his room with him because she was an undercover operative too. They couldn't exactly discuss how to coordinate their efforts out in the open like this. "I can take you with me to get the gel if you want."

She uncrossed her arms, smiled and slipped her hand into his. "Sure. I'd like that."

His heart slammed against his chest. He led her past two security guards standing guard in front of the lift leading up to the bridge. Both guards leered. The first guard licked his lips. "Hey, sweet cheeks. Do you wanna take care of me after you do the geek? We finish our shift in a half an hour."

Tarina lifted her chin. Her taut breasts bounced under the sudden movement.

Roane jerked his gaze away from her breasts, coughed and cleared his throat. His ears were so hot they felt like they were going to melt into shapeless blobs. He punched in the code on the lift for the residential area and they squeezed past the two guards. Hopefully she'd understand that he had to play the part of an asshole just like everyone else here. He managed a wink and swagger. "Don't worry. After I'm done with her, she'll be walking bowlegged."

Five excruciating minutes later, he finally stood in front of the door to his cubicle. There he pressed his hand against the lock mechanism and waited for it to read his palmprint. The air-conditioning in his room should help cool him down.

The door slid open. He escorted her inside and grabbed a Hawaiian print shirt from a chair, then turned around and held it out with his head turned sideways. "Here. We need to talk."

She accepted the shirt.

He walked over to the workbench and table and cringed at the mess. Computer parts, chips, and keyboards were strewn over every surface.

At least they didn't have to worry about the security scans. As the resident computer geek, the first thing he'd done was clear his room of all bugging devices, both audio and visual.

"You can turn around now. I'm decent."

Oh god. Tarina sat on his bed with her legs tucked sideways. She'd left his shirt unbuttoned.

The miniskirt barely covered her naked crotch.

Her pussy. The wax job. She's sore.

He spun around and fumbled on the shelf below the monitors. He pushed aside the bottle of sunscreen, anti-UV pills, and found the tube of aloe gel. As a vampire, high sensitivity to UV light meant extra precautions to prevent third-degree burns every time he walked around in broad daylight.

She patted the empty space beside her. "Come on. Sit down. I don't bite. We need to talk and there isn't enough room for both of us on that stool."

* * * * *

When Sloane sat down beside her, Tarina bit back a chuckle. She was strongly tempted to ask him if he wanted to apply the gel on her pussy, just so she could watch him blush and stammer.

No. Maybe later.

Right now they needed to sort out what they could do for each other on a professional level first. Besides which, if she said that to him, after he recovered from the initial shock he would probably flip her on her back, spread her legs apart and fuck her like a rabbit in heat. He had a good-sized erection bulging in his coverall already.

Down girl. Behave yourself. Stop teasing the poor guy to death. He's not a robot.

He was a man, a very attractive and horny man. And judging by the muscles she could spot rippling under his coverall, he used the weight bench in the corner of this room.

Brains *and* brawn. Exactly the kind of man she needed. Where had he been hiding all her life? Probably in a computer lab.

Speaking of which, if he squeezed that gel tube any harder it would burst. She took his hand. His fingers loosened their death grip under her touch. She eased the gel tube away from him and dropped it in her lap. "I'm sure Ivy told you I'm here on a private retrieval assignment. Venetia Warren's parents want their lovely daughter back home instead of wasting her time and money on this obscure religious cult. Why are you here?"

He sagged back against the wall and swiped his hands through his hair. Thick, brown and wavy, his short hair looked so touchable. The ends curled at the nape of his neck. He had two crooked bumps on his nose. He must have broken it at least twice. She flashed him an encouraging smile.

He blushed, then said, "One of the things the special homicide unit does is keep track of all death certificates and organ sales. A suspiciously high number of certificates from this commune listed heatstroke as the cause of death. Computer repair technician was the first job opening they posted on the Net, so I applied for that position in order to investigate these suspicious deaths."

"Heatstroke?"

His eyes darkened from soft pewter gray into cold, hard steel. "I've been here for six months. The cafeteria is immaculate. All physical activity is conducted inside air-conditioned buildings. There's no valid reason why anyone would suffer from heatstroke. Last, but not least, each death has occurred within Orion's inner sanctum."

He sighed and raked his hands through his hair again. "The only place I don't have access to is the inner sanctum. I do know Orion makes a huge profit selling organs, hair, eyes, skin and other body parts to hospitals and plastic surgery labs, but that's legit because

everyone signs organ donor cards when they enter the commune. That's the only direct link I've been able to document between the two events. Orion has a licensed and fully accredited physician on staff. He signs the death certificates and so far, no one has questioned their validity."

An icy chill did a mambo down her spine. All she wanted was to complete her retrieval of the errant daughter and earn her finders fee. But this! This was like a modern-day movie remake of Frankenstein and Igor robbing graves for body parts. Except in this case, Orion was Dr. Frankenstein and it was happening now, not in some stupid horror movie. "Oh shit."

"Yes." Sloane slipped his arm around her shoulders and held her close. He soothed her shivers with gentle touches. "I'm scared, too. If all went according to plan today, Ivy was able to document the information I need to request a police raid of the station. I don't want you to become one of Orion's handmaidens. I'm afraid he'll kill you too."

She closed her eyes, curled into his embrace and rested her cheek against his warm, strong chest. His breath feathered the top of her head.

Finally, she pushed herself back. "Venetia Warren's one of his handmaidens. The only way I can complete my assignment and get her out is to get inside his inner sanctum with her."

Shock, comprehension and then fear chased each other across his face. "No. You can't. It's too dangerous."

She put her hand on his mouth. "Shhh. I'm not going in there blind. I'm not going to take any stupid chances. We'll figure out a plan first. We'll help each other."

And they did. An hour and a half flew by while they planned their campaign out step by step and figured out every possible scenario. Tarina sagged back against the wall. In order to carry out their plan, she'd probably have to let Orion fuck her. Just the thought of him laying his hands on her, let alone sticking his cock in her, made her feel like puking. If their

plan went wrong, she'd wind up dead with her body butchered and sold to the organ banks and plastic surgeons.

Tarina knew Sloane wanted her, but he was too much of a gentleman to make the first move. Now, more than ever, she needed some sweet loving from a man with tender hands to savor before she faced Orion's slimy touch. She scooted closer to him and placed her hand on his thigh. "We have one more thing to do before I return to my dorm room."

He slanted a wary glance in her direction. A puzzled frown etched his brow. "What?"

"I need you to make love to me. That's the only way to make sure no one suspects the real reason why you brought me here to your room."

Sloane went perfectly still. He gaped at her with a shell-shocked expression that almost made her laugh. She didn't laugh. Instead, she licked her lips and stroked her fingernail down the thick bulge in the front of his coveralls.

He sucked in a startled breath, ducked his head, watched her finger tracing the contours of his aroused cock, and mumbled. "I'm not sure this is a good idea."

She tilted her head and studied the bright red blush staining his face. Her smile turned into a wicked leer. "Why not?"

He looked at her face and gulped. "Um ... you had a wax job. I could hurt you."

She picked up the gel tube from her lap and held it up. "As long as you apply plenty of this on my skin, we'll do just fine."

Panic filled his eyes. "Condoms. I need condoms."

She shook her head. "No condoms."

He gulped again. "Why not?"

She held up her fingers one by one and listed her points. "No one uses condoms here. It will make them suspicious. I had my blood tested a week before I came here. I'm clean. What about you?"

His expression changed to total bewilderment. "What about me?"

“Have you had any sexual encounters during the last six months?”

“Ah... No. I’ve been celibate.”

A celibate vampire? Interesting.

“When did you have your blood tested for STDs and HIV?”

“Six months ago.”

“You’re clean, right?”

“Yes.”

“Are you gay?”

“No!”

“Is it because you’re a vampire?”

Sloane jumped to his feet. His face went totally white. “Ivy told you? You’re not afraid I’ll bite you?”

She shook her head. “Nah.”

The vampire virus was a symbiotic one. In order to co-exist in the host body, the virus triggered a complex set of DNA changes that altered the body’s chemistry. These changes gave the host body extreme sensitivity to UV light, aversion to strong odors like garlic, a need to drink blood, increased strength and stamina, acute night vision, and also tripled the average human lifespan from a hundred years to three hundred.

“When the first reports about the discovery of the vampire virus hit the Net, I flagged every one of them and read everything I could find about vamps.”

Sloane sat down again beside her.

Of course, there were a few minor drawbacks. Only one in every thousand men and one in five thousand women survived the three-day transition from human to vamp.

Of those who survived the change, half of them went into a berserk feeding frenzy and had to be put down as vicious killers.

An injection of the “dead virus” at age thirty was the preferred option. That gave you double the normal life span with only one side effect. Sterility. She figured Orion had taken his injection five years ago.

“I know the only way I can become infected with the virus is if I drink your blood or if I get a blood transfusion from a vamp. So even if you bite me in the heat of the moment, it’s not going to make me a vamp, right?”

A wary expression filled his face. “Yes.”

“I also know that if you’re one of the legal vamps you’ve sworn not to bite anyone without permission and that you drink artificial blood to control your instincts. Right?”

He nodded. “This is true. I won’t bite you unless you ask me.”

She stretched her arms behind her head. The unbuttoned shirt she’d draped over her shoulders fell open and exposed her breasts. “Do you find me sexually attractive?”

He licked his lips and cleared his throat. “Um.” He tried not to look at her breasts, but couldn’t stop himself. His face reddened again. “Yes, you’re very ... sexy.”

“Do you agree it would look very suspicious if Hatchet Face checks me when I return to the dorm and she doesn’t find any semen inside me?”

He managed a shy smile. “Ah... yes. That would look extremely suspicious.” A panicked expression filled his face. “Um. You *are* aware that vampires remain fertile after the change, aren’t you?”

She patted his leg. “Is that why you’re so jumpy? Don’t worry. I have an implant. I can’t get pregnant.”

He touched her mouth with his finger. “May I kiss you?”

She grinned. “Yes, please.”

He lowered his face to hers.

An impertinent voice broke the silence. “Well, it’s about time. You made us wait for one hour, thirty-seven minutes and three seconds to see some real action.”

Tarina and Sloane sat up so fast they bumped heads.

Dragos and Ivy waved at them. The two quantum computers had taken seats on the edge of the worktable a few feet away. Both of them had transformed into gargoyle replicas. Dragos's black scales gleamed like onyx, and Ivy's green scales had the delicate color of spring leaves.

"Get out!" Sloane yelled.

Tarina glowered at Dragos. She pointed at the door. "Now! Both of you."

Dragos swiveled his head around in a complete circle. "We can't. He locked the door when you came inside."

Sloane rose to his feet, strode to the palmlock, slapped his hand on the glowing panel and opened the door. Dragos and Ivy jumped to the floor, rearranged their protrusions into the squat, dull shapes of cleaning bots and rolled out into the corridor.

The door slid shut and engaged its locks with a soft click. Sloane turned around. No longer shy and hesitant, he kicked off his boots and removed his coverall. The sizzling promise in his eyes held Tarina speechless. His erection rose strong and hard from the dark curls at his crotch. His cock swayed in front of his navel, uncut, the skin stretched back to expose the soft, engorged head. A thick vein pulsed around the hardened shaft. A droplet of pre-cum clung to the tip.

Oh my!

Her mouth went dry. Every scrap of blood in her body left her brain and flowed into her aching nipples and groin. Her clit throbbed and her pussy clenched itself at the thought of feeling his thick cock inside her. If he could get her this hot with just one look, well...

Sloane held up his hand. "I just remembered something else I need." He turned around and went to his workbench.

Hmmm. Long, lean legs and tight ass muscles curved up to a well-proportioned back and shoulders. *Not bad. Not bad at all.* She'd never considered clowns sexy before, let alone

known that clowns could be vamps. What other useful skills had he acquired besides tripping and falling with the practiced ease of a gymnast? Juggling? Knife throwing? A little sleight of hand? Combine those skills with a geek's intelligence and a vampire's incredible strength, nightsight, dexterity, and hand and eye coordination, and he'd make one hell of a clown. LOL.

Speaking of which... Tarina grabbed the aloe gel tube, squeezed a generous supply on her hand and carefully slathered her waxed pubic mound. It felt deliciously cool against her hot, slick skin.

Sloane flipped a switch and slow, sultry jazz filled the air with wailing saxophones and jungle drumbeats. He turned around again and approached with a smile and outstretched hand. His eager cock bobbed, hard and ready to perform for her. "May I have this dance?"

She held up the gel tube so he could see she'd already taken care of one problem, then slipped his shirt off her shoulders and accepted his offer with a peal of laughter.

A baritone whisky voice on the recording sang lyrics of warm and tender love, promising eternal devotion. She put one hand on his shoulder and the other on his waist. He wrapped one arm around her waist, slipped his other hand under her skirt, cupped her ass and pulled her tight against the solid, hard column of his cock.

They danced cheek to cheek in a slow, seductive grind of pussy upon cock. She breathed in the very male and musky scent that clung to his skin.

He groaned, slid his other hand to her ass, picked her up and crushed her breasts against his hair-roughened chest.

She wrapped her legs around his waist.

His cock slid inside her wet pussy in one glorious push.

Oh god. He felt so *good* inside her.

She tangled her hands in his hair and pulled his head down to her for a greedy, tongue-probing kiss that matched the slow, steady grind of his cock inside her.

The song ended. He lowered her to the bed still impaled on his cock.

Yes.

Another slow song filled the air. He placed his hands on either side of her face. Braced his weight with one foot on the floor. He leaned into her and splayed his long fingers over her breasts. Soft, gentle tweaks that pulled her nipples higher. He bent his head down to suck on them, and that shoved his cock even deeper.

His hot, wet mouth on her nipple sent a shock straight to her pussy with each eager suck. She twisted her hips against him and whimpered.

He lifted his head and stared at her. "Am I hurting you?"

"No... no... I love it."

He grinned. "You know you make a little humming sound deep in your throat every time I move."

She tightened her legs and lifted her hips higher. "Yes. Stop talking. Make love to me. I want to feel you come inside me."

There was nothing rough about him. Every move was slow and sure, a teasing dance of his thick cock in her eager pussy. He watched her face and took his cues from her breathing and soft cries of delight, slowly bringing her to a peak of pleasure that shuddered through her in wave after wave of sensation.

He moved his hands down, dug his fingers into her ass and pumped into her with total abandon. His eyes glazed over. He panted and moved faster. His ass muscles bunched under her legs and feet.

Two prominent fangs snicked into place inside his mouth.

Her pussy clenched. She wiggled on his cock with greedy anticipation. A little nibble wouldn't hurt, would it?

She lifted her breast. "Bite me on the bottom curve where the tattoo is darkest. No one will see the mark there."

His face was flushed with desire. His eyes coal black with hunger. "Are you sure?" His voice came out in a strangled whisper.

"I'm sure."

His cock swelled inside her, stuffing her pussy with flesh like it had never been stuffed before. He bent his head down to her breast.

One minute she was fine.

The next, every inch of her skin burned with sensual anticipation. A warm lassitude suffused her body. She closed her eyes. Shudder after shudder ripped through her in an orgasm that left no room for coherent thought. Pleasure, bliss, ecstasy, an endless aching need fulfilled.

He threw his head back. Blood dripped from the corners of his mouth. His cock jerked inside her, over and over again. Hot, wet cum spilled deep inside her and joined the warm, intoxicating pleasure racing through her blood.

* * * * *

Not only had she let him make love to her, she'd let him bite her. *Oh god.*

Her blood tasted like sweet liquor. It sang inside him with intoxicating power. His heart ached with the need to touch her, kiss her and hold her forever in his arms.

His hands shook. His legs felt like water. He pulled on his coveralls and sealed the front seam with trembling fingers. No time left. He had to escort her back to Deck 2 so they could implement their plan.

It wasn't right. He wanted to keep her safe, snuggled beside him for as long as she wanted him, but they had a job to do first. And as much as he wanted to protect her, he knew better than to try and stop her.

She was beautiful, sexy, and intelligent. Her courage astonished him.

He kept his hand in the small of her back as they walked past the security guards a second time. The black thorn tattoo scrolled across her body looked like dried blood under the space station's harsh fluorescent lights. He'd taken care not to bite too deeply. The puncture wounds under the curve of her left breast blended in easily with the tattoo's dark dyes.

White trails of dried cum stained the insides of her thighs. Everyone could see he'd fucked her front and back. They'd see the sticky cum matted in her hair and know she'd sucked him off too. And best of all, she strutted proud and happy by his side.

He nodded at the guards. They leered at her bouncy breasts. One of the guards reached over and tweaked her nipple.

She leaned into Sloane's side and clung to his arm.

He sucked in a deep breath and kept his fangs from unfolding. Soon. Very soon, this would be over. Until then, he better keep his temper under control. "Sorry, guys. She doesn't have enough time to take care of you now. Orion put her on tonight's initiation list."

The second guard jabbed his finger at the sticky mess in her hair, pointed at the streaks on her thighs and laughed. "Way to go, bud. I would never have suspected you had that much cum in you. For a geek, you did a damn good job of breaking this little cutie in for Orion."

* * * * *

Talk about a germ phobia. Orion had a super-duper case of it. Tarina spun around in slow motion and counted to a hundred while the disinfectant spray on her body evaporated under the compartment's blow dryer.

A soft chime announced the end of the procedure. The decontamination chamber's outer door slid open. She stepped over the threshold. The outer door closed behind her. A green light glowed above the inner door. She turned in a slow circle for the camera. The door opened and she entered her guru's sacred chamber.

Incense assaulted her nostrils and tonal music bombarded her ears. The two handmaidens from last night stepped forward and led her to the altar.

Squashed between the two women, she had no choice but to stand and sway under the hypnotic voice droning along with the music. She glanced at the time. Two hours of this crap to endure before the great guru initiated her. He wanted her brainwashed into a mindless stupor before he fucked her disinfected body. Might as well be fucking a porno robot doll instead of a living, breathing, intelligent woman.

* * * * *

Sloane shifted the bulky stack of insulated medical boxes in his arms. He dug the order sheet from his pocket and handed the crumpled printout to the guard on duty. "I'm supposed to check the controls and replace all outdated medical supplies on the pods."

The guard snorted and returned the order sheet to Sloan. "Scut work. Better you than me." He swiped his keycard through the central shaft's door panel and stepped aside.

On this station, the escape pods studded both sides of the main axis. Six pods per side waited on Deck 7 beside the loading docks and continued on each deck all the way up to Deck 1 and Orion Lapthorne's inner sanctum. Escape drills occurred once a month with pod assignments posted on the bridge, cafeteria, sickbay and dorms.

Pod controls were simple computer relays. Switching the control chips with the preprogrammed chips he'd created should be enough to lock the engines down after anyone pulled the doors shut and trap them inside. The hardest part of the job would be keeping his face and body language at bored competence whenever a guard wandered by while he inserted a new chip.

* * * * *

Goosebumps pebbled Tarina's skin. The sacred thorn tattoo that highlighted her adoring curves did a piss poor job of keeping her warm with the air conditioning set on the

highest level. She stretched her mouth in a smile of simpering vapidness as befitted her exalted state of incipient handmaidenhood and bowed before him.

Of course, because Orion Laphorne was her sanctified guru and holy master, he got to wear a flowing white cape, loose linen trousers and pristine leather sandals. He smiled. "Follow me." Then he turned and walked away, fully expecting her to follow at his heels like a bitch in heat.

Tarina rubbed her finger along her nose. The popping sound of the capsule breaking in her nostril sounded like a gunshot to her ears. The concentrated ragweed pollen produced almost instantaneous results. Her nose burned and itched. Her eyes felt hot and scratchy. Best of all, the cool air actually felt wonderful with her body temperature rising to feverish heights in a futile battle against her allergic reaction to the pollen.

Orion unfastened his cape. It slid off his shoulders and fell to the floor in a shimmering fabric puddle. His chest was buffed and slick, every hair removed. He kicked his sandals off, and struck a pose in front of the king-sized, heart-shaped bed. White satin sheets and covers flowed over the plump mattress. He gestured at the pristine white shag rug under his feet. "Kneel."

She strolled with swaying hips and sank to her knees on the soft rug. Orion untied his pants and let them fall to his feet. His reddened cock bounced in front of her face like a demented, blind snake.

Tarina tilted her head back at the perfect angle. She placed her hands on her thighs and resisted the urge to scratch the hives forming on her skin.

The soft bulbous tip of Orion's cock nudged her parted lips.

She sneezed. A honking-wet, explosive, teeth-clattering sneeze that sprayed a generous helping of snot and saliva over his cock and balls.

"Aaaaaaaahhhhhh!" He pushed her away with a violent shove.

She sat back on her haunches and sneezed three times in a row. More snot and spittle sprayed his legs. Excellent aim. She'd timed it perfectly.

He stared at her, his face transformed into a mask of horror. His mouth worked but no sound came out.

She ducked her head and rammed it into his balls with all her weight.

He fell back, cracked his head against the bedpost and sagged to the floor like a puppet minus its strings.

She rose to her feet, bent over, grabbed him under his arms and towed him across the room to his emergency exit door, stopping every two feet to sneeze and shower him with more disgusting germs.

By the time she reached that door, she collapsed against the wall and sucked in deep, ragged breaths, punctuated by more sneezes. Tears streamed down her face. She could barely see past the swollen slits of her eyes. Her tongue was a fat sausage in her month. Hopefully, the sneezing had gotten rid of most of the pollen from the broken capsule. Now all she had to do was get the door open before she keeled over and died from total anaphylactic shock. She grabbed Orion's arm and dragged him to the door. Pushing him to a kneeling position, she lifted his hand and pressed the clammy flesh on the palmlock.

* * * * *

"What the *fuck* are you doing here? What did you *do* to her?"

Sloane whirled around and ignored the laser rifles aimed at his chest. "I didn't do anything. I found her like this." He stepped to the side and waved at the young woman slumped on the floor. "I think she fainted. I was going to carry her down to sickbay."

He dug out his work order. "I was working on the escape pods, getting them ready for inspection tomorrow."

The first guard grabbed the printout and kept his rifle ready to fire. “Don’t move. Don’t touch her.”

The second guard went to his knee beside Venetia. He placed his rifle on the deck and checked her neck. “He’s right. I don’t see any bruises. She’s still breathing. She must have fainted.”

The first guard turned his head.

Sloane moved.

He slapped the rifle away with one hand and smashed the guard’s head against the bulkhead in one smooth lunge. A quick step to the side and he kicked the second guard in the face.

Sloane scooped the unconscious handmaiden into his arms, raced to the first escape pod, placed her inside and cycled the hatch shut.

Two more trips to dump the guards in yet another pod. As a final precaution, he smashed the lock panels beside the hatch, locking them in from both sides.

He ran down the corridor, climbed up the emergency access ladder to Orion’s suite with his heart thundering in his chest.

Blast it. Seconds counted. Dealing with them messed up his timing. Tarina would die if he got there too late.

He skidded to a stop at the locked entry door. Dragos and Ivy clattered to a stop beside him.

The door slid open. Tarina fell into his arms.

Her face had expanded to a grotesque size like a pumpkin. Her eyes had become narrow slits within the swollen flesh.

He scooped her up and held her tight. She sagged in his arms, a dead weight gasping and wheezing for air. He stepped over Orion’s body and carried her inside, leaving Dragos the task of securing the door behind them.

Ivy scooted inside between his legs. She carried a first aid kit in her tiny hands and set it on the floor.

He fumbled with shaking hands at the clasps and opened the box. Tossing bandages and ointments aside, he dug through the contents. *Here it is! The Epi-Pen!* He grabbed the ampoule filled with a single emergency dose of epinephrine, flicked the injector point out and pumped the antidote into Tarina's thigh.

He sank to the floor, propped her against the wall, curled his fingers around hers and waited. Seconds turned into excruciating minutes while he watched and waited. *Afraid.* So afraid that he'd arrived too late.

Finally, the horrible wheezing sound of her struggle for air eased into shuddering gasps and then to normal breathing. He folded her fingers around an inhaler. She nodded at him and carefully placed the nozzle in her mouth.

Dragos and Ivy seated themselves in front of Tarina. Flexible wires zipped from their hands and clung to her skin. Now that she'd passed the critical crisis point to recovery they were more than capable enough to monitor her breathing and pulse.

He glanced at the time. They were cutting it too close.

He grabbed Orion, slung the man's slack body over his shoulders in a fireman's carry, lugged him to the bed and dumped him. By the time he finished tearing Orion's discarded pants into strips, gagged him and tied him spread-eagled to the bedposts, Tarina struggled to her feet and managed a shaky walk across the floor.

He hugged her. "That was too close. I don't ever want you to take that kind of chance with your life again."

Helpless laughter shook her body for a few seconds. Then she took a deep breath, exhaled slowly and smiled at him. "Don't worry. I won't."

He pushed her sweat-soaked hair from her face and kissed her forehead. "Thank you."

She managed a weak smile. "You're very welcome." Her face went serious. "We still need to implement phase two of our plan and get the hell out of here in one piece."

He helped her over to a chair. She plopped down with the inhaler clutched in her hand, and shivers shook her body. Sloane grabbed Orion's discarded cape and draped the slippery fabric over her shoulders.

She grinned and used her chin to point at the computer lying on the night table.

Yeah. Right. Phase three.

Seeing Tarina almost die doing her part of the plan had knocked every brain cell out of his head. Not good. She needed him to think and carry out his part or they would both die from his stupidity. Sloane rushed back to the bed, grabbed the computer access pad and pressed the lid against Orion's hand. The lid glowed acid green. A sofscreen unfolded from the top and the computer powered on.

Sloane sorted through the files. He snagged autopsy photos. Images that showed bruises and strangulation marks on the dead handmaidens who'd been carved up so Orion could sell their organs, skin and body parts on the open market. He transferred hard copies of all the evidence onto minidisks and shoved the disks into his pocket.

Phase four.

He keyed in the command for an Emergency Fire Drill. A raucous alarm blasted his eardrums. Red lights flashed and the automated instructions for everyone to file to their assigned escape pods blared over the station's intercom system.

* * * * *

Tarina hesitated in front of the steps at the forensics lab. Even though she was wearing business tunic, slacks and heels, she still felt naked. Sloane had seen her at her worst. He'd seen her with sweat-soaked hair matted to her scalp and a face swollen into a distorted mask.

At least the stupid tattoo was gone. She'd removed that last night.

Would he want to continue working with her? Was what they had between them just a one night fuck that happened as part of his undercover duties, or the beginning of a long-term relationship?

The double doors at the top of the steps flew open. Sloane came out with a crazy grin on his face. He ran down the steps, picked her up and swung her around in a circle. Then he hugged her and kissed her over and over again.

Finally, he stopped.

They stood together and stared at each other. His cock pressed hard and rampant against her stomach.

He smiled. His fangs glinted under the streetlights. "I want to be your partner forever."

She grinned. "I love you, too."

 THE END 

Barbara Karmazin

With twenty-nine and a half years of experience as a bilingual (Spanish/English) caseworker under her belt, Barbara Karmazin utilizes a unique blend of multicultural knowledge for her Science Fiction. She incorporates the same sense of adventure and wonder to her SF/Erotica stories.

Barbara loves new ideas and is willing to write about all versions of sexuality, both human and alien, while maintaining a fast paced SF adventure plot that will leave you gasping in more ways than one. Affectionately known by the nickname of 'Chainsaw' by her many critique partners, she brings a fresh look and enthusiasm for 'out of the box' SF/Fantasy and Paranormal Erotica and Romance stories.

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