

Touched  
by  
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The overhead light flickered sullenly to life, casting shadows that danced for a moment before settling down. As usual, the dingy little apartment did little to cheer her up. It wasn't lost on Fiona that those shadows moved more freely than she did, tethered though they were to the objects that cast them.

Moving carefully, as she always did, she carried a small bag of groceries into what passed for her home. A large screen took up one wall of the living room.

"Time," Fiona said, and it sprang to life. A beautiful vista of tall grasses on the edge of a high cliff took over the wall. In the distance was an ocean of crystal blue that she would never see with her own eyes. She barely noticed the background, however. Her attention was claimed by the three numbers that dominated the center of the screen.

"Shit," she muttered. It was almost time to head to work, and today she definitely didn't want to be late. Everything had to be perfect; this promised to be a special day.

Fiona's heart screamed at her to hurry, but her head prevailed, as it usually did. Hurrying would only result in an accident, which would definitely slow her down. She had twenty minutes to get ready, and she could manage it, though it would be close.

She lumbered into the kitchen, maneuvering her shoulders carefully to make sure she cleared the narrow doorway. Despite her best efforts, she clipped her elbow on the edge of the door frame. The dull clunk should have reverberated through her bones, but the exoskeleton she wore afforded her only mobility, not feeling. It had been thirteen years since she'd felt anything below her neck.

The remembered din of the large crowd filled her ears. They'd come to see her and the women on her team. Her blood had quickened, ready as always for the clash of bodies and wills that came with zero-g hockey. It had always been hard for her to believe that the game used to be played on ice, of all things. Coolants couldn't be wasted on such luxuries as sports, not any more. Those were in high demand to keep habitats at a

reasonable temperature.

These days, almost everyone went about in cropped sleeves and shorts, but not her. The exo wasn't too obvious beneath clothing. It was a little bulky, but the only place it showed was on her hands and neck. From a distance, it was a lot harder to discern her disability.

She looked at the back of her hand as she methodically stowed the groceries. Thin bands of blue metal ringed her wrist and each joint of her fingers.

*Her body slammed into another and she careened away, twisting, ready to catch the pass from her teammate. Holly's pass went wide and she pushed off the boards, extending herself to intercept the errant puck just outside her reach. She'd been completely unprotected when that bruiser from the opposite team launched herself, so there had been no time to avoid the blow.*

Even the simple memory of the collision pulled a grunt from her lips. Fiona's memory was fuzzy after that. She remembered the deathly silence into which she'd come back to herself. The arena might as well have been empty. When she'd tried to get up, she hadn't been able to move.

*"Don't move," Holly said. Fiona rolled her eyes down her body to see where Holly and another teammate, Ferris, had their hands on her, holding her down. So that was why she couldn't move. But if that was the case, why didn't she feel their hands on her? She closed her eyes, but not before tears leaked from under the lids.*

She should have felt some anger, or at least bitterness, against the woman who'd put her in this position, but she couldn't bring herself to do so. Injuries were always a possibility in a match; she and everybody else who played knew that. How many times had she laughed, mocking an opponent who'd objected to some incidental – or not-so-incidental – contact? If they couldn't handle a little bump, they should have stuck to

tiddlywinks.

That day should have been the worst of the memories, but it wasn't. Those were reserved for the smooth and earnest tones of her doctor explaining that her body would reject the gene therapy that could fix her spinal injury. Apparently, she was part of the ten percent of the population unable to tolerate the therapy. Even trying could have killed her. There were other options, she'd been told.

Fiona refused to dwell on the possibilities that had been eliminated by her injury. Never mind that she was on her way up and was being scouted by the pros. *It doesn't matter now*, she told herself severely. *It never will be again.*

A can dented under her grip and Fiona let up on the pressure immediately, before it perforated. There would be no time to clean up a mess before work. She placed it carefully on the counter and closely examined her hand. A missed cut could kill her, either quickly as she bled out from a wound she couldn't feel, or slowly as it festered and sepsis developed from the unchecked infection. She heaved a sigh of relief. While an end to her dreary existence might sound like a welcome release on her bad days, this wasn't one of them. At least, she hoped not.

The perishables were stowed in her tiny refrigerator and she left the rest of the food on the counter. There would be time to put that away later. A glance over at the living room screen wall confirmed that she had about twelve minutes before she needed to be available for work. Fortunately, the bedroom wasn't far. Fiona snorted a humorless laugh at the idea. She could cross the entire length of her apartment in less than thirteen steps. Work wasn't even a stone's throw away, more like a stone's toss.

She clumped through the kitchen and into the bedroom. Her exoskeleton's frame was suspended over a bed of specially-formulated gel. The bed was the most expensive piece of equipment in the apartment, after the exo. It simultaneously represented freedom

and captivity. Built into the bed was the neural matrix that allowed her to manipulate the exoskeleton when she was no longer directly attached to it. That same matrix allowed her to have the job she did. It was an irony she tried not to dwell on. Neural matrices were expensive and tended to be reserved for the ultra rich. Fiona definitely didn't meet that description, but the price hadn't been an issue for her. It was an integral part of the exoskeleton that kept her from being a burden on society, or so she'd been told by the insurance company. If she hadn't broken her neck, she wouldn't have matrix access, but they'd made sure she paid handsomely for the privilege. She plugged the neural matrix into the plug at the base of her neck. Everything shifted, then dozens of new sensations bombarded her from every side. She closed her eyes and waited for a couple seconds as her brain sorted out the new inputs. Her exo went offline. It would be snapping open, small actuators firing as it retracted from Fiona's body. She hated watching that part, and being reminded of precisely how powerless she was without it.

Fortunately, she soon had other things to worry about. The matrix opened up in her mind, giving her access to raging rivers of information and data. While Fiona knew she had no corporeal form while inside the network, it was impossible not to think of her mental presence in body parts. She stretched, loving the sensation, though artificial, of limbs that moved without hesitation. There was no need to move, not really, all she had to do was will herself somewhere and she appeared there. No, the sense of motion was solely for her own benefit.

The nearest info-stream glowed a familiar light blue. She'd set up a shortcut to emerge closest to this stream. Once she entered it, she would be on the clock. In her excitement, little sparks of light snapped along her synapses. This was going to be a good day. She dabbled her toes into the stream before sliding in.

Just like that, Fiona became part of the deluge, swept along with millions of bits

all flowing in the same direction. She'd initially plotted out the course from the outside for no other reason than curiosity. The stream would route her through half a dozen government server farms before dumping her into the private server of the service that employed her. From there, she was routed to that day's client. It was a Tuesday, which meant she was headed for Ms. Demir.

Tracking the stream all the way through to her clients was what first gave her the idea. She and Ms. Demir lived in the same city. It was pure coincidence; her other six clients were all over the globe. Mr. van Hollen had requested to skip this week's sessions, leaving her with an open session for Ms. Demir, who had been delighted to get the additional attention. It was off the books, and purely under the table, which meant extra money for her, but more importantly, it meant extra time.

Barely a second had passed and she was opening her eyes. The living room was mostly dark, except for the lamp on the table next to her. Across the room, an open door led to a long hall. Light spilled out, painting the lush carpet a deep green. It was further to that door than it was from one end of Fiona's apartment to the other.

A hand-written note blinked dimly on the table's surface.

"Fiona, pay special attention to the glutes and the abs today. I have a wedding in a few weeks and I want to kill it in my dress. Your offer of a bonus session couldn't be better timed! Go get 'em, champ!"

Ms. Demir had been tickled when she'd discovered Fiona was her workout rider. Before the injury, Fiona had been well-known among those who followed minor league hockey in the city. Apparently Ms. Demir had been one of those followers. She still remembered Fiona as a member of the championship team and never failed to drop some mention of it. At first the woman's insistence on dredging up old memories had irritated her, but today it was a minor annoyance.

Fiona unplugged the neural cable from the chair and pushed herself up a little too quickly. She took half a step to keep from flying forward. The first few moves in someone else's body always took a little getting used to. For one thing, her point of view was now almost six inches lower than in her own body. That, and no two bodies reacted quite the same, and every single one of them was markedly different from how hers reacted in the exo. Gone was the slight hesitation, the stickiness in her joints. As an experienced rider, it didn't take long to dial in Ms. Demir's reactions and gain full control. Fiona wiggled her toes in appreciation, delighted at the way carpet strands tickled the bottom of her feet.

The clock on the tabletop's surface blinked softly at her. A little bit after 9:30. The local nightlife was only just getting into the swing of things, or at least that was what she remembered. The one time she'd ventured out with her former teammates after the incident had been an unalloyed disaster. She hadn't been out since then, but some of the old watering holes were still around twelve years later. She'd checked.

First things first, she needed a change of clothes. The workout shorts and tank top weren't going to do it. The fabric was soft and slick beneath her fingertips as she unconsciously smoothed her hand down over her belly. *Over Ms. Demir's belly*, she reminded herself. But for all intents and purposes, it was hers tonight. She had a full seven hours to enjoy it, and she would.

Fifteen minutes later, Fiona was stepping out of the shower toweling brown hair that bounced in loose curls around her shoulders. It was a far cry from the close-cropped fuzz she insisted upon. Even before being confined to the exo, Fiona had favored shorter hair, but now it was almost a necessity. Though she'd rarely worn her hair this long, it was enough of a difference that she reveled in it. She swung her head back and forth, enjoying the goosebumps that erupted where the tips brushed her bare skin.

She stepped up to the mirror and leaned forward, wiping a clear spot in the steam obscuring her reflection. Not-quite-familiar brown eyes stared back at her. It was disconcerting and Fiona looked down at the gorgeous marble countertop, vaguely ashamed. Cool stone beneath her hands steadied her and she looked back up, critically this time.

Ms. Demir's hairstyle wasn't the toughest thing she'd ever seen. The silky curls were exactly the type she'd loved to plunge her hands into when making love with a woman, but she'd never worn her hair in anything remotely similar. Maybe if she pulled it back, that would do.

*Well, it's going to have to do,* she told herself. *If your client wakes up with a haircut, that'll be the end of it.* It would be the end of a lot of things. *At least you don't need to worry about makeup.* Ms. Demir apparently did, judging by the third of the counter taken up with beauty products.

With the hair conundrum decided, Fiona headed into the bedroom to see if there was anything in the closet that would put out the appropriate vibe. It seemed unlikely, but hopefully she could put together something she'd be caught dead in.

By the time Fiona left the penthouse, she was down to six hours. Getting dressed had taken longer than she'd anticipated. It was only when she discovered a long-forgotten pantsuit jammed into the back of the closet that she'd found something she could stand wearing. It was dressier than she was accustomed to, but there was no denying how good the expensive fabric felt against her skin. It was cool and sleek, caressing her abdomen, like chill fingers being dragged lightly across the muscles there. In fact, it was all she could do to keep from rubbing her hands sensuously up and down her arms.

"Can I call you a car, Ms. Demir?" A short young man in a bright red uniform

hustled toward her as soon as she emerged from the elevator. Concern creased his face and he rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other. “If you’d let me know you were coming, I’d have called one already.”

“There’s no need,” Fiona said, trying for the appropriate level of hauteur. This little man seemed worried he might be blamed for something. “I’m not going far, thank you.”

The little man stopped dead in his tracks. “O-of course,” he said, red-faced and flustered. If he wasn’t careful, he was going to match his uniform. “I’ll get the door.” He rushed ahead of her and held open the tall glass doors to the street.

The “thank you” seemed to have thrown him, so Fiona settled for ignoring the poor guy as she swept majestically past him. Trying to look as if she knew exactly where she was going, Fiona strutted down the sidewalk. It had been true, what she’d said to the doorman. She didn’t have far to go. She wouldn’t even have to waste much time on the walk. A taxi had been out, as was the tube. Either one of them would require payment, and she wasn’t about to leave any kind of electronic trace by using Ms. Demir’s credentials.

Once out of sight of the building, Fiona slowed down. She knew where she was and the general direction to the club, but she had a stop to make before then. On foot, she could make the walk in about fifteen minutes, even with her little detour.

The shoes had started to pinch, but Fiona didn’t mind. It was sensation, and one she’d had too little of. Today, even pain felt good. It was one of the reasons being an exercise rider had appealed to her. Not only did she get to use a body, but she got to push it to its limits. There were only a few things that could be better. One of those was having full use of her own body, and the other... Well, with any luck, the other would be taken care of tonight.

Her steps quickened with anticipation. The faster she picked up her spending money from the locker at the metro station, the faster she could be working her way to the night's real goal.

The pounding bass beat shuddered her bones, echoing deep within her sternum as she walked through the front door of the club. With a wink and a grin, she'd charmed her way past the woman collecting that night's cover charge. The rhythm built along her bones, impelling her forward. Excitement bubbled within her, daring her toward the throng of lithe bodies that twisted and leaped to the throbbing music.

Ms. Demir wanted a workout, and what better way to get one than with a little cardio. Fiona gave in to the urge and she joined the frantic crowd of dancers. There was no way to keep from touching and rubbing against the women around her, and she didn't try. Each brush of bare flesh against hers sent sparks radiating out under her skin. Warmth suffused her, whether from the exertion or the contact, she didn't know. She didn't care. It wasn't enough, but it was a start.

Letting the music take her, Fiona danced as she hadn't in years. She danced from one partner to another, sometimes they stayed in pairs, sometimes more joined in. The hotter she got, the harder she danced, until she felt like she was about to rise up above the crowd in a cloud of sheer exuberance. She moved to the music between two women, one in front with her ass shoved against her pelvis, and the other behind with her hands on Fiona's hips.

"What time is it?" Fiona leaned back into the arms of the woman at her back, tilting her head to be heard.

"What?"

"The time?" Fiona yelled and exaggerated the words so the woman would understand.

“It’s almost midnight, I think.” The woman’s lips caressed Fiona’s ear as she spoke directly into it. More sparks showered down the right side of Fiona’s body, not fizzing out until they hit her toes. Warmth spread between her thighs. Ms. Demir was sensitive, that was for sure.

“Midnight?” Fiona extricated herself from between the two women. That left a little over four hours. She’d been dancing for almost an hour, and while it felt great, it wasn’t what she was here for.

“Where are you going?” the woman asked, grabbing after her hand. Their partner had already melted into the crowd.

“I need a drink.” At the look of incomprehension, Fiona mimed knocking back a glass. “A drink!” She worked her way off the dance floor, twisting to fit between writhing bodies.

Her dance partner didn’t let go of her, but allowed herself to be drawn after Fiona. The feel of her hand warm in Fiona’s was as distracting and exhilarating as the feel of her body on the dance floor had been. The buzz of adrenaline was being replaced by something subtler and more potent. A kind of shivery excitement had taken root within Fiona, sending her muscles to the edge of quivering. She relished the sensation and pulled the woman on toward the bar.

It was slightly quieter away from the music, though here the babble of voices was almost as loud. The bar was four and, in places, five women deep. Fiona stood on her tiptoes, trying to catch the bartender’s eye, but to no avail. Ms. Demir was on the short side, and it was working against her.

“What do you want?” her dance partner asked, mouth touching her ear.

Fiona swallowed hard and bit the inside of her cheek. The brush of the other woman’s lips made the question a loaded one. She wanted the woman’s tongue upon her

while Fiona threaded her fingers through her hair to keep her in just the right spot.

“Whatever’s on tap.” The point was to moisten her throat, not wake Ms. Demir up to a hangover. “Something light.”

The woman nodded and smiled. “Watching your figure?” She raked Fiona’s body with a gaze that threatened to set her alight.

“Something like that,” Fiona croaked. She could practically feel the woman moving beneath her, responding to her touch, rising to dizzying heights before plunging back down to lie exhausted and dripping next to her. Her pussy clenched, sending moisture flooding between her thighs.

Her dance partner somehow caught a bartender’s eye and shouted over her order. Within moments, two glasses brimming with foamy amber deliciousness were being handed back through the crowd toward them.

“Let’s go somewhere a little quieter to drink,” the woman said, handing Fiona her glass.

“Sounds good to me.”

“What?”

Fiona nodded enthusiastically, taking care not to spill her beer. It was her turn to follow when the woman grabbed her hand and directed them toward the edge of the crowd. They made their way past the bathrooms and up a narrow set of stairs. If Fiona had been in her exo, she would have been hard-pressed to navigate the enclosed space. Habit made her slow down and contemplate every step, every stair.

They came out above the dance floor on a narrow catwalk. It was markedly quieter up there and Fiona realized there was a large sheet of clear aluminum between them and the thrashing bodies below. They would have no problem talking at a normal level.

“That’s much better,” the woman said. She leaned against the railing and gazed down at the dancers.

“It really is.” Fiona took a long pull of her drink. She’d forgotten how good beer tasted after dancing. The crisp coolness slid down her throat and she sighed in appreciation.

“Good?”

“Very. I needed that.”

“I bet you did. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone throw themselves into dancing the way you were down there.”

“What can I say? Guess I like dancing.” Fiona shrugged, a little embarrassed to have been so obvious. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been able to cut loose like that. I missed it.”

“A lot by the look of things.” The woman’s eyes gleamed in the gloom. Her face was lit only by the shifting lights filtering from below. The lights outlined full lips that flirted on the edge of a wide smile. Her sensuous mouth heightened a strong nose, sending a shadow across one cheek until it merged with the sharp curve of her cheekbone. “I really enjoyed dancing with you.”

“I’m Fiona, by the way.” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, Fiona wanted to kick herself. She’d carefully prepared a fake name, but when the time came to use it, she’d completely cocked it up. It was a good thing she wasn’t a secret agent. She’d probably give herself away at the first opportunity. Compartmentalization was apparently not her strong suit.

“Desi.”

Fiona took set her beer on the railing and took Desi’s out-stretched hand, marveling at the combination of smooth skin and powerful grip, like steel covered by the

softest of kid leather gloves. “Who was the other one?”

“Nani? She’s my girlfriend. She’ll be getting to know another woman tonight. She’s on the prowl for sure.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

“Of course I am.” The smile that had been hovering around Desi’s lips burst fully into life. “I’m hoping to do the same.”

Another lesbian couple in an open relationship. It had never been Fiona’s preference, she was fiercely monogamous with the women she’d wooed. Or rather, she had been. It had been thirteen years since she’d even dated anyone. Her last ex hadn’t been able to handle the complications of her injury and had bailed soon after she found out the doctors couldn’t fix her. A number of her teammates had preferred open relationships, and most of them had managed to make them work.

Of course, she certainly couldn’t cast aspersions. She wasn’t there looking for a relationship.

“Lucky me,” Fiona said. Her smile stretched to match Desi’s.

“I was hoping you would say that.” Desi glided forward, crossing the handful of feet that separated them. She pushed Fiona back until her waist hit the railing. Her eyes practically smoldered and Fiona’s skin heated in response.

Desi stood pressed against her, the warmth of her skin penetrating layers of clothing. Fiona arched against her, aching to feel her without the cloth barrier between them. She suddenly needed the balm of skin upon skin like she needed air in her lungs.

Soft lips at her neck dropped widening pools of fire on her skin. Fiona gasped and threw her head back. When the lips were replaced by nipping teeth, her gasps turned to moans and she grabbed on to Desi’s upper arms, holding tight when her knees threatened to buckle.

With a soft growl, Desi speared the fingers of one hand into her hair, pulling at the strands carefully gathered back into a simple ponytail. Each tug at her scalp reverberated through Fiona's groin. The other hand was around her waist, sliding up under her shirt to splay fingers that scalded across her bare skin. Caught in the maelstrom of sensation, Fiona was paralyzed, helpless to do anything but hang on as Desi kissed, kneaded and fondled her way over her upper body.

She was so lost to the pull of dimly-remembered sensations that she didn't even think to protest when Desi tugged at the waistband of her pants, opening the fastener with one hand. The other woman had her mouth on the top of Fiona's breast, tantalizingly close to the nipple that was so hard Fiona wondered how it hadn't ripped through the fabric of her shirt. Ms. Demir was so flat-chested, Fiona had decided she didn't need any of the ultra-feminine bras in her dresser. The caress of fabric over the sensitive nipples was as distracting as the lips that ventured ever closer to them.

Desi's fingers slid lower, under the band of her underwear. Fiona arched her hips, silently begging the woman to touch her where she hadn't been able to feel for thirteen long years. Her entire universe was focused on those digits traveling slowly, too slowly, lower. When they grazed the top of Ms. Demir's neatly trimmed bush and stopped, Fiona couldn't control the growl that rose in her throat.

"Patience," Desi murmured in her ear.

"Easy for you to say," Fiona said, gasping. "You have no idea how long I've been waiting for this."

"Unless you want to be the evening's entertainment for a hundred people, maybe we should cool it down long enough to find somewhere more private."

A hundred people? That's right, they were still at the club. Fiona glanced down at the dance floor. To her shock, dozens of eyes were raised in their direction. She couldn't

hear much through the clear barrier, but the dim roar was all approval that seemed to have nothing to do with the music. Exhibitionism had never been her thing, but a thrill jolted through her center. It shouldn't have been possible to get any wetter, but a fresh trickle dampened her underwear. Maybe Ms. Demir got off on being watched. How much of what she was feeling was herself and how much was the body she rode?

The stray thought cleared her head more than the threat of an audience had.

"Some privacy would be nice."

Desi chuckled low in her throat. The sound caressed Fiona in all the right places. Half a moment of clarity and it was all undone by the sexiest laugh she'd heard in a long time.

"It wouldn't have bothered me, but I have no idea if you roll that way. I'm glad I asked."

"Me too." Ms. Demir *might* be an exhibitionist, but drawing this much attention to her wasn't in Fiona's best interest. "Do you live close by?"

"Close enough, or we can go to your place if you like."

"No!" Desi's eyebrows climbed her forehead at the force of Fiona's refusal. "Now is not a good time to be doing that at my place."

"Someone doesn't know you're out here, do they?"

"You have no idea." Not in the way Desi was thinking, anyway.

"My place it is, then."

"And soon."

Desi didn't waste any more time with chat, instead taking Fiona's hand and pulling her along behind her. It didn't take long before they were out in front of the club. Fiona raised her hand to flag down a car.

A familiar laugh pulled her attention back toward the club entrance. She hadn't

heard that chuckle in a long time, ten years maybe. That sounded like Ferris. It was. She would recognize the cock of the head and set of those shoulders anywhere, even without helmet and pads. Fiona's teammate swept past the two of them as they waited on the curb. There was a woman on each arm both gazing up at her former teammate with wide grins and shining eyes. Ferris noticed Fiona staring and flashed her a grin and wink.

There was no sign of recognition in those eyes, and why should there have been? Fiona kicked herself for feeling disappointed.

"Hockey fan?" Desi asked. "Or do you know her more...intimately?"

"Used to be." Fiona shook her head when she realized the answer made no sense. "I used to follow the sport, but it's been a while. I'm surprised she's still around."

"That one's been around, that's for sure." Desi sounded amused, not judgmental. "Our car is here." Her voice warmed even further and Fiona realized she was still staring after Ferris with her hand raised.

"Sorry," she said and blushed. Why was she blushing? This wasn't her first date, but now that they weren't all over each other, she felt as if she'd never spoken to a woman before. If she could have flushed further, she would have. As it was, she was on the edge of bursting into flames, and no longer from arousal. To cover her humiliation, Fiona stood back and gestured toward the doors that swung quietly open.

"Such a gentleman," Desi said on her way past. Fiona refused to feel any embarrassment for being polite and nodded gravely to her before taking her place in the car.

Desi gave the driver an address, but Fiona paid scant attention. She only hoped it wouldn't be too long a drive. They were closing in on the first potential wrinkle in her plan. Her regular session with Ms. Demir would be ending soon. She'd hacked in through a back door in her company's scheduling software and extended the session to

give her nine hours, but if someone had run a scheduling audit in the past day, they might have discovered the change. It looked like a glitch, and she'd done it that way to cover her ass if it was discovered. If someone had reset it, she would be flagged when she turned the body back over to Ms. Demir. By the time she would open her eyes back in her own body, the police – or worse – would already be there waiting for her.

It was a risk, and one she was well aware of, but she'd calculated the odds and was reasonably certain it would work out, but even the slightest possibility of disaster made her nervous.

"Are you all right?" Desi's quiet question brought her back to reality. "You seem distracted."

"I'm fine," Fiona said, trying to inject as much enthusiasm into her tone as she could manage. "It's been a long time since I went home with anybody."

"You keep saying that. How long has it been exactly?" Desi cuddled up to her. She slipped her hands under Fiona's shirt, running cool fingers over the ridges of her abdominal muscles.

"Over thirteen years." She twisted in Desi's arms. "But I don't want to think about that any more. I just want to feel you all over." A wicked grin stretched across her face as heat kindled again in her belly. "I want you under me."

"That can be arranged." Desi dipped her head and covered Fiona's lips with her own. Fiona gave herself over to the whirlpool of sensation, pulled in by the way Desi's lips moved against hers, tugging and teasing, the tip of her tongue playing over her lower lip, requesting entrance, but never committing to entering Fiona's mouth. Fingers roamed through her hair, alternating between tugging at the strands then soothing away the tiny hurts she inflicted.

Heat rolled through Fiona's center. She was aware of nothing more than the feel

of Desi against her and the magic she was performing with her mouth and her hands. With an impatient growl when Desi would go no further than tormenting, she slid both hands up over the other woman's bare arms, kneading and stroking as she went higher. She grasped Desi's shoulders and pulled the woman against her, turning the tables and leaning her back against the car's soft leather seat. Desi's lips parted to allow her entrance and she plundered the woman's mouth, exploring it the same way she hoped she'd soon be exploring other depths. The moan that came from the back of Desi's throat almost undid her and she pulled back, panting, to rest their foreheads together.

Desi laughed breathlessly, her voice low and with the same throaty quality of the moan that had just come from her.

"It may have been a while, but you aren't missing a beat."

Fiona chuckled. "I'm glad to hear it." She stroked Desi's shoulder gently while gazing into the woman's green eyes, so vibrant and surprising against her dusky skin. The woman's body shuddered beneath her, straining against her and Fiona longed for the feel of skin on skin.

An insistent tone pulled Fiona's attention away from the woman beneath her and to the front of the cab. "You have arrived at your destination," a mechanical voice said.

"Please place payment in the slot before exiting the vehicle."

"I wonder how long that's been trying to get our attention," Desi said.

"It's being pretty noisy. A while probably."

"I'm not surprised. You're very...diverting." The hooded look Desi gave her, with lowered eyelids and perfect white teeth biting into her lower lip propelled Fiona into action.

"I'll get it," she said. "You get us into your place." She hauled a handful of credits out of her pocket, the plastic sheets sliding against each other in her palm. Fiona gave

herself a mental pat on the back for having enough foresight to stash more credits in the station locker than she'd thought she really needed.

Desi slid out the open door as Fiona struggled to feed the money into the slot while also watching Desi's fine ass. She paid scant attention to what she was doing, stopping only when the machine acknowledged her.

She shot out of the cab as if she'd been fired from a cannon and looked around. The area was nice enough. Not as opulent as Ms. Demir's neighborhood, to be certain, but more than a few cuts above what she could afford. The towering apartments here were clean, not streaked with decades to centuries of grime the way her building was. Desi's place was masonry instead of corrugated metal and someone had cared enough to plant bushes around the building's base. She breathed deeply and was rewarded with only the faintest whiff of ozone. So this sector got functioning air scrubbers. It must be nice to have money.

Desi stood at the top of the stairs, holding open a large metal door and drumming her fingers impatiently on the handle. Fiona bounded up the steps two at a time.

"Taking your time?" Desi asked.

"This is a nice area," Fiona said, trying not to sound too impressed or defensive.

"Yeah, right." She placed a hand on Fiona's waist, right above her ass and propelled her through the open door. "Now scoot, unless you want to stand around talking architecture."

Fiona simply laughed. When Desi stepped up next to her, she slid her hand down the back of Desi's pants to feel the way the muscles shifted under her bare skin. Desi returned the favor by sliding her hand up under the front of Fiona's shirt. They groped their way into the elevator, touching and feeling as they shot upward. Fiona had no idea how many floors they ascended, and she didn't care in the least. Her only goal was to get

Desi beneath her before her shift was over. If it was going to go sideways, she wanted to have something to show – or feel – for it.

The elevator doors chimed loudly and slid open. Desi pulled Fiona with her down the hall. Their lips never stopped nibbling and sucking at each other. Desi did have to let go with one hand to swing her palm in front of the reader next to a door off the hall. It swished open quietly, and Fiona dimly noted that there was none of the grinding and creaking that accompanied her door.

“Finally,” Desi gasped, tearing her mouth away from Fiona’s. She attacked the shirt, threatening to tear the fasteners from her front.

“Careful,” Fiona said, laughing. Inside, she was slightly less amused. *Let’s not damage Ms. Demir’s clothing!* She intercepted Desi’s hands and pulled them away. At the other woman’s pout, she chuckled again. Slowly, she undid one fastener and pulled the shirt open at the neck. It wasn’t enough to show cleavage, but Desi licked her lips. Her eyes glinted with predatory hunger.

“Suit yourself,” Desi said and crossed the living room before lowering herself gracefully onto a long couch.

Fiona turned to face her but didn’t follow. Instead, she leisurely opened the next fastener. Cool air hit the skin between her breasts and she could feel her nipples tightening. When she snuck a quick glance down, they were outlined against the thin fabric of the shirt. There were definitely advantages to going braless. Desi seemed to think so too; she bit her lower lip. Even from the other side of the room Fiona could see her chest heave with a sudden intake of breath.

“Screw this.” Fiona quickly undid the last of the fasteners as she crossed the room in long strides. Desi’s eyes followed her, heating her skin, stoking the fires between her thighs. She stopped short of Desi, not quite close enough to touch and pulled the shirt

from her shoulders.

“Oh. baby.” Desi leaned forward and drew her tongue up the center of Fiona’s abs. “Could you be any hotter?” She hooked her fingers around Fiona’s pants and pulled her hard against her.

Sharp teeth nipped at the underside of Fiona’s small breast. The small pain left behind a spreading tide of goosebumps. She gasped when Desi twisted and pulled her down This she remembered. Fiona lowered her head to capture Desi’s mouth once more. Her fingers were busy at the other woman’s waist. Who knew what kind of muscle memory Ms. Demir had, but it was quick work to open up the fasteners there. Desi lifted her hips in mute encouragement. Fiona reluctantly relinquished Desi’s mouth to pull down her pants. She stopped to marvel at the bounty that lay beneath her. Desi’s legs went on forever; gentle curves swelling into wide hips. The tangle of curls at the juncture of her thighs made Fiona’s mouth water.

She settled between Desi’s legs and inhaled deeply of her musk. Desi was beyond excited, that much was obvious. Without having to touch her, Fiona knew she was wet. Lightly, she drew her tongue along the crease of her thigh, following it around to where sweet nectar tantalized her. She dipped the tip of her tongue into the fragrant liquid. *Mm, pineapple*, she thought, and prepared to get down to business.

Fingers tangling through her hair brought her up short. “What’s wrong?”

“Get your pants off and your happy ass up here.” Desi tightened her grip slightly before releasing it. “I’m not going to let all that go to waste.”

“Yes, ma’am!” Fiona jumped up smartly and shimmied her pants down over her legs. Desi drummed her fingers on the couch’s shiny surface.

Fiona smirked at her impatience. The other woman had no idea that she was going to savor this experience as much as she could. If Desi was impatient now, she would be

fairly begging for it when Fiona was ready to let go. She pushed Desi back onto the couch's soft surface and straddled her head.

"That's more like it," Desi said.

Fiona leaned forward until her mouth once again hovered over Desi's mound.

"No complaints here," Fiona said. Her words caressed Desi. She grinned when the woman's hips twitched in response. Her own hips jerked when Desi fastened her lips around her clit. Her tongue worked her enthusiastically, flicking over the sensitive bundle of nerves, each pass sending Fiona higher.

Any notion of drawing out the encounter fled her mind. All that remained was the feeling of a woman touching her as she hadn't been in far too long. She buried her head between Desi's thighs, plying her tongue to Desi's clit and labia. Desi rocked in response beneath her. She worked her way down Fiona's slit and stopped to tease her entrance with the tip of her tongue.

Things were rapidly slipping away from Fiona. She wrapped her arms around Desi, trying to keep from flying apart too soon. The pressure within her belly and groin was deliciously intense, but she wanted to bring Desi to climax before she let herself go. From the way Desi's hips churned against her, the woman didn't have long to go, but Fiona wasn't sure she could hold out much longer against the heat and pressure within.

She flicked the top of Desi's clit with the tip of her tongue and brought one hand up to gently spread open her labia. Desi was soaked with desire and Fiona's fingertips slid easily past her outer petals. Fiona licked the length of Desi's clit. When her hips jerked in response, Desi impaled herself on Fiona's fingers.

She pulled her head away from Fiona in a wordless, soundless scream. Fiona felt the loss of contact keenly, but didn't stop. This wasn't about her. Not yet. It would be soon enough. She pulled back and slid both fingers back inside Desi, deep this time,

straining to tickle the back of her while Desi's walls gripped around her like a velvet vise.

The nails scoring her back were at once intoxicating and exceedingly unwelcome. Fiona stroked her fingers within Desi while rolling to one side. Desi's hands fell away from her, hopefully before breaking the skin.

Desi didn't know. How could she? All she felt was Fiona inside her. Fiona marveled at how good it felt to have another woman wrapped around her again. Had she missed this more than being touched? It was impossible to tell. Now that she was no longer in danger of having Ms. Demir's skin scored by Desi's nails, she could abandon herself to the task of making Desi come.

It didn't take long. Another finger and ever-increasing pounding, and Desi's scream was no longer soundless. Her hips surged against Fiona as her head whipped back and forth on the couch. She came once, twice, and again before shuddering to a stop. Her chest expanded slowly then released. She opened her eyes and blinked twice before her gaze sharpened on Fiona who lounged alongside her.

Fiona knew the smile on her face was smug. She couldn't help it; she didn't really want to. It was good to know she still had it, that she could still bring another woman to the highest peaks of passion. Being able to feel her and adjust for what worked in real time was so much better than she remembered. How could one taste of all she'd lost be so good?

Desi's grip around her fingers relaxed. Fiona withdrew them slowly and with some sadness. Some of what she felt must have been evident on her face as Desi sat up and wrapped her arms around her.

"What's the matter?" Desi stroked Fiona's hair away from her eyes. "No one who makes me feel that amazing should look so sad."

“It’s nothing.” Fiona smiled at her, trying to recapture the excitement of the evening. “Maybe I’m jealous of that incredible orgasm you had.”

“Really?” Desi’s arch smile gave nothing away about whether she’d bought Fiona’s excuse. “Then I should really do something about that, shouldn’t I?”

“It couldn’t hurt.” Renewed arousal pushed down the despair and Fiona let it. She met Desi halfway, fastening her mouth desperately to the other woman’s as if she could hold them both in that moment, forever.

Desi sighed into her mouth and ran gentle fingers up the sides of her belly and over her ribs. Warm hands cupped her breasts, bringing those so-sensitive nipples to attention against Desi’s palms. It was Fiona’s turn to moan. She turned into Desi, pressing their bare skin together. It was contact, full-bodied and warm. Electricity crawled under her skin, seeking out the points where their flesh met and flowing back within, building in the core of herself.

She barely noticed when Desi pushed her back and nudged her thighs open. Cool air touched her wetness, wrapping around the most intimate parts of her, urging her even higher. Fiona gripped Desi’s shoulders hard. Her climb was terrifying in its speed. The faster they rose, the sooner it would be over. Desi dropped her head and took one of Fiona’s nipples in her mouth. She bit down lightly, sending a spike of pleasure through Fiona. It was so intense it verged on painful.

The edge loomed before her, and Fiona knew it wouldn’t take much to send her crashing over it, but not yet. This couldn’t end so soon. She gritted her teeth and pulled herself back from the precipice of her orgasm. Not yet...

Desi hadn’t gotten the message. Her attention now on the other nipple, she slid one finger between the lips around Fiona’s opening. Fiona knew she must be drenched, Desi’s fingertips practically glided straight into her.

She stopped, not moving an inch, not wanting to do anything but savor how it felt to be in this woman's arms, Desi's mouth around one nipple and excitement building against the underside of her skin. It didn't take much to fill her. Fiona couldn't help herself, she strained against the finger, pulling it deeper within.

"Like that?" Desi relinquished her lip's hold on Fiona's breast and grinned at her. "How about this?" She slid another finger in alongside the first one.

Fiona stretched to accommodate her. The delicious ache inside her, coupled with the pressure in her belly, pushed her right up to the precipice again. She resisted going over; her body shook with the effort to keep from letting go.

Desi withdrew and plunged her fingers in again, then again. And once more. That was it. There was no denying it, Fiona was done. She didn't care. Fiona hurtled over the edge and floated, uncaring and insensible. Her body filled with heat and light before bursting into countless tiny pieces that drifted gently downward before reassembling into something that resembled her body, but wasn't.

Fiona looked up and met Desi's eyes.

"Welcome back," the other woman said. She stroked the edge of Fiona's jaw. "That was quite the trip."

Fiona cleared her throat before answering. "It was." Her voice was little more than a whisper.

"I don't know that I've seen someone come like that before."

The smile on Fiona's lips felt wrong, but she forced them to widen anyway. "It's been so long." Her voice broke. "So very long," she whispered.

Desi's arms tightened around her. "We can do this again any time."

*Time! What time is it?* "Don't I wish." Fiona disentangled herself from Desi's grasp brusquely. It was probably rude, but until she knew the time... There were no

clocks that she could see.

“What’s wrong?” Desi sat back and wrapped her arms around her ribcage.

“I need to know the time.” When Desi stared blankly at her, Fiona couldn’t control the impatience in her voice. “The time!”

“Oh.” The single word was flat. Fiona would have cringed if she hadn’t been doing her best to control her rising panic. Desi looked up and to one side. That was why there were no clocks, the woman had some sort of implant. “It’s about half past two.”

Fiona relaxed a little. Her massaging of the company’s clocks hadn’t been noticed. She hadn’t even noticed the time pass in the midst of their activities.

“Wait, after two?” She needed to have Ms. Demir’s body back by 4:30 at the latest, otherwise she would have some explaining to do when there was no transfer of the client back to her own body. That was less than two hours. She’d planned on already being home by now, the deadline had been to give herself plenty of cushion. “I need to get out of here.”

“If you say so.”

“Sorry.” Fiona flung the absent apology over her shoulder as she tried to track down all her clothes. They’d ended up in the strangest places. After spending too much time trying to find her bra, Fiona remembered she hadn’t worn one. The thin shirt was almost a casualty, but Fiona forced herself to calm down before she tore a hole in the elbow pulling it on. She glanced around quickly to see if she’d forgotten anything.

Desi sat back in a corner of the couch, her arms still around her torso. She seemed to be making herself as small as possible.

*I’m being an ass*, Fiona thought. *You don’t have time not to be*, she tried to admonish herself. It didn’t work. Desi seemed too miserable to overlook.

“I really am sorry,” Fiona perched on the couch next to Desi. “I would stay longer

if I could, but if I'm not back by a certain time, there'll be hell to pay." She put her hand on Desi's bare foot and squeezed. "I'd stay much longer if I could."

She was rewarded with a small smile. "If you say so." This time, the words sounded more understanding. "We could have had a lot more fun together." Desi's smile widened into a wicked grin. "Even more when my girlfriend got home."

"I know, but I can't." Fiona disengaged slowly, sad to lose that last point of contact. "Can you call me a car?"

"All right."

"Thanks." She got up, but Desi captured her hand before she could get far.

"You could wait up here."

Fiona's laugh startled them both. It boomed out loud and genuine. "If I do that, I'll miss my window for sure."

"Fine." Desi pouted a little, her lower lip protruding adorably. It was all Fiona could do to keep from kissing it.

"That's exactly what I'm talking about."

"I'll see you around?"

"Maybe." Fiona shrugged. It was never going to happen, but there was no point in being an asshole about it. "It was fun, thanks."

Without so much as a glance behind her, she strode from the room. The ride down the lift was interminable, but nothing compared to the wait for the car. The evening was nice enough and she tried to pay attention to the way warm breezes caressed her skin, but it was hard to concentrate on anything except the feeling of time slipping through her fingers.

By the time the car showed up, Fiona was almost frantic. She'd already had to stop herself from trying to walk back to Ms. Demir's once. Only the fact that she didn't

exactly know the way on foot stopped her. She knew the general direction she'd have to head, but that was about it. That she'd likely have to walk through at least one terrible neighborhood had barely registered as a deterrent.

The clock in the car blinked at her. It wasn't even three in the morning yet. She heaved a sigh of relief before rattling off her address. The car doors slid closed before she realized her error.

"Strike that," Fiona said. The front console beeped an inquiry at her. "I've changed my mind. Take me to 25 Meadow Court instead." The car trilled its confirmation then whirred up and took off down the street.

Fiona leaned back and tapped her fingers together lightly. They'd be back by 3:30 and she'd be able to get Ms. Demir showered and back in her chair well before 4:30. It was still closer than she'd have liked, but definitely doable. Concentrating on her timeline helped calm some of the disquiet that was creeping into her thoughts. Her time with Desi had been intoxicating, but at what price? Ms. Demir would never know what Fiona had done with her body. She'd wanted a workout and she'd gotten one, though likely not in the way she'd expected. What would she think of the night's events if she only knew?

With a brusque head-shake, Fiona tried to pull her errant thoughts in a different direction. The question was useless, Ms. Demir *would* never know. What she didn't know wouldn't hurt either of them. The assurance rang hollow and once again Fiona tried to focus on something else. The feel of Desi's hands on her, Desi's lips on her collarbone and at her nipples, how Desi felt around her fingers.

That was just as bad.

Finally, Fiona stared out the window at what passed for scenery in the city. Concrete monoliths whipped by one after another, creating a monotone rhythm she could

finally lose herself in. When the car stopped, Fiona fed the required credits into the slot and stepped out. Ahead, the doorman held a door open for her. Was it her imagination, or was he watching her a little too closely? She hadn't bothered checking to see how she looked on the way out of Desi's. It was a habit she'd developed since being forced into the exo. If she didn't have to see herself in it, she could pretend it didn't exist, at least a little bit. Fiona lifted a hand to her hair. It didn't feel too bad. She felt a little further and discovered a large hank hanging down out of the ponytail.

*I bet that looks fantastic.* From what she knew of her client, Ms. Demir was not the kind of woman to come back from a night on the town with even a hair out of place. Well, there was nothing she could do about it now. With a quick jerk, Fiona pulled her hair out of the tail and shook it into place around her shoulders. She nodded at the doorman on the way past and breezed over to the elevators. Now was not the time to act as if she'd done anything wrong. There was work to be done before she could finish this.

Toweling her hair off after a long shower, Fiona did her best not to meet Ms. Demir's eyes in the mirror. *What's done is done.* She squared Ms. Demir's shoulders and headed back to the chair. The clock on the readout blinked 4:15. She'd made it with time to spare, and no marks to betray what she'd been up to. That was a major bonus; there had been no way she could be attentive to what was happening to Ms. Demir's body by the end.

That bright flare of shame lit up the inside of her head again. Fiona's cheeks heated in response. Time to head back to the prison of the exoskeleton. Past time. And yet, she couldn't make herself enter the sequence that would welcome Ms. Demir back to her own body. Sweat dripped down her forehead as Fiona wrestled with herself. The minutes ticked by as she sat there, her window rapidly closing. If she didn't leave this body soon, she would be stuck in it. Worse than that, Ms. Demir would be stuck in the

chair's buffer. Stuck until Corporate realized she'd gone rogue with someone else's body. That wouldn't end well.

Would the prison she'd end up in be worse than the one that awaited her back home? Yes. There was no way this could work. Fiona's fingers flew over the touchpad. They hesitated only briefly before hitting the final confirmation.

Everything shifted sideways. Fiona fell forward into the white-blue infostream. It swept her away from Ms. Demir's body in the blink of an eye. There was nothing for it, she was headed back to her own body.

It was too soon before Fiona opened her eyes to regard the grimy ceiling of her apartment. Sensing she was awake, the exo snapped into place around her limbs. It chirped once to let her know it was ready. There was no difference that Fiona could feel. There was nothing to feel at all.