

**Morgan  
Hawke**



**SECURITY  
ISSUES** ♂

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Security Issues

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## Also By Morgan Hawke:

*Uber-Gothic: Industrial Sorcery*

*The Cheater's Guide to Writing Erotic Romance*

*Demoness*

# Dedication:

To Stef, for all your patience, love and virtue.

# Security Issues

## *One*

The large airy boardroom of Arrington, Architectural and Engineering was the only room in the entire building that *didn't* look like it was about to fall into ruin. That in itself was impressive, considering the revolutionary war for planetary independence that had just ended. There was moderately fresh paint on the soft blue walls, and fairly new gold carpet. The long black marble meeting table wasn't scratched or chipped, and all twenty leather chairs were present and accounted for. Best of all, the room had fully functional air-conditioning.

Unlike the basement of Rory's two-bedroom cottage on the other side of town.

Strapped into his leather and chrome control chair and wired within an inch of his life, Rory ignored the sweat trickling down the side of his face. His attention was entirely focused on the sensations and images being fed directly into his nervous system through the wires attached all over his body. He lifted his gloved hands and spoke.

Across town, seated at the head of the long black marble table in the AA&E board room, a perfect replica of Rory followed the motions of the robotics specialist's hands to lift a document and replied to the question that had been posed. "Yes, I *do* feel that explosive demolition is the right way to deal with

those Imperial subterranean military labs.” The Imperial bastards had specialized in human experimentation. “We are recovering what can be recovered...” The stuff that *couldn't* be used to replicate said experiments. “But everything that cannot be dismantled and moved is far safer under several tons of rock.” Understatement of the year. Really.

The gray-suited, gray-haired and corpulent executive waved his hand in the replica’s general direction. “But, administrator, what about all that valuable equipment...?”

The Rory replica scowled briefly, then smoothed his expression to one of polite concern. “If you will look at document sixteen-b, you will find a list of what has been salvaged, versus what has not.” Minus a few things that no one needed to know existed—ever.

The balding executive shuffled through his papers.

“Now then...” Rory’s replica smiled and slid his scattered files and papers together. “According to the reports I received this morning, the Culvert Town hydroelectric plant is fully operational.” He looked down and tapped a finger on the document at the top of the pile. “And according to my sources, three more hydroelectric plants are about to go into full operation in less than seven days time.” He looked toward the foot of the long table. “Care to elaborate, President Teradyne?”

Dressed in an immaculate white suit, Christophe Teradyne, president and CEO of Teradyne Corporation, smiled. His sleek white-blond hair

gleamed in the understated lighting and his eyes creased at the corners giving his ice-blue gaze the illusion of friendly warmth. One wouldn't think that sugar would melt in his mouth.

However, the frightening truth was that he was currently the colony world's most powerful and influential man. Teradyne Corp. was the *only* company that provided electricity in the world—all two cities and seventeen towns of it. That he employed and trained top-notch assassins...*ahem*, security specialists to protect his assets went without saying.

A slight smile on his lips, the company president spoke in smooth, even tones. "You've ruined my surprise, administrator."

Rory's smile broadened even as the small hairs rose all over his body. "Oops, my bad."

He was one of the few who knew exactly how ruthless Christophe Teradyne could be. He'd been the master engineer under the previous President Teradyne, Christophe's megalomaniac and utterly insane Maker. Hell, he'd designed the planet's capitol city for the man. A city the insane bastard had allowed the Empire to destroy.

To say that Rory didn't regret the crazy son-of-a-bitch's death in the slightest was a vast understatement. He celebrated it every year—without fail.

He wasn't the only one.

A little less than two years ago, Wilhelm Kaiser Teradyne, company president and colonial council member, single-handedly caused the Empire to



damned-near wipe the little colony world off the interstellar map.

No one really knows why the insane bastard had ordered the mass assassination of just about every Imperial representative stationed on the colony world. Some say it was over an insult. Others say it was a bid for dictatorship. Personally, Rory was inclined to believe both. The man really *was* that much of a power-hungry sociopath.

That the mass assassination had gone off without a hitch—one hundred and twelve men dead in one night—was no surprise. Teradyne's Security were *that* well-trained, in addition to more than a few of them being cybernetically enhanced specifically for that purpose. However, that the Empire had retaliated with an entire battalion of warships hadn't been a surprise either.

That Teradyne's Security elite had spear-headed the fighting corps and applied their special brand of guerilla tactics to help drive the Empire off their world was entirely beside the point. By that time, it was purely a case of 'live free or die'. Sadly, that wasn't an exaggeration. The Empire took an extremely dim view of rebellious colonies.

However, the real deciding factor in the 'revolution' had been the simple fact that their little planet was way the hell out on the rim of known space, and possessed no resources of particular interest. In short, the cost of sending troops out to subdue them wasn't worth the loss of their out-of-the-way colony of two major cities and seventeen little towns.

Go Altair.

All in all, it was an intense—but short—revolution. All that was left was reorganization, clean-up and rebuilding...lots of rebuilding.

Strangest of all, Rory Arrington, simple architect and robotics engineer had somehow ended up in the Administrator's seat of the brand new Altair Republic council. It looked impressive on paper, but the truth was, he was little more than a glorified mediator.

A flurry of questions started up at the far end of the long table, all directed at the man in the white suit who sat directly opposite Rory. However, they were all careful to use polite tones of extreme deference, and with good reason.

Unlike his tyrannical—and deceased—father, Christophe Teradyne was keenly interested in the colony's continued survival, which was why was at that table. Not that that made him any less ruthless or terrifying, just more inclined to play nice...publicly, at least.

As a gentle reminder of Teradyne's true power, flanking Christophe on either side was two of his black-suited Security. On the right was Jin, a tall, elegant, and exotic dark-eyed man with long black hair drawn straight back into a snug tail. He was the cool and calculating head of Christophe's Security. On his left was Elizabeth, a compact and curvaceous, blue-eyed woman with ruthlessly straight, chin-length blond hair. She was the company's sharpshooter. One did not ever want to piss her off. She *didn't* miss.

In response to the signals being fed into his wiring,

the Rory replica sat back in his chair, sighed, and dug a handkerchief out of the pocket of his long, midnight blue Administrator's coat. Looking away briefly, he blotted his perfectly dry brow.

Jin, the tall, dark, and intimidating Security elite on Christophe's right, lowered his brows slightly.

Far across town, Rory's sensors picked up the slight movement. Rory barely hid his instinctive scowl. *Shit, Jin noticed something.* Luckily, Elizabeth hadn't. She was a little too trigger-happy for Rory's comfort.

What had set Jin off? His mind went over every detail of his motions, then dismissed them. His virtual reality equipment was damned sensitive to even the slightest twitch, so his replica's motions were in perfect synch with his actual body, except for his legs. He couldn't very well walk around when he was hard-wired into a chair. Walking was done by sensing the slight tightening and loosening of his leg muscles.

Abruptly, a white-haired board member wearing a blue suit entirely too snug for him turned to Rory with a question.

Rory responded to the member with facts and figures, dismissing the puzzle for later examination. No matter what the Security elite had spotted, there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it from his VR chair. He'd just deal with it, should Jin ask any...pertinent questions.

Of course, getting out of there the moment the meeting ended and avoiding the man entirely was another option. In fact, it was his preferred option.

The meeting concluded in the usual fashion—

about an hour past the time it was scheduled. In twos and threes, the members rose from their chairs, gathered their briefcases, and began talking about places to eat where they could discuss the results of the meeting.

Across town, Rory worked his hands as quickly as possible. *Need to get out of there... Need to get out of there...*

Rory's replica rose from his chair, gathered the scattered files, and began stuffing them into his briefcase.

"Mr. Arrington, Rory..." The voice was right at his shoulder.

Rory startled so hard, the papers in his replica's hands flew out of them and all over the table. He turned.

Right behind him was the elegant and extremely dangerous Jin. His hands were neatly folded behind him, but his head was slightly tilted in an obvious pose of polite inquiry.

Rory swallowed. *Crap.* He pasted a smile on his replica's face. "Oh, Jin, you, ah..." He started grabbing for papers again. "You startled me."

Jin's straight black brow lifted over one uptilted black eye. "So I see." The corner of his lips curled in the slightest of smiles. "Do I make you nervous?"

It was such a stupid question that Rory stopped his paper shuffling to turn around and face him with a blank stare. "Nervous...?" He sighed and rolled his eyes. "You're only capable of killing me in at least six nasty ways in about that many seconds, without ever using your gun." He leveled a glare at the man. "Of

*course* you make me nervous!"

Jin folded his arms across his chest. "I could see that as being a valid reason..." He lowered his brows. "If you were actually here." He gave Rory's replica a very obvious head to toe stare. "This is definitely one of your better robots. I didn't even realize that it was one until the very end of the meeting."

Rory dropped his paper-filled hands to the table and bowed his head in defeat. "You're also one of *the* most observant son of a bitches I've ever met." He took a breath and began stuffing the last of his papers into his briefcase though more slowly and carefully. He cleared his throat. "And the first to have noticed."

Jin's smile widened slightly. "Thank you. Does it bleed?"

Rory stilled, then turned to face the Security elite, his brows up and his mouth open. "What kind of question is that?"

Jin shrugged. "If it was shot by an assassin, bleeding would make them believe that they'd actually hit their target, giving you a greater chance to identify them, or at least, make an escape."

Rory sighed and closed his briefcase. Trust Jin to think in terms of assassins. But then, he *had* designed the replica with assassins in mind. "As a matter of fact, it does bleed." He pressed his palm to his chest. "The skin is cloned organic, which is why I have...body hair." He looked away and coughed. "A fully organic circulatory system is needed to provide it with nutrients and oxygen." He smiled wryly. "Though a mechanical heart pumps it."

Jin's smile widened and he shook his head.

“Brilliant.”

Rory felt something warm bloom in his heart, and in his face. He smiled. “Thanks.”

Jin’s smile curved a little more sharply. “However, it does not sweat. Wiping your brow when it wasn’t damp is what gave you away.”

Rory cringed. “Oh.” He stepped away from the table, briefcase in hand. “My...control room doesn’t have air conditioning, and the system is so sensitive, it mimics everything I do.”

Jin’s brows lifted. “I was wondering why your expressions were so very...you.” He tilted his head. “What about sensitivity from this end?”

Rory frowned. “You mean, can I feel what this unit feels?”

Jin gave a small nod.

Rory shrugged. “Damned near perfectly, on the surface anyway.” He lifted his hand and spread the fingers. “Normally with a virtual reality system, electronic pulses from such things as movement have to be translated into nerve impulses to perceive them and send them, so there’s a slight drag in timing. However, because the skin is organic, it transfers directly. It’s already nerve impulses, so sensations register instantly.”

Jin’s eyes looked a touch unfocused.

Rory winced. “Sorry about the techno-babble.”

Jin smiled. “I didn’t mind.” He casually stepped closer. “So, you can feel everything your robot feels, yes?”

“Er...” Rory frowned and stepped back, only to feel the table up against his butt. “Yeah, but only on the

surface.”

Jin looked downward and nodded. “So, then you should be able to feel this...” He reached out lightning fast, catching Rory by the back of his neck. His head dropped down, and he planted a kiss directly on Rory’s mouth.

Across town in his VR chair, Rory froze. Yes...yes he could *indeed* feel Jin’s lips pressed against his. In fact, he could feel Jin’s tongue sweeping across his bottom lip. He could also feel heat filling his face and his pants tightening behind his zipper too. He was suddenly very glad that his cybernetic unit wasn’t *that* anatomically correct.

Jin pulled back and smiled. “In case the message didn’t translate correctly... That was a kiss, and it means exactly what any other kiss would mean.”

Rory could only stare stupidly into the deep black eyes of the handsome elite who also happened to be the second most powerful man in the country. “Eh...?”

Jin leaned close to the replica’s ear and whispered. “I am interested in you, Rory Arrington. Call me at my personal number if you’d like to...discuss it over a glass of wine.” He stepped past Rory’s replica and walked out of the boardroom, his footsteps perfectly silent.

*Jin is...interested in me?* Too stunned to think properly, it took a full five minutes before Rory could focus enough to get his replica downstairs, into his jeep, and headed home without wrecking his car.

~ \* ~

Once Rory had his replica back in his basement and in its preservation tank, he tromped upstairs to his bedroom. “Jin is interested in *me*?” He stepped into his bathroom and turned on the shower. “*Jin* is interested in me?”

After a long cool shower, he went back into his large bedroom clad only in a damp towel, and flopped face down on the bed with a moan. “Holy mother of all, why *me*?” He had known that the man was somewhat attracted to him. This hadn’t been the first time the Security elite had hit on him. New Year’s Eve parties tend to encourage that sort of thing, but he still couldn’t fathom *why*.

Why would a top-notch assassin...err, enforcement agent have any interest in a practically harmless, not to mention pacifistic, engineer?

Truthfully, Rory admired the Security elite and found the man very attractive in a dangerous and somewhat scary kind of way. However, he didn’t know if Jin felt anything for him beyond attraction.

“Fuck...” He ground the heels of his hands over his eyes. “Why do I even care what Jin *feels*?” A fuck was a fuck, right?

Wrong. He couldn’t stomach being that intimate with someone merely to scratch an itch. He simply couldn’t do casual sex.

He blamed his parents. They’d ruined him—he was convinced of it. His parents were childhood sweethearts and were demonstratively in love with each other all their lives. Because of the open affection they shared with each other—and their only son—



he'd been thoroughly brainwashed into wanting the same for himself.

In short, a hard dick wasn't good enough reason to fall into bed with just anyone. If he needed to scratch an itch, he had a perfectly good hand for the job.

He knew damned good and well that hardly anyone else in the world thought that way, but that didn't seem to matter. He couldn't stop seeing sex as an expression of care and affection...of love.

Rory smiled sourly. Somehow, he sincerely doubted that Jin would ever do something so undignified as express care, never mind affection. Love was right out of the question. The only thing that man loved was his job.

Rory sighed up at the ceiling. The obvious answer was to turn him down and go find someone that was actually capable of affection.

*However...* He leaned up to stare down at the towel tented by his rather painful erection. No matter what he personally thought about sex, his body was clearly a total slut. If the man cornered him, he was doomed.

Rory flopped back on the bed, grabbed his pillow, and pressed it over his face. *Blood and hell...* When had life suddenly gotten so complicated?

## *Two*

The most hideous beeping in the world blared in Rory's ear. He rolled over in the dark, twisting among his sheets, and reached out blindly to smack at the button on the top of his alarm clock. He rolled back over, plopping his face into his pillow and moaned. Morning came too godawful early.

Suddenly, blinding light pierced Rory's tired eyes and the sheet was torn from his grasp. He winced. "Ah! Crap..."

A heavily accented and far too familiar voice called out with near-demonic glee. "Rise and shine, old man!"

Rory groaned and curled in on himself. "I don't wanna."

The intruder snorted. "You did last night when you told me to wake you up at this time."

"That was then. This is now." Rory rolled over to squint blearily at his intruder.

Standing upright in his open bedroom door and holding his sheet was a gray striped cybernetic feline. The decorative belt around his hips was held closed with an overlarge gold buckle, with a pair of ornate white gloves tucked into it. The empty sheath to a sword sat against his left hip. Huge, scarlet bucket-boots covered the feline's legs to the knee. "You told me to wake you at this hour, old man. I'm just

following your orders!” With a maniacal grin, the feline moved closer to the bed, his long white-tipped, striped tail swishing behind him. The wooden heels of his boots clopped loudly on the hard wood floor.

Rory curled his lip in distaste. “I don’t remember your boots being that loud.” He didn’t remember them being that big or decorative either.

The mechanical feline grinned, showing tiny fangs. “They’re my newest pair, direct from Walter!” The feline abruptly hopped in place, his feet thunking loudly. “Oh, and there’s a big hat to go with it, too! With a *feather!*”

Rory winced. “I think Walter takes your fairy-tale persona just a little too seriously.”

The feline cocked his head to the side and snapped his tiny paw-like fingers. “You’re just jealous because he likes me more than you.”

Rory refused to dignify that with a comment, mostly because it was true. The retired soldier was also a toy-maker, so it was kind of understandable, but that made it kind of scary too. Groaning, Rory rolled over and sat up among the sheets. “And since when do you call me *old man*, Boots?”

The mechanical cat’s slitted eyes widened to show bright green pupils. “But...” He tilted his head and scratched one triangular gray ear with a white-furred finger. “Tony said calling you ‘Maker’ was disrespectful.”

“Boots...” Rory scraped his fingers among his mussed black hair then scrubbed at his dark beard. “I told you not to listen to Tony!” No one should *ever* listen to Tony. Security’s Black Ops Tony Martini was

not only less than well-adjusted—he was an enthusiastic alcoholic with very short temper and a fondness for explosives—he took sadistic glee in making up stuff purely to entertain his gullible audience.

“Ah!” Boots’s white muzzle widened into a fanged grin. “But you also gave me independent thought; the right to decide for myself.”

Rory rolled his eyes. “Oh Mother, he’s reached the rebellious stage.”

Boots’s eyes narrowed, his gray ears tilted back, and his arms crossed over his furry white chest. “And what exactly is *that* supposed to mean, old man?”

Rory opened his eyes wide and blinked innocently at him. “Eh?” He smiled up at his creation. “Is the coffee ready?”

The feline snorted and flicked one ear forward, but kept the other ear back and his arms folded across his chest. “Yes, the coffee’s ready, and your eggs with toast are on the table.”

“Great!” Rory clapped his hands together. “Give me a few minutes to get dressed.” He added a few more watts of power to his smile.

Boots grinned. “Okay!” He turned and bounced out of Rory’s room.

Rory collapsed back onto the bed and pummeled his memory for what was on schedule for the day. *Hmm... One more meeting with the Council, and then...?* And then he was free — for the next three days. *Halleluia!*

After staggering out of bed, Rory dug into his dresser for his loud orange and blue surfing shorts,

care of his last vacation in Gold City on the southern peninsula. Once he'd dragged them on, he pulled on an equally loud palm-tree and hula-girl button-up shirt in orange and red, care of the same vacation. He grinned at the eye-searing image of himself in the mirror on the back of his closet door, and bounced down the stairs.

At the bottom, he grabbed the newel post to pull himself around the corner, then padded barefoot down the hall and into the cottage's small kitchen. It was filled with the scent of rich, dark coffee. Rory's mouth watered. On the small table, his largest mug sat filled to the brim with caffeinated Nirvana.

He dropped into the chair and sucked down a healthy mouthful of the dark brew. Yes, it was hot, but the pain was worth the shivers that spilled down his spine as the caffeine went to work. He could *feel* his brain going back online.

The mechanical gray tabby opened the oven to pull out a covered plate. "Not bad. I didn't have to go up to wake you a second time." He set the plate on the table before Rory. "Or a third."

Rory decided to ignore that and instead took a second swallow of coffee. He set the mug down and sighed in bliss. "Boots, I love you."

The gray striped cat tipped one ear back and snorted. "I think you love your coffee more."

Rory put on a cheesy grin. "That doesn't mean I love you any less."

Boots's ears shot forward, then laid flat back. "That was *not* reassuring."

Rory lifted one brow at his masterpiece. "Boots, I

did not spend twenty of the best years of my life perfecting coffee. I spent them perfecting you.” The truth, actually. He’d started making Boots back while he was still in Middle School—which was why the feline resembled a fairy-tale character. He abruptly smiled. “Better?”

Boots’s feline mouth rose into a fanged grin so wide he was forced to squint to make room for it. “Much, and appreciated!”

Rory nodded. “Good!” He lifted the cover off the plate—eggs over light and toast. *Perfect*. He picked up his fork. “So, on the schedule for today’s meeting...?”

Boots dropped into the opposite chair and began to recite the day’s agenda.

Exactly one hour later, Rory opened the trap door under the kitchen rug and started down the ladder into what was once a small root cellar. After some extensive remodeling and massive rewiring, the tiny root cellar had become an expansive three-room basement workshop.

The center room was where he...tinkered, for lack of a better term. The room on the right held the sealed tanks for his cybernetic units, and the power supply that kept them all running. However, for Boots, instead of a tank he’d set up a small bed complete with pillows, blankets and a small stuffed kitty, so he could be comfortable while he...napped.

The room on the left was the largest by far, but it was jam-packed with a monstrous amount of equipment. Dead center among a massive snarl of wires sat his master control chair. Rory frowned at it. No matter comfy the thing actually was, the chrome

and black leather chair still looked more like piece of torture equipment than the most advanced recliner known to mankind. The fuzzy pink dice hanging off of the overhead ring hadn't quite done the trick. Maybe he should try painting it some day-glow color...?

Boots came skipping into the crowded room. "The Rory unit is prepped and ready, old man." He rubbed his paws together. "Shall I strap you in?"

Rory turned to lift a brow at the cat. "Is he *dressed*?"

The cat's ears went back and he folded his arms across his furry chest. "I only forgot *once*...!"

Rory snorted. Once had been enough. It had been full winter that day. When Rory had interlinked with the unit, he'd been rather shocked by the abrupt all-over chill. "Just making sure."

Boots rolled his yellow-green eyes. "Fine, fine, you ready to strap in?"

Rory opened his mouth to say yes, and stopped. He lifted one finger. "Potty-break first!" He bolted out of the room and up the stairs.

Boots called up from the bottom of the stairs. "Since when are you an eight-year-old?"

Rory ignored the cat and went about his business. Taking a bathroom break while locked in his chair and operating his unit was a serious pain in the ass. He actually had to walk the unit to a john and sit it in a stall while he slipped out of the VR chair and ran up the ladder.

Thank Mother he'd thought to make a backup headset for monitoring the unit while away from the chair. He'd been...addressed while on the toilet more

than once.

Rory flushed and padded back down the ladder to begin his day.

~ \* ~

Rory expected that the council meeting would be both deadly dull and nerve-wracking. Since the meeting was pretty much an all day rehash of what had been discussed for the past week, all that was left was the bickering and the signing. That was the dull part. What made it nerve-wracking was that if there was going to be an *incident*, this was the day it would most likely to fall on.

However, he didn't expect the sleek black sedan that swerved into the path of his antique red jeep two blocks before he even arrived to the AA&E building.

"Son of a fucking bitch!" He swerved the jeep out of the car's path by using the sidewalks in ways they were definitely *not* intended to be used, and stepped on the fuel.

Rory had been asked many times why he didn't have an armored vehicle in case of situations like this. One of the reasons was that they were damned expensive, and he needed his funds for his cybernetic creations. The other was the plain and simple truth that while a jeep was not particularly fast—or bulletproof—it could go places a car couldn't follow.

Such as over the rather steep mountain of rubble to his direct right that had once been a warehouse.

A maniacal grin on his face, Rory stomped the fuel pedal, sending the jeep through the flimsy chain-link



fence, then up the rubble mountain. In the process, he sprayed broken bricks, bits of metal girders, and shards glass at the car that foolishly tried to follow him.

Under the impact of the fourth or fifth brick, the windshield of the car behind him cracked.

Rory's eyes narrowed on his rear-view mirror and he laughed. "Ha! Take that, asshole!" Bulletproof glass or not, bricks were another story. Close to the top of the pile, Rory swerved his jeep back and forth—hard, knowing full well that his erratic movements would loosen rubble directly under his tires. Rory grinned broadly and singsonged, "Leverage is my friend...!"

The front end of the car behind him began to slide a little to the right.

"But not yours...!" Chortling happily, Rory revved the engine and stomped the fuel pedal to toss a few more bricks from under his tires—and not a few chunks of cement—then charged down the opposite side of the pile.

The other car did not follow him. Clearly, it hadn't made it to the top.

Rory threw a fist in the air and hooted. "Never fuck with an engineer, asshole!" With only a minor swerve, Rory set his jeep back on the road, and took the next right-hand turn onto the main road. He was only a block away from the AA&E building. Rory chuckled. "Damn, I need to remember that shortcut." With a happy smile, he pulled into the underground parking lot and practically danced his way to the elevator.

Tall, dark, and severe in his black suit, his blue-black hair slicked back into a snug tail, Jin was waiting by his office door.

Eyes wide, Rory didn't quite trip over his own feet, but it was close. "Jin?"

The tall, elegant Security frowned at Rory, his black brows lowering. "Where are Tony and Marcus?"

Rory's brows shot up. "Eh?" How the hell would *he* know where Jin's two henchmen...err, employees were? Rory frowned slightly. "I haven't seen either of them in months."

Jin's frown deepened, and he turned to face Rory with visible tension in his shoulders. "They're not with you?"

Only the fact that he was not actually standing there in front of Jin kept Rory from stepping back—or cringing. It also erased every trace of warmth from his face. Jin was a scary, scary man when angry. "Uh, no?"

Jin's voice came out in a low growl. "They were supposed to meet you at your apartment and escort you here."

Rory blinked. "My apartment...?" He rolled his eyes. "Well, that explains everything." He smiled. "I'm not currently staying in my apartment."

Jin's frown dissolved. "You're not?"

Rory snorted. "Harder to assassinate someone they can't find." Which reminded him of the car that had intercepted him—and he'd escaped. That put the smile back on his face. "If you'll excuse me, I have some files to collect for the meeting." He nodded

towards his door.

Jin stepped aside, but it was clearly grudgingly. However, the anger left his face to be replaced by a slight smile. "It's nice to know you're taking precautions."

Rory set his hand on his doorknob and shot an annoyed look over his shoulder at Jin while the handprint scanner did its thing. "I'm wearing a—" He was *not* going to say 'robot' out loud for just any sound device to pick up. "—Suit, aren't I?"

Jin's brows lifted a tiny bit and his bottom lip protruded just a hair, turning the frown into an almost-pout. "I was hoping that with personal protection, you wouldn't feel the need to."

Rory's brows dipped in confusion. "Even with protection, I still would have worn the...suit." The doorknob clicked faintly under Rory's hand, signaling that his handprint had been found acceptable.

Jin's shoulder visibly dropped. "Pity." He abruptly smiled but his eyes also narrowed. "I was hoping to ask you out for a drink after the meeting."

Rory stiffened and his eyes widened just a little. Out for a drink *without* his unit? That sounded really...*compromising*. Rory slapped a broad smile on his lips. "Sorry to disappoint you." No, he wasn't, not in the least. "Better luck next time?"

Jin's gaze narrowed sharply.

Rory's smile cracked. *Oops, hadn't meant to say that out loud!* He shoved the door open. "Gotta go! Bye!" He rushed into his office. He didn't quite slam the door closed behind him, but it was close. He moved across his small office crammed floor to ceiling with

shelves filled with books, folders, papers, and bits of building debris to the battered wooden desk and sat in the creaky chair.

There was an old-styled computer on his desk, but he didn't bother to turn it on. His home computer was far more powerful and directly linked to the unit's optics. He moved his eyes to the left and held them there for an entire second. Semi-transparent text bloomed across the vision of his left eye. Using subvocal commands, he accessed the files he needed—and checked the AA&E buildings security system.

Visuals from the cameras stationed in every hall on every floor, and in every elevator shaft ticked across his left eye, one right after the other. At the same time, data from his infrared lasers and also from his heat and weight sensitivity instruments began to scroll across the page.

The cameras all seemed to be recording just fine. The count of people going into rooms and then out of them was consistent. No warm bodies were hiding in any of the storage closets or the air vents. The elevator shafts were clear and the cables were not burdened with any extraneous objects, such as people or explosives. The exterior walls were clear—no warm bodies were climbing up them. The roof—

Rory blinked at the camera again and zoomed the view back. There was a hovercraft on his roof. It had the red diamond logo of the Teradyne Corp. on it, but that didn't mean that it was Teradyne's.

Using the robot's internal cell phone, he called Jin's public number. No way in hell was he going to dial

that man's private number.

There was a connection purr, then a click. "Rory, I'm assuming this is a professional call?"

"Yes." Rory frowned at his data. "There's a hovercraft on my roof. Is that yours? According to my readings, Christophe isn't here yet." He immediately winced. *Me and my big mouth*. He'd just given away that the AA&E building's security was a hell of a lot more sophisticated than the run-down building implied.

"One moment, please." There was a soft beep, and then classical music.

Rory blinked. *What the...?* That he was on hold was no surprise, but that Jin had elevator music playing during that hold was more than a little strange. However, he had other things to worry about.

He needed to make preparations for a Teradyne sweep in the next few days or so. The sneaky SOBs loved breaking into buildings *just* to map out said building's surveillance. Rory groaned and shook his head. It looked like he was going to be staying late a few nights to disguise his equipment with added heat, sound, and light sources to foul their detection instruments.

The phone clicked and Jin spoke a little smugly. "We have the situation under control."

Rory smiled. "Oh, so it *wasn't* yours. Thanks for handling that."

Jin snorted. "It wasn't difficult." His voice dropped to a lower register. "Consider it a favor."

Rory cringed. Translation: consider it a *debt*. He lifted his chin. "Well, I'm sure Christophe will be glad

to have a new hovercraft.” Translation: payment for that debt.

Jin chuckled. “You’re very good at this, Rory.” Translation: Payment accepted.

A smile curved Rory’s lips. “Practice makes perfect.” Translation: I’ve been at this longer than you have, remember?

Jin sighed. “Sadly, I must cut this conversation short.” Translation: Quit rubbing it in. “Christophe is about to enter the building.” Translation: That’s my excuse and I’m sticking to it!

Rory checked his security data. An unmarked black sedan was indeed pulling into the underground parking lot. *Not an excuse after all.* However, that car was followed closely by another sedan that was strangely dusty, more than a little dented in the front, and sported a cracked windshield.

Rory suddenly had a very bad feeling... Unfortunately, he didn’t have the luxury to ponder it; he still had Jin on the phone. Rory took a steadying breath and pitched his voice to sound cheerful. “And I still have files to gather.” Bald-faced lie. All of his data was on his computer. The papers were strictly security-clean handouts. “See you in the meeting, Jin!” Translation: Hang up already!

“Indeed.” Translation: Just *try* to avoid me. The phone disconnected.

Rory flopped over and pressed his face to the desk. “Why me?” He groaned for good measure. *Why is it that I only attract the extremely dangerous weirdos? Why can’t I attract a nice, normal person?*

Sadly, he didn’t have the time to wallow in angst.

He had a meeting to conduct.

After checking to make sure that his briefcase held all the necessary handouts, Rory rose from his desk and slid into his long blue administrator's robes. Deciding that paranoia was merely a safe bet, he checked his security data to make sure that Jin had indeed left his doorway—and that no one else was waiting by it.

Jin was gone and the hall was deserted. The coast was clear! Rory left his office at not quite a dash and headed for the elevator.

The elevator pinged open. A dour-faced, bald-headed, and dark-skinned Marcus stood to the right. On his left slouched a scruffy and scowling Tony with his pitch-black hair scraped back into a long, midnight tail. However, something wasn't quite right about this picture. It was expected that Tony looked disheveled; his white shirt was usually more than half unbuttoned and never tucked into his pants, but Marcus's normally pristine black suit was covered in dust and almost looked...wrinkled.

Rory frowned at them. "Run into some trouble?"

Tony reached out to snatch Rory by the lapels of his blue administrator's robe and dragged him into the elevator to snarl in his face "*You owe me a windshield!*"

Rory blinked at the furious Security elite. *Damn, should have checked the elevator.*

Behind him, the doors pinged and closed.

## *Three*

**S**narling with fury, his ocean blue eyes crackling with rage, black ponytail flying with his head-tossing, and damned near foaming at the mouth, Tony jerked on the lapels of Rory's blue administrator's robes to glare directly into Rory's eyes. "We were sent to protect your skinny ass, and what do you do? You damn near kill us!"

Rory's eyes narrowed and his jaw tightened, but he didn't struggle. He didn't want to show off that he was far stronger than he looked. Tony might be scruffy, but he wasn't stupid. He'd know immediately that he was yelling at a cybernetic unit. As pissed off as he was, he might consider that excuse enough to try to destroy it. "First of all, I didn't know it was you guys. No one told me to expect you. More importantly, I didn't ask for protection."

Tony's eyes widened and his anger evaporated into confusion. "Jin didn't tell you we were coming?"

"No." Rory set his hands over Tony's, gently encouraging him to release his lapels. "In fact, I told Christophe weeks ago, point blank, that I didn't want any protection." No matter how good they were as bodyguards—and they were damned good—the Security elite were loyal to Christophe first. Rory had no interest in sharing all his personal secrets. That was just handing him blackmail material.



His black brows drawn together in open confusion, Tony released Rory and slouched back against the wall with his arms crossing his chest. "Then why the hell did Jin assign us?"

Rory shrugged. "Beats me."

Tony rolled his eyes, along with his head, and threw up his hands. "Well, shit..." He turned to grin at Rory a tad viciously. "I think Jin has a little crush on you."

Across town in his control chair, Rory's face lost all trace of color. Tony was not only a Black Ops agent for the Teradyne Corp., he was also the biggest mouth in the capitol. Even worse, he could stretch a rumor until it screamed. Rory didn't dare look away. It would only make him look guilty. Instead, he smiled. "Why don't you ask him?"

Tony's eyes widened. "Who, me? Ask Jin? No way in hell!"

Rory shrugged and folded his arms across his chest. "Then I guess we'll never know."

Tony's eyes narrowed and he scowled. "Anyway, you got yourself a pair of bodyguards now."

Rory's brows lowered and his jaw tightened. "No thank you."

Tony grinned. "Too bad, so sad." His black brow lifted and he tilted his head to the side. "I don't take orders from you."

Rory blew out a soft breath and shook his head. "You realize that I'll have to take this as a security threat to my person?"

On the right, Marcus suddenly frowned and his dark brows lowered.

Tony's chin went up, but his smile disappeared. "Yeah, so?"

Without moving a single muscle, Rory assessed exactly where they were standing versus where he was standing, then activated the elevator's intruder measures. There was a loud click right under their collective feet.

Marcus's and Tony's eyes widened. Their half of the elevator floor dropped open and they fell—shouting all the way.

Rory leaned over the hole and called out to the falling men with a smile. "Don't worry! There's a safety net!" There was—in the *basement*. He waggled his fingers at them. "Enjoy your walk back upstairs!"

The floor popped back up to where it belonged and locked in. Less than two seconds later, the elevator doors pinged open. Rory stepped out with a cheery smile and strode into the meeting room with a full five minutes to spare.

Seated at the far end of the table, Christophe looked at him briefly, then went back to his documents.

However, standing to the right of Christophe's shoulder, Jin narrowed his black eyes in open suspicion. Translation: Where are my men?

Rory lifted his brow and smiled rather smugly. Translation: Not with me— anymore.

Frowning hard at Rory, Jin flashed a hand-signal at blond-haired Elizabeth and spoke softly into his headset. The audio detection sensors in the room passed the message to Rory quite clearly. "Find Marcus and Tony, now."

Elizabeth looked up at Jin with widened eyes, then flashed a glance at Rory. She looked back up at Jin, nodded, and stepped past him to exit by way of the right-hand door at their end of the room.

Rory took his seat and opened his briefcase, pretending not to notice.

The meeting began in an orderly fashion, but as usual, it didn't stay that way for long. Arguments and barely veiled threats sailed across the room from one councilman to the next.

With a tight smile, Rory worked to soothe ruffled feathers by dancing around certain subjects while expounding on others, using handouts, and the occasional video clip.

Eventually, the council members all settled down to proper bargaining with what had been set on the table, as opposed to what they actually wanted.

Right about then, a somewhat bewildered Elizabeth returned with Tony and Marcus in tow. Both men looked even more rumpled than before, and they were both openly pissed.

Jin lifted a brow at Elizabeth.

She spoke into her sub-vocal com unit. The audio sensors in the room intercepted the message rather nicely. "They were coming up from the basement."

Jin blinked, then turned to Marcus and Tony.

Staring hard at Rory, Tony's eyes narrowed to shards of blue glass. "He dropped us down the elevator shaft."

Jin blinked then frowned. "How did you survive?"

Marcus's shoulders visibly tightened, straining his suit at the seams. "Safety net—at the bottom."

Rory tried to hold back his smile, but it just wasn't possible. *Engineer 2, Security 0.* However, he was smart enough to bite back the chuckles that were dying to cut loose. He wasn't *that* suicidal.

Christophe looked over at Rory with a raised golden brow, and the smallest of smiles curled the corner of his lips. It almost looked like respect.

The four Security elite, however, openly glared at Rory.

The council members took one long look at the four extremely annoyed Security elite then looked at each other. Roads, railroads, water rights, power grids, land allotments and Imperial equipment disposal arrangements...all of the issues they'd been fighting for over the past week were suddenly and decisively settled.

Rory blinked at the sudden change of heart. *Wow... I need to piss off Security more often.*

Tony turned to Jin, and spoke into his com unit. Again, the surveillance equipment picked up the subvocal communication. "Punish him."

Marcus didn't move a muscle, other than his lips. "Please."

Jin glanced down at Christophe. "Sir?"

Christophe smiled at Rory, almost sweetly. "Quietly and privately, if you please, and try not to break any bones or leave any visible marks. He's still useful."

Rory's blood went cold. *I changed my mind. I really need to stop pissing off Security.*

Twenty minutes later, the meeting adjourned.

With a smile on his lips, Rory nonchalantly strolled

out the door by his chair and then quite frankly, bolted into the closest service corridor. He then shamelessly used every security feature his building contained to dodge the Security elite openly hunting him.

The good news was that he was able to make it all the way to his office without one of them seeing him. The bad news was that Elizabeth was leaning against the door of his parked jeep with a pistol in her hand.

With a groan of frustration, Rory stripped out of his robes and his suit to put on a gray sweatshirt and some grey pinstriped coveralls that were not particularly clean. A hat with attached brown ponytail wig went on his head.

He opened up the tiny closet to hang up his suit and robes, and peered into the small mirror on the open door. The beard had to go. It was far too distinctive. A cup of water, some hand-soap, and a safety razor took care of that. Rory stared at his face and winced. He'd just lost ten years on his age. He damned near looked like a teenager. Still, it wasn't too bad a loss. Despite the fact that it was a cybernetic unit, the skin was actually living tissue. The beard would grow back in a matter of weeks.

A knock sounded on his office door. Jin's distinctive voice carried clearly through the reinforced steel. "Rory, open the door and take your punishment."

Rory scowled at the door. "No thank you. I like my kneecaps where they are, if you don't mind." They were ridiculously expensive to replace.

"What if I told you that I didn't plan to punish you

in that fashion? What if I told you that you might even...enjoy it?"

A completely different kind of chill swept across Rory's body. However... "Jin, the suit isn't built for that. It can't process that kind of data."

Jin's voice slid down into a velvety purr. "Then what are you so afraid of?"

All the way across town, every hair on Rory's body lifted. "No comment!" He had his unit press the back of his closet. The wood slid to the side, revealing a cable with a single narrow seat and one tiny light shining over it.

"Oh come on, Rory, you're not even in there. It won't be so bad."

Rory turned to scowl at his office door. "I'll pass, thank you." He close the closet door firmly, then carefully grabbed the cable with both hands. With a small hop and a twist, he perched on the seat, his feet dangling in open air.

"Rory..." His name came through clearly, but the rest was muffled. However, the sound detection in his office allowed the message to come through nice and clear. "Rory, you know I have to do this. You've made a fool of Security."

A violent shudder washed over Rory. He reached forward and slapped the red button located on the doorframe. The wooden panel slid closed with a soft thunk, and the cable began to descend.

"Rory...!"

Escaping the building was actually pathetically easy. There might be three extremely well-trained—and well-armed—Security elite hunting for him, but

they were looking for one person in a twenty-story building crowded with office workers. Whereas, he not only knew the building inside and out, but because he was directly connected to the security system, he knew exactly where each one was at any given moment.

Leaving was a simple matter of going all the way down to the basement and walking out the janitor's door. He then strolled around the corner to the shuttle stop and sat on the bench.

A few heart-pounding minutes later, the heavily battered diesel fueled shuttle-bus roared up.

With a heavy sigh of relief, Rory climbed on and sat down in the middle on the right side. The shuttle rumbled away from the stop at a snail's pace.

Rory caught a flash of black in the corner of his eye. He turned to look.

Tony was standing at the corner. The midnight-haired man stared after the bus with a frown on his lips. He abruptly looked left and right, his frown deepening. Suddenly, he stomped his foot and waved his fists in open frustration, then turned on his heel and stalked back the way he came.

Rory settled back into his hard-plastic seat and didn't bother to stop his grin. *Engineer 3, Security still 0*. Eventually they'd catch up with him—but not today.

He sat back in the bus seat and pulled his cell phone from his pocket. He didn't turn it on. "Boots? Boots can you hear me?" Across town, Rory shut down his unit's sight so he could use his own eyes to see. "Boots?"

The pitter-patter of big boots on mechanical cat feet sounded just before Boots came around the corner.

“You called, old man?”

Rory rolled his eyes. “Yes, I’m taking the shuttle home, so I’m going to be late.”

Boots blinked, then tilted his head to the side. “The shuttle?”

Rory nodded. “I ran into a...problem and was forced to use the janitor’s exit to leave. My jeep is still in the parking lot.”

Boots’s ears turned back and a low growl sounded. “What kind of a problem?”

Rory smiled. Boots being protective was so cute! “The kind whose names I can’t mention while I’m in public.”

One ear flicked forward. “Someone we know?”

Rory curled his lip in a cross between a wince and a cringe. “Several rather dangerous and powerful someones we know.”

Boots frowned. “That’s not good, old man. Just about *everyone* we know is a million times more dangerous and powerful than you.”

Rory rolled his eyes and mumbled. “Rub it in, why don’t you?”

Boots shook his head. “My point is—you are not as repairable as I am.”

Rory hunched his shoulders. “Yeah, I know.” He sighed. “So for Mother’s sake, don’t let anyone know where I am, okay?”

Boots set out a paw and gave him a grinning thumbs-up. “No problem!”



~ \* ~

A full hour and a half, and three transfers later, Rory stepped off the shuttle at the stop only two houses down from his cottage. He was extremely late and night was falling fast. It had been a slow and hair-raising ride. He'd jumped at every dark sedan with tinted windows that passed by. Still, he'd made it back in one piece. Rory trudged his unit around to the back of the cottage.

Boots opened the door to let it in.

Down in the basement, Rory finally unhooked from his chair to help strip, clean, and set the unit into its tank for a well-deserved rest. Wiping the sweat from his brow, he turned to the walking feline. "Boots, I hope you have dinner ready, because I am *starved*." He'd meant to eat at least lunch, but things had gotten so hectic so fast, there hadn't been time to park his unit in the john to grab even a sandwich.

The robotic feline nodded hugely. "Yes, indeed! I have steak and potatoes waiting for you, old man."

Rory groaned. "Wonderful!" He turned and crawled up the stairs. His body was not happy with him. He was shaking from hunger, nerves, and lack of exercise. Sitting all day long in a chair, no matter how soft, was hard on the ass but harder on his poor legs, which didn't get to move much at all. He really needed to get out and jog at least once around the neighborhood.

Rory stuck his head out of the trapdoor in the kitchen floor and smelled Nirvana, also known as grilled steak and baked potatoes. His mouth watered,

and his stomach rumbled. He lunged off the stairs and to the table.

Boots opened the oven and pulled out a plate covered by tinfoil. "Dinner is served!" He set the plate on the table and yanked off the foil. A nice thick rib-eye covered nearly all the plate. A large potato sat right next to it, brimming with melted butter, chives, and sea salt.

Rory grabbed his fork and his knife and dug in with gusto.

Boots's eyes widened. "Wow, I guess you really *were* hungry."

His mouth too full to speak, Rory merely nodded.

He finished in record time, then gulped down a tall glass of iced coffee with cream. Groaning with satisfaction, Rory flopped back in the chair. "That was utterly fantastic, Boots. You're a damned good cook."

Boots picked up Rory's empty plate and grinned, showing his little fangs. "You're a damned good teacher."

Rory smiled sourly. "I try to be." He scrubbed his hands through his hair and suddenly realized that the dark waves were well past his shoulders. He'd been walking around in the unit so much in the past couple of months he'd simply forgotten to get his actual hair cut. Sadly, it had to be done by a professional. He could handle his beard and mustache, but wavy hair was beyond his talents.

He also noticed something else—he stank. Grimacing from his own body odor, Rory rose from his chair. "I'm gonna go take a shower. Bang on the door if you need anything."

Boots waved from the sink, where he was rinsing dishes to go into the dishwasher. "Of course!"

Back in his room, Rory stripped and dropped his clothes in the hamper, then padded into his tiny bathroom. It was only big enough to hold a toilet, a small pedestal sink, and shower stall, not a tub. The hall bathroom had one, though.

Rory turned the shower on to barely warm and stepped under the refreshing coolness. While soaping up, he pondered what to do about Security. They might not know where he was now, but he wouldn't be able to avoid them indefinitely. Culvert wasn't the Capitol, the city he'd designed – the one destroyed by a madman. He couldn't activate a trap door whenever he needed one.

Rory shoved his head under the water to rinse off the shampoo. He'd just have to devise as many escape routes as possible through areas their cars couldn't pass. Thank the Mother of All that he'd already memorized the shuttle routes.

A knock came at the bathroom door. "Hey, old man, can I go to the movies with Tony?"

Rory froze. The movies, with *Tony*? He dashed the water from his face and shut off the water. "Boots, say that again?"

On the other side of the door, Boots huffed. "Fine. Can I go to the movies with Tony?"

Rory slammed the shower stall door open, snatched the towel from the rack, threw it around his hips and flung the bathroom door open. Dripping water on the carpet at his feet, Rory stared wide-eyed at his creation. "Boots, please tell me that Tony does

*not* know the address to this cottage.”

Boots tilted his head to the side and one ear swiveled back. “Uh, okay, but it’d be a lie.”

Rory did not let out a horrified scream, but he wanted to very, very badly. His heart beating in his mouth, Rory struggled to keep his voice even. “Boots, why in the Mother’s name did you give him this address?”

Boots frowned. “Well, so he could take me to the movies.”

Rory closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Yelling at Boots never *ever* did any good. He opened his eyes and prayed for a miracle. “Boots, the people I had a problem with were Tony, Marcus, Elizabeth, and Jin. If *any* of them find me, I’m in big, *big* trouble.”

Boots’s ears drooped and his voice lowered to a whisper. “Uh, then I suggest you be very quiet.”

Rory’s throat tightened. His voice came out a whisper. “Please tell me they’re not *here*?”

Boots began to hop from one foot to the other in clear distress. “But you told me never to lie to you!”

Miracle denied.

Rory’s knees promptly turned to rubber. “Oh bloody hell...” He grabbed hold of the doorframe to keep from collapsing. He closed his eyes to think. “Escape, we need to escape right now!”

The bedroom door creaked open. “Leaving so soon?” Tall, dark, and elegant Jin stepped through, wearing a long black wool coat over his dark suit. His gleaming blue-black hair lay loose and sleek over his shoulders. He smiled, his black eyes narrowed. “But

we only just got here.”

Tony poked his head past Jin’s shoulder to grin at Rory. “Yo, Rory. That was fun.” His eyes narrowed to flame-blue slits. “While it lasted.”

## *Four*

Rory wanted nothing more than to throw the bathroom door shut and lock it, but this door was not like his reinforced steel door at the office. This one was flimsy plywood. One hard kick, and it'd be nothing but splinters.

Boots bared his needle teeth in a feral hiss, his ears went flat back, and he drew his small sword from his hip while razor claws slid from the tips of the fingers of his free hand. Flecks of lightning began to dance down his sword—and between his bared claws. “You will *not* harm my maker!” He might not have been the strongest or most intimidating fighter in the world, but being bulletproof, inhumanly fast and completely electrified, he was more than a match for either Security elite.

Which also meant that if a fight broke out, the cottage was toast.

Rory was torn. He had some seriously valuable equipment down in the basement, but he liked his kneecaps where they were.

Tony huffed and rolled his eyes. “Yo! Take it easy, Puss!”

“Don’t...!” The feline pointed his electrified sword at the man hovering in the doorway and gave out a growl that would have made a lion proud. “Don’t call me Puss!”

“Whoa!” Tony put up his hands, his eye widening. “Yeah, sure, no problem, err, Boots!”

Tucking his hands behind him, Jin smiled and shook his head. “Master Boots, I am not going to *harm* your maker.”

Boots tilted his head to the side and one ear swiveled toward Jin. “You’re not?”

Jin looked past Boots to hold Rory’s gaze. “I’m going to *punish* him.”

Boots’s stance wavered. “Punish him? For what?” He turned around to look at Rory. “What did you do?”

“I, uh...” Rory swallowed hard. “Pulled a couple of pranks on Tony and Marcus.”

Boots turned all the way around and huffed. “But *you* told me pranking was wrong!”

Rory winced. Unfortunately, he *had*. He scowled at Jin. “They wanted to guard me and I didn’t want them to.” He spared a quick look at his creation. “But I didn’t want to hurt them, so I...pranked them instead.”

Tony curled his lip, baring his teeth. “That stunt with the car was no prank!”

Rory snarled right back. “I told you, I didn’t *know* it was you guys! When your car cut me off on the road, I thought you were assassins!”

Jin lifted his chin at Tony. “Which was perfectly understandable, since someone didn’t call you first to tell you they were on their way.”

Tony dropped his chin, but his gaze was still green fire. “And I told *you* that I didn’t have *this* number.”

Boots waved his paw. “You had mine!”

Rory looked down at Boots. "How did he get yours?"

Boots looked up at Rory with a smile. "He asked."

"He asked." Rory wiped a hand down his still damp face. Boots was brilliantly clever, but not so sharp when it came to who to trust, and who *not* to trust.

Jin's smile widened. "However, because my people were *not* hurt..." He looked over at Tony. "Merely embarrassed..."

Tony scowled. "Oi! My car was *very* hurt!"

Jin smiled at the mechanical cat. "I'm only going to punish your maker."

"Punish, eh?" Boots set his paws on his hips and cocked his head to the side. "What're ya gonna do, *spank* him?"

Jin blinked and then the most godawful smile bloomed on his face. "Why, yes, yes I am."

A *spanking*? Not even his parents had done *that*. Rory drew up to his full height and glared in outrage. "You are *not*...!"

Jin openly ignored Rory. "And while I am delivering his punishment, you will go to the movies with Tony."

Boots tilted his head the other way. "I can't watch?"

Rory let out an offended squeak and whirled to look wide-eyed at his creation. *What the hell...?*

Jin's brow lifted. "If *you* were being spanked, would you want someone watching?"

As though electrified, the fur on Boots's body visibly lifted in a wave from the tip of his tail to the



top of his head, then back down. Then he shuddered. He turned to Tony. "So, what're we going to see?"

*What...?* Rory opened his mouth to vent his frustration, but nothing came out. He didn't want to be left alone with Jin, but at the same time, he didn't want Boots to see whatever perversion Jin was planning to do to him.

Tony grinned directly at Rory. "There's this cool action movie out with giant robots. Sound interesting?"

"Sounds great!" Boots sheathed his sword and happily bounced over toward Tony.

Tony continued to grin at Rory. "It's a whole two hours long, too!"

Rory's mouth fell open. He was going to be at Jin's mercy for *two whole hours*?

Boots suddenly turned to Jin. "If I come back and my maker has to go to the hospital, I'm coming to get your ass."

Warmth bloomed around Rory heart. *He does care.* A small smile tugged at his lips.

Jin lifted both hands and dropped his chin in a gesture of surrender. "I swear that he will not need hospitalization." He shot a narrowed look over at Rory. "But he *won't* be sitting comfortably for a while."

A cold chill spilled down Rory's back. Of course, it could have been the water dripping from his still-wet hair, but Rory doubted it.

Boots nodded. "That's fair."

"Hey!" Rory stiffened and shot a glare at his creation. "*What's* fair? I was defending myself, damn

it!"

Jin shook his head and took a step toward Rory with a smile. "Defending yourself against the people trying to protect you?"

Rory bared his teeth. "I don't *want* your protection! I can protect myself!"

Jin abruptly turned to Boots and Tony. "You'd better hurry. The movie will start soon."

Tony tossed out a salute. "See ya!"

Boots copied the salute. "See ya, old man!" He then followed Tony out into the hall and disappeared from view.

Rory darted for the bedroom window. The bathroom window was far too small to go through.

Jin lunged to intercept and caught him by the wrist. With a hard jerk, he twisted Rory's arm up behind him with disgusting ease, then wrapped an arm around his throat in a chokehold.

Jerked back against Jin's iron-hard chest, Rory yelped and grabbed for the choking arm with his free hand.

Jin lifted his arm to slap a black-gloved hand over Rory's mouth, yanking Rory's head back against his shoulder. The dark-haired man whispered against Rory's ear. "Quietly now. I don't wish to alarm your rather perceptive creation."

Rory's gaze narrowed. *Quietly, my ass!* He released Jin's wrist to jab his elbow into Jin's abdomen while stomping back with his heel, hoping to hit Jin's shoeless foot.

Jin deftly twisted a little to the side, moving out of elbow and heel range at the same time. "Not wise,

Rory.” He then used Rory’s captured arm to swing him around and quite literally tossed him facedown on the neatly made bed.

Almost as soon as Rory made contact, he grabbed hold of the blankets and scabbled for the other side of the bed. A heavy weight crashed over him, pinning him to the bed. The bed squeaked alarmingly. He gasped and looked up.

A smiling Jin was seated on his back, or more accurately, on his rump. The man’s knees were up and his stocking feet braced to either side. With a disturbing rattle, Jin pulled a pair of handcuffs from his coat pocket and dangled them from one gloved finger. “If restraints will make this easier for you, I’m happy to oblige.”

Rory glared, though most of the impact was lost by being facedown on a bed wearing nothing but a towel. All of a sudden, he realized that something didn’t quite feel right. Or rather, that he *wasn’t* feeling something he should – namely, his towel. He reached down with both hands.

No towel.

He twisted hard to look behind him.

“Looking for something?” Jin lifted his other hand to display a somewhat damp white nubby cloth.

Rory’s eyes widened. Once again, he felt the urge to scream. He manfully held back, though.

Jin tossed the cloth in the general direction of the bathroom. “I must thank you for thinking to shower.” He leaned down over Rory’s back to whisper in his ear, “I prefer my men freshly cleaned.”

Rory grabbed the blankets under him and bucked

hard, his feet kicking beyond the edge of the bed – not that it did any good. “I prefer my men to *not* be deranged lunatics!”

Jin’s smile disappeared. “That’s my preference as well.” He leaned over Rory again. “Which is what attracts me to you.”

Rory stiffened. “What?”

“You are not a lunatic.” A gloved hand slid down Rory’s shoulder to become a finger sliding down his spine. “Despite everything that’s happened, you are still perfectly sane, even...kind.”

Rory shivered and spoke without thinking. “Somebody had to stay sane to fix this mess.”

‘Mess’ was a profound understatement. Said mess began with an utterly insane tyrant that decided to challenge a trans-planetary Empire. An Empire that damned near destroyed them all with their genetically engineered army of monstrosities plus underground labs that manufactured more of them, using kidnapped citizens... That the world had any people left, not to mention buildings still standing, was a freaking miracle.

Jin sighed and his gloved hand spread out to sweep down Rory’s other shoulder. “You could have left it to Christophe.”

Without thinking, Rory relaxed under the stroking hand and shook his head. “Christophe puts Christophe first. Someone had to put the people first.” He turned to look up at Jin with one narrowed eye. “Which is why I don’t want Christophe knowing my business. I don’t need spies that call themselves bodyguards.”

Jin jerked upright, his black gaze narrowing. "You might keep your secrets, but what about your life?"

Rory shoved at Jin. "I'm just a paper-pusher! A mediator in the council! I can be replaced!"

"No." Jin grabbed Rory by the shoulder and shoved him back down to hiss in his ear. "You are *not* replaceable!"

Rory kicked out in pure temper. "I'm not super-powered or super-trained like you guys! I'm just an ordinary guy!"

"You are *not* ordinary." Jin's fingers tightened on Rory's back. "Ordinary people cannot design a completely self-contained city like Capitol."

Rory shook his head. "It's gone..."

"But it *did* exist!" With a growl, Jin rose up on one foot and grabbed onto Rory's shoulder. With a hard pull, he heaved Rory over onto his back, then dropped down to sit on Rory's torso. "And not just the city. Ordinary people cannot create robots they can walk around in as easily as their own body." He pinned both of Rory's wrists by his head to the bed. "Ordinary people cannot make fairy-tale creatures come to life *and* think on their own." He leaned over Rory, his black eyes narrowed and his lips pulled back in a snarl. "Ordinary people cannot defeat my Security elite so easily without killing them."

Rory swallowed hard, but the lump of terror in his throat made it difficult to speak. "I didn't *want* to kill them."

"Which is my point!" Jin dropped his head to blow out a long breath. When he looked up his face had smoothed from its snarl, but his black eyes were still

narrowed with banked fury. “It takes a man of intelligence to stop an attacker. It takes a man of higher intelligence to stop them without causing harm to them, or anyone else in the process.” His black eyes rolled and a hint of a smile curved the corner of his mouth. “Especially when we’re talking about Tony and Marcus.”

Rory blinked up at Jin in confusion. That almost sounded like...praise.

Jin released Rory’s left wrist to cup Rory’s chin with iron strong fingers. He glared into Rory’s eyes from only a breath away. “You are one of the most brilliant minds I have ever known. You can *not* be replaced.” His mouth crashed onto Rory’s.

*He’s kissing me?* Rory blinked in bewilderment. *Wasn’t he just mad at me?* However, the softness of Jin’s lips and the insistent way Jin’s tongue was moving across his closed lips was very distracting. In fact, the urge to open his mouth and actually taste the man kissing him was damned near overwhelming—and exciting. Heat was spilling down into his groin at an alarming rate. He was getting hard.

*Crap!* With a soft sound of protest, he fought to turn away from the kiss, but Jin’s hand was mercilessly firm on his jaw. He reached up with his free hand and encountered Jin’s arm. He clutched at the man’s upper coat sleeve and tugged, but the angle was completely wrong to do any good. He couldn’t even reach the man’s hair to yank on it. Not that he would; that was a girl-thing to do.

Jin abruptly shifted back, bringing his butt up against Rory’s semi-hard dick.

A squeak of alarm and surprise parted Rory's lips. Jin's tongue slid right past them and invaded without mercy. He swept across Rory's tongue, then under it and around it, thoroughly exploring it.

Rory parried Jin's tongue with his own—strictly out of self-defense, of course.

Jin moaned into Rory's mouth.

The vibrations went right down Rory's throat, which brought forth a shiver, and a tiny moan of his own. *Holy Mother, the man can kiss!* Even worse, he tasted good, like...rich coffee with heavy cream. *Must have had a cup right before he got here.* His efforts to resist melted even as his dick rose to full straining erection.

Jin's hand loosened on Rory's jaw to push his head slightly to the side, angling it. He then proceeded to seal his mouth to Rory's and sucked on his tongue.

It *tingled*. Rory made a soft sound of surprise, then shivered hard. It suddenly became very difficult to think at all, and his will to resist vanished.

Jin pulled back a bit to nip at Rory's lips with his even white teeth. His gloved hands slid down Rory's chest to rub his fingers against Rory's nipples.

Bolts of erotic heat speared straight down to his dick. Rory gasped and grabbed onto the bed sheets, writhing.

Jin sat up on Rory's hips with a lifted brow and a smile. "Sensitive. Hmm..."

His face hot with embarrassment over just how easily he'd given in to Jin's kiss, Rory scowled up at the Security elite. "Yeah, so?"

Jin tilted his head to one side, his long black hair

sweeping across his shoulders. "Should I assume you're lacking in experience?"

Rory looked away, his face burning. "Not...completely." He glanced back at the smiling Security. "It's just...been a while."

Both of Jin's brows lifted, then lowered over slitted eyes. "Define 'a while'."

Rory winced. "A few...years." His last lover had been a sweet and gentle secretary for the one of the construction crews working on Capitol. She'd dumped him for a muscle-bound and brainless wielder. After that, he'd been too busy with the war efforts to even consider looking for a lover. In short, well over five years.

Jin's smile didn't waver, nor did his gaze. "How many were men?"

Rory clenched his jaw. "I dated *women*, if you must know!"

Jin snorted. "No wonder you're unattached."

Rory blinked. "Eh?"

Jin leaned back and casually wrapped a hand around Rory's hard-on.

Rory gasped and arched. "Fuck!"

"This..." Jin slid his hand down Rory's length to his balls, then stroked back up to the flared head. "Was not caused by kissing a woman."

Rory barely heard him. He was too busy just trying to *breathe*. It felt unbelievably good to have a hand on his cock that wasn't his own.

Jin leaned over him, his lips dangerously close. "I think you're going to like being spanked by me."

Rory's brain abruptly snapped back into focus and



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he stiffened, his eyes widening. “Eh?”

Jin’s smile curled into what was clearly an anticipatory smirk. “In fact, I think you’re going to enjoy just about everything I do to you.”

## *Five*

Rory glared up at the man literally sitting on his hips with Rory's dick in his hand. He folded his arms across his chest. "You're doing all this just because I embarrassed a couple of your henchmen?" He rolled his eyes. "Oh, excuse me, *employees*."

One of Jin's brows rose, but his smirk didn't shift a hair. "I'm doing this because I wanted to spend some personal time with you, and you were foolish enough to hand me an excuse."

Rory stiffened. "Personal time? Wait, *excuse...?*"

Jin shrugged just a little. "I admit that this is a *little* kinky for a first date, but I'm more than happy to oblige."

Rory's eyes widened and his mouth fell open. "*Date...?!?*"

Jin's mouth tightened and brow rose again. "I don't normally *kiss* those I'm sent to punish." He leaned down to peer directly into Rory's eyes. "I don't do overtime for just anyone, either."

*Overtime?* Rory ground his teeth. "Gee, how flattering."

Jin nodded and his smirk reappeared. "I'm glad you understand." He abruptly sat up. "Now then, for your spanking, do I need to restrain you or not?"

Rory leaned up on his elbows. You are *not* spanking me!"

Jin pursed his lips slightly and nodded. “Restraints it is.” He pulled a small silver aerosol can from his coat pocket.

Rory stiffened. “What the hell is that?”

Jin raised the small can. “Merely a fast-acting, short-term sedative. It’ll save time and prevent damage caused by struggling while I restrain you.”

Rory grabbed for the spray can. “No way in hell you’re drugging me...!”

Jin pointed the can toward Rory’s face and pressed the small button at the top. There was a hissing sound.

One second Rory reaching for the spray can, the next he was opening his eyes to find himself on his stomach with his cheek pressed into his comforter. His arms were extended above his head—and they wouldn’t move. He lifted his head to discover that his hands were bound together by handcuffs. A belt was looped around the cuffs’ chain and then knotted around his left bedpost. An experimental twist of his hips revealed that his ankles had been tied together by what felt like one of his own fuzzy bathrobe ties.

Jin groaned from right under Rory’s hips. “Mmm... You have my permission to do that as much as you like.”

Rory’s eyes widened. Apparently, those extremely hard pillows under his belly and thighs weren’t pillows; they were legs—Jin’s folded legs, to be specific. He was naked, facedown and stretched out across Jin’s lap. Even worse, his crotch appeared to be positioned right on top of Jin’s. Just to make matters truly unhelpful, from what he was feeling pressing

against his right hip, Jin was *very* happy to have him there.

This just couldn't get any worse. Rory glared at his traitorous bedpost. "That was a dirty trick."

Jin chuckled. "That was not a dirty trick. That was a safety measure." Fingers tapped against something Rory was only just noticing was lodged *in* his ass. "*This* is a dirty trick."

*No way in hell!* Rory sucked in a sharp breath and automatically clenched. His anus did *not* like that one bit, and let him know with a sharp ache. A small sound of pain left his throat. *Okay, that was a bad idea.* He took several deep breaths and forced himself to relax. "Is that a...?"

"Yes, it's a butt-plug." A gloved hand swept across Rory's ass cheeks. "Once I've warmed your ass, you should be nicely loosened enough for...other things."

An icy shiver danced down Rory's spine. It seemed that life could indeed get worse after all. His throat tightened so hard, his words came out in a whisper. "You're going to rape me." It wasn't a question.

"Rape is such a harsh word." Jin leaned over to catch Rory's eyes and smiled. "I prefer 'seduce'."

Anger stiffened Rory's spine. He turned his head to the right to aim a corner of the eye glare at his tormentor. "Changing the word doesn't change the act! I did *not* agree to have sex with you!"

Jin snorted but his gaze narrowed. "Not yet." He straightened up and began peeling off his black leather gloves. "First things first, however." He looked to the front, toward the bedroom window and nodded. "Just to be sure you won't miss anything, I

moved your mirror.”

Rory turned his head to his left.

Directly under his bedroom window was his free-standing full-length mirror, lying sideways on a chair. It gave him a full and complete view of his naked body stretched out full length and face down across Jin’s lap. His skin practically glowed against the stark black of Jin’s dress pants, but he wasn’t quite pale enough to blend in with the man’s snowy white dress shirt. Jin had apparently removed both his overcoat and his suit jacket sometime while he was out.

It was a rather...*stirring* sight. Rory swallowed hard. He looked up at Jin’s reflection and worked to summon a scowl. “Just how kinky are you?”

Jin snorted. “There isn’t enough time to go into that. Not tonight, anyway.” He closed his right hand around Rory’s left knee and raised his left hand.

*Shit!* Rory automatically twisted to get out of the way. Sadly, he didn’t budge an inch.

The hand landed square on Rory’s left butt cheek with a loud crack.

Rory flinched more at the sound than anything else. However, deep in his ass, the butt-plug *vibrated*. Abruptly, his ass cheek burst into flame or rather, it felt like it had. He sucked in a sharp breath, his eyes widening at the amazing amount of pain one bare hand could deliver. “Ow...”

Jin blinked, then choked on a laugh. “Ow? That’s all?”

Rory ground his teeth. His ass *still* hurt. “How about this, then?” He gathered his breath and shouted at the top of his lungs. “Muther-fucker! Son of a bitch,

that fucking hurt, you prick! Goddamn it!" He writhed for good measure.

Jin lowered his head, his long hair falling forward to cover his face, and pressed a fist to his lips. However, his shoulders shook. In fact, his entire body shuddered under Rory's. The son of a bitch was *laughing*. Jin drew in a breath and straightened with a subdued smile, but his eyes were suspiciously moist. "Yes, much better. Thank you."

Rory yanked on the belt holding him to the bedpost. "You're *not* welcome."

"Well, on that note..." Jin raised his hand again.

Rory flinched and sucked in a sharp breath. He just couldn't help it.

A loud crack announced that Jin had smacked him again. The butt-plug vibrated, only this time, Rory's other ass-cheek felt like it was on fire. He pushed up onto his elbows, to try and get away from the pain. "Ow! Shit! Fuck...!"

Sadly, Jin's right hand on Rory's knee easily kept Rory pinned in place. Jin's reflection in the mirror frowned at Rory's ass. "I'm glad I decided to use my hand on you. You mark rather easily."

"What do you normally use?" Almost as soon as the words left his mouth, Rory realized that he *didn't* want to know the answer. "Forget I asked!"

"A very slender metal switch, which would have cut your sensitive skin to ribbons." Jin's palm swept across Rory's blushing butt-cheeks. Burning tingles followed.

Rory hissed and writhed. "Shit!"

"Oh, and by the way..." Jin smiled faintly at Rory's

reflection. "That facial hair isn't fooling anyone."

Rory turned to frown at Jin's reflection. "What are you talking about?"

Jin smiled, and his gaze narrowed. "I checked your files. You're younger than me by three years."

*Eh?* Rory's brows lifted, then he rolled his eyes. "So? What's your point?"

"My point is, you should show more respect to your elders." Jin's reflection in the mirror showed swift movement. A loud crack announced exactly what that movement entailed, then a second crack sounded.

Rory gasped, but didn't get a chance to do more than that because not only did his left ass-cheek erupt with pain, his right did too, forcing a rather undignified high-pitched yelp from his lips. He tossed his head while rolling his hips and tugged at the belt that held him to the bedpost, dying to rub his stinging ass. "Ah, fuck! Damn it! Ow!"

Jin snorted. "I think you rather like being spanked."

"What the hell...?" *Was he insane?* Rory twisted around to look up at Jin.

Jin's brow lifted and a smirk curved his lips. "Not only are you erect, you're soaking my pants with precum."

Rory blinked. Truthfully, he'd been paying far too much attention to the burning in his butt to even notice anything else. However, now that he *was* paying attention... His eyes widened and his mouth fell open on a mostly silent moan. *Oh, holy Mother!* He wasn't merely erect, he was harder and larger – and

hotter – than he'd ever been in his entire life! His cock was so swollen, it throbbed in time with his heart.

What made the situation worse was that his cock was so stiff, it didn't hang. It was damned near tight against his belly in the space between Jin's folded legs – and not touching a damned thing. Despite his bound ankles, he pushed up on his knees to get some sort of friction against his aching cock. He'd happily hump Jin's thigh if he had to.

Jin pressed his palm to the small of Rory's back to push him back down. "Though, that could be the effect of the butt-plug." Jin tilted his head to the side, openly peering at Rory's ass. "It is a rather long one, designed specifically to put pressure on the prostate." He traced a finger around the edge of the plastic toy lodged in Rory's ass.

A mild electrical *erotic* sensation erupted throughout Rory's entire pelvic region. Every hair on his body rose. His cock *pulsed* and his anus actually twitched. Worse still, something right behind his balls clenched deliciously in what could have been an orgasm, had the pressure been a bit stronger. He arched up and shivered. "Holy shit!" His ass rolled all by itself, practically begging for more.

Jin leaned close and spoke softly by Rory's ear. "If you liked that, imagine what my cock will feel like."

Rory stiffened. "I'd rather not, if you don't mind." Unfortunately, the thought wouldn't leave his brain. He tried to push it away, he really did, but the idea of that tingling, electric, *exciting* feeling behind his balls being intensified just...wouldn't...go! A small whimper escaped his lips.



Jin chuckled softly. “Now, now, Rory, lies will only get you punished.”

Rory only had a split-second to spot the raised hand in his mirror.

*Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

Rory’s ass literally jumped under Jin’s hand. On top of that, his cock actually bobbed, tapping his own belly and resulting in painfully delicious pangs that vibrated up his spine. *Then* his ass tried to burst into flame.

At that moment, Jin gripped the plug in Rory’s ass and *ground it in*.

Electrical erotic bliss washed up Rory’s spine to mix weirdly with the pain of his ass-cheeks. It made his yell of indignation come out far deeper and more like one of carnal lust.

Jin grinned. “Now *that* was a lovely sound.” He gripped Rory’s abused ass cheeks with his hands and squeezed, which incidentally shifted the plug.

Another heated yowl left Rory’s throat. Thoroughly humiliated by his own body, Rory’s temper surged. “Quit playing with me, you sadistic bastard, and get the damned punishment over with so I can jerk off in peace!”

Jin snorted. “I’m afraid ordinary masturbation won’t help you with this.” He tapped the butt plug—firmly.

A pulse of electrical delight speared through Rory. He gave out a choked gasp and actually *felt* his cock leaking fluid in response.

Jin smiled sweetly—a look completely alien on his stark features. “This will take *interior* stimulation to

satisfy.”

Rory’s temper snapped. “You rot-gutting, flaming, asshole son of a bitch bastard! You did that on purpose!”

Jin’s features smoothed into one of mild concern and he nodded. “I’m afraid so.” His lips curled slightly, betraying a lurking smirk. “As I said before, *this* was a dirty trick.” He tapped lightly on the butt plug – again.

Rory twitched to the delicious erotic sparks, then jerked viciously on the belt that held him. “Don’t you feel the least bit ashamed for what you’re doing to me?”

Jin’s face smoothed out into his usually impassive non-expression. “I’m Security.”

Rory blinked, then rolled his eyes. “Right, stupid question.”

“Now then...” Jin brought his hands together and cracked his knuckles. “I shall continue the spanking until you either apologize –”

Rory yanked on his bindings. “I didn’t do anything wrong! I don’t want your damned spies for bodyguards!”

Jin snorted. “Or you ask me to fuck you.”

Rory gasped in outrage and twisted to look over his shoulder at the elegant Security elite. “That’s blackmail, you prick!”

“Yes, I suppose it is.” Jin shrugged, then smiled. “So, which shall it be, an apology or a fuck?”

Rory turned away. The plug in his butt made him seriously consider option number two, but his pride just wouldn’t stand for it. “Neither. Beat me all you

like, because I *won't* apologize and I don't want your dick up my ass."

"Very well then." Jin rubbed his palms against Rory's decidedly warm and still stinging butt. "But I should warn you, this..." He patted the butt-plug. "Will only get worse."

The pressure induced mild spears of delight that turned into a definite pulsing hunger right behind his balls. Rory choked and writhed complexly without meaning to. "Don't touch that!"

"What? This?" Jin grabbed the plug firmly and ground it in deep. "But you like it so much."

A strong pulse of electric fire that was damned near an orgasm burned up Rory's spine to detonate in the back of his skull. His cock even spat a small amount of cum. A choking cry of raw carnal heat left Rory's throat.

Jin rotated the plug. "In fact, the way this is moving so freely, I think you've softened up enough to take my cock with hardly any resistance at all."

Rory twisted and moaned. The plug moving in him was so close to making him cum—but not close enough. He wanted to cry. He wanted to scream. He wanted to cum, damn it! Once the aftershocks passed, Rory panted against his comforter. "I hate you."

Jin snorted. "Oh, it's much too soon for that." He made a show of putting his black leather gloves back on, then lifted both hands. "Allow me to demonstrate." He began to smack Rory's ass with both hands, one-two-one-two-one-two... However, instead of the sharp hard cracks he'd delivered before, these were far lighter slaps, and faster—and

they didn't stop.

Rory hissed and rolled his butt in spite of himself. It was almost endurable, except for one thing. Each slap, though light, was perfectly placed on the roundest part of Rory's cheeks, which happened to be to either side of the plug. The steady staccato of slaps made the damned plug vibrate constantly, and that vibration drilled right into that one spot behind Rory's balls.

Rory had no idea how many slaps had been pounded into his butt before he gave up trying to hold in his yelps. Even fewer passed before his yelps turned to choking cries of frustration. That damned plug was driving him insane! It was teasing him with hints of the bliss to be had if only the pressure was harder, firmer and... And accompanied by a hot, sleek Security elite who kissed like a demon.

Rory choked out a frustrated cry and his eyes watered. He refused to think of it as weeping. However, that didn't change the fact that he knew deep in his gut that surrender to Jin's cock was near.

Without stopping his hands, Jin spoke. "Rory, I suggest you make a decision sometime soon. Your ass is turning purple." He lifted a brow. "I rather like the shade, though."

For some strange reason, that was the last straw. He just couldn't take any more ass-smacking or the slow crawl toward insanity. He'd had *enough*. Rory loosed a loud howl of both indignation and frustration. "Fine, you sadistic son of a bitch!"

Jin lifted both hands from Rory's ass. "Yes?"

His face burning as hot as his ass, Rory looked

away from the mirror and growled. “Fuck me.”

Jin leaned toward Rory’s head and cupped a gloved hand to his ear. “What was that? I think I missed it.”

Rory gripped the belt holding him prisoner with both hands. “I said—” He sucked in a deep breath and damned near screamed, “*fuck me!*”

Jin smiled. “I’d be delighted to.”

## Six

With a flick of the chin that swept his black hair behind him, Jin reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a ring with several very small keys on it. One of them, it turned out, was the key to Rory's handcuffs. Their removal was swift, efficient, and frighteningly practiced. Jin rubbed at the redness on Rory's wrists with his thumbs and frowned. "You shouldn't have pulled so much. You've bruised yourself."

Rory growled as best he could with a voice that had gone hoarse from shouting. "If you hadn't put them on me in the first place..."

Jin's brows lowered. "Better bruised wrists than a broken arm, or worse."

Rory blinked in wide-eyed shock. "You...?" He couldn't ask. He didn't want to know the answer.

Jin snorted. "No, *you*." He moved to the foot of the bed to unknit the bathrobe tie around Rory's ankles. "You were so damned terrified of me... I didn't want you tossing yourself into furniture or through a closed window to escape."

Completely without thought, Rory's gaze moved to his bedroom window—the one he'd tried to leave through earlier. The sash was indeed closed and so was the storm glass, which meant he would have to have gone through two plates of glass to exit that

way. He looked back at Jin and felt a stab of what might have been guilt, but it actually felt more like shame.

Jin dropped the bathrobe tie on the floor and straightened. "I am *very* well trained. I do not hurt people by accident." He began unfastening the buttons of his shirt cuffs.

Rory snorted. "No, only on purpose."

Jin sat on the edge of the bed and smiled slightly. "I'm glad you understand." His hands lifted to his collar and he began to unfasten his shirt buttons.

Rory pushed up onto his hands and knees and his limbs trembled with exhaustion. He was also abruptly reminded that there was a rather large butt-plug jammed in his ass. His butt didn't exactly cramp, but the damned thing inside him wasn't soft by any means—or small. He winced.

"Wait." Jin turned to set one knee up on the bed and reached out to set a warm palm on Rory's thigh. "Lay on your back."

*On my back? On my butt?* Rory looked over his shoulder at Jin. "You're kidding, right?" He froze, staring with wide-eyes.

Jin's white shirt was free of his black dress pants and hung open, showing an extremely well-toned chest and belly. His skin was the color of rich cream. "You *do* want that butt-plug out?"

Rory was so distracted by the view he almost missed that Jin had even spoken. He shook his head slightly. *Focus! Focus!* He lowered his brows and narrowed his eyes. "You can't do it this way?"

Jin's gaze held Rory's steadily. "I can, but I'd rather

not.”

Rory frowned. “Is there something wrong with doing it this way?”

Jin’s brows lifted. “No, there’s nothing wrong with,” his lips curved up at the corners, “doing it this way.”

Rory scowled. Jin was clearly being evasive.

Jin’s palm slid higher on Rory’s thigh until his fingertips touched the bottom curve of Rory’s butt.

Rory flinched away from Jin’s hand and his trembling arm collapsed under him.

Jin’s expression didn’t change one iota. “However, I really don’t think your arms or your legs have the stamina to hold you up in that position long enough.”

Rory rolled his eyes. “*Now* you tell me.” With extreme care, Rory rolled over onto his back. His stinging butt did not like that one little bit. With a wince and a hiss, he jammed his heels into the mattress to lift his butt.

Jin moved to kneel before Rory’s knees. “Lift your knees and hold them. It will take the pressure off. Oh, and spread them, please.” He pulled his shirt off and twisted around to set it over the bed’s footboard.

Rory’s mouth fell open. Every inch of Jin’s sides, shoulders, back, and arms were cable-wired with muscle. He wasn’t bulky by any means, more like defined within an inch of his life – and it all *moved*.

Jin turned back and set his hands on his spread thighs. “Rory?”

Rory jerked his gaze from Jin’s stomach and felt heat flush into his face. “Um, yeah?”

A smile that was decidedly sly lifted Jin’s lips. “Lift



your knees, please.”

Rory blinked. “Oh, yeah.” He dropped his butt to the bed, which did not make his butt happy at all, and immediately lifted his knees. Surprisingly, the weight did come off his butt, setting it on his back instead. He caught his legs under his thighs and spread his knees wide.

“Good.” Jin leaned over him and peered straight down at Rory’s ass.

Out of sheer embarrassment, Rory’s gaze slid away to the mirror—and stiffened. He suddenly didn’t like this position at all. On his back and holding his own legs wide, he looked like a cheap whore waiting to be taken.

As though sensing Rory’s change of heart, Jin set a firm hand up against the bottom of Rory’s right thigh, keeping it right where it was. “Hold still.” He reached out with his left and gripped the plug. He twisted it and worked it back and forth.

Utterly distracting pulses of erotic fire pulsed throughout his pelvic region. Rory’s head fell back onto the pillow and a guttural moan left his throat. Rory’s extremely hard cock pulsed with interest, and dripped.

Jin’s gaze focused on Rory’s face and he pulled slowly. The plug had apparently been well greased because it slid free smoothly, revealing its tapered but bulbous black shape.

Rory sucked in a sharp breath. The feeling of being open and empty was shockingly profound. His ass was so wide open, it fluttered a tiny bit.

Jin’s gaze dropped to Rory’s ass and he froze, eyes

wide. His fingers clenched on Rory's thigh. He licked his lips and set the plug to one side. He yanked almost viciously on his belt, opening it. "Do you have any idea how hot you look, open and ready for me?"

Rory's face burned with embarrassment, but something deep in his gut, right behind his balls, clenched hungrily.

The sound of Jin's zipper opening was loud. With a soft groan, Jin withdrew himself from his pants and lifted higher on his knees positioned directly between Rory's thighs. His cock rose in a strong, long, and rigid curve. He was so hard, the head was almost violet in color, and it was dripping. The gleam of silver revealed that there was a finger-thick steel ring around the base.

Rory's eyes widened. "Is that a...?"

Jin nodded. "Yes, it's a cockring." He smiled slightly and released Rory's leg to pull a plastic tube of clear gel from his pocket. "I want you very badly, Rory." He squirted gel on his hand, then rubbed his palms together, coating them both. "Without it, I'd cum within seconds of entering you."

Rory pulled his gaze away. It was rather flattering to be wanted that much, in a creepy-stalker kind of way. "Oh..."

"Watch."

Reluctantly, Rory turned back to Jin.

Jin fisted his hand around his cock and smeared the gel from head to base, making obscene wet sounds. His gaze lifted to Rory's without a trace of a smile. His lids slid down to hood his eyes, but there was no mistaking the hunger in their black depths. He

licked his lips.

A shiver spilled down Rory's spine.

With smooth grace, Jin moved to capture Rory's right thigh with a slick palm. With his left hand still around his cock, he sat down on his heels and leaned in.

A hot blunt object pressed against Rory's anus. His fingers tightened on his legs and his heart suddenly leaped into his throat. *Wait, why am I letting him do this?*

Jin leaned further in, his cock-head breeching Rory's body with unsettling ease. He suddenly spoke in deep husky tones. "I wanted you on your back so I could watch you while I took you." He pushed into Rory's body slowly, firmly, and absolutely.

With a choking gasp, Rory let his legs go to throw back his head and grab onto the blankets under him. "Fuck!" It didn't hurt, the well-greased plug had done its job to prepare him. However, it was more than a little shocking to have someone—a man, a *cock*—inside him, filling him far deeper than the butt-plug had gone.

Jin hooked his arms around both of Rory's legs and leaned forward to set his palms on the bed, framing Rory and keeping Rory's ass in perfect alignment with his cock. "Oh yes, you're definitely ready." With a harsh groan, he ground in deep.

The cock grinding inside Rory brushed against that swollen gland inside him. It jolted him with a fierce electrical burst of raw, carnal pleasure. Rory choked out a cry and arched. *Oh, that's why I'm letting him do this.*

Jin flashed a feral grin, pulled back a little and thrust hard—directly into that spot.

A bolt of white-hot intensity speared through him, racing up his spine to ring in his skull. With a sharp cry, he arched up from the bed, toes curling. His hands fisted in the blankets, desperately grabbing for any kind of stability. It was so far beyond pleasure that for a crazed second he thought he was going to pass out.

Jin groaned with narrowed and hooded eyes, then spoke in a voice gone hoarse and deep. “That’s it, that’s what I want.” He ground deep.

Held in position by impossibly strong arms, Rory moaned and writhed. His clenched fingers pulled at his blankets, feeling the strain in his shoulders, his thighs, and his curling toes. The son of a bitch was grinding on that one spot, and the pleasure from it was almost too intense to bear.

Jin licked his lips and whispered almost too softly for Rory to hear it. “Now, for the rest.” Eyes narrowed under brows knit forcefully together, Jin’s hips began to snap, pistoning fast and hard, fucking him at a brutal pace with strong deep thrusts.

Rory could only arch and twist under the erotic assault, trembling under the shattering bursts of cruel pleasure. Deep, guttural cries burst from his arched throat while his mind was wiped utterly by the white-hot intensity literally being pounded into him.

The sound of wet slaps, grunts of effort and choking cries of pleasure filled the small room. The scent of sweat and lust was almost chokingly thick.

Drowning in sensations he couldn’t even label,

Rory's gaze fell on the mirror at the side of the bed. His gaze abruptly focused on the reflection—of himself on his back with his feet in the air while Jin fucked him. His eyes widened.

Jin's back arched and rolled, sinuous as a serpent. His long hair splashed across the corded muscles gleaming with sweat like spilled ink. Above the pitch blackness of the pants around his thighs, Jin's ass visibly flexed with each snap.

It was the most obscene—and exciting—thing Rory had ever seen.

At that moment, Jin slammed particularly hard into him.

His balls abruptly tightened and something inside him detonated. His body stiffened and his breath stopped. Lightning erupted from somewhere behind his balls to consume his cock then his entire lower half in a raw electrical explosion that surged up his spine. His brain filled with white noise that deafened him to everything, even the sound of his own screams for an eternity that didn't last nearly long enough. He barely noticed the white hot stream of cum that jetted from his untouched cock to splatter across his own chest and chin.

Shuddering with after-tremors from the most brutal climax of his life, Rory was barely aware of Jin pulling out of his body.

With a hoarse groan, the oriental man reached down to yank off the silver ring that bound his cock. He slammed back into Rory with a gasp and pistoned into him for about five strokes, then slammed in deep. His body stiffened. With a soft hoarse cry, he

shuddered and ground in deep.

Rory senses cleared enough for him to feel the hard cock inside him pulsing, and the hot wetness filling him to overflowing. Jin had cum – inside him.

With a groan, Jin pulled out of Rory's body, releasing Rory's legs and letting them fall to the bed. He sat up, head thrown back, hair spilling across his broad shoulders, his body damp and dripping with sweat. His cock arched upward obscenely between Rory's limp thighs, dripping with clear viscous fluid, with the cum that had been released inside Rory's body.

The shock of seeing such blatant evidence of being physically possessed to that degree made Rory tremble.

Jin suddenly leaned over Rory, his body, his hips, nestling between the smaller man's thighs, spent cock to spent cock. His eyes were still dark and intense, and his body was rank with the scent of sweat and spilled semen. Slowly he closed the distance between them to take Rory's mouth in a harsh kiss.

His world rocked in a way he'd never expected, Rory reached up to grip Jin's shoulders to reply in kind and tasted the traces of lust still on Jin's tongue. Perhaps he was looking for reassurance, or perhaps, it was merely acknowledgment of his compliance in the act, or perhaps it was gratitude for the mind-blowing pleasure Jin had given him. He didn't know. Whatever it was, the kiss settled him and put the world back on its axis.

Jin pulled back without a trace of a smile. "That was only a taste of things to come." He stood up and

walked to the foot of the bed to collect his shirt.

*Things to come?* Rory struggled to sit up. His ass was so very not happy with him, neither was his lower back, but he did it anyway. “Was that a threat or a promise?”

In the process of slipping his shirt on, Jin froze. He turned to look at Rory with an upraised brow and a slight smile. “Both.”

Rory folded his arms across his chest and lifted his chin. He believed in honesty...with himself, if no one else. Despite the ‘punishment’ at the beginning, he had enjoyed the sex thoroughly. If Jin was willing to continue, he was willing to participate—but that didn’t mean he had to make it easy for him. “Gotta catch me first.”

Jin turned to face Rory fully and buttoned his shirt with visibly trembling fingers. His smile turned pointedly predatory. “I can arrange that.”

Rory lifted one brow and snorted. “We’ll just see about that.”

Jin’s smile shifted to a rare one of open warmth. “I look forward to the challenge.” He turned to pick up his discarded jacket. “In the meantime...” He pulled another small spray can from his pocket, this one with a bright red cross on a white label.

Rory stiffened. “Is that medical spray?” During the war, their desperate scientists had discovered a new element. It had seemed pretty useless at first. Then they’d discovered that when combined with certain other chemicals, it promoted physical healing at an ungodly rate. It had been one of the few advantages they’d had against the empire.

Jin dropped his coat on the foot of the bed. "It is." He approached Rory with the small can. "I did promise your creation that you wouldn't have to go to the hospital."

Rory scowled. "You didn't hurt me *that* bad."

Jin smiled tightly. "You're still riding the endorphin high. When that wears off..." He shrugged and shook the can, making it rattle. "Let's just say that a hot bath in Epsom salts and a few aspirin won't be nearly enough." He sat on the bed beside Rory and held the can over Rory's belly. He depressed the button. Bright green gas erupted from the can and soaked into Rory's flesh.

Aches and pains Rory hadn't even noticed were suddenly gone, including the ache in his lower back. However, it also brought drowsiness. Rory abruptly yawned. "Crap, that thing's putting me to sleep."

"You can't sleep yet." Jin pocketed the can, grabbed Rory by the arm and dragged him onto his feet. "Shower first."

Rory rolled his eyes and curled his lip. "You have a point." He didn't need Boots asking about the funny smell coming off of his skin. Despite his unsteady knees, he somehow made it to his bathroom and into the shower.

Clean and mostly dry, Rory stepped out of the bathroom with yet another towel wrapped around his hips, fully expecting the Security elite to be gone.

Jin was still there. In fact, he was standing before Rory's full-length mirror, which had been set upright and back where it belonged in the far left corner. He turned to look over at Rory while buttoning his black



suit coat over a decidedly wrinkled shirt.

At that moment, the bedroom door crashed open and an upright gray striped feline wearing a comically large red hat with a curling feather—Boots—came barreling into the room. “Maker!”

Rory smiled. “I’m right here.”

Boots whipped around to peer very closely at Rory. “You look okay.”

Midnight-haired Tony stuck his head into the doorway to frown profoundly at Rory, then Jin. “Why does it look like you didn’t do a damned thing?”

Jin’s brows lifted. “Because unlike certain Black Ops members, I clean up after myself when I’m through.” He folded his hands behind his back.

That’s when Rory noticed the butt-plug *still sitting on the bed*. A cold sweat broke out on his back. *Oh, shit...* His gaze shot to Tony’s, hoping the man hadn’t spotted it.

Unfortunately, Tony’s gaze had indeed shifted, and it was pinned wide-eyed to the black object on Rory’s bed. He shot a distinctly lascivious grin Rory’s way. “Never mind.” He then ducked out of the room and yelled from the hall. “We going now?”

Jin heaved a sigh and strode for the bedroom door. “Yes, we’re going.” Without breaking stride, he snatched the black plug from the bed, pocketed it, and flashed Rory a smile. Then he was out in the hall.

Moments later, the front door closed loudly.

Rory stumbled over to his bed, reeling with all that had just happened.

Boots tilted his head to the side. “Are you really okay?”

Rory sent Boots a tired smile. "I'm fine. He used medical spray on me."

Boots's fur rose on his spine. "*Battle-grade* medical spray...? It was *that* bad?" He shot an angry look at the door and growled. "Why, that black rat...!"

Rory waved his hand to get Boots's attention. "No, no! It wasn't bad! I was just...sore, that's all." He smiled brightly, though it took more effort than he expected. "So, how was the movie?"

"Oh!" Boots immediately launched into an action-packed description of what happened in the movie, complete with sound effects.

Rory smiled and made agreeable sounds while taking the two steps to the dresser beside his bed and rummaging through the middle drawer for a pair of pajama bottoms to sleep in. Having had the feline since high school, he didn't think twice about dropping his towel to put them on.

Boots abruptly halted his flow of words and sound effects.

Rory turned around to look at the feline while tying the drawstring. "Boots?"

Boots suddenly looked away and lifted his chin as though examining the wallpaper. "Um, remind me never to piss off Jin."

Rory frowned. "What?"

Boots cleared his throat. "Have you seen your butt?"

Frowning deeply, Rory walked around the bed to get to the mirror then dropped the back of his pants. Rory's eyes widened. There on each ass-cheek was a very red and very clear handprint. Apparently, the

medical spray had taken care of everything except the first two strikes on his ass.

He reached down to rub the marks and discovered that they were still quite warm, though the soreness had dwindled to a tingle. He rolled his eyes. "I should have known a hickey wouldn't be enough for you."

Boots tilted his head to the side. "What's a hickey?"

Rory jerked his pants up over his ass and smiled at his far too nosy creation. "Nothing you ever need to worry about." There was no way in hell he was going to try to explain what love-bites were—or why Jin's calling card would be a handprint instead.

Boots nodded and smiled. "Okay!" He turned to the door. "I'll go ask Tony instead!" He darted out the door.

Rory chased after him. "You call that long-haired rat about this and I'm killing the service on your cell-phone for a month!"

"Nooooo!"

## *Epilogue*

Roughly a week later on a Friday afternoon, Rory sat down behind his battered desk at the AA&E headquarters and set his new spectacles on his nose. “Code AOH, activate.” Across the left lens of the spectacles, information began to scroll from his main computer across town via the fine-wire Ethernet connection he’d finally perfected.

Folding his hands before him, he leaned back in his chair and smiled. It had been a very interesting week. No less than four break-ins marked Teradyne’s attempts to map out his security system. All four had been complete failures, of course. Rory sighed. “They always seem to forget that not only did I design ninety percent of their own security system, I designed the detection equipment too.”

Right about then, a little green bar appeared on his right lens. It shrank very quickly to become a tiny blinking red light. Rory nodded. “That’ll teach them to mess with my security system.”

About halfway across town in the Teradyne main office building, every single locked door opened. Well, except for Christophe’s office door and the doors on the detainment level. Rory knew better than to mess directly with Christophe or allow any of the maniacs they had locked up loose among the office workers.

With a satisfied smirk, Rory opened his small closet to put away his blue administrator’s robes and

change his clothes. That done, he opened the panel in the back of the closet to reveal his secret one-seat lift. After descending to the ground floor, he left the AA&E office building through the cafeteria door wearing simple faded jeans, a gray unmarked sweatshirt and a black visor-cap with Boots's face stitched onto it.

A waiting taxi took him to the ports on the north side of town for a three-day ocean cruise to the North Coast. There was a small family reunion with a handful of his cousins. He'd be back to work in one week. By then the Teradyne techs should have been able to reestablish the codes to all the auto-lock and slide key doors. If not, he'd just reestablish all the codes for them.

This time, he'd warned Boots ahead of time not to speak to *any* Teradyne employees.

Rory handed the boarding ticket to the sweet-faced attendant with a smile. Abruptly, something in his pocket vibrated. While walking onto the ship, Rory reached into his pocket and pulled out a bright red cell phone. It wasn't his. It was Boots's—just to be on the safe side. He flipped it open, noted the caller ID, then closed the phone and put it back in his pocket with a grin. "Sorry, Tony, Boots won't be answering your calls today."

Four hours later, after a nice quiet dinner in the main dining room and then a game of cards with Boots in the bar, Rory wandered out on the broad promenade deck for a cigarette. He didn't smoke often, but it was a nice diversion once in a while. The night sky was crammed with glittering stars.

A throbbing sound came from somewhere distant and behind the ship. The sound approached and increased in volume until it was clearly identifiable as a hovercraft.

The small hairs on Rory's neck rose. "It can't be..." Cold dread drove Rory back to his small cabin. The tiny room was barely large enough to hold the full-sized bed. It was a good thing the closet was actually built into the wall. A narrow door right behind the cabin's door led to a tiny attached bathroom. The only other feature of the room, the best feature, in fact, was a good-sized round window overlooking the passing ocean.

Boots was sitting on the bench under the window playing computer chess on a holographic board.

Rory closed the cabin door behind him. "Boots, did you speak to Tony this afternoon?"

Boots shook his head. "Nope, not Tony, or anyone that works for Teradyne, just as you asked."

Outside, the sound of the hovercraft grew deafening.

"Did you speak to anyone at all this afternoon?"

Boots grinned and nodded. "Yep!"

The dread gathered into a hard cold lump in the pit of Rory's stomach. "Who?"

Boots threw up his paws. "Walter!"

Rory frowned. "Walter? The toymaker who makes your boots? What did *he* want?"

"He just wanted to know about our vacation."

Rory shook his head. "How did he know we were going on vacation?"

Boots tilted his head to the side, one ear turning

back. "Oh, he didn't. He wanted to know why I wasn't at the apartment or the cottage, so I told him about our vacation!"

Rory suddenly recalled that Walter was retired soldier. Not that big of a surprise, just about everyone had been caught up in the war and had done some time as a soldier. However, if Rory remembered correctly, Walter had been a member of *Security*, and *Security* had a reputation for life-long commitments.

Rory suddenly had a very bad feeling about that hovercraft. He shoved his hand into his pocket and closed his hand around Boots's phone. "Boots, how *exactly* did you speak to Walter?"

Boots clapped his paws together. "He walked right up to me right before I got on the ship."

Rory's mouth fell open. "He... What?" Outside, the sound of the hovercraft began to fade away.

Boots nodded. "He drove his car right onto the dock, right up to me and asked me how I liked the new buckles on my boots!" The feline lifted his foot to show off the large gold buckle nearly covering it entirely. "After we talked, he got back in his car and left the same way." The feline waved one paw. "You showed up not five minutes later!"

Rory dropped to his knees. "Take off your boots."

The feline jerked back. "*What?*"

Rory shot his creation a hard glare. "Just do it!"

"Fine, fine..." The cat sat down to tug off his boots.

Rory took the boots and swept his fingers along the undersides of the decorative buckles. Walter might be retired *Security*, but he was genuinely fond of Boots. Showing up the way he had – right on the pier – and

mentioning the buckles specifically had been a point-blank warning. He looked sharply to look at his creation. "Boots, why didn't you tell me you'd spoken to Walter?"

The feline shrugged. "You didn't ask."

Rory's fingers hit a bump stuck under the edge of each buckle. He pried the bumps loose with a fingernail and looked hard at them. They were small, black, and clearly electronic. "Son of a bitch..." They'd bugged his creation! Rising to his feet, he yanked open the upper casement of the window to toss the transmitting devices out into the water.

The feline's ears went down and his eyes wide. "Can I...put them back on now? My boots?"

Rory nodded. "Yeah, sure."

The cybernetic tabby snatched for his boots and shoved his feet back into them.

Rory wiped his hands down his face, then held out a hand to the feline. "Just to be on the safe side, let's go ask the captain for a different cabin."

Boots stood up. "The safe side of what?"

The cabin door creaked open to admit Jin wearing a long black woolen overcoat over his black suit. His hair looked a bit windblown. The Security elite smiled at Rory with narrowed black eyes. "There you are."

Boots rolled his huge green eyes. "Old man, did you prank Security again?"

Rory scowled at the Security elite in his doorway. "They were messing with my security system at AA&E!"

Boots heaved a huge sigh then looked over at Jin. "There's a movie room down on the entertainment



deck. You've got two hours." He strode for the door.

Rory stared after his creation in abject horror. "Boots...!"

The feline turned to the Security elite. "I expect him in the same condition as last time."

Jin bowed. "Agreed."

Boots walked out the door and closed it behind him.

Jin smiled and let the coat fall from his shoulder. "Missed me, did you?"

Rory backed up to the wall and spoke in a growl. "You can't expect me to let something like messing with my security system go without *some* sort of retribution!"

Jin lifted his chin and his smile widened. "Of course not." His smile soured. "Though I honestly didn't think it would take *four* times."

Rory blinked, then his mouth fell open. "You did it *on purpose*? You wanted me to retaliate just so you could...?" He ground his teeth. "You rat-bastard, that was..."

"A dirty trick?" Jin lifted one black brow and took a step closer. "Perhaps you should consider calling me on my private line so that...such things don't need to happen?"

Rory ground his teeth. "That's blackmail, you prick."

Jin's smile melted into something far more lascivious. "Let's just say, a week is far too long a wait for me."

*End*

# Morgan Hawke

To learn more about Morgan Hawke, check out her website: <http://www.darkerotica.net>.