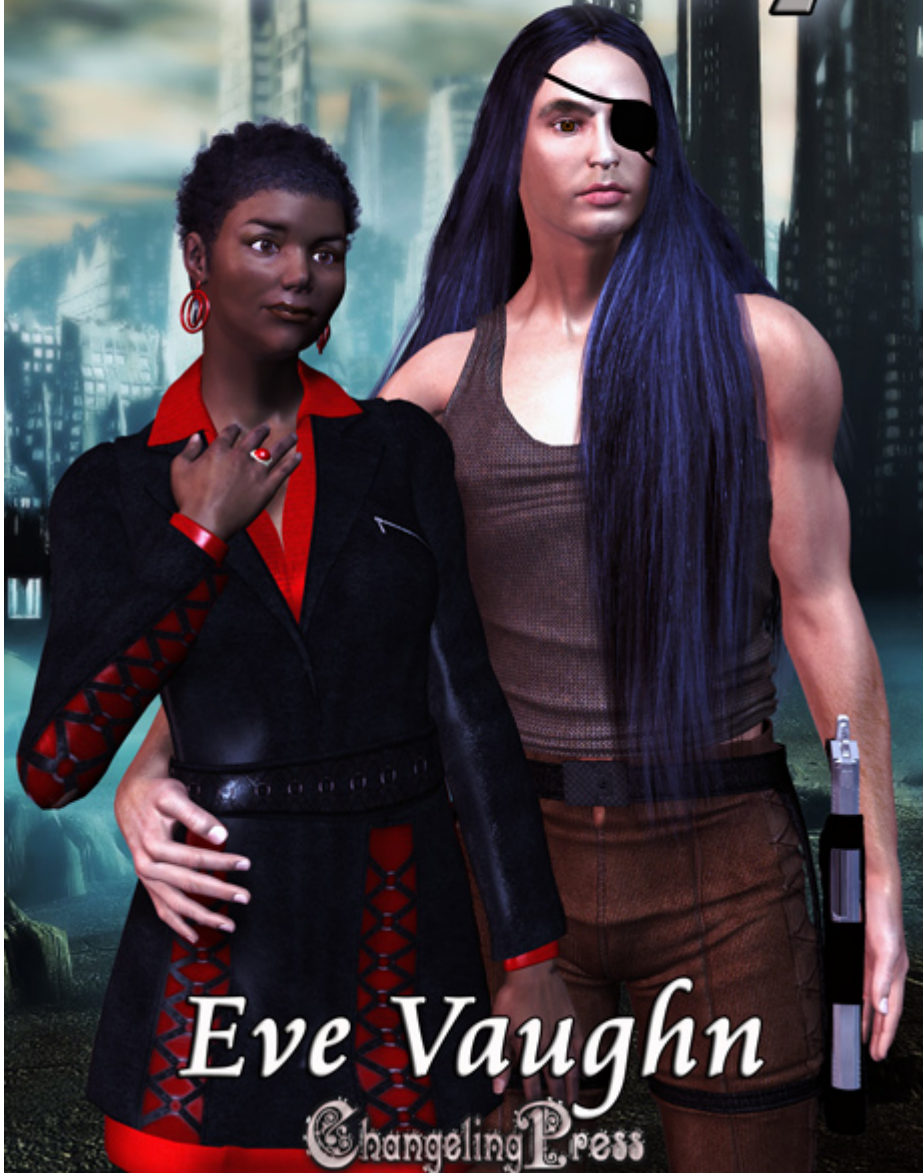


# The Factory



*Eve Vaughn*

Changeling Press

# Children of the Dust 2: The Factory

## Eve Vaughn

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ISBN: 978-1-59596-665-0

Formats Available:  
HTML, Adobe PDF,  
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:  
Changeling Press LLC  
PO Box 1046  
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046  
[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)

Editor: Crystal Esau  
Cover Artist: Karen Fox

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## **Children of the Dust 2: The Factory**

### **Eve Vaughn**

#### *Unlikely Heroes*

**Landing a job at Cryo Cor, the largest food manufacturer on the planet, is a dream come true for Sydney. But her dream job becomes a nightmare when she discovers a horrible secret about Cryo Cor's products. Cryo Cor is processing Humans -- as food!**

**Overnight Sydney becomes a wanted woman. She finds unexpected salvation in the form of a tall, dark, rugged stranger. Jack and his band of Freedom Fighters will stop at nothing to take down the alien threat to mankind. When Jack offers Sydney his protection, sparks immediately fly between these two headstrong people, but their arguments soon turn to equally passionate lovemaking. They'll have to work together to destroy the Cyrellian threat, and preserve the future of Earth.**

## Chapter One

“How can you work for them, knowing they’re behind Bella’s disappearance or don’t you care?” Holly protested, raking her fingers through her thick auburn mane. Frustration radiated from her like an energy beam.

Sydney raised a brow at her friend, not interested in renewing this topic yet again. Since she’d accepted the position at Cryo Cor as a financial analyst, her friend’s complaints had been non-stop. “I’m not going to give up this wonderful opportunity just because you have a grudge against the Cyrellians. And what’s your deal anyway? Even before Bella went missing, you were acting paranoid. I think you need a serious vacation. Are you by any chance implying I’m not as upset about our friend being missing as you are?”

Holly shrugged. “I think I pretty much came out and said it. What kind of friend are you?”

Hurt that Holly could have such a low opinion of her, Sydney turned her back toward the angry woman. Not a day went by when she didn’t think about Bella and where she could be. “If that’s how you feel, I can’t see why you’ve bothered to visit. Maybe it’s best if you left. I don’t have the energy or the time to go back and forth with you on this matter. My head is throbbing and I need to get up early in the morning.”

Sydney walked to the door and opened it, emphasizing her point. As painful as it was to end the evening on this note, she simply didn’t want to hear it anymore.

Holly opened her mouth as if to speak, but then closed it again. Instead, she took a deep breath. “I’m sorry,” she muttered. “It wasn’t my intention to start an argument. I know you care about Bella, but I wish you’d show it sometimes.”

Not one to hold a grudge, she gave Holly a half smile, accepting the apology. “It’s all right. I’ve never been the emotional type.” Goodness knows, showing how she

truly felt about things had been frowned upon when she was younger. Being raised by parents who treated her as an afterthought had done that to her. Sydney wished she knew how to express herself as passionately as Holly, but her most tender feelings she kept within, still fearful of being judged and made to feel inadequate.

“True, but I had no right to say what I did. It was uncalled for. It’s just... I’m scared we’ll never see her again. It’s almost as if she’s vanished into thin air.” Tears filled light brown eyes as Holly’s bottom lip began to quiver.

Unable to see her friend suffer without offering any comfort, Sydney closed the door gently behind her and strode across the room. Engulfing Holly within her embrace, she cradled and rocked her back and forth.

The redhead broke into loud sobs. “I think she might be dead and the last time we spoke, angry words were exchanged. I’d do anything to have her back, and to tell her how much I love her. I realize I can be a bit overprotective at times because of her disability, but it was only because I cared.”

Sydney stroked the back of Holly’s head. “I’m sure Bella knows how you feel. And she and I have been putting up with you for years. Besides, we can’t give up hope. Even though we’ve seen no signs of her, nothing concrete points to foul play yet. For now, I have to believe she’s all right. Our Bella is a fighter and you’ll have to give her credit for that.”

Holly raised her head with tear-filled eyes. “Do you really think so... that she’s safe, I mean?”

Sydney brushed away the wet tracks from Holly’s face. “Yes. I know it sounds strange, but I feel in my heart she’s alive. Believe it or not, I think about her too. And I do pound the pavement and ask people if they’ve seen her. Granted, I may not have devoted as much of my time with it as you have, but I haven’t forgotten her nor do I intend to.”

Holly’s mouth gaped open. “Why haven’t you ever said anything?”

“I didn’t think it was necessary. Surely you couldn’t have believed I’d do nothing?”

“But I said such mean things to you. You let me throw unfounded accusations at your head.”

“We all say stuff in the heat of the moment we don’t mean. You’ve apologized and I’ve accepted, so it’s done. Don’t worry, sweetie, we’ll find her.”

“I pray we do. Look, Syd, at the risk of harping on the same issue, would you at least consider what I’ve said about Cryo Cor?”

Sydney pulled away from Holly and leaned against the closest wall with a heavy sigh. “I’m starting my new position tomorrow. Besides, if I wanted to change my mind about it, I would have in the weeks it’s taken for my clearance to finally go through.”

“That’s another thing. Why do you have to go through such an extensive background check before you can officially begin your job? I mean, you’ll only be working in the finance department, not around the food. That seems kind of shady to me.”

“They’re very selective about who they hire.”

“But it took two months. You’d think they’d have contacted you sooner than last week.”

“I’m sure they only want to make sure I’m a trustworthy employee. Besides, it’s possible I could come in contact with their recipes and they want to make sure I’m not the type of person who would sell their secrets to a competitor.”

“But --”

Sydney held up her hand. “You accuse me of not being a good friend, but I can say the same for you. While I’m going to do what I have to for my own good with or without your consent, your support would be appreciated.”

“There’s something wrong with their food. It’s making people sick.”

“How would you know? You don’t eat any of their products.”

“I did once, and something seemed off. Besides, I’ve heard things.”

“You’re starting to sound like one of those renegades. Didn’t you learn your lesson when one of these nuts blew up the clinic while you were only a few feet away from it? You could have been killed.”

"But I wasn't." Holly nibbled on her bottom lip. "I wonder what happened to him." She got that far-off look in her eyes, the same one that appeared whenever she referred to the incident. Sydney never pressed for the full story, but she deduced something else must have happened. Otherwise, why else would Holly clam up when her encounter with the renegade was mentioned?

"You never fully disclosed what went on between you and that guy."

Holly furrowed her brows together, turning her lips down into a slight frown. "There's not much to tell. He blew up the building and... let's just say he didn't stick around long enough to witness the aftermath. Actually, I'd rather talk about you and Cryo Cor."

"And I'd rather not. Can't we simply agree to disagree?"

Holly scrunched her nose, looking like she wanted to argue. Thankfully she didn't. Instead, she nodded with obvious reluctance. "Fine, if that's what I have to do to keep the peace, I won't say anything else about it, but I'm not happy."

"But it's not your life, it's mine. And if you want to retain this relationship, I think we need to drop the subject altogether."

"Fine but --"

"No buts."

"Okay. Even if we don't see eye to eye on this matter, it doesn't mean we'll stop being friends."

"I know. I think we're both stressed over Bella, and it's making us a little crazy." Sydney stepped away from the wall, took a seat, and patted the empty space next to her.

Holly's lips tilted into a wide grin as she accepted the invitation and flopped down on the couch. "Okay, since we're avoiding all talk of you-know-what-Cor, tell me about your latest conquest."

Sydney grimaced. For some reason Holly and Bella believed her to be some sort of femme fatale. That was far from the truth. Sure she'd dated quite a bit; however,



none of her companions lasted longer than a few months. But it wasn't because she set out to conquer and discard.

The fact was, the men in her life eventually bored her. In her thirty years, she'd never once met a man who made her pulse race, head spin, or gave her that queasy feeling in her stomach. Considering the clinical way in which she'd been raised, it was a wonder she believed in romance at all. But she did, and wouldn't settle for anything less. Unfortunately she'd come to the conclusion that since she had gone this long without finding that certain someone, he simply wasn't out there. Maybe it was all just idyllic foolishness on her part.

"I don't have a latest anything as you so delicately put it. In fact, I'm through with dating for a while. I want to concentrate on my career."

"But what about sex?"

"What about it? The last two guys were disasters."

Holly's eyebrows furrowed together. "They couldn't have been that bad. Besides, I saw the hunk you were dating a couple weeks ago. He was an ebony god. Sheesh, how could he have been a dud in bed?"

Sydney rolled her eyes. "The problem was, he had too high of an opinion of himself. The bastard had no consideration for my needs as a lover. And on top of that he had a licking problem."

"Um, what's wrong with that? I'd love for a guy to run his tongue all over my body."

"He liked licking my face. Girl, I felt like a doggy treat."

Holly shuddered. "Eww. What happened to the blond before him?"

"That was even worse. He only lasted a couple minutes, rolled off of me then went to sleep. I had to masturbate in order for the night not to be a total loss. Needless to say, I broke things off shortly afterwards."

"Wow. That's unfortunate."

"Tell me about it," Sydney snorted.

"But all your former lovers couldn't have been that bad."

“No. Some were actually very nice in the sack, but there’s been no fireworks. Maybe I’m simply not the orgasmic type when I’m with men. I get more pleasure getting myself off.”

“Either that or you haven’t met the right guy to give it to you like a real man should.”

“Possibly, but then again, so-called real men are the ones who always disappoint. No thanks. Like I said, I’ll focus on my job and find fulfillment there. With all the losers coming my way lately, any man who brags about his prowess in bed is likely to have me running the other way.”

\* \* \*

Jack watched the workers head into Cryo Cor headquarters. He’d been waiting for his contact to arrive for the past hour. Where the hell was he? Had the man lost his nerve? Or had *they* gotten to him? The thought made him cringe. It hadn’t been his intention to put a civilian’s life at risk, but he needed a contact on the inside to get proof of what the Cyrellians were up to.

Maybe he was jumping the gun; something could have come up. Perhaps Weems was just getting to work late. Whatever the reason was, Jack realized he’d have to be patient, even though it was difficult. Knowing how close his band of rebels were to waking the rest of their people up to the dangers surrounding them gave him the will to persevere.

He scanned the throng of people until he found a person of interest. It wouldn’t hurt to have a backup in case Weems fell through. Jack spotted a nondescript man of medium height. He could easily blend in a crowd.

Lifting his eye patch, Jack scanned his potential mark with his bionic eye, using the zooming feature. Upon closer inspection there seemed to be something unsettling about the man. The way his hands shook and the sweat stains on his shirt told Jack the man might be a little too high strung to handle any mission. Besides, judging from the yellow sheen of his perspiration, the man was in the first stages of the wasting disease that had already killed hundreds of people.

It made Jack sick to his stomach to know how the Cyrellians had everyone fooled to the point where the Humans were unknowingly poisoning themselves with the food the aliens provided, and Cryo Cor was the main culprit.

Shit.

Where was Weems and how did Jack get stuck with this particular assignment? He would much rather have been the one to blow up the clinic, but instead he'd given the honor to Chase. Or at the very least, he should be back at camp coming up with a strategy to get the message to the people. Instead he was here, waiting for someone who might or might not show up -- the person who would help him bring down Cryo Cor.

Jack stuck around for another hour before coming to the conclusion that Weems wasn't going to show up. He'd risked his neck to sneak into the city for nothing and he was pissed. The only way he could salvage this trip was to find someone else -- a contact who wasn't likely to betray his presence. But who? It had taken him weeks to find Weems.

For one thing, if he chose someone who was too brainwashed by the Cyrellian propaganda, he took a chance of having the whistle blown on him and the rest of his band of Freedom Fighters.

Was it only three short years ago when he too believed in the so-called friendly aliens? He'd defended and trusted that they had the people of Earth's interests at heart. His error had nearly cost him his life. Jack was so deep in thought he nearly missed one of the most spectacular visions he'd ever seen.

Coming out of the building, and striding confidently on a pair of long shapely legs that seemed to go on forever, the woman drew several stares in her direction. With rich dark brown skin, exotically tilted light brown eyes, and a full set of lips made for sinning, she moved as if unaware of the effect she had on the men surrounding her.

Her shapely figure was encased in a black pant suit and a red top with the first three buttons undone to show off just enough of her skin while maintaining her

professionalism. The gorgeous creature's shorn locks hugged her scalp, showing off high cheekbones to perfection.

It had been a while since he'd had some pussy and he certainly wouldn't mind giving her a shot. To his surprise she walked in his direction. When she was only a few feet away, she halted.

Jack ducked behind the tree so he could continue to watch her unobserved. She seemed agitated as she dug into her purse for something. After searching for a minute, she finally pulled out a small communicator and punched some numbers in. Rocking back and forth on those incredible legs of hers, she seemed to be waiting for someone on the other end to answer.

"Holly. It's me, Sydney." She paused. "I can't really talk now, but can you come over to my place later tonight? There's something I have to tell you."

Again she waited for a response. "I don't think it would be a good idea to get into details right now, but I'll explain everything when I see you, I promise."

Silence.

"Yes, I'm fine, and yes, I will. I'm beginning to have my doubts about this place too..."

That got Jack's attention. Who was she talking to and what doubts was she having? A slow smile tugged the corners of his mouth. Maybe he'd just found his new target. He didn't know if he could trust her or not, but the simple fact that she'd voiced her uncertainty in the company she worked for was enough for him to see if she was at least willing to listen to him.

When she stuffed her communicator back into her purse, she moved as if she were going back into the building. Thinking quickly on his feet, he reached out from behind the tree and grasped her hand, pulling her close.

Her eyes widened and her lips formed an "o," poised to scream, but he put his hand over her mouth. "Don't make any noise."

Instead of the reasonable fear he expected, her eyes shot daggers at him. She didn't seem scared; in fact, she looked pissed.

## Chapter Two

Her heart pounded so fast and loud she was sure it would burst through her chest. Who was the psychopath with the menacing eye patch and the mammoth-sized hand covering her mouth? There was no way she was going to let some maniac kill her in broad daylight.

She brought her heel down on his foot. Hard.

That made him lower his hand but his grip remained tight around her waist. "Ouch. You little vixen!"

Sydney balled her hand into a fist, prepared to deliver a blow, but he was too quick for her. With his free hand, he caught her wrist and applied enough pressure to make her gasp.

"Let me go, you son of a bitch!" She began to struggle in earnest, but instead of letting her go, he scooped her off her feet and carried her to the side of the building.

She looked around to see if there was anyone who could aid her, but there was no one. Why couldn't she have waited to talk to Holly later instead of coming outside? There had been news that renegades were lurking around the city and bringing harm to the peace-loving citizen. If this jerk thought she'd stand for being a victim, he'd soon learn she wasn't going down without a fight.

"If you stop wiggling, and promise not to run off screaming, I'll put you down. I won't hurt you, but I need to talk to you." His deep throaty voice was like velvet. Murderers weren't supposed to sound like this. Or be so big, solid, and toned.

Regardless of his assurance, she didn't want to take the chance on his not trying something. Maybe if she played along with him to see what he'd do next and then when the opportunity presented itself, she could make a clean break from this goon.

This very disturbingly sexy goon.

*Stop it, girl.* Victims of violent crimes weren't supposed to think of their attackers in that manner.

"Okay. I won't run," she lied, going still.

"If you try to bolt, I will catch you. I'm bigger and faster than you."

She shot him a glare. "You're a big bully. If you wanted to talk to me, you should have approached me like a normal human being."

As he lowered Sydney to her feet, her body slid down his hard length. A rush of warmth swept through her body and her nipples pebbled against her blouse. Damn, why hadn't she worn a bra today?

"Would you have been receptive to what I had to say if I'd simply walked up to you?"

She shrugged, her eyes darting from side to side as she tried to map out an escape plan. "I don't know. Probably not. I don't normally make a habit of speaking to strange men who look like vagabonds," she muttered.

To her surprise, Tall, Dark, and Devastatingly Sexy threw his head back and laughed. It was a great sound, but she wouldn't have admitted it out loud if her life depended on it. Here was her opportunity, to escape.

Raising her knee, she jammed it toward his crotch. Unfortunately his quick reflexes saved him again. He moved enough for her blow to connect with his thigh instead of her intended target.

Before she realized what was happening, he had her pinned against the wall, his body pressing into hers. He grasped her wrists in one of his massive hands and pinioned them above her head.

Just as she was about to scream, his mouth covered hers in a suffocating kiss. The moment his lips hit hers, she was paralyzed with surprise. Internally she knew she should be fighting for her life, but something happened that she hadn't counted on. A wave of sheer desire washed over her.

No! This wasn't right. She wasn't supposed to be turned on by some random man off the street, and a dangerous one at that. Her sense of battle roused, she bucked against him in an attempt to push him off, but he was too strong.

She was sure the kiss had started out as a way for him to silence her, but it soon became more. He moved his mouth over hers, as though trying to find the perfect way for their lips to fit together. Then his tongue came forward, pushing past her teeth and plundering inside, seeking, exploring and tasting her. The sensitive peaks of her breasts rubbed painfully against the silk material of her blouse and moisture pooled between her thighs.

She couldn't remember the last time she'd been this excited by anyone. How was it that this man -- someone unknown to her a few minutes ago -- could wring such an immediate response from her body? Hell, she still didn't know him, yet in that moment it didn't matter.

Losing all common sense, she returned his hunger, giving as he took and savoring his pure masculine flavor. Frissons of heat shot up her spine. Dear Sweet Goodness! This man could kiss.

Releasing her wrists, he dropped his hands to cup the sides of her breasts. Sydney twined her fingers through his thick black locks, reveling in their silkiness. To her utter shame it was the stranger who broke away from her, a knowing grin on his face.

She wanted to smack him.

Trying to salvage what little of her pride she had left, she raised her chin defiantly. "Don't ever touch me again."

"Or what?" One onyx-colored eye gleamed with what she determined to be amusement. "Look, Sydney --"

She stiffened. "How did you know my name?"

"I overheard you talking on your communicator."

“And do you make it a habit to know all of your victims’ names before you kill them? Someone may come looking for me any minute now. I’ve been gone longer than I should have.”

“First off, I’m not going to kill you. Offing beautiful women isn’t something I relish.”

“Then why did you grab and molest me?”

He grinned, revealing large white teeth. “It’s only molestation if the advances are unwanted and from where I was standing, you liked it. Probably a lot more than you care to admit.”

She closed her eyes briefly to get a hold of her breathing and then slowly opened them again. “If you don’t want to hurt me, then why did you pull me behind the building?”

“I’m trying to figure that out myself, beautiful.”

“Don’t call me that. You don’t know me.”

His mouth slanted to a half-grin. “But I’d like to. The name’s Jack. Now that we’ve been formally introduced does that make you feel better?”

This man was insufferable. Sydney narrowed her eyes, hoping her expression conveyed her annoyance with him.

His facial expression became serious all of a sudden, a frown marring his forehead. “Do you know a man named Dexter Weems?”

The name rang a bell, but she couldn’t figure out why. “I don’t know him but...”

“You’ve heard of him haven’t you?”

“He sounds vaguely familiar.”

“He works for Cryo Cor.”

That’s where she’d heard of him. “When I started here a few weeks ago, the office was abuzz because the word was that he was embezzling money. But lately I’ve heard whispers that he actually had some type of breakdown and was sent to an asylum.”



He moved away from her and raked his fingers through his hair. "Shit. They got to him."

Sydney took advantage of the distance he put between the two of them to straighten her clothes. She didn't know why, but instinct told her, despite his imposing appearance, he wouldn't hurt her. Studying him from under her lashes she noted his tall, lean cut length. Being six feet tall herself, it wasn't often she met a man who she literally looked up to. He had at least five or six inches on her.

With a square chiseled jaw and a cleft in his chin he was all man. Added to that, the eye patch resting over his left eye gave him the hint of danger most women would have found exciting.

Maybe she should be more wary of this man if he could make her give in to him in an instant. Sydney trembled when she thought of what it would be like, trapped beneath this powerful man's body.

She shook her head, trying to rid her mind of the thought. Now was the time to get the hell out of here. "Look, I have to go." Sydney slowly inched away from him, but his hand shot out to keep her from fleeing.

"Wait. How long have you worked for Cryo Cor?"

"Not that it's any of your business, but three weeks. Look, I promise I won't blow the whistle on you, but you have to let me go."

"You seemed upset about something when you came out of the building. Did something happen?"

Sydney yanked her arm away from him. "Are you nuts? Why are you asking me all these weird questions?"

"Because our lives depend on it. Yours, mine, everyone's. If I had time to find someone else, I would, but the Cyrellians somehow got to our contact. For all I know, they could have killed him already."

The intensity burning in his obsidian eye chilled her to the core. Regardless of whether she thought him crazy or not, he obviously believed what he was saying and that could be a danger in itself. "So what do you want me to do about it?"

“Help me -- our cause. We need someone on the inside to find the GXT file. It just might provide the evidence we need to prove to everyone that our alien pals aren't so friendly. And I already have a sneaking suspicion you're beginning to have your own worries about the precious company you work for.”

She shook her head in denial. “I don't know what you're talking about.” Even to her ears, the words didn't sound very convincing. After all, hadn't she noticed things weren't quite right herself?

He raised a brow. “Wanna pull the other one?”

Sydney pursed her lips, realizing there was no point in trying to convince him otherwise. “Look, even if I did get involved, how do I know I can trust you, or that I won't end up like Weems?” She shook her head. “I can't afford to get involved with a terrorist.”

“Is that what you think I am?”

“Blowing up clinics, disorderly conduct, destroying public property, and endangering people's lives? Yeah, I'd call that terrorism.”

“One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.”

“Whatever your aim, I want no part of it. My day was bad enough before you got involved. Please leave me alone. I can't deal with this right now.” This time when she made a move to get away, he didn't stop her.

Jack watched Sydney scurry away, noting the sway of her generous backside. At the sight of that luscious rump, his cock jumped to attention, straining uncomfortably against the rough material of his pants. What the hell had made him practically make love to her against the very building he was supposed to be staking out?

Not only that, why in the world had he risked discovery by telling her more than she needed to know before he could assess whether she was trustworthy? As much as he wanted to stick around and find out more about the mysterious Sydney, he needed to get out of here.

But one thing was certain, he would be back.

## Chapter Three

"Are you fucking kidding me? What the hell is wrong with you, man? Not only could you have been caught, but you might have blown our entire operation in the process, over some pussy no less," Chase raged, striding back and forth along the strategy room.

Jack tensed, trying not to snap back at his friend and second in command. These weren't grievances he hadn't already tortured himself with. "I only had a few seconds to make a decision, and took the risk. Whether it pays off or not is yet to be seen."

Chase slammed his fist against the closest wall. "You spent weeks scoping the place and determining that Weems was our guy and when that blew up in your face you should have come back here so we could reevaluate what needed to be done."

Jack had had enough of being lectured like a child. Raising a brow and meeting Chase's angry brown gaze he said coldly, "The way you're going on, one would think you were in charge instead of me."

A furious red color crept into the other man's face. "Don't give me that shit!" Chase stalked toward Jack and poked him in the chest with his index finger. "You might be the leader, but this is a team and you said yourself we can't succeed unless we work together. When you decide to make decisions without consulting the rest of us then you go against your own rules, or do you think you're above them?"

Jack clenched and unclenched his jaw, breathing deeply and letting his own fury slowly leave him before replying. He sighed. "You're right. Had it been you, I'd probably be pissed too. I shouldn't have shared confidential information with someone I wasn't sure about, but she..."

"What?"

"There was something about her. She doesn't seem like the type to --"

“Blow our cover? Remember the last person we trusted who betrayed us? Those bastards destroyed our compound and we lost three good men because of it. I’m not going to let that happen again because you’re thinking with the little head instead of the big one.”

“Oh yeah, and you haven’t had those moments? What about that redhead you told me about. If you hadn’t been so caught up in her, you might have gotten away without almost blowing your cover.”

This time when Chase blushed it wasn’t from anger. Obviously embarrassed at being caught in his own trap, he offered a sheepish grin. “Okay, so we both had our dumbass moments, but at least I didn’t give away more information than I should have.”

“To be honest, I didn’t really tell her much. Only that the company she’s working for isn’t as great as she thinks it is. And I put the idea to her about replacing Weems.”

“Yes, but by giving that away, you could have cost Weems his life. For all we know, he’s already being processed and sold. He might already be digested by now.”

“No. The spy working in that sector says he’s still alive. The Cyrellians are probably going to torture as much information out of him as possible.”

Chase pursed his lips and rubbed his chin in his silent musings. “Hmm, it might be a good idea to move camp again.”

Jack grimaced at the prospect, but what option did they have? “It’s too bad. I was beginning to like this place. It’s spacious and the proximity to the city is ideal.”

“We’ll send Anna out to scout new locations. She found this place. I’m sure she can get us something comparable or even better.”

At the mention of Anna’s name Jack cringed. He knew he’d hurt her, which made living in such close proximity awkward. The once easy friendship they’d shared was almost nonexistent. Whenever their paths crossed, it was all business. Ever the consummate professionals, they put aside their differences to work together. Still, something had to give before things got beyond the point they were now.

“Earth to Jack.” Chase waved his hand in Jack’s face.

With a start he broke out of his thoughts. "Sorry."

"Where did you go?"

"Just thinking about what I'm going to do about the Anna situation."

Chase shot him an I-told-you-so look, but thankfully didn't verbalize what he was probably thinking. "Damn, I wish you would have kept your damn mouth shut about our operation," he muttered.

Jack's annoyance began to grow. "Okay, I get it. I made a mistake. We've established who's to blame, so if we all get blown to smithereens I take full responsibility. It's time to move on."

"I'm sorry. I'm being an ass aren't I?"

Jack chuckled, never one to hold a grudge. "A little."

"I just have all this nervous energy inside of me right now. We've been planning this coup for months, and it's frustrating to know they got to Weems. We'll have to bust him out. He didn't deserve to be dragged down for getting involved with us."

"You're right. We'll get the search and rescue team on that. Will you be heading it up?"

Chase nodded. "Will do. What about the woman?"

"Sydney?"

"Is that her name?"

"Yes. What about her?"

"It stands to reason if someone found out about Weems's involvement with us, then they could have also noticed Sydney talking to you. As far as we know they could already be setting her up."

Jack rubbed his chin. "I never thought about that. You're right. What do you suggest we do?"

"If it's not too late, we'll need to warn her. Let her know to lay low for a while."

"I'll do it."

Chase shook his head. "Uh uh. You were swayed by her pretty face once before. I don't want it to happen again."

Jack snorted. "What the hell do you think I'll do? I know better this time around. Anyway, it's my mistake so I'll be the one to fix it."

Chase's uncertainty was clear, but before he had time to reply the door flew open. "Jack, Chase, there's something I think you need to see." Anna walked into the room, her gaze not making contact with Jack.

Jack wished she'd look at him when she spoke. At least then he wouldn't feel like a class A asshole. "What is it?"

"We've intercepted some strange signal coming from space. I can't quite get a lock on the coordinates, but whatever it is seems to be getting closer."

Chase frowned. "More Cyrellians?"

She shook her head, making the long blonde braid dangling behind her swing. "I don't think so. It seems like some kind of distress call. Another odd thing about it is whoever is sending it is making sure the communication is sent outside the city, almost as if they don't want the Cyrellians to know of their arrival."

Jack furrowed his brows together. "More aliens? As far as I know, if some kind of signal is being sent, anyone with the proper equipment can pick it up."

Anna nodded, still keeping her attention focused on Chase. "Yes, but our communicators show it's only hitting outside of the city. If they're able to target where they want to send a message, their technology might be way beyond even that of the Cyrellians."

"I see," Chase murmured, although it seemed clear that he didn't. "I think you'd better show us what you're talking about." Turning on his heel, he was the first to walk out of the room.

Anna was close behind, but Jack halted her progress, grabbing her by the elbow. "Wait."

She stared pointedly at his hand. "What do you want, Jack?" A wary expression crept into her crystal blue eyes.

Jack wished more than anything he hadn't crossed that line of friendship between them. He'd known she liked him as more than a friend and a commander, yet

he'd taken advantage of her trust in him. Granted, he'd been honest and told her he'd wanted a no-strings-attached affair, and Anna had agreed, but he should have known better.

"I'm sorry," he said finally.

She pulled her elbow out of his grasp. "Forget about it. We need to go."

"I know things can't go back to the way they used to be with us, but couldn't we at least try to gain some ground back? There was a time when we had no problem communicating."

A tear spilled from the corner of her eye, which she angrily wiped away. "I don't want to talk about this. We've already established it's my fault anyway. I was the fool for thinking I could tame the great Jack Rogers. You discard women without an afterthought, so who was I to believe that I'd be any different?" The bitterness rang clear in her voice and each word cut him to the core.

He closed his eye briefly and then opened it. "You were more than that to me."

"Oh yeah? From my perspective you couldn't wait to kick me out of your bed."

"I'm sorry if that's the way you felt, but that's not how it was. If I can take back anything, it's that I hurt you."

"Well, it's too late and you did. This conversation is over and I'd rather you not bring it up again."

"Regardless of what you think, I do care about you."

"Bullshit."

"Anna --"

She held up her hand with a shake of her head. "If you care about me like you claim, then please respect my wishes. We have no choice but to work together toward a common goal, however I'd rather any further communications between us be business only."

Jack knew there was no arguing with that line of logic and he couldn't say he blamed her. He nodded in agreement. "If that's what you want."

"It is."

Jack followed her out of the room. Lately, it seemed as if women were complicating his life more than they should. First it was Anna, and then it was Sydney. If their paths crossed again, he wasn't sure how he'd be able to keep his hands to himself. He should have learned his lesson with the Anna debacle, but he'd always been told he was hard-headed.

\* \* \*

Sydney watched the clock, her heart pounding in time with its ticking. A wave of paranoia hit her. If she was caught going through these confidential files, there was no telling what would happen to her. But now that she'd come this far there was no turning back.

She slid the access pass along the sensor and waited for the green light signaling the door could be opened. Were those footsteps? She rushed into the room and ducked behind the wall. Not having the proper clearance to enter this sector of the building she knew if someone found her in here, she'd be fired for sure -- or worse.

Since her encounter with Jack, she hadn't been able to shake what he'd said, and unfortunately, she was beginning to agree with him. Something definitely wasn't right at Cryo Cor. Sydney had already come to the company with doubts Holly had planted, but coupled with some of the strange things she'd witnessed in her first week at the office, she began to wonder.

The strangeness started with Dexter Weems. He was already gone by the time she'd arrived, but a few looked fearful about his dismissal when they spoke of it. It had been said he was fired for absconding with company funds, but Sydney had overheard a heated conversation that stated otherwise.

"They got to him, I know it," whispered a nervous looking man with a yellowish tint to his skin.

"You shouldn't say that too loud. They might hear you." A woman with an equally yellowish hue looked over her shoulder as though expecting someone to round the corner any minute.



Sydney had backed away before the two could see her, but their conversation had added fuel to her growing concerns. What the hell were they so frightened of? Or who?

She'd chalked it up to an overactive imagination, but when she'd shared her observations with Holly later that night, the redhead didn't seem to think so.

"I knew it! I told you things were strange at that company. Maybe they had that poor man killed."

"We don't know that, Holly. It could be one of those things. You know how office gossip is."

"But didn't you tell me how the Cyrellians supply you workers with their food in the cafeteria and how snacks are put out in the break rooms -- for free? What place of business does that... all the time?"

Sydney had rolled her eyes. "Because heaven forbid that a corporation actually takes care of its employees."

"Yet everyone who works there seems to be off-color. I'd say that it's more than a coincidence. If your colleagues are filling their bodies with that junk it could be having harmful side effects. Not only that, I know people who buy their stuff all the time, and they're in no better shape. One guy died from it."

"Of a heart attack. Cryo Cor can hardly be blamed for that."

"Can't they? Look, I'm keeping my end of the bargain and not trying to discourage you from working there, but I caution you: keep your eyes open. Please do that for me at least."

Sydney had agreed and had done just that. In most circumstances she would have enjoyed her job as a financial analyst, but she began to notice more peculiar incidents. Whenever she spoke to a co-worker they always had some company provided snack in their hand. It was almost like an addiction.

Honestly, she'd never eaten their foods before because she was a vegetarian and rarely ate junk food. Curiosity made her wonder what it was about this stuff that had

people craving it to the point where they'd get up in the middle of a project and go get a snack before returning to their task.

When she'd tasted it, there was nothing spectacular about the flavor that would make one want more. Shrugging it off, Sydney didn't give it another thought until a few hours later. A hunger like she'd never experienced before hit her. It was odd, because she instinctively knew her usual fruits weren't going to hit the spot this time. She needed... Cryo Chips.

She ate an entire bag, hardly noticing the taste, but her craving had been fulfilled. Sydney didn't realize the effect of the snack on her until later. Maybe there was something to this food. She vowed not to touch the stuff, planning on sticking with what she brought to the office, although she'd broken out into a cold sweat wanting it later that night. That had led to a major headache the next day. It took a couple days until her longing to have it stopped, but from then on she never so much as glanced at the products.

One day she was called into a meeting with her manager, a female Cyrellian named Zjanna. Sydney had liked the other woman, who let most of the workers be as long as they did the jobs given them. So it had been a surprise to be summoned to her office.

Recalling that incident, Sydney believed she was going to get in trouble, but instead her boss had smiled. "How do you like the place so far, Sydney? You've been here for four weeks and I've heard great things about you."

She had let out a sigh of relief to know she hadn't pissed off the powers that be, but then her unease returned at Zjanna's next statement.

"It's been noted that you've been staying away from the food provided by the company. Is there any reason why?"

Sydney had frowned, thinking it odd for a manager to ask that of an employee. She was unsure what this line of questioning had to do with her position. "While I think it's wonderful that Cryo Cor provides hot breakfasts and lunches as well as snacks for their workers, I prefer my own lunch. I'm a bit of a health nut."

The Cyrellian looked at her with huge black eyes, not speaking for several moments. She finally nodded her long head. "I see. We thought maybe something wasn't to your taste. We like to give the people who work here the first shot at trying new products we'd like to put out on the market."

"Oh. That's a clever idea." Sydney had felt more uncomfortable sitting there under the alien's scrutiny than she ever had. She'd never once questioned the Cyrellians' generosity before working here -- never needed to... until now.

She sensed that her employers wanted everyone to eat the food. But why? And if this was what they planned to sell to the masses, there'd be thousands of junk food junkies.

Zjanna had smiled. "Well, maybe you should give our items another try. Employee feedback is important to us."

"Sure. I'll grab a bag of chips when I go back to the break room."

"Great."

On top of that strange meeting, running into that renegade hadn't helped matters. What did he know that he didn't tell her? Since their encounter, she couldn't stop thinking about him. How he'd made her feel was another issue entirely, but the mention of a file by the name of GXT had her wondering exactly what was in it.

Through casual questioning, Sydney had learned that Dexter had had access to this sector, which was probably how he'd learned about it. Not able to let the matter go without determining matters for herself, she devised a plan.

She'd find that file!

It took a few days to figure out how to do it, but the answer came in the form of an unsuspecting colleague who made a habit of leaving his security access card on the desk. He also had clearance to get into the file room, so Sydney decided to stay late at work one day and take the pass.

Her co-workers were gone for the day and everything was going according to plan. Most of the Cyrellian bosses stayed in their office and rarely ventured to the area she needed to be in.

Rifling through the files, Sydney was on the verge of giving up when she noticed a stack of folders away from the others. With shaking hands, she lifted them and thumbed through them. On top was what she was looking for.

There was no time to read it. She'd have to take it with her and then return it tomorrow in hopes that no one would notice it was missing.

Sydney stole out of the room with the precious cargo tucked under her arm and looked from left to right. Maybe she was nuts for doing this, but if there was nothing wrong, this file would prove it and she would finally have the peace of mind she desperately wanted.

Her heart drummed as she retraced her steps and returned the security card before leaving the building. Then she went straight home, making no stops.

Eager to read the fruits of her labor she opened the file and scanned it. To her absolute horror, the drug GXT was an addictive compound developed by the Cyrellians to get people to eat more of their foods. What was worse, there seemed to be no signs that it had been properly tested before it was injected into the food. Were they trying to poison the people of Earth? It explained the yellowish tint a lot of her co-workers had.

If she weren't reading it with her own eyes, Sydney wouldn't have believed it. What was going on? She wasn't sure what they were doing was illegal because there was no governing body to regulate what went into most of the food. Everyone simply assumed that what they were eating was good for them. So even if she brought this to light, she'd probably look like one of the crazy renegades, but then again they weren't as far out as she'd believed.

Her stomach turned as she read the rest, unable to believe they were selling this junk to people. She flipped through the file with a frown. Holly had been right!

Sydney was about to close the manila folder in disgust when a note fell out. Frowning, she lifted the small triangle, unfolded it, and read the handwritten note.

*My only hope is if someone reads this file before the Cyrellians can destroy it. Cryo Cor is not only poisoning the inhabitants of Earth with their drugs; the meats they use are not what*

*they claim. Anyone who has mysteriously disappeared within the last several months has likely ended up on dinner tables across the land. They're on to me, and I fear they'll do to me as they've done to countless others. I only wish I'd listened to the leader of the Freedom Fighters before this. Maybe I could have done more.*

*Dexter*

Sydney dropped the file as if she'd been scorched.

*People.*

Cryo Cor was turning Humans into cannibals!

## Chapter Four

Jack studied the notice on the side of the building. Plastered in the center was the face of Sydney: wanted for theft and destruction of property. The poster stated she was armed and probably dangerous.

Cursing under his breath, he shook his head. They'd found her out. He only hoped she was smart enough to lay low. His mission to save Dexter had failed. They'd killed the man by the time Jack had gotten to the holding facility. He wasn't going to allow that to happen to Sydney.

She must have gone after that file and it was his fault. Since the entire city was on the lookout for her, Jack knew it would only be a matter of time before they got to her. His task now was to find her before the Cyrellians did, but where could she be?

Where would a six feet tall, willowy woman with skin like polished mahogany hide out? He had to admit her looks would probably work against her since she had such distinctive features.

He drew the hood of his jacket over his head. It wouldn't do to have his face recognized either. Seeing no point in sticking around and drawing attention to himself, he set out on his search.

Jack covered the city, checking every alley and hideout he knew of, but there was no sign of her. Had they already gotten to her? With their trackers it was relatively easy for them to find their prey.

On the verge of giving up his search until the next day, he heard a scream. "No!" It was a woman's voice. One that sounded strangely familiar. Could it be?

Tapping his pocket lightly to ensure he had the weapons he needed, he ran toward the commotion.

One Human enforcement officer and the other Cyrellian were on either side of a fighting woman, who was scratching and clawing to get free. They had Sydney!

A crowd gathered around to see what was going on. The Cyrellian pulled out a taser and shoved it against Sydney's ribs. The blood-curdling yell she released spurred Jack into action.

Whipping out his smoke bomb, he tossed it in the center of the crowd. It released a thick grayish fog, cloaking the area. People scattered, coughing and sputtering. It gave him just enough time to break through the throng of fleeing bystanders.

He used the sheer bulk of his body to ram the smaller enforcement officer, making him lose his grip on Sydney. He took his pocket laser from his holster and aimed it directly at the Cyrellian, showing no mercy.

Once the two who'd been holding Sydney were disabled, he grabbed her wrist and tugged her along with him, giving her no choice but to run. Her heels clicked behind them and he was sure she'd give away their position despite the cover of the smoke.

Footsteps pounded the ground behind them. They were being chased! Sydney was panting heavily behind him. She'd slow them both down if he didn't do something. Without another thought he tossed her over his shoulder and continued on, not stopping until he reached his first hiding place.

He was sure no one would look in the nook of this alley.

"You can put me down now," she hissed.

"Shut up," he whispered. "You're going to get us noticed."

When Jack was sure their pursuers had gone by, he came out of the hiding place and continued on, playing this game of hide and seek several more times before he finally made it to the outskirts of the city.

Only when he was sure they were no longer being chased did he put her down. "We have three miles to go until we make it to the compound so I suggest you do something with those shoes of yours."

"What the hell am I supposed to do with them? They're the only shoes I have."

With a frustrated growl, he bent down and lifted one slender ankle and plucked off her shoe. Then he broke off the heel and threw it back on the ground. "Give me your other foot."

"You bastard. You've ruined them! These shoes cost me very good money!"

He didn't have time to deal with her princess complex. "Give me the shoe or I could simply leave you here for your buddies to get."

She looked like she wanted to argue, but finally gave in and handed him her other shoe, but not without one last glare, her light brown eyes shooting fire.

He wondered if her fury was an indication of how passionate she'd be in bed. Where did that thought come from? They were supposed to be running for their lives and his mind was drifting to more carnal pursuits. This wasn't a good thing.

Once he got Sydney back to headquarters he'd have to put some distance between the two of them. It didn't help matters that he'd already gotten a taste of her and knew what he was missing, but he couldn't afford to get involved with someone else so soon after Anna. Jack was still dealing with the fallout from that.

Once she slipped back into her altered footwear, Sydney crossed her arms over her chest and glared. "Now what?"

"We keep moving." He held out his hand to her. "Let's go."

She ignored his offering with a shake of her head. "I'll make it on my own, thanks."

Jack pursed his lips, annoyed by her action, but chose not to press the matter. What did he care anyway? Soon enough she'd have to learn he was in charge and called all the shots. He began to jog toward base. "Then you're going to have to keep up."

She half ran half walked behind him. "Where are we going?"

"To sanctuary."

Not bothering to slow down, he continued with his grueling pace. Every now and then Jack would look back to see how far behind Sydney had gotten and was surprised to see her never more than a few feet away. He was impressed that she was



able to keep up. But he could see it was wearing on her judging from the heavy panting and the perspiration drenching her dark brow.

Halfway to their destination, Jack slowed down to a leisurely walk and pulled off the canteen strapped to his hip and offered it to her. "Here. Drink some."

She eyed him suspiciously. "What's in it?"

He couldn't help but chuckle. "It's water. I'm sure you need it."

Sydney looked as though she might refuse, but then took it from him. "Thank you."

"It sounded as if those words were difficult for you to say. Do you have something against using basic words of common courtesy?"

Her lips pursed. "No. I have no problem with displaying my manners, but I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you."

Jack raised an eyebrow, a smile tilting the corners of his lips. Even after what she'd just gone through, she still had her spunk. He liked that. "Oh? And how do you figure? You're the one being charged with theft and destruction of public property," he teased.

"You know those charges are trumped up. Well... I did take the file, but I had planned on giving it back. As for the other garbage they're trying to pin on me, I cry foul."

He halted. "So you've read the file?"

"How could I not when it's apparently what got poor Dexter Weems in trouble in the first place? And you seemed interested in it. Let's just say curiosity got the better of me."

"Where is it now?"

She moistened her lusciously full lips. His gaze followed the movement and in that moment he thought he'd give his right nut to be that tongue.

*Get a hold of yourself, man.*

"When I woke up this morning, I prepared myself for work just like any other day. But I had this nagging feeling in the back of my head, I don't know, call it female

intuition. Anyway, before I was heading out, something made me turn on the news. To my surprise, my face was all over it. I knew I couldn't go to work, but I also knew I had a very important piece of information I couldn't let them destroy."

"So then what?" he asked when she paused.

"I took some pertinent pages out of the file and then I went to my friend Holly's house and slipped the information under her door before I sneaked away. I didn't want her to get caught up in this mess." Her lips wobbled as if she would break into tears at any moment, but she didn't. "I didn't believe her, but she was right all along."

"What do you mean?"

"For months now, she's been saying something wasn't quite right about the Cyrellians. They seemed too perfect. Even when our friend Bella went missing after going for some kind of treatment to get her hearing back, I didn't believe it. I thought it was some strange coincidence."

"She didn't go to Cyren Clinic, did she?"

"The one you guys blew up?"

"That's the one."

"Yes. Why did you do it?"

"We had to blow it up; otherwise they were going to harm more unsuspecting victims."

"What do you mean by that?"

"People who went for treatment there were usually never seen again. They either use the people as you've probably just discovered for Cryo Cor's meat processing factory or they sell the Humans to the highest bidders in other galaxies for slave labor and God knows what."

Her hand went to her throat, a stricken expression crossing her face. "Bella could be digesting in someone's stomach right now?"

Jack felt sorry for her. It wasn't easy learning that one's planet was being exploited by aliens who were supposed to be helpful. Knowing they were sucking the

Earth dry of all its resources, including the people, would be difficult for anyone to handle. "We don't know that. She might have been one of the ones they sold."

"Either way I may never see her again." This time she did break out into tears.

He hated seeing females cry. It was his one weakness. He engulfed the sobbing woman within his embrace and stroked the back of her head as she let it all out.

Sydney lifted her head with tear-filled eyes. "I'm never going back, am I?"

"Not unless you want to be captured."

"But you did."

"I've been trained, plus I know a lot of good hiding spots. Everything will be okay. I promise."

"How can I trust you? I put my faith in the Cyrellians only to find out they're committing terrible crimes against humanity."

He grasped her chin and dropped a light kiss on her lips. What started out as a gesture of comfort, however, became so much more in that moment when she pressed her breasts against his chest and twined her arms around his neck, silently begging him for more.

"Sydney," he moaned. "We shouldn't. We're almost at our destination."

"I know, but I'm so scared. I've never been so uncertain about my future before. From an early age, my life had been mapped out for me, but now things are a big mess and I'm no longer in control. I hate that feeling. Just give me this one moment." She pulled his head down.

Jack couldn't have resisted even if he wanted to. The woman was a vixen and his will was weak when she was near. His cock grew painfully hard. With a groan, he smothered her mouth with his, pressing his tongue forward in a hungry kiss, tasting her, his tongue sweeping over every inch it could reach.

He was so fucking horny. Jack couldn't have stopped himself from what happened next. He pulled her top open to reveal the smooth expanse of beautiful brown skin. Thankful she wasn't wearing a bra, he lowered his head and sucked on one pert tip. Her nipple came to life in his mouth.

Sydney sighed, threading her fingers through his hair. "Jack," she whispered.

If he'd stopped to think about their situation, he would have pulled away from her, but for some reason the thought of getting caught only added to the excitement. Was he debased for thinking this way? Jack wasn't sure, but coherent thought had no place in this moment.

As he released the taut peak with a wet pop, he yanked up her skirt and pushed her panties aside. Damn, she was wet.

"Oh, yeah. Touch me, Jack." Sydney shook her head from side to side in apparent ecstasy. She was obviously not thinking clearly about their surroundings either or else he was sure she might have said something.

As long as she was willing, he would go with the flow. He eased his middle digit into her wet passage and slid it knuckle deep. Jack lifted his head to meet her passion-glazed gaze. "Do you like that, baby?"

"Mmm," she sighed. "I love it."

"What if I slid another finger inside of this tight cunt?"

"Please," she said breathlessly.

Jack slipped yet another digit into her passage stretching and fingering her. Sydney gyrated her hips up and down on his hand. She was beautiful in her arousal. He had to have more of her.

Never removing his fingers from her wet box, he pulled her to the ground and situated his body on top of hers. He wanted to read her expression to see exactly what he was doing to Sydney.

Her lips were slightly parted as she panted with breathy moans and her breasts, though small, jutted forward proudly. Jack dipped his head again and grazed a swollen nipple with his teeth.

Sydney wiggled beneath him, running her hands down his back and tugging his shirt from his waistband. The contact of her fingers running lightly against his bare skin was just enough to send him over the edge.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd wanted a woman so badly, or ever for that matter. What was so different about her from the others? Granted she was by far superior in the looks department by anyone's standards, but beauties had flitted in and out of his life before and none had had quite this effect on him.

Jack looked her in the eyes, wanting to establish this was something she wanted too before they went any further. "There's no going back after this point, Sydney."

"I don't care. I want this."

He searched her face for clues -- some sign of doubt -- but found none. It was just as well, because he didn't think he could have handled her changing her mind.

With anxious hands, he pushed aside her top, exposing even more of her skin to his hungry gaze and then worked Sydney's skirt up her hips. Although he was in a hurry to be inside of her, when he took off her panties, he was careful not to rip them.

Sydney was equally frantic, working on his belt buckle and undoing his pants. She gasped when his cock sprang free. "You're not wearing any underwear," she said lamely.

Jack chuckled, knowing he was a little above average as far as his dick was concerned. The look of pure unadulterated lust she gave it told him Sydney very much liked what she saw.

"I can't abide the things. They're too restricting. Besides, this is easier access, my dear."

She licked her lips again. "No talking. I want more action."

"Whatever you say, pretty lady." He grasped his cock and rubbed it against her damp passage. Damn, Sydney was so wet she was dripping. "Open yourself for me, Sydney. Show me that pussy of yours."

Not hesitating for a moment, she reached between her legs and parted her swollen, slick folds, displaying the tender pink insides. Jack had never seen a more tantalizing sight.

With a growl, he thrust into her, driving balls deep. He released his sharp intake of breath. Dear sweet heavens she was tight. Sydney's cunt gripped his cock, sucking

him in as deep as he could go. Jack doubted he'd be able to hold out for very long. "Wrap your legs around me, darling."

Complying with his command, she tilted her hips up and he went deeper still. He didn't think it was possible for him to be so far inside of a woman to the point where he didn't know where he ended and she began. Jack didn't want this to ever end. For some reason, being with Sydney just felt right.

As he began to move she did so as well, meeting each shove of his cock and giving as good as she got. "Pussy... so... fucking... tight," he huffed, unable to verbalize his words effectively.

"More! Harder!" Sydney screamed. He increased the pace, pumping into her with more force, but it didn't seem to be enough for Sydney. "Faster, damn you!" She bucked and gyrated her hips against him as her vaginal walls squeezed him harder than ever.

Jack knew he wouldn't be able to hold out now. His only hope was that she got off before he did because his climax was on its way. Ramming in and out of her as quickly as he could for several more strokes, the payoff came when Sydney stiffened beneath him before she broke out in spasms.

"Oh yes!" she cried her release as her nails ran down his back. She probably broke skin, but Jack didn't give a damn, because the pressure in his balls moved through his entire being and then exploded.

Shooting his load into her hot, tight cunt, he collapsed on top of her, getting in a few more thrusts before stopping. Jack rested his head in the crook of her shoulder trying to catch his breath. With neither speaking, they lay on the hard cold ground, their arms wrapped around each other's bodies.

Then common sense finally returned.

Holy shit! What the hell had he just done? They could've been discovered and yet rational thought hadn't entered the equation while he was fucking her. If Chase found out what just happened, he knew he'd be in for another lecture. What was it

about Sydney that made him forget his vow to stay away from her? They had to get up and out of here just in case someone did come along.

Jack rolled off of her and sat up. "We shouldn't have done that." The minute the words were out of his mouth he wished he could take them back. Hadn't he already learned from past mistakes to think before he spoke when it came to women? Standing up on unsteady legs, he pulled up his pants. Hell, he hadn't even undressed properly. He'd taken her on the ground like some randy mutt. It was on the tip of his tongue to soften what he'd just said, but Sydney replied.

"You're right we shouldn't have." The matter of fact way in which she said it made it seem as if they were talking about the weather rather than the fact that they'd fucked.

He should have been glad she wasn't going to get hysterical on him, but her offhandedness bothered him. Was she so casual about it because she made a habit of screwing guys she barely knew? And if that were the case, why did it bother him?

She wobbled to her feet and adjusted her clothing, not making eye contact with him.

"Is that all you have to say?" he demanded gruffly.

Sydney shrugged, stepping into her panties and pulling them over the gentle curve of her hips. "What would you like me to say?"

Jack couldn't tear his gaze away from her gorgeous body. He'd just had her, yet the burning ache to possess her once again was rearing its head.

What he needed was a cold shower.

"I don't know... that *I* shouldn't have done that?"

"I'm just as responsible as you were. If we're being honest with each other, I was probably more to blame than you were. I asked -- no, I begged for it. You obliged. So don't feel like you owe me any explanations for what just happened. And for the record I don't usually do things like this. It was a heat of the moment thing. I've never been in a situation where I wasn't in control, and I needed something -- anything -- to gain some kind of balance."

Jack narrowed his eye. "So you used me?"

"No. We used each other. You enjoyed it too didn't you?"

He wanted to scream at her for being so nonchalant about it. Despite his own misgivings about the incident, he didn't like how easily Sydney was able to brush it off as if it were no big deal.

"Yes, you know I did."

"Good." She smoothed the wrinkles out of her clothes though they still looked rumpled for her efforts. "Then there's nothing else to discuss."

"No," he muttered tightly. "We should arrive at our headquarters in a half hour if we hurry."

She nodded. "Lead the way."

The rest of their journey was traveled in silence. Sydney seemed reflective and serene -- almost too calm considering what she'd experienced in the past day and just now. Jack, on the other hand, couldn't stop thinking about how her soft body had felt against his, how deeply her pussy had gripped his cock, and the scent of her skin.

How was he going to get anything done now when he had to deal with two women he had no right getting involved with? There was Anna, who he'd always valued as a friend, whom he'd hurt. And now there was Sydney who apparently didn't see him as anything beyond a quick fuck. It would be a wonder if he could make it through the next few days and still maintain his sanity.



## Chapter Five

Bella woke up with a start. Had it all been some horrible nightmare? Or had she really been sold to a zoo on another planet? She wiped away the cold sweat beaded on her forehead and then noted the pillow beside her. It had the imprint of someone's head.

Dar's.

No, it hadn't been a dream, but at least now she was no longer alone in her plight. She slid out of bed and grabbed the clothes she'd flung onto the floor earlier. Once she was dressed she left her cabin in search of her lover.

She found him in the cockpit of their tiny ship, a frown marring his golden face. Her heart raced at the sight of his shirtless body. He had the physique of a god with strength radiating from every muscle in his large frame. A smile touched her lips as her gaze slid down the taut length of him to rest on his tight buttocks.

Her pussy tingled with her need for him. They'd made love before she'd gone to bed but she was ready for him again. Quietly, she stalked toward him and then wrapped her arms around his waist.

Dar turned around with a smile on his handsome face. "Well, hello. I thought you would still be in bed asleep."

It took a moment to discern what he was saying from the movements of his lips. Bella was pretty proficient at reading lips, but she was still learning his language and some words still escaped her. She was pleased there were more times she understood him than not, as she was able to pick up enough to string together a sentence.

"I had that dream again."

He dropped a kiss on her forehead and pulled her closer. She felt safe within his tight embrace. If anyone had told her months ago that she'd end up on a planet in

another galaxy as an animal attraction, she would have laughed, and told them they were crazy. But that's exactly what happened. And had it not been for Dar, her caretaker, she would still be there, put on display for the amusement of the native Flamrylians. Just when her will to fight had nearly been shattered, Dar stepped in as her defender, and for that she was grateful, but her feelings for him ran much deeper than mere gratitude.

She was in love with him, gold body and all. It didn't matter that he wasn't Human and didn't look like the men she was used to on Earth. What did matter was how he made her feel with his compassion, bravery, and strength.

Dar lifted her chin, so that she was looking at his face, a sign that he wanted to speak with her. "Why don't you go back to bed? I'll join you shortly."

"No. I want to stay here with you. Is everything all right? You seemed disturbed about something when I came on deck."

Dar pulled away from her, the deep rise and fall of his chest and his warm breath on her face indicating his sigh. "We've made it into Earth's orbit."

The news sent a burst of pure joy soaring through her. When she had been locked up in a cage on Flamryl, Bella didn't think she'd ever see home again, or her dear friends Holly and Sydney. After their escape she had hope and now it seemed her dreams were finally going to become a reality. "That's wonderful! I can't wait."

"Darling, I've been sending a signal for several days, yet no one has answered. I fear if we don't receive some kind of communication back we'll eventually run out of fuel. So we'll either have to turn around or take a chance and land in hopes we're not shot down in the process."

The elation she felt only seconds ago quickly faded. "We can't go back."

"But we take the risk of falling right into the hands of the Cyrellians. Even if we aren't attacked the moment we attempt to land, we're not going to be welcomed. We know too much. They'll more than likely separate us and then torture us... if we're lucky."

“Are you sure they won’t intercept the signal you’re sending? Maybe they’re already on to us.”

Dar shook his dark head. “I’ve been very careful about it. The radar on this ship is able to zone in on the number of people in a certain area. It figured most people will be in the larger cities, and the renegades, as you’ve described them, would be on the outskirts.”

“Explain to me in laymen’s terms.”

“I’ve been able to lock into several communicators; most of them are within the bounds of highly populated sections. But I’ve managed to find one where there weren’t so many people. Actually a lot less. If my theory pans out, I’m hitting the renegade coordinates.”

“Are you sure the Cyrellians won’t pick it up? Their technology is probably as advanced as what’s on the ship. Maybe they have some kind of interceptor regardless of whether you can cloak your signal to any ones it wasn’t intended to go.”

“Keep in mind, Bella, that the Cyrellian technology is advanced by Human standards. These parasites were banished from our galaxy several hundred years ago, so they probably haven’t had a chance to develop their devices beyond what they were when they left. At least, that’s what I hope.”

Bella didn’t like the uncertainty lingering in Dar’s eyes. “How much time do we have before a definite decision needs to be made?”

“Two more days.”

“If you can lock in to where the majority of Earth’s inhabitants are located, why not try to land where they aren’t?”

“That idea has merit although by sending a signal we can at least flee while we’re in the air. Once we hit the ground, there may be no escape.”

“I see. But we’ve come this far, I’d hate to turn back now.”

Dar stroked Bella’s cheek. “I know what you mean, but I refuse to risk your life.”

She gave him a long hard stare. “I hope we’re not going to go through this again. I’m capable of taking care of myself. I don’t need you to coddle me. Besides, if David

weren't asleep at the moment, he'd agree with me about going to Earth no matter what."

David had been her fellow cellmate on Flamryl. It had been the intention of the head zookeeper to mate him with Bella. Little did the powers that be know, David was gay and Bella had already given her heart to Dar. Still, she'd come to appreciate the friendship that had developed between the two of them and wouldn't have dreamt of leaving him behind when she'd been offered a means to escape.

"I like David, but I don't care about his safety as much as I do for yours."

"But it's not up to you to make the decisions for me. I don't know if things were like that back on your planet, but on Earth, women are allowed to think for themselves."

He cupped her face between his palms. "I love you, Bella. The thought of harm coming to you causes me pain I can't put into words. I don't want to make you feel helpless, but I can't put you in the line of danger."

"I appreciate your concern, but please don't do this to me."

His brows furrowed together. "What? Love you?"

"No. Try to shelter me. One of my very best friends has done that to me all our lives, and while she only had the best of intentions, it got annoying. The last time we saw each other, we argued. I may never see her again, to tell her how much I care for her, but I want to try, and no one will steal that chance away from me. Not even you." She poked his chest to emphasize each word she said.

Dar crossed his arms over his massive torso. "Oh? And how do you propose to do that when I'm the only one aboard who knows how to captain this ship?"

"I'll find a way. If I need to, wherever you decide to land, someone is bound to bring me back to Earth."

"Do you think it will be so easy?"

"I've been told I'm stubborn. I'm very determined."

He gazed at her with those fathomless cobalt eyes of his. Dear heavens above, she adored this man. But she'd meant every word. Even if she had to go against his wishes to get back to Earth, somehow she'd discover a way.

Finally, his shoulders slumped, defeat radiating from him. "If this is what you really want, I'll do everything I can."

Bella jumped up and down, clapping her hands together in her glee before throwing her arms around him. "Thank you so much!" She planted kisses along his jaw line and against his sculpted lips.

A fiery wave coursed through her body.

Dar's erections pressed against her belly. Bella broke her embrace and frantically began to undo his pants.

He stilled her hands with his. "What are you doing?"

She grinned at him. "Thanking you properly."

"You don't have to."

"Haven't you learned I do what I want?"

"But David --"

She placed a finger against his mouth to silence his hesitation. "Is sound asleep. Whenever he takes those sleeping pills he picked up on Razek, he's out for several hours at a time."

As she pushed his pants down his lean golden hips, Bella went to her knees. She unlaced his under briefs to set his cocks free. She marveled at the sheer size of his members. No matter how many times they made love, it always amazed her. The fact that he was so huge should have been enough to scare her in itself, but his sub-penis, perfectly portioned and half the length and width of his main one probably would have given any woman pause.

Not Bella. She loved having a big hard shaft jammed into her pussy while another slipped in and out of her ass. Sucking and playing with them was nearly as much fun.

Grasping both dicks in one of her hands, Bella gave them a gentle squeeze. With the other she fondled his tight balls, tickling them with her fingers. She didn't have to hear his voice to know Dar was getting off by what she was doing. She could tell by the way he gripped the sides of her head and how his body quivered.

Running her tongue along the mushroom shaped helmets, she licked the precum dripping, reveling in the unique spicy flavor. Giving Dar pleasure was as arousing as receiving it. She lifted her head to make eye contact with him. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down and he clenched his jaw as if he might have been holding back. She wouldn't allow him to do that. Bella needed his absolute surrender.

Wrapping her lips around his main cock, she slid over him taking inch by delicious inch deeper into her mouth. Since they'd been together, she had practiced swallowing him whole. She was almost there and could get to the point where it pushed past her gag reflex before she was unable to take any more, but it was much further than her first attempt.

This time, she nearly made it to the base of Dar's dick before pulling back. "Mmm," she moaned, hoping the humming sensation she created around the sensitive rod was enough to send him over the edge.

It was, because his fingers dug into her hair and he began to thrust in and out of her mouth, gently at first, but when she increased the pressure of her mouth around his organ, he seemed to lose control like a man possessed. He pumped back and forth, practically yanking on her hair, but Bella didn't feel the pain. She was too caught up in the moment to care.

All that mattered was that Dar get off.

Bella gripped his sub-cock, rubbing her thumb back and forth over the velvety-smooth head. It spurted come, and she knew he was close to orgasm. Refusing to let up she sucked him harder, faster, moving in rhythm with his thrusts.

Dar stiffened, signaling his orgasm was near. Then he exploded into her mouth, shooting his seed down her throat.

Bella slurped and sucked, catching as much of his essence as possible. He was the one to finally pull away, before hauling her to her feet and then carrying her toward their cabin.

She snuggled against him, anticipation burning through her veins, because she knew Dar would return the favor.

\* \* \*

Holly re-read the note that had been slid under her door, searching desperately for some clue as to where she could find Sydney.

*If you're reading this, I might have put you in danger as well, but I didn't know who else to turn to. Don't believe what you hear on the news. I was set up. You were right all along. The Cyrellians are behind Bella's disappearance and what's worse, they're probably responsible for more deaths than we know of. I can only hope our friend is well. I'm going to lay low for a while until I figure out my next move. I'll need to leave the city. No matter what happens to me, know that you'll always be in my thoughts, my dear friend. I love you. Sydney.*

*P.S. Attached are some papers I took from the file I told you about. You may want to burn them soon after they're read; otherwise, you might be implicated in this conspiracy as well.*

"Dammit, Sydney, you should have come to me, and then we could have run together!" Holly exclaimed to no one at all.

To her horror, she'd woken up to see Sydney's face plastered all over the news as a thief. Holly had known something had gone terribly wrong. She should have tried harder to convince her friend to quit that awful job the moment Sydney had begun to voice her doubts. But she hadn't wanted to come off as pushy. It was what had driven Bella away in the first place and she didn't want to make that same mistake again. Too bad she hadn't listened to her first instinct. It might have caused Sydney to turn her back on her as well, but at least her friend would be out of danger's way.

Holly had called in sick to work after watching the bulletins on television, still unable to get over what had happened. To her dismay, a breaking story later came on to

say Syd had been captured, but then escaped with a mysterious man who was said to be the leader of a “terrorist” organization.

That had at least given Holly some hope, but were the renegades any better than the Cyrellians?

With shaking hands, she glanced over the papers her friend had taken from the GXT file. Holly had known those bastards were probably capable of anything, but this? Slowly poisoning everyone? And using their hapless victims as food?

Her stomach rolled at the thought. She’d tried one of their products once. It had made her sick. Thank goodness she’d never sampled the meats or else she would have spent the day vomiting the contents from her belly.

Despite Sydney’s advice, there was no way she could destroy this valuable evidence. She needed to somehow get it to the masses. But how could she without finding herself wanted as well? And would people label her as crazy for speaking out against their benefactors?

She knew for a fact that the Cyrellians could do no wrong in most people’s opinions. What if she left the city to find the outlaws? But then what? Holly never felt more helpless in her life.

First Bella, and now Sydney.

She slammed her fist against the wall in her frustration. “I’ll make those aliens pay. I swear it,” she vowed.



## Chapter Six

The compound wasn't what she'd expected. Sydney wasn't sure exactly what she had imagined it would look like, maybe some old abandoned military base, but this mansion wasn't it. The estate was ancient and the exterior was crumbling around them from neglect, but surprisingly the structure seemed sturdy. This reminded her of the antebellum houses in the south part of the United States she'd read about in her history books.

There was a man-made fence made of mortared rock and barbed wire around it, stealing the natural beauty of the place.

"Come on," Jack growled.

Sydney didn't know what his problem was, but after their encounter a mile or so back, he had been acting like she'd done him wrong for some reason. What was his deal? Weren't most men only interested in a quick fuck with no strings attached? The sex with Jack was hot. No. It was mind-blowing, more so than with any other guy. For the first time in her thirty years of life, she'd experienced an orgasm with a partner, of the likes her girlfriends used to speak.

Yet she wasn't ready to throw declarations of love at him. Surely he hadn't expected that. She could probably grow to care for him a little more than she should, but a man like Jack was definitely the love-'em and leave-'em type. She wasn't willing to give her heart to any man she couldn't trust to give his back. And she had no faith in Jack as far as his capabilities to commit. What other man would go around randomly kissing women he barely knew?

Sure she'd let him, but that was beside the point. She needed release from the tension building within, from having her life shattered, and Jack had provided it.

"I'm coming. You don't have to snap at me, you know," she muttered.

He turned on Sydney then, glaring at her with his obsidian eye. "Let's get one thing straight before we go inside. I set the rules, not you. Got it?"

Sydney's defensive mode kicked in. Leader or not, she refused to allow anyone, man or woman, to speak to her in that manner. "I got it, but if you want respect, you have to give it. I won't have you talk to me any way you feel like it, so it's time you get over yourself right now." She refused to back down from this confrontation.

Moving so swiftly she barely saw him advance, he grasped Sydney by the forearms. "If I wanted to, I could leave you out here. We don't have to let you in."

She clenched and unclenched her jaw. "I didn't ask for your sorry protection anyway," Sydney retorted, hoping to call his bluff. Would he really leave her out here alone, with no food, shelter or anywhere to go? Though the thought was terrifying, her pride fueled her ire.

"Try me, sweetheart."

"Jack! What the hell is going on? Why are you just standing out there? Come in," a man with wavy blond hair called out to him on the other side of the gate.

The next thing Sydney knew, Jack released her so abruptly she nearly fell on her ass. Damn, he was infuriating.

She followed Jack inside, daring him to say anything. He didn't.

The blond offered her a friendly smile. "So this must be the mysterious Sydney. Welcome to our home. Heard you got into a bit of trouble."

Sydney liked this man instantly. There was something about him that put one at ease. Could this be the man Holly had met, the one who'd blown up the clinic?

She laughed a little more casually than she felt. "Yes, you can say I'm in some trouble right now."

"There's no time to chitchat. Let's go in," Jack rudely interrupted the banter.

Killjoy.

One of these days, Sydney was going to strangle him, but she'd reserve that for a later date.

The blond shot her a questioning look as though to ask what was going on between the two of them. She had to admit the tension was so thick it could be cut with a knife. Sydney simply shrugged, not bothering to offer comment. She had enough to deal with without starting an argument.

The blond closed the gate and locked it. Once that task was complete the two men led the way along a path through the grass made by treading feet, and up some rickety stairs.

The inside wasn't as bad as the exterior. In fact, it contained all the amenities one would have found in any house in the city. "Wow, who decorated this place?"

"We all had a bit of a hand in it, but I'm not sure how much longer we'll be here. Unfortunately we're scouting out another location." Grinning at her with a twinkle in his warm brown eyes, he held his hand out to Sydney. "Chase Hudson. It's nice to meet you, Sydney."

"Likewise."

"Ahem. If you two are finished exchanging pleasantries, I need you in the strategy room, Chase."

"Sure. I'll have Anna show Sydney to her room."

Sydney didn't realize there was a fourth person in the room until she turned to see a petite blonde woman standing in the far corner. Her steady blue gaze was focused on Jack. Was that a look of longing Sydney had spotted?

Was this another one of Jack's conquests? Goodness gracious, the man seemed to get around. She was correct in her original assessment of him, and though it should have been gratifying to be right, Sydney didn't feel that way. In fact she was slightly annoyed, even though she knew she had no right to be. Who needed him anyway? She certainly didn't.

The woman finally walked over to where Sydney stood. She didn't offer a hand like Chase had. In fact, her only form of greeting was a curt nod.

"Sydney, you can follow Anna. She'll show you where you'll be for your time with us," Jack spoke gruffly, not bothering to make eye contact.

“You make it sound like I could be leaving at any moment,” she challenged.

Jack shrugged. “I don’t know. Are you?”

She took a couple steps forward and halted. The last thing she wanted was to cause a scene on her first day here. What must Chase and Anna be thinking of this exchange? Finally Sydney raised her chin defiantly. “I don’t plan on going anywhere, actually.” So there. How was it possible that he’d reduced her to a two-year-old’s level? Boy, this man was toxic.

“Of course you aren’t, Sydney. You can stay with us as long as you’d like. No one is going to force you to go. Right, Jack?” Chase raised a brow.

“That’s up to her. We can’t keep her prisoner if she doesn’t want to be here,” Jack muttered.

“Come on, Sydney,” Anna finally intervened. “I’m sure you’re exhausted after your journey and probably want to freshen up.”

Grateful for any excuse to get away from that insufferable man, she nodded eagerly. “Yes. I’d love to.” Shooting one last glare at Jack, Sydney allowed the smaller woman to lead her out of the room.

“Here it is.” Anna opened the door to a cozy looking room, though plain in its décor. “It’s a bit smaller than the other sleeping quarters in the house, but the larger ones are shared. I thought you’d rather have some privacy.”

“Thank you. I’d like that a lot.” Sydney flopped on the bed, wincing at how hard it was, but thankful to have someplace to lay her head for the night, free of worry.

“Unfortunately there are only a few functioning toilets and showers in the entire place, so you won’t have private accommodations for that. I believe the closest bathroom is unoccupied. I’ll give you a chance to unpack your things and return in about an hour?”

“What things?” Sydney looked down pointedly at her empty hands.

Anna grimaced. “I see your point.” The blonde’s gaze raked over Sydney briefly. “I’m not sure if there’s another female your size.” Anna said the words as if Sydney were some kind of gigantic freak, but she wasn’t going to let anyone make her feel

inferior because of her height. It was what made her who she was and she was comfortable in her skin.

“Yes, I am tall aren’t I? It’s fabulous,” she purred, stretching her arms above her head.

“There might be something I can find for you. You may have to wear men’s clothing for a while, though.”

“That’s fine. This business suit is hardly appropriate if I’m now an outlaw.”

Blue eyes narrowed to slits. “Freedom Fighter. The only lawbreakers are the Cyrellians for their crimes against humanity. Try to remember that, will you, sweetheart?”

What the hell was her problem? First Jack and now this bitch? At least she had one person here who seemed to like her. Pasting a grin on her face, she eyed Anna as insolently as the other woman had done to her. “It’s Sydney, not sweetheart. I trust you’ll get it right next time.”

If looks could kill, Sydney knew she’d be dead on the spot. “Look, I don’t know who you think you are --”

“Sydney.”

“Or what you did while you were in the city,” Anna continued on as if she hadn’t spoken, “but the minute you start causing trouble, you’re out of here.”

“On whose authority?”

“Mine.”

Sydney lifted a brow. “Oh? I thought Jack was in charge.”

“He is, but he’ll listen to me if I say you have to go.”

If this woman was so confident, why did she need to resort to threats? Sydney hadn’t missed the tension between Anna and Jack downstairs. If she were a betting woman, she’d say Anna was more interested in her fearless leader than he was in her. “You really think so?”

“I know it. Don’t press your luck.”

Sydney threw her head back and released a throaty laugh to show she wasn't affected by the other woman's words. "What kind of trouble could I possibly get into in the middle of nowhere? I think if you try to get rid of me, all it will do is make you look like a jealous shrew. You wouldn't want Jack to think that, would you?"

Anna looked as if she wanted to hit her, but thought better of it. Without another word, the blonde turned on her heels and strode out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Sydney hadn't realized she was holding her breath until she released it. Things weren't starting off well. Already two people hated her. Everything she'd grown to love and held dear was gone because she'd gotten too nosy.

No. It wasn't because of that. Judging from that file she'd read, the Cyrellians probably would have found a way to get rid of everyone on Earth eventually whether she'd found out about them or not. Knowing, however, didn't make her feel better.

Sitting on the bed, she pulled her knees to her chest and rested her head on them. Then she did something for the second time that day she hadn't done since she was a small child.

Sydney cried.

\* \* \*

"Okay. Tell me what the hell that was all about?" Chase demanded once they were in the strategy room.

"What was what about? The only thing I have to report is that the mission has been accomplished. We may not have the file, but we have the person who's read it, and knows enough about it to tell us what those bastards are up to." Jack knew exactly what Chase was getting at, but he wasn't in the mood to discuss it. What had happened between him and Sydney was his business.

"You were barely cordial to her. It's not like you to treat new recruits or anyone for that matter the way you did her. You practically bit the poor woman's head off."

"That poor woman has a heart of steel. I wouldn't worry about her if I were you. I'm sure she can take care of herself."

Chase threw his hands in the air. "Now what the hell is that supposed to mean? What happened between the two of you from the time you rescued her from the city to your arrival here? You couldn't have possibly fucked her in that short period of time." He laughed at his obvious attempt at a joke, but when he saw Jack's face, the smile fell. "What the hell? Are you kidding me? Already? What's wrong with you?"

"I ask myself that on a regular basis. Do you think I'm proud of my actions?"

Chase shrugged. "I don't know. Are you?"

"No, dammit! And if you were any kind of friend, you wouldn't be rubbing it in right now."

"Whoa! You know I was only teasing you. How was I supposed to know that you'd pull another stupid move like you did with Anna? What I'm trying to figure out though is where is this hostility coming from?"

Jack clenched and unclenched his fists at his sides. "I wish I could tell you. Honestly, I don't even know how it happened. One minute we're running for our lives, the next minute, I'm so deep inside her tight cunt, I didn't know which way was up."

"You have to stop getting yourself into these situations."

"Don't you think I know that? I didn't intend to make my life more complicated than it already is."

"So where do you go from here?"

Jack sighed. "For now, I'll play it by ear. For Sydney, I was only a convenience. I think anyone would have done for her."

"I'm not so sure. She doesn't strike me as the type to randomly sleep with just anyone."

"How in the world would you know that? You spoke to her for all of two minutes. Don't let the angel face fool you."

A wide grin appeared on Chase's face. "Now I'm starting to get a better picture of what's going on."

"What exactly do you see and why are you looking at me like that?"

“Because I think you like her. And you’re upset because she gave you a taste of your own medicine.”

“I don’t casually discard women.”

Chase raised a brow. “Okay, so you’re nice when you get rid of them, but is the end result any different? I don’t know what’s so special about you, but --”

“Gee, thanks. With friends like you, who needs enemies?”

“Stop being such an ass, and let me finish.”

Jack shrugged. “By all means, finish what you were going to say.”

“There’s something within you that makes women flock to you. I don’t know what it is. Maybe it’s that damn eye patch of yours. Whatever it is, you have that certain something. I think the main problem is that you take your charm for granted. It seems to me you’ve met your match in Sydney.”

“Hardly.”

“If that weren’t the case, then why were you so riled up when you brought her here?”

“Because... she...” When put like that, what excuse did he have for being nasty with Sydney? In fact hadn’t she done him a favor by not making such a big deal about them fucking? But why did it bother him so damn much? Could it be that maybe he had felt a little more for her?

How could that be when they’d only known each other for such a short period of time? No. That couldn’t be it.

“Okay, maybe it didn’t feel so good. I didn’t like being treated as if I had no feelings whatsoever. I at least tell my women up front what they’re getting into before I embark on an affair. And I know you’ll probably throw the Anna incident in my face, but I was truthful with her as well.”

“How do you know Sydney discarded you without a thought? Did you ask her how she felt?”

Jack snorted. “I think she made her feelings pretty clear. Who was I to make a big deal about it?”



“But that’s exactly what you did. By being mean to her, you showed her, me, and probably Anna that it was a *big deal* to you. Maybe Sydney had a reason for being so nonchalant about the entire thing. It isn’t every day one’s declared a fugitive.”

“What do you expect me to do to fix this?”

“Go talk to her.”

“She probably doesn’t want to see me. I acted like a jerk.”

“You won’t know until you try. But however she reacts, you’d better fix it fast. The rest of the group will soon know of her arrival and they’ll want a briefing on what she knows and how we can use it against the Cyrellians.”

“I guess you’re right.”

Chase wiggled his brows. “I know I am.”

Sometimes Jack hated being the leader.

## Chapter Seven

Sydney didn't realize she'd fallen asleep until she was shaken awake. Sitting up abruptly, she was surprised to see Jack sitting next to her on the bed. The light was on and she noticed it was dark outside.

Instantly she went on the defensive. Her head was pounding and she wasn't in the mood for another verbal back and forth with him. "If you're here to start an argument then please save your breath, because you won't get one out of me."

"That isn't why I came. I actually wanted to apologize."

She shook her head, not sure if she'd heard him correctly. "What?"

"I said I'm sorry."

Maybe something was wrong with her hearing because those words were not something she would have expected from this arrogant man. "Excuse me?"

"Sorry! Do you want me to write my apology in blood? Dammit, woman, the least you could do is accept it."

Despite herself, Sydney smiled. He was adorable when he was annoyed, even if he was infuriating as hell the rest of the time. "What exactly are you apologizing for?"

"You know. For behaving the way I did. It was unacceptable. Just put it down as one of those things."

"I see. And what about the next time I do something to tick you off? Are you going to rip into me again?"

"I'll try not to make that mistake again."

Sydney lifted a brow. "But you can't make any guarantees?"

"Don't press your luck, sweetheart. Besides humbling myself before you, what more do you want from me?"

She wasn't sure. What *did* she want from him? Reluctantly her gaze drifted to the broad expanse of his chest and down to his lap. His cock lay dormant now, but she couldn't help recalling when it wasn't. Great day, he was huge and he'd filled her so completely.

Beads of perspiration broke out on her forehead as heat raced along her every nerve ending. Was it wrong to want someone, knowing they were no good for you?

She bowed her head so she'd no longer have to look at him. "I'm not sure, but I think since we're going to be working toward a common goal, we should at least be cordial to one another."

"I agree. So does this mean you're in?"

"What does it take to be in with this group?"

"We all have different tasks. Some gather information and go on missions into the city, while others stay here and keep the house in order. No one job is more important than any other because we're a team. And we all pitch in where necessary."

"Oh. And what would I do?"

"I'm sure we can find something for you. No worries on that front. We'll give you a few days to settle in and see where you'd be best suited. Does that sound all right with you?"

"Yes, that seems fair."

An uncomfortable silence fell between them. There were so many questions she wanted to ask him, but was too scared. Sleeping with someone on such short acquaintance sure made things awkward. *Come on, girl, where's your courage when you need it?* She'd never backed down from anything before and now shouldn't have been any different.

"Jack --"

"Well, I --"

They began speaking at once and then laughed. "You first," Jack offered.

“I was only going to ask how this all came to be. Growing up, I’d heard about some dissention pertaining to the Cyrellians, but I don’t think I remember anyone mentioning any other rebel groups until a few years ago.”

“Oh, there have been others, but in the beginning our not so friendly alien guests were a bit more brutal. Those groups were sought out and destroyed. The Cyrellians have become more subtle since then. If you think about it, they control all the major corporations and what’s in the media. You’ll never see anything they don’t want you to, and their recent strategy has been to make freedom fighters like my group look like crazy terrorists. First they question our mental stability and then they make us look like criminals.”

“Well, you guys were responsible for blowing up the clinic.”

“Sometimes one has to take extreme measures for people to take notice.”

“I understand, but my concern lies with the fact that my friend Holly could have been killed. She was there that day.”

Jack crinkled his nose. “She wouldn’t happen to be a plump redhead would she?”

Sydney narrowed her eyes. “Yes. What do you know about my friend?”

“Only what Chase told me about her. He was the one who did it, you see.” Jack grinned. “He manages to bring her up in just about every conversation since their meeting. Says she had spunk. Chase likes them feisty.”

Sydney rolled her eyes. “Good for him. I’m not going to let you change the subject. How did you come to suspect the Cyrellians were up to no good in the first place?”

“For one thing, they were performing experiments on unsuspecting people. How do you think I ended up with this?” He lifted his eye patch to reveal a tiny mechanical ball in the shape of an eye in the socket covered by a thin film which she assumed was meant to match his normal one. Clearly it didn’t.

Sydney gasped, not because she was disgusted, but from the contrast the metallic thing created. “What... what is that?”

“It’s a bionic ocular piece. In other words, it’s an artificial eye.”

Sydney reached out to touch it, but pulled back not wanting to offend. “Is it functional?”

“More so than the other one. Therein lies the problem. The bionic one picks up things from a great distance. It gives me a damn headache because on one side I have nearly perfect vision by Human standards, but on the other side, I see too well. I tried adjusting, but it became too much of an effort, hence the patch. This wouldn’t be something I would have chosen for myself, but this metal monstrosity has gotten me out of a jam or two. It can zoom in on something as if it were being spied under a microscope. I’ve been able to read people better, see trouble coming my way.”

“Why do you have it if it wasn’t something you chose for yourself?”

“I went to the clinic because at the time I was suffering migraines. I saw an advertisement that said they had a treatment for it. Little did I know my aches were from the side effects of their poisonous food, but I went in anyway. At first I questioned why they needed to put me under, but they insisted.” Jack paused, his face tightening, as though reliving the memory was painful.

It took several moments before he continued. “When I came to, I had this thing in. That’s when I knew something was wrong. What rational person would have gone into any medical facility for one thing and then have another procedure done on them? But that’s exactly what they tried to convince me happened. They attempted to make me look crazy. Everyone is prone to bouts of madness, myself included, but I definitely didn’t have one then.”

“That sounds horrible. Why... well, I suppose knowing what I do now, I guess I can’t put anything past them. What happened next?”

“Of course I argued with them, told them to fix what they’d done. They insisted this was what I’d asked for. In my anger I attacked, which was my one mistake, because it gave them reason enough to sedate me. The next thing I knew, I woke up strapped down on a gurney with three Cyrellian doctors poking at my bionic eye. They were

speaking in their own tongue, but little did they know, I'd picked up enough of their language over the years to basically understand what was being said."

"And what was that?"

"They were going to harvest my organs and replace them with artificial parts, eventually, but not before they could perform experiments on me. From what I can discern, it was some kind of program they'd created to benefit Cyrellian health."

"In what way? I'm not sure I follow."

"Apparently the Human molecular structure is similar to theirs as far as how our hearts beat, we digest food, and so forth. A while ago, I'd read in some history books how our society used animals to test make-up, drugs, and anything that hadn't been introduced to the market yet. Though we've since found other means to do that, it occurred to me the Cyrellians were doing something similar to what our ancestors did."

Comprehension hit Sydney like a ton of bricks. "But this time around we're the animals."

"Exactly."

"Oh no, poor Bella," she whispered.

Jack rubbed her arm in a comforting gesture. "It's quite possible your friend has managed to escape. You don't know for certain if they have her."

"But she went to the clinic for treatment to get her hearing back. It seemed like her prayers had been answered when she received a letter in the mail that said there was a cure. It sounded too good to be true, but I wanted to support her. I even encouraged her to go for it." If only she had listened to Holly. Why hadn't she made Bella research this so-called procedure before diving in headfirst? Sydney buried her face in her hands.

Jack touched her knee. "Don't blame yourself. They had us all fooled."

She raised her head. "It doesn't make me feel any less responsible for what's happened. I thought I was being supportive. Instead I should've voiced my concerns. Maybe then she might have thought things through a little more before going for it."

“Sydney, regardless of who’s responsible, there’s no point in beating yourself up over it. We have to move on and figure out how to prevent those bastards from repeating their actions.”

“But in the meantime, she could be dead, or worse, on someone’s dinner table.” She shuddered at the idea, her stomach rolling with nausea.

“Or they could have farmed her out.”

“What do you mean?”

“For reasons known only to the aliens, people who went to the clinic were sometimes sold off to other planets as slaves.”

“How did you learn of this?”

“Because one of the men who’d come in for treatment around the same time I did suffered that very fate. I believe his name was David, or it could have been Daniel. You see, they kept a bunch of us locked in a holding cell. Every day one of the guards would choose a victim amongst us randomly for the doctors to run experiments on. This would go on until eventually we either died from the barbaric tortures we were subjected to, or they simply killed us outright.”

“I still don’t understand how you’d know about this David person being shipped away.”

“Oh, did I forget to mention? Our prison was made of Plexiglas -- located in the very laboratory where the procedures were conducted.”

Sydney gasped in horror, her hand flying to her throat. “How could they be so cruel? Making you watch...” She trailed off, unable to voice the unspeakable act.

“Apparently, it was another one of their studies. One of the doctors, a female with the coldest pair of eyes I’ve ever seen, would record our reactions. Whenever one of us would turn our backs to block out the horrible scenes they’d made us watch, she’d flip a switch that sent electric shocks to our feet. We had no shoes you see, and the floor was metal.”

A pained expression crossed Jack’s face making Sydney want to reach out and offer him comfort, but she knew she couldn’t. The last time she did, things ended in

disaster. It didn't help matters that his very nearness was still wreaking havoc on her equilibrium even though she'd seen a side of him that worried her -- the one that showed him as an imperfect man with the ability to be hurt.

Before she'd dozed off, Sydney had racked her brain trying to figure out why he'd been so angry with her. The only reason she could come up with is that she'd offended him somehow. But it wasn't something she planned on bringing up. If Jack was willing to pretend they hadn't fucked, then so would she.

"That's the most barbaric thing I've ever heard."

Jack nodded. "I still get nightmares about the things I saw. One day they came for David, but instead of strapping him to the operating table as they normally did, they put him in restraints and led him off. I already told you I understood enough of the language to know what was going on. They said something about selling him off to an interested party in another galaxy. For what purpose I'm not sure. Subsequently, others were soon sold off as well."

"How did you manage to escape?"

"Playing dead."

"Wouldn't they have checked for your vitals?"

"Not necessarily. So many of us dropped dead on a daily basis that when one of us would fall, the doctors would simply call in a team to remove the body. I took the chance they'd be careless with me as well. I lucked out that day because they took me out of my cell and tossed me into a corner for the pick up crew. You have no idea how difficult it was for me to remain still and hold my breath for long periods of time. When the goons came, they dumped me in the back of a truck."

"Did you by any chance end up at Cryo Cor?" Sydney guessed. It was all starting to tie together.

"Yes, although I didn't understand the connection until a little later. I came very close to becoming someone's meal. The second the back door opened, I was ready for them. I fought for my life and barely managed to escape. For days, I hid in the sewers, ate garbage, and did all I could to stay alive. Like you, I knew too much. My face was



plastered on bulletin boards all over the city and I was labeled a dangerous fugitive. Just when I thought there was no hope, I met up with Chase who took me in, despite the danger of harboring a criminal.”

“Why didn’t he turn you in?”

“Because he’d been having doubts about our so-called benefactors and I believe he helped me because he thought I might answer some of the questions plaguing him. He’d lost someone special, you see, though it’s really not my story to tell, but his. I will say, however, I think I probably would have died had it not been for him. Unfortunately, it wasn’t long before a neighbor of his spotted me and alerted the authorities. We were both wanted men. We managed to get out of the city.”

“And that’s how your movement began?”

“More or less. The first year we were together our base was much more modest, but with the addition of people with various skill levels we’ve managed to make our headquarters what it is now.”

“Your group is like one big family isn’t it?”

Jack nodded. “I trust these people with my life.”

“I appreciate your allowing me to stay. I’d like to contribute any way I can.”

“We’ll find something for you to do. No worries.”

The closest thing Sydney had to a family had been her girlfriends and now she wasn’t even sure she had them anymore.

“Why the sad face?” He reached out and gently grasped her chin, forcing her to meet his gaze.

“I feel so alone. I’m so used to being in control of things and to have my life in such chaos is difficult to handle.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

She bit her bottom lip. Could she trust him? Opening up had never been easy for her. But then again, this wasn’t a typical situation. “I don’t have much of a story to tell. My parents were, for lack of a better word, driven. They were part of a research team that developed drugs for the sick. Their work consumed them to the exclusion of most

things. Sometimes I wonder why they bothered to marry as neither one was particularly affectionate.”

“It sounds like you were lonely.”

“I was at first, but I soon learned to bottle those feelings up. I was punished for any emotional outbursts.”

“They beat you?”

She dropped her lids. “No. They would never do something so beneath their dignity,” Sydney finished on a snort. “What they did was far worse. They would remove everything from my room besides the bed. I wasn’t allowed so much as a book to read. The isolation was far worse.”

“Whatever happened to them?”

“My parents? Nothing. I moved out when I was of age. I used to visit every now and then, but after a while it grew too uncomfortable to bear. I stopped going over to their house and that was the end of that. They’ve never called and neither have I.”

“That’s sounds awful, especially when I had such a close relationship with my parents. Unfortunately, because of my status as an outlaw in the city, I’ve had to sever communication with them to ensure their safety.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Knowing they’re doing all right is good enough for me. My folks are one of the reasons I’m trying to bring down the Cyrellian occupation. I’m sorry about your family.”

Turning her head, she broke the hold he had on her face. “Don’t apologize. I’m sure there are people who’ve had worse upbringings than I did. Because they never showed love or taught me how to give it, it’s difficult for me to express it. The other kids in school would call me ‘the robot.’ I never had many friends. Bella and Holly were the only ones who took the time to get to know me. I’m grateful for that.”

“But your parents weren’t the only people who hurt you were they?”

Why did he have to be so perceptive? She sighed. “There were a couple of guys I had crushes on who I thought liked me back. The first of the two was the one I’d lost

my virginity to. I later found out he'd had a bet about how fast he could get me into bed. Despite that incident, I hadn't given up on the concept of romance, and still haven't actually. The next man was a serial cheater. I'm fully aware all men aren't that way, but it still makes me wary. Coupled with the fact that I'm not a very emotional person to begin with, those experiences hardened me even more."

Jack took her hands in his, an earnest expression entering his eyes. "Is that why you dismissed what happened between us so easily?"

"One of them, but I can't understand why you're so upset about it. I thought someone like you wouldn't want any complications like a needy woman in his life."

"Maybe not, but I don't like being used."

"I didn't use you. If anything we used each other."

"But I didn't treat you insignificantly as you did me."

"Jack, this is a difficult period for me; what happened out there was one of those things. I admit it was good. No, great, possibly the best sex I've ever had. But it's only that. Sex. You were the one who said we shouldn't have done it. I was only agreeing with you."

"I only said that because the time and the place were wrong. But you're fooling yourself if you don't think we wouldn't have ended up exactly where we did. Part of the reason I was angry was because I've never been attracted to another woman so instantaneously and our coming together far exceeded what I expected. To have you shrug it off was a slap in the face."

"Because you're usually the one who's able to walk away without a backward glance?"

"Probably. I'm not exactly proud of the way I've treated some of the women in my past, but now I know how it feels."

"Did you do that to Anna?" she asked softly, as a means to deflect him from delving deeper into her feelings. If they continued on this topic any further, he might have her caring for him, and she couldn't afford to do that.

A frown creased his brow. "Did she say anything to you?"

“No, but it was pretty obvious by the way she looked at you. And I think she’s picked up on the tension between us. The woman obviously still cares.”

“It’s a mistake I’ll probably regret to my dying day. Anna didn’t deserve my callousness. If she’s said something to upset you, try not to hold her responsible for it. She’s a good person.”

Somehow Sydney didn’t think the other woman would give her a chance to find out. “We’ll see.”

“We’re having a meeting in about --” he raised his wrist to take a peek at his watch “-- in about five minutes to discuss strategy. I think it would be a good time for you to be introduced to the rest of the group.”

Sydney nodded. “Okay. I’ll be there. Just give me a chance to freshen up.”

Jack stood up then and walked to the door and then paused. “Make no mistake, Sydney, the conversation about you and me is far from over. There’s something between us, and though you might deny it, I sure as hell won’t.”

And with that, he left, not giving Sydney a chance to refute his words. Even if he had, she wasn’t sure if she could.

## Chapter Eight

“Our first order of business will be to introduce the latest member to our group. Sydney. Would you come and tell us a little bit about yourself?” Jack made an attempt to address the members in the room at large, but he couldn’t tear his gaze away from the woman in question.

She was so beautiful and poised in the face of adversity. Had he not just had such a frank discussion with her, he might have thought her cold. He now knew behind that mask of calm was a woman aching for love. He wasn’t sure he could be the man to give it to her, but she intrigued him enough to find out.

Maybe his being in any kind of relationship with anyone was a disaster in the making, but one taste of Sydney wasn’t enough. And he was aware she knew it too.

Sydney stood up and walked toward him. He noticed she was avoiding eye contact with him.

Her hands trembled slightly as she took the podium. She offered a smile to the small crowd gathered. “There’s not much to tell about me. Up until recently I was an employee of Cryo Cor. I came across a file labeled GXT. It contained documentation of a drug by the same name. It’s an addictive chemical they’ve been putting in the food for years. From what I’ve read, only a handful of people have had no side effects from the use of it, while another tiny group are sick from it immediately. And then there’s the rest of the population who are slowly poisoned over time by the consumption of it.”

Hands shot up.

Jack stepped forward. “We’ll hold off any questions for later.” Then he patted Sydney on the shoulder, encouraging her to continue.

“Apparently the third reaction is what the Cyrellians are banking on. The drug makes Humans crave their products so much they buy more of their food in mass

quantities. They are working hand in hand with Cyren Clinic. Apparently when people complain of aches or pains, they go to the medical facility seeking treatment. A lot of them never return; in fact, most of those victims end up ground up as meat products for Cryo Cor."

Most of the audience remained silent. Judging from their lack of reaction about Humans being ground into Cryo Cor meats, they already knew that part.

"So they're slowly killing off people with this chemical?" someone in the crowd asked.

Sydney nodded. "Yes. Unfortunately, I couldn't believe it either. I still can't in a way."

"Then why are you here?" Anna demanded, shooting daggers with her eyes at Sydney.

Jack would have intervened but Sydney began to speak before he had a chance to. "Can you? Despite what they've done to us, would you have even imagined they were poisoning the foods we ate and then feeding our dead to us?"

Anna turned a bright red, but didn't answer. Jack felt bad for her but Anna's comment was unwarranted. He made a mental note to have a talk with her later. Her resentment toward Sydney could stem from jealousy, but she needed to know there wasn't room in camp for that. They'd all have to work together if they wanted to take down their common enemy.

Sydney's gaze was locked with Anna's, both women in a glaring contest that was making every single person in the room uncomfortable.

Chase coughed. "Please share any other thoughts you might have, Sydney."

The dark beauty continued to look at the blonde, neither woman giving ground, until Anna shifted in her chair uncomfortably and lowered her lids. Only then did Sydney return her attention to the other occupants in the room.

"There's nothing more I can shed light on, other than the fact that my very good friend went in for a procedure several weeks back and has been missing. I don't know where she is or if she's even alive, but I'm hoping you guys can help me find her."

"I don't see why we can't come up with a search and rescue plan, but they take time, because we have to be careful re-entering the city. You need to keep in mind they're on the lookout for every one of us for some reason or another. Will you be fine with that?" Jack asked.

She caught her bottom lip between her teeth and nodded. "Thank you."

Anna stood up then. "Bullshit! When I asked to go back for my sister you said we couldn't! Why does she get preferential treatment?"

The room fell silent as several people shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

Jack was slowly losing his temper. "Anna, now isn't the time to bring that up."

"Why the hell not? If your girlfriend can get perks, why can't the rest of us?" she demanded, her blue eyes shooting fire.

"Because we help the people we can. Your sister was already dead, and it's time for you to finally accept it." The moment the words left his mouth he wished he could take them back. This wasn't the place to get into a battle over what should or shouldn't be done.

Anna paled. "You miserable son of a bitch," she muttered, before racing out of the meeting room and climbing the stairs. The door slammed behind her.

"I think I should probably leave too," Sydney spoke, breaking the eerie quiet of the room.

Jack shook his head. "Take a seat and stay for the remainder of the meeting."

She looked uncertain at first, but he gave her hand a light squeeze. Sydney finally complied and returned to her chair.

It took a few minutes before he could bring some semblance of structure to the meeting. The next order of business was the strange signal which they seemed to be getting. They determined it was one of distress and whoever was captaining the ship was looking for assistance. One of the messages that had come loud and clear from the vessel was that they were not Cyrellians.

Jack called for a vote to see if they should answer. By the end of the count, it was ruled that they would. Whoever the occupants were had made a point to separate

themselves from the other aliens. Why? It could have been a trick, but most of them realized that there couldn't be progress without risks.

The remainder of the session had members sharing their updates. Proposals were made and votes on their viability were taken. For the most part, it ended anticlimactically.

Jack tried to stay focused, but he couldn't stop thinking about a certain woman he intended to visit later that night.

\* \* \*

Sleep didn't come easily for Sydney after turning in for the evening. Tossing and turning, she couldn't get that scene from earlier out of her mind. It had turned ugly fast, Anna's outburst being the cause of it. It made her more determined than ever not to be caught in the middle of whatever was between Jack and Anna, although she couldn't stop her body from tingling when she remembered his hands moving over her body.

Sliding out of bed, she walked to the large bay window and pulled back the curtains to look at the moonlight. The temporary peace in the house belied the turmoil going on outside. Her friends were out there somewhere and she silently prayed she'd see them both again.

When her bedroom door opened then closed again, Sydney instinctively knew it was Jack before turning around. She kept her back to him and her gaze ahead of her. "Why are you here?"

"Surely you knew I couldn't stay away."

She did, maybe secretly anticipated it. Damn this man. If she were smart, she'd tell him to leave her alone, but something held her back.

His hands descended onto her shoulders and his warm breath brushed the back of her neck. "Trust me, I tried. This is pure madness, but I could no more deny my lust for you than the air I breathe." He brushed his lips against her nape.

A shiver of excitement raced up her spine. A slow wave of rapture rolled through her body. "Why are you doing this to me?" she whispered.

"All you have to do is say no, and I'll leave you alone."



“What about Anna? She’s mad at the two of us.”

Jack slid his hands down the length of her arms and then pulled her against his body.

Sydney gasped at the feel of his erection pressing into the curve of her ass.

“Jack...”

“I’m sorry that Anna’s been hurt, but she has nothing to do with us. She and I had a brief fling. It’s over and while I regret how it ended, she’ll have to learn to deal with it.”

“That sounds so cold.”

“I don’t mean to be, but I can’t fix things if she won’t talk to me. But enough about her. I’d rather focus on us.” He licked the delicate shell of her ear, sending sparks of delight coursing through her being.

“There is no us,” she protested, even as she ground her ass against his cock. Her pussy was on fire and her body tensed in anticipation of his touch.

“Tell me you don’t want this.” He captured her right earlobe between his teeth and nipped gently.

Sydney reached around and grasped his waist, bracing herself. His nearness was driving her insane. A groan escaped her lips as his large palms cupped her breasts through the thin material of her night shirt. Her nipples pebbled to tight peaks.

“Can’t say it, can you?”

She closed her eyes in defeat. Though her mind told her to be wary of this man, her body did no such thing.

Jack chuckled. “That’s okay, sweetheart. You don’t have to say a thing.” He then commenced a slow erotic assault on her senses. Pinching her taut nipples, he planted kisses along her neck.

Moisture pooled between her thighs and she pressed them tightly together to temper the ungovernable heat raging from within. “Jack,” she sighed her surrender. Sydney no longer had the strength to fight the carnal urges warring within her.

When she attempted to turn around to face him, Jack stopped her. “No. Not yet.”

“But --”

He increased the pressure on her nipples, squeezing them to the point where she hovered over the line between pleasure and pain. “I want to bend you over and take you from behind. You have no idea how difficult it was for me to get through that meeting without thinking about your gorgeous body. Raise your arms for me, sweetheart.”

Too aroused to disobey his command, she complied. Jack then lifted her night shirt over her head and tossed it aside. “Place your hands on the window.”

Anticipation coursed through her like lightning as she obeyed once again. Her body trembled with raw desire for this powerful man. Sydney never realized how much of a turn on it was to be told what to do, being a slave to someone’s sexual demands.

She couldn’t keep still as he slid her panties off slowly and then lifted her ankles one at a time to discard them. Sydney turned her head when Jack didn’t immediately touch her. He undressed with unhurried movements, revealing his rock hard body.

Jack smirked. “Do you like watching me undress?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Good, because I enjoy you looking at it too.” When he finished removing the remainder of his clothes, Jack stood tall and proud, his thick long cock jutting forward.

“Please hurry,” Sydney begged.

He chuckled. “There’s no rush. Besides, I want to play with you some more, darling.” Moving behind her, Jack nudged her thighs apart with his knee and then slipped two fingers between them before rubbing her damp slit.

Sydney ground her pussy against his hand. “Don’t tease me.”

“What do you want, Sydney? Tell me.”

“I want you to fuck me!” she yelled, and then bit her bottom lip, mindful of the others in the house.

“In time, baby.” He slipped two fingers between her labia and thrust them deep inside of her channel. Jack grasped one of her breasts, fondling it with his free hand.

Slowly, he worked his digits in and out of her. "Mmm, you're already wet for me. Tell me that you like this."

"I do, very much, Jack," she panted.

"Tell me you want it."

"I want it."

"Need it."

"Yes! Give it to me!"

He finger-fucked her pussy, sending her body into a tailspin. Jack played her body like a finely tuned instrument, making her writhe and wiggle uncontrollably. Sydney's knees nearly gave out. If he kept this up, she thought she'd pass out from pleasure overload. Before she met Jack, Sydney hadn't believed herself to be a very sexual person, but she knew she hadn't found the right man -- until now.

Her pussy gushed as her climax hit and her cream slid down her thighs. Jack eased his fingers out of her and brought them to her lips.

Instinctively she wrapped her lips around them, sucking off the juices.

"That's it, baby."

Sydney slid her tongue over his hand until Jack groaned. "I have to be inside of you now!" Taking her by the wrist, he led her to the bed and then bent her over it, forcing Sydney to place her hands on the mattress.

Jack placed the tip of his cock against her slit, sliding it along the wet opening before pushing past the slick folds one thick inch at a time.

Sydney pushed her hips back, eager to have him fully inside of her.

"Easy, sweetheart, I want to make this last."

"But I need you. Don't torture me."

He brought his palm down on her ass with a crack.

Sydney yelped more in surprise than from pain. What was this man doing to her? She loved the way Jack stretched her vaginal walls so thoroughly, how he touched her so masterfully, and how he made her tremble from anticipation with just one look.

Grasping her hips, he nearly pulled all the way out, but then slammed into her again. He repeated the motion until she was panting with her desire for him. Jack smacked her ass again, but this time the sting was followed by a wave of pure pleasure. He was making her feel sensations she hadn't thought possible. As he thrust in and out of her, he spanked her bottom several more times, driving her insane with the need to be possessed by him.

Jack's sharp intake of breath told her he was near his climax as well. She wanted him to lose control. Taking matters into her own hands, she clenched her muscles around his cock and bucked against him.

"Sydney!" he cried, shoving deeper, harder, and faster into her.

She moved in time with his thrusts, until her body shook uncontrollably. When she reached her peak, it was an all consuming explosion. Her arms wobbled so much they were no longer able to support her. She fell forward, with Jack following, his dick still buried deep within her.

He pumped frantically, moaning her name over and over again, his fingers digging into her flesh. Jack released a primal shout when he shot his load inside of her.

Finally after a few more strokes, he pulled out of her. Then he lifted an exhausted Sydney off the bed, turned her around to face him and took her lips in a hungry kiss.

Sydney broke the tight seal of their lips to gasp for breath. "That was... incredible."

Jack rested his head against her forehead. "It was. And it will be like that the next time as well."

Too worn out to be offended by his presumption, she still couldn't help asking, "What makes you think there will be a next time?"

"Oh, there'll be a next time. There's something between us I can't quite explain. Maybe it's just great sex, or something entirely different. All I know is I like the way I feel when you're near."

Sydney opened her mouth to list the reasons why the two of them were crazy to even contemplate a relationship, but he forestalled her by placing his finger over her lips.

“Before you say anything; I know there are probably hundreds of reasons why we should stay away from each other, one of them being the mission we have at hand. It’s going to be a long hard road to make people aware of what the Cyrellians are up to and rid our planet of them. You and I are both strong-willed people who constantly clash. I find you infuriating at times and I’m sure you feel the same way about me. We still have the Anna situation hanging over our heads and we haven’t known each other very long. Despite all this, I can’t stop thinking about you. I ache for you as I have for no one else and for that very reason, I think we should at least see where this takes us.”

Sydney knew her life would never be the same, but these new circumstances presented her an opportunity to explore another side of herself. If she wanted to open herself up more and let people in she’d have to take chances.

She touched the side of his face and met his gaze. “Okay. Maybe tomorrow we’ll go back to butting heads, but tonight I just want to hold you.”

Jack bent his head and brushed her lips with his gently. Then he offered her a slight smile. “I can handle that.”

Though uncertainty of the future loomed before her, Sydney knew her life would never again be ordinary as long as Jack was in it.

## **Eve Vaughn**

Eve Vaughn has enjoyed creating characters and making up stories from an early age. As a child she was always getting into mischief, so when she lost her television privileges (which was often), writing was her outlet. Her stories have gotten quite a bit spicier since then! Eve likes to read, bake, make crafts, travel, and spend time with her family. She lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband and pet turtle. She loves to hear from her fans, so feel free to contact her at [EveVaughn10@aol.com](mailto:EveVaughn10@aol.com), join her Yahoo! group at [www.evevaughnsbooks-subscribe@yahoo.com](http://www.evevaughnsbooks-subscribe@yahoo.com) and visit her website at <http://www.evevaughn.com/>.