

“No, Mark. He didn’t imply anything. You don’t know him. I do. He was spelling it out. Neuroscience. Plain and simple.”

“Don’t you think I know that? I just didn’t want it to be true.” Mark looked squarely at Eva. “Here’s my epiphany: I helped save the woman’s life who was instrumental in my brother’s death.” He hung his head, fighting back a lump in his throat. His eyes stung. If Mark ever got near that woman again, he vowed to rip her heart out. “It wouldn’t surprise me if she masterminded the whole damned thing. Kidnapping the real Beth Coulter. Engineering the metal cyborgs. Recruiting terrorists. Stealing research. Sabotaging Eric’s mission and killing 152 people. All while she’s hell-bent on her way to world-building and terraforming the outer reaches before anybody else gets there.” He wanted to tell her the rest of it. He just didn’t have the strength. “Does that about sum it up?”

Eva stared at him. The color ebbed from her face. “I need a drink.”

Mark spotted McDonnell with her empty lunch tray. He flagged her over. “My colleague isn’t feeling well. Is there anywhere we can get a bottle of medicinal brandy?”

The lieutenant studied Eva, before glancing back toward the sergeants. “Might your guardians object?” Her hazel eyes sparkled with mirth.

“We outrank them.” Mark almost choked at the word “guardians.”

“Yes, sir. I understand. Be back in a moment.”

“What are we going to do?” Eva leaned in, whispering, “Should we tell someone? Except, we don’t have proof. So would anyone believe us?”

Mark tried to calm her. “It only took us a week to figure out who, how and why with just bits—pieces of information. Now we concentrate on putting the rest of the puzzle together before we share it. Right? Besides, Eva, we’re the scientists she was stealing from. We’re smarter. We can do this.”

The lieutenant returned with a towel and a cup. She stood blocking the sergeant’s view. After emptying mints from the cup onto the table, she handed it to Eva, then showed Mark the concealed bottle underneath the towel.

He poured a single shot in Eva’s cup, and a double in his glass. He drank it, as he slipped the bottle inside his shirt.

Eva downed hers in two gulps, made a face, and popped several mints in her mouth.

Mark patted her hand for moral support.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Eva said. “I seem to be having a bad day. I’ve had several of them lately.”

“Well, maybe this will cheer you up. We’ve located living accommodations not far from your new lab. Shall we go take a look?”

They all tramped out, boarded the little vehicle and sped over to the new location.

Eva elbowed him in the ribs.

He flinched. “You’re beginning to act like my sister.”

She grinned, as if it were a compliment. “What about last night?”

“I went out alone. Being under surveillance twenty-four hours a day is nerve-racking, it’s restrictive, it’s not normal. I’m almost thirty years old. I haven’t had a keeper since elementary school. And I’ve had a few weird days myself, recently. I needed to unwind. Axel disapproved. I was penalized.”

Eva’s eyes widened. “He’s dangerous.”

“Who? Axel? He’s a soldier. They’re trained to be lethal.”

“I know things. I’ve seen things—growing up. My minor was in psychology. You be careful. Trust me.”