



THE  
**CYBORG**  
WITH NO  
**NAME**

CYBORGS ON MARS

**HONEY  
PHILLIPS**

# THE CYBORG WITH NO NAME

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## CHAPTER ONE

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“Dr. Abbott! Dr. Abbott!”

The voice shouting her name and the pounding on her door finally penetrated Rose’s sleep. Groaning, she rolled over to look at the time. 6 AM. *Damn*. She was generally an early riser, but one of the horrific dust storms that still swept across the Martian surface had kept her awake the previous night. Even though she knew that the roaring wind and the harsh abrasion of sand against the dome of the habitat could not reach her, she hadn’t been able to settle down until the storm finally passed. An hour ago.

“Dr. Abbott!”

This time, she recognized the voice. Dr. Willis. He had been a last-minute addition to the GenCon scientific team, and he’d managed to annoy the entire rest of the team with his reckless behavior and exaggerated claims. With a weary sigh, she climbed her feet, tied her hair back in its usual tight knot, and pulled on her robe.

“What is it, Dr. Willis?” she asked impatiently as she slid open the door panel.

His eyes widened as he took in the colorful silk pajamas, so different from her usual conservative navy jumpsuit. When she cleared her throat impatiently, his eyes snapped back to her face.

“The storm.”

“Yes. I know there was a storm.” She was doing her best not to snap at him, but the fitful night’s sleep added to the general

exhaustion from the years-long project was not helping her keep her temper. Four years of nonstop work on Earth, followed by six months of space travel and another six months on the surface of Mars did tend to drain a person's energy.

He dropped his head and shuffled his feet anxiously. "The storm... It wasn't anyone's fault, but it got into one of the containers."

The storage containers should have been secured against the storm but it wasn't a catastrophic disaster, unless... Her heart started to pound. "Which one?"

"The one with the last set of horses."

*Damn, damn, damn!*

She had designed the robotic horses to withstand the Martian environment as much as possible, but she had never intended for them to be outside during a storm. She needed to see how much damage had been done.

To her surprise, Dr. Willis scurried after her as she stalked off towards the storage facility. Why did he even care? His research was based on plant genetics.

The habitat was composed of a series of interlocking domes arranged in a rough semicircle against one side of an ancient crater. The storage containers holding the assembled horses were located at one end, more exposed to the winds that had roared over the desert the previous night. From the adjacent hangar that stored the various transportation devices, she could see the door to one of the containers hanging at an awkward angle.

"Damn," she muttered again as she tugged on a thermal coat. The terraforming project had succeeded to the point where daytime temperatures, while cold, were within the range of human tolerances. A breathing mask was also necessary, although the outside atmosphere no longer required the use of a pressure suit.

"Err, wouldn't you like to get dressed first?" Dr. Willis asked, carefully averting his gaze from the pink silk showing beneath the coat.

“No, I would not,” she snapped. “I want to see how much damage has been done.”

Slipping one of the small breathing masks over her face, she headed through the personal airlock to one side of the hangar. Her heart sank as she drew closer to the container and saw the pitted surface of the half open door and the amount of sand that filled the opening. How much damage had the storm caused?

The inside of the container was dark, and it took a few moments for her eyes to adjust. Even then, she blinked several times, not sure of what she was seeing. Each storage unit contained twenty horses, and they were usually standing in neat, staggered lines, waiting for orders. But now they were all huddled against the wall furthest from the door. The smallest ones were at the very back, while the largest, a big grey, was closest to the opening. He had borne the brunt of the storm damage. Deep scratches marred his left side, and his left eye had turned cloudy.

“Oh no!”

She rushed forward to check on him, relieved to find that despite the gashes in the metallic skin, his internal mechanisms were undamaged. Unfortunately, the vision in that eye had definitely been compromised. Giving a soothing pat to the metal flank, she moved on to check the other horses. Because of the way the big grey had positioned himself, there was very little other damage. Except...

How had that happened? The horses were programmed to avoid dangerous situations—unless otherwise ordered—but that did not extend to the protection of other horses. And yet, not only had they moved away from their assigned positions, the big grey had done his best to shield the others. How was that possible?

She returned to the grey, studying his face as she stroked her fingers through the rubber tubing that made up his mane. The mane was somewhat of an affectation on her part, but she had decided that building the horses to more accurately resemble their ancient Earth counterparts was an appropriate reflection



of their new role. She looked up at the horse, and one dark eye and one silvery eye seemed to look back at her expectantly.

“Did you do this on purpose?” she murmured, even though she knew there would be no response. She had often caught flashes of what could be interpreted as personality from the horses, but this was the first time one had taken such a specific action.

The horse almost seemed to sigh, his head dropping on her shoulder. She continued running her fingers thoughtfully through his mane as she considered the possibilities.

“Dr. Abbott, this carelessness is completely unacceptable. How much damage was done?”

The barked question came from Quilby, the current GenCon supervisor. A big, heavysset man, he was neither a scientist nor a competent administrator, and Rose disliked him intensely.

She turned to greet him, keeping her voice cool. “Very little, actually, thanks to this horse.”

“Good. We are already over budget on this project.”

“He will need some repairs,” she added.

Quilby ran a disparaging eye over the horse, then shook his head.

“Cosmetic repairs are not in the budget.”

“It’s more than just cosmetic. His eye is damaged and needs to be replaced. It’s a simple procedure.”

“Does the damaged eye affect its usefulness?”

She hesitated. Strictly speaking, it probably wasn’t necessary to repair the eye, but she hated the thought that the horse’s bravery would not be rewarded.

“Did you hear what I said?” she asked. “He protected the other horses.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. They are machines, not people. Just because you developed this technology doesn’t mean you know everything. Why do women have to try and anthropomorphize everything?”

“I am a scientist, and I am telling you what I observed. The fact that I’m a woman has nothing to do with it.”

The look he gave her was as disparaging as the one he had given the horse. She could almost hear the words hovering on his tongue. *Not much of a woman.*

But she had long ago come to terms with her looks. She was too tall, too thin, and too plain to interest most men—especially one like Quilby.

“I want to replace the eye,” she repeated.

“Unnecessary.” Quilby shook his head, already turning away. “It’s only going to one of those damn cyborgs anyway. They’re as ugly as it is.”

*Bastard.* Even though he was right about the purpose of the horses, it didn’t mean that they should be treated poorly. The reminder made her fists clench at her sides, even though she had known the purpose of the project all along. The cyborgs had been created by Earth Government for the initial terraforming work on Mars. They had built the enormous plants that were turning the polar ice caps into usable atmosphere, and had done much of the initial preparation for permanent human settlement on Mars. But as those efforts began to wind down and the workers and scientists prepared to colonize, Earth Government had realized they needed to find a new use for the remaining cyborgs.

The majority of them had been converted into Rangers, to provide security and a basic legal system for the new colony. Her horses would be assigned to those new Rangers. The horses were specifically adapted to the Martian terrain, faster and more agile than the clunky rovers that were the only alternative.

She had known all that when she had taken the job, but at the time she had been too overwhelmed by grief to care about anything except burying herself in her work. Between the technical challenges, and then the adaptation to life on Mars, she’d had little time to think about the future. Now she was painfully aware that her horses would be leaving soon.

She looked at the grey horse, standing so patiently, still shielding the others. The cyborgs were all former soldiers, and she knew from personal experience how brutal soldiers could be. Would they treat her horses the same way? She would have hated the idea under any circumstances, but now she suspected that the horses were capable of developing at least a rudimentary sentience, it was even worse.

“I’ll do my best to protect all of you,” she promised the grey horse.

A useless promise, as it turned out.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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*O*ne year later...

ROSE MADE THE FINAL CONNECTION, AND SAT BACK ON HER heels to survey her creation. She was attempting to reproduce a canine—another species now very rare on an overcrowded Earth. Unfortunately, since leaving GenCon her access to materials was much more limited than it had been before. She spared a wistful thought for her fully equipped lab with every tool and material she needed.

*No.* It wasn't worth the price. She was much happier leading her own life, away from GenCon and their focus on profit and their disregard for anything else. Her only real regret was that she had not been there to protect her horses, to make sure they were assigned to good partners. That lack still haunted her, and her chest ached as she turned back to her latest project.

Her new creation had shredded rubber tubing creating what was almost a mane around his small pointed face. Two inquisitive ears poked up through the tangle of tubing. His metal skin was bolted together from scrap pieces in shades varying from silver to a rusty brown. But somehow, despite the hodgepodge of materials, she had created something appealing.

A ripple of excitement coursed through her body as she reached for the control and turned him on. The canine came to life with a slight whirring noise. His head tilted from one side to another, then each leg was lifted and put back down. But

then he went still. His eyes had the faint golden shimmer that revealed his systems were active, but there was no other reaction, no response, no sign that he was anything other than a machine waiting for a command.

She sighed heavily and put down the controller. What had she expected? He'd only just come to life.

Her theories remained just that—theories. Her attempt to recreate the scenario with the horses, to prove that a robotic creation could be more than just a machine had not yet been successful. But he needed more time, and more interaction. And...

“You need a name,” she told him. “Let me see... I think I'll call you Otis.”

The slightly mismatched eyes blinked once, but there was no other reaction.

*Patience*, she told herself.

Turning away from Otis, she wandered over to the wide window overlooking the valley below. She had chosen this spot to erect her isolated homestead specifically for this view, and the freedom she experienced every time she looked out at her surroundings. Here, the surface of Mars was untouched by any man-made changes. There were no settlers, no plantings, not even the occasional flash of a rover trundling across the surface. She had wanted isolation. She had found it.

The habitat was simple enough—one large central dome functioned as both laboratory and living area. On one side, an airlock led to the outside, and through to the garage where she kept her rover and the larger devices she repaired. Her modest bedroom was on the other side of the central dome, followed by her bath, and finally, her greenhouse. The greenhouse provided both oxygen and food, along with filtering recirculated water. Although she still received a quarterly delivery of food and supplies, it was a convenience rather than the necessity. She took great pride in knowing that she could survive on her own.

Unexpectedly restless, she wandered into the greenhouse to check on her hydroponic garden. The air was damp and rich with the smell of growing things. Maybe all of Mars would be like this one day—no longer barren and hostile to humans, but lush and alive.

*At least until we manage to screw it up as much as we screwed up Earth*, she thought cynically. She sighed again, then went back to the lab to start recording her notes. As she entered, she glanced back out across the plain and saw the faintest shimmer of dust hanging above the surface. That was odd. Barring one of the nightmare dust storms, very little would disturb the surface unless...

Swearing under her breath, she reached for her distance lenses.

A horse—one of her horses—was racing across the rocky ground towards her. It had been so long since she had seen one of her creations that she had almost forgotten how magnificent they were. She watched in admiration as the sleek metal form moved easily across the rough terrain, the hydraulic muscles moving in a smooth rhythm.

It wasn't until the horse was almost at the foot of the slope leading up to her home that she thought to wonder why it was coming. As it started to climb the slope, it was obvious that she was the destination.

Hurrying into the expansive airlock, she pulled on a breathing mask and wrapped a thermal coat around her shoulders, then went to meet the horse.

She emerged from her home just as the horse came skidding to a halt in front of her. My goodness, he was magnificent. Dark bronze skin gleamed in the pale Martian sunlight, a smooth expanse of metal completely unlike her poor Otis. She put a soothing hand on his neck as she started to inspect the details of his construction, but he shifted his feet impatiently and tossed his head.

“What’s wrong with you? Are you injured?”

Once again, she tried to run her hands over his body to check for injuries, and once again he shifted sideways, almost as if

he were nudging her back down the slope. A spark of hope ignited deep in her heart.

“Why are you here? Do you need something?”

Her first questions had simply been rhetorical, but this time she held her breath waiting for an answer. Not that the horse could talk of course, but he was definitely nudging her towards the slope, and more specifically, pressing the built-in stirrup against her side.

“Do you want me to go with you?”

He made a huffing noise and she almost jumped. Perhaps it had been a little premature to say that he couldn't talk. She bit her lip, then nodded. Whatever was going on with the animal, there was no one to stop her from following through this time.

“Just one minute,” she said quickly, hurrying back inside long enough to pick up a basic survival kit.

It wasn't until she returned outside that she realized that as soon as she said she was going with him, he had stopped trying to nudge her away from her home.

“I'm a little out of practice,” she muttered, reaching for the grip between his shoulders as she tried to put her foot in the stirrup. He was much too tall for her, but before she could lead him to a rock from which she could mount, he lowered his shoulders enough for her to climb up. That was... unexpected.

As soon as she was astride, he started climbing back down the hill, surefooted despite the rocky surface. When they reached the comparatively smooth surface of the desert plain, he immediately broke into a gallop.

She gave a delighted laugh as she gripped the protrusion that acted as a saddle horn. How much she had missed this. During the original engineering of the horses, she had spent many hours working with them as she experimented with various gaits and commands.

It didn't even occur to her to worry about returning to her habitat until they were a considerable distance from the lab. She gave a mental shrug. The horse obviously had a destination in mind. If necessary, she had a small toolkit in her

survival bag and she could adjust his programming, but for now, she was more curious to see where he was taking her.

As they approached the base of some rocky hills, he finally slowed. She leaned forward to pat his neck.

“That was quite a ride, but why—”

Damn. There was a body lying on the ground, half-tucked into a crevice in the rock. A very large, male body. They were close enough that she could tell he wasn't wearing a facemask. Which meant he was dead. Now what was she going to do?

Her practical side argued that since there was nothing she could do for him, it would be better to leave him where he was for someone else to find. But while she wasn't particularly sympathetic to the settlers and their voracious desire to transform the planet, she couldn't find it in her heart to leave him lying there.

If she could wrestle him up onto the horse, she could take him back to her lab and call for a ranger to come pick him up.

*A ranger.* Of course. He wasn't a man after all. He must have been one of the cyborg rangers, which would explain the presence of the horse.

She was even more tempted to leave him now, but the sight of the big, motionless body awakened a spark of sympathy. Sighing, she dismounted and slipped to the ground.

As she approached, she could see the damage that had been done to him. His shirt had been ripped open, and she could see deep gashes across his chest. More gashes sliced across his neck and arms, and his wrists were raw and bleeding. His nanites must not have been able to heal the extensive injuries in time to save him.

She bent over the body, trying to decide how she was going to get him onto the horse. She lifted one arm experimentally, but even that one arm was thick and heavy with muscle. This was not going to be an easy task. Unless she could rig up some type of pulley...

She reached for his belt, but just as she touched him, a big hand clamped down over hers and she looked up to see silver



eyes fastened on her face.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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The first thing he noticed was pain. A fiery streak of agony ran up one leg while more bands of pain streaked across his chest and neck. Even the blood traveling through his veins seemed to burn. He should be able to stop this, some part of his brain insisted, but he had no idea how.

“So you’re awake.” The low, pleasant voice whispered across his skin like a cooling breeze.

He searched for the source of the voice, even though his vision did not want to respond to his control either. *There*. A tall, thin figure silhouetted against a window, a vast expanse of orange desert behind her.

A woman. Why did that seem so unlikely to him? He tried to lift his hand, to rub his aching head, but it did not want to obey him.

“What happened?” His voice came out rusty, unrecognizable.

“I was hoping you could tell me.” The woman came closer, and he could finally focus on her. Tall, slender almost to the point of gauntness, but she moved with the grace of a dancer. Her face was all angles—high cheekbones, a patrician nose, and a pointed chin—but all he could focus on was her eyes. Cool and grey, they seemed to see right through him.

“Where am I?”

“You are in my lab. My home.”

He flinched at the word lab and instinctively tried to back away, but his body still would not obey his commands.

“No more experiments.”

She frowned at him. “I’m not experimenting on you. You were wounded, and your horse came to me for help.”

*Horse.* That triggered a memory. Riding across an endless orange plain like the one he could see outside, muscles flexing smoothly beneath him. *Muscles?* That didn’t seem quite right.

“Where is he?”

“Your horse? Outside absorbing solar energy and replenishing his batteries.”

*Batteries?* The memory coalesced.

“Not a real horse. A robot.”

A flash of something that looked almost like irritation crossed her face. “They are more than robots. You of all people should understand that.”

He should? The whole conversation was only confusing him and making his head ache more.

“Do you have a designation?” she asked.

He searched his memory, but there was nothing. More than just his name was missing, he realized.

“I... I don’t remember. Maybe R... something.” He started to shake his head in frustration, then winced as the movement increased the ache.

“Do you remember anything?”

This time, he was careful to avoid moving his head. “Not really. A few flashes here and there. I remember riding. I was in a hurry, I think.”

She sighed, reaching down to pick up his wrist. As those long, cool fingers touched his flesh, he jerked. How long had it been since he had been touched by another human being? Despite his uncertain memories, he was quite sure it had been a very long time.

And not just a person, a woman. This woman. In spite of the pain still rampaging through his body, he felt his cock stir. And

something about that felt even less familiar.

“I don’t understand,” she said, shaking her head. “Your nanites should be healing your injuries.”

“Nanites?”

“You really don’t remember anything, do you? The nanites are what they used to make you like this,” she said gently.

“Like what?”

“You’re a cyborg. You’ve had work done to your eyes and I suspect your legs.”

“I am not a cyborg.” He shook his head violently, despite the pain. “I’m a man.”

“Yes, you’re a man.” Her voice sounded strained. “But you have been... enhanced.”

He didn’t believe her. Couldn’t believe her. Then another memory emerged from the fog. He had been strapped to a table while people in white coats had worked on him. They had been talking, but not to him, and he had been unable to speak. A great shudder ran through his body, and he managed to move his hand, to twist it and grab hers.

“No experiments.”

She didn’t try and pull away, placing her other hand on top of his instead. “No experiments.”

His head swam, and the fire burning through his veins seemed to increase. The room felt like it was getting darker. Her voice was the last thing he heard.

“You’re safe here.”

ROSE STARED DOWN AT THE BIG CYBORG AS HIS EYES CLOSED and his body went limp. Now why had she promised him that? If whoever had damaged him so badly came looking for him, she had no real way of defending either of them. She had a gun, of course, but if his mysterious enemy was capable of taking down a cyborg, the gun probably wouldn’t be much use.

Even worse, if GenCon came after him they would have no hesitation in applying pressure just where it would hurt her the most. But he had seemed so genuinely distressed, and even though the cyborgs were not her favorite people—reminding her far too closely of the soldiers from whom they had been created—she had wanted to comfort him.

*How foolish*, she thought, studying his unconscious face. Not a handsome face—it was far too rugged for that—but it had a masculine quality that was unexpectedly appealing. And as for his body... She had removed most of his clothing in order to attend his wounds, leaving him dressed only in a brief undergarment that did little to conceal his assets. She shook her head, hastily dragging her eyes away from that part of his body.

*What is wrong with me?*

She had chosen celibacy long ago in order to simplify her life and allow her to concentrate on her work, and she had never regretted that decision. But perhaps after a year of living completely alone, it wasn't entirely unexpected that she might be interested.

*But it's just a momentary distraction*, she assured herself, withdrawing her hand from his.

As soon as she did, he moved restlessly, his head tossing from side to side. When she touched his arm again, he settled down. She was almost tempted to remain at his side, but she couldn't stay here and continue researching why his nanites didn't appear to be working.

She cast an undecided look back towards the main room and saw Otis sitting there, just where she had left him. *Hmm*. In the days before Earth became so overcrowded and polluted that animals almost vanished, dogs had been companions.

“Come here, Otis,” she called.

He jumped down and trotted towards her, then stood waiting as patiently as, well, a robot. She picked him up and placed him on the bed next to the cyborg.

“Lie down,” she ordered, and then when he had obeyed, she put the cyborg’s hand on the shaggy head.

It took a moment, long enough for her to start to feel rather foolish, but then the cyborg’s breathing slowed and his body relaxed. His hand was buried in the shreds of flexible tubing that made up Otis’s shaggy mane. *Not so foolish after all*, she thought with a smile, then returned to her search for an explanation.

His continued unconsciousness worried her, along with his amnesia. Although he had regained consciousness briefly when she found him, it had only lasted long enough to help her wrestle him onto the horse. He had dropped forward over the horse’s back on the way home, and it had taken all her strength and the help of her hover cart to transfer him to the bed.

Even after she’d cleaned and bandaged his wounds to the best of her ability, he hadn’t stirred until just now. The wounds worried her too. They showed no signs of the rapid healing that his nanites should have provided. Hopefully, the small sample she had taken of his blood would yield some answers.

After she dropped the sample of his blood into the x-ray spectroscope and set it to analyze, she couldn’t help glancing back at the huge figure taking up most of her bed. She was so used to being alone. Even though he was unconscious, she could feel his presence like a faint electric charge against her skin—and it wasn’t an unpleasant sensation.

She tried to concentrate on her work while the analyzer processed, but she felt even more restless than she had earlier in the day. Leaving the machines running, she pulled on her breathing mask and thermal coat and went outside. The pale Martian sun was beginning to set over the distant mountains, but she could still feel a faint warmth in the slanted rays.

The horse had been standing in that sun, absorbing solar energy, but he wandered over as soon as she emerged from the dome. He butted his head against her shoulder, and she laughed as she ran her fingers through his artificial mane.

“Idiots. This isn’t programmed behavior. Are they too stupid to see it? Or do they just not want to deal with the

ramifications?”

The horse didn't respond, but he seemed content to stand at her side as they looked out over the valley below. She would love to take another ride, but she didn't feel comfortable leaving her cyborg by himself. Especially if trouble was following him.

The thought made her frown, and this time when she looked out over the desert, she found herself looking for any hint of danger.

“I should set up a proximity alert,” she muttered to herself, then looked up at the horse. “You were smart enough to come here for help. I wonder if you're smart enough to let us know if trouble is on the way.”

The big golden eyes looked back down at her, and then he butted his head against her shoulder again. Was that an assent? Or was she projecting far too much?

“I guess I better get back to work... Hmm. You need a name,” she decided. “Did he give you one?”

She searched for the small identity tag each horse carried. BC-809. Not particularly inspiring.

“How about Bucephalus? He was a very heroic horse, just like you.”

Bucephalus tossed his head, and she took it as a sign of approval. With one last stroke of his mane, she went back to work. As she entered the main room, Otis raised his head from where he was still curled up next to the cyborg. It was the first time he had made an independent movement, and she gave a satisfied nod. Perhaps all it took was time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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Night fell over the desert, and millions of stars became visible through the thin atmosphere, but the cyborg still hadn't stirred. His golden skin glistened, a fine sheen of sweat covering him. When she touched her hand to his brow, he felt impossibly hot to the touch.

The heat might have been due to the natural healing process created by the nanites, but it still worried her. Perhaps she should try a more old-fashioned solution. Gathering up two of her limited collection of towels, she took them into the adjoining bathroom and soaked them in cold water. The water came from a shaft sent deep into the subsurface ice and was barely above freezing. She shuddered when she picked up a towel and carried it back to the bed, then hesitated. It seemed almost cruel to place the icy material on his burning skin, even though the cyborgs had been designed to withstand the original subzero temperatures on the surface of Mars without additional protection.

But it was a logical means of reducing his temperature. She cautiously wiped the towel down his arm, half-expecting him to jerk away, but there was no reaction. Encouraged, she moved to the other arm. Otis seemed to shift slightly to allow her to reach the cyborg's hand, but it was such a small movement she wasn't entirely sure she hadn't imagined it.

His chest was next, and she slowly ran the cool cloth across the heavily muscled expanse, then down the ridges of his abdomen. She had never been this close to such an impressive display of masculine strength before. Her few interactions had



been with fellow scientists who had not been remarkable for their physical prowess.

*Brains are more important*, she told herself, even as her hand lingered on the vee of muscles leading under the waistband of his brief shorts. *I'm just trying to be thorough*. Her towel-covered hand hovered over that waistband as she tried to decide if she should slip it underneath, and then she realized that the towel was now both warm and almost completely dry.

The knowledge snapped her back to reality, and she returned to the bathroom to let it soak while she collected the second towel. This time, she wiped down his legs and studiously ignored the thick muscles of his thighs and the way the snug briefs cupped what seemed to be an oversized cock.

*I wonder if the male scientists who worked on the cyborgs enhance that as well*, she thought crossly as her eyes were drawn back there once again. It couldn't be natural for it to be that large.

Annoyed by her own distraction, she swapped out the towels once more, deciding to simply cover his upper body with the cold towel. His head moved again, restlessly shifting back and forth, and she used a smaller cloth to gently wipe across his brow and over his cheeks. He quieted beneath her touch, and for a moment, his eyelids fluttered open. His eyes were like liquid silver, a striking reminder of his altered nature, but they were framed by long, dark lashes, and the combination was remarkably attractive. The silver eyes seemed to focus on her face, and her heart gave a ridiculous skip. Before she could compose herself, his eyes closed again.

Her chest tingled, and she looked down to see her nipples thrusting against the worn fabric of her jumpsuit. *It's just from the cold water*, she told herself as she jumped up.

His fever continued to rage throughout the night. Unable to think of any other solution, she continued to apply the cold towels, replacing them each time they grew warm and dry. Close to dawn, his temperature finally dropped, and she could only hope that the worst was over. Leaving him under Otis's

watchful eye, she went to prepare some food so it would be ready if—*when*—he woke.

HE FLOATED IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS. FLASHES OF fiery pain were interspersed with cooling cloths and the sound of a soft voice. When his head finally cleared a little, he opened his eyes and found himself in a strange place. Or perhaps not so strange. He vaguely remembered waking up here before. And there had been a woman. An elegant, graceful woman.

As if his thoughts had conjured her up, she appeared at the entrance to the next room. Yes, he remembered her. Remembered the way she seemed to float across the room, despite the unflattering jumpsuit that hid her slender curves. The tight braid that confined her hair showcased her delicate features.

“Good morning, Roy,” she said briskly as she put a small tray down next to the bed.

She refused to look at him, but he could see the faintest trace of pink edging the ivory pallor of those high cheekbones.

“Roy?” he asked.

She shrugged a narrow shoulder, even that small movement remarkably graceful.

“I didn’t want to keep calling you ‘the cyborg,’ so I picked a name starting with R.”

“Roy,” he repeated. It did not seem familiar, but he had no objection to the name. “And what is your name?”

“Rose. I mean, Dr. Abbott.”

“I prefer Rose.”

“No one calls me that.”

He took a quick look around, but the place seemed as isolated as it had before. “Is there anyone else here to call you that?”

“No. And I prefer it like that,” she said firmly.

“Do you want me to leave?”

He started to sit up as he spoke, but his arms would not support him and he fell back against the pillows. Even without his memories, he didn't think he'd ever felt this weak, and some part of him insisted that he should be considerably stronger. What was wrong with him?

“I didn't mean it like that.” The cool, slender fingers rested briefly on his forehead. “Don't push yourself or the fever may recur.”

There was an anxious whine from next to him and he looked down to see—a dog? A mechanical dog, he realized, taking in the assorted metals that made up its skin. He had been momentarily misled by the mane surrounding the small intelligent face. A mane made not from fur, but from something that looked like shredded rubber.

“Who is this?”

“This is Otis.” Rose was studying the animal thoughtfully. “He hasn't left your side.”

He found his fingers combing through the soft mane. “Why would he unless you ordered him to do so?”

“Even then,” she said dryly. “Get down, Otis.”

The dog's eyes swiveled from Roy to Rose, and then he put his head back down on Roy's leg.

“You see?”

“A defective chip maybe?”

“Or maybe the answer I'm looking for,” she said cryptically, turning back to the tray before he could ask any other questions. “Here. Try this.”

He tried to lift himself up and take the cup she was handing him, but it was beyond his strength. Small white teeth closed down over an unexpectedly full lower lip, and then she sat down next to him. With the limited amount of help he could provide, she managed to position him so that he was partially upright and leaning against her shoulder, then handed him the mug again.

He managed to take it, although she covered his hand with her own slender fingers as she helped him drink. The rich, meaty broth was delicious, and he drank thirstily, draining the cup.

“That was very good.”

She looked pleased. “Thank you. I enjoy cooking. Following a recipe is much like following the steps of an experiment.”

The word made him shiver, followed by a rush of heat, and she frowned.

“I think it’s time for you to rest again.”

She started to lower him back down on the bed, but he no longer had the strength to assist her, and his weight pulled her down. She landed on top of him, his face nestled in her small cleavage. Her jumpsuit separated them, but as she pulled away, her breast brushed against his face and the hard point of her nipple touched his mouth. She froze.

His fists clenched as he did his best not to move. Not to part his lips and capture that tempting little peak, to tug it into his mouth and taste it, to feel it stiffen beneath his tongue. Fortunately for his limited self-control, she seemed to come to her senses, scrambling away from him so quickly that she almost fell.

“I... I’ll make some more broth.” And she fled.

He watched her go and licked his lips, hoping to catch a hint of her taste despite the cloth that had separated them. His cock throbbed, and once again the sensation surprised him. But as he searched his memories for an explanation, the combination of food and weakness overwhelmed him, and he drifted into an exhausted sleep.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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Rose fled into the main room, all the way to the back wall where she could no longer see the open doorway to the bedroom. She bent over her workbench, pressing her hands against her heated cheeks as if she could force away her embarrassment. What had she been thinking?

When his lips had touched her breast, she hadn't wanted to pull away. She had wanted to push closer. Only a last-minute surge of panic had made her run.

*Maybe it was pheromones*, she decided. Why else would she be so attracted to someone she didn't even know? And a cyborg. A soldier. Like the ones who had killed her brother.

Their parents had been wealthy, wealthy enough to afford the astronomical licensing fees to have two children. They died while she was still attending university, and she had buried her grief in study. Her brother Zach had taken a different path. He had devoted himself to every worthy cause he could find, trying to save the world after being unable to save their parents.

His last cause had been trying to solve the issue of hunger so prevalent on an Earth depleted of resources. A band of demonstrators had been protesting the food policies that disproportionately affected the poor, and he had been one of them. Earth Government had declared it a rebellion and sent in soldiers against unarmed men and women. Her brother had been killed by a stray bullet as he tried to protect a younger man.

Even after all these years, the memories still hurt.

The thought sobered her, but her body still hummed with excitement. Determined to push away the unwanted attraction, she sat down at her computer and lost herself in data. But when she went to take Roy another cup of broth and found him tossing restlessly, she couldn't help but worry. She repeated the routine with the cool towels, and once again he seemed to settle down.

The pattern continued throughout the day. Twice he woke, and she managed to get him to take more broth—although she used pillows to prop up his head both times. She watched over him and tried to work and refused to admit that she was worried.

By the time night fell, he seemed to be sleeping more naturally. His skin felt cooler, and he wasn't tossing and turning. A wave of relief swept over her. Hopefully the worst was over now.

Exhaustion soon followed. She had been up most of the previous night, watching over him, and only managed to catch a few moments of rest in her favorite chair. *But it's no substitute for my bed*, she thought as she eyed it longingly.

Even though Roy's big body took up the majority of the bed, she could probably slip into the space next to him. The thought of sharing her bed with him caused a nervous flutter low in her stomach, but it was her bed, after all. And considering that he was barely strong enough to lift his head, she didn't think she would be in any danger from him.

Decision made, she went into the bathroom and changed into her nightgown. Long-sleeved and high-necked, it was designed for comfort and warmth. Even if he had the capacity for amorous intentions, the voluminous nightgown would be enough to dissuade him, she thought wryly as she eyed herself in the long mirror.

She dimmed all of the lights in the dome except for the thin strip of safety lights that ran beneath the windows, then very cautiously sat down on the edge of the mattress. He didn't stir.

Taking a deep breath, she laid down, keeping as close to the edge of the mattress as possible.

He was lying on top of the bedcovers, but she wasn't about to disturb him by trying to wrestle them out from under him. Besides, he was still giving off a considerable amount of heat. She took a deep breath of his oddly comforting scent, and found herself relaxing, inch by inch. He still hadn't moved, and his breathing was deep and even. With a little sigh of relief, she nestled her head into her pillow and let her exhaustion carry her away.

ROY WOKE WITH A START, HIS BODY POISED ON THE EDGE OF flight. His heart was pounding, but he didn't know why unless it was because of the dream that was already slipping away from him. A lab table, a man in a dirty white coat babbling nonsense. But then that too disappeared, as he realized that someone was pressed against his side, someone cool and soft and sweet-scented.

*Rose.*

Her head was pillowed on his chest and the rest of her body was wrapped around his. Her curled hand rested over his heart, and he reached out and covered it with his own. She nestled closer, her knee coming up over his thigh and brushing against his erection. His breath caught. Greatly daring, he raised his hand to stroke the silky tendrils of her hair. No longer confined in a tight braid, the soft locks flowed halfway down her back and he ran his fingers through them, over and over.

She squirmed against him, her knee pressing even harder against his erection, and he muffled a groan. He reached down to corral her restless leg and encountered smooth, bare skin. The garment she was wearing had ridden up above her waist, and he traced the smooth skin all the way up to the curve of her hip.

She turned towards him and he found himself cupping her ass, soft and surprisingly full beneath his hand. His fingers clenched involuntarily, and she gave a muffled gasp. Her sweet scent blossomed, and he realized that she was aroused.

*She must be dreaming, he thought. She must not know who I am.*

“Roy,” she murmured softly, and his heart skipped a beat. He might not have recognized the name originally, but now it sounded perfect on her lips.

She rocked against him, and he realized she was trying to rub her sweet little pussy against the firm muscles of his hip. If she wanted relief, he was only too happy to provide it.

He let his hand travel further, slipping down between her legs and groaning again at the slick heat that met his fingers. He traced the length of her delicate folds, and circled the hard little pearl of flesh. She called his name again, so he repeated the gentle movement before dipping back down to the narrow entrance to her channel. He pressed gently until she opened and accepted his finger. Tight and wet and hot. Perfect. As he stroked gently in and out, he used his thumb to caress her clit with the same rhythm.

He could hear her panting and feel her hot little breaths against his chest as she jerked her hips in response, eager to meet each inward stroke. He moved faster, sliding deeper as he increased the pressure on her swollen nub. Her hand clenched on his chest, her short nails digging into his skin in a fiery little burst of pleasure. Then her body arched, her muscles tightening, and she cried out his name as her tight channel milked his finger in long, delicious pulses.

Triumph roared through him. He had pleased her. He rolled towards her so that she was half beneath him, and bent his head to kiss her.

As he did, her eyes opened, dazed with pleasure—before they widened in shock and she tried desperately to scramble out from beneath him. He instinctively grabbed for her as she almost fell out of the bed, but she wrenched her hand out of his grip and landed on the floor.

“What did you do?”



ROSE STARED UP AT THE BIG CYBORG. HER BODY WAS STILL humming with pleasure, and even now she could feel the slick heat between her legs. He had made her come. In her sleep. The last man she had dated hadn't even managed when she was fully awake.

He didn't even look embarrassed; he only looked confused.

"I pleased you," he said, his deep voice grumbling over her skin. "The way you asked me to."

"I asked you? I didn't ask you anything. I was asleep!"

A look of horror washed over his face, and he scrambled back almost as fast as she had done. Otis barked, and she realized he had been curled up at the foot of the bed. The little animal seemed to give her a reproachful look as he scampered to Roy's side.

"But... you said my name," Roy protested, his face paling as he clenched a hand in Otis's fur.

"I was asleep," she repeated, but her voice lacked conviction. She had been dreaming about him. About him touching her. And it had felt so good—so real. So real that she hadn't wanted to open her eyes and find out she was dreaming.

*Or find out that I wasn't*, an inner voice prompted.

"I would never—" A spasm crossed Roy's face, and he lifted his hand to his head. Otis whined.

"What's wrong?"

"My head," he muttered. "Why can't I remember? I don't want to believe that I was the kind of man—" another spasm "—I mean cyborg, who would take advantage of a woman, but what if..."

She sighed. Her panic had faded, and now she only felt embarrassed. *And satisfied*, her pesky inner voice whispered.

"I don't believe you are, Roy."

"Really?"

How could that rugged face look so hopeful?

“Really.” She took a deep breath. “And I’m sorry too. I got in bed while you were asleep, and I, umm, may have gotten a little closer than I intended.”

“I honestly thought you knew it was me. That you... wanted me. I should have known better.”

His last words weren’t even bitter, merely resigned.

“Why would you say that? You’re a very attractive man.” She blurted out her response before she thought about it, and immediately felt the heat rushing to her cheeks. *Dammit*. She never blushed.

“But I am not a man.” Sorrow gleamed in those silver eyes. “I may not remember much, but I remember that cyborgs are regarded as less than human.”

She shifted uncomfortably. He was right. They were seen as emotionless machines, fit only to accomplish the work that was too deadly for standard humans. That perception was encouraged by Earth Government, in part because they had stripped the cyborgs of almost all of their rights.

“I don’t think of you that way,” she said firmly. And truthfully.

He studied her face, then dipped his head in acknowledgment. “Then I do not care about anyone else’s opinion.”

Her heart skipped a beat at the look in his eyes, but he merely patted the mattress as he started to stand. “Please return to your bed. I will—”

His legs faltered, and he collapsed back down.

She shook her head. “You will stay right where you are. I think it’s going to take a while before you regain your full strength.”

*But why?* His nanites should have already healed his injuries.

“But I don’t want to take your bed.”

“It’s fine. Besides, the sun is coming up.” She pointed to the thin line of orange creeping up the edge of the distant mountains. “I have work to do.”

“I do too.” Another spasm crossed his face. “At least I think I do.”

“All you have to worry about right now is getting better. Now lie down while I prepare some breakfast. If you’re a good boy, I’ll let you get up afterwards.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

He grinned at her, an unexpectedly charming, boyish grin, and her pulse actually fluttered. Doing her best to ignore the feeling, she hurried off to get dressed, hoping that putting on her work clothes would help her treat him with businesslike detachment.

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## CHAPTER SIX

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Her work clothes hadn't helped at all, Rose decided late that afternoon. She had been extremely aware of him before, but now that they had been... intimate, that awareness was twice as strong. Even when he was sleeping, as he had done after she left him that morning, she could almost feel the heat from his big body brushing against her as she went about her work.

When he woke the second time, she gave him more broth, then helped him to a chair by the window in the main room. She'd had to lean against him to provide support, his big arm draped across her shoulders and hers wrapped around his waist. He carried the faintest scent of leather and something else, something warm and musky that made her nipples tighten and her core ache. When she helped him sit, she didn't want to let go, but she forced herself to stand, hoping her expression didn't give her away.

Otis had followed along, and he hopped up into Roy's lap once he was settled. He looked perfectly at home there, and she realized she was jealous. Of a dog. Shaking her head, she returned to her work bench.

Roy dozed for a little while, exhausted by the short trip, but the next time she looked up to check on him, he was watching her.

"What are you doing?"

"Working on a cooling unit. After I left GenCon, I spent most of my savings on this place. I'm fairly self-sufficient out here,

but I like having funds for a rainy day.” She looked outside at the endless desert and laughed. “Better make that a stormy day. Anyway, I have a deal with the supply master. He comes out here every three months and brings me things that need repairing, then collects them on his next trip. I use a few credits to pay for the things I can’t make myself and bank the rest.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “That’s very impressive. How do you know how to make the repairs?”

“I’m an engineer. Cybernetics, actually.”

She saw him flinch, and hurried to reassure him. “I never worked on people. Animals were my specialty.”

“Like Otis?” He stroked the dog’s head.

“He’s a more recent creation.” She looked past him to Bucephalus, standing at the edge of the slope as if he was keeping watch. “The horses were mine. My design, my build.”

He followed her gaze. “That’s even more impressive. Why did you stop?”

“I wasn’t happy. GenCon only saw them as disposable assets while I began to realize that they were much more. They were developing personalities, I think even some level of sentience, but when I tried to make that argument, I was overruled. The final straw was when they threatened to destroy one of them, just to keep me quiet. So I left.”

That day still haunted her. She’d wanted to stay and fight for her horses, but she couldn’t risk their lives.

“I still worry that the cyborgs won’t treat them well,” she added softly.

He shook his head. “We value them highly. They are our constant companions, our—” His words died out as he stared at her. “I know that. I remember that.”

“That’s great. Do you remember anything else?”

“Nights in the desert with a million stars overhead. Sitting on a mountainside watching the sun rise. I was alone, but he was always there.” His voice had turned distant, his eyes focused

on the horse outside, but then he shook his head. “They feel like real memories, but there’s no context. I don’t know why I was there. I don’t know who I am.”

“You’re Roy,” she said firmly. “And that’s enough for now. The rest will come in time.” *I hope.*

“I want to see him,” he said. “My horse.”

“You can visit Bucephalus once you can walk from one end of the habitat to the other by yourself.”

“Bucephalus?” He raised an eyebrow, and she felt her cheeks heat.

“I believe in naming things. Bucephalus was a hero. He carried a king.”

That disarming grin crossed his face. “I’m not exactly a king.”

“But he’s a hero. Didn’t you wonder how you got here? He came for me.”

“He tried to protect me then too,” he said, then his face spasmed.

“Then?”

He shook his head, obviously frustrated. “I don’t remember.”

She had told him once more that it would come back in time and returned to her work. But the problem continued to nag at her throughout the day. What had happened to him? And why couldn’t he remember?

Now she sighed and put down her tools. “I’ll get supper started. Do you think you’re ready for something more than broth?”

“I don’t want to use more of your supplies.”

“I have plenty. You may be big, but you’re not going to eat me out of house and home.”

ROY WATCHED ROSE WALK BACK TO THE GREENHOUSE AND tried to control his unruly body. When she’d told him he was big, her eyes had traveled over him with undisputed

admiration. She had seemed just as appreciative in his arms that morning.

*Until she woke up*, he reminded himself.

He could hear her humming and wished he could follow her, but when he tried to stand, his knees shook. Determined to overcome his weakness, he grasped the back of the chair and forced himself to stand until he was on the verge of collapse. He sank back down in the chair, and Otis hopped up on his lap with what seemed to be a reproachful look. He remembered what Rose had said about her creations developing personalities. His little dog certainly seemed to have one.

“I thought perhaps mushroom risotto and salad,” Rose said as she came back with an armful of greens. “I’m afraid I don’t have any meat right now.”

“No chickens?” he asked automatically, then frowned. How had he known that most of the settlers raised chickens for eggs and meat and fertilizer?

Her mouth twisted ruefully. An unexpectedly lush mouth given that elegant bone structure, he thought. He wished he’d had a chance to explore the soft contours, to taste that plump lower lip, to... He jerked his attention back to her words.

“I tried once, and the poor things almost didn’t make it. I get too focused on my work to remember to pay attention to them. I sent them back with Cyrus.”

“Cyrus?” The word came out as a growl, and she gave him a startled look.

“The supply master I told you about.” She smiled reminiscently and he almost growled again. “He even gave me a few extra credits for them, since I’d managed to raise them. He’s a sweet old man, even if he tries to hide it.”

*Old man?* His flash of jealousy faded, but the fact that it had occurred at all worried him. Rose wasn’t his woman. He had no right to feel this way. As soon as he regained his strength, he would have to leave and... Leave and do what? Go in search of answers he wasn’t sure he wanted to find?

What if he could stay here instead? Buy more chickens and raise them for her. Make sure she ate and slept and didn't work too hard. He knew it was an impossible dream, but that didn't stop it from floating through his head. It stayed there as she cooked, as they ate dinner together, as they sat by the big window and looked out at the stars over the desert.

It grew even stronger when bedtime came. She insisted that he take the bed. He was equally insistent that she take it. Finally, she sighed.

"Look, why don't we share it? I'll stay on my side, and you stay on yours."

"Are you sure?" His heart thundered as he waited for her response.

"Yes. But no... touching me in my sleep." Pink touched her cheeks again, and the glance she gave him from under her eyelashes was almost a challenge.

"I promise," he said solemnly.

And he kept his promise, even when she rolled over and wrapped herself around him. Even when her hand caressed his chest. And even when she sighed his name in her sleep.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

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Rose woke to find herself wrapped around Roy's big body like one of those ancient sea creatures with clinging tentacles. And she'd told *him* not to touch *her*.

To his credit, he'd obeyed. Even though her head was on his shoulder, his arm was resting behind her back, not curled around her. The broad chest beneath her hand moved with his slow, deep breaths. She had a fleeting memory of his hand covering hers, holding it against him. *A dream memory*, she tried to tell herself, but she wasn't quite convinced.

Waking up like this was nice, really nice, she realized. He was so big and warm, and she felt comfortable in his arms. Protected. A feeling she hadn't had since her parents died. She wouldn't even have minded if his arm had been wrapped around her. In fact...

His chest continued to rise and fall evenly, so she cautiously reached back and took his hand. When he still didn't react, she lifted his hand and brought it around her waist as if he was hugging her. There. That was better.

"You are testing my control, sweetheart."

The deep voice made her jump, and she looked up to find silver eyes gleaming at her.

"I'm sorry. I didn't—"

She started to pull away, but he hugged her closer and she settled back down.

“I guess I didn’t do a very good job of staying on my side of the bed,” she mumbled.

“Since it’s your bed, it’s technically all your side.”

“I guess that’s one way of looking at it, but—”

“Go back to sleep, sweetheart,” he said firmly. “The sun isn’t up yet.”

Hmm. That was the second time he had called her sweetheart. If anyone else had done it, she would have been outraged, but somehow, she didn’t mind him using the term. She snuck a glance at the window and saw he was right. Not even the pale light of pre-dawn was visible. And she was awfully comfortable.

With a contented sigh, she snuggled closer and went back to sleep.

ROY FELT ROSE FALL BACK ASLEEP AND BIT BACK A SIGH OF his own. This was an exquisite torture. As much as he loved having her in his arms, he was painfully aware of her soft skin, the gentle swell of her breasts, the hard peaks of her nipples branding his side. He caught the sweet scent of her arousal as she murmured in her sleep and wiggled against him. His cock throbbed painfully, even though he ordered it to subside. His uncertain memories insisted that it should obey him, but it refused.

But when daybreak came and Rose opened her eyes and gave him a slow, sleepy smile, he didn’t regret a minute of the discomfort.

“Good morning. Again, I suppose.”

“Good morning, sweetheart.”

That hint of pink touched her cheekbones. “Why are you calling me that?”

“I’m not sure. It just sounded... right. Do you mind?”

More pink, and her lashes fluttered down to hide her eyes, but she shook her head. “No. I don’t mind.”

But then she pushed herself upright with a determined smile. “Time to get to work. Are you getting up?”

“I’ve been up,” he muttered, then winced. He hadn’t meant to say that out loud.

“I don’t understand,” she began, then her eyes widened.

He saw her glance down his body, and her mouth formed a soft little O of surprise. His cock jerked, and she licked her lips. She seemed to lean towards him... And then she scrambled out of bed almost as quickly as she had done the previous day.

“I’d better get to work—after I make breakfast, I mean—but maybe I’d better shower first or get dressed or...” The words tumbled out of her mouth, trailing off behind her as she disappeared into the bathroom, and he sighed.

He didn’t want to make her uncomfortable. Since he couldn’t seem to control his erection around her, tonight he would spend the night in the chair, no matter how sweetly she invited him into her bed.

The shower started in the next room, and his mind immediately pictured her naked under the stream of water. His cock jerked again, and he reached down and gripped it. Perhaps if he just relieved the tension, he could regain control. He worked his shaft in short, hard strokes, almost punishing the demanding flesh. He imagined he could hear her in the next room, hear her hand sliding over that pale flesh, hear her soft moan...

She was actually moaning, he realized, his hand speeding up. She was touching herself. A muffled cry was followed by the sweet scent of her arousal mingling with the steamy air, and he exploded, his body erupting in helpless spasms as he remembered her climaxing in his arms.

He collapsed back against the sheet—limp, drained, and unsatisfied. He barely managed to cover himself before she emerged, her cheeks pink and flushed, her eyes bright. She stole one quick glance in his direction before she rushed past.

“Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes.”

And just like that, he was erect again. It was going to be a very long day, he decided as he slowly climbed to his feet.

He was right. And yet, despite his constant awareness of her presence and his longing to touch her, it was also a very pleasant day. He managed—barely—to make it to the chair under his own power. Otis kept him company in the morning, but by the afternoon he was getting restless. He found himself picking up a dismantled reactor from one of her workbenches, then almost automatically starting to reassemble it.

“What are you doing?”

Rose rushed to his side, then paused, inspecting his work. “You know how to work on these? Were you an engineer?”

“No, I was a mechanic,” he responded, shocking himself. He wasn’t sure where the answer had come from, but it felt right.

“I thought you were a soldier?”

“I suppose I must have been.” But there were no memories associated with it.

His head ached, and Rose patted his arm. “Never mind. Why don’t you keep working on that? If you want to, that is.”

“I think I do.”

By supper time, the reactor had been completely reassembled, purring softly when he started it. Even though the effort had exhausted him far more than it should have, he was filled with exhilaration.

“You did a great job,” Rose said, inspecting his work.

“I enjoyed it. And it felt so familiar.” *I just wish I knew why.* But he pushed his concern about his missing memories aside and smiled at her. “Maybe now I can earn my keep.”

“You know that’s not necessary.”

“I know. But I want to do it.”

“All right. As long as it’s not too much for you.”

They ate dinner and watched the stars, and despite his good intentions, when she invited him to share the bed again, he

agreed. Once again, he woke with her curled in his arms, once again he took himself in hand as he listened to her in the shower. But as he sat down to work on his next project, he felt unexpectedly content.

The next few days followed the same pattern. He worked on various projects with Rose during the day and slept with her each night. More of his strength gradually returned, and he was able to go outside and visit with Bucephalus. Otis accompanied him, first growling suspiciously at the much larger animal. Roy was sure that the horse looked amused, but perhaps Rose's theories were rubbing off on him.

Then Bucephalus kicked a small rock across the ground. Otis chased after it, then brought it back and dropped it at the horse's feet. He kicked it again.

"They're playing," Rose said, her voice heavy with satisfaction.

"It does seem that way."

"Do you have another explanation?" Her eyes sparkled up at him indignantly from over her breathing mask.

"No, ma'am."

"Good."

They wandered over to the edge of the slope, his arm around her shoulder. Even though his legs were still weak, he didn't really need the support—but he did need to feel her tucked against his side.

"This is a beautiful spot," he said as they looked out over the desert.

"I think so too. I'm sure some people just see barren land, but I love the colors in the rocks and the way the desert is always the same and always different."

Bucephalus came over and nudged his shoulder while Otis collapsed at their feet, and for that moment in time, he was perfectly content.

Three nights later, the storm came.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

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Rose stared at the results of the analysis, as if her gaze could make them change. Roy's nanite count was low, much too low. She had tested it three times over the past week. Although it was marginally better than when he had first arrived, it was nowhere near high enough to support his cyborg technology. No wonder he was still so weak. He was so big and strong-looking that it was easy to forget, but she saw him sway when he stood up too fast and watched his hands tremble sometimes as he worked.

He was outside now with Otis and Bucephalus, but she had been too anxious about the results to join them. She paced restlessly back and forth, trying to come up with a solution. She had used nanotechnology herself, both in the original horse design and when she developed Otis, but it wasn't the same as that used on the cyborgs. The military had been responsible for that type. It was specifically designed to mingle with the human circulatory system and strengthen and repair organic tissue, but it only worked on humans who also had cybernetic components.

The formula was a closely guarded secret, rightly so in her opinion. As much as she despised the military, she was grateful that they hadn't made the technology available to companies like GenCon who would have sold it to the highest bidder. She knew the company had been trying to find an alternative, but to the best of her knowledge, they hadn't yet been successful.

None of which would help Roy.

Her eyes sought him out, just in time to see him stagger. Then Bucephalus was there, leaning under Roy's shoulder and providing support. By the time she grabbed a breathing mask and joined them, Roy was standing on his own again.

"What happened? What's wrong?"

"Look." His voice sounded strained as he pointed out across the desert. "Storm coming."

She followed the line of his finger and swore when she saw the dust clouds boiling on the horizon. It appeared that Roy shared her hatred of the storms.

"We'd better get inside. I want to make sure we're prepared."

"Yes," he agreed, but his voice still sounded odd.

"I'll put Bucephalus in the garage—"

"No!" He was shaking now.

"Why not? He can't stay out here."

"Don't separate us."

The horse was rather large for their small habitat, but it wasn't as if he produced organic waste. After another look at Roy's pale face, she nodded.

The four of them hurried back into the building. Bucephalus took up a lot of room, but he stood quietly next to the window. Roy stood beside him, his hand clenched in the horse's mane, while Otis sat at his feet.

She checked her preparations as quickly as she could, but by the time she joined them, the first grains of sand were already hitting the windows. The wind started to howl, and she shivered as she pressed against Roy's side. He immediately wrapped his arms around her, and she could feel his body shaking.

"What is it, Roy? Is it the storm? I hate them too."

"Something terrible happened."

She could barely hear his voice over the roar of the wind.

"What happened?"



“A room with a table. An experiment.”

Was he talking about becoming a cyborg? Or was this more recent? Was he starting to remember who had done this to him?

“Why don’t we go and lie down?” she suggested. Unlike the main room, the bedroom had curtains. Perhaps blocking out the sight of the storm would help.

His fingers were still clenched in the horse’s mane. “He couldn’t reach me.”

“But Bucephalus is here now. He can come into the bedroom too, if you want.”

“N-No. It’s not necessary.” He slowly unwound his fingers, then placed his hand in hers.

She led him into the next room, leaving the door open, then made him sit on the bed while she pulled the curtains. As soon as she came back, he reached for her like a drowning man. She sat on his lap, and he wrapped his arms around her.

“I remember.”

HE HAD BEEN DESIGNATED R-730. A REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE had come in from an outlying lab, and he had responded. Although GenCon usually handled their own issues, it wasn’t completely unknown for them to call on one of the Rangers. What was more unusual was that the place appeared to be deserted when he arrived. He couldn’t see any sign of life as he approached, but he could see a storm starting to build on the horizon.

At least he could take shelter in the building. He led his horse into an open hangar, then closed the outer door just as the first gust of wind reached them.

“You should be just fine in here,” he told his horse, rubbing his hand across his shoulders. “Since we’re going to have to wait out the storm anyway, I might as well go and see if there really is someone here who needs help.”

He left the horse standing against the wall and went into the main habitat. He hadn't taken more than a few steps when he felt a sharp sting on his neck. He automatically raised his hand to the spot and knocked away a dart, but even as he saw it fall, he felt ice begin to slide through his veins. His nanites tried to counteract it, but they were too slow to respond. He felt his knees weaken, then darkness rushed over him as he fell to the ground.

When he awoke, he was chained to a laboratory table, just like the one to which he had been chained when the military turned him into a cyborg. But this time, he wasn't surrounded by control panels and cold, efficient men in white coats. The only other occupant of the room was a tall, thin man in his late twenties. He was almost vibrating with excitement as he rushed over to R-730.

"Good. You're awake! Has the drug worn off yet?"

He had no intention of answering the man, but he surreptitiously flexed his muscles. No, not yet at full strength. The chains were titanium. He could break them—eventually—but not until he regained his strength.

"You're the one who called me?" he asked.

"That was me." The man giggled—actually giggled. He must have been a scientist, but he acted more like an immature teenager. Even his skin was pockmarked with acne.

Since R-730 had regained consciousness, he'd been vaguely aware of the distant roar of the storm, but it was suddenly overlaid by a loud thud. The scientist winced.

"That horse of yours is going to kick the hangar down," he complained.

"I have no objection to that," R-730 said dryly. He suspected his horse was trying to reach him, and he would be more than happy to see that big, bronze body entering the room.

"Well, I do," the man said peevishly. "I don't have the cyborg ability to breathe Martian air. Yet."

*Yet?* He didn't like the sound of that, but he wasn't going to ask questions. Apparently, he didn't need to because the man

started to babble anyway.

“You’re going to be the subject of my great experiment. Isn’t that awesome?”

*Somehow I doubt it.*

“GenCon, the company I work for—well, used to work for—is offering a million credits to anyone who can successfully apply cyborg technology to a human. Did you know that?”

*No, but I’m not surprised.* “That’s because it doesn’t work.”

“But I’m going to make it work.” The man dug in a drawer and pulled out an IV.

“You know that my nanites will die as soon as they leave my body.” That fact was one of the reasons the military had been able to keep the technology secret for so long.

“That’s the beauty of this. They’ll just go straight into my system. They won’t have a chance to die.” The other man grinned triumphantly.

“Do you honestly think no one has tried that before?”

He did his best not to sound too sarcastic, but he must not have been successful, because the man scowled petulantly. “I don’t believe you. This is going to work.”

The other man dug the needle into his arm with more force than necessary, but he refused to react. He heard another thud and wondered if his horse would make it through to him in time.

Still quivering nervously, the man hopped up an adjoining table and inserted the other end of the IV. Even though he was considerably gentler with himself, he still winced and moaned.

“You know it’s going to hurt,” R-730 said conversationally.

“What is?”

“Becoming a cyborg.”

“I’m not becoming a cyborg, dammit. I’m becoming an enhanced human.”

He shrugged and closed his eyes, quietly working to loosen the chains. The blood dripped out of his arm, and the room fell silent except for the roar of the storm and the repeated thuds. He started to feel sleepy, and to keep himself awake, he started running through the steps to recalibrate a navigation system. Or at least he tried to. The memory kept slipping away, and it wasn't the only one. His memories seemed to be flowing out of him like his blood.

As he struggled to hold on to them, the other man began to gasp, his body thrashing on the next table. And then he began to scream, high-pitched, garbled cries like an engine pushed past its limits.

“Stop the process,” R-730 yelled. “That’s enough.”

There was no response, only the continuing screams. *Fuck*. He pulled harder at the chains, sawing them back and forth until his wrists were raw. His memories continued to drain away, until all he could focus on was the need to escape. To escape the room, to escape the horrible noises.

At some point the room fell silent, but it was too late. The only thing that pounded through his veins was the need to flee. When he finally managed to break the chain, he stumbled off of the table, yanking the needle out of his arm. The body on the other table was limp and unmoving.

*Escape.*

He fumbled his way out of the lab, his legs barely supporting him, desperate to find an outside door. Somehow, he managed to stumble into an airlock and force the outer door open. The storm continued to rage outside, but it didn't stop his driving need to get away. The last thing he remembered was staggering out into the storm.

And by some miracle, Bucephalus had managed to kick his way free, find Rose, and bring her to him.

He had escaped.

## CHAPTER NINE

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Rose tightened her arms around Roy, doing her best not to cry as he told his story. She suspected he wasn't telling her everything, but he told her enough to make her heart ache. He seemed to grow calmer as he spoke, even as her own shock and horror increased. By the time he had finished, he was no longer shaking and his muscles were no longer tense.

"No wonder you couldn't remember," she said softly.

"But now I do." He used a finger to gently raise her chin. "You saved me. You and Bucephalus." There was a small woof from next to the bed, and he laughed. "And Otis, of course."

"Do you remember everything? Your name?"

"Yes, but it doesn't matter. I'm Roy now." Those silver eyes were intent on her face. "You saved me and you named me. I belong to you now."

Her pulse was racing so fast her head was spinning. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes, sweetheart. I love you."

*Yes.* The knowledge settled over her with a quiet certainty. He did belong to her—and she belonged to him.

"I love you too."

"Does that mean I can kiss you now?"

She choked back a laugh. "Yes, please."

He lowered his head, and his mouth brushed against hers, gently, so gently, as if learning the contours of her lips. When

he drew back, she gave him a startled look. Was that all he wanted?

He smiled down at her, that rugged face impossibly tender.

“As sweet and soft as I imagined. And I have imagined them many, many times.”

“You don’t have to imagine any longer,” she said impatiently, tugging his head back down.

This time, the kiss wasn’t tender. This time, he feasted on her like a starving man, exploring every inch of her mouth. The heavy ridge of his cock throbbed beneath her ass, and she reached between them, seeking to free it from the tight confines of his pants. He groaned into her mouth as her fingers brushed against him.

“Sweetheart, this is going to be over before it even begins if you touch me.”

“I don’t care. I’ve wanted to touch you since the first movement I had you in my bed.” She knew she was blushing but it was the truth.

He groaned again, and ripped open his pants. His shaft sprang up between them—long, thick, perfect. Her mouth went dry as she tentatively touched the silky skin covering the massive shaft.

“Was this an enhancement too?” she asked, remembering her initial speculation.

“I’ve always been big,” he gasped, his hand closing over hers and sliding it up and down his shaft. “But the nanites make everything bigger. Oh, God, sweetheart. You’re killing me.”

“Do you want me to stop?” she asked innocently. She couldn’t remember ever teasing a lover before, but then she’d never felt this happy before, joyous despite the urgent need throbbing in her body.

“Never.” His voice deepened, his face serious.

“I won’t,” she promised. “I will never stop loving you.”

His breath caught, and then he was lifting her higher, high enough that the broad head of his cock kissed her entrance. She clutched his shoulders, expecting him to pull her down, but instead, he held her suspended there as he bent his head to her breasts. His mouth closed over a taut peak, shockingly hot and wet, and it felt like a streak of fire straight to her aching clit. She tried to wiggle her hips, to brush the needy bud against his cock, but she couldn't move.

He kept her there, moving from one nipple to the other until they were both swollen and distended.

“Such pretty little tits,” he murmured when he finally pulled back. “I could feast on them all day.”

“Maybe later.” Her hips moved restlessly, trying to get closer.

“Do you want something, sweetheart?” His voice was teasing, but she could see the strain on his face as well.

Then his arms shook, and the head of his cock entered her with sudden, shocking fullness. *Oh my God.* Her body quivered as she tried to adjust.

He started to lift her free. “I’m sorry. I was—”

But she didn't want to give him up. Instead of letting him pull her away, she pushed down. Another inch slid up inside her, and they both groaned. A mini climax rolled over her, just enough to help ease his way, and she pushed down again. Tiny ripples of pleasure skated across her flesh as she gradually worked her way down the thick shaft. His hands clenched on her hips, but he let her set the pace until she finally felt her body touch his.

Her pussy fluttered, still trying to accommodate him, and it felt as if he was embedded in her, but nothing had ever felt so good. He leaned forward, their foreheads touching. His muscles were so tense they hummed, but he didn't move. For a moment she was content to bask in their closeness, but eventually her body demanded more.

“Roy,” she whispered.

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“I’m ready.”

He made a tortured sound, but then his hands clamped hard on her hips as he slid her up his long shaft and back down in one fast, thrilling stroke. And then he repeated it. Each time he moved her faster, harder, the sensations overwhelming her until her vision sheeted white, and she exploded in a fiery haze of pleasure. He didn’t stop, his muscles tightening, his breath coming in ragged gasps, until with a hoarse cry, he sank impossibly deeper, and she felt the heated pulses deep inside.

They clung to one another as happiness filled her.

ROY SMILED UP AT THE CEILING. ROSE’S HAND STROKED HIS chest, just as it did so often while she slept, but this time they were both awake and he was absolutely sure she wanted to touch him. He ran his fingers through her long, beautiful hair, completely content.

“I still find it hard to believe you were a soldier,” she murmured.

“I wasn’t really a soldier.” His mouth twisted. “But I was part of the military. They recruited me because of my mechanical skills. My dad was a mechanic—a good one—but he was unlicensed so he ended up taking jobs under the table. We never had any money to spare.”

He remembered now just how difficult their life had been—but he also remembered how much his dad had taught him. How much he had loved him. But then he’d been killed, swept up in one of the food riots, and Roy hadn’t had anyone.

“It seemed like a good opportunity at the time,” he added. “In some ways, it was. They taught me a lot. And fortunately, the closest I ever got to any type of battle was working on armored vehicles.”

“I don’t understand. Then how did you end up as a cyborg?”

“A stupid accident. An officer with more ranks than brains wanted to test one of the newer vehicles. I told him it wasn’t



ready, but he decided to test it anyway. He lost control, and when I tried to stop it, I got hurt.”

He had been pinned beneath the overturned vehicle. The officer hadn’t survived, but that only made it worse to know that his efforts had been useless.

“Oh, Roy.” She looked up at him, her eyes filled with tears.

The searing pain of the accident hadn’t been the worst part. The worst part had been waking up on a lab table, unable to move, as men in white coats made decisions about his future. But he didn’t want her to bear the burden of those memories.

“Because of the extent of my injuries, I was *volunteered* for the cyborg program.”

Even though he hadn’t been a soldier, the clause in his signing contract still applied. If he suffered a catastrophic injury, Earth Government had the right to use his body as they saw fit. He had never imagined it would happen to him. And truthfully, he had been desperate and alone, still reeling from the loss of his father. He would have signed anyway.

She bit her lip, but didn’t ask any additional questions. He suspected that she knew he would rather not talk about it.

“And then I was sent here.”

His memories of those first few years on Mars consisted mainly of cold. His cybernetics prevented him from freezing, but he had always felt cold, empty. His emotions had shut down until he felt as robotic as the normal humans believed him to be. Except perhaps for Bucephalus. When the initial terraforming projects were complete and he chose to become a ranger, he had been assigned a horse. And perhaps that had been enough to let him hold onto the last remnants of his old self.

“They shouldn’t have done that to you,” she said fiercely. “None of them. Not the military, and certainly not that asshole scientist.” Her delicate brows drew together. “Do you think he’s still alive?”

“No.” He thought back to the room and shuddered. “He didn’t move again after he stopped screaming. He wasn’t breathing.”

But he didn't want to think about it anymore. He wanted to concentrate on the woman he loved.

He rose to his feet, swearing under his breath as he felt the room sway. He wanted to sweep her up into his arms, but he didn't trust his own strength. Ironically, he was even weaker now than he had been as a human. Rose gave him a worried look, but he ignored it.

"I want to do something I have been thinking about since our first morning together."

Her frown disappeared, replaced by warmth and he knew she was remembering that first time. "What's that?"

"I want to take a shower with you. I want to run my hands over your soft, wet skin, and I want to watch your fingers playing with your pretty little pussy."

A tidal wave of pink washed over her pale skin. "You knew?"

"Cyborgs have enhanced hearing. It was one of the first things to return." *If only his other enhancements had come back as quickly.*

"You didn't say anything."

"Because I would listen and touch myself." He reached down and fisted his cock, once again hard and ready. "I would imagine that I was in there with you. And now I'm going to be."

"Does that mean I get to watch you as well?"

Her eyes were focused on his hand, and he took a long stroke just to see her cheeks flush an even deeper rose.

"You can watch," he promised. "I may even let you help."

She laughed and took his hand and led him to the shower.

## CHAPTER TEN

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A very long time later, Rose smiled into the darkness. She'd never realized a shower could be so exciting. Roy had insisted on watching her touch herself, and even though her cheeks had been on fire the entire time, watching his face as she circled her clit had made her come harder than she ever had by herself. And watching him had been just as exciting. His big hand curled around that massive cock, his muscles tight with restraint, his eyes burning silver as they focused on her face...

The memory caused a slow, throbbing pulse in her clit, and she was tempted to turn to him again. But he seemed to be sleeping at last. *Maybe more rest will help*, she thought, as her mind turned inevitably back to the test results.

Now that she knew what had been done to him, did that change anything? As she went back over his story, she heard Otis stand up and circle a few times before curling back up at the end of the bed. A sudden, wild possibility occurred to her. Was she completely crazy? She continued to examine the idea while he slept, and she was almost prepared to discard it completely.

But then he woke and turned to reach for her, and she saw his hand tremble. She had to face the truth. He wasn't getting better.

"What's wrong, sweetheart? You look worried."

"I am. I'm worried about you."

He looked down at his hand, clenching it into a fist to hide the shaking.

“I’m sure it just takes time.” He didn’t sound convinced.

“I have a theory,” she said slowly.

“What is it?”

“I think the man who took you drained so much of your blood that there simply aren’t enough nanites left in your system. They’re trying to reproduce, but they’re also trying to heal you and they can’t do both.”

He tilted his head, considering the idea. “It sounds logical. But is there anything you can do about it?”

“The military hasn’t provided the secret of their nanotechnology to anyone else.” Her heart rate sped up. She didn’t want to upset him after his previous horrible experiences. “I can only think of one possibility, but I don’t know if it’s going to help or not.”

“You mean it’s an experiment?”

She nodded miserably, but he didn’t immediately flinch away from her.

“What did you have in mind?”

“Both Bucephalus and Otis use nanotechnology. It might be possible to draw a small sample from Bucephalus and add it to your system. It’s not the same technology,” she added quickly. “But it’s used to make him stronger and more impervious to the conditions on Mars. It’s just possible that his nanites could strengthen your system long enough that your own nanites could reproduce in sufficient quantities to bring your system back into equilibrium.”

His face remained impassive. “So you’re saying you want to give me a transfusion of horse blood?”

She bit her lip again. “Not exactly, but sort of.”

He studied her face, then nodded. “Okay.”

“That’s it? You agree?”

“You said there was no other alternative, and I believe you.” He raised his hand again, watching it tremble. “I can’t go on like this.”

“But it’s an experiment. And I promised you no experiments.”

“It’s not an experiment.” He put his hand on her face, tracing the line of her jaw. “It’s an act of love.”

Unshed tears burned her eyes, but she managed to smile at him. “Thank you for saying that.”

“When do you want to do it?”

“I have everything here, but don’t you want some more time to think about it?”

“No. Even though I have my memories back, I still feel as if everything is poised to slip away again. I couldn’t stand that. I never want to forget about you.”

This time a tear did escape, but she quickly brushed it aside. As terrified as she was, it was best to get it over with.

“Then let’s get started. At least Bucephalus is already inside.”

As she went to get dressed, a sudden thought occurred to her. Instead of her utilitarian jumpsuit, she pulled on her pink silk pajamas. They were the furthest thing she could think of from a lab coat.

Silver eyes gleamed as he looked her over, and she could feel her nipples pressing against the cool silk.

“I definitely approve of that outfit,” he said.

“Better than white flannel?” She did her best to keep her voice light and teasing.

“Oh, I don’t know. I like sliding my hand under the flannel and discovering all that warm, bare skin.” He stalked towards her. “Of course, I also like to see that silk clinging to your body.” He traced a finger over an erect nipple, and the resulting spike of excitement almost made her forget her resolve.

“I’ll let you explore the differences later,” she promised, taking his hand and leading him into the main room.

The storm had died down, and she was shocked to realize she hadn't even noticed. Bucephalus still stood calmly by the window, as if he were keeping watch. She stroked her hand through his thick mane.

"I want to take a sample from you. I'm going to try and make Roy healthy again."

Those big, golden eyes studied her, then he inclined his head.

"Do you really think he understands?" Roy asked. He stood next to her, also running his hand through the horse's mane.

"Yes. Oh perhaps not the exact words, but the intention. Why don't you sit in the chair?"

"No lab table?" he asked, flicking her a quizzical look as he obeyed.

"I don't think either one of us wants that."

"You're right," he agreed, settling back in the chair. He seemed perfectly calm, but now her hands wanted to shake.

She took a deep breath and gathered her equipment. There was a small port behind the horse's left knee, and it would be the easiest place to take her sample. She ran a soothing hand down his leg as she carefully inserted the syringe. He remained perfectly still as she gathered a small quantity of golden fluid.

"That's it?" Roy asked.

"That's it. Now I'm going to add it to a neutral solution so I can control the speed at which it enters your system." *And shut it off if anything started going wrong.*

Her lips felt numb, but she forced a smile as she prepared the IV. Theoretically, the worst that would happen would be that it simply didn't work. That thought was terrifying enough, but there were always unknowns with any technology, and there was still so much they didn't know about nanites and their behavior.

"All right." She knelt down next to him and reached for his arm. His skin felt so warm and firm beneath her fingers, his muscles powerful. Maybe she should give it more time...

“Sweetheart.” Roy lifted her chin, and she realized she had just been staring at his arm. “Go ahead.”

“Are you sure? We could wait—”

“No. I already told you. I can feel that cliff in my mind. I don’t want to fall over it.”

His eyes were intent on her face, and she made herself nod. Fortunately, her hand didn’t shake as she inserted the needle.

“You have a gentle touch,” he murmured. “Much better than the great Dr. Willis.”

His eyes closed as she tried to keep her face calm. He couldn’t mean the same Dr. Willis, could he? Uneasiness swept through her as she remembered some of the young scientist’s more dramatic outbursts. He had always been impatient with proper scientific procedure.

Roy seemed quite sure that he was dead, but what if he had left notes behind? Something that might convince some other foolish scientist to perform a similar experiment.

*He’s not your responsibility*, she told herself firmly, but the idea kept resurfacing as she watched over Roy.

As the solution began to flow through his veins, he started to move restlessly. Otis whined and licked his hand, and he settled down. The restless movements were followed by a flash of heat. His skin glistened with sweat, and she could feel the temperature of his skin increasing, but it never reached the intensity of those first few days. Nanites did create heat as they healed, she reminded herself.

Twice she started to dash to the bathroom for cold towels, but his skin never grew unbearably hot and he didn’t seem to be in distress so she remained at his side.

Once all of the solution had flowed into his veins, she carefully removed the needle. She started to place a bandage over the small puncture, but it was already gone. Hope was like a living thing inside her, beating at her chest, but he had yet to wake up.

The sun was high overhead before he awoke. Unable to keep still, she had tried to work, but she couldn't stand to be away from him either. She was pacing the floor when his eyes finally opened. He looked at her, and she held her breath. A long, slow smile spread across his face.

"It worked."

"How do you know?" She hurried to his side, resting her fingers on his pulse, relieved to feel it beating in a steady rhythm.

"Because I can see you properly now."

He hadn't seen her before? Would he be disappointed—

"You are even more beautiful." He lifted a long lock of hair between his fingers so the light caught the pale strands. "Your hair is like liquid light."

She could feel herself flush, and he traced a finger along her cheek. "And your skin. It shimmers like the pearls I once saw a wealthy woman wearing."

"Roy..."

"I need to explore every inch again."

ROY ROSE FROM THE CHAIR, RELISHING THE EASE WITH WHICH he moved. No longer worried that he would not be able to carry her, he lifted Rose into his arms. He felt as if he had been unshackled, his body freed.

"You should be careful." Her soft voice whispered over his skin, and he could hear each subtle nuance in her sweet voice.

"I'm fine."

"But you've only just—"

He brought her concerns to an end with a kiss. *Fuck*. He'd thought her mouth a luscious little honey trap before, but it was nothing compared to the explosion of sweetness that tantalized him now. Unable to get enough, he kept kissing her as he laid her down, as he parted the silky fabric to reveal even



silkier skin, as his hand closed over a small breast and found a taut, responsive nipple.

The only reason he finally forced himself to stop kissing her and lift his head was so he could see her again. The fine skin, the flush of pink that high-lighted her cheeks and flowed down her chest to those tight, rosy little nipples. He stroked a finger across the tempting buds and saw her shiver. Her slender hips lifted towards him, and his gaze snagged on the small patch of pale curls shielding her core.

Unable to resist, he parted her legs to reveal her pretty little pink pussy, already glistening with excitement. The heady scent of her arousal made his head swim, and he took a long, slow lick. He groaned, his cock throbbing, on the verge of coming just from the sight of her, the taste of her.

“I can’t wait, sweetheart.”

“I don’t want you to.”

He had his cock at her entrance before she finished speaking, easing past the narrow entrance. She was tight—so tight—but she was hot and slick and ready and he buried himself in one long, liquid glide. He froze, afraid to move, his body on the verge of climax, and looked up at her. Her eyes were shining, her luscious little mouth softly curved.

“I love you, Roy.”

He exploded, his body jerking helplessly as wave after wave of heat pulsed through him, filling the body of the woman he loved so much. Her hands caressed his back in long, soothing strokes as he sagged down over her. Even with his renewed strength, it took several beats of his heart before he could recover.

When he finally lifted his head, she smiled. “You do seem to have recovered.”

“Completely,” he assured her, thrusting his hips forward so she could feel the full strength of his still completely hard cock. “And I intend to show you just how much.”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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Roy woke up, filled with satisfaction, already reaching for his woman, but all he found was empty sheets. He shook his head. Her dedication to her work was admirable, but he would have enjoyed spending more time exploring her perfect body.

He started to call out to her, then decided he would surprise her instead. He swung his feet to the ground, and they responded quickly and easily. When he stood, there wasn't even a trace of dizziness. He stretched his arms, and he could literally feel the strength flowing through his veins once more. *Yes.* This was the way he was supposed to feel.

Eager to tell Rose, he hurried into the next room, but she was not bent over her workbench. Even then, he merely assumed that she had stepped outside to care for Bucephalus, but when he emerged from the airlock, the horse was gone. And so was Rose.

His pulse beat rapidly and he could feel his nanites trying to calm him, but his panic was too great. Why had she left?

He raced back inside and this time he saw the note.

*My love,  
Hopefully I'll be back before  
you find this note, but I have to*

check. The lab you mentioned—it was where I used to work. I need to make sure that nothing remains to encourage some other madman to try a similar experiment. I won't be long.

Love, Rose

HURT AND ANGER MIXED WITH HIS PANIC, BUT THEY WOULD have to wait until he found her. As he left the airlock, Otis darted out in front of him.

“Stay here,” he ordered, but as he started to scramble down the slope, he heard the dog following him. “You have to go back.”

Otis only looked up at him, his head tilted to one side and his ridiculous tail wagging.

“You can't keep up. Now stay.”

He set off at a run, hoping that his speed would dissuade the dog, but when he looked back, Otis was still following, even though the distance between them was increasing. *Fuck*. He couldn't leave him out here alone. He whirled around long enough to scoop up the dog, and cradling him in one arm, he ran.

BUCEPHALUS CAME TO A HALT, AND ROSE STARED IN DISMAY at her former laboratory. She should have realized that it was the one that Roy had mentioned in his story, especially given its proximity, but she hadn't known that it had been abandoned. The entire way here she had hoped she was wrong. But the lab was undisputedly deserted. Sand had begun to pile up against the walls and one of the domes had an odd sag.

She slid down off the horse's back, despite the unease prickling at her spine. Maybe she should have waited for Roy to wake up after all.

*No.* She didn't want to expose him to the place where he had been hurt again. This wouldn't take long—she'd just check the computer system and make sure there weren't any records. *If the system is even working*, she thought, with another glance at the decaying building.

"I wonder why they left," she murmured to the horse.

"Because of you," a voice snarled behind her.

She whirled around to find Dr. Willis standing there. At least she thought it was him. His thin frame was covered in bulging muscles—distorted muscles that seemed to move under her horrified gaze. His face was distorted too, the skin flowing as if it was made of rubber rather than flesh.

"What happened to you?"

"Can't you see? It worked. I'm going to be a very rich man."

Dread swept over her. Despite Dr. Willis's horrific appearance, if GenCon believed they had the key to a solution, they would try more experiments and more innocent men would suffer.

"You told them what you did?"

"I sent a message." He scowled, the expression doing terrible things to his appearance. "But the credits haven't come through yet. That's why I'm still in this dump."

"You're here by yourself?"

"Yeah. They decided your horses were a success and they didn't need any more research. They closed us down and sent everyone to other labs."

"Why didn't you go with them?"

He tried to scuff at the sand but his leg didn't seem to want to obey him. When he finally connected, a great puff of rock and dirt erupted. He might have been uncoordinated, but he was obviously strong.

"They fired me. Said it was my fault the container was left open."

"It was, wasn't it? That's why you came to get me."

“Maybe.” He avoided her gaze, then looked back at her, his brows sagging together in a terrible parody of a frown. “Why are you here now?”

*An excellent question.*

“I wanted to check the computer system for some of my old research notes,” she lied. “I thought they might be helpful in this new project I’m working on.”

“Yeah? I heard you’re just some kind of repairwoman now,” he sneered.

“I still like to keep my hand in,” she said lightly. “But since the habitat is in such bad shape, I guess it’s too late now. I’d better get back to my repairs.”

“Wait a minute.”

He took an awkward step towards her, and then Bucephalus was between them, pushing him back. *Thank God.* She reached for the saddle horn just as Dr. Willis shoved, somehow managing to thrust the horse aside. She could barely imagine the strength it took to move the horse’s huge metal body. The horse seemed equally shocked, hovering next to her, but not making any additional moves.

Dr. Willis attempted a grin, his mouth stretching horrifically.

“Told you my enhancements worked.”

“I can see that,” she agreed, taking a small step back.

“Don’t you want to know how I did it? How I captured that stupid cyborg and his—” His mouth dropped halfway to his neck as he shuffled around to look at Bucephalus again. “That’s him. That’s the cyborg’s horse.”

“Is it?” She tried to laugh as she took another step back. “They all look alike to me.”

She knew she had made a mistake as soon as the words left her mouth. His eyes narrowed.

“You knew every detail of every one of those horses. What are you trying to pull? Where’s that cyborg?”

“Right here.”

Roy stepped out of the rocks, Otis tucked under one arm. His bare chest gleamed gold in the setting sun, his muscles moving with a natural, easy grace that only made Dr. Willis's deformities more obvious.

"And your little dog too?" Dr. Willis drawled. "How touching."

"He wanted to come." Roy shrugged as he put the dog down.

Otis stared at Dr. Willis then growled, a low, surprisingly vicious sound. The monstrous figure actually stumbled back before he regained his composure, scowling at all of them.

"So that's why you're here, Dr. Abbott. You want to steal my experiment and claim it for yourself."

"That's not true. I don't want anything to do with it."

"You don't want to be rich?" he mocked.

"I am rich—I have everything I ever wanted."

He rolled his eyes, and for a terrible moment, she thought they were actually going to come out of his head. How could he be deluded enough to consider this a success?

She forced herself to speak calmly. "Now if you'll excuse us, we'll be on our way."

"I don't think so," he snarled and lunged for her.

Once again, Bucephalus pushed him away. He shoved at the horse but overbalanced and ran straight into Roy's fist. He reeled back.

"Get out of here, Rose," Roy ordered.

She couldn't leave him, she couldn't, especially when Dr. Willis swung at him and managed to catch Roy's arm, his fingers leaving deep gouges. Roy stumbled and Dr. Willis started after him, but then Otis was there, his sharp metal teeth clamping down on the monster's ankle. Dr. Willis roared and kicked out, sending Otis flying into the rocks. He landed with a pitiful whine.

*Oh no.* Keeping one anxious eye on the fight, she circled around until she reached the small animal. He was crumpled

against a rock, one ear folded in on itself, but his eyes opened as she approached.

A tear slid down her cheek as she reached for him, and he licked her hand. She did a quick check, but nothing appeared to be broken, and she heaved a grateful sigh as she picked him up and cuddled him against her.

Roy and Dr. Willis were circling each other, Bucephalus hovering just out of reach. Despite Dr. Willis's lack of coordination, he occasionally managed to land a blow, and she could see the toll they were taking on Roy. There had to be something she could do to help him.

She put Otis down behind a rock where he would be safe and started collecting rocks. If she could just distract the scientist for a second...

Hefting the rock, she waited for the right moment. But then Roy stumbled, barely avoiding Dr. Willis's fist, and she stopped waiting. The rock flew across the clearing and struck the man's shoulder with surprising force.

He roared and looked over at her. Apparently forgetting about Roy, he headed in her direction.

"Oh, shit."

She grabbed a second rock, but before she could throw it, Roy was between them. He caught Dr. Willis by surprise, landing a blow that made the scientist stumble back to where Bucephalus was waiting. His hoof struck the man's head with a harsh crack, and his body collapsed to the ground like ice cream melting into a puddle. Keeping a wary eye on the body, she ran to Roy's side.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah." He held out his arm, and she could see the livid gashes were already healing. "Thanks to your experiment."

She shuddered. "I never want to hear that word again."

Before she could fling herself into his arms, he stalked over to the body. "Is he really dead this time?"

Reluctantly, she went to join him. The body looked even more like it was melting, those ridiculous muscles folding in on themselves. “I’m pretty sure, but maybe we should bury him?”

“Fine.”

He snapped out the word, and she turned to look at him. “What’s wrong? Are you angry?”

“You left me!” he roared.

“I didn’t want to bring you back here after you had such a terrible experience.”

“Instead I had a worse one! He could have killed you.”

Her first instinct was to argue, but he was right. “I’m sorry. I thought I was doing the right thing—for you—but I should have waited and talked to you.”

His face finally softened. Something nudged her back, and she stumbled forwards into Roy’s arms. As they closed around her, warm and reassuring, she looked back over her shoulder to see Bucephalus wandering over to Otis.

“Did he just push us together?”

He smiled down at her. “I don’t think he likes us arguing.”

“Me either. No more arguing.”

“And no more separations.”

She nodded enthusiastically, and then he kissed her. By the time he finished, she had almost forgotten where they were, but she couldn’t ignore the body. She tried to feel some sympathy for him, but all she could manage was disgust.

“I still want to check the computer system for any records he may have created.”

“I agree. As soon as I finish burying him, we’ll go and check. Together.”

THE SUN WAS HOVERING LOW ON THE HORIZON BY THE TIME they had buried Dr. Willis and wiped the computer system. They didn’t find any records, but they decided it was better to



be on the safe side. She still worried about whatever he had sent to GenCon, but it was out of her hands now.

She snuggled against Roy's big body, grateful for his warmth as they headed back to their home. Otis was curled up in her lap, seemingly no worse for wear, although his right ear still maintained that folded tip.

Roy tensed suddenly, and she looked up at him.

"Is something wrong?"

"I don't think so. But look."

She followed his finger and saw another Ranger riding away from them at an angle. He was a big man with a scarred face, and he was astride a big grey horse who also showed his scars.

"That's him. That's the horse that saved the others," she whispered.

"I wondered. Do you want to go after them?"

She watched as the ranger and the horse paused at the top of the next rise. The man reached down to pat the horse's neck, just as he would have done a real horse. The horse tossed his head, and then the two started off again, moving in perfect harmony. Relief washed over her.

Roy was right. Her horses had found their homes.

"I would like to see him again one day," she admitted. "But not right now. Right now, I just want to go home with you."

"Home," he repeated softly. "I've never had a home before."

"You do now. With me, and Bucephalus, and Otis. I love you, Roy."

"I love you too. And as soon as we get home, I intend to show you just how much."

He touched his heels to Bucephalus's side and the horse leaped into a gallop, carrying them across the desert and into their new life together.

## EPILOGUE

*E*ight months later...

“DO YOU WANT EGGS FOR DINNER?” ROY ASKED. HE HAD requested materials and chicks from Cyrus, and they now had a fully functional chicken coop attached to their habitat.

“That sounds nice. Maybe an omelet?”

“Coming right up.”

He bent down and kissed her as he passed, and she couldn't help but smile. There was definitely something to be said for a husband who spoiled you rotten, especially when you were eight ungainly months pregnant. The military had sterilized all of the cyborgs, but it turned out that their nanites were as capable of dealing with that as with any other bodily damage.

Otis trotted along at Roy's heels, ready to snap up any scraps that fell to the floor—and knowing Roy, there would be several of them. She had tried to tell him that the dog didn't need the food, but he refused to listen. Then again, she had a tendency to take Bucephalus treats on a regular basis.

The horse was still outside, standing at the edge of the hill. The garage was always open for him, but he rarely chose to enter it, preferring the freedom of the open air. She followed his gaze out over the desert. It was no longer quite so deserted. The homesteaders had arrived. At the far end of the valley, a small habitat had been erected, and she found she didn't really mind. There was something rather comforting about seeing a

light flicker on in the distance as shadows crept over the ground.

“He’s out there again,” Roy said, his silver eyes looking into the distance.

“Who?”

“The ranger. The one who’s tracking that woman.”

She picked up the distance lenses and looked where he had indicated. Sure enough, a ranger mounted on one of her horses stood guard on a distant hill, silhouetted against the setting sun.

“Why do you think he’s doing that?”

“Well, if he’s anything like me—and she’s even one tenth as beautiful as you—he’s in love with her.”

“Do you really think so?”

He left the stove to kneel at her side. “We are so alone, shut outside in the cold and dark. But the right woman glows like a beacon. A promise of light and warmth that we cannot resist.”

Tears threatened, but she smiled instead. “I don’t think I’m hungry anymore.”

He immediately looked worried. “Is something wrong? Do you want—”

She put her finger on his lips. “Not hungry for food, anyway.”

Silver eyes gleamed as he leaned forward and lifted her effortlessly into his arms, the additional weight of her pregnancy not deterring him in the slightest.

“Then I’ll have to find another way to satisfy you,” he murmured.

She had no doubt that he would succeed.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Thank you so much for reading *The Cyborg with No Name!* This is truly one of my favorite series! I love the mixture of Western and sci-fi elements, and, of course, I love the interaction between the cyborgs and their horses - and now Otis!

Whether you enjoyed the story or not, it would mean the world to me if you left an honest review on Amazon – reviews are one of the best ways to help other readers find my books!

If you would like to read more about the *Cyborgs on Mars*, [the complete series is available on Amazon!](#)

The adventures begin with *High Plains Cyborg!*

*Can a woman who is afraid to trust and a cyborg who has forgotten how to love find their dreams together?*

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Honey Phillips writes steamy science fiction stories about hot alien warriors and the human women they can't resist. From abductions to invasions, the ride might be rough, but the end always satisfies.

Honey wrote and illustrated her first book at the tender age of five. Her writing has improved since then. Her drawing skills, unfortunately, have not. She loves writing, reading, traveling, cooking, and drinking champagne - not necessarily in that order.

Honey loves to hear from her wonderful readers! You can stalk her at any of the following locations...

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