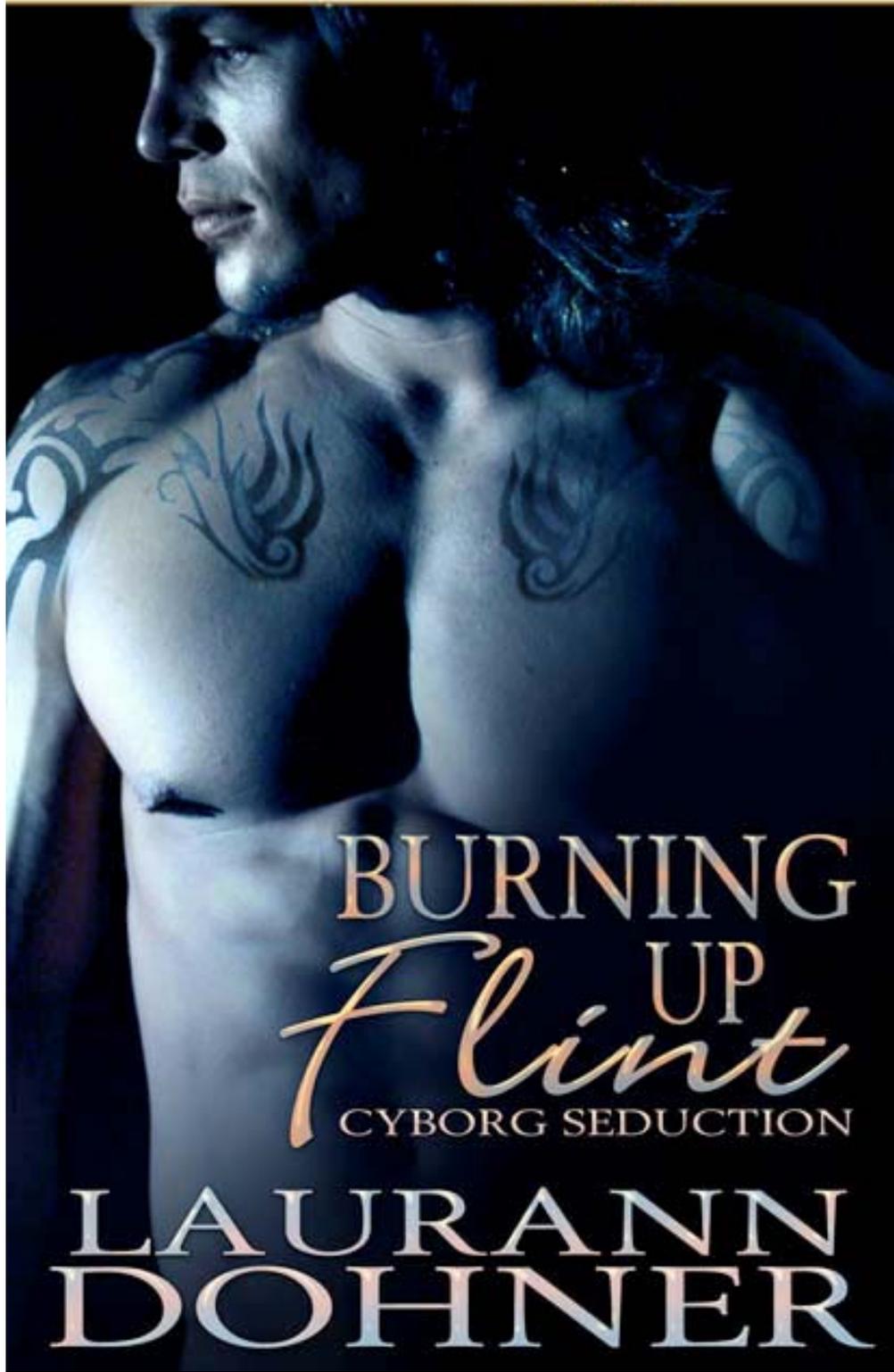


ELLORA'S CAVE **AEON**



BURNING
UP
Flint
CYBORG SEDUCTION

LAURANN
DOHNER

Burning Up Flint

Laurann Dohmer

Book 1 in the Cyborg Seduction series.

Flint is tall, gorgeous and dangerous. He's a cyborg—the absolute ultimate alpha male. He takes what he wants and holds what is his. Mira is his now. He takes her aboard his ship and has her branded with his mark. He captured her, owns her, and she will serve his every need.

Mira is instantly drawn to Flint, fascinated by his seductive appeal. The sex between them is smoking hot. Until she finds out he is a breeder, contracted to a dozen cyborg women, and she is no more than a possession.

Mira won't share her cyborg and she belongs to no one—not even to a man who has captured her heart. She doesn't know if cyborgs feel...anything. *Can* Flint love her? Mira is determined to find out, no matter how much trouble she makes for the big guy.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Burning Up Flint

ISBN 9781419926747

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Edited by Pamela Campbell

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication March 2010

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BURNING UP FLINT

Laurann Dohner

Dedication

I want to thank my husband David—for being who you are, for making the last twenty years the best ones of my life, and for inspiring me to follow my dreams. I couldn't do it without you! You've made me a believer that love grows stronger with each passing year—and I still think you're smokin' hot.

Chapter One

Mira frowned as the shuttle vibrated violently when it shouldn't have. The flight from Space Station Abaccas back to Earth was a straight shot of bursts. Sudden navigational changes caused vibrations, and judging by the way the shuttle was bouncing her around in a teeth-jarring way, they had to have changed their trajectory a lot, which frightened her. Was something in their flight path?

It happened very rarely but sometimes shuttles were attacked by pirates. It was a horrible thought and an even worse reality if that's what was happening. The short four-day flight in the shuttle from Abaccas to Earth was never attacked since thieves liked to go after the heavily supplied, larger ships. The shuttle was a poor target to hit with its meager resources and few passengers to rob. She soothed her fears by thinking it had to be just space garbage the pilot was trying to avoid.

Alarms screamed in the cabin and Mira's gaze flew to the only other passenger, General William Reed, who was her father's age—in his late sixties—and he looked furious. He met her gaze and reached for his side blazer. She stared at him, wondering what he meant to do with the retractable blade of synthetic steel. Knives and side blazers were the only weapons permitted. Guns or any other weapon that shot projectiles were regarded as dangerous to a ship's hull and weren't allowed on shuttles because, with the constant pressure changes, they could accidentally misfire.

"Shit," the man cursed. He grabbed his seat, pressing the com link to the cockpit. "What is it? What is going on, pilot?"

"Two vessels, Sir," the pilot sounded panicked. "We're being overtaken and they are blocking us in. They are faster than we are and we can't escape."

"Who is it?" The general was yelling now.

"I don't know, Sir," the pilot yelled back. "They aren't marked so they are probably pirates since they won't respond to our calls."

The general cursed again and released the com. Mira watched him yank off his wedding ring to shove it behind the backrest cushion. He looked around the cabin critically until his gaze finally rested on Mira, who wasn't fond of the pompous man. The evening before, when she'd boarded the shuttle, he'd annoyed her with boring conversations and his inflated ego.

"They won't get much but you." His lips turned downward into a frown. "I'm sorry, my dear. I have a daughter your age." He released his belt and stood. "I won't let them take you alive."

She watched the man grab for his blazer again, his intent becoming clear as the blade shot out at the press of his thumb. The blazer looked like a dagger until the blade

extended into a short sword. Horror washed over her as she lurched for her belt release. Her fingers shook as she pushed the button, knowing he was going to kill her before he would allow the pirates to get her.

“Stay away from me. You can’t kill me.”

The man was thrown off balance as the shuttle jarred violently before the engines died and Mira felt the gravity on the shuttle waver. Her ass left the seat for a second before it was restored. Both actions caused the older man to stumble sideways as she slammed back into her seat. He tripped and fell hard when gravity sucked him back to the floor.

“Do you know what pirates do to women?” He hauled his body up slowly. “You’ll be lucky if the men on those two ships just rape you to death. I’ve heard stories that some women get taken back to their planet and forced into pleasure houses where you’ll be used by dozens of men every day until you die within a few months.”

She clambered out of her seat and barely missed the blade he sent downward where she’d sat a second before, the sound of splitting fabric loud in her ears. She backed up and then screamed. There was a loud crunch of metal as the shuttle was suddenly shoved hard to one side, as if something had slammed into it, causing another alarm to shriek while red lights flashed in the large cabin. She was thrown across the shuttle but as she looked up from the floor where she’d landed hard she realized it had been a blessing.

“We’re being boarded,” the pilot shouted from the front. “Disarm and hopefully they won’t kill us.”

“They are coming,” the general yelled at her. “Have a brain and get over here. I’ll make it fast and painless.”

Mira had no intention of dying, knowing her family and her employer would pay for her safe return. She came from a rich and powerful family and knew she could talk whoever captured her into ransoming her. She ran for the bathroom just feet away from where she’d landed and made it inside. She slammed the door and pushed the lock. In seconds the general was beating on it, trying to gain entrance.

“Stay away from me,” she shouted. “I’ll pay my way out of this. Are you crazy? I’m worth more alive than dead.”

“Damn it, they won’t care.”

“Everyone loves money. They aren’t pirates for the hell of living in space. They are trying to get rich.”

The man cursed. “Stupid woman!” He kicked the door but then it grew silent.

Mira’s heart pounded when the shuttle shuddered. The lights flickered in the bathroom but they stayed on so she wasn’t left in the dark. She backed away from the door as far as she could get in the tiny compartment that housed only a toilet and a small foam cleaning unit in a corner. She bit her lip. Would the crazy general try to put his blazer through the thin metal to stab at her?

A long minute passed and then another. A knock sounded on the door. Mira jumped, startled. "Go away. I'm not going to let you kill me, General."

Seconds of silence passed and then a deep voice with a gruff tone spoke. "I'm not a general and I have no intention of killing a woman. Open the door now or I'll have to blow the lock. I would hate to risk damaging you."

Mira was certain that voice didn't belong to either of the two pilots or the general. She hesitated.

"I don't have hours to spare," the deep voice rumbled. "Open the door."

She moved slowly, reaching for the lock and sliding the bolt. If the door was blown it could end up killing her. Before she could reach for the handle, the door was jerked open. Mira stared in astonishment at the tall man who filled the doorway, knowing her mouth fell open, but she was helpless to stop it as she took in the sight before her.

It wasn't a human man who stared back at her. The urge to faint was strong but Mira wasn't the fainting type. If she were she would have hit the floor. She'd seen pictures of men such as he. He was at least six-foot-four with jet-black hair that brushed the top of his shoulders. Intense dark blue eyes studied her. Dull black leather encased his wide shoulders and powerfully built arms. His full lips curved into a tight smile and when he blinked, his thick black eyelashes drew her attention. The skin of his face was a dull nickel color.

"You're a cyborg," she whispered in awe.

The smile grew. "You're human," he said softly, amusement sparking in his eyes.

"But..." She swallowed. "They said all of you had been destroyed over twenty years ago."

He shrugged his massive shoulders. "They lied. What is your name?"

Her mind was reeling. "Um..."

"Um is an odd name."

"Mirasia Carver." She cleared her throat. "I am just shocked."

"You look it. Come with me. I won't hurt you."

He hesitated before holding out his large hand to her. She saw that he wore gloves and metal adorned the back of them like a weapon. If he were to backhand someone, it would break bones. She stared at the his hand and then realized he was offering to help her out of the tiny room. She was trembling as she lifted her smaller hand to place it in his, where only soft black material covered his palm.

His hand closed over hers gently as he tugged her out of the bathroom. She was a little alarmed as she glanced around the cabin of the shuttle to see the general and both pilots were bound—their hands behind their backs, on their knees on the floor. Three more large cyborgs were assessing her and Mira couldn't help but stare back at each of the large men.

It surprised Mira that cyborgs looked different from each other. She half expected them to be so similar that they resembled clones, since they'd been manufactured in

laboratories on Earth. She had read somewhere that cyborgs had metallic-toned skin to set them apart visually from humans. She took in the varying skin tones of all four men, ranging from a light dull silver gray to an almost pewter color. Their bodies were thick, buff, massive, and they were all tall – the shortest one was about six-foot-two while the tallest was inches more in height – but that was where the similarities stopped. One of the men had shockingly white hair while the other two had black hair like the one who gently gripped her hand.

“Leave her with us,” the general said gruffly. “You’re machines so you don’t need to rape a woman. Take whatever the hell you want and let us go.”

The redheaded pilot was unusually pale. “They won’t let any of us go,” he whispered. “They only attack when they’re looking for spare human materials.”

The general paled noticeably and pure terror showed on his face. The other pilot moaned softly, shaking with fear. Mira looked up at the large cyborg still holding her hand to watch as he tilted his head slightly, studying the three bound men carefully. He turned toward the white-haired cyborg.

“Take DNA samples of the males and strip the shuttle of anything we can safely salvage from them.”

The white-haired cyborg jerked his head in affirmation that he’d heard before reaching into one of the large pockets of his black pants to withdraw a small case. Mira watched silently as the man withdrew a small, white device from inside the case and gripped one of the pilots. He extracted blood and tissue from the man’s arm. The pilot groaned in pain but it was over quickly. The cyborg extracted samples from the other two men and then his gaze lifted to Mira.

“Her?”

“No.” The cyborg standing next to her shook his head.

The other frowned. “But –”

“Enough, Ice. Don’t question me in front of the humans.” He smiled coldly.

Ice grinned. “So should we take human materials, Flint?”

Flint looked amused. “Let me think about it while you strip the ship.”

Mira eyed the cyborg standing next to her, still gripping her hand. His name was Flint. The government had announced that they’d destroyed every last cyborg model made but they had obviously lied since she was staring at four of them. Supposedly, the last of the cyborgs had been stamped out of existence when she was a child, their destruction having been ordered by the government nearly twenty years before she was born.

Out of curiosity, she’d read as much as she could about them, and from what she remembered, they had been assigned numbers instead of names. Part of her was excited at seeing that they had survived while part of her was ashamed because what had been done to them.

As the three cyborgs tore the shuttle apart removing what they wanted to take she let her mind drift to her history lessons. At first scientists and doctors had used cybernetics to replace missing limbs, failed organs, and they'd managed to map the human brain to help the mentally ill. They had also made advancements to help repair brain-damaged people to be fully functional again. Eventually they'd mated humans with technology enough to think they could increase lifespan to a projected two hundred years. With space travel advancing, the scientists had decided disposable soldiers were a brilliant idea.

Mira had cringed in horror at learning that part of history. The military and the scientific community had gotten together for Project Cyborg. They had grown cyborgs in laboratories, made them tougher, stronger, bigger than humans and with longer life spans. They wanted to send them out into deep space for exploration.

What they hadn't counted on were their perfect soldiers becoming self-aware when their human side overrode the programmed chips in their brains. Cyborgs had demanded basic civil rights and when they were denied those rights, the rebellion had started. Cyborgs hadn't been violent but instead they'd gone on strike, refusing to work for a government that wouldn't admit they were sentient beings. It had really pissed off the government.

Fearing that the animosity would escalate and the cyborgs would call an all-out war against their creators, humans became afraid. The government had ordered all cyborgs destroyed. Sympathetic humans had tried to hide the cyborgs to keep them safe but it was announced one day when she was about twelve years old that every unaccounted model had been found and destroyed. Mira had cried when she heard that the last of the cyborgs were forever gone. She thought it was a screwed-up thing to deny them rights since they were human—at least mostly human—and she thought genocide of a created race was a horror.

The Earth Government had definitely lied to the public. Mira watched as the cyborgs finished removing what they wanted from the shuttle. She realized the large cyborg was still holding her hand so she looked up at Flint. She smiled at him when he turned his head to meet her eyes.

"I'm glad not all of you were killed. I thought it was wrong what was done to your people."

She saw his black eyebrows arch in shock at her statement. She flushed a little, embarrassed. "My parents were sympathizers so they raised me to believe in freedom for all."

The general uttered a foul curse. "You're being polite to that thing?" He spit on the floor. "They are machines that aren't worth speaking to. You may as well talk to the shuttle."

"Shut up," the pilot hissed at the general. "So far they haven't killed us and they usually do. They usually take people for spare parts."

Frowning, Mira looked at the pilot. "Spare parts? I don't understand."

The other pilot flashed Mira a frightened look. "They cut us up and use our skin and internal organs to make more of them."

Her gaze shot to the tall cyborg standing next to her. Flint was frowning at the pilot.

"You know," he said slowly, "I know a downed model about your size who needs repairs."

Horror hit Mira as she yanked her hand out of the cyborg's hold. She turned, inching away from him, to put herself in front of the pilot. "You can't really mean that. He's a living person."

The tall cyborg looked at Mira. "So are we. We breathe. It never stopped humans from trying to kill every one of us to benefit themselves."

She swallowed. "We didn't do that to your kind. I wasn't even born when those idiots made that law to have your kind destroyed and he's not much older than I am."

"You're right." The cyborg nodded, his attention turned to the general. "You are old enough to have been a part of it. You're a military man. Perhaps I should take you for spare parts."

Mira glanced at the general. She bit her lip before moving out of the way. She saw Flint shoot her a surprised look, his eyebrow arching again.

"Aren't you going to put yourself between us to save him?"

"He tried to kill me and I'm not willing to die for a man who wanted to slice me up with his blazer. I think he's a little old to be useful but I don't know anything about what you need or could use."

The cyborg shocked Mira and the three bound men by throwing his head back and laughing. She turned to see the other three cyborgs smiling, all obviously amused. Ice moved closer, stopping feet short of her to give her a once-over before turning his attention to Flint.

"Just when we think that humanity is at a complete loss. She is cute."

Flint nodded at Mira. "She is unique. We don't really use humans for spare parts. We take DNA samples because our gene pool is limited and they come in handy to our scientists when they need fresh ones to work with. We do not kill indiscriminately."

Relief hit Mira as she smiled, believing him.

He watched her carefully, his gaze studying her expression very closely, then sighed. He turned to one of the other cyborgs. "Have you salvaged everything we can use?"

"Yes, Flint. We left it so they could make it back to Earth safely. Their excess fuel has been removed." The cyborg turned to the pilot and said, "Use a short burst. The trip will take longer but you will get there. We monitored for leaks and cracks from our boarding and the integrity of your shuttle is sound. We did no damage that will cause your vessel to fail."

The other cyborg nodded. "One short burst. You could have an issue with it if you full burn. Do you understand? It could cause the tank to ignite."

The pilot nodded. "I got it."

"What does that mean?" It was the general.

The second pilot cleared his throat. "It means we're going to have to just give ourselves a little jerk to coast home. Instead of it taking a few days we're facing a good week of travel unless someone comes to refuel us when we get closer to Earth."

"But you took our supplies," the general sputtered. "You might as well kill us."

Flint shook his head. "We didn't take it all so ration what you have left. It won't be a pleasant trip but you'll survive."

The two dark-haired cyborgs lifted the crates they had filled from the shuttle. Mira saw all their travel bags wedged in with the food supplies they were taking but she didn't say a word, thinking everything she owned could be replaced. They had also removed some of the entertainment equipment. That just left Flint and Ice in the shuttle. Mira watched them then her eyes locked with Flint's. He gazed back at her and extended his hand to her as if he wanted to shake hands.

She only hesitated a second before putting her palm against his. "Thank you for not hurting anyone."

He gripped her smaller hand. "We're not killers unless we're left with no other options."

"Should I untie the men or let her do it when we're gone?" Ice waited by the door that docked their ship to the shuttle.

The large hand gripping Mira's didn't let go. Flint actually rubbed his thumb over her skin lightly, caressing her, tilting his head to stare deeply into her eyes. "I am wondering something. Will you satisfy my curiosity?"

She couldn't look away from his beautiful eyes. "Sure. What do you want to know?"

He released her hand and pulled off his glove then offered his bare hand. Mira took it, surprised at how warm his skin was. His palm was slightly roughened with calluses. She thought it was odd that he wanted to shake her hand flesh to flesh but she was more than happy to oblige. His fingers squeezed her hand. A gasp tore from her lips as he jerked her forward, right into his muscular body.

Mira stared up at the foot taller cyborg who still gripped her hand. Her free hand had ended up against the hard-shelled chest plate of his black uniform. Her body was flush against his since he'd pulled her there. His arm wrapped around her waist, locking her against him as he stared down at her.

Flint just held her like that for long seconds, watching her. She wondered what he was doing, if maybe he wanted her closer to detect if she was lying or not. She'd read once that cyborgs were good at tracking a human's heart rate by touch. Was he holding her so tightly so he could evaluate her honesty? It was her best guess.

“Um...what do you want to know?” She was proud that her voice didn’t shake in fear. Cyborgs were super strong. He could hurt her easily if he wanted to with that massively built body.

He lowered his head so he could gaze into her eyes. He had mesmerizing blue eyes that she couldn’t look away from. Cyborgs looked completely human except for their skin tone. He was a damn good-looking man. His hot breath fanned across her face. He smelled of some kind of sweet fruit.

“Flint?”

Flint didn’t even glance at the other cyborg when he spoke to him, instead keeping his eyes locked with Mira’s.

“What?”

“What are you doing?” Ice sounded amused.

Flint ignored the question to rub Mira’s hand again. “Do you have any children?”

She’d never expected that question in a million years. She shook her head. “No.”

He took a deep breath. “Good. Then you will forgive me in time.”

She frowned. “Forgive you for what?”

He took a step back and then another as he completely released her. “I do not care if you have a man in your life or if you have family you will miss. The one thing I could not take you from would be a child. That would be deplorable. You do not have any, therefore what I do is forgivable.”

Mira’s mind tried to make sense of his words. She gasped as he grabbed her arm above the elbow in a viselike grip. His gaze tore from hers to the other cyborg.

“Free the pilot so he can release the other two men when we are away. Let’s go, Ice. I have the only thing I want from the shuttle. I have her.”

Flint’s words sank in as he jerked her toward the door that attached the ship to her shuttle. She stumbled behind the man who gave her no choice but to follow. He kept walking, dragging a stunned Mira behind him.

Chapter Two

Mira was in shock as she was pulled by the cyborg as he entered a larger ship. She glanced frantically at metal flooring that he walked on, hearing his boots clank as they moved down a corridor. Her attention flew to the walls as they passed, but the lighting was dim in the corridor as he led her from one into another. The sound of the engines starting couldn't be missed. Flint suddenly stopped to brace against a wall, tugging her none too gently against his side, tightening his hold. The ship moved, making them both sway a little on their feet, before he started walking again.

"What are you doing?" Her voice shook now. "Please take me back."

"We have already released the shuttle and are leaving it behind. In a few minutes, when we are clear, we will do a long burn and head for our planet. It is already done and you will not be returning to your shuttle, Mirasia Carver."

He walked her inside a shaft and stopped. Doors slid shut and then Mira moaned a little as a queasy feeling hit her stomach at the fast movement upward, making her realize it wasn't a shaft after all but a lift. The hand gripping hers tightened.

"No harm will come to you, so relax." Flint's voice was husky.

"Why did you take me? What are you going to do with me?"

He hesitated. "Right now I am needed in Control so we'll discuss that later. You will be quiet until I tell you it is a good time to talk. Are my instructions clear?"

Her heart pounded with fear and adrenaline. "You're not going to sell me to a pleasure house somewhere, are you?"

He chuckled. "Would you like me to?"

"No! It's just that the general tried to kill me because he said if I were taken that's where I'd end up."

"I promise you that other men will not be having sex with you."

She blew out a breath of relief. "Thank you. I have a good job that will pay for my safe return since I'm a valued employee. You could ransom me for a lot of money."

He ignored her suggestion. The lift stopped. "Be quiet until I tell you otherwise. Are my instructions clear? You do not speak or move in Control."

"I understand."

"Good."

He walked out of the lift to turn down another corridor that ended in double doors that automatically slid open in front of them. Flint tugged her into a room behind him, stopping so suddenly just inside the doors that Mira slammed hard into his back. She

hit hard enough to bounce off him. His tight hold on her kept her from falling on her ass. She steadied her balance on her feet.

When Flint released her hand she shoved at her blonde hair, pushing the long, curly strands out of her face. Mira stared up at Flint as he turned to face her, giving her an amused look. He studied her for a second before he pointed to the floor.

“Sit.”

She looked at the metal floor, clenching her teeth over being treated like a dog in training, but sat where he pointed. Flint was a large man with wide shoulders and muscular arms that revealed his strength. She knew that in a physical struggle she would be no match. She sat cross-legged and was thankful she wore pants. When Flint stepped away, she took in her surroundings and that’s when more surprise hit her. Flint’s big body had blocked her view when they’d been standing but now she could see everything.

She was in a large control room that was twice the size of her shuttle’s interior. More than the four cyborgs she’d seen lived on the ship. She counted seven of them here, besides Flint. The three from the shuttle were not amongst them. So far, she’d seen eleven cyborgs.

She sensed their attention on her so she openly stared back at them, curious. All of them were massively built and tall, with an array of different eye and hair colors. Some kept their hair long to their shoulders, as Flint wore his, while one had no hair at all. One of them even had a thick braid of flaming red hair that hung down his back almost to the ass of his black pants. They all had skin tones in shades of metallic gray.

“Have they burst yet?” Flint asked.

The one with the long red braid shook his head. “No, Flint. They are just sitting there. Should we wait for them to leave to see if they need assistance?”

Flint hesitated. “They are far enough away from Earth that transmissions are unstable. We’ll wait to make sure they take off before we blast away.”

A gray-haired cyborg who looked no older than thirty nodded. “They have started their engines.”

“Bring it up,” Flint ordered.

The screen filled with a view of space showing, to Mira’s surprise, that they’d already put a lot of distance between the ship and the shuttle. She wondered how big the cyborg vessel was, wondering if it was larger than the space station she’d just spent two weeks visiting, since the lift Flint had tugged her into had gone up quite a few levels.

“Shit,” the gray-haired cyborg hissed. “They are fully powering up. Didn’t you tell them to only do a short burst?”

“Yes,” Flint said softly.

Mira stared at the screen, watching as the shuttle's thrusters burned brightly, flaring from the back, and a second later the shuttle exploded. She was horrified as she witnessed it blow apart. Pieces flew in all directions.

"Blast away," Flint roared.

Mira had the air knocked from her lungs as the large cyborg suddenly turned, throwing his body at her, taking her flat to the floor under him when he tackled her. Her back hit the metal surface as his weight crushed down. The ship vibrated roughly as the engines revved around them. Her body slid a few feet even with the massive man on top of her, pinning her down. Long seconds passed where she couldn't breathe under Flint's weight. He pushed up to get off her when the shaking under them ceased. Flint climbed to his feet, not even sparing her a glance, as he glared at the viewing screen.

"Did we escape the debris?" He sounded pissed.

"We did," the redheaded cyborg cursed. "The idiot humans full blasted, making their tank explode."

"Damn fools," the gray-haired cyborg spat. "If we knew they wanted to die we could have salvaged the entire vessel."

Mira lifted her chin to observe Flint as she pushed up to a sitting position. She knew he'd saved her from really getting hurt when they'd suddenly had to blast out of range of the exploding shuttle. Without his weight she would have been thrown across the room. Her back hurt a little but she was relieved that he'd done it. Flint looked furious as he shook his head.

"What a waste. Head home. I'll be in my quarters."

The redheaded cyborg eyed Mira. "Should I even ask why you brought her off the shuttle?"

Flint leaned over to hold out his hand to Mira. She didn't hesitate, letting him pull her to her feet. She noticed Flint's irritated expression as he shot a dirty look at the man who'd questioned him.

"It's none of your business. You have Control, Iron."

The cyborg chuckled. "I'll change the shift assignments so you won't be needed until we reach home, Flint."

Flint sighed. "Understood. Come along, Mirasia Carver. We are going to go talk."

He kept hold of her hand as he led her away from the control room. They were walking back to the lift. Their bodies were almost touching as the doors shut. Mira hated the sensation of the floor under their feet falling so she grabbed the wall for support and clutched Flint's hand harder. He turned his head to frown down at her.

"You do not like fast movement?"

She shook her head. "It makes me feel sick."

"You will adjust."

The doors opened when the lift stopped. Flint gripped her hand tighter, leading her into a dim hallway. He walked three doors down before he stopped in front of an electronic pad installed by the door. He reached up to press his palm on the device. It beeped once before the door slid open. Flint released her hand, motioning with his head.

“Go inside.”

Mira walked through the doorway and automated lights flared on. She stopped a few feet into the room, swallowing hard, eyeing the small sleeping compartment. It was similar to the one she’d just spent two weeks living in on the space station. The room was a box with built-in storage along one wall and a bed in the corner. Another corner held an open bathroom unit. She wondered why no walls separated bedroom from bathroom. Her former quarters hadn’t been quite like this after all. She turned, giving her full attention to Flint, as the doors slid shut behind him.

“This is mine,” he said as he glanced around the room. “They are built for one person. I apologize for the close living arrangements but we’ll be at my planet soon.” His gaze finally met Mira’s. “Remove your clothing.”

“What?” She’d never expected that to come from his lips in a million years. She was absolutely stunned, her heart pounding as she took a step back only to bump the bed, with nowhere else to go. “What did you say?”

He arched an eyebrow. “I said, remove your clothing.”

“Why?”

He calmly watched her. “I want to see you without them. If you won’t do it then I’ll do it for you.”

She stared up at him, too bewildered to move. She finally swallowed when her brain started to work. “You’re a cyborg.”

He arched an eyebrow, crossing his arms over his broad chest. “I am a cyborg, you are a human, and we have already established that. Now take everything off.”

“But...” She was at a total loss for words.

He just stared down at her, a frown on his face. “You do it or I will. You are small so I do not wish to harm you and I’d hate to bruise you if you fight me.”

She kicked off her shoes. Her hands shook as she reached for the front of her pants, unfastened them and shoved them down her legs. With shaking hands, she slowly removed her shirt next and shivered from the coolness of his room. Her gaze flew up to the large man silently watching her with narrowed eyes but he wasn’t showing any distinguishable emotions. Her hands paused when she’d stripped down to her panties and bra.

“Could you please tell me why you want to see me naked?”

“Do not make me repeat myself. Are your ears damaged from your ordeal?”

"I'm just trying to figure out your motive, damn it. If you were human I'd be damn worried right now about rape but if you were a doctor then I'd think you were examining me."

His features softened and something in his eyes did too. "I'm curious."

"I don't know much about cyborgs except what I read and most of the public records were destroyed when they said all the cyborgs were gone. Do you have girl cyborgs? Is that why you're interested in seeing me nude? I haven't seen any women on this ship." She knew she was rambling.

Dark blue eyes fixed on her. "Are you in need of assistance to remove the rest of your clothing? I do not have hours to waste waiting."

"Great," she muttered as frustration hit her, realizing he wasn't going to change his mind no matter how long she tried to stall him and make sense of what he wanted. He was set on seeing every bare inch of her and he'd already stated he would make her if she didn't do it herself. "Fine."

She knew her face was flushed from embarrassment since she wasn't in the habit of stripping naked in front of strangers. It made her self-conscious about her body and uncomfortable. The man was scary large too, which wasn't helping her any. Did cyborgs have sex?

Mira glanced at his large frame and shivered at the thought, hoping not. The guy was a good foot taller and at least a hundred pounds heavier than she. She wasn't some blushing virgin, she'd shared sex plenty of times in her thirty-two years, but the man in front of her wasn't completely human. He had a rough edge to him that she was a little afraid of since he didn't look like a man who knew much about being gentle or tender. She was in a bad situation that was getting worse.

"Shit."

He smirked. "Do you need to use the facilities?"

"It was a figure of speech."

"Proceed please."

Taking a deep breath, she unhooked her bra, dropping it at her feet, feeling her nipples instantly harden, thanks to the chilly temperature of the ship. She gripped the thin material of her panties and pushed them down her hips, letting them slide down her legs to pool at her ankles. She lifted both feet, taking a tiny step from them, watching the man studying her body. She didn't see lust in his expression but then again she didn't see any emotion in his face as his gaze slowly scanned her. His eyes paused for long seconds at the center of her body before his gaze lifted to meet hers.

"You do not have pubic hair."

"I had it permanently removed when I hit adulthood after I got tired of having to shave it off. I also had the hair that grew under my arms removed so it doesn't grow back. Can I get dressed now?"

"Turn around."

With dread and embarrassment, she turned around to present her ass for his inspection. She was tense, feeling vulnerable and exposed. She turned her head, looking over her shoulder at him, to watch as he carefully examined every inch of her with his unblinking gaze. Their eyes met when he looked up.

“Lie on my bed and expose yourself to me.”

Chapter Three

Mira's mouth dropped open again instantly, knowing what he was implying, but decided to play dumb. Maybe she was wrong and he didn't mean he wanted to see more of her.

"You're seeing me exposed."

"Do it now. I can tell by your accelerated heart rate and increased breathing patterns that you know exactly what I want. Lie flat on my bed on your back and expose your vagina to me."

She spun around to gape at him. "Why? That's just not...proper."

He actually smiled at her, his dark blue eyes sparkling with amusement. "I'm a cyborg. What would I know about manners? Are you going to do it or do I have to restrain you to position you on the bed the way I want to see you?"

She had to think about that one a few seconds, finally shaking her head. "I won't do it. I'm not some show-and-tell for your curiosity about female human anatomy."

He moved so fast Mira didn't even have time to gasp. She was shoved onto his bed as the man came down on her. He grabbed her flailing arms, restraining them as his weight pinned her legs. His face was inches above her.

"You can't win in a physical contest, Mirasia Carver."

"Stop calling me that."

"You said it was your name."

"It is, but I don't call you Flint Cyborg."

"What are you called?"

"If you get off me, I'll tell you." She figured it was worth a shot since he seemed all about curiosity.

"You'll tell me anything I want to know. Stay still and don't move at all or I promise you that you will not like my teaching techniques for you to learn to obey me."

That didn't sound good. Mira experienced a little fear as she stared into his serious eyes.

"You'll hurt me?"

"I'll train you. You belong to me now that I took you off the shuttle. On Earth cyborgs were properties of humans and you aren't on Earth anymore, Mirasia Carver. You are now mine. You will follow my orders or I will train you to do as I tell you. I would not enjoy enforcing any form of punishment on you but I would mete it out. Do you understand?"

She nodded, feeling fear. "Yes."

He released her wrists and pushed off her, getting off the bed to face away as he stood. He paused and she saw him bend at his waist. She stared at the man's ass, encased in his black leather pants – pants that molded his body like a second skin. He had a nice ass and muscular thighs. She shut her eyes, not wanting to stare. She heard something thump on the floor that caused her eyes fly back open. She watched him walk over to the storage wall and that's when she saw that he'd removed his boots and socks since he was barefoot now.

He removed something from one of the drawers and turned, holding two belts in his fisted hand. Fear flooded her instantly.

"I'll do whatever you want. Pleases don't whip me."

He stopped, his eyes darted to the two belts in his hand and then narrowed and fixed on her as he nodded at her. "Good. Then do as you are told."

He sat on the bed. Flint's mattress was longer and wider than standard but then cyborgs were big males. He probably took up most of the bed when he was lying flat.

"Raise your arms, grip the metal bars, and hold still. Do not move."

She hesitated before lifting her arms, doing what he said, not wanting to be whipped. She wondered if that's what had been done to them in the old days on Earth when they were punished and if that's where he'd learned that barbaric method of training someone to do as they were told.

She was frightened as he used the thin belts to fasten her wrists to his headboard, binding each firmly but making sure they didn't tighten painfully around her skin. When he was done he inched down the bed to study her body.

"Now lift your legs and spread your thighs wide so I may examine you." His voice was husky.

It shocked her a little that his aloof tone of voice was gone. Mira's gaze flew to his face but he refused to meet her eyes, instead watching her legs, waiting for her to comply. She shut her eyes and did as she was told, lifting her knees up and spreading her thighs. When she brushed the cyborg's body with her foot her eyes opened. She watched him scoot over on the bed to sit between her feet. His full attention locked on her pussy.

She was breathing fast, a little afraid, and a lot embarrassed as the cyborg removed his remaining glove. She wondered if he was going to hurt her. She'd gotten plenty of physical exams in her life by doctors but she tensed when she saw him slowly reach for her.

"Please," she gasped.

The cyborg froze as he looked up at her. "Please what?"

"Don't hurt me." She nervously chewed her lower lip for a few seconds, staring into his beautiful eyes. "Women are very sensitive in that area and you could hurt me really easily, Flint."

She saw his lips twitch, amusement flicked in his eyes. "I won't hurt you."

"This is amusing to you?" Anger overrode her embarrassment. "I'm in hell and you're enjoying this?"

His smile died. "I am sorry you think this is hell."

"I'm tied down naked on your bed and you're treating me like I'm some kind of specimen instead of a person with feelings and modesty. I'm frightened because I don't know what you are going to do to me. An hour ago I was just on my way home from a job and now my entire life is gone. You threatened me with punishment and I don't even know what that entails. I...do you feel fear? I do. Do you feel compassion? Pity? Anything? How would you feel right now if you were in my position and someone you didn't know was about to do God knows what to your penis?"

Flint stared at her. She saw something flicker in his eyes but she couldn't identify what emotion it was because he was hard to read. Did cyborgs have emotions? She had thought so from observing the cyborgs' interaction on the shuttle. They'd had a sense of humor and they'd laughed. If Flint and his men could feel amusement they had to feel other things. She knew they could feel anger since she'd seen that in the control room when her shuttle had blown up. She stared back at Flint.

He took a deep breath. "I will not hurt you as long as you do what I say. I have no intention of causing you pain or harming you in any way. I promise you this. Don't fight me."

"Like I could."

He stepped back. She saw him reach for the front of his shirt and stared in open-mouthed shock, unable to look away as he removed it. The man was as muscular as hell, not showing an ounce of fat. His arms and chest were thick and well-defined muscles ran down his stomach. He had designs tattooed in black over both shoulders that disappeared out of sight toward his back. They were thick markings and like nothing she'd ever seen before, like strange writing, but it was a language she didn't know. The design started just under his collarbone and rose up over the top curve of his shoulders. The black markings looked beautiful on his gray-toned skin.

He eyed his markings and looked back at her. "I thought you might be curious about me."

"What do your tattoos mean?"

He glanced at the markings again. His finger rose as he traced a wiggly pattern before his gaze returned to her. "We created our own written language. These represent my name and who I am."

He tossed the shirt toward the floor before getting to his feet, reaching for the front of his pants and slowly opening them. Mira's mouth started to drop open but when she realized it, she slammed it shut. She knew she should look away but there was no way in hell she was going to when she was curious about his body and if he were willing to show her what was under his clothes, she was more than willing to look her fill.

She wondered if he was anatomically correct. When he lowered the front of his pants she let her legs drop as every inch of Flint was revealed. Her heels lowered

against the bed as she slammed her thighs shut. She stared in fascination, and partly in fear, as the man stripped completely naked. As he turned sideways to step out of his pants, she got an even better view of cyborg Flint. Her heart pounded and the reason he wanted her naked on his bed was hugely evident.

"Oh shit," she whispered.

Flint turned to face her, his gaze meeting hers, and then looked down his body. She saw his head tilt slightly as his dark blue gaze rose to meet hers again.

"Spread your thighs now," he said softly.

Her eyes flew down his body to the biggest hard-on she'd ever seen. When he'd been designed in the lab they'd made everything big on the man. She shook her head frantically as her wide gaze flew up to his.

"You can't have sex with me."

Flint chuckled. "Watch me."

Mira whimpered as she tried to roll away when he slowly climbed on the bed. She twisted to her side but a large, warm hand curled around her hip, pulling her flat again. He sighed loudly.

"Don't fight me. Spread your thighs and lift them up again."

She didn't fight but she pleaded with him silently as she stared into his eyes. "You think this isn't going to hurt? Have you ever had sex? I'm not prepared. You're..." Her gaze flew down to that massive erection then flew back up. "You're too big and that's not going fit without pain. You're too thick."

He laughed. His eyes sparkled. "I'm not that big but thank you for attempting to boost my ego. If I had one, I'd appreciate it."

"You're bigger and thicker than any guy I've ever been with and I haven't had sex in almost a year. I broke up with the man I was seeing and then I got a promotion at work so I've been traveling between Earth and the space stations. I haven't had time to date or meet men unless you count men like the general and no way in hell I was interested in someone like him."

"I understand. Do you pleasure yourself then? How do you do this? Do you use toys?"

She was amazed by the fact that he asked her that kind of personal question and that he even knew about sex toys. She opened her mouth and then slammed it shut. "I'm not answering."

He grinned. "I'll figure it out. Spread open now, Mirasia Carver. Resisting is a waste of time."

Gritting her teeth, she spread her legs, letting anger override her fear. He was going to do this whether she wanted it or not. She wasn't afraid of him exactly since he hadn't hurt her so far. He just had no idea how uncomfortable sex between them was going to be but she did. She'd kept telling herself over the past year that she really needed to get laid but this wasn't what she'd had in mind.

She glared at him. "I can't stop you but please don't hurt me."

She shut her eyes and tensed, expecting him to just mount her and force his way into her body. Tears filled her eyes that she tried to blink back, knowing it was going to hurt, knowing there was no way it couldn't hurt. The cyborg was large and really strong and well hung. Something that big being forced into something smaller was going to be painful.

She started a little when his hands gripped her inner thighs to spread them wider. She glanced at him and was shocked to find him crouched on his knees facing her with his face hovering inches over her pussy. She wondered if he was examining her visually before he started whatever he was going to do to her. She jumped when his hot breath teased her exposed slit. She stared down at him. Flint looked up at her over her stomach. He chuckled and did the last thing she expected. The cyborg winked at her.

Surprise hit her at what he'd done but then he did something even more shocking. She gasped as Flint's tongue started to slide along the line of her cleft, sensitizing the tender flesh. His hands gripped her thighs tighter as his thumbs spread her labia wider, to expose more of her to his mouth. He flicked her clit with his tongue and then skimmed it downward until he pushed inside her pussy. She felt his tongue enter her body—hot, wet, and thick. She arched her back, squirming to get away from the pressure of the sudden entry.

She couldn't get away from his hands or his mouth. He withdrew his tongue and swiped upward to focus on her clit with his lips and tongue. Her body went rigid at the instant pleasure his licks and gentle sucks created. It spread through her entire body. A moan tore from her as he started to apply just enough pressure and movement against her swelling nerve bundle to heighten the pleasurable sensations to pure ecstasy. She gripped the belts securing her wrists with her fisted hands just for something to hold on to.

The cyborg's hot tongue teased and taunted her. He sucked on her and let his teeth scrape the sensitive bud he had captured in his mouth. His tongue then pushed at the hood of her clit to torment that tiny spot that drove her wild, pushing just enough against it that she knew she was going to come. She couldn't hold back.

Her body tensed, growing tighter and tighter inside as her inner muscles clenched and quivered. Moisture flooded her pussy as moans tore from her throat. What Flint was doing to her was beyond anything she'd ever felt before with a man between her thighs. He was better than her vibrator or her own finger pleasuring herself. She bucked her hips, feeling her clit harden even further, wanting to come more than her next breath and knowing she was so damn close she was on the edge. If he stopped she was going to kill him because she would never survive if he left her hanging.

He shifted his hands on her, instantly she worried that he'd stop but that thought turned into a loud moan of sheer rapture as he pushed a thick finger inside her to fill the aching need of wanting *him* inside her. He curled that finger and rubbed her inner wall at the back of her clit. That was all it took for Mira to come apart under his mouth and around his finger. She screamed out his name as violent spasms seized her. Sharp

blasts of pleasure surged inside her as she cried out over and over until she went limp in the aftermath.

Flint's mouth released her clit as the finger slid out of her. She knew she was soaked as that finger spread her wetness around her sex, coating her labia. She moaned softly as his thumb brushed her oversensitive nub before stroking downward, using her wetness to make sure every part of her was coated with her slick release. She couldn't move but the bed did though as his weight shifted on the mattress. Her eyes opened so she could stare up in wonder at Flint as he climbed over her to pin her under his body, trapping her between his hands spread on the bed next to her arms. She followed his intense gaze when he looked down their bodies and saw how aroused he was. He didn't even have to grip his thick, erect cock to guide it into her. He was so hard he just had to adjust the angle of his hips.

The thick head of Flint's cock pressed against her body as he teased her a little, gliding his incredibly hard blunt tip up and down her slit, spreading more of her fluids so that he was well coated too. He stilled, pressed against the entrance of her pussy, the thick head of his shaft poised there, against her opening. He slowly pushed forward, making her feel pressure before he slid inside her.

She gasped in pleasure at the wonderful sensation of her pussy being penetrated and stretched. He was so thick and she didn't think she could take him but he didn't give her a choice as he very slowly pushed in deeper. She shut her eyes, trying to relax. Her muscles were protesting being forced wider than they had ever been. Her pussy was slippery wet from how turned-on she was and from coming. It helped ease him into her without pain. He drove into her deeper still, causing her to suck in air in a loud gasp. Flint froze on her, not moving at all.

"Am I hurting you, Mirasia Carver? You're so damn tight." Flint's voice was unusually deep and raggedly harsh. It sounded as if the words had been torn from deep in his throat.

She saw sweat on his brow then looked into a pair of dark eyes that were raw with passion and need. He looked like a man on the edge. His shoulder-length hair fell forward next to her face. His mouth was tense and she could see a muscle jump along his jaw. He looked as if he were torn between pain and passion. She understood.

"You're stretching me. It burns a little but it doesn't hurt."

Relief was obvious in his eyes. "I'm using every ounce of my self-control, Mirasia Carver. I don't want to hurt you but you feel so damn good. You're like a fist around me that almost hurts but nothing has ever felt better. Tell me if I injure you. I'll try to be gentle."

He pushed in more. She moved her legs, wrapping them around his waist to try to squeeze his hips with her legs and use them as leverage to shove him back a little as he eased deeper into her. She was afraid it would hurt if he pushed inside too far. Flint chuckled, grinning at her, and shook his head as he pushed in deeper. He paused, buried inside her, stretching her.

"I'm in, little one. You can take all of me. I'll stay right here while you adjust to me, no matter how much you make me ache."

She heard the groan in his voice as he said the words. She stared into his eyes, seeing so much emotion there that it dazed her just a little. She saw the passion and almost pain but she saw need too. Need that he directed at her. She wished she could touch him, the urge to brush her hands over his body almost unbearable.

"Will you release my wrists?"

"No."

"I want to touch you."

He shook his head. "I think not. Are you ready? I won't last, little one. I'm sorry but it's been too long for me and you feel too damn good. I'm ready to come now from just feeling you squeezing me so tight."

She caught the part about how it had been a long time for him so she wasn't a first for him. He'd had sex with women, or at least one, before. She stared up into his handsome face, deciding that he was super sexy. She was sure the women cyborgs were all over Flint if there were women cyborgs still in existence.

He moved slowly at first then picked up the pace, fucking her in strong, steady strokes that had Mira loudly moaning in pleasure, the feeling amazing. He hit nerve endings she didn't even know she had as he shifted his hips just slightly, going at her from a new angle that had his shaft rubbing against her clit. She wrapped her legs higher around his waist as he rode her faster and harder. She bucked under him frantically as another climax started to build in her.

Flint was careful not to crush her but she didn't give a damn about anything but the feel of him inside her and rubbing against her. With every drive inward she fought the urge to scream from the ecstasy. With every withdrawal she tightened around him, terrified he'd leave and the pleasure would stop.

"Damn," Flint rasped. "Oh, Mirasia Carver, I'm sorry." He groaned loudly as he drove deep into her one last time.

Mira wanted to scream in frustration. She had been damn close to coming. His thick cock pulsed hard against her vaginal walls, twitching against her tightened muscles that were begging for release, even as his release shot deep inside her. There was a strong sensation of pressure and warmth as he came, flooding her.

Flint was breathing hard as he stilled on her. His eyes were closed as he hung his head. A long minute passed before he looked at her. They locked gazes and then he shifted his weight, bracing his weight on one arm.

Mira was shocked as he shoved his hand between their bellies to run his thumb around the area where they were joined before moving it higher, just over where he was still deeply buried inside Mira. He found her clit and rubbed circles over it as he started to move inside her again, fucking her slowly but deeply.

Mira cried out in pleasure. His thumb pressed down a little more, applying enough force to drive her passion higher. He slammed into her faster and harder, twisting his hips a little with each thrust. She gripped the belts as she came hard, thrashing and bucking, arching her back while crying out in bliss. She hadn't lasted more than a minute but she'd already been on the edge when Flint hadn't been able to hold back his own release.

He stilled and then lay there on her, keeping her firmly pinned under him. "Mirasia Carver, look at me," he said softly.

She opened her eyes and saw tenderness in his blue gaze. He was always surprising her. She realized that she needed to disregard her preconceived concepts about cyborgs.

"There are thirty-two men on this ship and you are the only woman. Never leave my cabin without me. I know you think we're nothing more than robots with humanlike bodies and beating hearts but you're wrong. If you manage to escape my room, I have informed the men not to touch you but they haven't had a woman in a while. I wouldn't trust any of them with you so don't leave. You're safe in here." He paused. "Out there you aren't safe without me. *They* would hurt you when they stripped you naked."

She was speechless. There went the idea of a warm-and-fuzzy after-sex talk she'd thought they might have when she'd seen that tender look in his eyes. Disappointment hit her. She'd wanted him to untie her so they could cuddle in the after-great-sex glow. She finally sighed, accepting that wanting and getting were two different things.

"I didn't think that you were like that. I know you're much more than just a machine. I just didn't know if you had sex or not. They didn't exactly advertise those facts in the history records. I won't leave your room and I know there's nowhere to escape on a ship."

A grin split his face. Dark blue eyes sparkled with amusement. "We have sex."

She bit her lip and couldn't help but grin at how damn cute he looked when he was in a teasing mood. "I know that now."

His grin faded as he reached up, brushing his fingers along her cheek while he studied her eyes. "I didn't hurt you at all?"

"You didn't hurt me," she told him softly. What she didn't say was that inside she was a mess of emotional confusion. "And...call me Mira."

Chapter Four

Mira finished her meal and studied the silent Flint. He'd left her in his room for a few hours after showing her the foam cleaning unit so she could bathe. He'd also left her a large, soft shirt to wear. She'd cleaned up and donned his shirt. He'd returned with two covered plates of food. Cyborgs liked meat judging from the abundance of it and the few vegetables on her plate. They ate in silence.

"You are watching me." He glanced at her.

"I didn't mean to stare or anything. I just have so many questions."

He frowned. "Do you wish to know how much of my body is artificial and how much of me is real flesh?"

"No. I don't care about that."

He didn't look as though he believed her. A suspicious glint was in his eyes. "Ask your questions then."

"You don't look about my age but cyborgs weren't made after the laws were passed to destroy your kind. That was about twenty years before I was born so that was over fifty years ago."

"You are correct. Earth stopped creating my kind when we were deemed failures."

"So you're older than you look?"

He nodded. "I am."

"How old are you?"

He chuckled. "I wasn't created on Earth. I'm forty-three of your years."

"If you weren't created in the lab then..."

"Where was I created?" He smiled at her. "I was born on a space vessel."

Shock tore through her. "You were?"

He nodded. "Another so-called failure was that we were able to correct their birth control measures so cyborgs can breed. We aren't born with our implants. Those are added after birth."

She was dumbfounded. "But why would they add implants to you if you were born human?"

"I never said we were born human. We are born flawed and we need cybernetics to fix that. Cyborgs from Earth were not born. They were grown in artificial wombs with a lot of cloning technology so our blueprints and donor DNA are human. We're part human but not completely, which creates flaws that we fix with cybernetics."

"Wow. My mind is reeling with questions." She paled suddenly. "I'm not on a birth control implant. I wasn't in a relationship so when my old one expired I wasn't implanted again. Can you get me pregnant?"

He shook his head. "No." He studied her face closely. "Do you feel relief?"

"I really haven't thought about having kids yet, so yes. I'm too young to have children. I decided I'd consider them when I hit forty."

He nodded.

"Do you have any children at home?"

He shook his head. "I haven't found a female I want to be a unit with."

"A unit?"

"You'd call it marriage or a life contract."

"So there are female cyborgs who survived?"

"Yes. We protected the women and got them to safety when the law was first passed. They were our priority. They are smaller and weaker than we are so it was logical to remove them from danger first."

"So cyborgs left Earth to settle on another planet?"

"Not at first. We stole the Genesis Space Lab."

Shock hit her again. "But it crashed into the moon due to a thruster problem that caused it to careen out of control..." At his shaking head and raised eyebrow she nodded. "They lied about that too."

"Your Earth Government lies about a lot of things. We stole Genesis and we also took control of the *Discovery Moon* ship."

"But it wasn't completed when they found major flaws with the construction—" She stopped talking when he smirked at her. She sighed. "They lied about that too. That project wasn't dumped, was it?"

"They lied about that too. The *Discovery Moon* was fully operational and was just undergoing final testing when we stole it. Earth probably didn't want to create a panic by telling everyone that hundreds of cyborgs had taken both vessels to escape. They were afraid, with our superior fighting skills, that we'd start a war. Their fears weren't logical since it was more practical to find another habitable planet to create our own society than to lose massive numbers of lives trying to belong to the existing society that didn't want us. We had already lost tens of thousands of our kind who couldn't escape Earth so a war would have drastically cut what few numbers we had left."

"They killed everyone you couldn't take with you."

He hesitated. "Not all. We were able to go back and pick up more after we found Garden."

"Garden?"

He nodded. "It is what we named our planet. When we offloaded most of our people to start building a city we knew we needed more resources so we returned to

Earth. We realized, when we contacted supportive humans to help us, that a lot of cyborgs had survived but were in hiding." Flint smiled. "Humans like you, who didn't hate cyborgs, were feeding them and keeping them safely out of sight. We managed to save hundreds more on each returning trip to Earth for more building materials."

"So you have a city on Garden?"

He nodded. "We're still building. It is going to take hundreds of years for us to colonize the planet as we plan. It is almost the size of Earth but we only claimed a small part of it for our own."

"Is it like Earth? I mean, does it look like it?"

"In some ways it is but in other ways no. There are two moons and the sun is smaller but closer. It is livable but the water content is more."

"The air is breathable and the water is drinkable?"

He nodded. "It's got slightly higher oxygen content but nothing significant. Do you have any other questions?"

"Millions."

He laughed. "Right now we have somewhere to be." He stood up and motioned to her. "Let's go."

"But..." She glanced down at the oversized shirt she wore. "I'm not dressed."

"That is where we are going. You need clothing that fits and I'm taking care of you so there's no property question."

That made her eyes widen. "What does that mean?"

He eyed her. "Let's go." He held out his hand.

She put her hand in his. "My shoes—"

"Are flimsy and useless. I'm getting you a pair of boots."

Flint led her out of his room and down a hallway. Living quarters, judging by the many doors. He took her to a lift and she clenched her teeth. She looked up at him and braced her hand on the wall. A draft blew up the shirt as the doors closed, reminding her that she wore nothing under the shirt that fell to mid-thigh. She locked her thighs together so she didn't feel totally exposed.

"I hate these things."

He grinned as he activated the lift. It jerked upward a level and stopped sharply. The doors opened and she was shocked at seeing more cyborgs in a large room—a converted cargo area that had been turned into some kind of workout space. She counted nine cyborgs, most of them strangers. The redheaded cyborg with the long braid was fighting with Ice in a corner on thick pads. They were both bootless and shirtless.

The male voices silenced and the room grew totally quiet as Flint led her out of the lift. Some of the men had been lifting weights—very old school, but still effective—but they stopped to turn their attention on Mira. She glanced toward the two men who had

been fighting to see that they too had stopped and were staring at her. She inched closer to Flint to grip his hand tighter in fear. She was almost naked except for the shirt that revealed too much of her legs. Her other hand inched lower, tugging the shirt as far down as it would go and holding it there.

Flint sighed. He ignored the men as he walked her through the massive room to the corner. She saw that they'd used that corner to set up some kind of medical area with two med beds. A man sat on one of them. She was shocked when she realized he was human. He was an older, mid-fifties, white-haired man in good shape and he had a reading tablet on his lap.

"Doc?" Flint's voice was deep.

The white-haired man jumped and turned his head, a grin instantly appearing. "Flint." The grin died when he spotted Mira as shock hit the man's features. He turned to study her and she saw a scar on his cheek. It was a deep groove that ran from his ear down under his chin. "Who is this?"

Flint turned and glanced at Mira. "Her designation is Mirasia Carver but you may call her Mira."

Doc climbed off the med bed and frowned at Flint. "I heard we intercepted a shuttle. Was it damaged? It wouldn't support the crew?" The man turned his eyes on Mira again. "Are you a pilot, young lady?"

"She was a passenger but now she's mine. I want you to examine her for a tracker device and then I want her branded as mine so there's no doubt that she belongs to me."

Mira's heart missed a beat at his words. She swallowed and looked up at the big man gripping her hand. "Branded?"

Flint didn't even glance at her, instead keeping his full attention on Doc. "Then I need her sized for clothing because it's your job to be impartial. I thought you could do it since I don't want another male to touch her."

Not wanting to be ignored, she gripped Flint's wrist above their clasped hands, with her free hand. "Flint? You're going to have me branded?"

He sighed and looked down, his gaze slightly annoyed. "You saw my markings. You will get markings that are exactly like mine so it marks you as mine. You will be much safer once you are marked clearly so there will never be a doubt of ownership."

"But..." She was at a loss for words. "I don't want tattoos."

He looked irritated. "Notice that I did not ask your permission. You do not want there to be a property dispute over you."

"I don't even know what the hell that means."

He turned fully to face her. "It means that until you are clearly branded as mine that someone could steal you and brand you as theirs. I would have to track you down if I could even find you to get you back from wherever you ended up. I would not like

to have to do that and I know you would not like being stolen. You could be severely damaged, if not killed, in the process. This protects both of us.”

“Damn it, Flint. She’s not something to own. She’s a woman.”

Flint shot a glare at Doc. “Doc, she’s human and on Garden she is property. If you will not do it then I’ll have Yarger do it. He doesn’t have access to your meds that would numb her from the pain. I do not want her to feel pain so I’m asking you to do it.”

“Son of a bitch,” the white-haired man cursed, slamming his reading tablet down. “Fine. Do something with all of them or do you want all of them watching me undress her?”

Mira turned her head and realized that she was still the focal point of the room. Even more cyborgs had appeared. She did another head count—eighteen now. She saw the third man from the shuttle as well as most of the men from the control room. She swallowed hard in uneasiness at their intense stares and moved so close to Flint that she walked into the front of him, putting his large body between her and most of the men.

Flint turned his head to eye the men and sighed again. “Don’t any of you have something better to do?”

No one moved but a few of them laughed. Flint shook his head, turning to the doctor. “They will not leave. Let’s get started. I know it must be done here for your scanners.”

Horror hit Mira. “You expect me to undress in front of all of them?”

Flint climbed up on a med bed and straddled it with his back to the men. He patted the med bed in front of him. “Climb up.”

“But—”

His voice deepened and his eyes narrowed. “Climb up now. Obey me.”

“Shit,” she cursed, carefully climbing up on the med bed.

She had to be careful not to flash Doc since she wasn’t wearing underwear. Once she was perched on the edge of the bed she gasped as Flint gripped her hips. He placed her in front of him so she faced Doc.

“Spread your legs now and straddle the table like I am.” Flint’s voice was husky in her ear as he bent his head forward.

She started to spread her legs, feeling dread, knowing she was about to flash Doc her privates for sure. She gasped as Flint’s hand suddenly slid around her waist and slid under her shirt to cup her mound. He kept his hand there, covering her sex as she spread her legs the way he’d indicated.

His other hand reached for the shirt to tug it over her head. She held still, not fighting, though her cheeks burned from embarrassment since Doc was seeing her breasts. If she fought Flint he might move and the men behind him would see her too. His large body was effective in blocking her from the room of cyborgs watching from the other side of the cargo bay. Flint curled around her more so his chest pressed

against her back as he dropped the shirt at the end of the table. His other arm wrapped around her, hugging her chest so his arm pressed over her breasts firmly, covering them. He then told the doctor, "Proceed."

Doc chuckled. "Nice. Exposed but covered." The man turned and reached for a scanning device. He flipped a switch and a monitor on the wall turned on. Mira watched as the doctor started at her head and ran the scanner down her body very slowly. She watched as she was sure Flint did as the doctor scanned every inch of her that was not being covered by Flint.

"No devices but I need to check her backside."

"Bend forward," Flint ordered, sliding his hand out from between her thighs as she leaned forward. His hands gripped her breasts, cupping them in his large palms as she stretched out on the med bed on her stomach and lifted her chin to see the screen. The device ran over her back and paused at the fleshy part of her ass near her hip where she saw something round on the screen.

"She's got an identification chip but I don't think it's got tracking abilities."

"I don't have any chips." Mira frowned, staring at the round object on the screen. "I mean, I'd know if I had one, right?"

The scanner was set aside and cool hands touched the top of her ass. Flint's hands tightened on her breasts. "Why are you touching her?"

Doc sighed. "Is it all right that I'm feeling how deep it's embedded? The scar is old so they probably had her tagged as a baby. They usually don't do that unless the family is political or has money, making the chance of abduction high. It looks like someone thinks your woman is important."

"Remove it," Flint ordered.

"I can't at this angle since you're behind her. She's going to have to bend over or lie flat on the table without you in the way for me to get to it."

Flint leaned over her and adjusted his hold so his arm was back across her breasts. He gripped the shirt and held it in front of them. "Put it on."

She snatched it from his fingers and put it back on, grateful to be dressed again. She tugged the shirt down, hiding her body, the material settling on her thighs as they both straightened. Flint released her and moved away, shoving her shirt down to her ass so it covered her completely. He jumped off the table and reached for her. She locked her thighs together as Flint lifted her and put her on her feet. He glanced at her and then the table before he moved her to the end of the med bed.

She was facing the room now, her gaze roaming the group of cyborgs staring at her, noticing that a few more had arrived so she counted again. Twenty-four cyborg men were in the room now. She backed up and bumped into Flint. He sighed heavily.

"Ignore them."

She turned her head to stare up at him. "Are you joking? Is that supposed to be funny?"

"It's unavoidable." His voice dropped to a whisper. "They are curious because you are the only female on board and you are human. You are safe with me, Mira."

"Can't you insist they leave?"

"It's an all-access part of the ship so they have as much right to be here as we do. Shut your eyes, bend over, and forget they are here. Obey me."

She shut her eyes and bent over the table, her fingers digging hard into the med bed in anger. "If you weren't such a strong, big son of a bitch I'd at least try to slap you for that 'obey me' crap you keep saying. I'm not a lap dog."

She heard a male chuckle. It wasn't Flint. She knew it came from Doc.

"You have to move out of the way for me to reach her, Flint. I have to hike up her shirt and touch her to remove it."

"Watch where you touch," Flint warned.

"I'm not going to molest her. Goddamn, Flint, I'm old enough to be her father. It might be a long damn time since I saw a naked woman but it hasn't been that long. Move farther back to give me room to work. I have to give her a shot and then remove that ID chip. I'll scan the back of her legs while I'm here. Are you sure you want me to brand her?"

"You know it needs to be done to protect her."

Doc sighed. "Right. I spend too much time on this ship."

Chapter Five

Mira didn't open her eyes but she jumped a little when her shirt lifted to expose her ass. She flushed. If she opened her eyes she knew she'd see twenty-four cyborgs watching her. Her only comfort was that she was facing them so her backside wasn't exposed to their view. She kept her eyes closed and tried like hell to forget their existence but it was impossible to do.

"Are you branded, Doc?" She decided to sidetrack her thoughts.

"Nope." Something cold was wiped against her skin numbing the area. "I live on the *Star*—the ship we are on now. I'm the full-time medic who takes care of the crew."

"How did you end up on the ship?"

He chuckled. "She's full of questions, Flint. Am I allowed to answer her?"

"That's fine if you don't mind her curiosity," Flint said softly, standing very close to her elbow at the side of the table, watching Doc closely. "She seems to like asking questions."

"I used to be the medic on this ship when humans still had her. The *Star* was a recon ship looking for other habitable planets until pirates hit us four years ago. I was one of the lucky ones to survive the takeover since they needed a breathing medic. I was stuck in that hellish situation for a year, little more than a prisoner forced to work for them, while they barely kept me alive. Then one day we got boarded by these fellows. They rid me of the pirates and offered to send me back to Earth on the next ship they stopped that was heading that way since they were keeping the *Star*. I decided to tag along instead since I don't have anything on Earth to go back to and this is my home. I'm pretty happy here. They feed me well, keep me stocked in reading material, and the company is good. I even get a trip to the *Borian* every few months when we go there to trade."

"What is the *Borian*? I haven't heard of that."

The Doc hesitated. "Well, now, um..."

"It's a floating pleasure ship," Flint said softly. "We barter with them. Garden is a lush planet. We grow many crops and have plenty of water. We exchange with them for what we need."

Mira's eyes snapped open and she turned her head to stare up at Flint in shock. "You trade that for sex?" She didn't like the idea of Flint sleeping with pleasure workers. She had heard about those ships, that they were floating gambling casinos for the most part with female sex workers where diseases ran rampant, even with current medical technology.

Flint frowned. "No. We trade for materials for our clothing, electronic equipment, and supplies we can't obtain on Garden."

Relief hit her. "Oh."

"We pay money for that," Doc chuckled. "They only deal in currency for sex."

Flint looked away from her, turning his full attention on her backside. "He's got the ID chip out."

She was shocked it was over that quickly. She hadn't experienced any pain. Doc had already given her a shot to fight infection before slicing out the tag. She grimaced at the thought of him cutting into her ass.

"Is the cut bad?"

Flint shook his head. "It is under an inch and it was shallowly put. You don't have much fleshy tissue there."

"Can you check me for diseases, Doc?" Mira glared at Flint. "I was clean sexually but I know how dirty those women on those ships can be. I've obviously now been exposed." The idea of Flint with pleasure-worker women was enough to make her clench her teeth.

Flint shot an angry look at her and his mouth slammed into a tight line. "Belay that. I do not have diseases, Mira."

"Pleasure workers are loaded with diseases."

He clenched his teeth. "I always use medicondoms and have regular exams."

"You don't always use condoms."

"You are the only female I haven't used a condom with because you are mine. You have not been exposed to sexual diseases."

"Children," Doc chuckled, "you might want to save this discussion for later, no matter how amusing everyone is finding it."

Mira turned her head, suddenly reminded about all the men on Flint's ship, seeing amusement on a few faces. She softly cursed before dropping her head. Her forehead rested on the soft med bed as she shut her eyes. She was definitely going to have a talk with Flint later.

"All done. She's been scanned and there are no more hidden surprises. If you have her sit down and bare her upper body I'll brand her for you."

Flint shoved her shirt over her ass and down her thighs. She opened her eyes and sat up on the med bed while Doc walked to a cabinet. He returned with a bag. She eyed it with dread. She'd never wanted her skin marred. If she was getting tattooed to match Flint, she'd have wiggly patterns over both shoulders.

"Bare your body," the doctor told Flint. "I'll use the imager on you and then get to work so they are exact on her."

Flint removed his shirt without hesitation, giving Mira a great view of his tattoos. They were thick black images on his beautiful metallic-gray skin. She glanced at her

shoulder. It wouldn't be too bad. They were just on the curve of the shoulder down the front of Flint's chest a few inches. Then Flint turned. She hadn't gotten a look at his back because when he'd been naked he'd been facing her. The markings went over his shoulders and down onto his shoulder blades.

The Doc removed what looked like a tiny camera and pointed it at Flint, who slowly turned. They repeated the process on each side. The doctor nodded.

"I got it."

"Wait," a deep voice said loudly.

Flint tensed and spun around. Mira swallowed hard, turning her head, watching the large redheaded cyborg with the braid down to his ass approach. He walked closer, his eyes locked with Flint's, stopping five feet from them.

"What do you want, Iron?" Flint's voice sounded like gravel and he looked angry. "Why are you halting Doc?"

The cyborg cocked his head, studying Flint. "I will trade you for her."

"No."

Relief hit Mira. She didn't want to be traded. The cyborg with the braid looked pissed. "You haven't even heard my offer."

"I do not wish to trade her. There is nothing that I want more than her."

Iron took a deep breath. "I will give you the *Levi*. You like my shuttle so I will trade it for the human."

"Why would you trade the *Levi* for her?"

Fear hit Mira hard since Flint didn't say no immediately. Asking questions was a bad sign. She didn't want to be given away. She didn't want to end up belonging to the other cyborg. She liked Flint. She didn't worry that he would hurt her or sell her to a pleasure house. He'd saved her life when he'd taken her off that shuttle because if he'd left her there she would have blown up with it.

"I find myself attracted to her and you seem to enjoy her since you look pleased. Unlike you, I am assigned to the *Star* for six more months. She would make my off shifts enjoyable."

"I won't trade her. Your offer is very generous but I want her for more than sex. I have plans for her." Flint said the words softly. "She is not for trade."

Iron looked pissed. Flint tensed as they watched each other. Mira feared that they'd fight, and they looked evenly matched, both being large males, so worry ate at her. She held her breath until Flint finally spoke.

"I will give my consent to stop the *Piera* shuttle. They usually carry human females if you want to own one so badly."

The other cyborg nodded and his body relaxed almost instantly. "I can live with that compromise."

Flint nodded. He turned around to glare at Doc. "Brand her now."

Mira jerked her attention to Doc as he removed something from the case. She'd never seen anything like it before. It looked like a wrap pad but it was thicker and bulkier than the heated wrap pads used for sore muscle relief. Doc hooked the camera into a cord that trailed from the wrap. He moved forward, holding it.

"Bare her."

Flint moved. He gripped her shirt and yanked it over her head. Mira grabbed her breasts, trying to cover them when Flint didn't bother shielding her this time from the men in the room. He did toss the shirt on her thighs so her lap was hidden. He gripped her arms right above her elbows to hold her still.

"Do it fast," Flint almost hissed. "I see dissent. The longer she is unmarked the more dangerous it is. I should have had you brand her the second I brought her on board."

Doc nodded, looking nervous. "Hold still, Mira. I'm going to put this on you and then give you a shot for pain. Whatever you do, don't move."

Doc dropped the wrap over her skin. She gasped as the thing seemed to move on its own to snugly pull tight around her shoulders and back. It hugged around her front as if the thick pad had a mind of its own. Her frightened gaze flew to Flint.

"It is forming to you," he said quietly, gripping her tighter. "Don't move. You don't want to mess up the branding."

Doc turned away to grab a syringe that he jabbed into Mira's arm before she could even get a good look at it. It hit fast and hard. In seconds she swayed a little as the sensation of her body getting heavy and her limbs getting numb hit her. It worked up her shoulders and into her throat. She experienced a total loss of feeling and control of her body from her neck to her waist.

"Can you feel?"

"What have you done? Am I paralyzed?" Mira heard the panic in her voice.

"Do you have her? The transfer is ready," Doc said to Flint.

"She won't move. Do it."

Doc gripped the camera-like device and punched in something on the small screen. Mira couldn't feel a damn thing. Flint held her firmly by her arms. She could feel her ass and legs fine, it was just from waist to throat that was deadened. She didn't have the urge to fall over but she might have if not for Flint's grip. She took a breath and then frowned, sniffing.

"What is that smell? Is it time to eat?" Mira smelled food.

Flint and Doc glanced at each other. Doc frowned at Mira. "You can eat soon. This won't take long so just hold still. The imager copied Flint's designs exactly. It even factors in his bone placement so the design is perfectly aligned in the imager and then the wrap forms to your body and the imager can replicate the markings exactly to the precise locations as the donor markings. It's an amazing thing."

"This wrap is giving me a tattoo? It is doing it right now? But I've seen tattoos done and they use needle machines to stamp them into the skin after the machine gets the right image to imprint."

"Those are standard tattoos and the ink can be removed later with dermis layer removal. These markings aren't so simple to remove." Doc shifted his weight, looking uncomfortable. "These are placed a little deeper than just under the skin. They will look like standard tattoos but no skin doctor can remove them in his office." He paused. "It's a system that puts small needles into your skin and removes a minute amount of fatty tissue to replace it with a special tattoo dye that the imaging wrap can manipulate. Think of the dye as tiny magnets that will move under the skin and are directed to exactly create the pattern of Flint's brand. This is actually less invasive than a tattoo artist's machine. There are a lot less needles involved and you'll heal very quickly."

"Oh." She inhaled again. "I'm getting hungry."

Doc cleared his throat, looking uncomfortable as he shot a frown at Flint. He bit his lip and didn't look at Mira. She frowned knowing they were hiding something from her so she decided to ask them flat out.

"What is going on?"

"Nothing," Flint said softly.

The other cyborg was still standing where he'd been when he'd offered a trade. Iron chuckled. "You smell something cooking and it makes you crave food, correct?"

Mira couldn't turn to look at him but instead she glanced up at Flint seeing his angry look. He turned his head to glare at Iron.

"That is enough, Iron. Do not say another word or I'll make sure you get the least appealing female on that shuttle."

Something beeped and Doc looked relieved as he nodded. He put down the handheld device he'd used to start the branding. "It's done. She can move."

The wrap was snug and it didn't seem to want to loosen at first as Doc carefully tugged it gently from her skin with Flint's help. When they opened the wrap, the smell that had been teasing her grew stronger and horror hit her. Her mouth opened as she stared down at her shoulder. Her skin was marked with black ink and she saw a faint redness around the surrounding skin from the tiny needles. She sniffed.

"I think I'm going to be sick. It was *me* that I smelled, wasn't it? Did it burn the black marks into me?"

Flint moved fast to grip her face by wrapping his hand under her chin, jerking it up, to almost go nose to nose with her. "Look at me. Take shallow breaths through your mouth to lessen the smell. Do not get sick. Just look into my eyes, Mira. What you smell is the small amount of fatty tissue that was exchanged with the ink. The wrap disposes of it by burning it up after it is removed from your body but your skin wasn't harmed at all."

She locked gazes with him and took shallow breaths through her mouth. That helped a lot since her stomach stopped heaving. She blinked back tears that rose at the idea of her fat being disposed of and the horror of getting hungry at the smell. Flint's grip on her chin didn't release. She heard someone close to them laugh and knew it was Iron. She suddenly had another name for him. Asshole fit him really well.

"You are fine. I would never allow you to be hurt. By the time the pain meds wear off, it will just be slightly uncomfortable. I will have Doc give me a cream to put on your skin to relieve even that. In two days you won't even feel it. I told you that I don't want to hurt you, Mira, so trust me."

"Okay. I'm not going to throw up. I just... God, it smelled good, like barbeque. How sick is that?"

"I personally like the way you taste and smell," Flint said softly. "Do not feel sickened by your scent making you feel hunger. I hunger for your body right now, even before you smelled like food. I just don't want to eat you with a fork and knife." He winked before releasing her.

Mira blushed at his words, knowing Doc had heard every one. He tugged the shirt back over her head, careful of her new branding as he smoothed it down. Flint turned, nodding at Doc.

"Thank you. I am in your debt."

"A bottle of some hard liquor would be great." Doc chuckled.

Flint nodded. "Done. I have a case on Garden so I will give two bottles if you'll measure her for clothing. She needs clothing that will show her markings. It will dissuade anyone from thinking about trying to take her."

Doc looked at the men standing in the large cargo room. "No shit, Flint. They are almost panting." He gave Mira another shot with an injector.

Flint's mouth tightened. "She is branded now so there is no question of ownership." He turned to glare at the room. His voice rose, deepened, as he addressed his crew. "I do not share my personal possessions and she is completely mine."

Iron uttered a foul curse. "I guess that means you won't trade something for her body for an hour then."

Flint's jaw clenched. "No."

Doc walked over to Mira. "I gave you a shot to counteract the paralyzing agent so you should be able to move now. Come with me, young lady. I have to take your measurements. You can keep the shirt on. I just have to wrap a measurer around you in some awkward places."

Flint moved away to face off with Iron. The two men glared at each other. Mira was relieved as sensation rushed back and she was able to climb off the bed easily when she could move again. Doc led Mira to a corner by a desk where he opened a drawer and removed an electronic measurer. He leaned forward, eyeing her, as he moved the device around her body so it could scan her.

“Are you all right?”

Mira eyed the man who whispered so Flint couldn't hear him. She nodded. Doc moved the scanner lower, circling without touching her breasts and back to take her measurements there.

“Do what he says. He's a good guy. You got lucky. Some of the crew would barter your body out. Flint doesn't share shit. He won't hurt you and he'll protect you. Just pray he doesn't die.”

She swallowed. “What happens if he does?” She whispered the words.

Doc went to his knees, running the device around her lower body as he lowered it. He glanced down then looked up at her and shook his head. “You will be left to his family and if he doesn't have any then you'll be auctioned to the highest bidder. If you're in deep space his things are divided amongst his men equally so it's fair to all.”

They were in deep space. Horror hit Mira as that sank in. She'd be divided between his men? She was only one person. As if Doc read her mind, his expression was grim.

“You'd belong to all of them. They would all get to use you.”

Terror hit her at that thought, so strongly her knees went weak and she had to lock her legs to keep upright. She jerked her attention to Flint, seeing he was just feet from Iron. The two men were still glaring at each other like guard dogs trying to stare the other down. A horrible thought struck her.

“Do they assassinate each other?”

Doc shook his head. “Luckily no. Cyborgs will not kill other cyborgs. I meant if he died in an accident or if we run into pirates. Those crazy pirates love going after large ships. This used to be their flagship until it was taken from them by the cyborgs. Sometimes they attack just to piss us off. We lost two of the crew the last time we had a skirmish with them. I doubt they'd attack the *Star* right now though because we have the *Rally* with us this trip but you can never tell with pirates. The *Rally* is a heavily fortified large jumper shuttle so it might make them think twice before attacking two ships.”

Doc got to his feet and nodded at her. “All done,” he called out to Flint. “I'll feed her information in and have her clothing manufactured within a few hours.”

Flint turned. “I won't forget your two bottles. They will be delivered to you when we dock on Garden. I'll dispatch the order today so it's automatically done.”

“I know you won't forget.” Doc smiled.

Flint held out his hand to Mira. She ran to his side to grip his hand, not needing any real encouragement than that. She was too close to Iron for comfort. She refused to even look at as they passed him. She heard him sniff as they did though and she stiffened. Why had he sniffed her? Did she still smell like cooked meat?

Flint led her through the throng of men who had decided to spend their free time watching Mira. She refused to look up at them, keeping her eyes on the floor, and brushed against Flint with every step. If she could she would have crawled up him into

his arms so he could hold her. She knew he could carry her like that, that he was strong enough to do it if need be, but she just didn't think he'd appreciate her wrapped around him.

"That wasn't bad, was it?"

They walked into the lift. Instead of putting her hand on the wall, she faced Flint and walked right into his body. He released her hand and she put her face on his chest and wrapped her arms around his waist. She knew she'd shocked him when his body tensed but he relaxed and wrapped his arms around her.

"Are you all right?"

"No. I was scared."

His hands were open on her back. He patted her with one hand. It was a light tap and she got the feeling he wasn't used to comforting anyone. It was an awkward gesture but she appreciated it.

"I told you that I want no harm to come to you, Mira. I will protect you. The men won't harm you and I won't trade you away. You belong to me."

She looked up into his beautiful blue eyes and then shut hers. She burrowed tighter into his body, seeking the comfort he gave her. He held her even after the lift had stopped. He finally pulled away.

"We will finish this in my quarters. Someone will call the lift at some point and I do not want to be still in it, holding each other."

She smiled, relaxing at the humorous situation and the horror in his voice at the thought of just that. She took his offered hand and he led her back to his small room and opened the door. Once inside she asked, "Do you have a mirror?"

"No. Why do you want one?"

"I want to see what these look like. The markings, brandings, tattoos—whatever you want to call them."

Flint didn't hesitate to remove his shirt and drop it on the floor, smiling. "They look like this." His fingers brushed the marks on his shoulder. "Only on your white skin and you have some red marks that will fade in days."

Laughing, she shook her head at him. "Very funny."

"You calm when you laugh and I want you calm. I feel..." he paused.

"You feel what?"

He hesitated. "Protective. I never had a desire to own a woman before, Mira. When I met you and you took my hand I didn't want to release it. You smiled at me and you made me laugh. Humans who first see us always react in three ways. They are terrified that we exist still, they are disgusted by us, or they are confused about what we are. You are the first to be glad to see us alive."

"I *am* glad you're alive. I hated reading about what was done to your people. Earth has a longstanding history of doing messed-up things to people—like slavery and killing off indigenous people to take their land. People have been killed over religious

differences, and for the differences in their skin colors. You would think they would learn but history just repeats itself. They killed your people and it was wrong. Humans created cyborgs, which makes us the same in my mind.”

“Remove your shirt.” Flint stepped closer to her. “I want you, Mira.”

Chapter Six

Mira stripped while watching Flint remove his boots and the rest of his clothing. She went to crawl onto his bed but he stopped her by gripping her wrist. He turned her so they faced each other.

“You can’t rub your branded skin for at least an hour.” He released her wrist and clasped her hips instead. “Grip my arms.”

She reached up to curl her fingers around his muscular biceps. He lifted her so she could wrap her legs around his hips. Flint walked forward and braced the side of his shoulder against a thick support column. He hesitated a second before he went for her mouth with his.

She met his hungry kiss. He shared enough passion with her to send her body into flames. She’d always thought cyborgs would be walking computers and she was glad she had been so wrong. Flint was a man who just happened to have inner, hidden electronics.

His large hands gripped her ass, cupping her, pulling her tighter against his hips. She was wet and he was hard. His cock rubbed against her clit, his hips slowly moving so the tip and shaft caressed the length of her slit, teasing her. Moisture soaked them both where Mira showed her need for him the most. She moaned into his mouth, wiggling against him, and broke the kiss. She panted. An almost painful ache to have Flint fuck her gripped her.

“I want you now. Please?”

His eyes locked with hers as he shifted her hips. He was so hard he just needed to move her hips over him to fit them together. He lowered her down his body. Mira wrapped her arms around his neck, gripping the back of it with her hands. To her, the sensation of Flint filling her, stretching her and breaching her deeper was amazing as their bodies locked together, bringing a cry of pleasure from her lips. He was amazingly thick.

“Heaven,” Flint rasped. “If there is such a place, you are it, Mira. You feel like home when I’m inside you. You’re warmth, acceptance, just right. So pleasurable, and perfect.”

His words turned her on more. He wasn’t only handsome and sexy but he was a romantic, it seemed. She bucked her hips. “Nothing has ever felt better than this, Flint. No one has ever made me feel the way you do.”

He moved then, withdrawing a little to slam upward, driving into her depths in a sharp motion. The sensation of it drove Mira wild. She moaned, using her legs to clasp his hips as her hands gripped his back so she could move on him. She braced against

his shoulders to ride him as he drove in and out of her body. Flint grew even harder inside her pussy. Her lower back and butt slammed against the side of the support column but it didn't hurt. She'd probably have bruises but she didn't give a damn. Flint's cock was hitting all the right places.

He shifted his hold on her. One of his arms locked under her ass, shelving her bottom on his forearm, while his other hand slid between them. He pressed against her clit with his thumb as he moved even faster, driving harder up into her. It was the last thing she'd expected him to do and her pleasure exploded. She screamed out his name as she climaxed hard.

His hand slid away from her clit so he could wrap both arms around her. He jerked hard inside her, groaning loudly as he buried his face into her neck when he came. He exploded and heated semen filled her deep. They were panting as they stilled, wrapped around each other as Flint stood there holding her tightly.

"You are mine," he finally whispered. "I will never let you go."

She should have resented the words but she didn't. She didn't want him to let her go. As much as she might miss her family, the truth was she rarely saw her parents. Her father was always traveling the world with his business and her mother's circle of charity benefits always kept her from making time for either of her two children. Mira's brother was a senator and she only saw him every few years. With her job as a sales rep for Firmaline, a company that sold products to space stations, she traveled too often to have a boyfriend or keep friends. There really wasn't much to give up or miss on Earth.

Logically she should be fighting her captor. She should hate Flint for taking her from that shuttle but the truth was that she didn't. She'd been excited when she'd seen the cyborgs after her initial shock at their continued existence. If he'd left her on that shuttle she'd have blown up and her life would have been over anyway. Thinking of it like that reminded her that he'd saved her life. She was drawn to Flint and she was experiencing strong feelings for him that went beyond his sexual skills. The thought of how he'd gotten those skills finally drew her out of her post-coital euphoria.

"No more hookers, okay?"

Flint tensed, holding her, and lifted his head. He frowned at her. "Hookers?"

"Female pleasure ship workers. I'm yours now and you don't need another woman, right?"

He blinked, tilted his head. "It disturbs you, yes? I see anger in your eyes at the thought of me having sex with other women. Am I reading you correctly? Why?"

"You don't want to share me with other men."

He nodded. "That is correct. You are mine. I own you."

His words weren't what she wanted to hear. She wanted him to understand that it went both ways. He didn't want men to touch her and she didn't want women to touch him. She chewed on her bottom lip and tried to get him to see it from her point of view.

“Well, since you don’t want to share me and don’t want other men touching me, I don’t want to share you either. If I am yours then you are mine right back.”

Dark blue eyes narrowed as his body tensed. “You are small and fragile. They could harm you. Other women couldn’t harm me.”

Mira tensed in shock as his painful words hit her and sank in. “Is that the only reason you aren’t trading me to other men? You’re afraid I’ll get damaged somehow?”

“It’s a real possibility. You are mine and I want to protect you from ever getting hurt. If you are harmed, I could lose you and I want to keep you. You wouldn’t be useful to me if you were damaged.”

Her heart plummeted. He didn’t care about her in the way she had thought. He was looking at her as if she were valuable property. Her brother used to collect ancient cards, which he kept in vacuum-sealed boxes to preserve them. Only he could take them out, touch them, because he hadn’t trusted anyone to handle his cards with enough care not to damage them in any way. Her stomach roiled a little, realizing she was like that card collection to Flint.

“Please put me down.” Mira lifted off him, forcing his semi-erect cock out of her as he set her down on her feet. She backed away from him then turned to hide the tears that threatened. She didn’t want him to see. “I’m going to get clean.”

She had nowhere to flee and the corner wasn’t far enough away. She pushed the button for the cleaning unit walls to slide up. In seconds foam doused her. She grabbed a cloth to scrub at her body as the foam melted into liquid, trying to clean off every trace of Flint that she could reach, avoiding her brand because the skin was still a little red and puffy near the markings. She hit the button and shut her eyes as foam doused her again to rinse her body one last time.

The cleaning unit walls collapsed when she was done. She grabbed a towel and started to dry her body. She knew eyes were on her and quickly glanced back and saw Flint, naked still, standing where she had left him, a frown on his face. He appeared to have shut himself down from the way he stood statue-still but his eyes followed her every movement.

“How have I upset you?” His voice was soft.

She turned on him. “You wanted me to think more of you than you being just a computer with a humanoid body.” Her pain turned to anger quickly. “And I believed you had feelings and real emotions. I was wrong.”

Anger sparked in his eyes. Those dark blue depths looked even darker as he glared at her. “I do have feelings and emotions.”

“So do I!” She shook her head. “I was being stupid. I thought you had real feelings and emotions for me.”

“I do.”

“No. You have ownership. That’s all I am to you. I’m property, like the damn shirt you dropped on the floor. You don’t want other men to wear your clothing either, I bet. There’s no difference to you between me and that damn shirt.”

His lips twisted. “That isn’t true in the least.”

“Right. Your shirt might wrap around you but it doesn’t get you off, does it? Yeah. I’m different because you can fuck me.”

Flint watched her warily. “You are very upset and that shirt analogy is not even something I’m willing to debate. It is too irrational. Do I need to take you to Doc to check your chemical levels?”

“I’m a human and I don’t need my levels checked. I’m upset, I’m pissed off, and worse, I’m hurt. You go on about how you don’t want me hurt but you’ve hurt me with your words. I’m more than property, damn it. I’m a person with feelings. I...” She threw up her arms. “I don’t even think I can make you understand just what is so wrong about you treating me this way.”

“You are tired and you have had a lot of distress in a small amount of time. I’ll leave you to rest.” He dressed quickly in fresh clothing. In less than a minute he sailed out of the small living quarters, leaving her alone to simmer and stew.

Mira walked to his bed and collapsed on it as hot tears fell down her face. What if he thought another cyborg wouldn’t hurt her? Would he trade the use of her body then? Terror hit her. She’d rather die than be passed around for bartering. The idea of other men touching her made her sick. She wasn’t a pleasure worker. She had mistakenly thought Flint was so possessive of her because the idea of someone touching her would make him jealous. She thought he gave a damn about her and had real, fond feelings for her. Instead she was just property he was securing from possible damage. She didn’t even bother wiping at her tears as they fell.

She sat there for a good twenty minutes before she moved, putting on one of his shirts to pace the room thinking. She needed to escape from Flint. The *Star* was a large ship, and they all had escape pods. Its pods were probably outfitted for at least ten persons. Survivors could live for weeks in a pod designed to accommodate a lot of passengers.

An escape plan comforted her. The *Star* had been an Earth ship according to Doc so the pods would be preprogrammed to head for Earth. Hopefully the cyborgs had not changed the programming since they would be able to fly them and set any course as needed. The fact that she was a small woman would help her use less air. Her only hope of escape would be to get to an escape pod and launch. It was the only option. She wasn’t going to be a heartless man’s “thing”. She was more than a piece of property.

An hour later when Flint returned she was calm. He entered the room carrying her new clothing. She eyed the black leather material he held, realizing that all the cyborgs she’d seen seemed to like to dress in black leather. She wondered if her new outfits were made from the same material as their uniforms. Her next thought was, *Is he putting me in uniform?* She didn’t ask.

Flint placed the clothing on the bed. "Two pairs of pants, two shirts, and one flight suit."

"What about a bra and panties?"

He shook his head. "We don't have a clothier machine on board that has been programmed for women's bodies. The Doc had to modify your shirts by hand to show off your markings. That was the extent of his sewing ability. Unless you can make your own underwear you won't be wearing any until we reach Garden."

"What about the ones I was wearing?"

"I got rid of them."

She frowned as her gaze went to the clothes and then nodded. "Thank you."

"You are still agitated. Your heart rate is accelerated and you are flushed, implying you are angry and distressed. I thought you would have learned to control yourself while I was gone."

She looked down at his boots. "What happens if one of your damn cyborg buddies swears he won't damage me? Are you going to barter with my body then?" Her gaze shot up to his and she glared at him.

He blinked. "I hadn't considered it."

"Consider this," she ground out. "You have to sleep sometime, Flint. If you let someone else touch me I'll kill you."

He frowned. "I said I would not share you. You're being totally irrational. You got angry and unbalanced over the topic of me having sex with other women. I don't follow the jump from that conversation to you threatening me harm if I let someone touch you."

"It wasn't a jump. I thought you wouldn't let another cyborg touch me because you felt possessive of me in a caring way that implied you would be bothered emotionally at the thought of another man touching me. That's how I felt about you and the thought of you with other women. I thought you had the capacity to have those kinds of feelings. You put me in my place and set me straight now so I am perfectly aware that I'm just property." She took a deep breath. "Don't you have somewhere else to be? I think leaving me alone so I can find some control would be nice. I need a lot more time though."

Dark blue eyes regarded her, but he masked any emotions he had. "Do not ever threaten to kill me again, Mira. I don't take threats well."

Pain stabbed at her. That was all he had to say on the matter? No denials of what she'd said, no clarifications that he had emotions for her. She'd secretly hoped he'd tell her that he did have some feelings for her. He didn't.

He watched her closely.

"I have a raid to plan. We're going to go after the *Piera* shuttle."

"What is that?"

He sighed. "Are you always so full of questions?"

"Yes."

He shifted his weight. "The *Piera* is a large shuttle that travels from the Vonder Station to Earth and back."

"Vonder is the scientific station that is in orbit over Arian Nine, right? I read something about them trying to plant the planet with enough vegetation to create adequate oxygen on the surface to sustain human life."

"That's the one. From our reports, they are almost successful. They have a high volume of human females who work on Vonder and they rotate the crew monthly. Our reports state that Earth Government hires mainly human women for the station."

"Why?"

Irritation flashed in his eyes. "I'm not certain. My best guess is that females are smaller and use fewer supplies than their male counterparts. I don't work for Earth Government and I do not know their reasons. I just know that when we have scanned their shuttles they are mostly carrying women. In fourteen hours we will intercept the shuttle. It's a fast transport but it's not heavily armed. I believe if we order them to let us board with the clear intention of not killing them or stealing the ship that they will not try to fight. The *Rally* is faster than the *Star* and maneuvers better so we're taking it. It would be suicide for them to fight since the *Rally* is faster and is heavily armed."

Mira almost snorted. "You think that will work? The pilots on my shuttle thought you were pirates. That general tried to kill me, thinking he was saving me from pirates and that I'd be sold into the sex trade. Most women would want to die before they faced that kind of life."

"You didn't die. You locked yourself away, to safety."

"If pirates had taken me I'd have earned them more money by returning me to Earth than they would have made selling me for my body in the sex trade."

"I will go to Control and be back in a few hours. One of the men will bring you food but don't let him in the room. He'll just open the door and hand you a tray. Are my instructions clear?"

"Perfectly clear."

He nodded and left. Mira sat down, chewing on her lip as she thought. She could try to escape when her food arrived but it would be hard to fight her way past a cyborg. All the cyborg men were big and really strong, designed to be fighting machines. She shut her eyes. No. Her best bet would be to try to escape when some of the men weren't on the ship as when Flint and his men went after the *Piera* shuttle. Flint had said they were going to use the *Rally* to capture the shuttle so that meant it would be away from the *Star*, giving her pod a real shot at escape.

She nodded. That was the plan. When Flint and his cyborgs went after the *Piera* shuttle she'd go for one of the pods. It was the best shot at escaping and winning her freedom.

Chapter Seven

Later that night when Flint returned to his quarters, he nudged her but Mira pretended to be asleep. She heard Flint enter the room, heard the rustle of his clothing as he stripped to bare skin to climb into bed behind her. She almost jumped when his hot body curled against her back. Now he was trying to wake her and she had a really good guess as to what he wanted.

"I know you are awake." He sighed. "I want you."

She tensed. She knew he was always aware of her heart rate and breathing patterns. He knew she was awake. She scooted away from him until she was against the wall.

"I don't want you. Go find a pleasure worker since any woman will do."

He took a deep breath. "You are still angry. I have thought about our conversations and I understand why you are upset."

She carefully turned over in the small bed. The room was dark and she couldn't see him but she knew he was inches from her. "Really? It doesn't matter to you that I'm just property but it does to me, Flint. I'm not just something you own."

"I do own you though, Mira. You belong to me. You carry my brand on your body. You might not like that fact right now but it doesn't make it any less true. Does it really matter to you why I won't let another male touch you? I won't barter your body. Isn't that the important issue? The reason doesn't really matter as long as you are content with the result." He paused. "Lights, dim."

The lights in the room flickered on to a dim setting. Mira stared at Flint. He was lying on his side facing her with his hand propping up his head, his dark gaze locked on her, and he wasn't covered by the blanket. He'd pushed it down on his side of the bed so there was no missing the sight of his erection straining toward her as she glanced down his muscled body. Seeing Flint naked always affected her and she hated it. A woman would have to be blind or not have a sexual hormone in her body to not feel turned-on at the sight of his wonderful body, she justified, trying to explain her instant attraction to him and her body's immediate response.

Her gaze lifted upward and she stared into his eyes. She could get lost in his dark blue eyes that reminded her of a stormy sky over the ocean. She'd seen that color once while on vacation in Florida Province when a hurricane had gathered before the weather buster shuttles had arrived to disperse the growing winds.

"I want to be more than property to you. I want—"

He cut her off. "I want you and you are my property. Stop dwelling on the title of things. Stop annoying me with your unfounded fears. I told you that I won't let other males touch you and I told you that I am attached to you. It has to be enough. Roll on

your back now, Mira. I want you. If you don't want me any longer then tell me now but think before you say the words. I'm going to be picking up more women from that shuttle in nine hours. You said you don't want me touching other women. If you don't want my attention then I'll have to seek out one of them to fill my needs. I won't sleep next to you every sleep cycle while my body aches with need that you won't fulfill. I will have to release myself on one of those women."

Shock hit her again. "You're threatening me? You're saying that, if I don't let you touch me, you'll screw one of those other women?"

His eyes narrowed. "Yes."

"You're such a bastard. Go ahead. I don't want you touching me ever again." She sat up and tried to scoot down the bed to get away from him. "I'd rather sleep on the floor than be in a bed with you."

Flint grabbed her, yanking her flat on the bed, rolling on top of her. His body held her down while his legs pinned hers. His hands gripped her wrists, pinning them above her head. He looked furious as he glared at her.

Fear hit Mira instantly. "You're going to force me? What happened to you not wanting to hurt me?"

He clenched his teeth. "I thought threatening you with touching another woman would get you to want me. I thought if I threatened to use another woman for pleasure that you would give yourself to me so there was no need for me to seek release from another. I don't understand you, Mira. You frustrate me. I don't want another woman. I want you. You are the one who makes me ache with need. You are the one who makes me hard."

The guy shocked her yet again. "So that was a meaningless threat?"

"Yes." His voice went cold. "I don't want another woman. You belong to me and you are the one I want. I won't force you, Mira. I won't hurt you. I never want to cause you pain but you seem intent on causing me pain."

"How am I hurting you?"

"I ache for you. My balls feel like I have a set of boulders in my sac and my shaft is throbbing like an injury. You do that to me. I truly hurt for you." He took a deep breath. "Let me inside you. Say yes to me and I'll make it damn good. I want to bury myself in you so deep and fast that we set the sheets on fire from the friction. I need you. Does that mean anything to your wounded pride? I need you."

She reacted to his words. She turned her wrists in his hands. He hesitated before releasing them. She reached up with both hands to cup his face. This was the last time she'd be with him. She was going to escape at the end of the sleep cycle. She pulled his face down and shut her eyes. Her mouth touched his as their lips brushed gently.

"Take me, Flint."

He growled against her lips as he plunged his tongue into her mouth. His legs shifted, pushing hers apart so he could fit his hips into the cradle of her thighs. His kiss

was frenzied. He rolled them both so she ended up sprawled on top of his large body, placing his hard cock against her ass. His big hands wrapped around her and cupped both sides of her ass. He used his firm hold on her to tug her lower down his body until his erection was between her thighs so he could rub against her slit with his rigid shaft. She was wet and the head of his cock rubbed against her clit.

Mira broke the kiss and moaned, "Flint."

"Are you in pain from the branding?"

She shook her head. "I only hurt for you to be inside me."

He rolled them again. They almost rolled off his bed but he caught them before they tumbled. "Wrap around me," he ordered her, "and hold on tight."

She wrapped her legs around his waist, locking her ankles behind his back. Her arms wound around his neck. Flint pushed up from the bed, taking her with him. The guy was strong to do a literal push-up with her body clinging to his. He moved them to the center of the bed and eased them down. He entered Mira when her back gently touched the bed again.

Mira threw her head back as Flint drove deep inside her. The sensation of the sudden entry was staggering and intense. The moan that tore from her didn't even sound human. *It is fitting*, her mind whispered. She didn't feel human. She reacted like an animal in desperate need as Flint used his strong body to plow in and out of her. He wasn't gentle but he wasn't brutal. He spread his thighs, pushing into her deeper, at a new angle, and he hit her G-spot with force and speed.

Mira screamed his name as she came violently minutes later. Flint tensed as he snarled her name when he came, pumping into her in jerky short motions as his release poured into her body in heated spurts. He groaned her name again as the last jerk made him shake over her.

"You're mine," he panted. "I will never let you go. Never."

She shut her eyes. Mira's body, locked around his, started to relax, going limp. She let her legs unwrap from around him and she let go of his neck. She felt the loss as he withdrew to roll off her. He lay on his side facing her. She turned her head to meet his gaze. His face was relaxed as he smiled at her.

"Lights out," Flint ordered the room computer, making it go dark again. "We'll work on getting along better," Flint said softly. "Sleep well, Mira."

She rolled on her side, facing away from him. The sex was great between them but it wasn't worth the cost of her pride or getting her heart broken. He was never going to return her feelings. The longer she stayed with him the more she'd grow to care for him. What would happen when he grew tired of her? Would he trade her off to someone then? She was just property after all. All boys got tired of their toys at some point, especially if there wasn't a bond. It really hurt.

She listened as his breathing changed, knowing he'd fallen asleep. She lay there unable to sleep. She finally turned and blindly reached for him. Her hands encountered hot bare skin. She inched forward and curled into his body, facing him. He woke for a

moment when she nuzzled his chest with her cheek. He chuckled softly, a strong arm slid around her when he realized she was the source of what woke him. His breathing slowed again.

She lay there for hours, enjoying him holding her. He didn't move in his sleep. His breathing was slow and he didn't snore. She drifted in and out of light sleep, awakening when the automated lights came on at the end of his programmed sleep cycle and something beeped in the room. Flint woke instantly, releasing her as he sat up. He smiled before climbing out of bed. The beeping stopped the second he was on his feet. The room computer knew he was awake so it shut off.

Mira stayed in bed, watching him silently as he used the cleaning unit then got dressed. She wanted to memorize every inch of him. He gave her another smile.

"I will be gone for a few hours. I'll have Drakos bring you breakfast. Do not let him inside the room."

"You'll be in Control?"

He shook his head. "We're going after the *Piera*. Vollus will have control of the *Star* while I command the *Rally*. I promised Iron a human of his own and he wants to look them over and choose one himself. I ordered this mission so I have to lead it."

A sense of worry hit her. "Are you going to be in danger?"

He shook his head, chuckling. "No. The *Rally* is heavily shielded. The *Piera* is no match for it. This will be an easy raid so there is no reason for you to feel concern. I will be back in a few hours. Use the cleaning unit and dress in the clothing I had made for you. I don't want Drakos to see you wearing only my shirt." His eyes ran over her blanket-covered body. "You are too attractive."

She nodded and climbed out of bed, naked. Flint's gaze flared, studying her body as she walked toward him. He tensed and his breathing increased slightly. She picked up those tiny reactions as she watched him. She walked right up to him and put her hands on his chest, went up on tiptoe, and gazed into his confused eyes.

"I do not have time for sex right now but I will have plenty of time after I return."

She forced a smile. "I wanted a kiss goodbye."

One eyebrow arched but he wrapped his arms around her. He was wearing his gloves. The metal gently brushed her skin at her hip as his hands encircled her. He lowered his head. Mira shut her eyes and kissed him. He tried to just brush his lips against hers but she wrapped her arms tightly around his neck, dragged him down and invaded his mouth with her tongue, deepening the kiss.

Flint hardened against her stomach. Mira couldn't miss the bulge that grew in the front of his pants as he kissed her back. He finally broke the kiss and lifted her away from him, using his strength to force her to release him. His eyes narrowed as he stared down at her, passion flaring in his beautiful gaze, breathing hard.

"If you thought kissing me goodbye like that was going to keep you in my thoughts while I am away from you then it will work. I will be counting the seconds until I can finish this."

"Be careful. I don't want anything to happen to you." She didn't look away from his eyes. She wanted him to remember her words. "I care about you. I'm more than property, Flint. I just wish you could see that."

His mouth tensed, anger sparking in his eyes. "We'll discuss this when I return." He turned and walked toward the door.

"Be careful," she called after him as the door opened. "I really don't want anything to happen to you."

He turned, his features still tense. "I heard you and Doc talking. My hearing is extremely good. If I die, the men will share you so I don't blame you for being concerned for my safety."

"That's not why I hope you return safely. I care about you."

He sighed and some of the tension left him. He watched her for long seconds. "I will be back in a few hours. I want you to get clean and dress." The door shut quietly after he left.

She showered quickly and put on the clothes Doc had manufactured for her. The pants were tight in the waist but the legs were a little baggy. The leather material was soft against her skin but the outside was tougher. The shirt surprised her. It was a long-sleeved, waist-to-neck shirt. The material remained across the tops of her shoulders, from collar to sleeves, but had been cut away to reveal her markings. She stared at the tattoos on her skin. The altered shirt displayed Flint's symbols very clearly.

The boots fit her as if they were made for her, which they had been. She'd missed seeing them the night before but had spotted them just inside the door after Flint left. She paced the room and finally heard the door alarm. She walked to the door and waited long seconds until it slid open.

He was one of the cyborgs who'd been there when she'd gotten her ID chip removed and been branded. He'd silently watched her in the roomful of men. He held out a covered tray, eyeing her with interest. She bit her lip nervously.

"Could you come in and take a look at the control computer for the room? The sleeping alarm keeps going off every time I sit on the bed."

He frowned. "Flint said to not enter his quarters."

"Every time I sit down and stay still that damn alarm is beeping at me. It's driving me crazy and I don't know how to shut it off."

He hesitated for a long second before nodding his head, carefully handed her the tray and walked slowly into the room. She had seen the silver control panel on the wall by the bed, which had given her the idea in the first place. As he moved across the room, the door started to close. She moved fast, almost diving through the opening and

into the hallway as the door slid shut behind her. Spinning around, she saw the panel that controlled it.

She used the metal tray to slam the control pad as hard as she could, imagining the cyborg realizing that she'd tricked him. She hit the panel again, using the edge of the tray to hammer at it repeatedly until the control panel broke. She tore the dented lid off the tray and grabbed for the drink inside, dropping the damaged tray and mess of food to the floor. She shook the drink, tearing the seal off with her teeth, and poured liquid into the broken control pad. Instantly an acrid, burning, electrical smell filled her nose. The wires were fried.

Something struck the door from inside and she heard the cyborg yell her name. Drakos was trapped in the room and she was glad she could only faintly hear him. Ships were designed with thick walls in case of a space breach. Sealed rooms without damage could remain sealed until they ran out of breathable air, which also meant someone would have to pass close to hear him yelling. She turned and ran for the lift. She'd seen a ship map on the wall but she hadn't time to study it when Flint had walked her past it. Now she studied the ship layout to locate the life pods. No pods were on her level but there were two on the deck below her. With her heart pounding she hit the button to call the lift. She wouldn't have much time before Drakos called for reinforcements. When the lift doors opened she sighed in relief that it was empty.

She hated the damn things but it would get her to another level quickly. The lift doors shut and she leaned against the wall as it dropped a level. The doors opened and fear hit again until she realized the corridor was empty, no one was waiting to grab her. She ran, heading down toward the first split. She saw the red marker on the wall that pointed toward the life-pod bulk doors. She pressed one to open but nothing happened.

Had they been disabled? Were the pods gone? The doors should open if they were working. She moved to the other door and hit the emergency open button. It slid open. Relief hit her as she saw the interior pod door slide open a second later, revealing the interior of the pod on the other side of the small docking sleeve.

She ran in and spun, hitting the emergency close button. She stared at the empty corridor and hoped that luck was with her since no one had appeared to stop her. Her fear didn't ease until the door slammed shut, sealing her inside. She moved the few feet into the pod and sealed those doors. She turned then to take a better look at the pod.

The emergency lights had been activated by motion so she had a clear view of the interior – a twenty-five passenger pod. It was larger than she thought it would be which was lucky for her. She ran around the passenger area to the pilot seat. Throwing her ass into the seat, she started to put on her belt.

"State emergency," a hollow male voice startled her.

"Um..."

"This is autopilot for Pod 3. State emergency."

She bit her lip. "We've been boarded by pirates. We need to blast away and get away from the *Star* before they can come after us. Pirates have control of the *Star*."

“State destination to safest location please.”

“Um...Earth?”

“Understood. Uploading location. Locked. Prepare for release and sudden hard blast when we are clear. Countdown in three, two, one...”

She barely got her belt tightened before the pod released. Her body slammed forward, hard against the belt as the small ship turned then was thrown back against her seat as it launched. Her stomach protested the sudden and violent move and a moan of terror burst from her parted lips. Most of the gravity went. The pod slowed to a stop and she saw her blonde hair floating as her limbs grew so light she could barely feel them.

“Cross your arms tightly to your chests and lean your heads back against the headrest,” the computer voice ordered. “Hard blast in three, two, one, blast.”

Mira would have screamed but she had no air left in her lungs from the violent motion of being slammed into her seat. She was glad she’d followed the instructions quickly. If she hadn’t crossed her arms over her chest she was pretty sure they would have been broken by the sudden burst of speed. The force was crushing her as the pod continued to hard blast.

It wasn’t stopping as she knew it should have. The escape pod was on full blast speed, which meant it was pouring fuel into the thrusters, forcing the pod to rocket away from the *Star*. She closed her eyes, managing to force air into her lungs. The pressure was still there but it eased as her body adjusted to the speeding pod. She’d been through hard blast only once before. That had been when the *Star* had done it to avoid the debris from her shuttle. It had only lasted a few seconds. The pod was burning fuel far longer than that.

“We are being pursued by the *Star*,” the computer announced calmly. “Evasive maneuvers.”

Mira did scream when the pod rolled and everything spun. She wished the gravity had completely shut off so she wouldn’t experience the sick feeling of the small ship rolling but she couldn’t get the words out to order the computer to shut it off.

The pod violently shook as it adjusted course. She kept her eyes closed, clutching the belts over her chest, unable to do anything else. The *Star* was coming after the pod. That shocked her. She wondered suddenly if the *Star* could capture the smaller vessel but she didn’t think it could. Escape pods were usually pretty fast because they were for higher speeds in case of real pirate attacks.

“Pod 3 has successfully pulled away from the *Star*. Reducing burst to steady to keep out of range and initiating normal gravity from minimal gravity for comfort. Monitoring to continue until the threat is no longer on sensor range,” the computer announced. “Fuel levels are acceptable. Attempting to auto signal Earth with status.” It paused. “Out of range. Will attempt every hour to establish contact with Earth. Please remain belted until no hostile threat is detected. Changes will update.”

Mira opened her eyes finally, breathing easier, her fear easing. She had escaped. She took more deep breaths. The *Star* had tried to come after her, which made no sense to her. She wondered if Flint was still on board or if he'd already left on the *Rally*. Her guess was that he'd already left or the *Rally* would have come after her instead. It was the faster ship.

She wondered if Flint would miss her. Pain hit at the thought. He'd probably just replace her with a new woman when he heard she was gone. He'd get a new possession. Maybe the next woman wouldn't mind that he felt nothing more toward her than ownership. The thought of him touching another woman hurt though, causing her to utter a curse.

"State problem." The computer's voice broke the silence.

She shook her head. "No problem. I was thinking out loud."

"I will initiate voice mode. If you wish to address the pod, state Pod 3 before orders. I will not respond to other voice commands so you may communicate amongst yourselves in the compartment."

Mira shook her head, eyeing the empty pod. The stupid computer thought she had someone else to talk to.

"Pod 3?"

"Pod 3. State problem."

"I was wondering how long until we reach Earth."

"At current rate of speed it will be four days, six hours, thirteen minutes, forty-one seconds."

She sighed in relief. "That's great news. That's faster than I thought it would be."

"We can't stay at current rate of speed," it announced. "We will run out of fuel in three hours, fourteen minutes, sixteen seconds if we continue current burn ratio. The fuel will be cut when threat is out of scanner range. Ask for estimation when pursuit is over."

She clenched her teeth, thinking, taking a few deep breaths to relax. "What happens if the *Star* continues to pursue the pod?"

Seconds ticked by. "Programming states to continue burn until threat is out of scanner range. If pursuit continues we will burn all fuel in three hours, twelve minutes, three seconds."

Mira was horrified. If the *Star* continued to chase her it would only be a matter of hours before they caught her. She wasn't a damn pilot. She stared at the controls, realizing she was at the mercy of the automated pilot.

"Are there other options, Pod 3?"

"None. I have auto scanned for any other emergency locations but we are out of range."

In other words, she was screwed. All she could hope for was that the *Star* broke off its pursuit of the pod. It might happen, she reasoned. The *Star* wouldn't want to get too

far from the *Rally* while it was away on its mission. The pod was heading for Earth and she knew the *Star* had been heading toward Garden. Would Flint really waste all that fuel chasing her?

She was property to him and all property had value. She just couldn't be that valuable to Flint. He was picking up more human women on the *Piera*. She tried to relax. The *Star* would break off pursuit when they realized that she wasn't going to stop running.

"Incoming message from the *Star*," the computer announced.

"Shit."

"Order not understood. Would you like communications open?"

She hesitated. "Yes."

"Mirasia Carver," a deep voice that was unfamiliar to her barked. "I am Vollus. Order the pod to stop burn now and reverse direction back to the *Star*."

"No."

The man literally growled. "I have contacted Flint. He and the *Rally* will catch up to us soon. You do not want him to have to board the pod. He was very angry. Order the pod to stop burn and reverse direction to the *Star* now. I promise you no harm will come to you if you do as I say."

She was tempted. She was terrified of Flint coming after her. Would he be so angry he just blew the pod up with her on it? She knew she was going to run out of fuel sooner than later. Did they? She took a deep breath.

"This pod was designed for twenty-five passengers. I'm not burning much fuel with only one body aboard," she bluffed. "How much fuel are you wasting coming after me? I'm just one human. I'm worthless, Vollus. Flint is pissed because I got away. Think logically. You're a cyborg, damn it. Is it rational to waste fuel and time to come after one worthless human?"

Silence greeted her statement, giving her hope that he was considering her words.

"I'm not going to stop burn and I'm not going to turn around. I'll blow this damn pod up before I go back on the *Star*. Is that clear? I saw how upset it made everyone when the pilots blew up the shuttle I was on. You could have salvaged the shuttle. I'll blow the pod if you chase me until I run out of fuel. I'll be dead, the pod won't be salvageable, and you'll have lost all that time and fuel for nothing."

Silence.

"Hello?"

Silence.

"Pod 3? Is communications still active?"

"Affirmative," the computer announced. "I can pick up breathing sounds."

Fear hit her. They weren't answering her. They were just listening. "End communications," she whispered.

"Communications ended."

She waited a good five minutes. "Pod 3? Are we still being pursued?"

"Affirmative."

"Son of a bitch!"

"Order not understood. Please restate order."

"Fuck you."

"Order not understood. Please restate order."

"He's going to kill me."

"Order not understood. Please restate order."

"Pod 3? Stop talking to me."

"Order understood."

Mira let her head drop into her hands.

Chapter Eight

“Warning. Respond. Warning. Respond.”

The computer’s voice jerked Mira awake. She’d fallen asleep, exhausted from her lack of sleep the night before.

“I’m here,” she got out.

“Second unidentified ship approaching.”

“Shit!” That woke her up all the way. “Is it the *Rally*?”

“Unidentified. Hailing.” A pause. “No response.”

“How far out?”

“We will make contact in four minutes.”

“Four minutes?” Shock tore through her.

“Warnings have been issued in minute increments for twenty-three minutes. You did not respond.”

She had slept deeper than she had thought. “Is the *Star* still pursuing?”

“Affirmative.”

“Can we full burn?”

“Negative. Fuel resources are at an unsafe level. Full burn could cause tank rupture.”

She knew that meant the pod could explode as the shuttle had. She shut her eyes, trying to think. The *Rally* was going to reach her in less than four minutes. Damn.

“Orders?”

“What do you suggest we do?”

“Orders?”

“Fuck!” Frustration hit her hard. The damn computer was asking her what to do and it wasn’t giving her any options. She had no idea what to do beyond a full blast to put distance between the pod and the *Rally*. “I don’t know.”

“Orders?”

If she risked a full burn it would probably blow her up. All it would give her was another ten minutes, if that, before the *Rally* caught her again. She was screwed and she knew it. She’d never thought Flint would chase her down. It was insane to waste his fuel to come after her. She’d underestimated her worth to the crazy cyborg. She didn’t want to die so she didn’t order the computer to do something suicidal. She’d been bluffing about blowing up the pod.

“Third ship in range. Unidentified.”

She frowned. "What?"

"Proximity alert!" A sharp blast sounded through the pod as an alarm screamed. "Impact is imminent. Evasive maneuvers. Reversing engine thrusters to soften impact."

The gravity went as the pod engines cut out. They suddenly flared again. The pod vibrated violently and then all hell broke loose when it slammed into something hard. Mira was grateful that the gravity was gone or she knew the violent hit might have torn her painfully from her seat. As it was, she was just jarred a bit, barely enough to cause mild pain.

"Pod 3 has been hooked," the computer announced. "Computer is attempting to send Earth an emergency transmission." It paused. "Negative signal. Would you like Pod 3 to continue to try to send emergency signal as long as there is power?"

"Affirmative," she said in a shaky voice.

"Confirmed. Hatch is being breached."

She unhooked her belt so she could turn her head. She almost floated out of her seat. She could order the pod to turn the gravity back on but she didn't. It would slow Flint down getting to her if he had to cross the pod to the pilot seat to reach her without gravity. Every second was one more instant that she was going to be free.

She could see the pod hatch from where she floated just above her seat, gripping it to stay in place. She heard a loud pop as the hatch was wrenched open. She swallowed hard, feeling fear. Would Flint be the first one in the door? She was pretty sure he would be. Would he kill her outright or take her on the *Rally* to do it? She was certain he'd be so furious that he'd want to end her life. He seemed like the unforgiving type.

Terror struck as she saw the man who entered the pod. It wasn't Flint. It wasn't even a cyborg. He was human but he was scarred and something was wrong with his head, only sporting hair in a few places as if he'd suffered radiation poisoning. She'd seen it before on the news when a ship had had some kind of containment failure. Survivors lost clumps of hair that never grew back without surgery, if they were lucky enough to be fixed. The man floated into the pod and his eyes met hers.

Near heart-attack-inducing terror hit her. His eyes were two different colors. She'd seen that on the news too. He'd definitely suffered severe radiation poisoning. From the different eye color, the lack of a full head of hair and the skin scarring, she knew when he'd been exposed. Unborn infants exposed to high doses of radiation were born like this man, indicating that he was a lifer space inhabitant. As he moved forward, grabbing seats to float his way toward her, she got a good look at his misshapen hands. He was without a doubt a full-on radiation mutant, which meant he was a pirate. They usually were born in space and lived on old, unsafe ships, turning them into virtual monsters.

"What do we have here?" The man's voice was raspy.

She saw more motion at the pod door, causing her to turn her head. Three men who floated in were just as physically messed up as the first man.

"Pod 3? How far away is the *Star*?"

“Not close enough,” the pirate rasped as he grabbed her by her floating hair.

Mira screamed in pain and missed what the computer said as her grip was torn from the seat. Her body floated freely in the cabin. The man had yanked her so she was pushed in the direction of the three other mutants until rough hands grabbed her. Mira tried to kick and claw at them but the lack of gravity hindered her. They dragged her through the hatch into a sleeve that connected to the pirate ship. The hatch was shut and gravity suddenly returned.

Mira fell, hitting the floor of the sleeve, pain slamming through her head and her back where she hit the hardest. Three mutant males grabbed her and lifted her. She heard a door slide open on the pirate ship and then she was carried into a cargo area. One had her arms while the other two were gripping each leg. She saw the beams and the high ceiling above her. Boxes were packed and secured in the hold.

“No!” she screamed. She fought but she couldn’t get away.

The men hauled her higher, slamming her down on a large table-sized crate with enough force that pain tore through her back where she landed. The air was knocked from her lungs. Rough hands gripped her as they rolled her over onto her stomach. One of the men dropped on her, his body slamming down over her to pin her in place. Mira sucked air into her lungs. Her wrist was yanked above her, something closing over it so painfully that she screamed out. The other wrist was yanked upward and more pain shot up her arm as something pinched that wrist.

“Nice,” a raspy voice hissed. “Where are the other ships?”

“The jumper is approaching fast. The second ship is larger and slower.”

“Pull back behind the asteroid. We’ll be off their sensors and we can jump them as we did the pod. By the time their proximity alarms go off we’ll have hooked them. It’s two for one day. We’ll have to let the larger ship go, unfortunately. We’ll lose them in the asteroid belt where they won’t dare follow us.”

Hands gripped her hips and yanked them away from the crate as the weight lifted off her. The man who’d pinned her smelled horrible. She breathed through her mouth so she wouldn’t puke. The entire cargo bay smelled like garbage and rotted flesh so it wasn’t just his stench that was getting to her. She lifted her head, shaking the hair from her eyes, to see at least seven of the radiation mutants approaching her. The man behind her slid his hands around her waist and reached for the front of her pants.

“What a nice one,” one of the men rasped.

If snakes could talk Mira imagined this was what they would sound like. Fear struck her as the hand started to unfasten her pants. She’d heard horror stories about pirates who got their hands on women. She threw her hips forward, grinding her pelvis between the crate and the man’s hand, trying to smash it.

She saw that her wrists were tied over the edge of the crate. Blood ran down one of her fingers. They’d bound her so tightly that her hands were going numb and the straps they’d used had cut into her skin. She yanked anyway, trying to break free. Pain made

her gasp. The man behind her cursed as his knee slammed into the back of her thigh. Mira screamed.

"Get the pants off. I want to fuck her before we attack the shuttle. We'll see what goodies it is carrying. Maybe there are more women." It was the man who'd first boarded the pod.

"I'm worth a fortune for ransom," Mira yelled in terror. "I work for Firmaline. They'll pay heavily for my unharmed return."

The hand yanking at the front of her pants froze. Mira turned her head, glaring at the horrible-looking mutant gripping her. He looked at the first mutant she'd seen on the pod, indicating that he was the one in charge. That man stared at her with his two-tone eyes, one iris totally white, and she realized he had to be blind in that eye. His other eye was brown and milky looking. She stared into his eyes and tried not to show her horror at his bumpy and scarred features.

"I'm Mirasia Carver. My family is rich as well. You could double ransom me. You could name your price. They won't pay though if you hurt me," she lied. Her family would still pay regardless of her condition as long as she was breathing. Firmaline wouldn't. The company refused to pay for useless employees. If Mira were gang-raped she knew she'd be deemed useless because they would consider her unstable. "Think about it. Hurting me isn't worth that kind of profit loss."

The man frowned. It twisted his misshapen lips horribly. His mouth opened and she saw missing and crooked blackened teeth. "What is your employee identification code?"

Relief hit her. "Mirasia four-four-six-thirty-nine."

The man turned his head to shoot a look at one of the men. "Check it out. Contact them and see what they offer for her."

One of the men turned, almost running from the cargo area. The hand left Mira's pants as the man behind her eased away from her body. Two-tone eyes moved closer, studying her. "Who is following?"

She hesitated. "I don't know. I thought they were pirates."

"How did you end up on a pod?"

Lie, she thought frantically. "We had engine trouble. Because of my worth I was put on a pod for safety. The pod malfunctioned and jetted away from the ship. They aren't the ones pursuing me though because they were off line for repairs."

The man who'd run away came back in less than a minute. "The asteroid field is blocking transmissions so there is no signal."

Another mutant came closer and rubbed the front of his pants. "I say we have her and just take her so we don't break anything. They'll pay if she's not broken."

She shivered in revulsion. "They don't pay if you rape me. They will deem me an unfit employee because of mental instability." She didn't have to lie about that. "I'm a sales representative who has to travel deep space often. I won't be able to do that

anymore if I'm attacked. They won't mentally clear me for those missions. I'll be useless to Firmaline and they won't pay for my return. They always scan their employees before payment. If you've ever dealt with them for ransom then you know this."

"Captain," a voice rasped from speakers. "The jumper is searching for us. It has entered the asteroid field."

Two-tone spun away. "Don't touch her. Watch her. We're going to take down the shuttle."

The pirates were going to attack the *Rally*. Fear for Flint's safety hit Mira. He'd said the *Rally* was heavily armored so she prayed it was. If the pirates attacked the *Rally* though Flint might have to blow up the ship she was in. Her eyes traveled the cargo area, thinking it wouldn't be a loss. It was a floating garbage tank as far as she could see and smell. The men on board were all radiation mutants who had turned to attacking space shuttles for profit and they were rapists too. She'd die but she'd rather do that than suffer their brutality.

The ship vibrated as the engines came on. A high-pitched sound emitted when the engines shuddered. Fear hit her. The ship was in really bad shape. She heard metal groan, wondering what that meant, knowing for sure that it couldn't be anything good. Seconds later men started yelling.

"What is going on?" the man who was guarding her yelled out.

Another mutant ran into the cargo area from the direction from which the others had disappeared. He ran for the far corner. "They have weapons," the man shouted as he ran. "We've been damaged. I'm sealing my ass in the tank so when the hull ruptures I'm not sucked out."

"Fuck," the man behind her rasped. He ran for that corner too, leaving Mira strapped over the wooden crate.

The engines died slowly. They didn't just shut off. They groaned and shook. At least the high-pitched sound died with the engines. A painful jolt ran up Mira's legs from her feet on the floor. Something had hit the ship hard enough to cause the metal to send shock waves through the floorboards. She yanked her feet up so she lay on top of the crate. A hard push sent her body sliding a foot on the crate but her tied hands kept her from flying off it to roll away. The gravity was still on but a scream tore from her as the ship started to tilt badly. The stabilizers had been damaged.

Mira saw the deck lift up on one side. Unsecured boxes started to slide toward the now-lower section of floor, slamming into the metal walls. She rolled off the crate and slammed into the floor painfully since she couldn't stop the fall when the ship tilted more. Her bound wrists kept her from sliding down the slanted floor into the wall. She stared at the large table-sized crate and was relieved that it was tied to the deck. It wasn't going to slide toward her and crush her.

Something slid loudly on the tilted floor. Mira looked up, another scream tearing from her when she saw a large barrel rolling toward her. She screamed again and used her feet to brace on the deck to turn her body to roll, barely getting out of the way

before it passed her. It smashed into something below. The deck was now at a good forty-five-degree angle. She prayed the ship wouldn't roll all the way over.

Something dripped on her cheek. She looked up as blood drops hit her again. The ties they'd used on her wrists were digging deeper into her flesh. Her weight was supported by those ties, causing blood to run down both arms now that she was putting more pressure on them. She was grateful that her hands were numb because she feared the bindings were going to sever her hands from her wrists as her weight stressed them. Hot tears poured down Mira's face. She never should have left the *Star*. She was going to die horribly.

An explosion rocked the ship with a deafening blast. She shut her eyes and said a final prayer as she lay on the dirty floor. She waited for the suction to start. She'd read about what happened to ships with breached hulls. In a matter of seconds that breach would enlarge as objects sucked in that direction widened the hole and in minutes, if a person were unlucky enough to survive that long, all air would be sucked into the vacuum of space. She would die painfully but quickly.

Metal groaned loudly close by. She tensed. Mira squeezed her eyes shut tighter, waiting for the suction to hit her. She was actually grateful for one thing. She was tied down so her body wouldn't be sucked out into space to float out there forever. At least inside a ship her family might one day have closure should her body be discovered.

Men screamed and then she heard popping noises. She frowned, recognizing the sound. She'd seen enough action vids to know that pack guns made those noises. She opened her eyes and turned her head. Shockingly, she saw cyborgs enter the cargo area. Above her she saw a mutant leaning out of a hatch firing down on the cyborgs. Mira turned her head and saw Flint. He held a pack gun but he didn't spare her a look as he took aim to fire again.

Above her a male screamed, causing Mira to jerk her head up just in time to see a mutant fall from the hatch. He slid face first down the deck about eight feet from where she lay. He skidded limply down the tilted deck until he slammed into the wall of the cargo area with a sickening thud.

"Get her," Flint snarled. "We'll cover you."

Flint had come for her. Mira stared down at him where he braced against the wall and the tilted deck. He held a pack gun firmly in his hand, pointing it toward the area from which they'd taken fire, still not glancing at her. She saw movement below her and turned her head. Iron was using what looked like hooks to climb up the floor toward her. She met his eyes, seeing how pissed off he was as he glared at her. He climbed the deck until his large body was next to her and stared into her eyes for long seconds before yanking a knife from his belt.

"You're in deep shit," he growled softly at her. "I wouldn't want to be you when we get on the *Rally*."

She swallowed hard as Iron sliced through the ties that bound her wrists, using his leg to pin her to the deck so she didn't go sliding away. He shoved his knife back into

his belt and wrapped his strong arm around her waist. She didn't even gasp as the large man rolled her on top of his body so her back was to his chest. Iron yanked the hooklike tool from the floor, setting them free, and they started to slide down the deck toward Flint and his men.

Iron braced his feet, lifting them so when they hit, his legs took the impact of colliding with the wall. He softly cursed as he rolled her over. He was on his feet in a heartbeat, reaching down and grabbing her around her waist to yank her off the floor. Iron held her like that as he climbed out of the blown hatch with Mira folded over his arm. It hurt but she didn't cry out from the pain—she was too terrified. In seconds he had her through the sleeve that attached the *Rally* to the pirate ship.

Iron stormed into a room that was nothing more than a hatch room. If the seal of the sleeve broke this room would keep the jumper shuttle from a hull breach. He hit the button that opened the doors. A second later she was in a much smaller cargo area. She saw two large cages set up. Iron set her on her feet and grabbed her by the back of her neck.

Mira saw five human women locked in the larger cage. They wore blue space jumpsuits that were comfortable for travel, sporting their company logo on the breasts of their suits. She only got a glance at them before Iron tore open the smaller cage door and shoved her roughly inside. She fell inside and cried out as the metal floor bruised her knees. The door slammed shut behind her.

"If you were mine I'd kill you," Iron growled. "Right after I took a few inches off your ass with my belt."

Mira slumped, collapsing on her legs so she sat on them. Her wrists burned with pain and her hands tingled painfully and sensation hit her as the blood flowed back into them. She was shaking as she tore away the corded ties they'd used on her wrists. Her wrists were cut and blood dripped. All she could do was cradle them to her chest.

"Here," Iron snarled. He shoved something through the bars. "Clean and deal with them yourself."

The first-aid kit hit the floor of the cage. Her gaze lifted. Iron was standing there glaring at her.

"Thank you."

He spun away, storming for the door they'd just come through but it opened before he reached it. Flint and four cyborgs entered the cargo area. Mira's eyes went to Flint but he didn't look her way, not once. He turned to one of his cyborgs.

"Tell Ice to release the sleeve. We'll blow their hull out and tow their ship to the *Star*. We could use the metal off the ship for building materials on Garden. Most of their cargo was secured so it won't float away. Do life scans to make sure they all die."

Mira watched Flint leave the cargo area without ever turning his head to look at her. The men secured the door and then they followed Flint out. With shaking hands she opened the medical kit and started to work on her bleeding wrists.

Chapter Nine

Mira watched the five women who were all in their early twenties to mid-thirties. She'd gotten their names but she could only remember two of them. Her mind was foggy and she knew she was suffering from shock, blood loss, and she had a fever. The pirate ship's hold had been filthy so she'd injected her arm with an antibiotic to guard against infection. She didn't know how long she'd lain on the floor, shivering and miserable, but she knew she was in bad shape.

Dawn, a small redhead with bright blue eyes, was crouched in the other cage watching Mira. "You're really sick."

Mira clenched her teeth to keep them from chattering. "Is it cold in here?"

"No. You're burning up. I can see how flushed you are." Dawn stood up and yelled. "Hello! Someone help! Can anyone hear me? We need help in here!"

In less than a minute the doors slid open as Iron stormed in. He eyed the redhead. "What is wrong?"

Dawn pointed at Mira. "She's dying, damn it. She's shivering and the shot she gave herself isn't working. Please help her."

Mira watched Iron turn to face her. A frown marred his features as he stared down at her. He reached for his waist to fish out a key. "You try something and I'll hit you. Got it?"

She didn't even bother to respond. She curled into a ball, shivering too badly to even think of a smartass response. She was freezing and miserable. Iron opened the door to the cage and crouched when he stepped in. He tore off one of his gloves and touched her cheek then her forehead. She saw his eyes narrow as his jaw clenched.

"Damn." He dropped to his knees, put his arms under Mira and lifted her. He got to his feet and ducked out of the cage, carrying her against his chest. "Ice, contact the *Star* immediately. Hook us up fast. Mira is really sick. We need to get her to Doc right now."

"Understood," a deep male voice said through the speaker system. "Should I report this to Flint?"

"Yes." Iron glanced down at Mira. "She's in bad shape."

Mira shivered in his arms though his body was warm against hers. As he studied her carefully his gaze softened. She was shocked that he seemed to care whether she was dying or not. He cradled her gently, walking to the door where she'd entered the ship. He stood there to brace his back to the wall.

"Hang on, Mira. We're connecting to the *Star*. Doc will fix you right up."

She just stared up at him. He watched her with worried eyes. He shifted her weight as the ships lightly bumped. Iron pushed away from the wall, holding her tighter. He faced the door and waited. It finally slid open. Mira saw corridors, recognizing the *Star*. It was her last thought before she passed out.

* * * * *

Mira woke when her clothing was being removed. She opened her eyes to see that Doc and Iron were stripping her. She tried to fight but she didn't have the strength. Doc leaned over her, frowning.

"Calm down, Mira. We're getting you out of your clothes. It's all right. I need to check you over. You have an infection somewhere and it's not your damaged wrists. I inspected them first. You need a stronger antibiotic but I need to figure out which one to give you. Do you know of any other injuries on your body?"

She couldn't remember any. She shook her head and then groaned in pain as Iron pulled her boots from her feet. She looked down her body as large hands touched her hips. Iron glanced at her as he unfastened her pants. He shot Doc a look.

"I never thought I'd get the chance to take her pants off, considering how possessive Flint is of her."

Doc looked pissed off. "Just strip her or get the hell out of my med bay. She's a patient right now. Where is Flint? Has he been informed?"

Iron opened her pants and hooked an arm under Mira's knees. He lifted her ass off the table and hooked his other hand at the waistband of her pants. He jerked them down, exposing her to their sight. She was too weak and sick to be embarrassed that she didn't have underwear and that both men were seeing her naked.

"He was informed."

"So where the hell is he?" Doc sliced open the front of her shirt, tearing it away from her once he'd sliced down each sleeve.

"He is in Control." Iron stared openly at her naked body. "I don't see any injuries."

"Let's flip her," Doc said.

Mira didn't fight as the men gripped her to flip her naked body. Then Doc cursed. "They scratched her. Those are fingernail marks. Damn mutants."

"What's wrong with me?" Mira's teeth chattered. "I'm so cold."

A firm hand landed on her back. "Hold still. Were you raped, Mira?"

"No."

She heard two men sigh in relief. "One of the mutants clawed your lower back. Did they touch you at all? Try to remove your pants?"

She nodded. "I offered them ransom money to stop. They did."

"One of them scratched you. The thing about mutants is they are dirty bastards who carry all kinds of nasty infections and they broke your skin." Doc sounded pissed. "Hand me the red injector," he ordered Iron.

"Is she going to survive?" Iron sounded worried.

"If she responds to the hyperantibiotic then she will recover. If she is septic then she might not make it. I don't think the infection has gone that far but we have to get it under control. If her fever spikes too high, she'll be in danger of convulsions and brain damage. We'll know in a few hours. If we caught it early enough and the meds kick in, she'll be a little weak but she'll recover quickly.

"I guess the bastards hadn't had a woman in a long time. She's too pretty and would fetch a good price as a sex slave. They had to know they were carrying infection and that raping her would kill her in a matter of days just from them touching her."

Iron cursed. "What are her chances?"

"It's up to how strong she is," Doc sighed. "She's a little thing." Mira flinched in pain when Doc injected the hyperantibiotic. He covered her with a blanket and reached up to pat her shoulder. "Hang in there, honey," Doc said softly. "You're tough."

"I'll go report to Flint and tell him how serious this is." Iron sighed. "I'm sure he'll be down immediately."

"I'm going to put her out. She needs to rest to fight the infection."

Doc leaned down so Mira could see his face and smiled. "Flint will come down and hold your hand, okay? I'm going to put you to sleep now."

"I'm so co-cold."

"I know, honey. You just sleep so you get better." He lifted the sheet at her hip and gave her another injection.

Mira drifted to sleep.

* * * * *

Over the next few days, every time she opened her eyes, Doc was sitting on the med bed next to her. He'd walk over to her to tell her she was doing great. She moved her arm once and realized he had hooked her up to liquid nourishment.

"Flint?"

Doc looked pissed. "He's not here, Mira. He came once. He's worried about you."

He looked away when he said it. Pain hit Mira. She was deathly sick and Flint didn't care. He was too angry at her for fleeing the *Star* and him. She blinked back tears.

"He'll never forgive me, will he?"

Doc hesitated. "Cyborgs are...well, they are human in a lot of ways but they take certain things badly. I think he feels that you betrayed his trust. That's the worst thing you can do to one of them. He's pretty damn angry."

“Is there a way to get rid of his marks? Has he asked you to do that so he can sell me to someone else?”

Doc looked away. It was enough of an answer for Mira. Flint had asked. Doc cleared his throat. “Markings like that are permanent. I’d have to remove inches of tissue and you’d have to re-grow it. It would be weeks of pain. You’d be locked in a med bed to prevent bleeding and scarring during skin and tissue rejuvenation if it would even work. Those marks are meant to be forever. Flint understands that. I told him when he asked.”

She shut her eyes, fighting tears. “So he’ll have to sell me to someone besides a cyborg, right?”

Doc hesitated. “Yeah. No cyborg would want you with his markings. At least not long term. It would bother them. They— Oh, hell. This is upsetting you. Don’t worry about this now, Mira. Just get well.”

She went back to sleep.

It was the sleeping cycle when she woke next. She was finally starting to feel better. The lights in the med bay were dim and Doc wasn’t on the med bed next to her, reading. She lifted her head and almost gasped. Fear hit her instantly at the sight of a large man standing at the head of her bed. Her gaze flew up.

Flint was watching her with his arms crossed over his chest. She stared at him in stunned silence, taking in that he’d cut his hair. It was shocking to see his longer locks gone. It was cut short—only about an inch long. It made him look ruthless with his mouth in a tight line while fury burned in his dark blue eyes.

“Flint...” She whispered his name.

“I came to evaluate my property.” His voice was deep and cold.

She flinched. “I’m sorry.”

He growled low in his throat. “You’re sorry? What are you sorry about, Mira? Sorry that you almost cost us the raid on the *Piera* because we were docking to her when I got word that you’d stolen a pod? Are you sorry for the fuel and resources we wasted going after you? Are you sorry that you didn’t get away? Maybe you’re sorry that pirates caught you before I could. Maybe you’re sorry that you’re back here. What are you sorry for exactly?”

Mira gripped the blanket. She felt weak but carefully sat up on the bed, wrapping the blanket tighter around her naked body. “I’m just sorry for everything. I didn’t think past escaping. I thought if I got away that I wouldn’t be just property anymore.”

He swayed a little on his feet as his hands fisted until his knuckles whitened at his sides. Flint’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “You are property, Mira. You are mine to do with as I wish. You almost got yourself killed and you could have gotten me, along with the crew of the *Rally*, killed with you if those pirates had gotten the drop on us instead.”

“I’m sorry. I never meant to put your life in danger.”

"You did." He took a step toward her and then halted. "You are going to have to be punished for what you've done, Mira. You've cost me a lot of money. I'm the one who had to pay for the fuel that both ships wasted going after you."

Movement in the dim room caught Mira's attention. She saw Iron standing about fifteen feet back, behind Flint. Flint turned his head, motioning Iron forward. Iron strode closer. Mira eyed the man with dread. She knew he didn't like her and she remembered his suggestions of what he'd do to her if she were his when he'd shoved her into the cage. Was he going to suggest her death or have Flint take a belt to her ass to remove some layers of skin?

He stopped next to Flint to glare down at Mira. Terror flooded her at the anger she saw in the other cyborg's eyes. She turned to Flint, silently pleading with him. His eyes were cold.

"I've sold you to Iron."

The words shocked and horrified Mira. She literally jerked back on the bed. "Please, Flint. I'm sorry. I'll pay you every cent I cost you. I have money. Please don't do this."

Flint's mouth tensed. "I don't want your money. Iron owns you now." Flint turned on his heel, presenting her with his back, as he marched away.

"Flint, please..."

She shoved off the med bed and got to her feet. She gripped the blanket around her to keep her body covered and tried to run after the retreating Flint. She felt a tug on her arm where the nutrition IV was attached. She tore it away. Dizziness hit her but she stumbled after him, dragging the blanket that was around her body.

"Flint!" she yelled.

He froze, turning around slowly. Mira reached him and grabbed his shirt with her free hand. She clutched at him desperately as she stared up into his surprised features. She'd forgotten how big and tall he was.

"I'll do anything, Flint. Please don't do this. I want to be with you."

He reached down to curl his hand around hers where it gripped his shirt. She almost expected him to crush her hand in his. She knew with his strength he could have. His touch was gentle though as his fingers encircled her fist.

"You wouldn't have run away if you wanted to belong to me. I've given you what you wanted, Mirasia Carver. You are no longer my property. Release me and go to your new owner."

Hot tears slid down her face. "Please, Flint. I'll beg. Don't do this. I'm so damn sorry. I was hurt. You...I'm more than property. I..."

He cut her off. "You *are* property. You are Iron's property now." He tore her hand away from his shirt and turned away. He stormed for the door.

A sob tore from Mira before she collapsed on the floor. "Flint! Please! Please don't do this!"

He didn't pause or turn around again. He just left the large cargo bay, the doors slamming shut behind him. She ignored the cold floor against her bare legs and the uncomfortable blanket twisted around her. Mira lowered her head as sobs hit her. She didn't fight when Iron lifted her off the floor to carry her back to the med bed.

As he gently dropped her on it she looked up at him. She saw something in Iron's eyes that almost resembled pity. He sighed.

"What did you expect? You rejected him when you ran. You embarrassed him in front of all the men. They are teasing him about how you ran from him and how he went after you. He was irrational to order two ships to follow you. We're days off course."

"I only ran because—"

Iron cut her words off. "It doesn't matter why you did it. It was done. Rest and heal. I'll collect you when Doc clears you from Med." His eyes narrowed as he leaned in so his face was inches from hers. "I will not be anything like Flint. I won't trust you or give you an opportunity to embarrass me. You will learn your place, slave. That's your title now. You will learn to answer it and you will do anything I say. If you resist I will take great pleasure in punishing you. Flint was soft where you were concerned but I'm won't be. If you think about running tonight let me assure you that you have nowhere to go. I'll be watching every move you make. There are cameras focused on you and Doc embedded a stun implant. With one push of the button a high-voltage shock will shoot up your spine to temporarily paralyze you so you'll drop where you stand. You will suffer greatly if you try anything, slave."

Mira just stared at him. Inside she went numb with shock.

Iron smiled coldly. "Unlike Flint, I don't mind sharing my property if you piss me off. I want you to think about that. Have you ever been tied down and shared by men? You won't even be able to fight. Whatever they want to do to you, they will do. You'd better please me when I get you into bed—enough to make me rethink wanting to punish you like that."

Horror hit her. She was in hell. Maybe dying on the pirate ship would have been best. She watched as Iron turned on his heel and marched away. The cargo doors slammed shut behind him.

She lay down, curling into a ball as hot tears slid down her cheeks. When she had no tears left she used the blanket to blow her nose and wipe her eyes. Flint had sold her to Iron and Iron hated her. She didn't want Iron to touch her. If she *had* to be property, she wanted to belong to Flint. She climbed off the med bed and walked to the cleansing room. Inside she surveyed her reflection in the mirror.

She looked like hell with her long blonde hair in messy clumps, red, swollen eyes and a nose to match. She dropped the blanket, went into the cleansing room and stepped into the cleaning unit. She scrubbed every inch of her skin. Doc had given her a toothbrush, which she used, and then removed a med outfit from the cabinet. They

were all in large sizes to fit the cyborgs. The shirt was huge and the pants wouldn't stay up. She discarded the pants.

The cargo area was empty when she stepped out of the cleaning unit. She was pretty sure no cameras were in the cleansing room. She'd half suspected that Iron would be waiting outside the door to check on her. The med shirt fell to mid-thigh. She walked to the med bed on shaky legs, feeling weak from days of running a fever. She surveyed the large cargo area.

She'd rather die than belong to Iron. The idea of begging Flint again came to her. She'd do anything if he'd just buy her back. She knew they would have safeguarded the other pods. Escaping the ship wasn't a possibility but she just had to reach him.

She remembered the way to his quarters from the med bay. Her wet hair dripped down her back and dampened the med shirt. She took deep breaths. How long would she have before Iron became aware that she'd left the area? Was he watching her now? If he was she wouldn't make it out of the cargo area. She took a few more breaths and then pushed away from the med bed and sprinted for the doors.

They opened automatically at her approach. She'd half expected them to be locked. She ran straight into the lift. She hated the damn things but it was the fastest mode of travel on the ship and she didn't have time to hunt for hatches.

Mira waited for pain to hit her from the shock implant but it didn't. She hit the button for the level of Flint's quarters. The lift moved and she gritted her teeth. *They really need to fix this thing*, she thought. It moved too fast, was too jarring, but when it stopped relief hit her when she saw that no security waited to grab her in the corridor.

She moved quickly. She was terrified that the implant would shock her at any second or that a cyborg would show up to stop her. Flint's quarters were easy to find. Staring at the door, she didn't know how to get the damn thing open since he'd never given her access to it. She put her hand over the replaced scanner pad but it didn't admit her. She used her palms to beat on the door.

Nothing. Tears blinded her for a moment. Flint was either in there and didn't hear her because the walls were too thick or he was out. She heard heavy boots hitting metal, telling her that someone was coming. She had nowhere to go and nowhere to hide so she just stood there waiting as the sound grew louder.

"Understood," Flint sounded pissed. "Make sure the pods are locked down. Do a search of the ship. Scan for every life sign on the ship and confirm—"

He turned the corner and saw Mira. He was gripping a device over his ear. He froze—just his eyes widened. A frown marred his features. "Cancel that. I found her. She's on level six. I have her." He paused. "Yes, inform Iron where she is. He can collect her."

She noticed the other two cyborgs behind Flint who had stopped walking when he did. Flint looked furious as he dropped his hand from his headset. "The life pods aren't on this floor. Did you get lost in your second attempt to flee the ship?"

She ignored the other cyborgs. "I wasn't trying to escape. I was looking for you. That's why I was pounding on your door."

Cold eyes narrowed. "Iron is on his way to return you to Med. You'll be locked to the bed this time until Doc releases you after his sleep cycle."

Mira stared up at Flint. "Please don't do this. I won't try to escape from you again. Don't sell me to Iron. Please. I'll pay you back what I cost you when I ran. I have the money. I'll give you everything I have, Flint. Hell, you'll make a profit. Whatever Iron paid for me, I'll pay that too. I can get it, whatever it is. Just don't let him take me."

Mira heard booted feet approaching behind her from the lift area. She turned her head to see Iron storming toward her. She was shocked when she saw the intense rage on his face. The fact that his hair was unbraided and the flaming-red, wavy hair flowed down his body was another shocking sight. She turned her head back to stare up at Flint, instinctively knowing Iron was going to drag her away from him when he reached her.

Chapter Ten

Without thinking, Mira moved. She threw herself at Flint. He backed up a step and she stumbled. She hit the floor on her knees instead of being able to grab his waist. She lunged forward, wrapping her arms around his thigh. She clung to him tightly, pressing her body against his leg, firmly wrapping both arms tighter, clinging to him.

“Please, Flint. I will plead if that’s what it takes. Don’t do this. I’ll do anything you want. Just don’t let him take me. Don’t sell me to him. I swear to God, I’ll never run again. You tell me what you want and I’ll do it. I swear on my life.”

She was aware that Flint tensed since she was wrapped around his thigh and her face was against his inner leg. She hugged him tighter, using every bit of her strength. She heard him take a deep breath. He wasn’t tossing her away from him.

“Please! I’m begging you, Flint. Anything. You told me you wouldn’t hurt me. He will.”

Rough hands grabbed her shoulders as she was forcibly torn away from Flint. Flint stumbled a little from how tightly her hold on him had been. Iron forced her to her feet, his hands bit painfully into her arms, making her gasp in pain. She was spun around to face the angry cyborg. Iron lowered his face to glare at her.

“I told you not to run.” He released one arm and raised his hand. “I see you need a heavy hand to learn to obey your master.”

He was going to hit her. Mira whimpered and would have collapsed if he wasn’t holding her other arm so tightly. He kept her on her feet against his body, facing him. The hand swung. He didn’t aim for her face. He swung for her ass. She tensed, waiting for his large palm to make contact with her body. At the last second his hand stopped. She turned her head. Flint gripped Iron’s wrist.

Flint shook his head at Iron. “Do not.”

Iron’s eyes narrowed. “You sold her to me.”

Fury tightened Flint’s mouth. “I said I would sell her to you if you did not abuse her.”

“She needs a good spanking. Maybe if you’d put her over your knee she wouldn’t have run.”

Flint looked furious. “The sale isn’t final until Doc releases her from Med. He didn’t do that. Unhand her now.”

She saw surprise cross Iron’s features but he released Mira grudgingly. Flint wrapped his arm around Mira’s waist, jerking her back against his body. He held her. Flint sighed. “Leave us. I’ll return her to Med after I’ve talked to her.”

Iron didn’t move but glared at Flint instead. “Do you know what you’re doing?”

Flint gave a sharp nod of his head. "I'll return her to Med after we've settled this. Our discussion is not forgotten."

Iron nodded, his eyes narrowed as he glared down at Mira. "I'll deal with you tomorrow."

It was a threat. Mira turned in Flint's loose hold to wrap her arms around him. He'd stopped Iron from hitting her. She curled tightly into his body. Hot tears filled her eyes and she didn't try to stop them. She figured Flint could feel her tears soaking through his clothes because he wasn't in uniform. He was wearing pants and matching shirt made from some kind of soft gray material. She'd seen some of the men working out wearing outfits like the one he wore.

Flint let her hold him for approximately thirty seconds before he gripped her arms. "Release me. We are going in my quarters to talk."

She let him go but she didn't want to. Flint closed the distance to his doorway to run his palm over the lock pad. The doors opened instantly. He paused and looked at her.

"Get inside."

Mira almost ran into the quarters she'd shared with Flint. She noted that nothing had changed. At the sound of the doors closing, she turned to face Flint. He hesitated and then shook his head at her.

"I do not understand you. First you escape from me and now you are begging me to take you back."

She wiped at her tears as she gazed up at him. "Please don't sell me to that man."

"It's already done. When Doc goes on shift in about seven hours he will clear you from Med. You will belong to Iron."

"I know I messed up but you hurt me. I'm human, damn it. We're emotional. You made it clear that I'm nothing more to you than property. I'm..." She took a deep breath. "You hurt me, hurt my feelings, and I got scared that you'd get bored with me and sell me. My brother had a card collection. I want to be more than a damn card collection to you. That's why I ran away. You saved me again. Please don't let Iron take me, Flint."

"You are still property so nothing has changed. Your feelings still should be hurt."

"They are but I'm here. I didn't get away. If I have to belong to someone, I'd rather it be you."

He frowned at her. "Your logic is lacking, Mira."

"If I were back on Earth, my life would be different, but I'm here. If I have to be here, I want to be with you. What isn't logical about that? Iron hates me and he's going to hurt me. You promised that you wouldn't hurt me and you haven't."

"You think you are safer with me – that I won't hurt you?"

"You said you wouldn't hurt me."

"I did say that." He nodded. "Undress, Mira."

She stared at him and then reached for the bottom of her med shirt. He wanted her. Did that mean he'd changed his mind? She wanted to ask. She opened her mouth but shut it again quickly when Flint shook his head.

"No words, Mira. Just do as I say. Show me you can obey me. Remove your clothes and get into my bed now."

It sounded like a second chance. She tugged off the med shirt to reveal that she wasn't wearing anything under it. Flint's eyes were on her body as she watched him. Passion burned in his dark blue eyes. He bent, removing each of his boots. The shirt and pants went next. She climbed on his bed as she watched him strip naked. He took her breath away. He was perfection as he moved for the bed.

"Spread your thighs for me."

She spread her legs wide open. He climbed on the bed to sit between her thighs. His gaze took in her exposed sex before they slowly ran up her body. Their gazes met and held.

"You need to obey me," he said softly. "Can you do that?"

She nodded. She'd obey him if he kept her. She'd happily do anything he said if he wouldn't sell her to Iron. She didn't want anyone but Flint touching her. Even as angry as he'd been, he hadn't hurt her and he hadn't let Iron hit her.

"Touch yourself."

She hadn't expected that order. She hesitated for just a second. Mira put her finger in her mouth, wetting the tip. She let her other hand go to her breast to cup it. Her wet finger moved down her body. She watched Flint's interested gaze follow the movement until she reached the apex of her sex.

She only hesitated a second before she teased her clit with her finger. Drawing slow circles around the little nub made her bite back a moan. It felt good and having Flint watch her did something to her. It really turned her on. She heard Flint's breathing increase in pace. Passion flared in his eyes.

He reached for her and she froze. His eyes jerked up to hers. "Don't stop."

She pinched her nipple between her index finger and thumb. Her fingertip moved, doing slow circles around her clit. She'd never had a man watch her masturbate. Her cheeks reddened slightly with embarrassment but it was also a turn-on. Her gaze tracked down Flint's exposed body to stare at his erect cock as she continued to play with her clit.

Flint's fingers brushed her finger and then he ran them down the line of her slit. He slipped the tips of two fingers into her pussy, testing her readiness before pushing them deep inside her when he found how wet she was. Mira closed her eyes and bucked her hips against his hand. He drove his fingers deeper. She moaned.

Flint curled his fingers and tapped at her G-spot with his fingertips. Pleasure made Mira moan louder as she rubbed her throbbing clit harder and faster. She pinched her nipple. Her hips wiggled against his hand. She knew she wasn't going to last. It had

been days since she'd had sex. Her inner muscles quivered and she knew she was going to come.

"Please, Flint. I want you inside me. I'm going to come."

He tightened his hold inside her vagina and rubbed against her G-spot. She threw her head back, arching against his hand, and cried out his name as she came. Her body jerked with every spasm. She ground her pelvis against his thick fingers as she rode out her climax. She pulled her finger away from her clit, opening her eyes.

Flint was turned-on and breathing fast. He met her eyes as he withdrew his fingers. "Roll over on your hands and knees. Now."

Mira didn't question the order. She rolled over on the bed onto her hands and knees. She turned her head as Flint rose so he was on his knees behind her. A firm hand gripped her hip, curling it around her hipbone, as he moved closer to her.

"Put your elbows on the bed. Brace, Mira. I'm going to fuck you hard and fast."

She lowered her chest to the bed, fisting his bedding tightly to get a good hold. A soft moan escaped her lips as his thick cock pushed inside her. He eased in slowly until he was buried balls deep in her quivering pussy. She still felt the aftermath of her climax. His balls brushed against her oversensitive clit so she knew he was in her that deep. His other hand gripped her hip, curling around it too. He withdrew slowly and paused.

"Hold on tight," he almost panted.

She cried out in pleasure as Flint started to fuck her fast and deep. His hips pulled back and rammed against her ass. He was big and thick. Pleasure and pain shot through her with every rapid thrust. If she weren't gripping the bedding he would have ridden her straight down into the mattress with his powerful, driving thrusts. The sound of his hips hitting her ass filled the room, along with their heavy breathing.

Flint tensed as his cock pulsed inside her. He stiffened, his cock jerking inside her in short bursts. "Mira." He groaned her name as he came hard.

Mira almost wanted to scream when Flint slowed his movements. She'd been so damn close to coming a second time. With a few more short thrusts, he spilled everything he had into her and then withdrew from her body. He moved back, releasing her hips. Mira collapsed on her side on the bed, turning her head to stare at Flint.

He climbed off the bed to walk to one of the storage drawers. She watched him as he withdrew a hand towel and used it to clean his body. He hesitated for a long moment before he turned his head. Their gazes held. He tossed the towel at her on the bed. She reached for it. She could feel wetness seeping onto her thighs. Flint walked to the corner and presented his back to her.

She wiped her thighs clean and sat up. "Flint?"

"What?" He didn't turn around. His voice was tight and he sounded angry.

“Thank you for keeping me. I’ll make everything up to you, I promise. I’ll make this right between us. If you give me access to a terminal I’ll have my money transferred to you. You can have everything I have if you want it. I don’t want you to lose your money.” She climbed off the bed to approach him.

Flint’s entire body went rigid. He had the best ass and when his body tightened, it made the muscles in his ass flex. She walked up behind him, letting her hand brush down his spine.

“I’ll never run away from you again. Thank you for giving me another chance. You won’t regret this. I’ll be the best damn...” it hurt her to say it but she did, “property that you own.”

Flint turned to face her then. Anger masked his features, making his eyes narrow and his full lips press tightly together. The anger surprised her.

“Is that what you thought that was? Me changing my mind? I already sold you, Mirasia Carver. It’s a done deal. You just belong to me until the end of Doc’s sleep cycle. I can’t stop the sale even if I wanted to. It’s final.”

Her knees went liquid under her. Mira didn’t even try to stop her fall as she collapsed to the floor. Pain shot up both knees as they slammed into the unforgiving metal. She stared up at Flint in horror.

“No. Don’t say that.”

Flint’s expression softened as he crouched naked in front of her to stare into her eyes. “I told you to obey me. You humiliated me in front of my crew when you ran away. You cost a lot of money to chase down. What was I supposed to do? Keep you when you didn’t want to be kept? I had no idea you’d still want to be mine when you were returned. I sold you to Iron before I knew you were ill. It’s done and nothing can change that.”

She reached for him, grabbing his hands. “Please, Flint. Use my money to buy me back. Don’t let him take me. I want to stay with you. Do you want me to crawl? I’m already begging.”

Flint jerked his hands from hers as he straightened to his full height. He moved away from her to another part of the room. He kept his back to her.

“He is set on the sale. He wants you and now he’ll have you in a few hours. Even if I offer him money for you so he’d make a profit he will not sell you back.”

Her mind was in a daze. “But I carry your mark. Doc said no cyborg would want me with another cyborg’s branding mark on me.”

Flint turned to frown at her. “He won’t keep you for long. He’ll sell you to another when he gets bored. I could buy you back when he’s done with you but...” He sighed. “I don’t think you will be the same.”

“You mean you don’t think I’ll be sane.”

Dark blue eyes looked away from her. “That and Iron made it clear after he purchased you that he’d be willing to rent you out to the men on the ship for a few

hours at a time. I didn't know until after we'd agreed to the sale." His eyes turned back to Mira. "Plenty of them were interested. I had plans for you, Mira. Those plans are broken now."

"What plans?" If she wasn't cried out already she probably would have started again.

"I wanted to breed. I wanted to have children with you. I was going to take you to Garden and make a family unit with you."

Pain and shock tore through her. "Why didn't you tell me that?"

"I had no reason to share my plans for our future with you. I owned you so I didn't feel the need to discuss it with you because I thought you might argue with me about it. I didn't want to make you emotional again. I didn't know how you would react to my plans. By the time Iron is done with you, having a family unit with you would be impossible. He'll have to make you sterile when he rents you out so you won't breed."

"You said I couldn't get pregnant by you."

"You can't get pregnant by me now. I haven't taken shots to activate my sperm to make them viable. Then I will be able to impregnate you. Not all cyborgs need them. Most cyborgs have viable sperm." He sighed. "Iron told me after I sold you that he was having your uterus removed. Most pleasure workers have that done to prevent pregnancies and if males get rough it reduces the risk of internal bleeding. There is less to damage." He shook his head. "He never mentioned any of this before the sale. I wouldn't have sold you to him if I had known all of his plans."

Mira got to her shaky legs and walked to the bed. She sat down hard and curled her arms around her legs, hugging them. She started to rock back and forth. Her future was going to be hell. Iron was going to turn her into a ship whore. She'd rather die than suffer what Iron had planned for her.

"I have to return you to Med, Mira," Flint said softly. "I was angry when I sold you. If I had known you would want to be returned to me, I wouldn't have made the deal with him. It is done. I can't make him sell you back to me."

Mira lifted her head to stare into his Flint's eyes. She didn't miss the regret there and she could swear she saw sadness reflected in the cyborg's gaze. It wasn't going to save her though from what Iron would do to her and allow other cyborgs to do to her. Anger and pain tore through her. Why couldn't Flint have just told her he wanted to have a family with her? She never would have run away. That was a relationship—having children together. If she'd known he had those kinds of plans, she wouldn't have been so hurt.

"Get dressed, Mira."

She didn't want to move. She shook her. "Kill me, Flint."

Shock hit his features. "What?"

"Please! Just kill me." She whispered the words.

"I won't do that." He frowned at her.

She stared into his eyes. "You can return me to Med but I won't let Iron have me. I'd rather jettison my body into space or bleed out than let someone besides you touch me. I'm not a whore." She took a shaky breath. "I won't be a whore."

Flint frowned at her, watching her, and said nothing. He turned away from her to stand silently. Long minutes passed. Finally it sank in that he wasn't going to help her by ending her life before it could turn into a nightmare.

"You took me off my shuttle, Flint. You took me away from my job, my family, and my friends." She stared at his back. "When I opened up that cleansing room door to you and looked into your eyes, I felt things instantly toward you. The first time you touched me I felt a strong connection between us." She paused. His body had tensed. "I just wanted to be more to you than something you owned. I wanted you to care about me the way I was starting to care about you. That's all I asked for and you left me in the emotional cold. That's why I ran. Don't let this happen to me. I trusted you from the moment you held out your hand to me. I put my hand in yours, and along with it, my life."

Flint slowly turned to face her. His dark eyes locked with Mira's.

"I ran away because I don't want you to break my heart. It was a mistake running from you. You're angry with me right now and you sold me. Don't you think that was a mistake? There is something between us, Flint. You feel it when we touch, just as I do. It scares me. We have almost nothing in common, yet I feel so much for you. I have no idea what kind of future is out there facing us—together." She paused, looking at him. "If you give me to that man you might as well just shoot me, Flint. You'll be killing me all the same. He's going to hurt me until I no longer want to live. Is that why you took me from that shuttle? So I could end up being a whore on this ship for men who'd make me wish I were dead? No. You took me because you wanted me."

"Mira..."

She stood and walked closer to him. "You want me as much as I want you. We both feel this. I know you're pissed off at me. I cost you money and time. I have money to pay it all back so what did you really lose?" She paused in front of him, searching his eyes and then ran her hand up his chest. She let her palm glide over his skin until her fingertips brushed his neck. She finally touched his short hair. "This will grow back. If you hand me over to that asshole I'll be gone forever. Don't do this, Flint. Don't let me go. You chased me in that damn pod, refusing to let me go, so don't let me go, damn it."

Flint's eyes closed. He took a deep breath. His head turned slightly, allowing Mira access to touch more of his hair. He took slow breaths before finally opening his eyes. He frowned down at Mira but his arms wrapped round her waist. His large hands gripped her firmly.

"You're difficult, Mira. I'll talk to Iron. I'll bargain with him but you owe me. Do you understand? If I get the sale revoked, you had better never try to escape from me again. We'll chalk this up to a learning experience. I'm trying to adjust to you being

human and you don't know much about cyborgs. We are proud, Mira. You reflect upon me. I command this crew. If I can't control my own—"

She sighed. "Slave? Property? Go ahead and say it."

He nodded. "If I can't control you it makes me look weak in front of them. It's my job to be in command of my men, Mira. Do you understand?"

She did understand. She nodded. "I get it."

He lifted her slowly up his body, walking them around the bed. He gently laid her down. "You're worn out still from healing. You'll stay here with me."

"Thank you, Flint," she said softly. Gratitude and relief filled her. He was keeping her. She had faith that he'd break the sale. He had to. "Just...thank you."

Flint ordered the lights off as he climbed into bed with her. Mira curled up flush against his large warm body. Flint held her tightly. It felt right, being in the cyborg's arms and Mira loved the feel of him holding her. She felt safe with Flint. She yawned, physically and emotionally exhausted.

Flint caressed her back, rubbing her spine. "Sleep, Mira. I'm here. No one will take you from me."

She nodded into his chest. "I swear you won't regret it."

His hand slid up her back higher so he could fist her long hair, gently rubbing the strands in his fingers. "It will be all right. When we reach Garden we'll be a family unit. I want to have children."

She nodded. "Will they be cyborgs?"

He hesitated. "Probably. I'm mostly made up of human clone material but all cyborgs have children who are physically flawed. We were purposely engineered flawed and it has carried on to our children. Cybernetics will make our children whole and healthy."

"Okay."

"Will this bother you?"

"Having little cyborgs?" She shook her head. "I hadn't planned on having a family for some years but I never planned on meeting you either."

Flint chuckled. "I never planned on you, Mira."

"You saved my life yet again. I really would want to die if you let someone else have me. I want to stay with you."

His hand stilled and then he continued to brush his fingers through her hair. "Sleep. You need it."

Chapter Eleven

Mira woke alone to find a tray of food at the end of the bed. Flint was gone but she was still in his room. That had to be a good sign. She used the cleaning unit and put on one of Flint's shirts. The entire time she ate she wondered if Flint was talking to Iron. What if Iron wouldn't sell her back? Fear hit her. It still hurt slightly that Flint had sold her in the first place. She finished breakfast.

She paced. Being locked in Flint's quarters was boring. He didn't have any entertainment units. Most living quarters carried vid players or music players. Flint's didn't. Hours passed before the doors finally opened. Flint walked in, wearing his uniform. His grim expression made her heart slow in dread.

"Is everything all right?" Mira asked, afraid.

Flint hesitated while the doors shut behind him. "Iron wasn't happy when I asked him to sell you back to me or when I reminded him of our longstanding friendship. I had to tell him how much I wanted to keep you to try to get him to revoke the sale."

"But did he sell me back?" She heard the desperation in her voice.

Flint hesitated again. "With conditions."

She moved to the bed and sat. "That doesn't sound good. What kind of conditions?"

Flint crossed his arms over his chest, his features were set in a grim mask. "He wanted to use your body for a few hours."

Dread hit her hard. She shook her head. "No. Please, Flint?"

His eyes narrowed. "I refused."

Relief washed through Mira as she nodded. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet. He's never had sex with a human but he was given one of the new females we took from the shuttle we boarded. He's nervous about touching her. Cyborg women and pleasure ship females far out in space are not fully human. I won't let him have you but he'd like to see a demonstration."

Startled, she let his words sink in. "I don't understand. What kind of demonstration?"

"He's going to watch us. He wants me to show him how to have sex with a human."

Panic hit her. "No way."

"Would you prefer he not sell you back to me? The only reason he wanted you in the first place it seems was because you've had sex with me. He didn't want to keep you long term because I'd branded you but he wants his new slave to enjoy his touch. He

thought renting you out afterward would make the money back that he paid for you. I won't force you, Mira—it's your choice. I'm not particularly thrilled with the idea of performing for someone during intercourse. That's not something I'm into but I am willing to ignore him to keep you. Are you willing to ignore him to stay with me? He won't use your body. I made him swear to that."

Mira stared at Flint in shock. She wasn't even sure how to respond to such a request. Did she really have a choice? If she said no then Iron would refuse to break the sale and he'd take her away from Flint.

"It will just be Iron? No one else will be here?"

"Just Iron and I won't allow him to use your body."

"So he'll be in the room with us?"

Flint nodded. "He might ask questions. Iron is very curious."

"Isn't sex with me just like sex with a cyborg woman or a pleasure worker?"

"No. You're more fragile. He doesn't want to damage his female."

"Well, you figured it out. Can't he just figure it out too?"

Flint hesitated. "I am unique in the fact that I worked with humans. I have dealt a lot with sympathizers to our causes who help smuggle things to us from Earth. I made human male friends and had many conversations with them about sex when a few of the human females were interested in sex with me. I didn't have to seduce them and make them want me as Iron will have to do with his slave. He's interested in making a family unit with her as well. She is resistant to him so he wants to learn about how to seduce a human woman to pleasure her so his slave wants him."

"So I'm going to be a show-and-tell on how to turn on a human woman? Is that the sum of it?"

Flint nodded. "It was the condition he gave me to release you from our deal of sale. It is your choice, Mira. I won't force you."

She studied him. "Isn't that the point though? This woman is unwilling and he wants to seduce her? You could seduce me. You have."

His eyes narrowed. "I see. You are agreeing, but you want to do this without saying the words aloud, as if you are unwilling."

She swallowed and repeated, "You could seduce me. All I ask is that you blindfold me."

She saw shock hit his features. "Why?"

"I would be really uncomfortable looking at him, knowing he was watching you touch me. Do you swear you won't let him use me?"

"I swear to you that no man but me will take you. I'd fight him if he tried to possess you. You are mine, Mira."

She stared into his eyes. "I trust you. I need to be blindfolded so I can pretend it is just us."

Flint nodded. "Whatever makes it easier for you will make it easier on me." He went to his drawers where he removed a few items. He tucked them under his arm. "Let's go."

She paled. "Now?"

"Now. He is impatient to touch his new acquisition."

She was nervous. "Okay." She walked closer to Flint and gaze up at him. "I guess this is a small price to pay."

"You will be blindfolded. I have no shield to hide behind and I really am private about my matters."

She blushed. "So am I."

He gripped her arm. "Let's go. He's waiting."

"Where are we going?"

She let Flint lead her out of the room to head away from the lift. "There is a room down the hall that isn't in use at the moment. I didn't want him in our room and he has his human female tied to his bed."

Flint stopped in front of a door to press his hand to the scanner. The doors slid open and Mira saw that Iron was already in the room. The man was leaning against a wall. He eyed Mira with then his cool look shifted to Flint.

"Are you returning her to me or is she willing?"

"She's willing but she wants to be blindfolded so she doesn't have to be aware of you watching her."

Iron grinned, looking highly amused as he met Mira's eyes, arching his eyebrow at her. "Really?"

Flint released Mira and pointed to the bed. "Strip and get on your back."

Mira's face flushed as she looked at the bed, which wasn't like Flint's. This was just a metal single-size cot, though it was longer than a standard-size Earth one. Cyborgs were tall. She kept her back to Iron as she stripped quickly. She was really embarrassed because she knew he could see her ass. A hand gripped her arm and she gasped, her head jerking around, as she covered her breasts with her hands.

Flint met her eyes and arched an eyebrow at her. "You're a little jumpy. I told you that I'm the only one who will possess you."

"You startled me. I didn't hear you come up behind me."

"I don't have a blindfold but I brought a belt I use for sparring. Ready?"

He released her. He showed Mira the belt—a soft cloth at least four inches wide. He placed it over her eyes. The belt went from the tip of her nose to her forehead. He tied it carefully before turning her to face him.

She was mostly blind. She could see a tiny bit of light peeking in if she looked down her nose where the belt didn't totally cover since Flint had been careful to not block her nose completely so she could breathe. She realized she faced Iron as well. The blindfold

helped her not feel completely embarrassed that Iron was looking at her body. She decided to shut her eyes tightly and kept them that way.

Flint gripped her gently and eased her down on the cot. His big hands guided her until she was lying flat on her back on the soft mattress. "I'm going to tie her down," Flint said softly. "Your human doesn't want you to touch her so we'll simulate this accurately." Flint released Mira. Seconds later his large hand curled around her arm.

"Easy, Mira. You look damn tense. I'm going to bind your arms above you. Your wrists are still injured so I'm going to bind you above the elbows. It's just me touching you as we discussed."

She nodded, forcing herself to relax as much as possible. She was naked on her back on the cot as Flint bound each of her arms. He secured them together so she was palm to palm and the binding ran from just above her elbows to just under them. Flint released her, giving the binding an experimental tug. Her arms wouldn't come down and they wouldn't move more than a few inches. She tugged harder, realizing she wasn't going to get free.

"Using a cot like this will be preferable to your bed. You might want to grab one of these from supply to take to your room." Flint spoke softly.

"Why?" Iron's voice sounded huskier than usual.

"The bars are perfect to restrain a woman. Let me undress and I'll show you what you can do to your human. Strip off your shirt and give it to me. I don't have a spare and I just realized how perfect these cots are for total control."

Mira panicked. He was asking Iron to remove his shirt? Had Flint lied to her? Would he let Iron touch her? He'd given Mira his word. Maybe she should ask for the blindfold off so she'd know for sure Iron wasn't near her.

"Please take the blindfold off," she said softly. "I want to make sure you don't let him touch me, Flint."

Silence met her demand until a deep sigh sounded. "I gave you my word, Mira. It should be enough. No one will enjoy your body but me."

"Please, Flint."

He sounded angry when he spoke. "I swear to you that I will be the only one to fuck you. You doubt my word?"

Shit. She'd pissed him off. Mira shook her head.

"I'm going to use my shirt and his to bind your legs. Don't fight me."

That was the only warning she got before material wrapped around her calf right under her knee and then her leg was shoved upward and to the side. Flint forced her knees to bend in his hold. She gasped from the shock of it. She tried to pull her leg away but Flint just chuckled as he tied the arms of the shirt around the side of the cot.

When he gripped the other leg she fought but it didn't do her any good. Flint was much stronger as he put her where he wanted her. She ended up being tied just under the knees with her legs spread wide apart. She couldn't move anything but her feet

since the shirt material stretched from knee almost to ankle. She couldn't straighten her legs or close them.

Well, so much for her plan of being seduced, she thought. This was not going the way she'd imagined.

She burned with embarrassment. Her knees were almost breast level, her ass barely touched the bed. Being totally exposed made her squirm. Every inch of her pussy was revealed for Flint and Iron to view.

"She had her hair permanently removed. Humans usually have hair here." A fingertip brushed Mira's mound, causing her to tense. "It's very soft skin. I prefer her without the hair."

"May I?" Iron sounded damn close.

"No," Flint almost growled. "No touching."

"I just wanted to touch her skin."

"You'll discover how soft a human's skin is when you go to your room, Iron. You do not touch this one. She's mine."

Iron didn't sound happy as he said, "Proceed."

"You have to be a little more careful with humans. They aren't built to endure our violent tendencies. You'd hurt your woman if you took her like one of ours. Remember that when you enter her. Our cocks are larger than most of their males. Enter slowly and carefully to give her body time to adjust."

"Understood. She looks damn small."

The cot mattress dipped as weight settled on it, making Mira tense up again. Flint was just going to fuck her obviously, no foreplay, no preparing her. She was experiencing too much fear and embarrassment to be turned-on. She waited to feel the pain when he pushed into her but instead his fingers slid from the top of her mound down her slit. He removed his hand.

"Hand me that. Thank you for remembering to bring it. I thought she might be stressed."

"Hand you what?" Mira was nervous.

Flint chuckled. "Silence, Mira. You are show-and-tell. Show-and-tell doesn't talk."

She bit back a nasty reply only because this would keep her with Flint. She knew Flint didn't want to do this any more than she did. The least she could do was shut up and suffer though this without making it worse.

"She obeys you." Iron chuckled. "Now."

"Shut up and watch, Iron."

Flint's finger returned to Mira's slit. A soft gasp escaped her. His finger was coated in something wet, slippery, and cool as he rubbed circles over her clit. He was using some kind of lube on her.

"This is a core spot," Flint said softly. "Play with her here with your fingers or your tongue but not too hard. Which feels better, Mira?" He rubbed up and down and then did slow circles again.

A moan tore from Mira. She was horrified by how turned-on she was getting but with Flint's lubed finger rubbing her clit she couldn't stop the pleasure the sensation was sending through her. She tried to buck against his finger but she was tied down too tightly. Her nub seemed to swell and Flint's circling finger sent her into pleasure overload, making it nearly impossible to think.

"Which feels better?" Flint switched from circles to sliding up and down. "Answer me."

"Both," she panted.

"She's getting wet and I can smell how aroused she is." Iron's voice lowered to a husky tone. "Put your fingers in her and show me."

Flint didn't let up with his finger on her clit so Mira thought he'd ignore Iron's demand but instead he used his other hand. His fingertips rubbed lower at the entrance of her pussy. Mira cried out as he slowly pushed two fingers inside her. The stretching of her inner walls was sheer bliss. He pushed his fingers in deep and then stopped. He withdrew almost totally. Shock hit her at the uncomfortable pressure she experienced as he separated his fingers, spreading her vagina. It started to turn to pain.

"Flint, it hurts."

He froze. "She's tight." The pressure eased as he put his fingers back together. "It's all the same inside but always remember to be gentle and enter slowly. She's damn tight. It almost hurts me when she comes. She clamps down on me like a strong fist."

Iron sighed. "I don't suppose you'd let me feel that, would you?"

"No."

"Just my fingers." Iron sounded closer. "You owe me for releasing her back to you. I could have made a large profit, Flint. I had a lot of high offers for her body from the men on both ships."

Flint hadn't stopped rubbing her clit while both men talked. Mira was close to coming. She wiggled and arched her back. Flint withdrew his fingers. She heard him take a deep breath.

"No," he said softly.

She was relieved that he had refused but that feeling was short lived as Flint's finger left her clit. She wanted to protest him stopping. She was so damn close to coming. Before she could voice her objection his thumb pressed down on her clit, applying more pressure against the sensitive nub, massaging it in an up-and-down motion. She moaned as her body strained against the restraints. Flint moved a little on the bed, making the mattress shift with his weight.

"She likes it fast and hard. Inside you should rub upward. If you felt inside her..." he paused. "You would apply pressure there with every thrust or two of your fingers."

"I understand." Iron was closer. His voice was next to Mira, about hip level, and he was breathing faster and heavier.

Mira could hardly think. She bucked against the restraints. She couldn't move much at all. She moaned and tossed her head. Two fingers breached her pussy and pushed back in. The fingers slowly eased deeper inside her.

Mira threw her head back, moaning louder as Flint started to fuck her with his fingers as his thumb picked up the pace while rubbing her clit. He applied pressure against her G-spot just as he'd explained to Iron. It was too much.

Her body tensed and her muscles clenched when pleasure exploded through her body. Mira cried out Flint's name. Her vaginal walls clamped down on Flint's fingers, twitching. The climax continued since Flint didn't ease up on her clit though he had stopped fucking her with his fingers. His fingers were locked inside her as her muscles twitched around him.

"Damn," Iron groaned.

Flint's thumb released the pressure on her clit as he removed his fingers from her body. Mira went limp, trying to catch her breath.

"I told you," Flint said softly. "Have you learned enough?"

"I want to watch you possess her."

She heard Flint nearly snarl, sounding really angry. "I think I more than paid the debt, Iron."

The man hesitated. "I'll leave you then. Thank you, Flint."

"Thank you for releasing me from the contract."

Mira heard the doors open and then shut. The bed dipped as weight shifted on it. The sound of clothes rustling was distinctive. "I'm going to possess you," Flint growled.

"He's gone?"

Flint reached up, shoving away the blindfold. Their eyes met as he came down on her, entering her body hard and fast, burying himself balls deep in her pussy. Mira cried out in surprise and pleasure. Flint's pants were just shoved down his thighs. She was soaking wet, ready for him, as he started to fuck her hard and deep. He braced his arms next to her head. The fact that she couldn't move, had no control, that she was totally at Flint's mercy wasn't lost on her, but to her shock, she was really turned-on by it.

"I'll make this up to you later."

She couldn't talk. Flint was pounding into her body. The pleasure was almost painful. She stared up into his face with, fighting the urge to shut her eyes to feel the bliss of him but she wanted to watch Flint's face. His eyes were closed and then she saw an almost agonized look on his face a second before his body tensed as his mouth opened. He jerked inside her with every spurt of semen that shot into her as he came.

Flint's beautiful eyes opened when he stopped moving his cock inside her. His expression was solemn. "I knew I wouldn't last. I felt the need to claim you and I got too turned-on to hold out."

"It's all right."

He chuckled. "I'll make it up to you in our room." He shifted his weight so he could balance on one arm. He eyed the restraints and then slowly grinned. His gaze lowered to hers. "Or I could make it up to you now."

"I'd like to go back to the room."

He smiled. "You can't stop me though, can you?"

She stared at him, unsure of what he would do. He smiled wider as he backed up so he knelt between her spread, tied-open thighs. His eyes lifted and she saw his sexy eyes narrow.

"How many times can I make you come for me?"

She was speechless. She didn't know the answer. Flint chuckled as he reached for her, his fingers teasing her clit. He never looked away from her.

"We're going to find out."

Her heart pounded as Flint's other hand reached up her body. His fingers cupped her breast. He squeezed hard enough to make her moan but he didn't hurt her.

"I never want you to forget who you belong to, Mira. I'm going to make you come over and over again. Sometimes I'll fuck you between bouts of you screaming out my name."

"Flint," she moaned.

"That's right. Tell me you belong to me."

He pinched her clit, teasing it by giving light tugs as the thumb and finger of his other hand repeated the same action to her nipple.

She was turned-on again. "I'm yours, Flint. I belong to you."

"Don't ever forget it, Mirasia Carver. Never run from me again. Swear it to me."

"I swear," she moaned.

Chapter Twelve

Mira was damn nervous as she dressed in the shirt that bared her shoulders and put on pants. She paced, her gaze kept going to the door, knowing that at any moment Flint was would return. They'd reached Garden and Flint had gone to Control two hours before when they'd flown within range of the planet. He was due any time to collect her and take the *Rally* down to the surface.

What would life be like on Garden? When she'd asked Flint, being his vague self, all he had told her was that it would be fine. She hated vague. She was bursting with questions. She was about to be transferred to a planet of cyborgs. She paced the room again and was startled when the doors slid open. Flint arched an eyebrow at her when he stepped inside, the doors sliding shut behind him.

She realized that she missed his long hair. He looked handsome with the short cut but the longer hair had been really sexy. She supposed it was her fault that he'd cut it when he'd been angry with her. Mira bit her lip. "Why did you chop off your hair?"

Flint studied her for long seconds before he answered. "You subconsciously played with it and after you left it was a reminder of you that I no longer wished to keep." He paused. "You look frightened. It is just me."

"It's not you I'm afraid of. What is going to happen on the surface?"

"We'll land and then I have a meeting to go to. We'll go to my home right afterward. You are frightened for no reason. No one will harm you. You belong to me."

She was grateful that he hadn't called her his property. She'd realized since the day he'd broken the deal to sell her that he had not called her property again. He just stated that she belonged to him. In her mind, belonging to him beat being called property. She nodded.

The past four days had been wonderful between them. Flint had stayed in their room with her from the time he'd untied her from the cot until he'd left that morning to go to Control. He had even helped her pack up their belongings though she only owned a few articles of clothing. He leaned down to grab the bag. He almost looked amused.

"The *Rally* waits for us. Let's go."

She moved to him and gripped his hand. He froze, looking down at their hands. She frowned, staring up at him.

"What's wrong?"

No emotion showed on his face or in his eyes. "It is inappropriate for you to touch me in public."

Hurt hit her. "Oh." She released his hand. "I don't want to embarrass you. Should I walk five feet behind you or something like a good slave?"

His dark eyes narrowed. "Garden is not Earth. I would not be embarrassed by you touching me but public displays of physical relationships are not done. The fact that we're physical will be apparent to anyone who sees my brand on you. A male doesn't mark a female as I have you unless he values her greatly. I'd be..." He paused. "Dead if I wasn't aware of you sexually and didn't fully appreciate you in every sense. It isn't appropriate to hold hands or kiss in public places here. That just isn't done with cyborgs so touching me wouldn't be proper conduct."

Some of her pain eased. "Oh. May I hold your hand while we're still on the *Star*? It's not like we're walking down the center of town."

"It's a city and some of the new crew has arrived already. You will see new faces as we board the *Rally*. The *Star* is set to go on a mission in twelve hours. The crew returning to Garden has replacements who reported to the *Star* over an hour ago."

She nodded. "So should I walk behind you? Beside you? In front of you? I don't know what is expected of me." She paused, trying not to sound flip. "What is proper slave etiquette?"

"You may walk at my side and always stay close to me. When we enter the government building you should walk behind me. Never speak unless you are spoken to but no one should speak to you."

Her gut twisted just a little. "Why wouldn't they talk to me?" She was afraid he'd say that she was comparable to a pet and that she wouldn't even be worthy of someone talking to her since she was just property.

"You belong to me. You are mine. Without consent first it would be rude for someone to address you."

She could live with that. She nodded. "Okay."

He moved suddenly, his large palm cupped her cheek, a smile curving his generous lips. "Don't worry, Mira. In a short time we will be home and it will be more comfortable for you. You might be stared at when we are in public. While there are some humans on Garden, human females are a rarity and even then they are a lot older. You are also smaller than the humans I've seen here so you will draw attention. Just stay close to me and everything will be fine. I would never let anyone hurt you."

Mira's hands brushed his chest. He was wearing his black outfit with the chest plating under the leather material. He looked sexy in his uniform but she hated not being able to touch his skin. She gave him a smile.

"Thank you for comforting me."

"We must go." Flint released her face, turning to palm the scanner so the doors slid open.

Mira almost ran to keep up with Flint's lengthy stride. The man had long damn legs. She touched him in the lift because they were alone. When the doors shut she reached over to grip his arm as the lift dropped.

"I really hate this damn thing. Would it kill someone to slow the speed on it?"

Chuckling, Flint grinned at her. When it stopped and the doors opened Mira released his arm. She walked quickly after him, following him into a large cargo area. She was shocked as she spotted a lot of strange cyborg men. She sensed eyes on her and met more than a few curious looks from the large cyborgs.

"They are unloading their things and resupplying the ship," Flint said softly as they walked to where the *Rally* was docked to the *Star*.

Iron was waiting for them by the docking sleeve, wearing his uniform. He smiled at Flint. Flint stopped to nod at the other man. Their eyes locked.

"You're lucky that your shift is over. I guess I'll see you in six months." Iron gave Flint another nod. His gaze jerked to Mira and then back to Flint. "Good luck."

"Good luck to you. How is your human coming along?"

Iron smiled. "Your instructions were excellent."

"Safe travel," Flint said softly. "Keep in contact. Otherwise I'll see you next shift."

The *Rally's* cargo area was packed. Flint led her to a corner free of boxes, dropped his bag and then one of his arms suddenly encircled Mira, pulling her into his body. That arm locked around her waist as his other arm reached up to find a grip on the wall. Mira stared up at him.

"I thought you couldn't touch me in public. If we were any closer..." She winked at him.

Flint grinned down at her. "The *Rally* is about to drop from the *Star*. It literally drops. Hang on to me tightly."

"Oh shit, it's not as bad as the lift, is it? I hate that falling feeling." As she spoke she locked her arms around his waist and clasped her fingers together at his spine.

Flint's arm around her waist tightened. "It's worse. I'm sorry. We'll drop from the *Star* and then hit the atmosphere. It can get a little bumpy. Just hold on to me tightly."

"Where are the damn seat belts?" She frantically looked around the cargo area.

A chuckle came from Flint.

Mira's head shot up and she sent him a dirty look. "That wasn't a joke. Where are seats with belts?"

"We're cyborgs. We just brace and hold on. It will be fine."

Her mouth dropped open as she stared at him. She heard a loud, short, fast pulse of an alarm sound. "I'm not a cyborg."

"Hang on, Mira."

His body tensed and she wanted to curse a blue streak but instead she buried her face in his chest. She felt a sharp jerk like something bumped the *Rally* right before they fell, making her stomach feel like it hit her throat. If Flint hadn't held her around her waist she knew she would have been thrown to the floor when the falling sensation suddenly changed to a sharp jerk that sent vibrations shock-waving up her legs from the floor.

"The atmosphere," Flint said softly. "It will be over soon."

Mira whimpered in pain. The deck was vibrating hard enough that she could feel each painful jolt in her bones. The ache grew worse, more powerful, into sheer agony.

"What's wrong?"

"It hurts. My legs..." She whimpered as the floor vibrated harder.

The hold on her waist tightened as Flint lifted her up his body with one arm so her feet left the floor. She released him around his waist to reach up. She gripped his shoulders, climbing higher up his large frame. The relief was instant when her feet left the floor, the pain radiating up her legs gone. Mira ended up with her arms wrapped around his neck and her knees gripping his hips. She couldn't wrap her legs around Flint's waist because his back was braced against the wall. She knew he couldn't release the bar above his head. His hold on it was keeping them both from being thrown to the floor.

"Better?"

"Yes. Isn't that hurting your legs? It felt like my bones were going to shake apart."

Flint met her eyes. "I'm sorry. Your bone density isn't as strong as ours and you don't have enough muscle mass. I didn't think it would hurt you. Is my body absorbing enough of the vibrations so you aren't in pain?"

She nodded. "Yes. Am I holding up enough of my own weight?"

"You're doing great."

When the *Rally* stopped shaking a minute later, Flint had her ease back down his body. She was glad the floor wasn't a big, painful vibrator anymore. She turned her head to study the cargo area, spotting three cyborgs in the cargo area that she hadn't noticed before. They were braced against the bulkheads like Flint, gripping onto the ship to keep them in place. They had to have watched everything that happened between her and Flint. She jerked her attention back to Flint, who was watching her silently.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "We're in public and I was just literally on you."

His lips twitched with amusement. "This was acceptable."

She grinned back. "I see. So you can touch me and I can climb up your body if we're hurtling toward a planet surface?"

"Exactly."

The *Rally* landed with a light bump. The strong engines powered down as Flint released his grip above his head, gently releasing his tight hold on Mira too. "Are you all right to walk? Do your legs hurt still?"

"I'm good."

He reached down to grip his bag. She heard the cargo doors open as a loud motor sounded. Warm air whooshed into the cargo area. Mira breathed in fresh air, instantly enjoying the luxury. It had been weeks since she'd smelled anything so wonderful. A huge difference separated artificial oxygen from natural air. The scent of life came with

the real thing and she smelled it in the woodsy and terrific scent drifting into the shuttle.

Mira followed Flint out of the cargo area to a metal ramp that ran from the *Rally* to the ground below. She stared in open-mouthed wonder at the sight before her. Large trees decorated the sides of the landing site. She looked up in wonder at the sun. She thought Flint had told her it was smaller but it looked bigger than the one on Earth. Flint was halfway down the ramp before he paused, turning his head to study her.

"Let's go."

She nodded, forcing her legs to move. "I was just looking."

"I want to get home, Mira. You can look your fill for the rest of your life. We have a great view from our home."

It hit her suddenly that this was her new home and it was a stunning feeling to not call Earth home anymore. She shoved her thoughts back though to follow Flint to a large open vehicle that waited for them. Flint walked up the ramp into it and turned, holding out his hand to assist her since the ramp was steep. Mira gripped his hand gratefully as he helped her walk up into the open space of the bed of the vehicle. It wasn't like any kind of vehicle she'd ever seen before, just a box on wheels with no cab in the front and from what she could see, it had no driver either.

"What is this thing?"

"This is a completely automated transport designed for hauling cargo. When the ramp is lifted it will carry us to the intake center gate."

He moved to the side and dropped his bag, motioning her to move closer to his side. "Hang on."

She gripped the side of the vehicle and looked toward the *Rally*—from the outside, she realized it was a huge ship by shuttle standards—before returning her full attention to her new surroundings.

"Is the entire planet like this?" She motioned to the trees. Thick woods surrounded everything but the landing. "It looks like a thick forest with the exception of that wall I see peeking over the trees."

"No. Garden is mostly water. We're inland on one of the few land masses. This is the largest land mass on the planet."

"So there are large oceans?"

"Fresh water oceans. This isn't like Earth. We don't have saltwater oceans. You could drink the water anywhere on the planet."

"Cool."

He nodded. "You seem to be breathing fine."

"The air feels a little different but it's great. It could just feel different because it's fresh."

"If you have problems let me know. I can take you to Medical and they can implant you with something to help you while you adjust."

"I'm sure I'll be fine."

The three men from the cargo area climbed in, along with about nine men she recognized from the *Star*. When the ramp lifted the vehicle jerked into motion instantly. Mira tightened her grip, watching raptly as it moved along the road.

"How large is the city?"

"There are just over fifty buildings. Building has been slow."

"What about housing?"

"We live in the cities. We found it is safer."

That statement made Mira jerk her head in his direction and meet his eyes. "Safer from what?"

He hesitated. "The planet's inhabitants aren't friendly. We're the superior life on the planet but other life exists here. We would never harm existing life on a planet so we surrounded the city with a security wall to keep them out."

"What kind of life exists here?"

He hesitated again. "There are amphibian-humanoid life forms. They are not as civilized as we would wish but they haven't tried to war with us. They stay near the oceans so we took the inland areas, which they mostly avoid. There is a lot of small animal wildlife and some large species that are dangerous, like Earth's bears and tigers. The only intelligent humanoid life forms are the amphibians though. We try to keep the peace with them."

"Wow. What exactly do they look like?"

He hesitated. "You will see."

"Some of them are in the city?"

He shook his head. "No. They avoid us and we avoid them. We've found that we get along better that way. They have attacked some of our scouting parties in the past. There are vids of them that I can show you if you are curious."

She nodded. They approached the huge wall that ran as far as the eye could see. "Wow. That's some damn wall."

"Yes. It is a seventy-five-foot-high defensive line. No Garden resident life forms can breach it except harmless bird species and bugs. You will be safe inside the wall. Just never leave the city, Mira. This is not a world you want to explore. You'd end up being captured by the amphibians and I have no idea what they would do in that situation. When we catch them we just release them unharmed but they have never captured any of our people so we are unsure of their intentions."

The gate in the wall automatically opened as the transport vehicle approached. Cyborg City came into view, showing Mira dark blue buildings that were all uniform—same height, color, and shape. The streets were perfect, as if someone had taken the time to exactly measure everything. There was no litter, making it the cleanest place she'd ever seen.

Cyborgs walked from one building to another, mostly wearing loose blue clothing like jumpsuits, while fewer of them wore black pants with different-colored shirts. She saw some women and she couldn't help but stare. The cyborg women were tall, well-muscled, with athletic proportions. She didn't see a single white-skinned person like her. She saw cyborgs in all shades of gray, from a very light, almost dolphin-blue shade to a color much darker than Flint. A few were almost charcoal gray.

When the transport stopped in front of a building, the ramp automatically slid out. Flint leaned down, gripped his bag and nodded at Mira. "Stick close to me."

Flint didn't even have to tell her that. Mira was afraid. She was the only human she could see. She saw heads turning, some cyborgs halted, giving their full attention to Mira. She even noticed some of them were coming out of buildings to stare openly at her as she reached the top of the ramp. Flint braced his legs halfway down, reaching back to offer his hand to Mira.

"Ignore them," he said softly. "Some of them haven't seen a real human woman before. We have a few elderly human females who left Earth when we did, sympathizers, but they stay inside for the most part. They are just curious about you."

He helped her down the steep ramp but released her hand at the bottom. He turned on his heel, heading for the nearest building. Mira glanced around nervously, seeing that there had to be a hundred cyborgs staring at her and it looked like more were walking their way to get a better look at her. She almost ran behind Flint, not wanting to let more than a few feet get between them. She was betting, with human/cyborg history, that humans probably weren't real popular in the cyborg world.

A male dressed in a black uniform nodded at Flint as they entered the building. When he saw Mira he lunged into her path, getting between Flint and Mira. She gasped, jerking to a halt to avoid slamming into the huge, muscular cyborg. He scared the shit out of her. His eyes were black to match his hair and his skin was startling in contrast – a light blue-tinted gray. He looked furious as he glared down at her.

"What are you doing?"

Flint was there all of the sudden, moving around the man, shoving the other cyborg away from Mira as Flint gripped her arm. He jerked her farther back, stepping in front of her to block her body from the cyborg in black.

"She's human!" The cyborg sounded furious. "You can't bring one of them in here."

"She's my property. Are you blind to her markings? She goes where I go." Flint snarled the words. "Is your training so inept that a little thing like her is something you consider a threat? I'll protect you from her, guard."

The two cyborgs glared at each other as Mira's fear mounted. The guard seemed to hate her and she was shocked that he considered her a threat. She swallowed hard before finding her voice. She was terrified Flint and the other cyborg were going to come to blows over her and she wanted to avoid that.

"I'm just a sales representative from Firmaline."

The guard moved a little so he could see her better. A slow frown formed on the man's lips. "Firmaline? Is that the Earth company that sells beauty products to females to keep them from aging?"

She nodded. "We call them health enhancers. We sell a lot of products to men too. They aren't just for enhancing looks. They literally slow the aging process."

The guard actually chuckled and his black gaze slid to Flint. "You enslaved a beauty consultant?"

"I'm a sales representative, not a beauty consultant." Mira was irritated.

Flint sighed. "May we pass now? She's not a threat."

The guard nodded. "Proceed. I can't wait for Arrion to meet her. Did you bring her as a present to Arrion?"

"No." Flint sounded pissed. "Don't purposely aggravate me. You can see from her markings that she's mine and no gift."

"That's a shame." The guard chuckled. "I would have escorted you to Arrion's office myself, just to see the reaction of being gifted with a beauty consultant, if you had grown tired of owning a human."

Flint looked annoyed. "Follow me, Mirasia Carver."

She had noticed that Flint addressed her by her full name when other cyborgs were around. She followed him into a lift. When the doors swished shut Mira realized that Flint still looked furious as he shot her a grim look.

"I apologize. Are you all right?"

"I can't believe he thought I was dangerous."

A grin split Flint's lips. "It was amusing. You're not secretly a trained human assassin, are you, Mira?"

"If I were, I would have kicked mutant pirate ass when they boarded the pod."

His smile instantly died, looking pissed off in a heartbeat, making Mira want to kick herself for reminding him that she'd run away from him. She swallowed as the lift stopped. Flint didn't look at her as he stepped out of the small space so she just followed him closely. She saw glass doors leading into a large office with a male cyborg in a blue jumpsuit sitting behind a desk. The cyborg looked up and nodded at Flint as they walked into the room.

"You're back," the cyborg grinned. "How was deep space?"

"It is the same as always." Flint chuckled as he spoke. "How are you, Zare?"

"Good. I'm the same as before. Arrion is waiting for you." The man's focus slid to Mira. "You brought a souvenir back?"

"This is Mirasia Carver."

Zare frowned at her. "She's human."

"She is." Flint sighed. "I won't keep Arrion waiting."

Flint moved forward with Mira on his heels. He'd told her to stick close so she followed him to a room with an open door. As Flint walked inside, Mira got a look at the large private office with a terrific view out the large windows along one wall. She could see the edge of the city and the woods. In the distance an ocean was visible. It was barely in view but there. They had to be on a high floor in the building to get such a scenic view.

A female cyborg walked out of a side door. Mira turned her attention to the woman, noticing immediately that her skin was almost the same light shade as Flint's. She had white hair, big blue eyes that were startling in their light color, with long white eyelashes that surrounded those compelling eyes. The woman wore a tight black shirt that revealed cleavage and she wore a black leather miniskirt with high-heeled shoes. The woman's legs were muscular and well shaped. She was a gorgeous Amazon of a cyborg woman.

"Flint," the woman almost purred. "You're back." She closed the distance in a few long-legged steps to throw her arms around Flint, hugging him hard. "I've missed you."

Flint tensed, hesitating before giving the woman a hug by gripping her hips. He let her hold him for a few seconds before releasing her to step back, almost forcing the woman to let him go. They were almost the same height. The woman had to be six-foot-two in low heels. Mira's jealous streak roared to life. Were Flint and the woman lovers? Ex-lovers? The cyborg woman looked as if she were sexually interested in Flint, making Mira instantly dislike her. She didn't like feeling the green monster that gripped her.

"This assignment was too damn long." The woman sat on the edge of her desk and spread her thighs a few inches apart, her ass barely touching the piece of furniture. She crossed her arms under her breasts, which pushed up her cleavage dangerously high, to the rim of her shirt, exposing a healthy amount of cleavage. "I've really missed you. Have you considered my unit offer?"

Flint looked irritated. "Arrion, I considered it but I decided I have to refuse your offer."

Shock showed on the woman's face. "What?" She let her arms drop to her sides as she pushed away from the desk, standing again. "I was so sure you'd agree that I've had the paperwork drawn up and Darbis has given his consent. I also contacted Roth and he said he didn't care who I picked to close our unit since he is gone so much that whoever I bring into our bond won't affect him."

"You know my feelings on the matter." Flint's voice had gone cold.

"Yes but I'm perfect for you, Flint. Roth is gone so much that he's only on the planet for a week here and there. You and Darbis can easily avoid each other with mission scheduling so you would have me alone plenty of months in the year."

"I understand and I'm grateful for the offer but I have to refuse." Flint's voice took on a harder edge. "That's my decision. No thank you."

“Who else is going to agree to a unit offer with you? You’re gone too much. I can’t think of one female who wants that. You’ll never get another offer this perfect again. You know it and I know it. You can’t refuse me, Flint. I won’t allow it.”

Flint took a deep breath. “I have another option and I’m taking it. I am reporting in today to my supervisor as my job requires me to do and I have sent you full reports. The salvages were a success. I will report for duty on my assigned date. I also will be sending you a request for family unit quarters aboard the *Star* upon my return to duty. I will need more room to accommodate a family unit because I fully intend to need it. As detailed in my contract, you are given notice so you can have the *Star’s* quarters enlarged for those purposes.”

“You can’t be serious.”

The woman looked shocked as she looked away from Flint, finally noticing Mira standing in the doorway. The woman jumped, startled, and then frowned.

Mira saw the woman’s eyes narrow she could almost see the woman’s brain working. The female cyborg had that look of calculation in her eyes as she visually inspected Mira and then stared openly at the branding marks on Mira’s exposed shoulders. Rage showed on the woman’s features as she moved closer, glaring at the tattoo. She walked slowly around Mira but kept a few feet of distance between their bodies.

“You branded a human slave? When the hell did you buy one?” Arrion’s voice shook with fury.

Flint sighed. “I didn’t buy her. I took her off a shuttle we stopped for salvage. It was an easy target that happened to come within radar. If you read my reports when I transmitted them to you then you would know this already.”

Arrion spun, glaring at Flint. “You’re up to something. You don’t own slaves. You abhor that I own three. You think it’s cruel.”

Shock hit Mira as her eyes flew to Flint. If he didn’t believe in slavery then why had he kidnapped her off the ship to make her one? Flint glanced at Mira, met her stunned gaze, and then his eyes narrowed on Arrion.

“You own slaves to work for you without payment. That isn’t why I branded her.”

The woman walked to Flint, glaring at him. Mira saw the woman pale as she gasped. Her head jerked in Mira’s direction to stare at her. Arrion definitely looked stunned. Her head snapped back to Flint.

“You can’t be serious. A human? A slave? Property?” The woman snorted. “They won’t allow it. If you think you’re being smart to avoid the laws then you are wrong.”

Flint straightened his shoulders, his expression stoic. “I checked it out and it’s legal. They will allow it with a human.” He slowly gave the woman a cold smile. “I win. I am getting exactly what I want and I want her.”

The woman softly cursed, spun around and almost stumbled away from Flint. She walked around her desk to drop heavily into her seat. She still looked at Flint with shock.

“You can’t do this, Flint. What kind of result could come of it? Have you thought about it? Look at her. She’s not good material. What I’m offering you is the best deal you’re ever going to get. Don’t do this. I won’t give you another chance if you don’t drop this crazy plan of yours immediately.”

“I won’t need another chance. I’ve come here, I’ve done my duty, and now I’m eager to get home. It’s been too damn long since I saw it.”

Flint turned his back on the woman. “Let’s go, Mira.”

He had called her by name without being formal. The woman cyborg looked pissed. Flint walked for the door and Mira was more than ready to go. She was pretty damn sure Flint had slept with Arrion. She definitely had the look of a woman who had just lost her favorite lover. The idea of Flint with the beautiful cyborg woman hurt, but Flint had chosen Mira, which soothed some of the jealousy that still resided in her.

Chapter Thirteen

"Flint?" Arrion shouted.

Flint froze at the threshold of the door. He turned his head to shoot Arrion a cold look. "What?"

"Did you tell your little slave there that you're using her? That she's just a way for you to circumvent the law you despise?" Arrion glared at Mira. "Did he tell you why he stole you from your shuttle?"

Mira looked at Flint. He turned fully, his bag hitting the floor, as he glared at Arrion. "I didn't think you'd be so bitter. Are you done? Give your kind unit offer to someone else. I'm sure there are plenty of males who will love to take you up on it."

The cyborg woman seethed, glaring at Flint, and then met Mira's eyes. "On Garden, cyborg males outnumber the females five to one. A lot of our males work off planet, as Flint does, for months of the year. It is law on Garden that every cyborg female take three males into a family unit contact. We schedule our time carefully so that one of the males is always with the female. I offered Flint a unit with me and my two males but Flint isn't a team player. Rather than share a woman he is fucking, he decided to grab you."

Mira was taken aback. They had three husbands? She cringed at the thought. Handling one man would be tough enough.

"I offered him plenty of alone time. One of my unit partners is an ambassador who travels space extensively. My second unit partner has the same job Flint has only on a different ship." She glared at Flint. "You could have plenty of alone time with me. Rethink this."

"I thought long and hard about your offer, Arrion. I'm flattered, but as I stated, that is not the kind of family unit I want."

"You're a cyborg. It's your duty to breed."

A muscle in Flint's jaw jumped. He was obviously angry again. "I'm aware of that and fully intend to comply."

A look of horror hit Arrion's face. Her eyes flew to Mira. "With her? With a human? She's short and fragile. You can't possibly breed a child with that."

Flint reached down to lift his bag again. "That's the plan."

Arrion moved quickly to launch her body at Flint. She gripped his arm, moving closer, to go almost nose to nose with him. Only a few inches in height separated them. "Reconsider. I'm ready to breed. I'm going to prepare my body for ovulation. I will give you the first opportunity with me. You can prepare your body when I do. We'd have a strong child together."

Flint clenched his jaw as he jerked his arm out of her hold. "My decision is made. I will see you when my downtime is over and I'm ready to report back to duty."

Mira was pushed out of the office by Flint's strong hand gripping her elbow. He led her away. Behind them a door slammed shut. The sound of glass breaking was distinctive. It seemed Arrion was having a fit of temper. Zare was standing in Flint's path blocking his way, alarm clearly written on his face.

"I heard. You're brave to deny her." He spoke softly.

"I don't want that type of family unit."

Zare nodded. "Nor do I, but what options do we have?"

"Her." Flint gestured to Mira.

Zare looked down at Mira and frowned. "Humans hate us."

Flint tilted his head slightly. He was staring at Zare and didn't look away. "Do you hate me, Mira?"

"No," she said softly. "You know I don't."

Zare frowned at Mira. "Humans hate us. They want every one of us destroyed."

Mira looked up at the tall cyborg. "I don't. A lot of my generation doesn't. We are horrified at what was done to cyborgs on Earth. To try to kill and abuse someone for being different is wrong and just evil."

Shifting his attention to Flint, Zare sighed. "What about breeding compatibility? Arrion had a point. Your female is small boned and fragile."

"I spoke to the *Star's* medic. You've met Doc. He did a little research for me. The *Star* was a human vessel and the ship was fully banked with Earth information and medical files. We were created to have dominant genes. Any children we share will inherit my genes. Doc believes there will be fewer genetic defects with our children because a union with a human will bring healthier results than a set of cyborgs breeding."

"Damn. I bet no one on Garden wants that information known. Otherwise we'd be inflowing human females into our society. She's still property status though, even if you get permission to form a family unit with her. Humans will probably always remain property."

Flint shrugged. "It matters not. She's protected either way. As a citizen or as my property no one can harm her or remove her from me. It actually has advantages. Cyborg females must be shared because of their limitedness. As my property, Mira is mine alone. If another male were to try to touch her it would be in my right to kill him for trying to take what I own."

Zare had a thoughtful expression on his face. "You should leave before Arrion stops sulking. She had her mind set on you being the third and final of her family unit and you know she holds grudges."

Flint nodded, turning his attention on Mira. "Let's go. Now we are going home."

Mira followed him back to the lift while her mind worked. Flint's world was messed up. Flint was a possessive man, she'd learned that, and property or not she'd seen it in the way he'd protected her from the other men on the *Star*. The idea of having to share a woman with two other men had probably not been his ideal plan.

They left the building to walk two blocks over to another blue building. She saw curving text etched on each one. The markings looked like the tattoos on her and on Flint, obviously their written cyborg language. She wondered if she'd have to learn it now that she lived on Garden, instantly hoping she wouldn't have to because she wasn't good with other languages. She was just really happy that cyborgs still spoke English instead of adopting or creating some other language when they'd done the written text. Flint entered the building, walked into the lift and pushed the top button.

Mira's eyebrows rose. "You live on the top floor?"

He nodded. "I'm a commander of a salvage ship. It's a high-ranking, very respectable job to have. I get the best accommodations due to my title."

A horrible thought hit her. "When you were telling that woman that you wanted to request unit quarters on the *Star* does that mean you are going to take me with you when you have to go back to work?"

Dark blue eyes narrowed at her. She saw his body tense as his mouth flattened into a tight line. "Why do you ask?"

"You were obviously gone for months. I don't want to be left here without you. I want to go where you go. Why do you look pissed at my question?"

The lift doors slid open and Flint moved, not answering her. She followed him out into a corridor. Flint didn't look at her as he spoke, leading her down a long section, around a corner where he stopped in front of a door and lifted his palm to a scanner.

"I thought at first you might want to know when you'd be rid of me. Your tone implied that traveling with me wouldn't be a happy event for you."

"My tone implied fear that you'd leave me here alone. I don't want to be without you."

Smiling, Flint turned to face her as the door swished open. He stepped inside with Mira following. "No fear of that, Mirasia Carver. You are mine. Where I go, you go. You will be traveling with me and I will not leave you on Garden alone while I return to duty aboard the *Star*. You will be sharing my bed every sleep cycle whether I'm here or on the ship. Welcome to our home on Garden. I own this as well."

Mira tore her gaze from Flint. She stared in wonder at the large room that was an open living area. A kitchen was tucked in the corner with a long bar separating the kitchen area from the living area. Barstools told her that was the eating area. The entire outer wall was glass and the view was almost the same as the one in Arrion's office. She could see beyond the wall that separated the city from the wilderness, the trees, and in the distance the ocean. She also saw a long balcony that extended the length of the large room.

"Wow. It's all so beautiful. The view, the room, and it's so big."

"I thought you would like it." Flint dropped his bag as he walked to the glass. He touched up high and the glass separated instantly, turning to open like a door. Warm, fresh air blew into the room as Flint stepped out on the balcony. He turned to grin at her. "Come here."

Following him outside Mira eagerly took the hand he offered. Flint pulled her into his body as he turned her so they both faced the view. "I love being on Garden and this is why. I spend too much of my time in space so when I'm here I usually keep the panels open unless the weather turns bad. What do you think of Garden? Is it as beautiful as Earth?"

"I think it might beat Earth. It's rare to see so many trees and I love that you can see the ocean from here."

"Wait until the sun sets and the moons come out. I love staring up at them." He hugged her a little tighter. "Are you hungry? Food deliveries should be arriving soon. I preorder before I come home so I don't have to shop. I also took the liberty while still on the *Star* of ordering you more clothing from the sizes Doc recorded. They should be arriving today as well. I'll show you the rest of our home."

The rest of it contained a spacious cleansing room with both a cleaning unit and a soaking tub just off the hallway. Farther down she found two more rooms and an office. The smaller room had weight-training equipment and the second room was the sleeping room. A dresser and a huge bed dominated the room. It had an even bigger cleansing room that included a large soaking tub. Four people could fit in it if they squeezed in.

Flint met her eyes as she smiled at him. "I love your home. It's huge compared to your room on the *Star*."

"My room on the *Star* would fit into my cleansing room here." Flint's eyes narrowed. "It is our home now, not just mine."

His words touched Mira and she smiled wider at him. "I love our home," she corrected.

"I want you to bathe and climb into bed to wait for me." He walked to the glass wall in the bedroom to open the slide panel to let fresh air blow into the room. He slowly turned to face her. "I have deliveries arriving at any moment. After they are here I'll join you. Take your time in the cleansing room." He chuckled. "You should have seen the longing on your face when you saw it. When is the last time you soaked in water?"

"Before I left Earth on business about two months ago."

"Take a long bath." He nodded at her before striding out of the room.

Mira walked into his cleansing room, noticing no windows were in the room as an Earth one would have but she saw a vid screen mounted along one wall. Did Flint like to watch the news or entertainment while soaking in the tub? The image of a naked Flint lounging in that huge tub did things to her libido. She stripped quickly while water filled the tub and delight hit her instantly at the luxury of hot water up to her

chin as she climbed in it. At one point she heard a chime, guessing that some of Flint's deliveries had arrived.

She was still soaking in the warm tub when Flint walked in, naked. Her eyes raked over his large muscular body and she couldn't miss the erection he sported. Flint took her breath away with his muscular, perfect body and sexy, incredible eyes. He was the hottest guy she'd ever seen in her life. The cyborg turned her on instantly just by being undressed in the same room with her, knowing what was going to happen between them. She ran her gaze up his body slowly, noting every inch of him to memory, until she met Flint's amused gaze as he smiled at her.

"They arrived faster than I thought so I'm joining you."

"Please do."

He climbed into the tub, making the water level rise dangerously high when he settled in next to her. She laughed. "Maybe I should let out a little water."

He reached for the release first. "I have it." His eyes locked with hers. "I want you."

"I saw how turned-on you are. I want you too."

She didn't hesitate. She moved around in the water to face him as she straddled his lap. She saw surprise hit his features and then he grinned as his hands slid to her waist. He said nothing but his features spoke volumes.

"You're sexy when you're naked and wet." She cupped water in both hands to let it run down his chest.

"Tomorrow I made an appointment with medical. I've requested the shot I need to activate my sperm."

She was instantly confused. "You already have sperm."

He chuckled. "Not fertile sperm. Once I take the shot my sperm will be viable." His thumb brushed her lower stomach. "With active sperm I will be able to impregnate you."

Now it was her turn to be shocked. "You want to get me pregnant already?"

His entire body tightened as he frowned at her. "Yes."

"But we haven't been together long enough. I thought we'd wait a bit."

"Define long enough. You're mine, Mira. I have requested the paperwork to be filed for us to be a family unit and it should be approved today since they have no grounds to deny me. I've waited a long time for a family unit and I won't wait any longer. The moment I saw you when you opened the door to me on that shuttle I knew you were going to conceive my offspring. My mind was made up then."

"Just a few days ago you were willing to sell me."

Pure anger constricted his features. "You ran from me. I made a rash decision in anger. Let it go. I've forgiven you for running."

She nodded. "You're right. I'm sorry. I still owe you money. I really do have it. I'll pay you back for the fuel I cost you to come after me."

Flint relaxed, his anger fading as quickly as it had flared. "There is no need. The salvage from the pirate ship more than paid for the cost of fuel used to capture you again. The value was higher than I first thought. They had stolen a lot of cargo that we were able to use. Your running was actually profitable." His smile died as his eyes narrowed. "But don't ever run from me again, Mira."

"I won't."

"Convince me."

Passion flared in her. She loved the husky tone he used when he said the words. She reached over for the body wash bottle and opened the lid to pour a generous amount of the soapy liquid into her palm. She washed Flint's neck with her fingertips, her palms, her fingernails raking his skin. Flint groaned softly, shutting his eyes in contentment, tilting his head back to rest on the edge of the tub.

"That feels good."

"Wait until I start cleaning lower."

She paid extra attention to Flint's sensitive nipples. She cupped water in her curled hands to rinse all the soap off, watching his nipples bead into taut tips that tempted her. She leaned forward until her mouth closed over one of Flint's nipples, sucking on him and using her teeth to tug at the hard, pebbled tips. Flint groaned as his hands cupped her ass.

She reached between them to curl her hands around Flint's hard cock. He was big, thick, and long. She ran her hands over him gently, exploring. He arched his hips so he was more firmly in her hands. The motion lifted them both, with her straddling his lap. It also made her release his nipple.

"Ride me," he groaned, his head lowering so intense dark blue eyes could open to stare into hers. "Ride me now." He gripped her hips, lifting her easily.

Flint's strength always amazed her. Mira felt as light as air in his hold as she braced one hand on his shoulder while her hand, still gripping his cock, navigated that thick member under her as Flint eased her body down on him. She moaned as he stretched her, filling her slowly, gravity and his hands pulling her down on his lap. Her body eased all the way down until Flint was buried deep inside her. Their eyes remained locked together so they could mirror their passion for each other.

She gripped his shoulders, bracing herself to move. She tilted her hips and drove down fast after a few minutes. A moan tore from both of them at the sensation. She experimented, rolling her hips as she moved up and down on Flint until she found the perfect angle.

"Oh God," she panted. "Just like that."

She rode him down as he thrust up into her. They groaned and panted together at the feelings their sensual movements created in their bodies as they rubbed sensitive pleasure points together. It was sheer bliss as their bodies moved in unison. The water lapped at Mira's nipples and their moving bodies made waves that splashed against them, heightening her sexual awareness.

Flint shifted his hold a little on her hip and his thumb slid between her spread thighs to brush against her clit. She knew she was done for. He rubbed her nub just by having his thumb there as their bodies rocked together.

"Flint!" Mira cried out his name as she came. It was a violent release. Inside her Flint followed her in seconds as her muscles went wild around his hard flesh still moving in her. He groaned her name. Flint's cock pulsed inside her when he flooded her with his release.

She collapsed against him, resting her head on his chest. Flint wrapped her tighter against his body. The sound of his beating heart was loud in her ear. Flint chuckled, cupped one of her ass cheeks.

"I'm making a new house rule. You aren't allowed to bathe without me being in the tub with you."

Laughing, Mira turned her head a little to brush a kiss over his heart. "I like that rule. I think it should be a rule that you have to get naked with me often in the tub."

"Done."

"Do you know that I won't leave you? Are you convinced of that yet?"

Flint held his breath, his body tensed for a split second before he blew out the air in his lungs to relax again. "You had better not, Mira. You belong to me. I will always come after you and there is nowhere that you can go that I won't find you. I won't ever sell you but you will wish that I had if you ever run from me again."

Lifting her head, she met his gaze and saw fury there in the dark depths of his stormy eyes. "I will never leave you, Flint. I want to belong to you."

His hand rose from the water as he gripped her face in his large palm. "I do own you. You belong to me and don't ever forget it, Mira."

"You are scaring me a little and you make it sound like a threat."

"If you think of it as a threat I'm sorry. I just want you to know that I value you above all else and unless I die I will do whatever it takes to keep you."

Searching his eyes, she relaxed. "Good."

He looked shocked again. "Good?"

"Yes. The only thing that could ever make me try to leave you is cheating."

"Cheating? I'm honest. I do not cheat."

"It's a term that means sleeping with other people. I don't want anyone but you touching me. I want you to say the same thing to me. I want monogamy, Flint. It would kill me if you touched another woman. I couldn't take it."

Flint frowned as his gaze left hers and she saw him swallow. Long seconds passed as Flint didn't say a word, not looking at her. He blinked a few times before he took a deep breath, still not saying what she wanted to hear.

Mira tensed, feeling pain hit her at his silence. "You aren't going to give me that, are you?"

He met her gaze. "I won't touch another woman purposely."

"What in the hell does that mean?" She jerked out of his hold, separating their bodies, to climb out of the tub.

She heard him stand up and hit the water release on the tub. The drain was loud as it let the water flow out. She grabbed a towel to dry her body, shooting a glare at Flint over her shoulder. He was frowning at her, watching her silently.

"I'm a cyborg, Mira."

"And that means you have to cheat?"

He sighed as he stepped out of the tub. "I've been activated in the past and I'm a good breeder. Some cyborgs are not."

She spun around to face him head-on. "What in the hell does that have to do with anything?"

"Some cyborg men are unable to reproduce. I'm in a contract with a dozen cyborg males. Ten of them are in family units already. If they are unable to reproduce I'm obligated through that pact to help them."

Her mouth dropped open. "What?"

"It has already happened twice. I was contacted by Sole and Varl when both failed to impregnate their females. I am obligated to that pact, Mira. If either one of them wants or needs to reproduce they could call upon me again. My sperm was activated on both occasions and it was successful."

Shock tore through her. "They wanted you to sleep with their wives and you're telling me you have two kids?"

He frowned. "I guess you would see it that way. The children are biological results of mine but they are not mine in any other way. I was a donor. They belong to Sole and Varl."

She took a deep breath, having to force air into her lungs, which felt frozen. She was partly horrified, mostly stunned. "Can't you just donate your sperm in a damn cup? Are you telling me you have to have sex with other women if one of your buddies gives you a call?"

"Medical intervention isn't successful. We've found that our bodies tend to reject artificial methods in that regard. It has something to do with the stress levels in the females during conception. Natural breeding has a much higher success rate."

"I can't believe this. If you were a bad breeder would that mean you'd bring some guy home one day and tell me to fuck him if you didn't knock me up?"

He frowned. "I wouldn't do that because I know that I'm a good breeder. There is no need for me to ever call on one of the males in the breeding pact to help me in that regard."

"You said a dozen of you are in a pact together?"

He nodded. "All cyborgs males are signed up in a dozen-member pact."

“So if any of those eleven men call you to fuck their wife to knock her up, you have to go sleep with those women?”

His mouth pressed into a grim line. “Yes.”

She spun away from him. “Oh. My. God.”

She stumbled out of the cleansing room and into the bedroom. Pain, shock, and horror were hitting her at once. Mostly it was pain she suffered. Flint would cheat on her. Her eyes frantically went around the room to finally land on his dresser. She dropped her towel, walking toward it, and just tore open drawers.

“Calm yourself, Mira.” Flint had followed her into the room. “I would not have sex with another woman otherwise. Isn’t that enough for you? I will only touch a female who I am obligated to impregnate.”

Mira jerked on one of Flint’s shirts with shaking hands. It fell to her thighs. Eleven men could call up Flint at any time to ask him to sleep with their wives and two of them already had. He had two biological kids somewhere on Garden. She wouldn’t be the mother of his only child if she let him get her pregnant. It hurt her, and worse, it really pissed her off. She shot him a glare as she put on her pants.

“No. It’s not enough. Damn you and your screwed-up cyborg world. What kind of sick people are you? Forget what I said. I don’t even want to hear it. If you can’t make a commitment to me then I won’t be making any to you.” She spun away to get her boots.

Flint moved fast, grabbing her arm to spin her around to face him, to glare down at her. “What does that mean?”

“It means the first damn time you walk out that door to go fuck someone else I won’t be here when you get back.”

Flint’s face darkened. It was no longer such a pretty shade of gray. “What?” He growled the word.

“I’ll let you own me, Flint. I won’t even flinch when someone calls me nothing but property. I can take all of that because I have feelings for you. I am willing to let you get me pregnant. I was ready to swear up and down on my damn life that I’d stay by your side forever. What I won’t do is give myself to a man who goes out and betrays me. I consider it a betrayal if you fuck someone else and I don’t give a damn about your breeding pact.”

Flint looked furious. “I wouldn’t touch other women out of a desire for more than you. It would be an obligation.”

“That wouldn’t hurt me any damn less.” She jerked out of his hold.

“I can’t believe we’re fighting over this. A cyborg woman would understand. This wouldn’t be an issue.”

“Then go marry Arrion!” She stormed out of the bedroom. “Then you can both screw other people and call it duty or obligation or the law. Take your pick of how you can screw other people and validate it.”

Flint caught her in the hallway, spinning her around to face him again. He grabbed her and pinned her body there, making her aware that he was totally naked. His towel had dropped when he'd come after her. They glared at each other.

"You are threatening to run away from me if I fulfill my obligations? Do you know how unreasonable that is?"

"What if it was an Earth obligation that I fuck other men? You kidnapped me so you could have a wife who you didn't have to share, right? How would you feel if I nailed other guys and just expected you to deal with it? You want to talk unreasonable to me? I'm willingly giving up any chance of ever going home, promising to stay with you until I die, and all I ask for is that we're loyal to each other by not sleeping with other people."

Flint glared down at her. "What would you have me do?"

"Swear to me you won't touch other women and mean it."

"I'm obligated to do exactly that if I get the call."

"Then we have nothing more to talk about. When that call comes, you won't be surprised when you come back to an empty bed."

He clenched his teeth. "And how do you suppose you'd get off Garden? Do you think you could just stroll out the gates and ask the next ship leaving the planet for a ride to Earth?" He snorted, releasing her as he stepped back. "I'm sorry it upsets you but this is the way it is and you will adjust to the idea. I would tell you that it is highly unlikely to happen but that would be a lie. I would be surprised if I didn't get a call in the near future. I know two of them are trying to breed right now and so far they haven't had success. While I'm on the planet they will contact me if they need my sperm activated. Lucky for them I'll have already taken that step because I fully plan to do that tomorrow so that I can breed you."

She shook her head. "No."

Flint growled at her. He was that angry. "Yes. I own you, Mira. You are mine. If you say no I will tie you to the bed and we both know I can make you want me. You could run away but you will be found quickly and returned to me. You would still be in my bed by nightfall. This is the way it is and you need to come to terms with those facts. You have no choice, just as I have no choice. You will adjust to the way life is on Garden. That's an order. I'm going to put on pants and I'll meet you in the kitchen. I'm hungry. I won't argue with you. This discussion is over." He spun and marched for the bedroom.

Chapter Fourteen

Mira leaned against the wall and shut her eyes. Hot tears filled gathered and her shoulders slumped. He was right about her being trapped on Garden. The tall wall around the city would prevent her from escaping. Even if she could miraculously escape the city she'd been warned how dangerous the natural inhabitants of the planet were. They were amphibians, so could function just fine on dry land. They were probably worse than cyborgs.

Flint would sleep with other women and she'd have to suffer the knowledge. Every time he left she'd have to try to pretend it didn't bother her when she knew it would. What else would he inform her of later? If he tired of her, would he find some damn obligation clause, some weird cyborg law, or some other bullshit excuse to let men sleep with her? Was that the kind of life she was facing?

She walked into the living area and automatically walked out onto the balcony to stare at the breathtaking view. She walked to the railing to gaze at the ocean in the distance. Cyborgs and humans were just too different and their ways were too foreign to each other. He seemed genuinely confused as to why she wouldn't just accept and understand the fact that he'd have to knock up other women because it was some fucked up law. What kind of life would she live? She was trapped on Garden in this life with Flint, no matter what.

Shaking her head, she fought back a sob, knowing she couldn't live that way. Why couldn't he just commit to her so they could be happy? Why did he have to pull the property card on her and just demand she adjust to his messed-up cyborg ethics? Couldn't he see how he was hurting her? Didn't he understand that he was going to destroy her emotionally, one painful situation at a time? He had even dashed all hope of escape. She knew, unless Flint sent her home to Earth, that she'd never get there any other way.

She wiped her tears and then took a deep breath. She gripped the railing, inching up on tiptoe, and before she could rethink it, she threw her leg over the railing. She glanced down, only to wish she hadn't. They were on the twentieth floor and far below were sidewalks that looked tiny, making her realize just how high she was. Mira knew she'd never survive the fall. Her ass dug into the top of the railing as she balanced. Swinging her other leg over the railing was tough but she managed to do it without falling. Her feet braced on the outside railing as she sat suspended on the edge, staring down.

"Mira," Flint's voice was soft, shaky. "Get down. What are you doing?"

“Stay back or I’ll release my hold to kick off.” She turned her head to meet Flint’s horrified gaze, where he stood at the opening of the door wearing only his pants. His beautiful skin had visibly paled. He did follow her demand though as he inched back.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“I want to go home.”

His mouth dropped open and then slammed closed. “You’re going to drop to your death if I don’t release you? Is that what you’re saying? Fine. Climb back over to safety and I’ll send you to Earth.”

“I’m not an idiot. You have no intention of sending me home. You just want me to get down so you can grab me.”

“I was hopeful that you’d believe me. Please come down on this side, Mira. You’re acting irrational.”

“Irrational is staying with a man who expects things from me that he won’t give in return. Irrational is setting myself up for a lifetime of watching you walk out the door to fuck other women while it tears my heart out and accepting your shitty attitude of expecting me to just deal with it. Go to hell, Flint. I’d rather die with my dignity intact than live like some pathetic moron who puts up with being treated like shit.”

“Dignity? What the hell does that have to do with this? You’re threatening to go to your death over an obligation I have sworn to uphold.”

A chime sounded, letting them know someone was at the door but Flint didn’t move. Mira stared at Flint.

“I can’t live like that, Flint. You made me very aware that I won’t be able to get away from you if you sleep with other women. Whatever you decide to do, I will just have to put up with it no matter how bad it is. I’d rather die. I know you think of me as property but—”

The chime sounded again. They ignored it.

“But I can’t live like that and be happy. I’d be miserable, Flint. You say you want a family unit but that’s just messed up to be with someone you will hurt over and over again until I hate you for breaking my heart like that. What other screwed-up cyborg shit are you going to hit me with? One day are you going to pass me off to one of your friends? Maybe when I get old you can just toss me out on the street and be done with me? I have no say in anything, do I? Well, this is my say. I get the final word this way. No fucking way am I letting you destroy me a day at a time.”

Mira saw movement behind Flint as a tall, redheaded cyborg walked slowly toward them. Somehow he’d gotten through the front door into the living room. He was frowning as he stepped next to Flint. His shocked gaze was fixed on Mira.

“What is your human doing? That’s dangerous. Human, get down carefully. You won’t survive a fall from this height.”

Flint turned his head to glare at the other man. “She knows that. She’s threatening to jump on purpose.”

The cyborg's red eyebrows lifted as he crossed his arms over his chest. "I got a call from Arrion, telling me you refused her for a human. I didn't believe it until I reviewed your request to form a family unit with one. Imagine my shock when I realized there was another formal request for another family unit with a human when Iron filed as well. What the hell is going on?"

"Leave, Cal. This isn't a good time." Flint was pissed, glaring at Mira. "Get down from there now that you've made your point. We'll work this out somehow."

She glared back. "You think we have nothing to talk about. You said this discussion was closed. Those were your exact words, if I remember right. I don't believe anything you say at this moment since you'd say or do anything to get me to climb down. I know you'll just tie me to the damn bed to make sure I can't get outside again or you'll lock the windows so I can't open them."

"Damn it, Mira. Get down from there before you fall. We'll work this out. I'm sorry you're so upset. I didn't know it would affect you this way."

The redheaded cyborg was frowning. "What did you do that was so bad she'd rather die than suffer through it? Is she afraid to breed with you? She is small."

"Leave, Cal," Flint snapped.

"I can't. I was ordered to come investigate. You're creating waves with your request. It wouldn't have caused any alarm but then Iron's request came in right after yours so I was ordered to come here. I came to figure out how a human and a cyborg family unit can work." The man frowned at Mira. "So far I would say it's not working out well and there's no reason for worry that this will become commonplace. We like to keep our streets clean and humans diving from balconies would stain them."

"Damn it, Cal!" Flint yelled. "Do you see this isn't the time for your humor? Do I look amused?" He turned and took a step onto the balcony. "Mira –"

"Stop!" She inched her ass a little more over the edge.

Flint froze and then took a step back. "Damn it, Mira. Sit back again. You're going to fall if you mean to or not. At least don't die accidentally."

She eased her ass back to where it had been. "Then stay back."

"Fine. I don't want you to die. Tell her about breeding pacts, Cal. She doesn't seem to believe that I'm obligated to do my duty."

The redheaded cyborg frowned. "She's threatening death over a breeding pact? Why?"

Flint sighed. "Humans like monogamy."

The man blinked. "I see." He turned his gaze back to Mira. "It is our duty to breed because our numbers are so low that if we don't we will die out as a race. It is the responsibility of every cyborg to at least breed one child apiece but breeding more children is highly encouraged. Every female and every male must have one to replace their life in our existence. Some of us are unable to breed physically so we have breeding pacts set up. It's not a choice that we join them, it is law. If you join in a family

unit with Flint, you must have at least one child together. If you were a cyborg couple then you would be expected to have two children, one for Flint and one for yourself. If you are unable to give him a child then another cyborg female would be ordered to conceive and carry a child for Flint. Isn't that comforting to you? You will still get to raise a child made by Flint in your family unit." The man smiled. "It's a good system."

Horror hit Mira. "You mean some poor woman would be forced to sleep with him and then just hand over her baby to us? Just like that? She'd have to give it away?"

Cal frowned. "That news didn't comfort her. I thought it would."

Flint shot the man a glare. "Shut up and stay out of this. You're not helping. Mira, come down and we'll talk about this."

The redhead looked confused. "You're not a cyborg. You are not in a breeding pact. No one will take your child away from you or force you to carry another male's cyborg child that you have to give away. No sane cyborg would want to breed a child with someone as small as you. Flint is just being irrational."

"Who the hell is this jerk?" Mira glared at the man as she addressed Flint.

Flint clenched his teeth. "The jerk is a friend of mine but he's also who you would call my boss. Can you refrain from calling him names while he's within earshot? I at least wait until he leaves the room when I want to insult him when he pisses me off." Flint glared at the man. "Leave. I'm off duty."

The man sighed. "I actually wanted to talk to you before the *Star* left. A situation has come up."

"Yes, one has. Do you see right now isn't a good time to talk? I'm a little involved in my own situation. Get out, Cal." Flint glanced at Mira. "Please, come down from there. At least sit on the balcony floor. I swear to you on my honor that I will not come after you by stepping foot on the balcony. Just get off the railing before you accidentally fall."

"If I fall it won't be an accident."

Fury hit Flint's features. "What would you have me do, Mira? Disregard the pact? I could be arrested for it. There are laws to follow and they were made for my race's survival. I'm not happy with them myself. You know this. I took you from the shuttle because I don't want a family unit with two other males sharing my woman. I told you that I have no wish to touch other females and that wasn't a lie. I wouldn't be happy if I got a call to breed with a female in a pact's family unit. I especially wouldn't want to do it knowing that you were hurting because of it. The last thing I want to do is make you unhappy and hurt you. I like it a hell of a lot when you're happy and want me touching you. I have told you that you mean more to me than anything else and I didn't lie about that either. If I was harsh with my attitude about this it is because I am frustrated. You were happy and now you are sitting on my railing threatening to end your life. Don't you think I wish it wasn't this way? I wish I didn't belong to a breeding pact but I can't get out of it."

Cal cleared his throat. "Actually, I can get you out of it."

Both Mira and Flint stared in shock at the cyborg. Cal smiled. "As I was saying, a situation came up. We got a message from the *Vontage*."

Flint frowned. "We lost contact with her months ago. Is Steel alive? His crew?"

"Apparently. The codes were correct so we verified the messages were from him when transmissions were very bad at first. He said they were attacked by pirates and suffered extreme damage to the ship. They just now have made enough repairs to get a signal to us. That's the other reason I came here. I want you to command the *Star* and go meet the *Vontage*. They reported finding a planet with other cyborg survivors from Earth who have colonized there. Remember the *Moonslip* that disappeared twenty-five years ago? It crashed near that planet and, according to the report from Steel, there were survivors who made it to the planet surface. I'd like you to lead the rescue mission to bring them back to Garden."

"I am off duty. Iron is in command of the *Star*."

"I want you to lead the rescue and retrieval." Cal hesitated. "Steel requested you and he was adamant about you being there. The ship *Moonslip* carried mostly female cyborgs. Steel thinks that between the *Star* and the *Vontage* that you could repair and tow the *Moonslip* back here. There are hundreds of cyborg female survivors and they've bred more females, Flint. Do you know what this means?"

Flint nodded. "Yes."

"Can someone clue me in?" Mira called out.

Flint turned his attention to her. "I will if you at least straddle the railing."

She lifted a leg and threw it over the railing. "Happy? Now what does it mean?"

Cal answered. "Males outnumber the females on Garden five to one. With hundreds more cyborg females back in our population that number is greatly changed."

Flint nodded. "Our council said the laws would change according to need and population."

"We could change our breeding laws so that females would only have to enter into a family unit with two males instead of three. With my authorization I can not only clear you to join in a family unit with your human but I can remove you from the breeding pact you are in. I will exchange your name for one of the rescued males. You would be without a pact." The cyborg eyed Mira. "He wouldn't be required to touch another female ever again as his payment for agreeing to leave Garden after a lengthy shift and returning to another one consecutively. I have the authority to do it."

Mira bit her lip. "So let me get this straight. He won't have to touch another woman? Ever? No stupid law, contract, obligation, or hidden clause somewhere in there? He could be totally loyal to me in a monogamous relationship?"

"Yes. I'm even willing to put it into writing." Cal stared at Mira. "He will be totally yours sexually. I don't know why you would only want one male since females seem to enjoy the three men in a family unit but he could be yours exclusively if he agrees to go on this mission. It's that important."

"He'll do it." Mira didn't hesitate to say the words.

Flint frowned at Mira. "I'll do it?"

She glared at him. "Yes. You'll do it. If you want me happy and if I mean so much to you, like you said, then you'll do whatever it takes to get out of that damn breeding pact. I get to come with you, don't I?"

Flint nodded. "Where I go, you go. You can't accept deals for me."

"The hell I can't," she sighed. "Come grab me. I'm terrified of heights and I'm afraid to toss my other leg over. I don't want to fall anymore. You are going to accept his job if it means that you're not touching any other women."

Flint cursed softly, storming out onto the balcony. He grabbed Mira around her waist and hauled her into his arms and walked into the living room carrying her. Fury radiated off him as he set her on the couch. He spun away to shut the doors firmly. He glared at her as he slowly turned to face her again.

"If you ever pull another stunt like that I'll chain you to my damn bed for six months."

"He can get you out of your stupid breeding pact, Flint." Mira stared up at him. "Please accept the job for me? For us?"

Flint shut his eyes, taking a few deep breaths. His eyes opened and he nodded. "For you." He glared at Cal. "That was low. You used her to get me to agree to the mission."

Cal grinned. "And it worked. I'm happy, she is happy, and it all works out well."

"I'm not happy. I just returned home and the last thing I want is to return to the *Star*. When would I report for duty?"

"I want you to report on board in an hour. Iron is waiting for your return. I thought I would have to hold up your family unit request to force you to accept command of the *Star*. I thought we'd have to yell and bargain." The man chuckled. "I had no idea it would only take getting you out of a breeding pact."

"I still want my request to make a family unit with her approved immediately and I want my sperm activated. I have an appointment tomorrow with medical, Cal."

Cal chuckled. "Are you sure you want her in that capacity? She looks like a handful for something so small and helpless looking. With the new women coming to our planet you will have the opportunity to only share a cyborg female with another male. You could form a family unit with one who picks an ambassador. Those males are gone for most of the year."

Fear hit Mira. Would Flint not want her after the stunt she'd pulled? She met Flint's dark blue gaze. He still looked pissed but as she watched, his eyes softened.

"She's mine, Cal, and I only want her. Make sure you don't forget to remove me from the breeding pact. I'll be on board the *Star* within the hour with the other half of my family unit, which you will approve immediately."

"Excellent. I'll call medical on my way and have a kit sent to the *Star*. Doc can handle activating your sperm on board. Breeding her will give you something enjoyable

to do for the next few months while you're off Garden." Cal walked to the door and left without another word.

"Are you mad at me?" Mira stood, walking slowly to Flint.

He shook his head. "I don't care where we are as long as we are together. Now will you swear to never run away from me or try to harm yourself again? I can give you my word I will never touch another woman and I swear to you that I will never allow another man to take what is mine. You are mine, Mira."

She wrapped her arms around his waist, staring up at him. "I swear."

Flint's hands slid around her as he hugged her. "It's a good thing that we didn't have time to unpack yet and that your new clothes haven't been unboxed. We need to leave. You heard Cal. He wants us on board within the hour."

"I'll finish getting ready."

He chuckled. "Me too."

Ten minutes later, all arrangements were dealt with, and they left Flint's twentieth-floor home. She transferred her new clothing into a backpack Flint had given her. They had to rush to a transport heading for the edge of the city and then climb aboard the vehicle that had brought them inside the cyborg city. Flint held her hand while they watched the security gate open enough to let them outside. When they reached the landing site was, the *Rally* stood waiting for them.

"I miss the fresh air already," Flint said softly.

Mira turned into his body. Two cyborg males were loading supplies onto the *Rally*, which would fly them up to the *Star*. She sensed both men watching her and Flint but she ignored them. Her gaze locked with Flint's.

"I'll make it up to you."

His eyebrows rose as his lips spread into a sexy grin. "I really like fresh air. How are you going to make that up to me?"

"I feel pretty confident that I can think of a few things to do to you that will make you forget you're even breathing. It will be better than fresh air."

Flint's body responded since she was pressed up against the front of him. The hard bulge in his pants pushed against her stomach. She grinned up at him and winked.

"I can't wait until we're alone." His voice had turned husky. "You will show me what is better than fresh air."

They boarded the *Rally* and this time Flint sat on the cargo floor, pulled her into his lap and leaned his back against the bulkhead wall.

"Leaving the surface isn't as rough as dropping down was."

The flight wasn't bad at all. She was shocked at how smoothly and quickly they were docked to the *Star* when Flint announced they had arrived. Climbing to her feet, she yanked up her backpack. Surprise filled her when Flint held out his hand to her.

"I thought you said to not hold your hand around other cyborgs." She jerked her head toward the men in the cargo area waiting to board the *Star*.

"We're a family unit now." He winked. "And besides, you made it clear you're planning on being in my bed while we were on the transport." He laughed. "And I want to hold your hand. I don't give a damn if they are stunned by the sight."

Iron was waiting when they stepped into the *Star*. He was wearing his uniform again, his long hair braided. When he noticed them holding hands, he lifted a red eyebrow.

Flint sighed. "Sorry to take your command. I was blackmailed into accepting the mission."

Iron grinned. "I like it when you're in charge. That means you get to deal with the problems. You are on board so I officially am handing over command to you. I'm going to my room, to my human."

Flint sighed as he and Mira watched Iron stride quickly away from them and out of sight. "I guess I'm going to have to go to Control for a few hours while I get us underway. It's my duty to go over our mission with the crew." He gazed at her. "I'll be in our room as soon as I'm done."

"Okay. I understand." Mira smiled at him.

Ever so slowly his eyes lowered, passion showing as he took in every inch of her. "I want you naked and in our bed when I get there. I'll escort you there now and drop off my bag."

"Lead the way."

Minutes later they entered Flint's quarters, which Mira was happy to see again. Flint dropped the bag and gave her a smile. "I will be back as soon as I'm able."

Mira reached out for him quickly and gripped his shirt. "Not so fast." A smile curved her lips. "I remember something about saying I'd show you how I can make you forget about the artificial air we breathe and right now seems like a damn good time to start."

His eyebrows rose. "I must report now, Mira."

She knelt before him, reached for the front of his pants, and unfastened them quickly, staring up at Flint with a teasing grin. "I have a feeling this won't take long. I want to give you something to look forward to while we're aboard the *Star*." She freed his thickening cock.

"We don't have time right now as much as I wish we did."

Her gaze fixed on his aroused flesh as she ignored his words. One of her hands cupped his scrotum while her other hand wrapped around Flint's shaft. *For a guy saying he can't, his body is saying a big hell yes*, she thought. He was getting harder by the second as blood rushed to his lower half, where she was kneeling. She knew he was watching her so she made a show of it as she licked her lips, wet them, and inched closer to the tip of his sex.

Without hesitation she took Flint's cock between her parted lips, her tongue swirled around the crown before she took him deeper, toward the back of her throat, firmly wrapping her lips around his shaft. A groan came from Flint as his fingers brushed through her hair.

"Mira," his voice had gone husky and low. "That feels incredible."

You haven't felt anything yet, she thought smugly, while she moved her mouth on him faster, sucked on him and licked the underside of his shaft with enough pressure that she knew he'd love it. His breathing turned louder and ragged as she turned her head at different angles, fucking him with her mouth.

"Mira," he growled as he tried to pull back from her.

She removed her hand from massaging his balls to slide it between his legs to reach up to grab hold of his ass, clutching him to hold him steady so he couldn't get away while she continued to suck and lick his cock. Judging by how hard he grew from her ministrations, he was close to coming.

"Mira," Flint rasped. "Unless you want me to shoot my cum in your mouth, pull back now."

Mira wanted all of Flint, her hand tightened on his ass, refusing to let him back away as she milked his cock, teasing and sucking on him until his body tensed, his legs shook a little, and he started to come.

A moan came from her as his release spread on her tongue—a sweet, rich taste that she swallowed over and over until she knew he'd given her all he had. She eased her grip on him and slowly eased his cock from between her lips. She licked them clean when he was free from her.

Her chin rose and she stared up into his sexually satisfied gaze, loving the smile he gave her as he held out his hand to help her up. She placed her hand in his and allowed him to gently tug her to her feet. He released her to close his pants, his attention never straying from her eyes.

"So, when you were panting, did you notice it wasn't fresh air you were breathing?"

Flint chuckled as he shook his head and reached to brush his knuckles over her cheek in a caress. "I will hurry back to you but you will occupy my thoughts the entire time."

Grinning at him, Mira nodded, taking a few steps back, knowing he had to get to work. "I'll be waiting right here for you."

He hesitated and then nodded, turned his back to her and strode out of their quarters. As soon as the doors slid closed, Mira laughed out loud.

Oh yeah, I'm totally better than fresh damn air, she thought with amusement.

Chapter Fifteen

The feel of the bed dipping from a heavy weight on the mattress woke Mira instantly. Flint had turned the lights on low. She turned, opening her eyes, to smile at a naked Flint as he lifted the covers to get under them with her.

"That was more than a few hours."

He chuckled. "I'm sorry."

"Thank you for sending me food. I was starving."

"I figured. We missed lunch."

"What was the holdup?"

"We had some cargo issues. We are supplied with spare parts for the *Vontage* and the *Moonslip* but unfortunately our food supplies were loaded in the wrong cargo area so we had to sort it out. Then I had to have a vid meeting with the Cyborg Council. They are very excited about the discovery of the survivors of the *Moonslip*. As we were conferencing they got an incoming message from the *Vontage*. We were able to communicate with her commander by vid for the first time since it went missing. They were able to fix it since their last communication with our council. Steel is the *Vontage's* commander. He was relieved we got his message and he's returning to the planet to prepare the survivors to abandon the planet."

"How long will it take to reach them?"

"It will take a good week but we are looking at three weeks minimum for repairs on the damaged ships when we arrive. No one knows why the *Moonslip* was so far out. It had been heading for Garden but it must have gone off course. I was able to get more details so I know what I'm facing. The *Moonslip* suffered damage from an asteroid hit. They were able to set it down on the planet's moon and then shuttle everyone to the habitable planet nearby. It will make it easier to lift the *Moonslip* from a dead moon with hardly any gravity than to try to lift her off from the planet's surface. That makes my job a lot easier. We could have transported all the survivors on the *Vontage*, the *Star*, and the *Rally* but we would have been really packed on all three ships. The *Vontage* was damaged by pirates but it was a lucky break since they found the survivors of the other ship. We'll have both ships running as quickly as possible."

"The *Rally* is traveling with us?"

"They left when we did but they are faster so they have taken the lead. They will arrive before we do. They are going to assess the damage to both ships so that by the time we arrive we can get the repairs immediately underway."

"That's good." Mira was glad that he was opening up to her, talking to her, and it made her happy.

Flint inched closer to Mira. "I was thinking about you."

She turned, curling against his large, warm body. His hard erection rubbed her bare stomach. "You were? You sounded like you were too busy to give me much thought."

She raked her fingernails lightly over his nipples, instantly loving the way they immediately pebbled in response. His cock jerked slightly against her, letting her know he was in tune to her slightest touch so she lowered her head to make a pass at his neck. He tilted his head, letting her bury her face between his cheek and his wide shoulder. She opened her mouth to tease his skin with her tongue before she kissed the area she had just wet.

"I was also late because I made Doc activate my sperm."

She pulled her face away from his neck. Their gazes met. "How long does it take to work?"

He smiled. "By tomorrow my sperm will be viable."

"So we're really going for this trying to get pregnant fast, huh?"

He suddenly pushed her on her back, pinning her under his body. She spread her legs so he could fit his hips in the cradle of her thighs. They stared at each other as he settled down on her. She loved the feeling of Flint surrounding her.

"I want everything with you. My request was approved. We are officially a family unit and Cal was nice enough to officially close the application as well."

"Close the application? I don't understand."

"On Garden a family unit isn't complete until there are three males with the female. Arrion is the female you met. She offered me the third male spot in their family unit. Her application is still open. If I had agreed then the unit would be closed and so would the application process. Cal closed our application so no other person can enter into our family unit." He smiled.

Mira smiled back at him. "I'm starting to like Cal. I'm almost sorry that I called him a jerk."

"I don't like him at the moment for sending me on this mission. We should be celebrating our family unit approval in my large tub together. Instead we're in this closet of a room on a tiny bed."

"It's cozy."

"It's tiny."

Wiggling against him, she arched her back. "Cozy. Look how close we have to get all the time. We can't sleep together without wrapping around each other. While I wish we had that tub in here if it would fit, which it sure wouldn't, I can happily live with this. You're all mine and I'm all yours."

"You're more than property to me, Mira." Flint stared into her eyes. "I have spent hours thinking about you and I realized something I have been struggling with for days."

Her heart stilled at his serious look. "You haven't reconsidered being in a family unit with me, have you?"

Flint chuckled, his dark blue eyes sparkling with amusement. "No. I want you to know that I feel more than just possessive of you. When you wanted to die before you were willing to let another man own you I realized how important you are to me and that I was important to you as well. I knew that I valued you more than anything else I possess but I hadn't realized why. Seeing you on that balcony today I realized that I didn't want to live without you in my life. I never thought I could feel so much for someone but I feel everything for you."

Mira grinned at him. "I love you too."

He cupped her face in his large hand. "Love. Yes. That's what I feel for you. Your smile makes me happy and your pain makes me hurt with you. Your unhappiness makes me unhappy. Your body makes me ache and you make me hard with need to be inside you. You are always on my mind and when I am not with you, I want you with me."

He shifted his hips, his cock slowly filling Mira. She moaned, wrapping her legs tightly around his hips. "I'm so wet for you and you haven't even tried to turn me on."

"Just being with you, looking at you, and touching you make me need to be inside you." Flint brushed a kiss on her lips.

"I've been aching just thinking about you coming to bed with me." Mira raked her fingernails on his skin where she clutched his shoulders.

Flint lowered his face to kiss her. He moved on her, driving deeply into her as his mouth savaged hers. She met his passion, locking her legs tighter around him, her hands gripping his broad shoulders to brace against as she bucked under him in time to each drive of his hips. He shifted his hips to change his angle of entry. It was all it took for the pleasure to become too much. Mira cried out Flint's name as she exploded in rapture. He groaned, his mouth tearing from hers as he emptied his release into her body that squeezed and gripped him as her muscles held him.

Flint adjusted her legs so that they weren't hooked together behind his ass, rolling them over so she was sprawled on his wide chest. He cursed and had to lift up, moving them away from the edge of the bed before collapsing in the middle with Mira on top of him.

"This bed is too damn small."

She laughed at his grumpy tone. "But we're in it together."

He relaxed under her. "It's cozy. I remember you telling me that. I'll keep repeating that in my head every damn time we end up on the floor."

"If we fall out I hope you hit first and I land on you." She lifted her head up, smiling as she gazed at him.

His hand cupped her ass. That hand gave a squeeze and then lifted away from her body. Flint swatted Mira's ass just enough to make her jump and feel a slight sting. He laughed.

"What was that for?"

He smiled at her. "You want me to hit the floor?"

"You're bigger. If you landed on me I would not only get bruised from that damn floor but you'd crush me."

"I wouldn't want that."

"Me neither."

They stared at each other. Flint suddenly narrowed his eyes. "I have a plan."

"Uh-oh. I don't like that gleam in your eyes."

He tried to look innocent as he smiled at her but he failed miserably at it. "What gleam?"

"The gleam I see in your eyes." She watched him closely, grinning. "I'm seeing total naughtiness and mischief there, Flint. Don't even deny it."

He laughed. "I was only thinking that I'll replace the bed with the cot. I'll tie you down like I did before and then you won't be able to fall out of bed. I'll be cuddled between your lovely thighs so I won't fall off either. It's a perfect solution."

She smiled. "Or I could tie your large body down so you don't fall off and I'll sleep on top of you. You're big enough to be a mattress."

He laughed. "I doubt that me being tied down would be nearly as arousing as you being tied down."

She lifted up off Flint so she could take in the sight of his chest, his arms and shoulders. She studied him carefully. She was getting turned-on just imagining Flint tied up on a cot—bound, naked, so she could do anything to him.

"You'd be surprised. I would touch you everywhere with my hands and my mouth." She put her hand on his chest and lightly raked her fingernails over his nipple. "My fingernails all over your body like this. I'd get you so hard that you would beg me to make you come but I'd hold back. I'd take you to the edge and then tease you all over again until you wanted to break free from the restraints. I'd take you inside me then, Flint. I could ride you or I could take you with my mouth and it would all be up to me."

"Mira," he almost growled her name.

Her gaze lifted, locking with his. Flint's cock hardened under her, letting her feel its firm presence as she spoke. "I'd make you come so damn hard you'd feel like your mind was blown."

Flint groaned. Mira gasped as he rolled them suddenly. He threw off the covers and abruptly climbed out of bed. In shock she saw him lean down to grab his clothes. She sat up, feeling confused and alarmed. Flint started to jerk his pants up his legs.

"Flint? Did I say something wrong?"

He turned to look at her. "Wrong?" A grin split his features as he gave her a sexy wink. "I'm going to get that damn cot. We won't have any floor space in here but I don't care if we can walk in our room. You dig out the ties. I have belts in the fourth drawer. I think we should take turns tying each other up to see what is more arousing."

Tossing off the covers, she laughed as she left the bed. As she passed Flint he grabbed her and lifted her off her feet to kiss her with enough passion to make her moan. He eased his lips from hers. Their gazes met and held.

"I do love you, Mira."

"I love you too. You taking me off that shuttle was the best thing to ever happen to me. I know we've had our ups and downs but I am so happy to be yours, Flint."

"If you ever try to leave me again I'll chase you down. I am never going to let you go. You belong to me and I belong to you. We're one unit now."

Mira smiled. "Good. Now go grab that cot and I'll get the belts." Her feet gently touched the floor as Flint lowered her down and slowly released her. "I know you didn't want to take this mission. I did tell you I was going to make it up to you."

He bypassed his boots to walk to the door. He turned as the door opened when he palmed the scanner. "Who gets tied down first?"

She winked at him. "I got tied up last time. It's your turn."

He nodded with a grin and then he was gone. Mira withdrew belts from his drawer to lay them neatly on the bed. She put on his shirt that he'd forgotten to wear. Right now he was down the hall collecting a cot, wearing just his pants.

Mira chuckled at the thought of him running into any of his crew. The doors behind her opened and she turned. Flint was gripping the cot so it was standing up. It looked damn heavy and awkward to carry but he was a big, tough, strong cyborg. He easily brought it inside the small room, the doors shut behind him. Passion flared between them as their gazes met. Both of them grinned.

* * * * *

Down the corridor two cyborg males frowned. "Was that just the commander carrying a cot into his room? Do you think something happened to his bed?"

The other cyborg shrugged. "That wasn't as strange as the fact that he was mostly naked. He was without boots as well. It's against policy to walk without footwear or a shirt anywhere on the *Star*. The commander is very strict about following policy."

A third cyborg stepped out of the lift with a tray of food and eyed the two men standing in the hallway. "What is going on?"

"We just saw the commander carrying a cot into his quarters. He only wore pants and nothing else."

The third cyborg grinned. Iron laughed aloud at the two confused men. "Everything is as it should be. Trust me on this. I have a cot in my room too."

Both men frowned at Iron. One of them spoke. "Did something happen to your bed?"

"No." He winked. "It's better to tie my human down on a cot when I do things to her to make her beg me to touch her."

With that said, Iron chuckled at their stunned expressions and walked away from the two cyborgs. He couldn't wait to get to his room where his human was waiting, tied to his own cot, taking up all the excess space of his quarters.

About the Author

I'm a full time "in-house supervisor" (sounds *much* better than plain ol' housewife), mother and writer. I'm addicted to caramel iced coffee, the occasional candy bar (or two) and trying to get at least five hours of sleep at night.

I love to write all kinds of stories. I think the best part about writing is the fact that real life is always uncertain, always tossing things at us that we have no control over, but when you write, you can make sure there's always a happy ending. I *love* that about writing. I love it when I sit down at my computer desk and put on my headphones to listen to loud music to block out the world around me, so I can create worlds in front of me.

Laurann welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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