

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

LOYALTY DESERVED

Kathryn Sparrow

Contents

Love Has No Boundaries	3
Loyalty Deserved	6
CHAPTER 1	7
CHAPTER 2	12
CHAPTER 3	16
CHAPTER 4	24
CHAPTER 5	28
CHAPTER 6	37
CHAPTER 7	44
CHAPTER 8	49
CHAPTER 9	55
Author Bio	62

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

LOYALTY DESERVED

By Kathryn Sparrow

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved worldwide

This eBook may be distributed freely in its entirety courtesy of the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group*. This eBook may not be sold, manipulated or reproduced in any format without the express written permission of the author.

Loyalty Deserved, Copyright © 2013 Kathryn Sparrow

Cover Design by Goodreads M/M Romance Group

This ebook is published by the *M/M Romance Group* and is not directly endorsed by or affiliated with Goodreads Inc.

LOYALTY DESERVED

By Kathryn Sparrow

Photo Description

A young man with neatly trimmed brown hair, thick eyebrows, and piercing hazel eyes stares at the camera, looking determined. His torso is bare except for leather restraints surrounding his neck and wrists. A rope is wrapped around his wrists several times and through a ring on the leather cuffs, and holds his hands suspended next to his head.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

A moment of inattention and I found myself in the hands of my enemy. I was captured, restrained, interrogated for information I don't even have. No one is coming for me; I knew that without his taunts. But if he thinks I'll surrender, he has another thing coming.

**Sci-fi or fantasy setting please*

Sincerely,

Amanda

Story Info

Genre: science fiction

Tags: military, spacemen, abduction, captivity, enemies to lovers

Content warnings: mentions of past rape

Word count: 16,018

LOYALTY DESERVED

By Kathryn Sparrow

CHAPTER 1

Connor wrapped his hands around the rope that imprisoned him, trying to ease the throbbing in his shoulder muscles. He had woken to find himself hanging by leather cuffs around his wrists. He shook his head, hoping that would somehow clear the cloudiness that seemed to slow his thinking.

He realized he was able to stand and relieve some of the physical pain. That surprised him. He expected the rebels to suspend him by his wrists with his feet barely touching the floor. Instead the rope just kept him from moving around the room, but didn't physically dangle him. Still, the mental anguish continued. What did the rebels have in store for him?

He cursed his own stupidity.

It had just been a routine shuttle run. One he'd made a million times. He'd only looked away from the controls for a moment. Nothing was supposed to happen. Instead, a big-ass rebel ship appeared and tractorized his shuttle before he could run evasive maneuvers. The damn autopilot countermeasures were totally useless.

When his ship had been pulled aboard, a sickly-sweet smell, like a sugar shack boiling down maple syrup but mixed with cough medicine, permeated the cabin. The next thing he knew, he was here—a generic, dorm-style room, a bed in one corner, a table with chairs on the side. Of course, the bars on the window and the hook he was attached to in the ceiling didn't fit the whole happy-home theme.

His uniform was gone, not surprising since several locaters were sewn into the seams. They let him have baggy sweatpants but no shirt and no socks, and some kind of collar had been strapped around his neck. Would they use the collar to choke him? Goose bumps covered his skin although the temperature in the room was mild.

They had him and he wasn't going anywhere.

He waited, unsure how long, with aching shoulders and sore feet. This was part of the game, or so his instructors had said. Letting him stew and worry about what they had planned. That was the rebel's way. Kill, maim, torture. Anything to bring down the Democration of Planets.

Connor had no idea what was coming, but he wouldn't betray the Democration. His planet, Dex-G9, had been a member for hundreds of years. The rebels started bombing worlds when Connor was sixteen years old. He wanted to be the first to join up to protect innocent lives, but his parents said no. Two years later, when his mother was killed in a rebel bombing attack, his father gave his blessing.

It had been a huge culture shock, leaving his peaceful agrarian home and joining the military. Six months of crazy training, learning to fly shuttles, and trying not to get his ass shot off during drills. But he made it and had been flying solo for the last two years, bringing supplies to the ships on the front lines. It was lonely work—not a lot of action either—but he was proud to serve, and his father wanted him out of harm's way.

Damn rebels.

He licked his dry lips, wishing for some water, and tried to shift his wrists away from where the cuffs chafed. What did they want? It's not like he knew anything. He flew cargo where they told him, unloaded, and picked up more crates with contents unknown. Lather, Rinse, Repeat.

The door opened slowly, admitting a tall, lean brunette. Sunglasses obscured her eyes and her hair was pulled back from her face except for her wispy bangs.

Her black tank top exposed shapely arms and hugged petite breasts. But Connor wasn't fooled. They hoped to use her attractiveness against him. Fortunately, he didn't swing that way. He did like her tank, however. Very retro with frayed edges along the neck.

She walked up to him and pressed something cold and flat to each of his temples.

He braced himself, wondering what she was attaching and what it would do.

Circling him, she asked in a crisp voice, “Name?”

He kept his eyes trained forward and his tone neutral. “Connor Spaulding.”

She ran a finger lightly along his bare shoulders as she walked. “Rank?”

His skin twitched from her touch like a horse shaking off a fly. “Shuttle Pilot.”

Stopping in front of him and meeting his eyes. “Current mission?”

Connor closed his mouth and refused to speak. Name he would give, rank too, but that was it.

“Tough guy, huh?” She circled around him again and then got right up in his face, her breasts brushing against his chest, her breath mingling with his. Although she smelled of mint, she just made him nauseous.

She opened her mouth, and then her face blanked for a minute. She looked up at the camera in the corner of the cell. “You sure?”

She stood silent for a moment, then nodded and cocked her head to one side, her eyes slipping to him. “Later, Connor.” She left the room, never having given her name.

Time passed. Minutes? Hours? His shoulders burned. His legs ached. This was only the beginning.

The next time the door opened, it admitted someone a little more interesting. He had short black hair, and strong biceps. An abstract tattoo adorned the man’s left shoulder. It was traditional on some planet, but Connor couldn’t remember which one. This guy wore the same style black tank top, but it looked better on him. He carried a tray with food.

“Let me just set this down, and then I’ll untie you.”

As soon as his arms were released, his hands fell forward, throbbing with pain as the blood rushed to his extremities.

He felt hands massaging his shoulders and turned his head to meet the other man's eyes. A sweet smile adorned his captor's face. The man was attractive, no doubt, but Connor wasn't buying this act, either.

"Here, come, sit. You must be starving. I'm Dan."

Connor let himself be led to the table and eyed the tray suspiciously. What were the chances the food was untainted?

"Eat. It's just food. Look." Dan took a forkful of the rice and lifted it to his mouth. He tasted the peas and the chicken as well.

Connor waited a few moments before deciding to eat, but his growling stomach and parched lips made him decide to take a chance. It was tricky bringing the food to his mouth with his hands still cuffed together, but he was so hungry. How long had it been since he last ate?

"So, your name is Connor?"

"Yup."

"You're a shuttle pilot?"

"Yup."

"Tell me about yourself, Connor."

"Nope."

"What?"

"This isn't a date. I'm Connor Spaulding, Shuttle Pilot for the Democrations."

Dan looked up at the camera and nodded his head.

"Where are you from?"

"I'm Connor Spaulding. I'm a Shuttle Pilot for the Democrations."

Dan tapped his ear and listened, nodding.

Connor turned and looked directly at the camera. "Whoever the hell you are, why don't you come in here yourself? Afraid of a half-naked shuttle pilot

in cuffs? Seriously. I'm Connor Spaulding. I'm a Shuttle Pilot for the Democration." Connor sat back in his chair, wishing he could cross his arms.

Dan tried a few more questions, but eventually left the room.

Connor went and laid down on the hard cot in the corner. No pillow. No blanket. But at least he wasn't hanging.

CHAPTER 2

Connor snapped awake to the sound of his cell door closing. Another tray had been delivered. His shoulders were still sore but had improved. He eyed the food suspiciously and took a sniff of the oatmeal. Hunger won out, and he ate.

Pacing the cell, questions raced in circles around his head. Why had they taken him? What did they really want? Could he escape? But there were no answers.

His hands twisted in the cuffs and he tried to fiddle with the collar on his neck but both were locked.

When the door opened Connor looked up and saw a man that took his breath away. God, this guy was hot. He was about six foot two with spiky dirty-blond hair and a serious five o'clock shadow. His left eye was brown with a golden starburst pattern around the pupil, but the most surprising thing was the eye patch covering his right eye. Was it an affectation, or a covering for some injury?

“You wanted to see the man behind the camera. Here I am.”

The man was dressed the same as the others, black tank top, black pants. Same uniform, but somehow, on this guy it looked... more than good, it looked delectable. Between that, the musky scent rolling off of him, and his gravelly voice, Connor found himself half-hard.

But it didn't matter. This was the enemy. Connor lifted his chin and looked down his nose at the man. “I'm Connor Spaulding, a Shuttle Pilot for the Democration.”

“We've established that and actually a good bit more, farm boy.”

Connor scowled, but he stayed silent.

The man lifted a tablet and swiped his finger across the surface. “Dex-G9. I had to look that planet up. I'd never heard of it and I can see why. It makes nowhere look central.”

Connor knew his planet was small and remote. He didn't need this prick telling him so.

“You know there's no one coming for you? Even if they did know where this base was. The Democrations doesn't rescue prisoners of war. They rarely even trade for them and then only someone of high rank, like a member of one of the government families. Not someone from the hind-end of East Bumblefuck.”

Connor knew what he said was true. That had been part of the training. Don't get caught. The government didn't negotiate with terrorists. That's all the rebels were. Terrorists who killed civilians and tortured prisoners to further their agenda.

One thing puzzled him—what did he mean by government families? He wasn't about to ask.

But if he thinks I'll surrender, he has another thing coming. Connor stood a little straighter and glared at his captor.

The rebel's eyes twinkled. “You a badass? I bet you know what we do to prisoners. Heard all about it in basic training.”

Connor tried to keep his expression neutral but knew he failed. He had heard. The stories had been horrific at best. Torture: electric shock, rats, stretching on the rack, burning, tainted food, imprisonment in underground dungeons, the list went on and on. They had even been shown pictures of a rickety elevator leading to a dim corridor lined with old-fashioned cells, with actual bars. He had been forced to watch a few movies that had been smuggled out, “at great expense”, of actual tortures being performed. They'd been sickening and barbaric.

“Yeah, we're not gonna do that. We never do that. It's more fucked-up Democrations propaganda. But I need to know what you know. Where is the fleet heading?”

How in fuck would he know that? He was just a shuttle pilot. Not that he would tell if he did know. And what did he mean, *we never do that*?

“Look, I’m Nic. Nic Maltisse. I’m gonna unbind your wrists now. We’re the good guys here. I bet you don’t know half the shit your beloved Democration does.”

The man uncuffed him and Connor rubbed his wrists. When Nic removed the collar, his finger brushed Connor’s neck, and he quivered as a shot of want passed through him.

Nic reached out and slid the discs from his temples as well. “A little bio-feedback to get to know you better. I think we don’t need these anymore. I’m going now. I’ll be back. Maybe we can talk then.” Nic backed up to the door and knocked; it opened, and he slipped through.

Connor fell back heavily on the cot. What was this guy talking about? More lies from a terrorist? But he didn’t look evil. Okay, maybe the eye patch looked like a pirate from the ancient holovids, but the guy was young and appealing and seemed sincere somehow.

I’m so naïve. Clearly they kept sending people in until they found someone I reacted to. It’s all part of the game.

Nic headed across the compound away from the makeshift cells used to hold prisoners. They were really just converted cabins with bars added to the windows.

He cursed again under his breath.

Connor.

Nic knew he shouldn’t have gone in there with the man. He could already see it through the camera. Connor was adorable. He had that naïve courage that just cut right through Nic, and his body was smokin’ hot. The way he pouted and tried to hold back his fear of what might happen just slayed Nic.

He went back and forth between two extremes. On the one hand, he wanted to fuck the innocence out of the young man and show him what the world was really like. On the other hand, he wanted to protect him from the universe. The

Democracation would have eaten this poor boy alive if he had ever gained the notice of anyone.

Of course, that problem was solved now. The rebels would question him for a few days and then relocate him to one of their internment camps.

The camps were basically glorified farms. Connor would be right at home. He hated sending anyone there, condemning them to an indefinite time away from family and friends, but he wouldn't kill prisoners in cold blood, and he couldn't return them to the Democracation just for them to fight him again. It sucked being a rebel leader.

The Democracation didn't deserve loyalty from anyone, much less someone as idealistic as Connor. Nic had seen firsthand just what the people in power would do.

CHAPTER 3

Connor woke from a fitful sleep to the sound of the door opening.

Nic entered the room. “Good morning, farm boy.”

Connor stood and faced his captor. “Connor Spaulding, Shuttle...”

“Yes, yes. We’ve been through all of that. Here’s breakfast.” Nic set a tray with some warm oatmeal and a glass of milk on the table. “The milk’s not farm-fresh like you’re used to, but it’ll have to do.”

“I’m not going to tell you anything.” He couldn’t. He didn’t know squat.

That didn’t matter. He wouldn’t tell, even if he did know something. The rebels killed his mom, and he’d taken an oath not to allow others to suffer her fate. He would stay strong, even if Nic did look hot with his tank top and bad guy eye patch.

Nic sat at the table, opposite the food. “Go ahead and eat. It’ll get cold.”

“Why do you care? I know you’re going to torture me. Can we get to it?” His stomach twisted inside.

Nic’s brows rose. “Why? Do you have some pressing engagement or perhaps some pain fetish I should be aware of?”

Pain fetish? This guy thought he wanted to be tortured? Was he insane? “What? No.”

Nic’s lips quirked up in an alluring smile. “Have you ever even had sex?”

Connor’s cheeks burned. He wanted to look away but forced himself to meet Nic’s gaze... or at least the bridge of his nose. “What? Why would you ask me that?”

Nic’s eye crinkled at the corners as a full smile bloomed on his face. “Cause you have that too-innocent-for-words look about you.”

“I’ve had sex.” Okay, so it was only a couple times with a guy back home.

The bastard looked like he was holding back laughter. “I bet you’re a total man-whore.”

The room seemed to spin a little. “What? No.”

Nic grinned as he shook his head. “You say *what* a lot, man-whore.”

“I’m not a man-whore.” Connor tried to think. Why was he arguing with the crazy terrorist? He should just stay silent. Why did he care if the man thought he was innocent or a whore? So what if Nic was gorgeous, the guy was just trying to get him talking, and... damn, it was working.

However, some part of his brain wanted this guy to find him attractive. His stomach twisted in knots. How could he be interested in someone who blew up civilians just to cause fear?

Nic’s lips pressed into a thin line but his eye still held a twinkle. “I’m not going to torture you. We don’t do that.”

Connor made sure his voice dripped with sarcasm. “Right. You’re just gonna let me stay in these luxury accommodations, give me three square meals a day, and then let me go back to my family?” He hardened his face. “No one ever returns when they’ve been captured.”

“True, no one does. We send them to a place. Lots of open land, everything they need.” Nic waved his hand as if gesturing to a field. Then slapped it lightly on the table. “No way to leave.”

Yeah, right. How could a struggling rebel movement do something like that? “So send me. I’m not telling you anything.”

Nic looked up at the ceiling then back at Connor. “So you say.”

“So I say.”

Nic stood and looked down at Connor, his hands clenched into fists. “You really are infuriating.” Then he left the room, the door slamming behind him.

What the hell was that?

Nic paced back and forth in his quarters. He'd seen tougher men. He'd seen hotter men. Why was he so hung up on this one? Something about Connor just reminded Nic about what life could be like, should be like. *We should all be able to have such faith and loyalty because the people in charge earn it. Not steal it through propaganda.*

In the normal course of events, Connor would never have left his planet and joined the army. But Nic had to lead his rebellion. Okay, so maybe he had a good reason, and maybe the rebellion would have happened anyway since he was one of several leaders.

I need to get laid. That was all this was. Just some pent up sexual need. There were a few candidates around who were more than willing, and had been pleasant in the past, but none of them seemed appealing now.

An image of Connor, his lean, hairless chest and his penetrating hazel eyes blazing with determination, filled Nic's mind. Suddenly, his dick woke up, ready for action.

He made the plan before he could talk himself out of it, grabbed his tablet and strode out across the quad to Connor's cell.

He knocked, although he knew how stupid that was, and then had the guard give him access.

Connor was doing pushups on the floor. Nic couldn't blame him. There wasn't much to do in the cell. When Connor stood, sweat dripped down the side of his face and dots of moisture spotted his lean chest. Nic wanted to lick them off.

He placed the pad on the table and sat, gesturing for Connor to do the same.

"The Democrations rule by controlling the flow of information. I'm going to show you what they hide."

Nic tapped an icon on the screen and swiped down. "Do you recognize this picture?"

“That’s Simon Valdovas, the first Democrator of the Democration of Planets.”

“Very good.” He swiped a few more buttons. “Who’s this?”

“Thaddeus Valdovas, the current Democrator, and the great, great, several times grandson of the first Democrator.”

“Interesting, right and wrong.” A few more taps. “These are all of the official portraits of the Democrator for the four hundred years the Democration has been in place. Notice how they all look the same.”

“Of course. One family has been elected to that seat since the beginning, and they’ve served us well.”

“No, look. Really, look. They aren’t similar. They’re identical. It’s the same person. If they had been offspring, some traits of their mothers would show through. But they don’t. This is the same man.”

“Are you on drugs? Look, sometimes their eye color changes.” Connor pointed to the current holder of the office.

Nic smiled tightly. “Not only does facial recognition software confirm this is the same person, but I’ve seen him in person, and his father. Never together, of course. They’re the same man. The eyes are a whole different story.”

Connor’s head shook. “You’re delusional.”

“The tech exists to prolong someone’s life indefinitely. It’s just very expensive and the person’s body gets more frail as it ages. So they solved that with organ transplants.”

Connor’s eyes widened. Nic could imagine they probably popped forward but he had no depth perception.

“What?”

“There’s that *what* again. Organ transplants. Really any part of his body that breaks down is seamlessly replaced by donors. These donors are not volunteers.”

Connor's hand waved through the air in a dismissive gesture. "You're nuts."

"Am I? Let me tell you how I lost my eye."

A snort escaped Connor. "Let me guess. It was some unprovoked terrorist attack that killed thousands of innocents. You should've lost more than your eye."

"Ah, yes, *we're* terrorists. *We've* never attacked a civilian target. Military only. The Democrator has done all of the *supposed* terrorist attacks and then blamed us." Nic knew he sounded acerbic, but he couldn't help himself. His enemy made lies seem true. "But that's not what happened to my eye."

"Yeah, okay, right. What did happen?"

Connor's tone was cutting, but his body language was a whole different matter. He was leaning forward almost reaching for the screen. *Maybe, I could show him the truth.*

"My father was a senator and an advisor to the Democrator. I spent a lot of my childhood in the Prime Home. I attended school there." Nic remembered the countless hours he had spent exploring the enormous residence.

Nic pinned Connor with a stare that made the pilot recoil as he continued. "When I was sixteen, the Democrator stopped by class, gave me his winning smile, and asked me to join him. I was stunned. What had I done to earn his special attention? I was also apprehensive. I knew Valdovas was a man not to be crossed, that my father's position could be at stake. So I went, my stomach flipping the whole time."

Connor looked fascinated. Was that hero-worship in his eyes? Of course, this would sound like a great honor to him.

"He brought me to his room and he tried to... to... I wanted to stop him. I said no, but that just made him angry and his guards made sure I had no choice."

The color drained from Connor's face and he wrapped his arms around his bare torso.

“When my father learned what had happened, he confronted Valdovas, who lied of course. He said that such an accusation required an apology. He needed a new eye. So he took mine.”

Connor stared at him, mouth open.

Nic couldn't decide if he wanted to smile at the shock on Connor's face or look away from the pity in his eyes.

“My father never believed him. He worked for months, in secret, gathering evidence of Valdovas's deception. But the Democrator has eyes everywhere. His forces came at night, took my fourteen-year-old sister, and killed my parents. I heard them and hid.”

Nic remembered that night too well. The sound of blaster fire, the smell of seared flesh, his sister's screams. His blood racing and his throat dry as he hid in the secret room behind his closet. Just a fun place to play. He wanted to go out and help his family, but he had no weapons.

“My sister was brought to the inner sanctum to be a member of the Democrator's private harem. He kept all the boys and girls that caught his fancy, loaning them out to favored advisors. I was desperate to find her... save her. I found others like me, and we banded together. They helped me look. We got the resources to get her out. By the time I found out where she was being held, I learned she'd committed suicide.”

Nic got right into Connor's personal space. He had to make Connor see the truth. “So tell me, is this the government you serve?”

The look in Connor's eyes was difficult to read. Fear, loathing, pity, but for what? “I...”

Too close. I'm too close. I care too much what this guy thinks. “Forget it.” Nic stood quickly and left the room before the tears started streaming down his face.

Connor watched Nic leave, frozen in place. On the one hand, the stuff he was spouting was total nonsense. *Wasn't it?* The Democrator didn't do stuff

like that. And the idea that the Democrator was, what, 400 years old? Was this Nic guy nuts?

On the other hand, his chest tightened as doubt filled him. He had never heard of so many members of the same family tree looking identical. How had he never noticed this before? Or that he had never seen the father and son together. It didn't bother him so much, that one man could rule, but that he lied about it. What other lies had he told?

Connor shook himself. He was still standing, staring at the door. He should rest and he needed to think, needed to make sense of all of this.

All his training told him he would be tortured if he were ever caught. That hadn't happened, at least not yet. In fact, nothing was as he expected. Where was the long hall with stone cells with bars? The one they explained was purposely made to look like it was on medieval Earth. The cold, dank, stone walls designed to create a feeling of hopelessness that would break prisoners faster. Had his superiors in the Democrator told him the truth? How could they have been so wrong?

And the look on Nic's face as he told that story about his eye, about his family, his sister. Connor's eyes stung. The man should be in the holovids because he looked... *wrecked*. Totally, completely, devastated. It only lasted a moment, but Connor had seen it and it looked so genuine.

Or was this all part of some ploy to get him to trust them and give them the intel they wanted? Another trick. He had attended several days training on how to fight psychological manipulation and this tactic seemed particularly devious to him.

He walked over to the wall, punched it, and then shook his hand as it throbbed in pain.

Manipulation was wasted on him. He knew nothing. He took a few deep breaths, trying to calm himself and focus.

How had Nic really lost his eye? If it had been in a fight, the scar was small enough that it fit under the eye patch. Did someone get a lucky shot?

The worst was this voice inside his head urging him to trust Nic, to believe him. The man seemed so honest and appealing.

I can't think with my little head. Sure Nic is hot and attractive, but he looks every inch the bad boy and I never go for that type. But he acts like this earnest, thoughtful, caring person. Fuck!

The thoughts spun around in Connor's head, raising questions but no answers.

CHAPTER 4

Nic stalked across the courtyard from Connor's cell to his room, glaring at anyone who made the mistake of approaching him, almost daring them to comment on the wetness on his face. Dan walked up to him, stopped short, eyes wide, then backed away slowly. Nic finally reached the door to his cabin. He let himself in, closed the door, turned and slid down it, wrapping his arms around his knees.

Who was questioning whom? Why was he spilling his guts to this Connor guy? The man barely spoke. Everything Nic had learned about him so far was from the files they had hacked from the Democraton mainframe. Granted, the Democraton had incredibly detailed records on every citizen. Much more invasive than anyone imagined, so he actually knew quite a bit about the man.

He knew how Connor had saved a friend when a barn caught on fire when he was twelve. He knew that Connor had two brothers and a sister. He knew Connor's mother had died when he was sixteen in a supposed terrorist attack while she was off-world marketing their planet's produce.

He even had Connor's grades, showing he was an above-average student. He had a recording of Connor's eighth grade piano recital and video of every sporting event he had ever participated in, his birth certificate, his height, weight, and Apgar score at birth, and a variety of other minutiae.

He also knew the Democraton had staged the attack that killed his mother, knowing how much more outraged people would be at the interruption of the food supply. No one noticed that the government always had plenty, even when those around them were on short rations.

Connor was brave, smart, and loyal. It had been a long time since Nic met anyone quite like him.

He stayed away for several days, trying to get over these inconvenient feelings. When his subordinates asked why they kept the prisoner around, and didn't send him to "the farm", Nic knew they were right. They never really expected to learn anything from Connor. He had been captured for his cargo

and nothing more. His interrogation should have been quick, a routine formality.

The whole situation made him furious. Connor was so smart. He should be able to grasp the truth. Nic had to show him.

He stormed up to the door and had the guard let him in.

Connor was on the floor stretching. “Do you finally get it?” Nic bit out. “The people you serve think you are less than nothing.”

Connor continued to lean over his right thigh. “All I see is someone who is trying to manipulate me.”

Nic wasn't sure what frustrated him more, the fact that Connor continued to stretch like nothing Nic had to say was important. Or the fact that he could see Connor's point of view. Connor believed he was an unprincipled terrorist who would do anything at any cost to get what he wanted. “I... I just want to show you that they are using you.”

Connor stood and stared right in Nic's eye. “Connor Spaulding, Shuttle Pilot.”

Nic's hands clenched into fists as his eye fell shut. He inhaled slowly, opened his eye, and got in Connor's face. “What's it gonna take to show you that your loyalty is misplaced?”

Connor stared at Nic, silent.

Nic was so close to Connor. He could feel the man's breath on his face. Their lips were inches apart. The urge to take those lips overcame reason. He closed the distance, pulled the man into his arms, and kissed him.

At first, Connor was stiff and unmoving, and then he seemed to melt into the kiss as the unspoken chemistry between them ignited. The answering response of Connor's body inflamed Nic. He needed more. Connor had the potential to be someone to him. Nic pulled the man close, but then he felt something solid pressing his chest.

Connor pushed hard on Nic's torso, forcing him back. "No, damn you. Connor Spaulding, Shuttle Pilot." His head dropped as he tried to control his ragged breathing.

Nic took a step back, panting. Connor's face was hard, his eyes narrowed, even as his lips were swollen from the kisses.

Revulsion filled Nic. *I'm no better than the Democrat, forcing myself on him.* He backed to the door and signaled to the guard that he was done.

It had taken every ounce of Connor's willpower to push the man away. Even now, his erection was not entirely gone. Memories of that kiss kept reviving it.

He shouldn't be attracted to Nic. He was the enemy. The evil terrorist who threatened the lives of the citizens of the Democration. For all he knew, Nic could even be the man responsible for his mother's death.

How could he reconcile that with the serious, sad, attractive, thoughtful man that was Nic? Connor tried to convince himself it was an act. The images Nic had shown were doctored, weren't they? The Democration couldn't have been the real culprits behind his mother's death.

How could he have been lied to his whole life? How could Nic be a terrorist? Someone somewhere was wrong and it tore Connor up inside.

The door to his room opened and two guards walked in, with Nic behind them, as if they were a shield. The guards made him stand with his arms behind his back and he was cuffed again. Was the torture going to begin? It had all been an act.

Nic didn't meet Connor's eyes. "We're letting you go. We'll take you to a planet where you will be found. We'll have to sedate you so that you won't know how long the journey was. We can't have you leading them back to us."

Connor's brows shot up and his heart started racing. "What? Why?" he said in a high-pitched squeak.

Nic seemed to find the ceiling fascinating. “Because... because that’s the way it’s going to be.”

Connor’s mind spun in turmoil. It was a trick. Why would they let him go? Why did some part of him want to stay? It all came down to Nic.

“What about my shuttle? My cargo?”

“I’m afraid we’re going to have to keep that. We need it for our cause.”

He opened his mouth to speak, not completely sure what he was going to say, but it was too late. The prickly, cool feeling from a spray syringe penetrated his skin. His eyes closed as sleep claimed him.

CHAPTER 5

Connor came awake wrapped in a warm sheet and blanket. His eyes blinked open. He lay in a large bed, its headboard centered on one wall of the room. The blanket, the walls, and the carpet were all a bland shade of beige. A still life of pale flowers in a vase adorned the wall to his right. A holo-vid plate stood on the faux-wood dresser across from him.

Clouds drifted through his mind. Connor struggled to focus, and realized he must be in a hotel or inn.

He spoke to the air. "Lights on."

The two bedside lamps flickered to life as Connor pulled himself into a sitting position against the headboard.

How did I get here? Was I drugged?

His memory returned slowly. Capture, questioning, spray syringe.

Nic.

Where was he?

In the bathroom, he splashed cold water on his face. He found a room key fob by the bed and pocketed it before leaving in search of answers. In the hotel lobby, he found an information terminal near the concierge desk. He walked up to it and started scrolling through local attractions. An advertisement for Pelenda beach came up on the holo-vid, pure white sand stretching off into the distance and azure skies.

The next advertisement was for a children's camp program that promised an underwater excursion using child-safe breathers. The kids would get to swim with various sea creatures while their parents could go enjoy the rest of the Malamy-Pre resort.

Connor stepped outside the hotel into bright sunshine. A hint of salt filled his nostrils, and in the distance he heard waves crashing against a shore. A sign pointed the way to Felek Beach.

There had been bright green grass and oak trees outside the window of his cell. This place had white sand and palm trees.

A bungalow across the way was labeled *Tourist Information*. He headed toward the bungalow in a daze, trying to process all that had just happened to him. Capture, fear of torture, and a scorching kiss, then release to where? He thought the name Felek Beach sounded familiar. Where was he?

The gift shop in the bungalow brought clarity. There was a section for clothes with the logo of Mirandian Pre, a resort planet he had heard of but never dreamed of being able to visit. A second section had items labeled with the name Amendor-Mirandian, the name of a medium sized island on Mirandian-Pre.

He knew the where, but not the how. He headed back to his room almost on autopilot. His mind refused to do more than put one foot in front of the other. Other than the key fob, his pockets were empty. The only thing that kept him moving was a driving need to contact his superiors in the Democration.

In his room, he picked up the communication unit, an old-fashioned handset that he had to hold up to his ear, and asked to be connected with the local Democration offices.

A bored female voice answered, "Office of the Democration, Mirandian-Pre division, how may I direct your call."

"I'm Connor Spaulding, a Shuttle Pilot assigned to the Fifth-Detan battalion and I need assistance contacting my superiors."

"Excuse me?"

Connor sighed. "I'm Connor Spaulding, a Shuttle Pilot assigned to the Fifth-Detan battalion. I have been separated from my assignment and I need to contact my superiors."

"Is this a prank call?"

"No ma'am. I would never do such a thing. Can you please help me get in contact with my superiors?"

"Please hold."

A discordant set of soft notes shot from the unit, while Connor waited. He was starting to think he should earn a PhD in waiting. His stomach tied in knots. What was taking so long? His request was simple and made according to protocol. Wouldn't they want to get him back to his battalion? He was eager to report what had occurred and to be reassured that he had done the right thing, because right now his mind was littered with doubts that had a name—Nic.

A new, crisp voice came through the receiver. "Shuttle Pilot Spaulding, wait outside the hotel, a car will be there momentarily to pick you up."

The car arrived, and a man in a dark suit with sunglasses and a Democration badge motioned for him to get in. He slid in to the back seat to find another dark-suited man frowning at him.

Goose bumps travelled down Connor's back. "Where are you taking me?"

Neither man responded. They just drove until he arrived at a nearby shuttle port. The sun beat down on his neck and face as they escorted him to a security station.

"What's going on?"

One of the men gestured inside a holding cell. "Please wait in here."

He was away from the rebels. He should be happy, but instead he found his skin was crawling. After yet another eternity, he was escorted to the military section of the port and taken out to a waiting shuttle. Longing rose up in him. This was the same model he flew. He could have been the pilot.

Two heavily armed men debarked the shuttle and moved quickly toward him. "Come with us, sir."

Before he could join them, one of the men grabbed his arm, pushing him toward the open hatch.

That made no sense. He glanced at the stern expressions of his escorts—no, not escorts he realized with a sickening lurch, but guards.

"Hey, I'm on your side," he said as he tried to yank his arm free.

It did no good. “That has yet to be determined,” said the guard, leveling a pistol at him.

As they pushed him through the ship, he passed through a few security checkpoints in the area that would have been the cargo bay in his shuttle and was led into a hall with holding cells. They led him to an empty cell, and shoved him inside. The cell was standard Democration issue. He had never expected to be inside one, but he recognized the stark, utilitarian lines. No tables, no chairs, no ports to the outside. Three pristine steel walls plus a fourth transparent barrier held him inside. He had better accommodations with the rebels.

He sat on the cot until a major with a regulation haircut and a crisp, dress Democration uniform arrived. The officer stopped in front of the invisible wall.

Connor leapt to his feet and came to attention, trying not to think about the basic black shirt and pants that the rebels had dressed him in. Maybe he should have shaved and spruced up a bit, but he had nothing.

Squaring his body into a perfect military pose, every line ramrod straight, the officer looked at Connor with narrowed eyes. “Shuttle Pilot Connor Spaulding?”

“Yes, Sir.” Connor resisted the urge to duck his head and look away. He had done his duty and had nothing to be ashamed of, but the man facing him looked angry.

The major locked eyes with Connor. “You have been missing for several weeks. Where have you been?” he growled out.

Connor’s mouth went dry and he swished his tongue trying to get enough moisture to speak. Why was he more intimidated now than when he was a prisoner of the enemy? “I was a prisoner of the rebellion.”

The man scoffed. “Are you telling me that you escaped from them?”

“No.” Connor paused. Why was this guy so hostile? He was telling the truth. “They let me go.”

“That’s impossible. The rebels don’t free prisoners.”

“I don’t understand it myself.” Connor shook his head. “I think Nic decided to let me go.”

“Nic? Nickolai Maltisse?”

“Yes, Sir. He tried to convince me that the rebels weren’t responsible for the atrocities. When I wouldn’t budge, he drugged me, and I wound up here.”

“Maltisse is one of the cruelest men in the rebellion. He has a personal vendetta against the Democrator. He would never have just let you go.”

The questions went on for hours. He was allowed no food, no water, no sleep. Did they think he was a rebel? He answered every question fully and held nothing back. He described the room where he had been held and the people he saw.

He was hungry and exhausted. How could his own people treat him this way? “What do you want me to say? I’ve told you everything.”

A man in a lieutenant’s uniform approached the major and whispered something in his ear.

“Understood.”

Hungry, he was given meager rations of food, basically bread and water. Then, he was hyposprayed into a deep sleep.

Connor was awakened by two large men. They took custody of him and brought him to a group shower room, forcefully scrubbing him from head to toe. They yanked his head back by his hair to wash his face. He spluttered as water kept filling his mouth and his eyes stung from the abrasive soap.

Connor was screaming inside. He wanted to fight, to run, but these were his people. Still his body instinctively twisted in their grasp, earning him a wrenched arm. He tried to keep his tone even, but his voice broke as he asked, “Why are you doing this?”

Neither of the goons answered.

He was strapped into a chair where his hair was trimmed and styled, and they shaved the beard he had started to grow. His face burned where the razor ran over his skin.

“Please, I’ll cooperate.”

Silence again as he was unstrapped from the chair and shoved into a formal suit.

Resentment rose in Connor. This was his reward for loyalty?

Then he was escorted to a shuttle and strapped into a seat. There were no windows in the compartment so he could not see where he was being taken, but he felt the pull of a planet’s gravity as the shuttle shuddered in a landing sequence.

After exiting the shuttle, he rode in a limousine through a large city. At first, he was unsure where he was, but looking out the window he soon saw the famous landmarks: Victory Way, the Democrator Founding Monument (a gigantic statue of the first Democrator). He was on DiPurna, the capital planet of the Democrator. *Why would they bring me here?*

He passed several security checkpoints. No one spoke to him. He arrived at the residence of the Democrator, the Prime Home.

Holy shit!

The word *home* always made Connor think of the small, humble houses on his planet, but the Prime Home was neither small nor humble. The five-story brick structure resembled a castle from the holovids. It was surrounded by a large stone courtyard. The main entrance was surrounded by a two-story white arch and flanked by two uniformed soldiers.

They escorted Connor inside, through several security checkpoints. Each time Connor was required to identify himself, his trepidation grew, his chest tightened, and his mouth went dry.

One corridor he was led down was lined with portraits of each of the elected Democrators since the beginning of the Democrator, their too-similar faces staring down at him. Finally, he was led into an ornate antechamber and

escorted into a very famous room, the Democrator's office chamber, the Prime Office.

The man himself sat behind a large, gleaming hardwood desk. Guards flanked him.

Connor's mouth flew open as he tried to pull himself into a proper attention, awe at being in the presence of the great man filling him.

A good-looking man, Democrator Thaddeus Valdovas projected a casual air with the way his brown hair was brushed back, but Connor suspected it was a calculated effect. He had a bit of stubble, just like in his Vid appearances—it always seemed to say he was so busy working for the people that he didn't have time to shave properly.

Most striking was his single blue eye versus his single brown eye. Connor took a moment to study the brown one. It had the same golden starburst pattern as Nic's left eye. A small gasp escaped him as his stomach sank.

Valdovas stood and moved around the desk to circle Connor, like a predator stalking his prey, or sizing up an opponent. Connor stood stock-still at attention. This was his supreme commander, the man to whom he owed all his loyalty as the living embodiment of the Democration.

But Nic's words kept going through his mind. Was the man really the same one that had been elected since the Democration began? He'd be hundreds of years old.

“Connor Spaulding. Shuttle Pilot. Taken captive by Nickolai Maltisse and his rebels. Held for ten days, fed, clothed, drugged and gently put to bed to sleep off his hangover on Mirandian-Pre.” The Democrator's voice was low. Dangerous, and would be almost seductive if it weren't so creepy.

Connor's eyes widened and a trickle of sweat ran down his neck. “I was held prisoner.”

“You're the only soldier ever to have been released by our enemy. Explain yourself.”

Not the only one. High level prisoners returned. “Explain myself how? You already know all the details—that’s what happened.”

Valdovas shook his head. “That’s what happened. And this doesn’t strike you as odd?”

Connor struggled to control his breathing and his voice came out higher than normal. “Sir. I can only tell you what I know. Nic didn’t give me a reason.”

Valdovas continued to circle Connor. “Nic didn’t give you a reason? And how is Nic? I haven’t seen him in years.”

Connor blanched, his stomach threatening to spill its contents. Nic’s story about his treatment at this man’s hand swirled through his mind.

“What did he tell you?”

Connor struggled to get the words out, hoping for a denial from Valdovas. “Lots of stuff, lies. He said you took his eye.”

Valdovas stopped right in front of Connor, focused on his eyes, and leaned right into his personal space. “Actually, I did.”

Connor was speechless. He stared at Valdovas while his heart hammered in his chest.

Valdovas smirked. “His father, former Senator Maltisse, was a traitor. It was part of his punishment. I had injured an eye and needed a donor. This,” Valdovas said pointing to his eye, “seemed fitting.”

Connor’s brain whirled into overdrive. *Nic told me and I didn’t believe him. What else was Nic right about?*

The Democrat stepped back, crossing his arms over his chest. “You seem very familiar with Nickolai Maltisse. One of the rebellion ring-leaders, a terrorist, a man known for his cruelty and depravity. He lied to you. Brainwashed you. Pulled you into his insane, violent worldview, turned you over to his cause, and sent you here to infiltrate Democration forces!” Valdovas’s face was hard. His eyebrows drew down over the mismatched orbs.

“No! I...”

The Democrator’s brows shot up and his head tilted to the side. “No? You don’t think so?”

“Sir, I... I only ever told him my name and rank, as protocol dictates. I love the Democrator and everything it stands for.”

Valdovas took a step toward Connor. “I know. My advisors believe you’re a spy, but I don’t see it. I see something else in those piercing hazel eyes.” He reached out and ran a finger down Connor’s cheek. “I see loyalty.” Valdovas spun abruptly and addressed the two silent goons behind his desk. “Bring him to my chambers.” He turned and swept out of the room.

CHAPTER 6

Connor was led down halls and up stairs until he arrived at a private bedchamber. He had never seen or imagined a room like this. It was bigger than the shuttle he flew and decorated with gold accents. To one side was a platform with a huge four poster bed that looked coated in gold and rich maroon draperies hung from the canopy frame.

A *humongous* fireplace, big enough to stand in, dominated the wall on the other side of the room. It was surrounded by an ornately carved gold mantel. A fire crackled in the grate, filling the room with the aroma of wood smoke, and made the gold in the room glint and waver. A formal sitting area was arranged with the fireplace as a focal point.

Murals of historical moments from the Democration decorated the upper part of the wall. One was the signing of the Articles of Democration. Simon Valdovas stood front and center, pen poised over the document. Another was of Philip Valdovas, setting foot on Clenton to accept that planet's surrender. A third was of Bartholomew Valdovas commanding the battleship *Righteous Vengeance* during the battle to convince the Emperor of the PelovianSky that democracy was a superior form of government. After that battle, all six planets in the Empire signed on to be member worlds of the Democration.

Looking at the various murals of the Democration, Connor was reminded of Nic's accusation that this was all one man. The murals had clearly been painted by different artists, but each one highlighted the man in a glowing light. If it was one man, he slept under the paintings of all of his past triumphs.

One area where a mural should have been had been painted white, as if primed and ready for a new frieze of their exalted leader.

Connor walked over to a velvet upholstered couch by the fire, his footsteps echoing on the tile floor. He sat primly on the cushioned seat, wondering why he was here.

A side door opened and the man himself entered. He had changed into a white bathrobe with the flag of the Democration on the lapel. His hair was slicked back as if he had just left the shower.

Connor leapt to his feet, stood at attention, and watched the man approach. His heart sped like a racehorse.

Valdovas sauntered over to where Connor stood and trained both his blue and brown eye on Connor. His voice could have been called seductive if Connor hadn't heard the hint of mockery in it. "Well, it's time to show me your loyalty."

"Yes, Sir."

Valdovas reached up and ran his fingers through Connor's short brown hair, then cupped his hand around the back of Connor's head and pulled him in for a bruising kiss.

Connor was shocked enough that he let himself be pulled forward. He could smell the clean scent of soap and taste a hint of mint. He could feel the Democrator's stubble rubbing his face.

One thought shot through his mind. *This is wrong*. He didn't want this man. What was he going to do? This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

He reached up and pushed away, causing Valdovas to stumble back, eyes flying open wide.

The smile the Democrator gave him was at once winning and almost feral. "Come on, don't be like that. I'm honoring your commitment to me and the Democration."

"I am committed to the Democration, but I don't feel that way about you. Don't you have a wife?"

"Sure I do. She doesn't mind if I indulge in some harmless recreation."

"I'm not that kind of guy."

"Excuse me?" Valdovas tone was shocked but something was off in his body language. "Do you mean to say you would betray the Democration?"

Connor's stomach clenched and the bile rose. "Being loyal to the Democrations doesn't mean I'm gonna have sex with you."

"Of course, it does. I *am* the Democrations."

"No, you're the elected Democrat. Anyone can get elected."

The Democrat laughed. "You're adorable. I can see why little Nic was taken with you."

Connor wanted to vomit. What if the things Nic said were true? He was in serious danger here. He backed up a step.

"I want you. What I want, I get. It's that simple." Valdovas crooked a finger. "So come here and kiss me."

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"I could force you, but it's more fun to convince you. I'm sending you to prison, to await execution. Most of my advisors will be delighted. None of them trust you. If you change your mind, just let the guard know. Otherwise, you'll get to choose between death by firing squad or lethal injection in two days. Later."

Valdovas tapped a button on his wrist. Two guards entered the room and hustled Connor out of the chamber, as the man turned and walked away.

They led him through the halls to a back elevator that looked barely fit for use, ready to break down at any moment. Connor tried to make sense of what just happened. He was in deep trouble, but at the same time, he was surprised Valdovas hadn't just taken what he wanted. Goose bumps rose on his arms and the back of his neck as his chest tightened, while he considered his options.

They rode down, deep into the bowels of the Prime Home. The door opened into a dank hallway. His skin shook with the chill. This was what he had been told to expect from the rebels—stone cells with old-fashioned bars

lining the walls. He realized with a start that it was this very hall his instructors had shown him as belonging to the rebels. Another lie.

They stripped him naked and pushed him into a cold cell. The floor and walls were made of rough-hewn granite. The ceiling was covered in stone as well, but a few pieces had fallen away to expose dull steel. The room reeked of blood, sweat, and urine.

He paced and rubbed his arms trying to keep warm. What else had Nic said? Was it all true? He had followed his training and instead of being welcomed back, he was given a devil's bargain.

Could he bring himself to have sex for his life? The Democrator was older than him, in his forties or perhaps much older—in his *four hundreds*. He could get through that.

He pictured himself on Valdovas bed, on hands and knees, the man thrusting into him, and he shuddered. *No, this is wrong. I don't want this. I'd rather die.*

He shook himself. *Would I really rather die?*

He knew what was holding him back.

Nic.

Memories of Nic's lips on his. The look on Nic's face when he pushed the man away. The fact that Nic let him go. Nic was a leader in the rebellion, but did not abuse those around him, use them, even his prisoners.

His instincts had said to trust Nic and he had denied them. Would he pay a horrible price for his mistake?

Death was final. Could he bring himself to survive this experience and maybe seek out Nic when he was free? But some instinct told him the Democrator would never free him. If he did this, then the man more than commanded his loyalty, he owned him.

What should he do?

While he pondered his dilemma, he explored his cell to see if there was any way out.

Connor awoke from a fitful sleep on the hard surface of the cot to a strange scraping noise above him.

A whisper shot down, “Connor?”

The sound was familiar. One he had been thinking of for hours. “Nic?”

A hatch opened in the ceiling, and a pair of shorts dropped down, along with the end of a rope.

“Get dressed and grab on.”

Connor slipped on the shorts, grabbed the rope, and looped it around his waist. The scratchy feel of hemp was abrasive in his hands. He was pulled into the air, swinging like a pendulum although the motion was jerky. When he reached the narrow opening in the ceiling, a hand reached out and connected with his arm, pulling him the rest of the way into the narrow vent.

The vent was darker than space, except for a light shining from Nic’s forehead. His rescuer slipped a band holding a light around his head as well.

A tight grin split Nic’s face. He started to reach for Connor but stopped himself. “This palace is littered with secret passageways, and has been renovated so many times that sometimes they don’t realize the security holes.”

“How did you know about them?”

“My father was a senator. I played here as a child. I got into lots of mischief.”

The two crawled along single file. There was no room for them to stand or go side-by-side. Connor’s bare knees were soon scraped raw.

“Why did you come?”

“I screwed up. I should’ve known our beloved Democracy would assume you were a traitor for being captured by me. I couldn’t ask anyone else to risk themselves for my mistake and I couldn’t let you die.”

“Why?”

“Why do you think? Why do you think I let you go?” When Connor didn’t answer, Nic spoke, “No more talking. These are secret, but that doesn’t mean they’re sound-proof.”

The path they took was not straightforward and Connor had to trust that Nic knew the way. They turned at some junctions and went straight at others.

“This passage opening is over a vehicle hangar. I have a car there with clothes for you. We’ll take it to a waiting spacecraft.”

Nic took a tool from his belt and twisted it in a notch in the metal. A panel slid with a scraping sound. Nic took another tool and extended it down to see if the coast was clear. He gasped. “Shit, I’m sorry.” Nic handed the viewing tool to Connor letting him see what awaited them.

There were five men stationed in a circle right beneath them, with guns pointed at the opening. Another ten men surrounded those, and others were trained along the passage they had just crawled through. Several suspicious packages were attached to the ceiling.

Well out of reach, the Democrator stood with two guards flanking him.

“You can both come out now,” Valdovas announced. “We have this entire area covered with directional explosives. We’ll blow up the tunnel with you in it if you don’t surrender.”

Nic dropped through first, his hands in the air, and Connor followed.

Valdovas’s face lit with a huge smile. He walked over to Connor and clapped him on the back. “Well done, Shuttle Pilot Spaulding. I knew my good friend Nic well enough to know that if he cared sufficiently to let you go, he wouldn’t let you die. Or at least he would try not to. You have managed to capture one of the ringleaders of the rebellion. Thank you for pretending to be in prison.”

Connor felt the bile rise inside him. He had been used to capture Nic. Nic who wouldn’t leave him to die.

“I... I didn’t do that. Nic, you have to believe me. He said I had to... to... or die.”

Valdovas’s grin never wavered. “That still stands, submit to me or die.”

The Democrator was a lie. The people were manipulated by one crafty, evil, old son-of-a-bitch. Everything Nic said had been true. His instincts had said here was a man he could trust, a man who deserved his loyalty and maybe more—maybe his heart. Nic *had* come back for him, and that made his choice an easy one.

“I choose death, then.”

“No, Connor,” Nic urged. “Live.”

“Nic, I can’t do what he wants. I won’t.”

The two men were cuffed and dragged back to the cells. Connor was right back where he started from, weld lines now sealing his would-be escape route.

Nic was stripped and placed in the cell across from him. The metal entrance clanged and echoed as the guards closed and locked it.

The two men faced each other through the bars. Connor’s eyes travelled up and down Nic’s bare form and then he looked away, his face heating.

When he raised his eyes again, Nic looked like he was about to speak, but a holoimage of the Democrator was broadcast in front of them. He gave a speech about how Nickolai Maltisse had been caught, and he and the traitor, Connor Spaulding, had been sentenced to death.

CHAPTER 7

Connor wanted to say something to Nic, apologize, but just as he started to speak they hauled Nic away.

Connor waited, again. Would he ever see Nic again or were they just going to execute him? He tried to rest and conserve his energy but the creatures in his stomach—which certainly were a hell of a lot nastier than butterflies—propelled him up to pace.

Hours later, two guards dragged a panting Nic between them and threw him into the cell where he collapsed in a heap.

Connor watched the guards head off down the hall and then ran for the bars, reaching out for Nic even though his cell was too far. “What happened?”

Nic’s right brow rose above the eye patch. “They questioned me.”

Connor eyed Nic up and down, elated that he was still alive, and tormented at the pain showing in every line of his body. He searched Nic’s bare form for any injuries that could cause such agony, but saw nothing that could account for the quivering flesh. Seeing such a magnificent figure in such pain brought tears to his eyes. “You look like you feel awful, but there are no marks.”

Nic pulled himself to sit up leaning against the bars. “No, they can inflict pain without leaving any signs. Besides, their hearts weren’t in it. They knew I had nothing to tell.”

“What do you mean?”

“Before I came here, I had a ForgetMe.”

“Forget me?”

Nic’s eye softened. “You really did just fall off the turnip truck. ForgetMe is a procedure where critical memories are downloaded and erased from your brain. They are safe... somewhere. Waiting for me. It was surgical, so I remember my position in the rebels but don’t know any information like who the others are or how to find them.”

Connor looked away for a moment, his chest tightening. “You remember me?”

Nic sighed and smiled. “Yes, of course.”

The words poured out of Connor. “I’m so sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?”

Connor gestured to the cells with his hand palm up. “Why did you come for me?”

“I couldn’t let you die. I never should have sent you back.”

“Why did you?”

“I... I was starting to like you. I knew what you had been told about us. I knew you were terrified, but you stood firm, loyal. I didn’t agree with what you were loyal to, but I respected who you were.” Nic gripped the bars that held him in his cage. “I thought I had a vibe... that maybe you were interested too. So I kissed you, but you pushed me away and I realized I had become like the man I hated, forcing myself on others. I couldn’t be that.”

Connor leaned against the bars. He knew it was stupid but he wanted to be as close to Nic as he could. “You aren’t. I... I was interested.”

“Kind of you to say, but don’t.”

“No, I was, but I was also confused. I thought it was another trick, or I don’t know...”

The words hung in the air between them.

“And now?”

“You were right. About everything. He’s a monster and I’m interested in you. You weren’t what I expected at all. I wish you were safe.” The enormity of what he just declared weighed on him, pushing him down to sit on the cold concrete floor. He and Nic could have shared something special, but now it was too late. They were going to die.

Nic directed his gaze at Connor. “I should have sent you to the farm with the others. You would have been safe there. You would have hated me, but

you would have been alive and well. But I... I couldn't. Not you, but I should have known better. Known they wouldn't have believed you and let you go back to your life. He wanted you, didn't he?"

Connor's face heated. "Yes. But I couldn't. I... you..."

Breathing out hard, Nic's eye narrowed. "So he used you instead. To get to me. He's a crafty bastard."

Connor took a deep breath and looked up at Nic, willing him to see the caring, the regret for what might have been. "I wish we could go back to that kiss. I wish I had thrown my arms around you and never let you go."

Nic looked directly into Connor's eyes. "You have to promise me something."

Connor pulled back an inch from the bars and consciously forced himself to breathe. Nic looked so serious. "What?"

"When they ask, choose the lethal injection. Not the firing squad. Promise."

Confusion filled Connor. "Why?"

His face softening, and his eye wide, pleading, "Just promise."

"Not until you tell me why."

"They send the bodies back, to the families, or sometimes the rebels. The injection is quick and painless, the bodies are at peace. The firing squads aren't that accurate. Before the, quote, *live broadcast*, unquote, they dub the feed to make it look like the kill-shot was humane and caused instant death, but it doesn't work that way. The victims bleed out slow and their bodies are riddled with holes. Just do what I say, for once. Promise me."

Connor considered. He wasn't a coward. He deserved the pain for what he had done to Nic, but here he was doing it again. He had to trust Nic. "I promise." The least he could do was keep the promise.

They spent the night talking.

Nic's eye was starting to droop and Connor was drifting off when the guards arrived, dressed them in orange jumpsuits, and dragged them out into the blinding morning sunlight in an inner courtyard of the Prime Home.

The courtyard was empty except for two tables attended by a female in a white lab coat, the firing squad, and strategically placed cameras, carefully aligned so they weren't in the picture. Like a set for a holovid.

The Democrator stood on a balcony. "Wondering where the crowd is? We'll dub that in later. We don't need witnesses if we have to fix the tape. Can't have you making some noble speech or anything." The man turned his attention to Nic. "I might have let you both live. You are still awfully pretty, Nic, in spite of your deformity," he said, tapping his brown eye. "But the ForgetMe was irritating, so, time to die."

A man in a military uniform came out and read the charges and the sentence before addressing Nic first. "Nickolai Maltisse, how do you choose to die?"

"Lethal injection."

Valdovas snorted. "Coward."

"Connor Spaulding, how do you choose to die?"

"Lethal injection."

The two men were led to the tables. Connor's heart pounded and his head felt light. The world seemed tilted somehow as he moved onto the table and was strapped down. He got one last glance of Nic, his head held high in defiance. He hoped he looked half as brave.

Tubes were connected to each arm, as a tear streamed down his face. Everything he believed was a lie and he had no chance to change anything.

"Commence."

"See you on the other side, Connor," Nic called out.

The other side. Connor wondered if he would be welcomed in the afterlife. Surely Nic would. "I'm sorry, Nic."

“I know.”

His arm felt cold as the liquid started flowing into his right arm. Then the one on his left felt warm, hot, almost burning. Then numb, so numb, cold, hot, numb, tired, sleep...

CHAPTER 8

Connor's eyes slid open to a stinging in his neck. He tried to reach up to slap the bug, but his arms were restrained.

"We have to hurry." A woman's voice Connor didn't recognize whispered.

"It worked." Nic's voice.

Nic. It's Nic. Connor asked the first question that popped into his head. "Am I dead?"

The woman came closer. "No, Connor, you're very much alive."

Chilled fingers brushed his wrists as the straps came undone and the blood rushed to his newly freed hands. Connor moaned. "Where are we? How?"

He looked up at the woman. She wore a white lab coat and had short brown hair streaked with blonde. Her face was serious but her eyes were soft. He recognized the woman now. She was the one that operated the lethal injection.

His would-be executioner spoke. "You're in the morgue in the basement of the Prime Home. Put these on, we need to hurry."

His heavy limbs moved sluggishly as he groaned, removing his one piece outfit and pulling on a pair of nondescript pants and a T-shirt. Nic moved with equal slowness, a grimace on his face as he pulled a shirt over his head.

"It'll pass. It's the drugs. Moving will help." She led them out a door and through a tunnel. They climbed a ladder and removed a manhole cover. When they climbed out, a vehicle was waiting for them. They ducked inside and she drove, Nic taking the other front seat. The car ride took hours as they left the city and headed through the suburbs of the capital of the Democration, snacking on food that had been stashed for them.

Connor wanted to reach into the front seat and do something. Maybe hold Nic's hand or rest his head on Nic's shoulder. Something, but his head was

still foggy from the drugs and he felt shy around this new person. “Could someone explain to me what just happened?”

“I’m Dr. Amanda Renault. My title is personal physician to the Democrat, but my role, more often than not, is executioner. What he doesn’t know is that I’m a rebel. I feed them information.”

Nic looked over his shoulder at Connor. “Amanda cooked up a scheme to switch the drugs a while ago. I contacted her right before I came to get you, just in case.”

“The drugs I gave you mimic death but are reversible. After I declared you dead, I brought you to the morgue and revived you.”

Nic turned to face her. He looked so concerned. “Amanda, they are going to figure out what happened. You have to come with us.”

Did Nic have feelings for her? Connor wanted to question him, talk to him, but not in front of her.

She shook her head. “No, they won’t. I’ve planned for this for a long time. They’ll never know. I already have two bodies set up to look like yours.”

Nic reached a hand for her shoulder. “Still, if they check the DNA?”

“They won’t. I’m trusted, and because of that I can do more good here and you know it. I appreciate the risks—they’re mine to take.”

After four hours of driving, they arrived at a space port big enough for local shuttles only. Amanda handed them false papers and bid them farewell, driving away as they prepared to board a craft heading to one of the large orbiting space stations.

They kept their heads down as they began a series of short hops—space station to a planet jumper to another planet jumper—hoping this would elude any pursuit. The news vids showed their “executions” over and over.

Connor’s eyes were glued to the holo vid in sick fascination. He watched the fake roaring crowd, screaming for their end. It conveniently drowned out any words they spoke so that reporters could “quote” them instead. He was

personally attributed with having said that he defied the Democrator for money and power.

Then the scene cut to the Democrator on his balcony. He looked directly at the camera, distinguished with his perfectly coiffed hair, his stylish Democrator uniform, and his mismatched eyes. “Now here is a message for the rebels. You know who you are. We know you’re out there. We will find you and you will be destroyed.”

Connor’s stomach sank as a panic filled him. It felt like the Democrator was looking right at him. Speaking right to him, but Dr. Renault had assured them she had it covered.

Then they showed him being strapped to the table. He imagined his father, his brothers and sisters watching this. Would they believe the lies that he was a self-serving bastard? Would they be sickened to watch him die?

He watched as his eyes fell shut and his breathing stilled. Dr. Renault pronounced him dead.

It had all been a show.

Arriving on KendleNar, a planet that had no near neighbors, they drove into the countryside and found a ship waiting, the *Veritas*.

Nic shook the hand of a man waiting on the boarding ramp. “Captain Nigel Bromwich, meet Connor Spaulding. Nigel is the commanding officer of the *Veritas*.”

Bromwich shook Connor’s hand. “Commander Maltisse, we sure are glad you got out okay.”

Nic chuckled. “Thanks, Nige. Why so formal?”

The Captain grinned and reached up to pat Nic on the back. “Sorry, Nic. I’m just relieved you’re okay.”

Nic took the offered hand and gripped it. “It’s good to be among friends.”

“The other leaders are waiting for you to conference in. Please come with me.”

Nic turned to Connor. “Will you be all right on your own for a bit?”

Connor quivered inside. He didn’t want to be separated from Nic. He wanted to go somewhere private with him, but he knew that was selfish. Nic had responsibilities. “I should be.”

Captain Bromwich signaled to a crew member standing inside the hatch. “Show our guest to some quarters.”

Connor was led to a lift and rode up several levels before he was brought to quarters. There wasn’t much for him to do so he turned on the Holoivid.

He watched a few programs, and started to see the subtle propaganda placements in each. He never would have noticed how every program reinforced that one should be loyal to the Democrator.

A news program came on, showing the latest sports scores and other mundane items. He was relieved that at last, his execution was old news.

He woke from a doze and realized he had fallen asleep with the Holoivid still running. Another news segment was playing. At first, Connor didn’t pay much attention until a name caught his eye.

The home of Dr. Amanda Renault, personal physician to the Democrator, had been broken into in the middle of the night. The place had been ransacked and her body had been found brutally beaten and tortured. Written in her blood on the wall was a message, “For Nickolai Maltisse.”

Connor ran to the bathroom just in time to vomit in the toilet. Renault had been caught and the rebels had been blamed. He already believed Nic about what the Democrator did, but this felt more personal, and he was sure it meant they knew he and Nic were alive.

She had died to save his life. A shiver passed through him. How would he live with her death on his conscience? He knew he had to find a way to make her sacrifice worthwhile.

He turned and left the bathroom to see if he could learn any more information from the Holoivid.

Democrator Valdovas entered the image. “This is a sad day for the Democration. I knew Amanda personally, and she will be missed. She was irreplaceable. It seems Nickolai Maltisse has reached out from the grave and continues to trouble our fair people. We will find those who act in his name. We will stop this rebellion so that our good citizens can live in peace.”

Connor understood the message. Valdovas was looking for them, and he wouldn’t stop.

Rushing into the hall, Connor needed to find Nic. He looked right and left, trying to decide which way to search first. He went right and crossed a hallway intersection. He looked down that hall and saw a crewman of the *Veritas*.

“Can I help you?”

“I need to find Nic, uh, Commander Maltisse.”

The crewman pulled out a communicator and called the bridge. Captain Bromwich told the man to lead Connor to Nic’s quarters.

Connor’s heart raced, but the moment Nic’s door slid open, his breathing slowed. “Did you hear?”

Nic’s lips curled up in a half-smile. “I’ve heard lots of things.”

“Dr. Renault was killed.”

Nic motioned Connor inside, called up the newscast, and watched the report, a frown marring his face.

Connor turned to face Nic. “She died for us.”

Nic’s eye seemed to lose focus, his voice came from deep inside. “I told her to come with us but she wouldn’t listen. She was...”

A surge of fear shot through Connor. “What? Was she someone to you?”

Focusing again on Connor, Nic reached out and put a hand on his shoulder. “Connor. She was a stubborn woman. We were friends, nothing more. She wasn’t my type.”

Breathe. Connor inhaled. “No?”

“No. Wrong fiddly bits.”

“Fiddly bits?”

“At least, you’re not saying *what?*”

Connor wanted to smile at that and play the game, but there was more he had to say. “The Democrator knows we’re alive. He’s after us.”

“I know.” Nic squeezed Connor’s shoulder. “It’s not new for me. I’ve had a target on my back for a long time now. I’m sorry this happened to you. I know you didn’t choose it.”

“You didn’t choose it, either. You didn’t choose what happened to you.”

Every line of Nic’s body hardened as he pulled his arm away and wrapped it around his midriff. “No, I didn’t.”

Connor reached out to Nic. He looked so lost, so broken. All he could think of was comforting the man. He wrapped Nic in his arms and pulled him in close. Nic stiffened for a moment before his arms came around Connor. Having Nic in his arms felt so good, so right. He was warm, and Connor leaned into his neck, breathing in his musky scent. He turned his head and brushed his lips across Nic’s, gratified by the returned pressure as Nic’s arms came around him, pulling him closer.

Connor opened his mouth and Nic slid his tongue inside. Connor let his hands drift down Nic’s back, stroking. Nic’s tongue left no corner unexplored as it perused Connor’s mouth. The delicious tangling sent flashes of need to Connor’s groin. Nic moved to Connor’s jaw and neck, planting nibbles and kisses as he went.

Connor wanted to see Nic, wanted to see his bare flesh. He had just reached for Nic’s shirt when an alarm sounded, and “*Battle Stations,*” echoed throughout the ship.

Nic gave Connor one last kiss. “I have to go.”

Nic slipped out of his room.

CHAPTER 9

Nic marveled at the quiet efficiency of the bridge crew under such stressful conditions. The Democraton vessel, *Absolute Loyalty*, had found them and was giving chase. They were still out of weapon range, but that wouldn't last.

The communications officer put a transmission on the speakers for the bridge to hear. "This is the *Absolute Loyalty. Veritas*, you are ordered to come to a stop and prepare to be boarded."

Captain Bromwich signaled for the com officer to maintain silence while the navigator plotted evasive maneuvers.

"Options?" Bromwich asked his bridge crew.

The helm officer, who seemed to bounce in his seat suggested, "We could slingshot around the sun."

Bromwich smiled. "We'll keep that in mind, Lieutenant. Other options?"

The first officer spoke. "Fight or run."

Turning to his second-in-command, Bromwich asked, "Can we outgun them?"

"No."

"Can we outrun them?"

"Maybe."

The door to the bridge slid open and Connor ran in. "I have an idea." His breath came in short pants.

Nic turned to look at Connor whose eyes blazed with determination.

Captain Bromwich gestured to Connor. "Speak."

"*Absolute Loyalty*. This is Captain Nigel Bromwich of the *Veritas*. The *Veritas* is a legally registered Democraton cruise ship. Why are we being stopped?"

“*Veritas*. Hold your position and prepare to be boarded. Failure to comply will be considered a hostile act and we will open fire.”

“Relax, *Absolute Loyalty*. We are complying.” Bromwich signaled the helm to hold position as the *Absolute Loyalty* approached.

The communications officer piped Nic’s voice for the crew to hear. “Shuttle bay to Bridge. We’re off.”

Bromwich replied, “Godspeed.”

A shuttle launched from the bay of the *Veritas*, and immediately started sprinting away from the ship. It took only moments before the *Absolute Loyalty* went off in pursuit. The little shuttle was fast, but not enough to escape the battle cruiser, and soon was being tractored aboard the Democration naval vessel.

“*Veritas*, our sensors show this shuttle contains two known fugitives, Nickolai Maltisse and Connor Spaulding. Your ship is impounded and all of you are under arrest.”

Bromwich pointed to his communications officer and leaned back in his seat. “*Absolute Loyalty*. How is that possible? Weren’t Maltisse and Spaulding executed?”

“Sensors don’t lie. We’re boarding and taking you into custody.”

Bromwich huffed a sigh as a trickle of sweat slid down his face. “How could we know they were here? We shouldn’t be arrested.”

The *Absolute Loyalty* pulled the shuttle into its bay and closed the doors. Everyone on the bridge held their breath as the *Absolute Loyalty* exploded. Bright reds and oranges filled the forward viewscreen as pieces of the former ship shot away in spiraling tendrils of smoke.

The door to the bridge slid open. Connor and Nic stepped out onto the deck, satisfied grins splitting their faces.

Captain Bromwich turned to Connor. “How’d you know how to spoof their sensors? Make them think you two were on board and not the explosives?”

“I’m a shuttle pilot. I spend a lot of time flying missions with very little to do. I started playing around with the shuttle controls, replicating DNA. I learned a few tricks. Never knew they would come in handy.”

Nic draped his arm around Connor. “We better get out of here and hope no reinforcements are on the way.”

They arrived at Nic’s home base and Connor finally thought they had a chance at survival. This place almost felt safe.

He looked around the large open quad. A set of small cabin-like buildings with bars on the windows lined one side. That must have been where he was held. A large building flanked another side of the quad. Delicious scents of cooking meat rose from it. Another set of cabin-like buildings were across from the cells. These had no bars. A couple of large buildings made up the fourth side. All of the buildings were painted a cheerful yellow with white trim. A few people played Frisbee in the middle of the quad.

When they arrived, one of Nic’s people whisked him away. Connor tried to go with him, but Nic smiled and said they were just going to restore his memory. He kissed Connor quickly and then he was gone.

One of Nic’s people, Amy, led Connor to one of the small cabins across from the cells. Exploring the room, it became clear that these were Nic’s quarters at the base.

It was fascinating to get a glimpse into the man he cared about. Connor explored the items Nic chose to display. Some of his books had spines so filled with creases that the titles were no longer visible. The bed was hastily made and a black tank top was tossed over a chair in the corner.

He inhaled deeply, breathing in Nic’s musky scent. It gave him comfort while he waited to finally talk to the person he was coming to care deeply about—and he hoped do so much more.

The door wasn’t locked, but where would he go? One of the rebels—he had to learn their names—at least brought him food, so he ate and waited,

unsure what to do next. He found a book, *1984*, that looked like it had been read and re-read. It had a note hand-scrawled on the inside cover: *We need to make a happy ending*. Intrigued, he took it outside into the sunshine, the sky just a tad more green than home, and settled in a chair to read.

Hearing footsteps approach, he looked up to see Nic. “You’re free to go. Anywhere you want.”

Connor’s mouth dropped open. The expression on Nic’s face was unreadable. *Now that he remembers, he doesn’t want me*. Connor’s heart raced. He should just go. It had all been a lie.

He took hold of himself. Why else would Nic have come to rescue him? It was time to take a chance. “I want to stay here, with you.”

Nic’s face was neutral. “Why?”

Connor vowed to never play poker with the man. He stood and faced Nic. Swallowing hard, he answered Nic’s question. “Wasn’t that clear on the ship? To see where this thing between us leads.”

Nic’s face softened a little, but his lips curved down. “It’s not safe here.”

Connor lit up inside. Nic was worried for him. “It’s not safe anywhere, but here I can help with the cause. I want to make Dr. Renault’s death mean something. I think I’ve shown I can be useful.”

Nic smiled. “I guess you are good for more than tending crops.”

“Most of all, I want to be with you. If you’ll have me?” Then he closed the distance between them, threw his arms around Nic, and kissed him.

Nic melted into the embrace and his arms came around Connor. Their lips parted and their tongues joined, tangling, twisting, dancing together.

Sparks of need shot through Connor, making his nerves tingle and his cock harden. Nic kissed down the side of his neck, licking, and nibbling. Then he lifted his head and looked Connor in the eyes. “Stay. Be mine.”

A sense of rightness settled over Connor. Finally, he’d found something, someone, worthy of his caring and loyalty. “Yes.”

Nic led him back into his room and Connor's heart pounded in a whole different way.

Nic lunged, smashing their lips together. The kiss was hot before, but now its fire was burning straight through Connor. Nic walked Connor back towards the bed until his knees bumped the mattress and he fell back onto it.

Nic grabbed Connor's shirt and pulled it over his head. Connor tugged Nic on top of him and removed Nic's shirt as well.

With their chests pressed together, they shared more passionate kisses. Connor's hands were on Nic's back, his nails scratching down, making Nic's skin quiver beneath his fingers, and his lover's groin thrust forward, pressing against Connor's erection.

Nic reached up and grabbed the hair on the back of Connor's head, pulling to get access to his neck, his ear, his jaw, kissing and nibbling while Connor thrust up against him.

Connor whimpered, "Too many clothes."

Nic rolled to the side and shimmied his pants off while Connor did the same, and then took a moment to admire the man before him. Strong pecs, a flat stomach decorated with a treasure trail leading to a long, hard prick, the head purple with need. Connor dove for it and ran his tongue along the top.

"Oh."

Connor ran his tongue all around the ridge under the head, hitting the sensitive nerve bundle on the underside, smiling at the way Nic's hips bucked. Then he ran his tongue up and down the smooth length, so similar, and so different from his own. He reached up, tickling Nic's balls, while Nic's head thrashed to the side and his hand grabbed Connor's hair again.

Then Connor engulfed him, taking him deep into his mouth. He reveled in the little mewls of need falling from Nic's mouth when he felt a tug at his head. He lifted off and looked up at Nic, seeing his pupil blown out in lust.

"W... Want you. Want to be inside of you. Please? Can I?"

Connor couldn't think of anything he wanted more. "Yes."

Nic reached toward the side table and grabbed a bottle of lube and a condom from the drawer while Connor crawled up to kiss him. He heard the snap of the bottle and the trickle of liquid.

Encouraging Connor onto his elbows and knees, Nic knelt up. “Have you done this before?”

“A couple times. It’s been a while.”

Nic’s hands parted Connor’s cheeks and then a digit pressed against his needy pucker. His cock jumped as Nic pressed in slowly, gently, and inexorably. The finger went in deeper and deeper, stretching Connor, preparing him.

White-hot need warmed Connor as sensation shot to his prick. He moaned when Nic’s finger nudged his sweet spot inside.

When his guardian muscle relaxed so the finger could move smoothly, Nic added another, spreading them, and then he added a third.

Connor twisted to look over his shoulder. “Do it Nic. Don’t make me wait.”

“Pushy.” Nic smiled.

Nic knelt behind Connor and pushed into him, inch by inch, until he was fully seated. It felt so good to have him inside. Connor laid his head sideways, his cheek pressed onto a pillow at his head, as Nic pulled out and then thrust inside him.

“Oh, yeah,” escaped his lips.

Nic worked into a rhythm, pushing in and out of Connor.

“Oh, God, yeah.”

Connor pushed back, meeting him thrust for thrust, as Nic nailed him right on his sweet spot. Connor reached under himself and started pumping his prick in time to Nic’s thrusts, struggling closer to orgasm.

Nic's arm reached around his chest and pulled him to kneel up while still pounding into his ass. Connor turned his head so their lips could join in a sloppy kiss filled with tongues and desire.

“Nic. So close.”

“Let go.”

Connor pumped his cock a few more times and then spurts of pleasure shot out of him while he threw his head back onto Nic's shoulder. Nic pounded his ass until he suddenly stilled, filling the condom.

The two men collapsed together, Nic holding him close. Connor's eyes drooped, he was warm and content. As he slipped into a deep sleep, his last thought was that he would stay with Nic.

Together, they would face the future and whatever the Democration and its Democrator threw at them.

THE END

Author Bio

Kathryn Sparrow has had stories spinning around in her head her whole life and finally decided it was time to write them down. Until recently, she worked in the Software Industry as a Software Quality Engineer, so she gets a particular thrill including geeks and tech in her stories. Now she is a full time wife and mom for her geek husband and adorable, infuriating young daughters, who are too smart for their mommy's own good. She is working on her first novel, Alpha Coder, an M/M story about werewolves at a Software Company. If she had spare time she would spend it knitting, crocheting, cross stitching, and doing any other handicrafts that catch her fancy.

Contact & Media Info

[Email](#) | [Kathryn's Website](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [WordPress](#) | [Twitter](#)

[Pinterest](#) | [Pinterest board for this story](#) | [Goodreads](#)